CHAPTER 2

INDIAN NATIONALISM AS SAGA OF CASTE-CLASS POLITICS

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CHAPTER 2

INDIAN NATIONALISM
A SAGA OF CASTE-CLASS POLITICS

India is a peculiar country and her nationalists and patriots are a peculiar people. A patriot and a nationalist in India is one who sees with open eyes his fellow men treated as being less than man. But his humanity does not rise in protest.... The patriot's one cry is power for him and his class. I am glad I do not belong to that class of patriots.

~ B. R. Ambedkar

The primary task taken up in this chapter is to contextualize the discussion of various topics like nation, nationalism, and narration, initiated in the previous chapter, into the specific setting of the Indian subcontinent. Although the history of India as a nation is of recent origin, it is essential that we attempt to answer certain pertinent questions in order to understand the intricacies of nation-building process in our country. Some of the pertinent questions to be addressed at this juncture are:

i. If nation is a new social collectivity, then what was society like in its pre-nation stage?

ii. What were the specific ways in which the pre-nation characteristics of a society were transformed, or not transformed, and continue to exert influence today?

iii. What were the forces within pre-nation society that gave birth to the new ideology of nationalism? and,

iv. What are the senses in which nation can be considered a continuity or break with history?
In some way, colonial period was responsible for ushering in the period of modernity in India. It was a period of great socio-political upheavals which were the product of the interaction between traditional Indian society and colonial rule in accordance with the double reference points – one external and the other internal. The net result of all these changes was some sort of restructuring of power relations within.

Colonial period was a period of shift to nation and nationalism in India. It was the period in which the ideology of nationalism had its genesis, growth and maturation in India through the nationalist movement. This resulted in the formation of India as a modern nation-state.

Keeping in mind the double congruence between culture and power we need to analyze their restructuring during this period of transition. Power relations during period were altered with respect to two referral points – the British and the country’s past – to the present nation-state. To understand this, we need to know, firstly, the general and particular contours of pre-modern India in terms of power distribution within social relations and secondly, if there were any material and ideological changes during the colonial period that prepared the ground for the transformation of the pre-modern forms of social power. We need to understand these changes, if any, with respect to their level and direction so that we can understand their impact on the different sections of society and its overall implication to India as a nation. This necessitates us to make a short analysis of the power relations in Indian societies prior to the colonial experience.

Power Dynamics in the Pre-Colonial India

Most of the eminent sociologists opine that the advanced agricultural societies in pre-colonial India were characterized by unequal, stratified distribution of power among different communities (Aloysius: 1997). The inequality practiced was highly rigid and ascriptive in
nature. This unjust system permeated all spheres of social relations and had resulted in fragmentation in society with relatively isolated segments such as status-groups and castes. The stabilizing element to this inequitable power distribution system was supplied by the generalized cultural and religious concepts.

It seems apt here to identify the major features of the caste system used to sustain the social structure of privileges for a few and disabilities for the majority. This hierarchical structure of ascriptively segmented occupational and endogamous castes, endowed with differential distribution of privileges/disabilities was a pan-Indian reality with some asymmetrical spread. It was justified through the highly deceptive and misleading religious categories of Karma and Dharma. This ideological framework helped the system sustain itself for more than a millennium. M.N. Srinivas (1966, 66 ff) has rightly observed that despite infra-regional differences, the pattern of hierarchy was remarkably uniform over different regions with the Brahmins at the top, other literary, propertied and 'clean' castes following and *shudra*, *ati-shudra*, labouring and 'polluted' castes at the bottom. The hierarchies of different spheres of social relations tended to coincide with the religious hierarchy of purity and pollution, which was a rough reproduction of production relations and ownership patterns, also expressed itself in an unequal privilege/disability structure in public life. Thus, as well documented works of Beteille (1980, 110 ff), and Gould (1987, ch. 1) show, the foundation of the entire edifice of the caste hierarchy was the ascriptive status by birth, legitimized and sanctified by the dominant Brahminic religio-cultural symbol and belief traditions.

At this point, a question may be raised as to the factors responsible for such a pervading presence and influence of the caste system in this subcontinent? Religio-cultural symbolism in the form of mythologies, ubiquitous temples as social institutions, Sanskrit as the sacred language, codification of laws and customs, and, most of all, the actual socio-economic dominance of Brahminic and other collaborating upper castes, were the factors responsible
in creating a structure suitable for the flourishing of the caste ideology and creating an illusion of cultural unity. It is generally identified as the Chaturvarna ideology. It is in this context that Embree (1989, 10) defined the adjective ‘Brahminical’ as ‘a set of values, ideas, concepts, practices and myths that are identifiable in the literary tradition and social institutions’ and as something that implies ‘an ideology that is confined to one group’.

Added to the above-mentioned factors was the backing of the caste system as the accepted custom and tradition of the land by the varieties of political powers in the subcontinent. Aloysius (1997, 27) convincingly argues that the Brahmins as a force were not limited to the sacred realm as debated by thinkers like Dirks (1987), Inden (1986, 1990), and Appadurai (1981). They wielded enormous power within the secular realm of society as well. Political institutions of kingship most often included Brahmins as the main and important functionaries. The king himself upheld the Dharma of the caste system, as much in deference to the shastric injunction, as to the ground realities within society. It was because caste as a system and ideology was perceived to be part of the religious and cultural rather than the political sphere. Hence, any demand for change was rendered futile by making it appear as a revolt against culture and tradition. Thus, autonomy from polity, on the one hand, and nexus with religion on the other, explains the seeming invincibility of the ascriptive dominance in pre-modern India.

In the discourse of caste in India what is often conveniently forgotten is the series of anti-casteist struggles. To get a fuller picture, it is important to view the history of pre-colonial India as the story of the constant struggle of the power as resistance against the snares and designs of power as dominance. While dominance was expressed in the form of ascriptive and hierarchical caste system, resistance took several forms like subversion, sabotage, flight, revolt or the creation of a counter-culture/ideology. Bendix (1961) argues that although only a few conscious and organized struggles to create an egalitarian system
of power distribution could be identified, all these attempts by disadvantaged groups intended to a greater or lesser degree to change the current form of power distribution either by escaping the disabilities or by appropriating more powers.

Thus, the history of entire sub-continent is replete with examples of contestations of Varna ideology at different times and places though in an irregular and deficient manner. The irony, however, is that in resemblance of the strengthening and perpetuation of the caste system most of the resistance and counter-ideology for the system too arose and got subsumed within the religious framework. The major movements opposing the caste hierarchy were the Ajivikas, Sramanas, pan-Indian heterodoxies such as Buddhism, Jainism and the Bhakti movement; regional sects, such as Vira-Shaivism, Sikhism and Kabirpanth, and numerous other local movements.

Power as resistance is also manifested in the production of literature in many Indian vernacular languages despite the all-encompassing tendencies of Sanskrit. Simultaneously, there was rise of the vernaculars in the mushrooming of regionalized and non-Brahminic popular religious forms, festivals, pilgrimages etc. There have also been many turbulent and localized forms of resistance such as social banditry, caste boycotts and peasant-tribal movements against the impositions and excesses of caste-feudalism. However, all these forms of resistance failed to develop into full-fledged, pan-Indian counter-ideology and consciousness (Inden: 1992).

It is also important here to recognize that while attempting to project the prominence of caste system and ideology in the pre-modern India we need to acknowledge the role of other contradictions like that of gender, class, ethnic-region, etc. However, it needs to be emphasized that it was caste that provided the overarching structure for all these contradictions to arise and grow. For instance, gender-oppression was a function of caste-patriarchy; class relations expressed themselves as Jajmani relations and patterns of land
ownership and cultivation rights; and relations between regional and ethnic communities were mostly expressed in caste terms. Also, the struggles to resolve these contradictions had eradication of caste as their basic focus (Kothari: 1973).

It also needs to be understood that *varna* ideology in pre-nation India was restricted to the societies in the river-valleys from the Gangetic plain to Cauvery and Narmada to Brahmaputra. Despite more than a thousand years of its existence there were many regions in India, especially the non-agricultural dry lands and hill-forest areas, which managed to remain outside the influence of the *varna* ideology. These societies had their own versions of stratification, which although hierarchical, were very different from that of *varna* mainly because they lacked the religious legitimation that *varna* ideology enjoyed (Clarke: 1997). There were yet other societies which had got into the contradiction between egalitarian ideal and inequality in practice because of their acceptance of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity as their religions. However, even the practices of *varna* ideology in this era cannot be termed monolithic nor considered to be universally accepted. It is because other traditions, cultures and value systems contesting for their space had been quite successful in containing it (Inden: 1992).

The British and the Indian Society

The period between 1650 and 1750, i.e. the period preceding the British take over, was a witness to some changes within the social and political system which seemed to be helpful in furthering the ideology of those opposed to the *varna*. Habib (1995), Raychaudhuri (1983) and Ghosh (1985), in their works, have shown that people in the lower-rungs of society were freed during this period from different types of servitude due to the opening up of opportunities for non-agricultural activities such as wars, manufacture of arms and clothes as they enabled various types of mobility.
The influence of the British on the societies in Indian subcontinent should be seen as non-monolithic and hierarchical. The cultural interaction by the British was through the officials, the missionaries and the civilians, each of whom had their own identities and ways of going about.

Despite all these levels in the interaction Maddison (1971, 35) opines that the East India Company was thoroughly focused on the pragmatic self-interest of trade and revenue. Ghosh (1985, 153 ff) observes that it is because of this interest of the British that there was no antagonism but only collaboration between the imperial rulers and the local emerging bourgeoisie. Except for a very brief period between 1820 and 1855 when some social reform legislations were pushed through and several territories were annexed, resulting in the abortive Mutiny of 1857, the British on the whole were very reluctant to intervene in the status quo. Whatever changes that had occurred then, were necessitated from their side by political considerations or in fact were unintended consequences of their actions (Killingley: 1993).

While official intervention was characterized by pragmatism, the zeal of the missionaries knew no such inhibitions once they were allowed entry in 1813. Although their contribution to actual changes within society was rather marginal, they helped transform the ideological climate of the country by provoking several controversies in the realm of cultural and religious practices (van der Veer: 1994).

Works of Brown (1984, ch. 11) and Frykenberg (1965, 230-44) have argued that the British did not and could not affect any serious change within Indian society. Also, the British period was characterized more by its continuity with the past than by a revolutionary break with it. What was very significant was the effective, structural unification under the British. The most important implication of this unification is that it caused a transition from competitive and wasteful warlord aristocracy to effective and diversified bureaucracy.
(Maddison: 1971, 37). It was thus a process of bureaucratization which had several political implications.

The nature of power over society and the method of wielding it also came to be transformed. To rule, now, was to administer. This change is significant, for in the new setup men with qualities and skills different from those of warriors are called forth. Politico-administrative unification was aided by the physical linking of the entire country by various communication networks—railways, roads, and telecommunications. Although their development, was skewed as they were primarily intended to serve the purposes of imperialism, they laid the foundations for spatial mobility as a possible prelude to social mobility. Along with these what is significant from the perspective of our study is that literary skills in general and modern education in particular, came to be viewed as providing access to this new realm of power.

The Creation and the Impact of Orientalism

Orientalism, for Said, is “a... kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient” (1995, 93). Orientalists, he claims, have plotted their narratives about the history, character, and destiny of the Orient for centuries but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the geographical vastness of the Orient had shrunk, the discipline had expanded with colonialism, and “Orientalism had accomplished its selfmetamorphosis from a scholarly discourse to an imperial institution.” There was a new, positive, twist to Orientalism: “since one cannot ontologically obliterate the Orient [...], one does have the means to capture it, treat it, describe it, improve it, radically alter it.” (Ibid, 94–95.)

Although Said’s view on Orientalism has been criticized as monolithic (specially by Clarke: 1997, 9–10; Dawn: 1979; Lele: 1994, 45–47 & Kopf: 1980, 498–499), Said obviously sees many variations and modes in the ways Europeans have constructed the
Orient. In his most general division, Said distinguishes between academic, general and corporate Orientalisms. Said also makes a distinction between latent and manifest Orientalism. Manifest Orientalism has been comprised of "the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology etc." (Jukka, Jouhki. Papers: Orientalism and India: Academia.edu. http://jyu.academia.edu/JukkaJouhki/Papers/.../Orientalism-and-India) whereas latent Orientalism has been more stable, unanimous and durable mode of thought. In manifest Orientalism, the differences between Orientalist writers, their personal style and form of writing have been explicit, but the basic content of their writing has reflected the more or less unified latent Orientalism. Moreover, latent Orientalism and race classifications have supported each other very well, especially in the nineteenth century. The "second-order Darwinism," of Orientalism has seemed to justify division of races to backward and advanced, cultures and societies. Hence, Orientalism for Said (1995) is a form of cultural hegemony at work. Some cultural forms predominate over others, just like some ideas are more influential than others.

Although Edward Said concentrated mainly on European Orientalism focusing on Arab Middle East, the Saidian approach to Orientalist discourse is thought to be validly applicable to other parts of the non-Western world, and various scholars influenced by Said have expanded his theories to include India. In the words of King (2008, 14-15) the notion of 'Hinduism' itself is a Western-inspired abstraction, which until the nineteenth century bore little or no resemblance to the diversity of Indian religious belief and practice. The term 'Hindu' is the Persian variant of the Sanskrit sindhu, referring to the Indus river, and was used by the Persians to denote the people of that region. The Arabic 'Al-Hind,' therefore, is a term denoting a particular geographical area. Although indigenous use of the term by Hindus themselves can be found as early as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, its usage was derivative of Persian Muslim influences and did not represent anything more than a
distinction between 'indigenous' or 'native' and foreign (*mleccha*). It is in the nineteenth century that the term 'Hinduism' came to be used as a signifier of a unified, all embracing and independent religious entity in both Western and Indian circles. The Oxford English Dictionary traces 'Hindooism' to an 1829 reference in the Bengalee, (Vol. 45), and also refers to an 1858 usage by the German Indologist Max Muller. Dermot Killingley (1993), however, cites a reference to 'Hindooism' by Rammohun Roy in 1816. As Killingley (p. 60) suggests, 'Rammohun was probably the first Hindu to use the word Hinduism.' One hardly need mention the extent to which Roy's conception of the 'Hindu' religion was conditioned by European, Muslim and Unitarian theological influences. King (2008: 16-17) opines that there is, ironically, considerable reason therefore for the frequency with which Western scholars have described Roy as 'the father of modern India'.

What was the main impetus for the British Orientalists to try to define and describe India in the manner that they did? Rajalaxmi (2004, 5) opines that the heterogeneity of the Indian sub-continent initially posed certain problems for the British. This made them take up the difficult task of defining India which was so very different from their country in terms of its culture, civilization and the socio-political life. It is because they realized that they cannot continue to conquer and rule India without first defining it as it was very essential for them to justify their engagements with it. It is in this context that the early orientalist scholars on India undertook the task of defining it. Sir William Jones and James Mill through their 'empirical and scientific' methods attempted a study of India, and succeeded in providing a logical framework to an understanding of the subcontinent. Pioneering work by these scholars for long was regarded, as an 'authentic account' of India. Needless to say, being products of the modernist Project, they judiciously considered rationality as the yardstick to be used in their endeavours. Through logical arguments, Jones established that by comparison of languages, he succeeded in establishing that at some point in history there
was a strong affinity between Sanskrit, Greek and Latin. Through the history, India and Europe had shared a common heritage. Apart from this comparative linguistic study, he also made several other comparative studies in literature. He translated Kalidasa’s *Shakuntala* and compared the talent of Kalidasa to Shakespeare. This enabled him to establish that India had a glorious language and literature. The inference that Jones derived from this was that good literature and language could be produced only in a civilized nation. Thus, he was able to establish that once upon a time India had been equal to Europe in all respects. Javeed Majeed says that such a comparison was neither innocent nor accidental but intentional. He reasons:

Jones’s attempt to define an idiom in which cultures could be compared and contrasted was in part a response to the need for such an idiom in the late eighteenth century. It was only through the use of such an idiom that the cultures of the heterogeneous British Empire could be compared, the nature of British rule overseas determined, and the empire unified by the same ethos (Majeed: 1992, 16).

In the opinion of King (2008, 9-10), the notion of a Hindu religion was initially constructed by Western Orientalists based upon a Judaeo-Christian understanding of what might constitute a religion. William Jones for example, in his role as Supreme Court Judge in India, initiated a project to translate the *Dharmasastras* in the misguided belief that this represented the law of the Hindus, in order to circumvent what he saw as the ‘culpable bias’ of the native pandits. In taking the *Dharmasastras* as a binding law-book, Jones manifests the Judaeo-Christian paradigm within which he conceived of religion. This attempt to apply such a book universally reflects Jones’ ‘textual imperialism (van der Veer: 1993, 7). The problem with taking the *Dharmasastras* as pan-Indian in application is that the texts themselves were representative of a priestly elite (the brahmana castes), and not of
Hindus in toto (Majeed: 1992, 16). Thus, even within these texts, there was no notion of a unified, Hindu community, but rather an acknowledgement of a plurality of local, occupational and caste contexts in which different customs or rules applied (Thapar: 1989, 220-21). Jones, of course, had mastered Sanskrit to gain access to the knowledge of the Vedas, Upanishads and other Sanskrit texts. However, his knowledge of the Indian society was based on a particular canon of texts than on a direct experience of Indian society. But, as we know, a vast geographical space like India did not share a common culture or language unlike many of the western civilizations. In addition, Sanskrit was the language of an elite class, which was a microscopic minority in India. There were a number of other languages and dialects which were used by a huge mass of people. They remained beyond the reach of all those who attempted to understand India using a predetermined modern method. Thus in his enthusiasm to understand India Jones employed an approach which conveniently ignored the existent plurality. The irony, however is that it is this construct of Jones, in the opinion of King (2008, 10), that was subsequently adopted by Hindu nationalists themselves in the quest for home rule (swaraj) and in response to British imperial hegemony.

The natural result of Jones' empirical study, which was based on the knowledge of Sanskrit and his discourses with the learned Brahmins, produced an Indian history based solely on Vedic-Brahminic Ideology was that he saw his contemporary India as decadent, unprogressive and culturally arrested one. The tragedy however is that Jones' work was given great importance by the colonial rulers in power who wanted to use it to understand the complexity of India in order to manage and rule it. Also, as Javed Majeed (1992, 36) argues, "the rediscovery of an Indian past by Jones and his colleagues provided the foundations for the nationalist interest in and glorification of past" for the Indian elite.

James Mill's study of India, which had the same objective as Jones' project, augmented narrow definition of all that was 'Indian'. Compared to Jones, Mill was more critical and
emphatic in his rational approach to the study of India. But it is quite clear that, both, 
Jones and Mill had adopted as their mission a justification of colonial rule and the British 
presence in India. In their view colonisation was the white man’s civilizing mission.

In his *The History of British India*, Mill believed that all human experiences and reality could be plotted, codified, compared and reduced to empirical data. As made explicit by Javed Majeed, Mill was of the opinion that,

... it was possible to formulate a scale of progress from a ‘joint view of all the great circumstances’ of nations. It was from an ‘accurate comparison, grounded on those general views that a scale of civilization can be formed, on which the relative positions of nations may be accurately marked’ (1992, 135).

With this kind of an approach Mill succeeded in using ‘civilization’ as a tool to prove India a barbaric land that needed to be civilized. In sharp contrast to other Orientalists who had suggested that the Hindus were a people of high culture now in a state of decline, Mill deemed Hindu civilization as crude from its very beginnings, and plunged in the lowest depths of immorality and crime (Chakravarti: 1999, 35).

Central to the criterion by which Mill (1840, 312-13) judged the level of civilization was the position it accorded to its women. According to him Hindu women were in a state of dependence more strict and humiliating than that which is ordained for the weaker sex. They were held in extreme degradation, excluded from the sacred books, deprived of education and (of a share) in the paternal property.

A major conclusion of Mill’s was that the practice of segregating women did not come with the Mohammedans (Mill:1840, 318); rather it was a consequence of the whole spirit of Hindu society where women must be constantly guarded at all times for fear of their innate tendency towards infidelity. Quoting from an ancient text he stated that the Hindus
compared women with “a heifer on the plain that longeth for fresh grass”, with reference
to their uncontrollable sexuality (Mill: 1840, 314). Thus the conquest of Hindustan by Muslim
invaders had nothing to do with the general degradation of women which, Mill argued, did
not alter “the texture of society” (ibid, 318).

Having justified their rule and domination with the help of the Orientalists in this manner
the British later adopted the pedagogic approach. As part of their ‘civilizing’ mission they
hoped to achieve a rational scientific temper in their subject peoples through education.
The intentions implicit in the recommendations of the Macaulay Commission (Macaulay: 1935)
become very important at this point. The extent to which the Anglicist Macauley was
successful in his aim ‘to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions
whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in
opinions, in morals, and in intellect,’ (Macauley: 1835), will become readily apparent when
we consider in the later sections of this Chapter, the development in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries of the notion of a single religious entity known as ‘Hinduism’. However,
we shall concentrate more here on the intentions and the impact of the educational system
on the Indian sub-continent.

The introduction of education in India by the British was never an emancipatory project.
Instead, it aimed at the intellectual enslavement of the Indian people. Keeping in view the
probable factors, which are supposed to be instrumental in shaping the attitude of subjects
in the colony, the substance of education was decided. Various scholars have pointed out
that the objective of educating Indians was to mould obedient clerks to work in the factories
of the colonial bureaucracy, produce perfect technicians to participate in the mission of
industrialization, and train soldiers to obey the orders of their imperial masters. Also, the
European translations of Indian texts prepared for a Western audience provided to the
‘educated’ Indian a whole range of Orientalist images. Even when the anglicised Indian spoke
a language other than English, 'he' would have preferred, because of the symbolic power
attached to English, to gain access to his own past through the translations and histories
circulating through colonial discourse. English education also familiarised the Indian with ways
of seeing, techniques of translation, or modes of representation that came to be accepted
as 'natural' (Niranjana: 1990, 778).

However, Jones (2004, 28) argues that the Indian response to new opportunities
created by the British was determined largely by their place in pre-British society. At the
height of the Orientalist period, scholars of Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, and of South Asian
learning were hired by such institutions as Ft. William College. With the shift to English
education those castes that were already literate supplied the students of this new language;
in practice this meant primarily Bengali Hindus of the Brahman, Baidya, and Kayastha castes.
In previous generations individuals from these groups mastered Persian to gain employment
under the Mughal and post-Empire Muslim rulers. Now they learned English.

Jones (Ibid. 29) also notes that the response of the Indians to the British educational
influence was widely varied. While the radicals enthusiastically embraced all that was English
-language, ideas, and customs such as beef-eating and hairstyles, the Hindu conservatives,
by contrast, wanted the practical advantages afforded by a command of English, but were
willing to make only those changes in customary behaviour needed to work with the new
rulers. They defended the status quo from the external criticisms of the Christian missionaries
and the internal attacks of Hindu radicals. For those who lived and worked within the sphere
of this new power and its accompanying culture, that is, within the colonial milieu, they
had no choice but to examine a set of questions that affected their lives.

The women's question, notably, was not one of the themes that were foregrounded
in the earliest work of the Asiatic Society. Jones, for example, did not pay any attention
to sati (widow immolation) and made only a passing reference to Gargi, whom he described
as "eminent for her piety and learning." (Jones: 1807, 64). More important than Jones in influencing the actual reconstruction of the past was the work of Colebrooke whose original researches earned for him the admiration of Max Muller. With Colebrooke the Orientalists came to focus their attention directly upon the women’s question by compiling evidence bearing on women from the ancient texts; predictably, the focal starting point was the ritual of sati. One of Colebrooke's first pieces of research was “On the Duties of the Faithful Hindu Widow” (Colebrooke: 1895, 205-15) wherein he presented the textual position on sati. The essay reflects all the characteristic features of the historiography of the women’s question: the reference to a variety of ancient texts, the special authority given to texts over custom, the search for the ‘authentic’ position as contained in the older and more authoritative texts, and the confusion in reconciling contradictory evidence (Chakravarti: 1999, 30-31).

The focusing on the ‘duties’ of the ‘faithful’ Hindu widow, would most likely have had a great impact on Europeans who were the main readers of the Asiatic Researches. Whatever other research Colebrooke engaged himself with in reconstructing the ‘glories’ of the ancient Hindus, an unintended consequence of his essay on the ‘faithful widow’ was to add the weight of scholarship to the accounts of travelers and other lay writers whose descriptions of burning women came to represent an integral part of the perception of Indian reality. Colebrooke’s account of sati highlighted an ‘awesome’ aspect of Indian womanhood, carrying both the associations of a barbaric society and of the mystique of the Hindu woman who ‘voluntarily’ and ‘cheerfully’ mounted the pyre of her husband (Neufeldt: 1980, 3).

It is also important for us here to understand the impact of Max Muller’s works on the Indian sub-continent. Although the Vedas was already well-known and often used, it gained tremendous currency following Max Muller’s work. Due to the writings of Muller the Vedas was regarded as the ‘Bible’ of the Aryans, which in turn resulted in a great deal of importance being attributed to the term Aryan. Starting from the researches on
comparative philology Max Muller extended the meaning of the term Aryan to apply it to the unknown people who "spoke the assumed Indo-European original language common to all members of this language group." Sanskrit was the closest language to this unknown language group (Muller: 1892, 13). Later, the emphasis shifted from language to race and the 'unknown' Aryans were then described as the "true ancestors of our race." (Muller: 1982, 4). For his European audience Max Muller attempted to establish the relationship between the Aryans in India who had, in their primitive glory, composed the Veda and the Aryans who now inhabited Europe; making a distinction between two major 'races': the Aryan (or the Indo-European) and the Semitic, he went on to imply that the Aryans were racially superior to the Turanian and Semitic races (Ibid, 7).

Thus, it could be observed that the earliest group of the Orientalists, saw themselves as engaged in reintroducing the Hindu elite to the 'impenetrable mystery' of its ancient lore. The Sanskritic tradition, locked up till then in the hands of a closed priesthood, was being thrown open and its treasures made available to the people in its pristine form (Kopf: 1969, 149), and the truths of indigenous traditions were being recuperated (Mani: 1986, 35). In sum, the Europeans who had successfully constituted their own 'true' history were now engaged in giving to Indians the greatest gift of all – a history (Cohn: 1985, 326).

Of great importance here is the point that the first stage of the Orientalist enterprise in reconstructing the past was hardly a case of "giving back to the natives the truths of their own little read and less understood Shaster (sic)," (Mani: 1986, 35) as portrayed by the Orientalists. The indigenous intelligentsia was not functioning within a political and social vacuum. The natives were no passive recipients of the perception of the past, then in the process of being reconstituted. In fact the indigenous literati were active agents in constructing the past and were consciously engaged in choosing particular elements from the embryonic body of knowledge flowing from their own current social and political concerns.
Parekh (1999, 33) argues that the upper caste Hindus were the first to take an early and keen interest in their rulers, interacting with them socially, offering their services to them and engaging in a critical dialogue with them and, in the process, developing a rich tradition of discourse unmatched by any other community.

King (2008, 19) too reminds us that there is a danger that in critically focusing upon Orientalist discourses one might ignore the importance of native actors and circumstances in the construction of Western conceptions of India. He further argues that we need to note the sense in which certain elitist communities within India (notably the scholarly brahmana castes), exerted a certain degree of influence upon the Western Orientalists, thereby contributing to the construction of the modern Western conception of 'Hinduism'. Thus the high social, economic and, to some degree, political status of the brahmana castes has contributed to the elision between Brahmanical forms of religion and 'Hinduism'. This is most notable for instance in the tendency to emphasize Vedic and Brahmanical texts and beliefs as central and foundational to the ‘essence’ of Hindu religiosity in general, and in the modern association of ‘Hindu doctrine’ with the various Brahmanical schools of the Vedanta, particularly Advaita Vedanta.

King further notes that the Brahmanical religions, of course, had already been active in their own appropriation of non-Brahmanical forms of Indian religion long before the Muslim and European invasions. Brahminization, viz., the process whereby the Sanskritic, ‘high’ culture of the Brahmans, absorbed non-Brahmanical (sometimes called ‘popular,’ or even ‘tribal’) religious forms, was an effective means of assimilating diverse cultural strands within one’s locality, and of maintaining social and political authority.

It is in this way that in the case of the educated Brahmaṇa castes, the British found loosely defined cultural elite that proved amenable to an ideology which placed them at the apex of a single world religious tradition. If one asks who would most have benefited
from the modern construction of a unified Hindu community focusing upon the Sanskritic and Brahmanical forms of Indian religion, the answer would, of course, be those highly educated members of the higher Brahmana castes, for whom modern 'Hinduism' represents the triumph of universalized, Brahmanical forms of religion over the 'tribal' and the 'local'.

As Frykenberg points out,

Brahmins have always controlled information. That was their boast. It was they who had provided information on indigenous institutions [for Western Orientalists]. It was they who provided this on a scale so unprecedented that, at least at the level of All-India consciousness, a new religion emerged the likes of which India had perhaps never known before (1991, 34).

In sum, we can agree with King (2008, 17) who opines that the European colonial influence upon Indian religion and culture has profoundly altered its nature in the modern era. According to him western colonization has contributed to the modern construction of 'Hinduism' mainly in two specific ways – firstly by locating the core of Indian religiosity in certain Sanskrit texts (the textualization of Indian religion) and secondly by an implicit (and sometimes explicit) tendency to define Indian religion in terms of a normative definition of religion based upon contemporary Western understanding of the Judaeo-Christian traditions. These two processes are clearly interwoven in a highly complex fashion and one might even wish to argue that they are in fact merely two aspects of a single phenomenon – namely the Westernization of Indian religion. These presuppositions about the role of sacred texts in 'religion' predisposed Orientalists towards focusing upon such texts as the essential foundation for understanding the Hindu people as a whole. As a result, the oral and 'popular' aspects of Indian religious tradition were either ignored or decried as evidence of the degradation of contemporary Hindu religion into superstitious practices on the grounds that
they bear little or no resemblance to 'their own' texts.

Indian 'Renaissance'

In the words of Sen:

In British India the Hindus were numerically the largest community, and numbers, as we know, can prove to be an important determinant in the modalities of change. Whether rightly or wrongly, the Hindus could also boast of a long and rich cultural history – a claim considerably reinforced by the Orientalist researches of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As seen in the previous section, especially in the latter half of the nineteenth century this new self-awareness was widely disseminated by the print media, pioneered by the Europeans, but no less utilized by the Hindus. The Hindus were spatially distributed almost throughout the subcontinent and, allowing for regional variations, were also the first to successfully adopt modern education and adapt to new ways of life. Paradoxically enough, this made them the greatest admirers of British rule as also its sharpest critics (2003, 3).

Kopf argues that the implications of the British position on social and cultural questions and the possibilities of generating certain changes through legislation became fairly clear in the early nineteenth century. The reconstruction of the past thereafter assumed a practical and utilitarian function. The question was no longer one of discovering fragments of texts, or translating them, but as the movement for abolition gained momentum, stratifying the texts to establish authenticity became crucial. All this meant that apart from a general increase in historical consciousness, the past was beginning to be classified and analyzed more rigorously to argue the debates of the present. What was of lasting significance from the
point of view of historical consciousness was the fact that the reconstruction of the past was no longer confined to the pages of the *Asiatic Researches*, read by a few select people. The reconstructed past was increasingly appearing in pamphlets and vernacular journals, made possible with the introduction of printing, and the participants in this were the newly emerging intelligentsia composed of both traditional and modern elements who perceived themselves as interpreters of tradition in a changing situation. This intelligentsia could regard itself as a product of an ‘exhausted’ culture but, through the work of the Orientalists, could simultaneously feel optimistic that despite the present circumstances they were representatives of a culture which had been “organically disrupted by historical circumstance but was capable of revitalisation.” (1969, 8).

King (2008, 23) observes that this new *episteme* created a conceptual space in the form of a rising perception that ‘Hinduism’ had become a corrupt shadow of its former self located in certain key sacred texts such as the Vedas, the Upanisads and the *Bhagavad Gita* – all taken to provide an unproblematic account of ancient Hindu religiosity. The perceived shortcomings of contemporary ‘Hinduism’ in comparison to the ideal form, as represented in the text, thus created the belief that Hindu religion had stagnated over the centuries and was therefore in need of reformation.

The gap between original (ideal) ‘Hinduism’ and the contemporary beliefs and practices of Hindus was soon filled by the rise of what have become known as ‘Hindu reform movements’ in the nineteenth century represented by the groups such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission. Virtually all textbooks on Hinduism describe these groups as ‘reform’ movements. This representation, as seen in the section on Orientalism, falls into the trap of seeing pre-colonial Hindu religion(s) through colonial spectacles. When combined with a highly questionable periodization of Hindu religious history (which ultimately derives from James Mill’s *A History of British India*) the impression given
was: (i) that Hinduism is a single religion with its origins in the Vedas, (ii) that from the 'medieval' period onwards (c. 10th century onwards) Hinduism stagnated, and lost its potential for renewal, and (iii) that with the arrival of the West, Hindus became inspired to reform their now decadent religion to something approaching its former glory (King: 2008). Along with this trend Mehta (1998, 158) observes that the Muslim interregnum was seen as mainly responsible for all manner of deterioration in the status of Indians.

**Genesis and Growth of Bengal Renaissance**

David Kopf (1980, 502) suggests that modern Orientalism, born in Calcutta in 1784 with the establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal itself was responsible for the birth of the Bengal Renaissance since it 'helped Indians to find an indigenous identity in the modern world'. Kopf further suggests that the modern Orientalists 'were men of social action, working to modernize Hindu culture from within'.

Renaissance minds included Raja Rammohun Roy (1774-1833), Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) and his radical disciples, Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905) and his followers, Akshay Kumar Datta (1820-86), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824-73), Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Western ideas influencing renaissance thinkers and activists included rationalism, humanism, utilitarianism, scientism, individualism, positivism, Darwinism, socialism, and nationalism. Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Isaac Newton (1642-1727), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), Thomas Paine (1737-1809), August Comte (1798-1857), Charles Darwin (1809-82) and John Stuart Mill (1606-73) are only a few among modern western thinkers who found followers and admirers among the thinkers of renascent Bengal. Institutions such as the Asiatic Society of Bengal (est. 1784), Baptist Mission of Serampore (1800), Fort William College (1800), Hindu College (1817), Calcutta School-book Society (1817),
Calcutta Medical College (1835), University of Calcutta (1857) contributed significantly to the Renaissance.

Two of the expressions of the Renaissance were the appearance of a large number of newspapers and periodicals, and the growth of numerous societies, associations and organisations. These in turn served as so many forums for different dialogues and exchanges that the Renaissance produced. However, the most spectacular expression of the Renaissance was a number of reform movements, both religious and social. The other major expression was a secular struggle for rational freethinking. Growth of modern Bengali literature, spread of Western education and ideas, fervent and diverse intellectual inquiry were the results of the Renaissance (Jones: 2004).

Special mention needs to be made of Henry Derozio, a free thinker, who taught European history and literature at the Hindu College (1826-31) as he differed significantly from other reformers in his ideas and approach. He inspired about a dozen disciples to think rationally and independently. Eager readers as they were of Tom Paine’s *Age of Reason* and *Rights of Man* these young men, known collectively as Young Bengal, propagated their radical ideas for some fifteen years (1828-43) in a society called the Academic Association (1828). They were associated with at least six periodicals - Parthenon (1830), East India (1831), Enquirer (1831-34), Jnananvesan (1831-40), Hindu Pioneer (1835-40) and Bengal Spectator (1842-43). For the first few years their chief target of attack was traditional Hinduism. Later, they concentrated on the failings of the colonial Government.

Unlike Rammohun and his followers, the Derozians depended on pure reason and no spirituality. They described the Rammohunites as ‘half-liberals’. This conflict became more spectacular when in the late forties Brahmo leader Debendranath Tagore and the exponent of science Akshay Kumar Datta fell out on the question of infallibility of scripture. In fact, Tagore inherited Rammohun’s spiritualism while his rationalism and scientism inspired Datta. Akshay Kumar attempted to transform Brahmoism into Deism and replace revelation with
the scientific exploration of nature. In the 1850s the conflict assumed a triangular shape with humanist Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar serving as the third arm. Vidyasagar’s humanism got on well with Datta’s scientific rationalism, but both met in Tagore’s spiritualism a most formidable enemy (Jordens T. F: 1978).

This very significant conflict ended in the expulsion of Datta from the Brahmo fold. Turning agnostic, Akshay Kumar Datta would drive into the history of Indian religion and philosophy with rationalism, objectivity, and critical spirit. This is a syndrome that marks the lives of many renascent intellectuals in nineteenth century Bengal (Chakravarti: 1987). The sceptic-agnostic-atheist tradition developed by Derozio, his disciples, Akshay Kumar, and Vidyasagar reached a finale in the positivist Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya (1840-1932), who professed atheism. Historically, this development is immensely significant because, long after the seventh-century nastika (atheist) thinker Jayarashi Bhatta, these deniers were the first to revive the tradition of Indian materialism (Jones: 1976).

Vidyasagar and Akshay K Datta together created modern Bengali prose on the foundations laid by the Pandits of Fort William College, by certain missionaries of the Serampore Baptist Church, as well as by Rammohun Roy and his opponents. The prose would then be flourishing in different forms through the works of Peary Chand Mitra (1814-83), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941). In poetry and drama the iconoclast Michael Madhusudan Dutt, a ‘Derozian’ in spirit, broke conventions to introduce blank verse, sonnet, individualism, worldliness, patriotism, prominence of female characters, and sharper conflicts in drama. A host of playwrights and poets of lesser abilities quickly followed him. Apart from literature, the fields of science, history and philosophy were cultivated by scholars such as Madhusudan Gupta (1800-56, the first Hindu to dissect a human dead body), Mahendra Lal Sarkar (1833-1904), Jagadish Chandra Bose (1858-1937), Prafulla Chandra Roy (1861-1944), Rajendra Lal Mitra (1822-91), Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909), Dwijendranath Tagore (1840-1926), and Krishna Kamal Bhattacharya.
Bhai Girish Chandra Sen (1835-1910) concentrated on Islamic studies and authored numerous books and biographies to illustrate the Islamic tradition. He crowned his life's work with an annotated translation of the Quran (1886), the first such work in Bangla.

The Bengal Renaissance proper covered the first six decades of the nineteenth century during which the driving principle was rationalism, the chief purpose was reform, and the reformers' general target was some aspect of Hinduism. The last four decades were dominated by nationalism, the purpose being regeneration, and the targeted opponent being the British colonial establishment. These efforts led to an intellectual movement known as Neo-Hinduism that sought to rejuvenate Hinduism with the help of a critical reappreciation of Hindu classics as well as the sciences of Europe. Among exponents of Neo-Hinduism were Bhudev Mukiopadyay (1825-94), Bankim C Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekandanda, and Brahma Bandhab Upadhyay (1861-1907). Offering a pantheistic rejoinder to the challenge of monotheism from Brahmos and Christians the Neo-Hindu ideologues set aside social reformism in favor of the idea of conservation/regeneration/growth through education, social service, political and economic activities, as well as intellectual pursuits. They, in general, also promoted the idea of political freedom through armed struggle and adored the motherland as the Mother Goddess. Hindu nationalism gave way to more rational secular Indian nationalism that took shape through such organisations as the India League (1857), Indian Association (1876), National Conference (1883), and the Indian National Congress (1885).

Despite the prevalence of Neo-Hindu and nationalist sentiments, the spirit of the Renaissance did not die out. It rather found new ground in such Muslim pioneers as Delawar Hossaen (1840-1913), a rationalist thinker on Muslim socioeconomic problems, Mir Mosharaff Hosaain (1847-1912), novelist, playwright, social critic; and Roquiah Sakhawat Hossain (1880-1932), writer, educationist, crusader for the emancipation of Muslim women. And by the end of the century the renascent spirit started spreading to many parts of the subcontinent (Chakravarti: 1999).
According to many post-modernist scholars, the term ‘Renaissance’ for Bengal context is a mislabelling in the sense that it was a phenomenon occasioned by the colonial government’s administrative and educational measures consciously intended to produce a class of the kind we find in the nineteenth century. The class was very tiny and limited to a section of the upper class urban Hindus and its thinking and activities had little or no effect on Bengal society in general. Large sections of Muslim society remained unaffected by it and so was non-urban Hindu society (Mani: 1989). However we have discussed this ‘renaissance’ here because the novelists chosen for the study belong to the elite minority that was influenced by the spirit of revivalism set in motion by this movement as could be learnt from their biographical details.

Perceptions of Islamic Reformers

Like ‘Hindu’ social reformers, the Islamic reformers also perceived indigenous social structure in diverse ways. Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-98), fascinated with western science, and knowledge felt depressed with the state of decadence of Muslim society in particular and India in general. To overcome this state of indigenous society, he felt that some of the innovative features of English society – its discipline, orders efficiency and high level of literacy along with science and technology – must be adopted by the Muslim community. Sayyid Ahmed addressed himself to the members of *ashraf* (respectful descendents of past rulers) and stressed the importance of ancestry and social status. He believed that western education and knowledge through institutions like the Mahammadan Anglo-Oriental College of Aligarh (1875) would create a generation of leaders who would unite the depressed Muslims into a single *qawm*, a community no longer divided by sectarian strife, class tensions and issues of language. Although Ahmad wanted to introduce some changes in behavior and customs, he upheld the structure of social hierarchy and class. Contrary to this, the
Barelwi ulama led by Ahmad Riza Khan (1856-1921) defended contemporary customary practices and religion of Islam. The Barelwis accepted a wide variety of customary practice, defended the established religious elite and showed no interest in western science. However, the Islamic movements of return like Deobandis linked the Ulama class-interests with the fortunes of the Muslim community. Although they did not ignore the ascendancy of English power, they looked for a new vision of purified religion and a resurgence of ulama. The Deobandi curriculum was designed to prepare students for their role as members of the ulama and thereby strengthen the link between Islamic religion and culture and the Muslim community. Although, they used English techniques and methods for erecting their educational institutions and raising funds, the structure of Islamic society, especially the ashraf classes provided broad support and financial resources for their endeavours.

The Fara’izis under the leadership of Shariat’ Ullah (1781-1840) and his son Dadu Miyan also represented a return to a more puritanical Islam. In fact the term fara’iz meant the obligatory duties of Islam. They wanted to purge Islam of polytheistic beliefs and other customs that prevailed among the uneducated, Muslim peasants of Bengal and which the Fairazis believed were because of influence of Hindu community on them. They challenged the beliefs of orthodox Muslims as well as Hinduism which was seen as the fountain of polytheism and all evil innovations. As the majority of landlords in East Bengal region were Hindus, their ideological campaign got embroiled in the agrarian conflicts. They challenged the power of local landlords and indigo planters. Shariat ‘Ullah asked his followers to reject the illegal demands of landlords such as collection of money for Durga Puja. His son, Dudu Miyan took a more radical stance and proclaimed that all land belonged to God and that land tax was both illegal and immoral. Such a perception of landed property was a direct attack on the power of landlords and popularized the fairazis among the Muslim peasantry.
The net result of the reformation and revivalism within the Indian Muslim society was that some of the Hindu leaders became very self-conscious and defensive as the Muslims along with the Christians were defined by them as the other, in opposition to whom their identity had to be explored and defined.

Reformation as a Communal Agenda

While Rammohun Roy cherished a vision of an Indian society rejuvenated by centuries of exposure to Western science and Christian morality, Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) urged a regeneration of Hinduism through adherence to a purified "Vedic faith". The Vedic Aryans are praised by Dayananda as a primordial and elect people to whom the Veda has been revealed by God and whose language (Sanskrit) is said to be the 'Mother of all languages' (Dayananda: 1981, 249). National renaissance for Dayanda implied a return of the Vedic Golden Age. The chief object of the Arya Samaj, which he founded in 1875 in Bombay, was to bring about social and religious reform through a renaissance of early Hindu doctrines. Popular slogans were "Back to the Vedas" and "Aryavarta for the Aryans" (Smith: 1938, 57). This view simply equated Indian culture with Hinduism and Hindu culture; all non-Hindu cultural traditions were regarded as contaminating influences. The Arya Samaj is probably the first movement in India to define nationalism in terms of ethnicity as in Dayananda's writings the Hindus are described as the incontestable descendents of the Aryans.

Dayananda's attack on other religions such as Christianity and Islam was vigorous. His book, the *Satyarth Prakash* contains a polemical chapter against Christianity, one against Islam, one against Buddhism and Jainism, and several against allegedly degenerative trends in Hinduism. The Arya Samaj had two items in its manifesto: *Shuddi*, the meaning of which is purification, a term for the ceremony by which non-Hindus were converted to Hinduism, and *Sangathan* which literally means union, that is the promotion of solidarity.
among Hindus. In short, the Arya Samaj wanted to establish a Hindu nation by propagating a common religion and culture in India and converting others to Hinduism through the ceremony of Shuddhi (Jordens: 1978).

The idea of world domination by the Hindus was voiced at that time by another Arya Samajist based in the Rajasthani British enclave of Ajmer, Har Bilas Sarda (1867-1955). In the second chapter of The Hindu Superiority (1906), entitled “Hindu Colonization of the World”, the author rejects the Central Asia theory of emigration of the Aryans to India, and asserts that Aryavarta was the birthplace of a race which subsequently spread and settled in Egypt, Ethiopia, Persia, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Turkistan, Germany, Scandinavia, the Hyperborean countries, Great Britain, Eastern Asia and America (Sarda: 1975, 109-163). According to Sarda most civilizations of the world could be traced back to the Hindu-Aryans, a race which had colonized the whole world before the Mahabharat war (Sarda, 1975). The ideological impact of the Arya Samaj was one among several factors that influenced the subsequent ideology of Hindu nationalism that emerged in the 1920s (Jaffrelot: 1996, 17).

An Analysis of the ‘Renaissance’

The causal factors responsible for Indian renaissance are many: the rise of a new class which was in search of jobs under the new dispensation; the scientific basis of the new culture which had created a powerful technological civilization in the West; and the disintegration of the traditional social and economic institutions as a result of the introduction of new laws. The impact of the introduction of English education was incalculably great. The products of the system began to share the general sense of progress which was common to people of different dispositions in the West. It is not, therefore, surprising that people like Rammohun Roy and Keshub Chandra Sen set themselves up to preach the superiority of the modern, largely Western, culture. It indeed seemed reasonable to assume that the
new culture, which had led to the development of sciences and arts in Europe, could also lead to the development of India. They reasoned that if this culture had led to a better society in the West, it was no less relevant to India (Mehta: 1988, 51). Even schools and colleges started by the Arya Samaj (Lajput Roy Section) the militant foe of alien influences, accepted and taught modern education, only adding to it religious instruction, such as the teaching of the doctrine of the infallibility of the Vedas which, in fact, contradicted very spirit of the liberal education which they imparted, the keynote of which was to appraise things by experiment and reason. (Desai: 1989, 142-143)

Most nineteenth-century Indian intellectuals shared the conviction, that the prevailing social practices and religious order were impediments to progress (Kidwai: 1961, 123-24). Polytheism and idolatory, they believed, negated the development of individuality; and supernaturalism and religious authority fostered obedience born out of fear (Roy, 1906, 945-46). However, Mehta (1988, 52) argues that along with adoption and appropriation of the ‘rational’ and ‘libertarian’ ideas of the West, their attitude of looking down upon Indian society seriously repelled the renaissance thinkers at the turn of the nineteenth century. This was not merely confined to politics but was spread throughout all aspects of national life and literature, art and manners. The leaders of this reaction launched a severe assault upon assumptions of the Western model; and the story of this reaction against not only the political but also the cultural domination of the West, both sinister and liberating, is largely the history of the national movement till the nineteen thirties. The leaders of the reaction never accepted that the aim of modernization in India was to imitate the West. They all admired the efforts of the West to create a new order based on freedom and equality. Their attempt was to confront the processes of modernization and changes in family structure with a new articulation of Hindu values and norms. They called upon the people to keep the Hindu family atmosphere free of all cultural pollution since they believed that the ongoing invasion of Indian cultural space by Western values was a conspiracy by forces determined to weaken India by uprooting it from its traditions (Kakar and Kakar: 2007, 136).
Sen (2003, 12-33) argues that since the days of Rammohan, there was a serious search for not only a ‘rational’ but ‘national’ scripture. This, it would seem, was the tactical move to bring Hinduism closer to a ‘Religion of the Book’ comparable to Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. On the other hand, modern Hinduism also upheld the idea of religion as a plural experience, which implicitly called for an eclectic attitude towards texts. The latter – represented by modern mystics like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836-86), Keshab Chandra Sen, and, still later, Gandhi – was never entirely obliterated. However, the passion for a single identity or the fetishization of what was seen as a homogenized tradition considerably undermined the pluralist thesis.

The early religious reformers strove to extend the principle of individual liberty to the sphere of religion (Desai: 1989, 282). In fact, these religio-reform movements, the early Brahma Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj, the Arya Samaj, and others, were in different degrees endeavors to recast the old religion into a new form suited to meet the needs of the new society. It is true that some of their leaders (especially of the Arya Samaj) had the misconception that they were reviving the old pristine social structure of the Vedic Aryans, that they were returning to golden age. In reality they were engaged in varying degrees, in adapting the Hindu religion to the social, political, economic, and cultural needs of the contemporary Indian nation. History records instances where the consolidators of new societies were imagining that they were returning to the past and reviving the best social forms existing in the old periods. In fact, the early religio-reform movements in India were attempting to build a religious outlook which would build up national unity of all communities, the Hindus, the Muslims, the Parsis, and the rest, for solving such common national tasks as the economic development of India on modern lines, the removal of restrictions pit on the people’s free evolution, the establishment of equality between man and woman, the abolition of caste, the abolition of the Brahmin as the monopolist of classical culture and sole intermediary between God and the individual (Desai: 1989, 282). However, slowly
and progressively the reform movement became very narrow and restricted in its approach due to the side-glancing of the West.

Desai (1989, 285-86) observes that another characteristic of the religio-reform movements was that their programme was not restricted to the task of merely reforming religion but extended to that of the reconstruction of social institutions and social relations. This was due to the fact that in India religion and social structure were organically interwoven. Caste hierarchy, sex inequality, untouchability, and social taboos, flourished because of the sanction of religion. Social reform, consequently, constituted a part of the platform of all religio-reform movements. While rationalizing religion to a greater or less degree, these movements also aimed at rationalizing social institutions and relations to greater or less degree. Nowhere in the world did religion dominate and determine the life of the individual as in India. His economic activity, his social life, his marriage, birth, and death, his physical movements, all were strictly and minutely controlled by religion. It was indispensable for the religio-reform movements to have an all-embracing programme of religious, social, and even political reform. They fought the caste system and the ban on going to a foreign country as much as polytheism and idolatry. They attacked caste privilege as much as the monopoly rights of the Brahmin in the sphere of religion. They attacked all this because they were obstacles to national progress which required, as its vital pre-condition, national unity based on the principles of equality and liberty of individuals and groups.

Despite all these broad, overarching features of the movement, the world of reform as one can imagine, was far from homogeneous or united in its objectives. Thus, both Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) and Keshab Chandra Sen (1838-84) singled out idolatry and the worship of multiple gods and goddesses as issues which deserved top priority in any reformist agenda. Pandit Iswar Chunder Vidyasagar (1820-91) and Behramji M. Malabari (1853-1912) committed their lives and personal fortunes to the emancipation of women. Jotirao Phule (1827-90), E.V. Ramasami Periyar (1879-1973), and Bhimrao Ambedkar
identified caste as the major stumbling block on the road to social progress (Sen: 2003, 5). Hence, it can be observed that the reactions of the reformers were also shaped by the regional culture in which they lived, by their place in the social hierarchy, and by their membership of a particular religious community. The British themselves changed in their attitudes and in their own culture as the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, and the nineteenth to the twentieth (Jones: 2004, 2).

Thus, as the movement was spearheaded mainly by the elite, upper-caste leaders the concerns of the people at the lower strata were either not represented or often put forth in a partial, distorted fashion.

Renaissance and the Question of Indian Identity

The caste Hindus were unhappy with the essentialist and, inevitably, biased definitions of themselves by the British. The only way out for them was to define themselves in their own terms. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that almost all Hindu writers from Raja Ram Mohan Roy onwards, were seriously preoccupied with self-definition.

The British treated Hinduism as a religion in their attempt at codifying everything based on their historical orthodoxy. But Hinduism is not a religion and is a set of practices followed by large sections of people on the subcontinent. Therefore, the Hindus felt the need to define themselves against their colonizer. Bhiku Parekh sums this up aptly:

... Hindus could not define and make sense of themselves without defining and making sense of the colonial rule and vice versa....Colonial rule was not an independent and external phenomenon brought about by the British, but an expression of the inner processes occurring within Hindu society. It, therefore, provided not only the context in which, the Hindus collectively defined both what and who they were, but also a minor in which they caught glimpses of themselves, of their character, strengths and especially their weaknesses (1999, 41).
Sen (2003, 3-4) opines that in nineteenth-century India, the Hindus were quick to realize that ‘reform’ was not just about altering beliefs or practices, but invariably touched upon deeper questions of self-identity. According to him (f. 3) their growing familiarity with modern disciplines like history, anthropology, politics, and the natural sciences enabled Hindus not only to compare the state of their own society and civilization with that of the West but also to develop a deep self-reflexivity about their own tradition. Over time, they began to perceive themselves as a distinct community with its history and trajectories of social and cultural development. Modern Hindus also acknowledged the fact that the operative side to reform work was intertwined with the cognitive. Thus, attempts to bring about change went beyond the selection of issues or appropriate strategies. Above all, it needed a social subject. Hence, ‘What is Hindu?’ became inextricably linked to ‘Who is a Hindu?’ or ‘What does it mean to be a Hindu?’ Hence, nineteenth-century Hindu reformers, even when targeting select groups such as upper-caste widows, Dalits, or purely local communities indulging in specific malpractices, tried to project their work as something touching upon the life of every Hindu. For exactly the same reasons, Hindu religious thinkers of modern India, rather than abide by the highly pluralistic nature of traditional Hinduism, promoted the idea of a single, nationalized religion for all Hindus.

Nationalism and the Creation of a Pan-Indian Culture

In the opinion of Jones (2004, 66) the British conquests in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries stimulated a growth of trade, while their legal system protected commercial activities. For urban Hindus of the upper castes this meant a new degree of prosperity and with that came an increase in aggressiveness and a pride in their culture. Wealthy Hindus built temples, sponsored the publication of Hindu religious literature, and founded organizations for a variety of purposes. Along with the rise in this trend, after some
limited success of the western ideas in ‘modernizing’ Indian thought and life, there was a perceptible decline in the reform movements as “popular attitudes” towards them “hardened.” The new politics of nationalism “glorified India’s past and tended to defend everything traditional.” Thus, all attempts to change customs and life-styles began to be seen as the aping of western manners and thereby regarded with suspicion. Consequently, nationalism fostered a distinctly conservative attitude towards social beliefs and practices. Hence, Chatterjee (1989, 234) argues that the movement towards modernization was stalled by nationalist politics.

Sarkar (1985, 157-72) argues that the limitations of nationalist ideology in pushing forward a campaign for liberal and egalitarian social change cannot be seen as a retrogression from an earlier radical reformist phase. Those limitations were in fact present in the earlier phase as well. The ‘renaissance’ reformers, he shows, were highly selective in their acceptance of liberal ideas from Europe. Fundamental elements of social conservatism such as the maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in the family, acceptance of the sanctity of the shastra (ancient scriptures), preference for symbolic rather than substantive change in social practices – all of them were conspicuous in the reform movements of the early and mid-nineteenth century (Chatterjee: 1989, 235). In fact, Sarkar throws doubt upon the very assumption that the early attempts at reform were principally guided by any ideological acceptance of liberal or rationalist values imported from the West.

In the opinion of Fox (1992), the major part of the problem is that even the highly respected personalities such as Swami Vivekananda and Mohandas K. Gandhi, deeply influenced by the West’s stereotypical portrayal of ‘the Orient’, tended towards a highly selective, partial, and in a way ‘communal’ outlook of Indian history and culture. In Vivekananda’s hands, Orientalist notions of India as ‘other worldly’ and ‘mystical’ were embraced and praised as India’s special gift to humankind. Thus, the very discourse which
succeeded in alienating, subordinating and controlling India was used by Vivekananda as a religious clarion-call for the Indian people to unite under the banner of a universalistic and all-embracing Hinduism (King: 2008, 13).

Chatterjee (1992) and Juergensmeyer (1993) assert that the invention of ‘Hinduism’ as a single ‘world’ religion was also accompanied by the rise of a nationalist consciousness in India since the nineteenth century. As we have seen the modern nation-state, of course, is a product of European socio-political and economic developments from the sixteenth century onwards and the introduction of the nationalist model into Asia is a further legacy of European imperialism in this area. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, to find that the very Hindu nationalists who fought so vehemently against British imperialist rule, themselves accepted the homogenizing concepts of ‘nationhood’ and ‘Hinduism,’ which ultimately derived from their imperial rulers (Chatterjee 1986 & 1992). King (2008, 25), however, argues that it is difficult to see what alternative the anti-colonialists had, since the nation-state provides the paradigmatic building block of all contemporary economic, political and cultural interaction. Romila Thapar consolidates this position by pointing to the political consequences of the construction of a common Hindu identity. Thus, she argues that,

Since it was easy to recognize other communities on the basis of religion, such as Muslims and Christians, an effort was made to consolidate a parallel Hindu community. . . . In Gramsci’s terms, the class which wishes to become hegemonic has to nationalize itself and the ‘nationalist’ Hinduism comes from the middle class (1989, 230).

**Historical Consciousness and the Reconstruction of History**

As seen in the earlier sections of this Chapter, the explicit reaction to the attacks on Hindu civilization by the proto-nationalists in the 1840s was preceded by a growing
historical consciousness of the past. Chakravarti (1999, 36) opines that as an important aspect of the ideological encounter between the west and Hinduism as contained in the writing of history, it is necessary to briefly review the early indigenous historical works and trace the subsequent shift as the century progresses. For instance, the very first textbook published at Serampore press in 1801 was *Raja Pratapaditya Charita*, a historical sketch of the Raja of Jessore by Ramram Basu. (Kopf: 1969, 125) This was followed by *Rajaboli*, a story of kings, by Mritunjay Vidyalankar. Essentially anecdotal, it however included tales of heroes, Hindu, Muslim, and British, from the battles of Kurukshetra down to Plassey. It is significant that at this early stage heroism was not an attribute of nationalism in particular, that the Marathas are cast as “alien plunderers,” and that valour was not associated with particular communities in India. Further, it should be noted that historical knowledge about ancient India was still not available. Vidyalankar says nothing of Ashoka, the Guptas or Buddhist India; the rediscoveries by nineteenth century scholarship which would establish the contours of the political history of ancient India were still to come. (Kopf: 1969, 124) *Rajaboli* was thus a reflection of the eighteenth century consciousness (often transmitted through the oral tradition) of the Bengali pandits before the birth of cultural nationalism. (Chakravarti: 1999, 36-37).

In the wider context of cultural nationalism Bankim too was creatively involved in forging a new national identity for both men and women which highlighted the newly regenerated Hindu-Aryan male as one who combined in himself the militancy of the martial groups and the spirituality of the *sanyasi* (renouncer). In Bankim’s view India was in a subject position because Indians were weak (*balhin*) and effeminate (*strisvabhav*) (Clark T.W, 435). He bemoaned that liberty was unknown to any Indian people except the Rajputs. According to Bankim the concept of *svadhinta* (freedom) was unknown in ancient or in medieval literature (*Ibid*, 436). The only people who had a consciousness of their nationhood
were the ancient Aryan invaders of India but in course of time even they became divided into small and separate groups and lost the sense of nationhood (Ibid, 437). To remedy the situation, Bankim felt it was necessary to develop a strong militant race. The prerequisite for attaining this objective was the restoration of national unity and pride through a reinterpretation of the past (Ibid, 435).

The aggressiveness of the new cultural nationalism marked a sharp break from the universalism of the earlier phase associated with Rammohun Roy and a section of the Brahmo Samaj. The new identity of aggressive cultural nationalism valorized select features of a Hindu past; everything related to Aryan and Kshatriya values embodying vigour and militancy were central to this new identity; So Was genuine spiritualism of the world-affirming kind such as that associated with the Vedas or even with Bankim’s Krishna in the Krishnacharita or the sanyasis in Anandmath. But this process of selection also meant a process of exclusion in the formation of the new national identity. First, it was clearly a new ‘Hindu’ identity which excluded all ‘foreigners’ which for Bankim meant Muslims. Further, in his view, the Hindu identity also came to be explicitly associated with a specifically Aryan identity. In his analysis there was also a connection between the un-Aryan and the Muslim. In Bengal the awareness and pride in an Aryan identity had led to a simple dichotomization of the population into high castes comprising Aryan, and labouring groups comprising un-Aryan. Bankim extended this dichotomization by associating Aryan purity with the high castes, especially the Bengali Brahmin, and non-Aryan impurity with the low castes, especially those who had converted enmasse to Islam. Thus Bankim’s regenerated Hindu ‘national’ identity excluded not only the Muslims but also the lower castes as they were of non-Aryan and ‘impure’ extraction. This process of exclusion and inclusion was more explicit in Bankim’s case but it is important to bear in mind that it was fairly representative of all the nineteenth century cultural nationalists (Chakravarti: 1999, 49-50).
Social and Ideological Moorings of the Nationalists

The social background and the ideological basis of a group play a very significant role in shaping its perception. Although, there cannot be direct correlation between social and class background and perception of a group, it can be said that the class background of nationalists imparted some general characteristics to their perception of prevalent social-structure. Generally speaking, as most of the nationalists were of a liberal democratic persuasion, they believed in the sanctity and security of private property and also upheld the virtues of social-hierarchy. According to Prof. Bipan Chandra (1993), diverse political and ideological trends co-existed and simultaneously contended for hegemony within the wide spectrum of nationalist ideology, however, most of them tended to ignore and downplay the internal contradictions of Indian society in terms of class, caste and religious divisions.

Social Background of Nationalists

The Nationalist leadership came mainly from the upper caste and class, western educated urban middle class professionals (Kothari, 1987). There was not much urbanization during the first half of the 19th century in India. The percentage of population residing in towns of more than 5,000 inhabitants remained stationary between 10-11 percent (Pannikar: 1995). However, the picture was not so static as the nature and character of urban centers changed significantly under the colonial rule. Some old towns linked with administrative and military functions of indigenous ruling houses declined and some new towns especially those functioning as major warehouses for distant markets emerged, stimulated by commercial colonial economy.

According to Yogendra Singh (1997) one peculiar urban form associated with colonialism was 'port-city'. We can take up the example of Calcutta to show the impact of such urban centres on the indigenous socio-cultural life. The European or White town,
constructed as per the English urban models, was confined to a small part around Fort William. It was the headquarter of the East India company in India. About 3000 Europeans stayed there in vast houses surrounded by wide avenues and green spaces. But the majority of 2,30,000 Indians in 1837 who made up the Block-city, stayed in a number of localities (paras). Each para had developed around the domain of a merchant family, each having its own market and other services necessary for its functioning. Such cities were to become the centres of social and cultural life for the indigenous elite. All zamindar families of Bengal had a residence in Calcutta and members of intelligentsia initially either came from this group or were dependent on this group. However, new opportunities, associated with western education, new printing technology and capitalist enterprise gradually replaced this dependence.

Chatterjee (1986) opines that the indigenous elite wished to acquire western knowledge and proficiency in English language, but did not always seek to imitate the English or Europeans in all aspects of life. The initiative to learn English and Western science came from the upper caste and upper class Hindus as early as 1817 who established the Hindu College in Calcutta. The print-culture also came with colonialism. The first modern press established by William Carey (The Baptist Missionary) in 1801 at Serampore, published, along with the translations of Bible, the first works of modern Bengali prose, and a Darpan (1818). A new class of indigenous intellectuals emerged in this process of importing western knowledge and technology of print, though it still came from the upper castes who enjoyed the privilege of literacy in the pre-colonial times. Soon, it became independent of the local zamindars and landed magnates.

The Macaulay's Minute (1835) accelerated the process, although his own aim was to produce Indians who would serve the British in subordinate positions (Damle & Aikara, 1982). The Wood's dispatch (1854) adopted a more coherent plan to develop education in India. Universities were established at the Presidency capitals of Calcutta, Bombay and
Madras in 1857 and between 1865-85, about 50,000 candidates passed the entrance examination to the university and about 18,000 earned a University degree. In addition to it, some others were enrolled in specialized professional courses and institutions such as Medical Colleges and engineering schools. These colonial educational institutions were sources of both employment and intellectual influences. The legal profession was the main source of both employment and intellectual influences. The legal profession was the main source of employment and at the end of 19th century, nearly 14,000 person were employed in this in the three Presidencies.

The Vernacular Press and teaching offered other prospects. Some scholars even relate the emergence of Indian nationalism to the absence of satisfactory job opportunities among the indigenous elite sections. This sounds too simplistic but there is little doubt that the colonial state followed a strategy to cultivate the urban professional classes, whose skills were essential to the business of administration (Heehs: 1997).

Social groups such as the Bengali bhadralok ('the respectable folk') and the Parsis of Bombay were drawn to the standard of the Raj not simply by financial and status rewards of public service but also by the heady allurements of western thought and culture. As early as 1877, Keshab Chandra Sen had expressed faith in the providential hand of the Raj. Gradually this faith in the providential aspect of the colonial state was shaken and moderate nationalists, whatever the weaknesses of their strategy, made a brilliant and thorough critique of the economic aspects of colonialism (Koenraad: 2001).

The colonial social milieu had not only produced student clubs like the society for Acquisition of General knowledge (Calcutta, 1838), it also became a cradle for the development of political associations such as British Indian Association (Calcutta, 1851), Bombay Association (1852) and Native Association in Madras. The colonial public space initially affected only an infinitesimal elite, not even the urban middle classes. When Indian
National Congress was created in 1885 under the guidance of A.O. Hume, most of its delegates hailed from bourgeois big city professionals with a sprinkling of merchants and landowners. Eleven of first sixteen Congress Presidents were barristers. Badruddin Tyabji earned Rs. 122,000 from his legal practice in 1890, an amount that was four times the salary of a highly paid Indian Civil service (ICS) officer. Justice M.G. Ranade, was attended by some 21 coolies. Motilal Nehru, a highly successful lawyer of High Court, lived in a big mansion lit by electricity and drove a motor car when there were only a handful in the entire country. In short, they came from wealthy sections of the society and enjoyed high social status in the hierarchy of traditional society (and many of them happened to be Brahmins).

This social background naturally placed limitations on their form of patriotism and their imaginations. They were wedded to the system of property and apprehensive of sponsoring anything that might upset the social harmony and the hierarchical arrangement of society (Koenraad, 2001). According to Rajni Kothari (1987) the foundational goal of the Indian National Congress reflected this. The principal demands of Indian National Congress were: reform of central and Provincial Legislative Councils (with greater powers and with acceptance of elective principle in representation), the Indianization of top-level administration by simultaneous organization of entrance examination to Indian Civil Service, both in England and India, judicial reform and access of Indians to the high ranks of the army. Other demands were economic in nature such as reduction of Home charges and military expenditure, the need to encourage technical education with a view to facilitate the industrial development of the country, the abolition of duty on alcohol and the extension of permanent settlement. These issues were of interest only to a small section of privileged individuals within the indigenous society. The nationalist paradigm of development reflected the aspirations of the propertied sections to take India onto an independent course of
capitalistic development, although some broader issues such as reduction of salt tax, betterment of conditions of Indian migrant labour working in colonial plantations and revocation of Forest Acts were included to give the programme a semblance of general public concern. As most of the members of Indian National Congress, especially in Bengal belonged to zamindars, the scope of agrarian programme remained very limited. In fact, the nationalist intelligentsia was operating in a context characterized by predominance of landed property over movable property and could hardly overcome the constraints imposed by these conditions.

According to the Cambridge historians, C.A. Bayly (1975) and R.A. Washbrook (1976), the intelligentsia intervened into the public space, not as the representative of their own class but as the agents of rural magnates or of the powerful banker traders of the cities. Such simplistic correlation leaves out the complex ideological strands that coloured the perceptions of the nationalist leadership. Still, it appears that they are limiting at the roots of question as to why the congress ultimately favoured a bureaucratic rather than mobilizational form of carrying out the “passive revolution” or a gradual conservative social transformation in 1947 and, thus, retained the power of agrarian magnates in the countryside.

The Ideological Base of the Nationalists

As seen by us in the previous sections, the colonial modernity that shaped many public institutions and policy measures entailed the notion of legal rights, sanctity and security of private property and capitalistic enterprise, modern printing and state regulated education. The nationalist leadership, while seeking to challenge the colonial state and its hegemony used an ideological amalgam or hybrid of ‘modern’ ideologies and ‘invented’ indigenous cultural resources. Therefore, the ‘nationalism’ was a multi-faceted phenomenon.

The Congress leaders, who had imbibed the liberal consciousness and who were also
guided by a modernistic credo, wished to create a civil society in India on the model of European society, a society of individuals that would be implicitly counter to descent groups.

The extension of print culture and the colonial education with a standardized school curriculum stimulated the growth of such a civil society in India and the nationalist leaders only wanted to accelerate this process. However, as Rajat Kanta Ray (2003) has shown, “The pre-history of every national movement lies in emotions, identities and notions” (5). The idea of a ‘nation-in-the-making’ might have been new, but popular mentality and emotions were rooted in the past cultural-historical legacies. In other words, identities in the colonial milieu were not created all of a sudden they were rooted in “the raw, un-fashioned feeling of the multitude” (Ray: 2003, 34). One way to avoid being caught in the trap of multiple and competing religious and cultural identities was to refuse to make social reform an objective of political action. Therefore, the social issues were not tackled directly during the annual sessions of the Congress, rather they were discussed in an Indian Social Conference, outside the framework of the Congress under the guidance of M.G Ranade.

K.N. Pannikar (1995) opines that the colonial state also provided encouragement to the redefinition of social identities by its own initiative. The decennial censuses started enumerating people according to the caste-status and there was a competition among many sub-castes to claim a high varna-status. This expanded the axis of ‘horizontal solidarities’ through a number of caste-associations that fostered supra-local identities especially in towns where it was difficult to observe ritualistic prescriptions. Similarly, the Cow Protection Agitation (1893) in North India, a movement against the slaughter of cows, also consolidated a Pan-Hindu identity. Earlier, the Hindus were a disparate collection of castes, sects and local cults that followed a congeries of religious practices. The new Hindu ‘collectivity’ also brought merchant and artisans into the public arena (Haq: 1992).

The educated nationalist intelligentsia, nevertheless, hardly seemed preoccupied at this
juncture with the questions of religious and communal identity (Damle and Aikara, 1982; Koenraad, 2001). Many of them seemed to concur with the criticism of Christian missionaries directed against the ‘evils of Indian Society’. The consolidation of caste-solidarities did not bother them as they were wedded to the notion of social-hierarchy and caste was the best representation of the principle of hierarchy. What some of them, especially the Extremist faction led by Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal, questioned was the right of colonializers to interfere in the beliefs and faith of the indigenous people. While some people like M.G. Ranade agreed to the criticism of social evils on the basis of Western Conception of rationality, the revivalistic strand in nationalist politics perceived the Indian Social structure from a contrary point of view. Lala Lajpat Rai wrote in 1904 in an article entitled ‘Reform Revival’:

“Cannot a revivalist arguing in the same strain, ask the reformers into what they wish to reform us? Whether they want us to be reformed on the pattern of the English or the French? Whether they want us to accept the divorce laws of Christian society or temporary marriages that are now so much in favour in France or America? Whether they want to make men of our women by putting them into those avocations for which nature never meant them? In short, whether they want to revolutionize our society by an outlandish imitation of European customs and manners and a diminished adoption of European vice?” (89).

However, Viswanathan (2003) argues that a simplistic demarcation between tradition and modernity is not possible and the hybrid that evolved due to interaction between modernity of the west and the indigenous traditions involved many ambiguities and ambivalences. The issue was addressed again and again in the nationalist discourse. The colonial milieu produced intellectuals who adopted different routes to seek transcendence.
from the oppressive present. Nehru had hinted at the basic ambivalence involved in this cultural encounter and described the Indian middle class dilemma to choose between modernism and a search for the cultural roots in the past. Aurobindo Ghosh (1965) had wished for a synthesis of oriental values and occidental ideas in the following words in an essay 'New Lamps for Old', published on 4\textsuperscript{th} December, 1893:

"No one will deny — that for us, and even for those of us who have a strong affection for original oriental things and believe that there is in them a great deal that is beautiful, a great deal that is serviceable, a great deal that is worth keeping, the most important objective is and must inevitably be the admission into India of occidental ideas, methods and culture" (13).

Nationalists’ Perception of the Social Division

In the opinion of Chakravarti (1998) the nationalist faced no problem in opposing the bureaucratic intrusions of Indian society by the colonial state, even if some of them were, on the surface, at least guided by altruistic motives (such as famine relief and free vaccination against diseases). They could be easily depicted as the agenda of an alien government to wean away the Indians from their ancestral beliefs and customs, thus, requiring resistance from indigenous society. In a similar fashion, the economic penetration and imposition of land-revenue policies, forest Acts through an alien bureaucracy could be held responsible for the moral and material degradation of indigenous society. The economic backwardness and primitiveness of Indian social institutions was linked to lack of sufficient modernization and transfer of resources from India to England due to preponderance of vested colonial interests. However, a more vexatious question was how to deal with some of pre-colonial social cleavages of caste, class, gender and religious nature. Contrary to
what some scholars believe, not all of them were 'invented' by the colonial rulers. Some of them were modified, distorted and used by the colonial rulers. For instance, religious division was used selectively to patronize a particular religious community in the system of separate electorate. In some cases, the religious divisions were enmeshed into an intricate web of property-relations at local level. These were also other irreconcilable contradictions such as between landowning dominant farmers and the landless agricultural labour, and capital and labour in the new urban centres. There were also contestations between the dominant, upper castes and lower caste groups. The system of agrestic serfdom or bonded labour had existed even in the pre-colonial periods due to a peculiar caste-class configuration that maintained landlessness among the lower castes (Sunder: 1986).

Smith (2003) asserts that the nationalists, even when they were aware of many of these contradictions, tended to ignore them. They had no intention of challenging the existing pattern of social prestige and hierarchy. They gave primacy to the contradiction between colonialism and the entire Indian society. Poona Sarvjanik Sabha (1870), in its manifesto had declared that its members were to be "men of respectability, inamdars or proprietors of land, savkars or money lenders, merchants, government officers, pleaders, professors and most of the ruling chiefs of the Southern Maratha country."

It is, therefore, not surprising that the Indian educated classes were divided even over the support to a mild reform like Behram Malabari's campaign against early marriage and a need to raise the legal minimum age of marriage from 10 to 12 for girls. [The Age of Consent Bill Controversy (1891)]. Although aware of the inherent social contradictions in the indigenous social structure, the social conference under the leadership of M.G Ranade did not want 'to kick the old ladder' yet talked about 're-casting family, village, tribe and nation in new moulds'. Ranade also lamented that the colonial state had done away with the traditional protection of person and property. He, therefore, wished to achieve a
harmonious integration of hierarchically ordered village society with a paternalistic hand. Ranade emphasized the credit functions of sahukars (money lenders) in the wake of the Deccan Peasant Revolt (1875) and established Poona lavad (arbitration) court on the model of traditional village Panchyat, which would function to achieve an informal but effective compromise in both public and private conflicts (beyond the contractual British model). This was like an attempt to restore an old institution that had decayed because of violent innovation under the destructive impact of colonialism (Geetha and Rajadurai: 1998).

The Gandhian imagination of a ‘Ram-rajya’ with its idyllic village communities and his idealization of small scale village cottage industries, even while making some qualified exception to the use of labour saving modern machines, became a symbol of nationalist challenge to the colonial penetration of Indian society and its institutions (Keer: 1962). However, Gandhi selectively ignored the class questions and wished to resolve them through the policy of adjustment of class-interests and harmony. Mahatama Gandhi had organized the textile workers of Ahmedabad in the form of Ahmedabad Textile labour Association and under-took a fast of 21 days to get bonus from the capitalist employers in 1918. Subsequently, Gandhi stayed away from the militant actions of industrial labour. The Gandhian Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association promoted the ideology of class-harmony between labour and capital. Gandhi employed the notion of Trusteeship for the capitalists and perceived the employers as the trustees of the society who would work for the benefit of the workers. The other prominent nationalist leaders who were associated with labour organization such as B.P. Wadia, V.V. Girri, C.R. Das and even Jawaharlal Nehru also favoured a constitutionalist and reformist line of action in labour-struggle. Similarly on the agrarian front, although some congress leaders especially those belonging to the Congress Socialist camp organized peasants and tenants against the semi-feudal oppression, the general approach was to ignore internal differentiation within peasantry (Deshpande: 2002). The Right wing conservatives within
congress, on the other hand, directly sided with the feudal landlords. The most marginalized section dependent on agriculture, the agricultural labour was not on the agenda at all. M.G. Ranade had favoured transfer of land from inefficient poor peasants to resourceful, rich and inefficient poor peasants to resourceful, rich and efficient farmers on the ground of economic rationality. R.C. Dutt had defended the Zamindari or Permanent Settlement as a rational and just act of the British in India. Similarly, while perception of caste differed and while some regarded it as the essence of Indian social structure, others were aware of the harmful effects of caste, no systematic anti-Caste ideology was worked out. Even the radical wing of Congress thought that the institution of caste will wither away with industrialization and modernization of society (Aloysius, 1998).

Gandhi repeatedly addressed women in his political discourse and regarded them as a regenerative force. He permitted and encouraged their active participation in the public and political life, especially after 1930. On the other hand, the roles he expected for them were as mothers and supporters of men and as examples of self-sacrifice and non-violence, as spinners of Khadi. Gandhi considered women most worthy in their traditional place and avocation i.e. concerned with household tasks and upbringing of children. Thus, the vision and imagination of Gandhi was colored with patriarchal values (Rodrigues: 2008).

**Dalit Response to Marginalization**

Though the struggle against inequality within the caste system goes back to Buddha, movements for doing away with untouchability and the social disabilities of the untouchables in the recent past sprang up as a result of the contact with British liberalism. Earlier, contact with the Muslim culture had given rise to the Bhakti Movement which, through the vernacular language, had preached egalitarianism and rejected the cast system and the practice of untouchability. These movements helped in lessening the hold of ritualism to some extent,
but failed to make any impact beyond the level of sensitization as far as untouchability was concerned. Before long, Hinduism again lapsed into ritualism and exclusiveness (Pimpley: 1990, 162).

As seen in the preceding section, mainstream nationalism in India overwhelmingly strove towards welding a nation together in which particular identities, except probably religious, linguistic and adivasi were meant to dissolve. Nation was to be the community writ large. Rodrigues (2008, 22) argues that many dalit-bahujan thinkers, however, asserted a sense of belonging, retaining markers of identity, culture and language. They argued that dalit-bahujans belong to and participate in distinct cultural domains. Mainstream nationalism promised an unmarked identity where nationalism would be the predominant identity, if not the exclusive one. But behind such an offer they saw the ghost of Brahmanism looming large. It would be an identity which would reproduce relations characteristic of Brahmanism buttressed with the resources of nationalism. For Periyar, one of the complete expressions of political Brahminism was Indian nationalism. He thought that the term nationalism had come to acquire a veritable sanctity sounding like ‘gods’, ‘salvation’ and ‘heaven’ but was used to mystify ‘the play of self-interest’ (Geetha and Rajadurai: 1998, 320).

The main figures of this larger non-Aryan and anti-Brahmin vision of Indian nationalism are Jotiba Phule, E.V. Ramasami ‘Periyar’ and Babasaheb Ambedkar, with many others throughout India such as Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Acchutanand in Uttar Pradesh, and Mangoo Ram in Punjab. They attacked of exploitation at all levels: culturally, economically and politically.
Jotirao Phule's Vision for the Dalits

Jotirao Phule was the first Indian in modern India to proclaim the dawn of a new age for the common man, the down-trodden and the Indian woman. It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason.

Phule simply reversed the perception that the Indian civilization was seen as primarily derivative from Aryan civilization, and the caste system was lauded as a means by which people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds were brought together and subjected to the civilizing influence of Aryans (Omvedt, 1976:103). He argued that the ‘low’ castes, whom he sometimes called “Shudras and Ati-Shudras” and sometimes simply listed as “Kumbis, Malis, Dhangars... Bhils, Kolis, Mahars, and Mangs”, were the original inhabitants of the country, enslaved and exploited by conquering Aryans who formulated a caste-based Hinduism as a means of deceiving the masses and legitimizing their power.

It was the confirmed view of Jotirao that the ancient history of India was nothing but the struggle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins (Keer, 1964:120). Hence, Phule consciously sought to bring together the major peasant castes (these were, besides the Kumbis or cultivators, the Malis or ‘garden’ cultivators and Dhangars or shepherds) along with the large untouchable castes of Mahars and Mangs in a common ‘front’ against Brahmin domination.

Phule reinterpreted sacred religious literature, for example, by reading the nine avatars of Vishnu as stages of the Aryan conquest. He used King Bali (a non-Aryan King) as a counter-symbol to the brahminical scriptures and Puranas. He revolted against priestcraft and the caste system and set afoot a social movement for the liberation of the Shudras, Atishudras (untouchables) and women.

To achieve his life’s ambition for a casteless society, Phule founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873. The Samaj opened the first school for girls and untouchables and organised
widow remarriages, marriages without Brahmin priests, etc. Phule's view of exploitation was thus focused on cultural and ethnic factors rather than economic or political ones.

**Periyar and his Self-Respect Movement**

E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, known as Periyar (Great Sage), was convinced that casteism and Hinduism were one and the same. He wanted Hinduism, as he saw it, to go altogether out. His movement took a turn towards racial consciousness and became a 'Dravidian' movement, seeking to defend the rights of the Dravidians against Aryan domination. The Aryans were blamed for introducing an unjust and oppressive social system in the country (Hardgrave: 1965, 17).

Periyar immediately realised what the new ideology of the Indian elite, the 'Aryan view of race', would imply. This view was adopted enthusiastically by the Indian elite as a new model for understanding caste – i.e., Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas were held almost as a matter of definition to be the descendants of the invading Aryans; Shudras and untouchables of the native conquered inhabitants. In the light of the new ideology to claim "Aryan" descent was equivalent to claiming "twiceborn" status; to say "Dravidian" or "non-Aryan" almost equivalent to saying "Shudra". Periyar saw in the Brahmins the representatives of Hindu arrogance and a stronghold of social injustice. He left the Congress attacking it as a tool of Brahmin domination. In 1925, he organized the "Self-Respect Movement", designed as Dravidian Uplift, seeking to expose Brahmin tyranny and the deceptive methods by which they controlled all spheres of Hindu life. Periyar publicly ridiculed the Puranas as fairy tales, not only imaginary and irrational by grossly immoral as well. He also attacked religion as a tool of Brahmin domination.

Periyar denounced the Hindu religion as an opiate by which the Brahmins had dulled and subdued the masses. Measures were taken to destroy the images of Hindu deities such
as Rama and Ganesha. According to Periyar, Rama and Sita are despicable characters, not worthy of imitation or admiration even by the lowest of fourth-rate humans. Ravana (a Dravidian hero represented as a demon in the north), on the other hand, is depicted as a Dravidian of “excellent character”. In his preface to The Ramayana: A True Reading, he states that “the veneration of the story any longer in Tamil Nad is injurious and ignominious to the self-respect of the community and of the country” (Naicker: 1959, iii-iv).

**Ambedkar as the Champion of the Dalits**

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was greatly inspired and guided by the example set by Mahatma Jotiba Phule (Rajashekhria: 1971, 18-19). Ambedkar was very critical of the two prevalent approaches in his time to reform the caste system, namely, that of Dayananda Saraswati and of Gandhi. In his opinion, if caste was to be destroyed its religious foundation, the Vedas and Shastras, must also be destroyed. Faith in these scriptures was nothing more than a legalized class ethic favouring the Brahmans. Hence, according to Ambedkar in order to destroy the caste system you must destroy the religion of the Smritis first (Ambedkar: 1945, 70).

Ambedkar also rejected the position of Gandhi with regards to caste and its reform. Gandhi felt that the ancient Hindus had already achieved an ideal social system with the varnayavastha. So according to Gandhi, “the law of vama means that everyone will follow as a matter of dharma-duty the hereditary calling of his forefathers... he will earn his livelihood by following that calling”. (Michael, S.M., SVD. Culture and Nationalism: Politics of Identity in India. http://www.sedos.org/english/michael.htm) In contrast Ambedkar believed that an ideal society had yet to be achieved in India. For him, the priority was not making “Hinduism” or Hindu society “shine forth” but building a new, equal, free, open, non-hierarchial, modern India.
According to Ambedkar, "it is wrong to say that the problem of the untouchables is a social problem.... the problem of the untouchables is fundamentally a political problem" (Ambedkar, 1945:190). Hence, Ambedkar launched his revolutionary movement for the liberation and advancement of the Dalits. On 20th July 1942 he declared at Nagpur:

With justice on our side, I do not see how we can lose our battle. The battle to me is a matter of full joy. The battle is in the fullest sense spiritual. There is nothing material or sordid in it. For our struggle is for our freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human responsibility which has been suppressed and mutilated by the Hindu social system and will continue to be suppressed and mutilated if in the political struggle the Hindus win and we lose. My final word of advice to you is, "educate, organise and agitate"; have faith in yourselves and never lose hope (quoted in Das and Massey, 1995: viii).

Thus Ambedkar was able to put the issue of untouchability at the centre stage of Indian politics. It was because he was convinced that in Hinduism the untouchables would never be able to obtain a respectable status and receive just treatment. He had also realized that individual and group mobility was difficult for untouchables within the Hindu social system. In this context, he saw two possibilities of social emancipation: the political unity of untouchables and mass conversion. Hence, in 1936 he talked of conversion to another religion: "Though I have been born a Hindu, I shall not die as a Hindu" (1936-31st May, Bombay).

Hearing the conversion call of Ambedkar, Hindu leadership was very disturbed. Several leaders began to persuade him not to go ahead. Ambedkar expressed surprise that the caste Hindus who had never shown fellow-feeling for the untouchables for centuries were suddenly beseeching them to stay within Hinduism. His embracing Buddhism in 1956 was a strong protest aimed at all that the Hindus, including the nationalists, had failed to do (Michael: 1999; Oommen: 2001).
From the discussion of various issues related to the background and the actual dynamics of Indian nationalism it is quite clear that the lower strata of the Indian society was, by and large, either left to suffer the pre-colonial subjugation or were further disadvantaged because of the caste Hindus grabbing a lion’s share in the opportunities offered to them due to the socio-economic and political upheavals of the colonial era. Even the noblest of them were unable to be conscious of how their obsession with the agenda of independence and national resurgence blinded them to the plight of the Dalits. In the succeeding Chapter we shall try to study this process in a detailed manner by focusing on the debate and the questions pertaining to Caste in Indian society.