Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Scuola delle Scienze Umane e Sociali
Quaderni
34

NATIONS IN THE EMPIRE

THE MANY FACES OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Proceedings of the International Conference held in Naples, Federico II University – Department of Political Sciences, 20-21 June 2023

edited by Maurizio Griffo, Diego Maiorano, Teodoro Tagliaferri

Federico II University Press

fedOA Press

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Scuola delle Scienze Umane e Sociali
Quaderni
34

Nations in the Empire

The Many Faces of Indian Nationalism

Proceedings of the International Conference held in Naples,
Federico II University – Department of Political Sciences,
20-21 June 2023

edited by Maurizio Griffo, Diego Maiorano, Teodoro Tagliaferri

Federico II University Press

fedOA Press

Nations in the Empire : The Many Faces of Indian Nationalism : Proceedings of the International Conference held in Naples, Federico II University – Department of Political Sciences, 20-21 June 2023 / edited by Maurizio Griffo, Diego Maiorano, Teodoro Tagliaferri. – Napoli : FedOAPress, 2024. – 191 p. ; 24 cm. – (Scuola di Scienze Umane e Sociali. Quaderni ; 34).

Accesso alla versione elettronica:
http://www.fedoabooks.unina.it

ISBN: 978-88-6887-317-2
DOI: 10.6093/978-88-6887-317-2
Online ISSN della collana: 2499-4774

Questo volume è stato pubblicato con un contributo del Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche dell'Università di Napoli Federico II e del PRIN 2020 "Myths of Legitimation and Government of Difference in the European Imperial Regimes during the Modern and Contemporary Age".

Comitato scientifico
Enrica Amaturo (Università di Napoli Federico II), Simona Balbi (Università di Napoli Federico II), Antonio Blandini (Università di Napoli Federico II), Alessandra Bulgarelli (Università di Napoli Federico II), Adele Caldarelli (Università di Napoli Federico II), Aurelio Cernigliaro (Università di Napoli Federico II), Lucio De Giovanni (Università di Napoli Federico II), Roberto Delle Donne (Università di Napoli Federico II), Arturo De Vivo (Università di Napoli Federico II), Oliver Janz (Freie Universität, Berlin), Tullio Jappelli (Università di Napoli Federico II), Paola Moreno (Université de Liége), Edoardo Massimilla (Università di Napoli Federico II), José Gonzàlez Monteagudo (Universidad de Sevilla), Enrica Morlicchio (Università di Napoli Federico II), Marco Musella (Università di Napoli Federico II), Gianfranco Pecchinenda (Università di Napoli Federico II), Maria Laura Pesce (Università di Napoli Federico II), Mario Rusciano (Università di Napoli Federico II), Mauro Sciarelli (Università di Napoli Federico II), Roberto Serpieri (Università di Napoli Federico II), Christopher Smith (British School at Rome), Francesca Stroffolini (Università di Napoli Federico II), Giuseppe Tesauro (Corte Costituzionale)

© 2024 FedOAPress – Federico II University Press

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Centro di Ateneo per le Biblioteche "Roberto Pettorino"
Piazza Bellini 59-60
80138 Napoli, Italy
http://www.fedoapress.unina.it/

Published in Italy

Gli E-Book di FedOAPress sono pubblicati con licenza Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International

Index

Foreword

This volume collects the proceedings of the International Conference "Nations in the Empire: the Many Faces of Indian Nationalism", held in Naples on 20-21 June 2023 at the Department of Political Sciences of the Federico II University, with the addition of a couple of essays aimed to provide the reader with key elements of the historiographical background of the ongoing debates and controversies about the Indo-British relationship, namely the contribution and the evolution of the so called "Cambridge School", in ideal continuity with another book focused on the work of Christopher A. Bayly we published a few years ago[1].

This Conference was part of the PRIN 2020 "Myths of Legitimation and Government of Difference in the European Imperial Regimes during the Modern and Contemporary Age" – a research project which seeks to answer two overarching issues: first, how did the European empires cope (or failed to cope) with the mosaic of institutional, ethnic, cultural, religious, territorial differences inherent in the imperial form of polity? And, second, which kinds of myths, discourses, representations of both the ruling peoples' identity and their subjects' otherness were forged and employed with the intent of legitimizing, or delegitimizing, in the case of the anti-imperial and anti-colonial movements, the "politics of difference" deployed by the imperial authorities?

The participants to the Conference were invited to offer insights on both counts with reference to what was arguably one of the central core-periphery relationship in 19th-20th-centuries world history, namely that between the British Empire and its Crown Jewel, India. Through an exploration of the nature

[1] M. Griffo, T. Tagliaferri, eds., *From the History of the Empire to World History. The Historiographical Itinerary of Christopher A. Bayly*, Naples, Federico II University Press, 2019. This volume is freely downloadable at http://www.fedoa.unina.it/12336/1/Bayly_24.pdf.

of the conflict as well as the collaboration and negotiation between different nationalisms and the British Empire, the Conference proposed to elucidate the following main questions: 1) How did the British Empire manage India's diversity, and what was the response from Indian society? 2) Has recent historiography gone beyond the dichotomous characterization of the British *Raj* as a project of "divide and rule" or as an impartial arbiter among conflicting communities, as the imperial myth claimed? 3) To what extent were different nationalisms a product of India's contradictory modernization, in its turn a product of the encounter/clash with the Empire? 4) To what extent were India's nationalist projects genuinely "national" – as opposed to "communal"– and how did they contest or reinforce the British imperial politics of difference? 5) To what extent have the variegated and internally conflictual nationalist movement in India and the imperial response to it shaped Independent India discourses on national identity and societal conflict?

More specifically, the speakers developed analyses grouped around two perspectives. First, the comparative analysis of different "religious" nationalisms, in particular Hindu, Muslim and Sikh nationalisms. And, second, the role of key figures representing different strands and different phases of the Indian nationalist movement, from Gandhi to Tilak, from Bhagat Singh to Ambedkar.

* * *

In the history of colonialism, the situation in India constitutes a particularly interesting case study. The English conquest of the Asian subcontinent marks a crucial moment in European colonial expansion. This is an event in which superiority in military technique is decisive, but it is accompanied by and supports in turn economic penetration. This process also occurs with the collaboration of some important sectors of Indian society.

At the same time, however, the British conquest triggered a response from the Indian side. Indian nationalism is the fruit of this response which is articulated in what we can define as a structural ambivalence. On the one hand, British domination is perceived as a foreign and negative presence that subverts the customs and lifestyle of Indian society, which must be preserved. Hence the need to emancipate oneself from that domination arises. On the other hand, however, the English presence places a part of Indian society, the classes that come into contact with Western culture and civilization, in connection with ideals of political emancipation and self-government that they

see contradicted by colonial rule. In other words, Indian nationalism is a process of revolt but also of osmosis, which seeks Indian emancipation, but which borrows, at least in part, from the conqueror principles and ideals that need to be achieved.

Animated by this dual and partly contradictory drive, Indian nationalism is a political movement that has undergone several seasons. In all its phases, however, the interrelationship with the colonial power is always present. The great revolt of 1857 forced the British to liquidate the indirect rule of the East India Company and to place the South Asian peninsula under the direct control of the British Government. In 1885 the birth of the Congress Party took place under the English aegis, but in the following decades it developed into an autonomous political movement where various more conciliatory or more radical orientations towards the dominators coexisted. The municipal government reforms of 1892 and the so-called Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 were made by the English colonizers to respond to Indian unrest, but at the same time to contain and weaken it. A first turning point was the Great War which saw a strong presence of Indian troops on the war fronts. As a British response to this participation in the war effort we have, in 1917, the Montagu Declaration, which contains a promise of future Indian self-government, and, in 1919, the creation of a system of diarchic provincial governments opened to Indian participation. However, the war created further expectations on the Indian side. Thus began the civil disobedience campaigns which largely nullified the English response. This historical dynamic of participatory openings and intransigent closures is repeated in the following decades until the Second World War. Here is the second decisive turning point. The British concessions made during the war were very large but met with Indian refusal. At the end of the conflict, then, the change in world equilibrium requires the dismantling of the Empire. India's independence in 1947 inaugurated the era of decolonization.

Indian nationalism also has its own ideological history that runs parallel to that of events. There is a universalist and tolerant nationalism that believes that the Indian nation must peacefully coexist not only with different ideal tendencies but also with different religious communities within a framework of civil liberties. Alongside it, there are national orientations that consider the nation closely connected to a particular religious faith. The contrast between these orientations causes the emergence of growing intercommunity tensions that are increasingly acute and poorly mediated. Hence, at the time of the granting of independence, the division of the subcontinent into two different national states.

Indian nationalism experienced subsequent and significant developments even after independence. Nation-building is a continuous process that experiences various seasons over the course of more than seventy-five years of history.

In the opening paper of the Conference and the volume (*Indian Nationalism and Western Culture: A Creative Assimilation*), Maurizio Griffo describes Indian nationalism as a creative assimilation of Western influences. The Indian nationalists do not simply derive passively from the Western colonizer a political culture, but instead, starting from that political conception, they shape a new synthesis. To illustrate his subject Griffo proposes two case studies. The first case study concerns the so-called "drain theory", which was a staple of nationalistic propaganda. The "drain theory" is the idea that the British presence in India was founded on economic exploitation that produced a constant drain of wealth from the subcontinent. But the drain theory had already been exposed, albeit not in polemical form, by a Swedish author in 1838. How Indian nationalists portrayed the Italian Risorgimento offers the second case study. The nationalistic leaders don't shape a coherent historical interpretation of 19th-century Italy but draw inspiration from those events for their political campaigns.

Kama MacLean's contribution (*Martyrs for the Nation: Death, Religion, and Dying for Freedom*) explores the theme of the partition of India not from the point of view of the relations between religious communities, but from the point of view of the national imagination in the colonial context. She focuses on the theme of the nation's martyrs, arguing that, in a poorly literate society like India at the time, with only 12% of inhabitants able to read and write, nationalist ideas were spread mainly through images. These images, polysemic in themselves, were decoded by a process of identification between national consciousness and religious identity. This process of distorting reception is illustrated with the help of a rich iconographic set. The author demonstrates that even in the case of patriots who were not at all religiously connoted, or even explicitly atheists, like in the case of Bhagat Singh, the popular diffusion of their martyrdom entailed a process of assimilation, implicit or explicit, to the religious horizon of Hinduism. In other words, the Hindu identity was the implicit basis of Indian nationalism.

Parimala V. Rao's two intertwined interventions illustrate two aspects of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's political action and thought. Her contributions to the volume differ in terms of investigation perspective and topic but arrive at identical conclusions which uniquely illuminate Tilak's nationalism.

The first paper – the one actually delivered at the Naples Conference (*Against Orthodoxy and Reforms: Emergence of Reactionary Movement in*

Colonial Maharashtra) – starts from Tilak's opposition to the Bill aimed at increasing moderately the age at which women could contract marriages, bringing it from ten to twelve years. These positions of the Maharashtra politician can be understood by keeping in mind the fact that Tilak was the bearer of Neo-Hinduism. According to this conception, even partially questioning or attempting to reform the caste order meant undermining Indian society from its foundations. Tilak Neo-Hinduism was not a reassertion of orthodox Hinduism but grew in opposition to it. It was also against reform within the Indian society. It was essentially feudal in nature. Authoritarian in character, misogynist in its disposition.

Rao's second paper (*«When the Servants Become Masters»: Agrarian Distress, Peasant Empowerment and the Emergence of Feudal Nationalism of Bal Gangadhar Tilak*)[2] analyses Tilak's positions concerning the peasant problem. In particular, the essay examines the positions expressed by Tilak in his newspaper, between 1881 and 1908, concerning the ownership of the land and the collection of revenue, the peasant revolts and the measures taken to deal with famine. The conclusions of this analysis are unequivocal: Tilak's defense of the interests of the moneylenders and big landlords was comprehensive and definite. The freedom of India found little space in the idea of Tilak's nationalism. His nationalism was a feudal nationalism, and the freedom of India, or the welfare of all Indians, found no place in it.

The paper by Srirupa Roy (*Our Exceptional Diversity: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism in Millennial India*) analyses how a particular vision of India's exceptional social and cultural diversity has powered the political ascent of majoritarian Hindu nationalism in recent decades. Since 2014 India has been governed by the Bharatiya Janata Party which is the main political party of the Indian nationalist or Hindutva movement. Hindutva is a political vision that endorses a Hindu majoritarian vision of India as a state that reflects the political, social, and cultural pre-eminence of Hindus, the demographic religious majority community in the country. However, this political vision does not establish itself as a monolithic implementation of a pre-planned master-minded project of Hindu nationalism that is controlled and orchestrated by a central headquarter; rather, it advances through a contingent, decentralized, and flexible series of actions and events that are shaped by localized contexts and imperatives and yet (re)produce a Hindu majoritarian social order. This

[2] This second paper was communicated to the editors sometime after the Naples Conference.

political conception also has a projection on the international stage which presents Indian civilization as an exemplary model of "true diversity" which the world can learn from, as a civilizational alternative to the liberal Western nation-state.

Gurharpal Singh's paper (*Sikh Nationalism – from a Dominant Minority to an Ethno-Religious Diaspora*)[3] explored the historical and sociopolitical evolution of Sikh nationalism from the late 19th century to contemporary times. His paper used an ethno-symbolic approach, emphasizing the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and nation-building, particularly within the contexts of India, Pakistan, and the global Sikh diaspora. Singh's presentation began by tracing the foundations of Sikh nationalism through key historical movements like the Singh Sabha reforms in the 19th century, which helped institutionalize Sikh identity. The British colonial period further intensified the distinctiveness of Sikhs by highlighting religious and cultural differences, shaping Sikh political identity and aspirations. The authors delved into critical events such as the Partition of India in 1947, which fostered a sense of loss and displacement among Sikhs, reinforcing their desire for a separate homeland. The paper also covered the turbulent period between 1984 and 1992, marked by the Khalistan movement for Sikh sovereignty, which emerged after the Indian Army's Operation Blue Star and the subsequent anti-Sikh violence. The last part of the presentation examined the globalized phase of Sikh nationalism, especially how the diaspora in countries like the UK, USA, and Canada has contributed to the transnational nature of Sikh identity. Singh analysed the shift from territorial nationalism to a more globalized, cultural nationalism driven by modern media, while discussing challenges such as the rise of Hindu nationalism and the Sikh leadership's crisis of legitimacy.

Ali Usman Qasmi's paper (*Genealogies of Muslim Nationalism in Colonial India*) offers a brief intellectual history of the Muslim *qaum* (an Urdu word usually translated as "nation" or "community") in British India, locating it within the milieu of the late colonial period through a close reading of texts and performances. He analyses the abortive attempts at crafting a homogenized Muslim identity articulated via tropes of the past that lay at the heart of Muslim expression of nationhood during the colonial period. By foregrounding the category of Muslim *qaum* and its intellectual genealogy in British India, Qasmi traces the layered meanings attached to the metaphor of

[3] Unfortunately this very interesting paper was not made available to the editors for publication.

the nation from a richly imagined historical entity grounded in the cultural unit of Hindustan or the larger Muslim *ummah*. For this process, the Muslim intelligentsia selectively drew upon the repertoire of the *qaum* to create notions of belonging or articulate a sense of distinctness. Concomitant to these imaginations were multiple political expressions that varied from claims to a privileged minority status to sovereign statehood. Qasmi emphasizes the historical and political contingencies of these expressions as they were shaped by the policies of the Empire and its epistemic apparatus.

The contribution by William Gould (*Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Changing Cultures of Leadership: Hindu Reformism and the Mobilisation of Space in 1930s India*), starting from the controversy between Gandhi and Ambedkar about the untouchables, explores the changing cultures of political leadership in late colonial India that arose from this powerful moment, both the outcome of the clash of personalities and also, crucially, its spatial characteristics. In particular it argues, firstly, that the strategy of both leaders related to a wider powerful development in the idea of Hindu reformism as a modern national project. Secondly, it suggests that both leaders connected local and regional concerns to a concept of the "international" through this event, and reactions to it, and such connections (and the strategies that arose from them) reflected wider developments in political leadership that transformed some of the key debates around representation, rights and the concept of "minority". The two figures at the center of the drama have produced both a voluminous literature and a form of historical myth-making that has, in important ways, obscured or transcended the details of their personal histories. The paper also attempts to use the comparison between these two leaders in the early 1930s to critically read across this corpus and to offer some conclusions about the wider nature of leadership in 20th-century India.

In the first of the two concluding historiographical essays referred to above (*Colonialism and Nationalism in India: Reassessing the Scholarly Contribution of the "Scandalous" Cambridge School*), Michelguglielmo Torri critically and authoritatively addresses the Cambridge School that in the 1970s offered a totally new interpretation of Indian nationalism and its relationship with the colonial state. Although based on detailed research of undoubted scholarly depth, the new interpretation immediately provoked an adverse reaction from most other historians. This was the natural enough result of both the provocative tone of almost all the works of the new school and its complete devaluation of the importance of the nationalist movement and ideology coupled with the questioning of the personal honesty of the protagonists of the

nationalist movement, including Gandhi. The extremely bitter debate which followed petered out in the 1980s without any shared conclusion having been reached. The final outcome was that the Cambridge School's contribution was willingly forgotten. This was a net loss for the advancement of our knowledge of the history of India in the age of nationalism, since, beyond its provocative tone and a number of over-the-top positions, there is much in the Cambridge School's contribution which is crucially important. The goal of Torri's essay is to reassess this contribution in a critical but, hopefully, balanced manner, extracting from its provocative shell, and leaving aside what is transient or demonstrably wrong, the much that is useful and important in the work of the Cantabrigians.

Looking at the Cambridge School discussed by Torri from the point of view of the general history of contemporary historiography, Teodoro Tagliaferri (*Reconceptualizing the Expansion of Europe*) regards its outstanding mentors – John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson – as representatives of a wider and evolving approach to British imperial and colonial history as a whole, whose recent developments, in the works of Christopher Bayly and John Darwin, for example, significantly merge into the international revival of world history, which has been going on for about thirty years. Indeed, the emergence of India as a major manufacturing power is one of those epochal novelties of our times that are evoked more frequently in international historiography by those scholars who advocate the urgent need to adopt a global perspective in the study and teaching of modern and contemporary history. Darwin, who has been professor of imperial and global history at Oxford, and who is the author of *After Tamerlane*, an important volume on the rise and fall of the global empires from 1400 to 2000, argued for example that, if it is true that the ultimate goal of the historian is to envisage a genealogy of the «present», then a «present» which among its most characteristic features includes the redistribution of world industrial power to the benefit of large Asian societies such as China and India cannot but urge the historians to modify the very same questions that they address to the past – their notions of which parts of the past is most essential for us to know and understand here and now[4]. India, in particular, is playing a prominent role within some of the main thematic strands that historians are pursuing in an attempt to make the present and the

[4] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*, London, Penguin Books, 2008, pp. 6-8.

contemporaneity intelligible as a result of the processes that have shaped the globalized world of our days. The first thematic strand involving India relates more generally to the reconstruction of the centuries-old process of growth of «global connectivity» whose current stage we are accustomed to name globalization and which global historians read in terms of interactions between large regional societies. The second thematic strand centering on India concerns the role played within this process by Europeans and Westerners, especially with the means of formal (i.e. political) or informal imperial rule. The third important thematic strand involving India focuses on the «resilience» of the other societies, cultures and states of Afro-Eurasia in the face of European expansion, and the dynamics and consequences of the encounters between «the world and the West»[5]. Tagliaferri reads therefore the reinterpretation in terms of «interactive emergence» of the rise of British colonialism in South Asia, which has been advanced by today's heirs to the Cambridge School, as a crucial aspect of the reconceptualization in a polycentric key that has invested, in the same period, the field of studies dealing with "The Expansion of Europe". Focusing first on the "founding fathers" Gallagher and Robinson, then on the innovative work of their successors, Tagliaferri outlines a synthetic profile of this historiographical and academical tradition. His contribution aims to show how the nowadays outcomes of the expansionist paradigm, as illustrated by Darwin's book, can provide a way out from the false alternative in which present debates about the role of Europe in the history of the modern and contemporary world often risk to become entangled – i.e. the polemical demand of "provincializing Europe" and the uncritical reproposal, in reaction to the radical assault against Eurocentrism, of a European centrality which is undoubtedly in need of a profound rethinking.

M.G.
D.M.
T.T.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 6; A. J. Toynbee, *The World and the West*, London, Oxford University Press, 1953.

1
Indian Nationalism and Western Culture: a Creative Assimilation

Maurizio Griffo

1. *Geography, Administration, Rule of Law*

As a necessary premise, it is right to define the boundaries of my presentation. I don't tackle the problem of the existence of a national feeling in India before British domination. Without any doubt the Indian subcontinent has a definite and recognizable geographical identity, as has rightly been mentioned «the first occurrence of the term "Hindu" is as a geographical nomenclature»[1]; moreover, and much more important, in this area has developed an ancient civilization with its culture, religions, customs, traditions. However, this set of factors constitutes only a part of the materials with which national identity is built; in the historical records, we have many cases of cultural identities that didn't give birth to a nationality. In other words, there is no equivalence between a cultural identity and a national consciousness. Be that as it may, my presentation concerns a more specific topic: the close correlation that exists between British rule and the development of an Indian national identity. A connection that, in its turn, redirects to another and more general feature.

My starting point can be summarized in the following terms: «Nationalism in India as elsewhere was a modern phenomenon, predicated in the belief that India was a nation/s and that freedom from colonial rule was a birthright of its people»[2]. That can be judged as an old-fashioned way to present the subject, but it is still useful because at the end of British rule in India we haven't a colony anymore, but one independent nation, in fact two.

Let's start with a general survey. It's a truism to remember that only during the British rule the Indian subcontinent was unified under a single admin-

[1] R. Thapar, *Interpreting Early India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 77.
[2] R. Suntharalingham, *Indian Nationalism, an Historical Analysis*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1983, p. 17.

istration. This had never happened before, not even during the Mughal era, when the Mughal Empire reached its maximum extension. Under British rule there were created: an effective tax system, courts of justice, an extensive railway network, and a postal service covering the whole subcontinent. Certainly, these too are preconditions and not constitutive factors of national identity; more exactly they are the materials with which is made the fabric of the modern state. However, compared to the geographical conditions, the above listed elements appear to be features of modernity. A modernity, it is hardly worth mentioning, functional to colonial domination.

The same argument, if anything with a more immediate political relevance, concerns the English language which British domination imposed as the official language throughout the subcontinent. In this way, and unintentionally, the English offered to the Indian political elite a uniform means of communication that was lacking until then. In this way, the language of the colonizers will become the *lingua franca* of the nationalist movement. A similar thing had already happened during the Mughal Empire when the Farsi was the *lingua franca* of the administration and of the ruling elite, but in the case of the English the foreign language had a stronger impact. English was the medium of the political culture of the West, including the idea of the nation.

As you can understand we are shifting from a commonplace truism to a more relevant intellectual consideration. So, for the next step of our analysis, it is useful to refer to an authoritative observer: Alexis de Tocqueville. This reference isn't a tribute to a current fashion but has an objective reason that is better to illustrate shortly. Between 1840 and 1843 Tocqueville planned to write a book on colonial India, that is, on the British conquest and on how the British administered the subcontinent. The project was abandoned but the materials collected on that occasion make us appreciate very vividly his working method, based on a historical and comparative approach. In the draft of the first chapters that Tocqueville left among his papers, we can see that the French writer paid tribute to the idea, widespread in his English sources, of the Indian civilization as a petrified civilization, waterproof to external influences. Later, nonetheless, Tocqueville developed a keener understanding of the Indian problem. His interest in India was newly aroused by the great uprising of 1857. In that period, he not only followed the current events in the press but consulted his British correspondents for first-hand information on the development of events. Moreover, in a letter of 2 August 1857 to Henry Reeve, the editor of the «Westminster Review», Tocqueville sketched a brilliant analysis of the characters of British rule in the subcontinent and expressed a prevision – a typical Tocquevillian feature

– on its possible future evolution. Tocqueville thought that, as a rule, «All government rests on a force of opinion», but the British domination in India «more than any other». The conclusion that he drew was that, «if this force of opinion, were I do not say destroyed, but only shaken for a certain time, your power would run more risk than any other». The reason of this danger resided in the character of British influence in India: «By bringing them closer to civilization and giving them more just ideas in matters of government and administration» – Tocqueville argued – «you have made them more dangerous to their master's and have diminished their prestige»[3].

In this reflection, the French writer underlines two relevant aspects of the relationship between the colonial power and the colonized people. In the first instance, Tocqueville discerns the intellectual factors of the British dominion, what we can call a cultural submission of the Indians in front of the perceived superiority of the British. But the French writer also detects a wearing factor in British supremacy. Educated in the Western culture and its political ideals, the Indian people will aspire to self-government and political independence, feeling the British rule as oppressive and unnatural.

The forecast of Tocqueville can be usefully matched with another opinion equally authoritative, or maybe more so because expressed *ex post facto*. Interviewed, in the early 1970s, about the granting of independence and partition of India, Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy, expressed his opinion about the five more important Indian and Pakistan leaders (Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali) with whom he had conducted the negotiations for the transfer of power. According to Mountbatten, the five leaders had five points in common: they were all in middle age, had spent their lives arguing reciprocally, their lives had been totally dedicated to political action, and the independence was for all of them a culmination of a life effort. From my perspective of analysis, however, the most important common characteristic of them all was, in Mountbatten's own words, that «They were all Lawyers. They'd all eaten their dinners at the Inns of Court in England, and they were nearly all well versed in British constitutional law»[4].

Tocqueville's intuition is totally confirmed by the remarks of the last Viceroy: the leaders of the nationalist movement were all experts in British con-

[3] A. de Tocqueville, *Correspondance Anglaise*, in *Œuvres Complètes*, vol. VI, Paris, Gallimard, 1954, p. 230.
[4] L. Collins, D. Lapierre, *Mountbatten and the Partition of India. March 22-August 15, 1947*, New Delhi, Tarang, 1983, p. 46.

stitutional law; in other words, they had learned to appreciate the value of the rule of law and a free government through the medium of British culture. At first sight, such an outcome would seem to justify the thesis according to which Indian nationalism is a derivative discourse, a passive acquisition of values and ideals devised and developed elsewhere. In my opinion, however, things must be explained from a different perspective.

In fact, liberal ideals had a critical value towards colonial domination because «Western civilization, which the Westernizers upheld as the source of all enlightenment, was also the source of the degradation of their own country»[5]. The Western-educated Indians perceived clearly what for the British was an enduring political and intellectual difficulty: the inescapable contradiction that existed between the autocratic system of government of the *Raj* and the liberal political balance of the metropolis. In other words, the unbearable opposition between the elevated ideals of liberalism and the crude reality of colonial domination. Certainly, a similar attitude was fostered by their condition of a people dominated by a foreign agency, a situation that prompted resentment and revulsion towards the British presence in the subcontinent. This statement is a general observation that is commonly accepted. More difficult is to define when and how this feeling developed and increased. For some historians, a watershed was the great uprising of 1857 and the repression that followed. On this point Chris Bayly has written: «Were it possible ever to measure the quantum of anti-British feeling in India at any time, it might be found to have remained remarkably constant through from 1860 to 1947»[6]. In my humble opinion, I think that in this case Bayly generalizes too much and we should better periodize. Anyway, I think that the feeling of hostility increased considerably after the end of the First World War and its aftermath, but the subject is open to discussion.

This feeling of hostility or impatience with colonial rule was the lowest common denominator of all the shades of nationalism. An attitude that encompassed the moderates not less than the extremists.

Let's give some examples. Gopal Krishna Gokhale is commonly considered a moderate, an adamant admirer, or a fan of the British political model. But for him, moderation did not mean a conciliatory attitude toward the Brit-

[5] G. Borsa, *Nationalization and the Beginning of Modernization in Eastern Asia*, in Id., *Europa e Asia tra modernità e tradizione*, Milan, Angeli, 1994, p. 64.

[6] C.A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics. Allahabad 1880-1920*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 7.

ish. Gokhale shared the «drain theory», with its hard-hitting criticism to the economic policy of the British in India, and attacked vehemently the colonial government «for the inefficacy of famine relief operations»[7]. Also, on the means of political action, he was not «unconditionally against mass agitation, provided that it was led from the above»[8], and appreciated passive resistance.

A confirmation of this widespread feeling of hostility towards British domination can also be found in the testimony of an Indian princess. In her memoirs, the Maharani of Jaipur tells that when she was a young student, in the princely state of Cooch Bear in Bengal, she and her classmates «supported the idea of independence» and they «often shouted Congress slogans about a free and united India». Moreover, «following the teaching and example of Gandhi, we each had our little spinning wheel and dutifully spun our cotton yarn, without fully understanding what Gandhi had intended to symbolize»[9]. This testimony is even more significant not only as a naive expression of a climate of opinion which was perceived even by children but also because it comes from the privileged sectors of Indian society, which were strictly connected to the British colonial ruling class and, as in the case of the Maharani, to the British aristocracy. The existence of princely states, ruled by an aristocracy of blood, was understood by the British as a naturally conservative element that would strengthen British domination.

An attitude not exclusively negative towards the princely state was fostered also by the Indian nationalistic leadership. In 1937 the Maharaja of Jaipur was told by the British authorities to arrest Gandhi when he was passing in the Maharaja's state. For some unknown reason – either the message didn't arrive at its destination, or Gandhi's train didn't stop in Jaipur – the suggestion wasn't translated into practice. Some years later, when Gandhi met the Maharaja, he greeted him saying: «Ah, so you're the naughty boy who tried to arrest me? I've met you at last»[10].

Also the Indian members of the Indian Civil Service, which, as we know, increased progressively in number from the 1920s onward, although framed in a binding bureaucratic routine, were not driven by that same imperial com-

[7] E. Valdameri, *Indian Liberalism between Nation and Empire. The Political Life of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, London, Routledge, 2022, p. 54.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 156.
[9] G. Devi of Jaipur, S. Rama Rau, *A Princess Remember. The Memoirs of the Maharani of Jaipur*, New Delhi, Tarang, 1992, p. 204.
[10] *Ibid*., p. 188.

mitment that guided British officials. In other words, however respectful of their official duties, the Indian civilian's identification with the imperial power of which they were also instruments progressively declined.

Considered from this respect, Indian nationalism therefore developed itself as a progressively growing intellectual and moral hostility to the British dominion, which manifested itself in various sectors of Indian society.

2. *Metabolizing Diversity*

However, Indian nationalism is not only a vindication of the ideals hypocritically affirmed by the colonizers as universal and then betrayed in practice. It is also an original and creative reformulation of them.

More generally, this aptitude for reformulating the acquisitions of European culture originally and creatively, enriching them, is a characteristic of Indian nationalism which can also be found in connection with themes and topics not directly connected to the struggle for freedom. Since it is not possible to address this topic exhaustively, it will be appropriate to limit my exposition to a few examples which I hope will be significant and telling.

However, before carrying out this theme, it is necessary to preliminarily discuss a notion often used by scholars. I refer to the category of Westernization. In this regard, we must always keep in mind that Westernization was never complete but always mixed and coexisted with traditional customs and habits, so that at the same time «the political activity incorporated western and indigenous styles of political organization»[11]. In addition, Westernized Indians maintained relationships and connections with more traditional sectors of society, in an osmotic process that involved both the cultural sphere and the political behaviour and public relations. Let's explain this point with an example. It is usual to think that the leadership of the nationalist movement was composed mostly of Westernized Indians. From this point of view, the case of Jawaharlal Nehru, who was probably the most Westernized leader in the Congress of the late colonial phase, is paradigmatic.

Nehru studied in England, where he resided for nine years, frequenting the same public school as Churchill; for his marriage, however, the selection of the

[11] P.G. Robb, *The Evolution of British Policy towards Indian Politics 1880-1920. Essays on Colonial Attitudes, Imperial Strategies and Bihar*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1992, p. 1796.

bride was operated by his father more traditionally. Motilal selected Kamala, who hailed from a Kashmiri Pandit family, namely from a family belonging to the same caste as the Nehru family, and the young Jawaharlal serenely accepted the decision of his father. Moreover, in his turn, Nehru followed a similar pattern when, after the death of his father in 1931, he became the head of the family. In 1933, when his younger sister Krishna announced that she had decided to marry a Bombay lawyer, Nehru wrote to Gandhi to ascertain the reputation of the future husband. Gandhi not only informed him that the pretender was well known by his friends, but summoned the suitor, and submitted him to a real interrogation, to test the seriousness of his intentions and his full reliability. Also when, some years after, his daughter Indira had to marry, Nehru asked again for the supervision of Gandhi.

The always imperfect Westernization that characterizes the Indian elites offers a useful reference scheme to also understand the use that Indian politicians make of concepts and categories borrowed from the culture and worldview of the British colonizers.

As we all know, the drain theory, to which we have already alluded, namely the idea that the British presence in India was founded on economic exploitation and produced a constant drain of wealth from the subcontinent towards the metropolis, was a staple of the propaganda of Indian nationalism. The drain theory asserted and popularized by Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Chunder Dutt from the late 1860s was officially adopted by the Indian National Congress from 1896 onward. Less known is the fact that Indian forerunners of the theory can be traced already around the 1840s and, more importantly, that they founded their ideas on European reports.

To understand the metamorphosis of the idea of the drain it can be useful to refer to a book by a Swedish writer, published in 1838 and translated into English two years after. The author, Count Magnus Björnstjerna, was no critic of the British Empire. Instead, he believed that the British conquest of India had rescued the Indian population from a condition of anarchy, violence, and disorder. He stressed the advantages connected to British domination: «the Liberty of the Press; that of being tried only by their peers, in a jury; and religious freedom». To which we must add, on a less idealistic but not less significant level, «the regular and just course of the administration of the law, the peace which now generally prevails over this extensive territory»[12].

[12] C. Björnstjerna, *The British Empire in the East*, London, John Murray, 1840, pp. 191-192.

The Swedish writer also calculated the economic advantages that the United Kingdom derived from the possession of the Indian colony; according to his estimate, six and a half million pounds each year. An amount that «would in the end completely ruin this colony» through «draining it of its bullion»[13]. As Björnstjerna argued, this sum did not come to the UK directly, but through a commercial triangulation. The opium produced in India was sold in China and here exchanged with the tea that went to the metropolis, thus keeping in equilibrium the balance of payments. According to Björnstjerna the real advantage that the UK derived from the possession of India wasn't in first instance economic, but political, because of the enhanced prestige and power in the field of international relations, which it conferred to London.

In Björnstjerna's book, we can also find a criticism of the economic effects of «the system of trade adopted by the English in India». In the subcontinent, the Swedish writer argued, «the decline of certain branches of manufacture for which India was celebrated […] is a fact». The English textile products can be sold in India «at a lower price than that for which they can be manufactured in India», a situation that greatly «injured the principal manufactures of India». But the observation concerning the negative effects of British competition vis-à-vis India does not become the subject of a political denunciation, instead is brought back to the impersonal necessity of free trade. However painful the decline of Indian industry, because «it must have produced a great mass of individual suffering», for the Swedish writer «this decay was inevitable»[14].

As we can see, all the features characterizing the economic criticism of the British domination in India, which we have found in the Indian nationalists, are already present in Björnstjerna's assessment: the drain of wealth, the decay of the Indian manufactures. However, in his case, the discovery of the economic reasons isn't translated into a political accusation, remaining a set of observations a plausible explanation of which can be given without any political connotation. Instead, in the vision of Indian nationalism, the analysis of the negative effects of British economic policy in India becomes the justification for the attack on the legitimacy of colonial domination. This political vindication translates itself into an assertion of national identity. The same national identity will be strengthened at the popular level by the Gandhian practice of hand spinning.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 180.
[14] *Ibid*., pp. 200-201.

For the next example, I will refer to a subject more familiar to my national sensibility: the Italian Risorgimento as understood by the Indian national movement. It is a well-known fact that the Risorgimento, the Italian movement for the liberation and unification of the Italian peninsula, has been popular in India because it was seen as a case like the Indian one and one happily resolved. It is worth remembering that popular biographies of Garibaldi and Mazzini were printed in India during the 19th century. How has been rightly observed, «our Risorgimento seems to have influenced the successive phases of the struggle for independence in India». Surely, we must not make the mistake of overestimating this influence which remained, «all in all, modest; but it is worth emphasizing its continuity and universality»[15].

Also in this case, I will not make an exhaustive examination of a topic that would need a more detailed study. I will limit myself to analysing the reading or, if you want, the use that Gandhi and Nehru make of some aspects of the Italian Risorgimento. Logically neither of the two Indian leaders formulates a reasoned historical judgment on the process that led to Italian unification, but both refer to that experience as a useful example for the political struggle they are waging.

Gandhi in the chapter XV of *Hind Swaraj*, a work published in 1909, refers to the Italian recent history. In this occasion, he is primarily concerned with underlining the difference between the situation in India compared to that of Italy; in fact, the chapter is entitled «Italy and India». An underlining that is functional to giving India's struggle a different objective than the Italian one. In Italy only the government on the peninsula had been changed, not the condition of its inhabitants that «in general still remains the same». What was called a national war was actually just «a game of chess between two rival kings, with the people of Italy as pawns», whereas the country «still remains in a state of slavery»[16]. A similar situation must not be repeated in India, where it was necessary not only to get rid of the British but also to change the spirit of the people, by learning the power of self-sacrifice and non-violence. It is no coincidence that in summarily outlining the Italian situation the figure who receives the greatest credit is Mazzini. The other protagonists of the

[15] G. Borsa, *L'influenza del modello risorgimentale nelle varie fasi di sviluppo del nazionalismo indiano*, in G. Borsa, P. Beonio-Brocchieri, eds., *Garibaldi, Mazzini e il Risorgimento nel risveglio dell'Asia e dell'Africa*, Milan, Angeli, 1984, p. 163.

[16] M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and other Writings*, edited by A.J. Parel, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 76.

events are dismissed with few and unflattering references. In his opinion «the machinations of Minister Cavour disgrace that portion of the history of Italy» and also Victor Emanuel is judged negatively. No doubt Gandhi acknowledges that Garibaldi «was a great warrior», but Mazzini deserves greater recognition because he «has shown in his writings on the duty of man that every man must learn to rule himself»[17].

In the *Glimpses of World History*, that sort of universal history in the form of letters to his daughter composed by Nehru in prison between 1931 and 1933, a chapter is dedicated to the Italian Risorgimento. In this short narrative, Nehru is more equanimous than Gandhi concerning the events of the Italian Risorgimento and gives of them a more exact historical interpretation. For example, he correctly traces the origins of the Italian Risorgimento to the French Napoleonic three-year period and its influence on the following generations. The chapter is an exposition of the unification process of the Italian peninsula, which focuses first on the Roman Republic of 1849 and then on the Second War of Independence. The lion's share goes to Garibaldi, whose exploits are celebrated. This analytical angle depends on the fact that the most important source of Nehru's narrative is the Garibaldi biography by Trevelyan which he received as a prize at school when he studied in England.

Nehru gives the right importance to Mazzini, defines him as «the prophet of Italian nationalism»[18], but observes that, after the unification, «Mazzini was not happy» because he had always «laboured for the republican ideal, and now Italy was but the kingdom of Victor Emanuel of Piedmont». But Nehru didn't negatively judge the whole turn of events in Italy because he remembered that «the new kingdom was a constitutional one and an Italian Parliament met at Turin immediately after Victor Emanuel became king»[19]. However, the political telos of Nehru's discourse is the criticism of the contradictory attitude of England. After having summarized the more important facts of the period, Nehru recalls how at the time of those events many Englishmen had sympathized with the Italian cause, only to then polemically point out that «it is strange how the sympathies of the English often enough go out to struggling

[17] *Ibid*., p. 75.
[18] J. Nehru, *Glimpses of World History. Being further Letters to his daughter, written in Prison, and containing a rambling Account of History for Young People* (1934-1935), Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund – Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 507.
[19] *Ibid*., p. 509.

people provided their own interests are not involved», instead when this happens in India, «their messengers bring maxim-guns and destruction»[20].

3. *A Word to Conclude*

To conclude, albeit provisionally, our reasoning, we can speak of Indian nationalism as an assimilationist nationalism, which built its own identity starting from cultural and intellectual elements partly borrowed from external influences. A nationalism that managed to metabolize British influence, at the same time forging an Indian national identity. An identity that did not present itself as closed but aimed to be open, capable of borrowing ideas and practices from the European dominator, but at the same time remaining the heir to a millenary cultural tradition.

[20] *Ibid*., p. 510.

2
Martyrs for the Nation: Death, Religion and Dying for Freedom

Kama Maclean

One of the recurrent questions for modern South Asian political historians has to explain the forces that led to the partition of British India in 1947. Did anti-colonial movements merely reproduce the imperial politics of difference, the proverbial "divide and rule" as they responded to the governmentalities of the colonial state? To what degree was the nation imagined in communitarian terms, and why? Perhaps one answer to this question lies at the heart of nationalist imagining in a colonial context, and the ways in which such imaginings are, and can be, communicated. Key to the ideology of nationalism that is predicated on struggle is a professed willingness "to die for the nation". The question then becomes: how do we imagine dying for the nation, and how do we remember those that have died for the nation? This is a question that is difficult to answer without recourse to religious frameworks, if we see one of the key tasks of religion as offering us a way of thinking through death.

I considered the question of communal national imagining briefly in the conclusion of my book, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*[1]. *A Revolutionary History* demonstrated the extent to which the threat of political violence was pivotal to fueling the dynamics of the Indian nationalist movement in the interwar period, acting as an impulse for Gandhi to lead and insist upon a non-violent strategy. In this period, Gandhi's dominance was such that he remains central to narratives of how nationalism unfurled, presented as the orbit around which other nationalists congregate, or must navigate. Gandhi's centrality finds ongoing endorsement in Congress politics from the 1930s and Gandhi remains at least symbolically central in the decades after

[1] K. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 232-233. The arguments presented here are made in greater depth in this book, and in publications I have otherwise referenced.

independence as well. Gandhi's ability to effectively speak to the masses and communicate to them was considered a game-changer in the anti-colonial movement. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that Gandhi «seemed to emerge from the millions of India, speaking their language», a quality that distinguished him sharply from his contemporaries[2]. Gandhi is written about by historians too as the master communicator, able to project his politics through visual genres and performances[3]. Many of these worked along profoundly religious lines: the Salt March as a pilgrimage, the very idea of a Mahatma and the cultures of abstinence are redolent of religious traditions, and so on. Even though these were not explicitly communal, they had implications for politics that were.

The influence of liberal constitutionalism formed early nationalist thought, and so nationalist expression from the late 19th century was often predicated on critiques that gently exposed British economic exploitation, or were based around ideas of representative institutions, and the acceptance of an idea of the British bringing the colony into modernity[4]. But these were very much elite-driven ideas, which were difficult to communicate to the "masses", particularly in the context of mass illiteracy and the extent of linguistic diversity. Government of India figures indicate 18.6 million literates and 229 million illiterates in 1921[5]. This amounts to about 12% of the population, although it has to be noted that the figure varies greatly for region and gender.

According to Benedict Anderson, print capitalism becomes central to spreading the idea of a nation[6]. C.A. Bayly in particular observed that Anderson's theory of print capitalism's convergence with nationalist imaginations fails to explain how political leaders in India, given its «relatively low rate of literacy should have been able to create a widely diffused and popular nationalist movement so early»[7]. In India, there is an extraordinarily vibrant culture of reading newspapers communally, and newspapers are not put aside, but passed on and shared, extending their reach beyond individual reading practices[8].

[2] J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, London, Meridian Books, 1951, p. 336.
[3] C. Kaul, *Communications, Media and the Imperial Experience*, London, Palgrave, 2014.
[4] D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2000.
[5] *India in 1930-31*, Delhi, Anmol Publications, 1985.
[6] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 2006 (firstly published in 1983).
[7] C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780-1870*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 2.
[8] See the discussion in G. Pandey, *The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh: Class Community and Nation in Northern India, 1920-1940*, London, Anthem, 2002.

News sparks discussion, so that the text of newspapers become reinterpreted and reincarnated in an oral form. Orality is an underestimated form of news and knowledge communication, overlooked for its epistemologically indeterminate and changeable nature, often dismissed as gossip or rumour[9]. Yet oral networks were vibrant and important in communicating nationalist ideas, including ideas about Gandhi and his apparently magical powers[10], but also about the Government of India, which are revealing of a profound distrust in colonial designs[11].

The production and circulation of imagery also effectively communicated nationalist ideas, often drawing on religious tropes that linked to well-known stories and that frequently compared the forces of British colonialism to malevolent beings and depicted nationalist leaders, including those who are often thought of as ideologically secular, as aligned with Hindu gods or divinities[12]. Such posters and handbills were officially proscribed by the Government of India, but they nonetheless were widely distributed underground. I argued in my book that ideas about revolutionary politics were carried through polysemic images, from which people made different interpretations, that were sometimes not weighted to, nor were consistent with, a verifiable historical narrative or trajectory.

Within understandings of anti-colonial nationalism, the idea of the martyr for the nation begins to take great weight. Martyrdom is central to revolutionary politics of the period: all revolutionaries know that the colonial state will meet political violence with the death penalty, that the price of freedom is death. Gandhi's non-violent politics also factor in the perilous dangers to the body entailed by nationalist action, most starkly in his Quit India slogan, "Do or Die", but even during the Civil Disobedience movement, the deaths of *satyagrahis*, for example Baba Ganu, who was killed during a protest during the Salt Satyagraha in Bombay in 1930, were mourned publicly[13]. The deaths of revolutionaries, in combat with the police, in prison while under hunger strike or on the gallows, were all mourned as martyrdoms, as is evident by

[9] A Ghosh, *The Role of Rumour in History Writing*, in «History Compass», VI (2008), 5, pp. 1235-1243.

[10] S. Amin, *Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2,* in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies*, vol. 3, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 21.

[11] K. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*, pp. 185-186; 201.

[12] S. Ramaswamy, *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2010; C. Pinney, *"Photos of the Gods", The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, London, Reaktion Books, 2004.

[13] J. Masselos, *The City in Action: Bombay Struggles for Power*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 209.

martyrology that was popular during the period, and the bane of the colonial censorship regime who saw martyrology as "inflammatory".

Gandhi too became a nationalist martyr after his death, although I believe he learned a lot about martyr-making from his close observations of revolutionary politics. A good example of the production of a revolutionary martyr (although he was certainly not the first) can be seen in the case of Jatindranath Das, who was under trial for the Lahore Conspiracy Case, and went on a long hunger strike in protest at prison conditions. He was violently force-fed, during which a feeding tube was pushed into his lungs, and in his emaciated state was not able to fight the ensuing infection, and he died. A photograph of his body was published on the front page of the «Tribune» (Image 1), one of the major nationalist newspapers, and his body was given back to his family for a funeral.

DR. ALAM AND DR. GOPI CHAND RESIGN.

The Tribune.

TELEPHONE NO. — 861. REGISTERED NO. L. 4.

VOL. XLIX, NO. 211. LAHORE, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1929. Price : One Anna.

JATINDRANATH DAS PASSES AWAY.

[illegible]housands Attend Funeral Procession.

[illegible]EOPLE SHOWER FLOWERS AND COINS.

Calcutta Corporation Adjourns.

[illegible]. MOTILAL NEHRU WILL MOVE ADJOURNMENT OF ASSEMBLY

[illegible] DIED FIGHTING FOR BETTER TREATMENT OF POLITICAL PRISONERS.

Mr. Jatindranath Das lying dead in Borstal Jail

Mr. Jatindranath Das passed away at 1-5 p.m. on Friday.

"I am not a Bengali. I am an Indian."
Jatin's Parting Words

HARTAL IN LAHORE.

[*From Our Special Representative.*]

"I kissed my shoulder on which was placed Jatin's bier, imagining that it was rendered holy," said Dr. Alam giving an account of how the procession started from the Jail Gate.

[illegible] He has bravely laid [illegible] his life for what he [illegible] to be the cause [illegible] the country.
[illegible] MOTILAL NEHRU.

"I AM NOT A BENGALEE."

Mr. Das breathed his last at 1-5 A. M.

A few minutes prior to his death, he said that he had [illegible] his mind. "I do not [illegible] that my obsequies should be [illegible] at the Kali Bari in the [illegible] Bengali fashion. I am [illegible] Bengali; I am an Indian," [illegible] his parting words. And in [illegible] to his last wishes, the [illegible] plan of carrying his dead [illegible] to the Kali Bari was given up.

The cause for which Mr. Das died will triumph, although for the present Government may think think wrongly, that they have won.
MR. SEN GUPTA.

(See Page 2)

Calcutta Corporation Adjourns.

Mayor Pays Tribute to Jatin Das.

Calcutta, Sep. 13.

"Today Mr. Jatindra Nath Das becomes a great hero for all Bengalees and for all Indians to worship, and the cause for which he gave his life is certainly going to triumph, although for the present the Government may think wrongly, that they have won said Mr. J. M. Sengupta, Mayor, adjourning the Corporation meeting this evening as a mark of respect to the memory of Mr. Das.

Mayor continued, "Mr. Das was arrested in Calcutta a little over two months ago and was taken to the Punjab on a charge which was in all conscience a very serious one. Now that he had gone it is possible for those who had known him well to say that he was perfectly innocent of the charges brought against him by the Government. Whatever opinions people might have with regard to the charges there cannot be but one opinion amongst Indians, and particularly of people of Bengal, that Mr. Jatindra Nath, an unknown hero, was fighting for a cause which had nothing to do with the offences he was charged with.

Mr. Das was fighting for the better treatment of political prisoners, a cause for which in other parts of the world people in the past have fought and died. In all civilised countries, political prisoners do take upon themselves the right to vindicate their position. The same thing happened with regard to Macswiney and it was the same thing with regard to Mr. Jatindra Nath Das. It would be well if youngmen of the country would follow in the footsteps and show to the world, as other great men have shown in the past that however much the Government of the country might imprison our body our soul is beyond the control of foreign Government."

A condolence motion expressing sorrow and sending condolence to the bereaved family was adopted, the whole house standing in silence.—*Free Press.*

SWARAJISTS AND LADY SCHUSTER'S PARTY

Simla, Sep. 13.

The Congress Party leader, Pandit Moti Lal Nehru, issued an emergent whip, advising members of the Party not to attend Lady Schuster's garden party this afternoon. This whip says:

"The attendance of the members of the Party at Lady Schuster's garden party this afternoon was permitted on her assurance that it was not an official function and was being held in order to enable her to meet her friends of the Assembly before her approaching departure for England. News has just been received that Mr. Jatin Das, one of the hunger-strikers of the Lahore case, died at 1 p. m. He has bravely laid down his life for what he believed to be the cause of the country. As a mark of respect for the memory of that great soul, I direct that no member of the Congress Party will attend Lady Schuster's party this afternoon. I am writing to Lady Schuster on behalf of the Party, and members need not take the trouble to write separately."

CONFERENCE AT PT. MOTILAL'S HOUS[illegible]

Commotion in Simla.

VICEROY'S EXECUTIVE COUNC[illegible] MEETS TO DISCUSS SITUATION.

(*From Our Special Correspondent.*)

Simla, Sep. 13.

There is considerable commotion [illegible] Simla since 3 o'clok this afternoon [illegible] consequence of the death of Mr. Jatin[illegible] Nath Das.

The Executive Council of [illegible] Governor-General held an emerg[illegible] meeting at Viceregal lodge a[illegible] discussed the situation that has aris[illegible] and the prospect of a censure motio[illegible] by Pandit Motilal Nehru tomorrow [illegible] the Assembly.

The form of this motion underwe[illegible] considerable changes every ho[illegible] as the result of conversations [illegible] Pt. Motilal's residence. At o[illegible] time the formula was considered [illegible] doubtful of admission because as [illegible] then stood it related to the adminis[illegible]tration of Jails which is a provin[illegible]cial subject but the defect in th[illegible] language, was suddenly removed an[illegible] new text drafted.

Pandit Malaviya and Mr. Jayakar wer[illegible] consulted and their party will suppo[illegible] the motion.

Mr. Jinnah's attitude, it was diffi[illegible]cult to ascertain as he was at lady Schuster's garden party till the after[illegible]noon. But he has given a definite pledg[illegible] to support the motion and it is expecte[illegible] his followers, who number ten, wi[illegible] also join him. Thus the Governmen[illegible] of India will be censured for allow[illegible]ing scandalous treatment to the under[illegible] trial prisoners in the jails whic[illegible] forced them to resort to hunger strike and has already resulted i[illegible] the death of Mr. Jatin Das afte[illegible] sixty-one days' fast.

ELECTRIC ATMOSPHERE.

The atmosphere on the eve o[illegible] futrther discussion on the Hunger Strike Bill is indeed electric and th[illegible] executive Council anticipating ba[illegible] time, is discussing all aspects o[illegible] the situation and how best to wriggle out of it. There are three courses ope[illegible] to them, firstly that as five accused i[illegible] the Lahore Case have terminated hunger-strike and hunger-strike is now confined to Sardar Bhagat Singh and Mr. Dutt, they may withdraw the Bill. Secondly, they may agree to Mr. Kelkar's dilatory motion for circulation to elicit public and legal opinion. The third course is to proceed with the Bill. Should the last be the case then attempts would be made to induce Mr. Kelkar to withdraw his motion and Mr. K. C. Roy to withdraw his amendment for a select committee and thus throw out the Bill by taking advantage of the atmosphere.

I understand that neither Mr. Kelkar nor Mr. Roy will refuse to adopt this course should that be deemed necessary. Any way the fate of the Hunger-Strike Bill from Government point of view is very uncertain as the whole attempt of the Government to place this legislation on the Statute-Book at any cost by resort even to certi[illegible]fication if necessary has been [illegible] in the melting pot by the death [illegible] Mr. Jatin Das. The Government's [illegible]sion of this evening is not known at the time of wiring.

Image 1: «Tribune», September 15, 1929, p. 1.

The transportation of Das's body back to Calcutta became the occasion for more photography, more newspaper coverage and more condemnation of prison conditions and British rule. The photographs became the basis for martyrology, such as Image 2, in which Jatindranath Das's body is shown with an image of Mother India tending over him. His body ascends to heaven, flocked by other revolutionaries, who flock like moths to a flame to self-annihilation. Das is awaited in heaven by others who have died after fighting the British – Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Dadabhai Naoroji and perhaps, at the end, C.R. Das – all flanking the God Krishna, who holds out a garland to receive Das.

Image 2: *Kedarnath Seghal, Jatindranath Das, Ch Sher Jang, B. K. Dutt*, c. 1930, NMML.

In this and in so many other images of this period, we find religious, quasi-religious symbolism underpinning the idea of the nationalist martyr. Sometimes these are less Hindu in their imagination – for example *Independence Gift* (Image 3) draws on ideas of decapitation as martyrdom, which find

resonance more in Christian and Sikh martyrology. In this image, Jawaharlal Nehru provides Das's head on a platter to an enthroned Mother India, while Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt (one of Bhagat Singh's revolutionary colleagues) stand behind him.

Image 3: Roop Kishore Kapoor, *The Gift of Independence*, Kanpur, c. 1929. Author's Collection.

Bhagat Singh was born in a Sikh family, and grew up with strong influences from the Arya Samaj. Yet he wrote extensively on the problem of religious consciousness in India, and famously wrote an essay, *Why I am an Atheist*, while in prison. Yet his own personal belief about religion and politics is undermined by the number of images created before and after his death, in which he is shown in profoundly religious contexts or in the company of gods or goddesses (in which we must include Bharat Mata, who appears in all of these images)[14].

[14] S. Ramaswamy, *Maps, Mother/Goddesses, and Martyrdom in Modern India*, in «Journal of Asian Studies», LXVII (2008), 3, pp. 819-854.

Religious imagery was extensively used in national imaginings, even in ostensibly secular ones[15] and they seem to have also particularly animated British anxieties, as they perceived them as particularly powerful by making "emotional" claims through religious genres[16]. Concepts about sacrifice, nationalism, anti-colonialism are often expressed in these profoundly religious ways, despite the disinclination that many of the revolutionaries had towards religion. People come to interact with these images, too, in performatively religious ways. After Bhagat Singh was hanged on March 23, 1931, his photograph was published in nationalist newspapers, and those very newspapers become a focus for mourning. Image below shows a front page of the «Tribune» that announced the hanging, upon which some people cut their thumbs and bled to demonstrate their own willingness to die for the nation, a photograph of which was exhibited in 2008 under the statement: «Blood of Shaheed which is the life for the Nation».

Image 4: Exhibit at Supreme Court Museum Exhibition on Bhagat Singh, November 2008.

[15] See the extensive collection of images in V. Lal, *Insurgency and the Artist*: *the Art of the Freedom Struggle in India*, Delhi, Roli Books, 2022.

[16] D. Sethi, ed., *Banned & Censored: What the British Raj didn't want us to read*, Delhi, Roli Books, 2023.

Image 5: *Bhagat Singh and and his Companions being Carried to Paradise*, Arorbans Press, 1931.

In this image, for example, Bhagat Singh is carried to a «paradise» which seems rather ecumenical. Waiting for them in paradise is an unlikely coalition of departed personalities, in death their political differences set aside: Motilal Nehru, Mohamed Ali, Lala Lajpat Rai and other revolutionaries, which also gives us a sense of how the lines of religious community are drawn together and unproblematically crossed in these imaginations. There are similarly images of Bhagat Singh as Jesus Christ, which the Government of India promptly banned[17].

After Bhagat Singh was killed, mass protests broke out all over India, animated at the loss of a young, fervent revolutionary around whom many different ideas had been communicated in newspapers, in oral communication and in images, such as those shown here. In the town of Kanpur, Congress workers called a *hartal*, and when Muslim shopkeepers refused to close their shops, terrible communal violence broke out, lasting several days. Hundreds were killed, including a prominent Congress leader, Ganesh Shankar Vidyar-

[17] See K. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*, p. 138.

thi. This was not an outcome that Bhagat Singh or his colleagues ever would have supported or understood themselves to be endorsing. They were actively trying to work against communalism. And yet the ways in which their politics were imagined and spread was done through profoundly religious frameworks. The revolutionaries came to be aligned with the Congress in the popular consciousness – which was not erroneous, especially given the contacts they had with Congress leaders, including the Nehrus (implied in Image 3). But it was also not the full picture, as many connections they had with the Congress were covert and were strategic, rather than as a result of ideological alignment[18]. As William Gould showed, the Congress repeatedly fell back on religious formats of organization, and so could not avoid the perception of representing a majoritarian Hindu politics[19].

The last fifteen years in particular have seen a profound reassessment of imperial history from a focus on intellectual and liberal colonial projects, to better understand the operations of violence of the colonial state[20]. This throws the dilemma for anti-colonial nationalism into sharper relief. How do can nationalism be imagined without martyrs, given the threat of colonial violence? How do we imagine martyrdom without religion? Without religious frameworks, death is abstract and hard to visualize, let alone mobilise around. This raises the question: what would a secular mobilization perhaps look like? How do we imagine a nationalism which is predicated around possible death without drawing on a religious vocabulary that locks the other, the communal other, out of that imagination? This is possible, and attempts were made to do so, but they seem to have been muted by the wave of religiously inspired messages[21]. South Asia's many vibrant visual and textual traditions of religious martyrdom provided an alluring set of metaphors through which nationalist sacrifice could be imagined.

[18] K. Maclean, *Revolution and Revelation, or, When is History too Soon?*, in «South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies», XXXIX (2016), 3, pp. 678-694.

[19] W. Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[20] M. Condos, *The Insecurity State, Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017; E. Kolsky, *Colonial Justice in British India: White Violence and the Rule of Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010; T.C. Sherman, *State Violence and Punishment in India*, London, Routledge, 2010; J. Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal. War, Famine and the End of Empire*, London, Hurst & Co, 2015; D. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

[21] K. Maclean, *Imagining the Nationalist Movement: Revolutionary Metaphors in Imagery of the Freedom Struggle*, in «Journal of Material Culture», XIX (2014), 1, pp. 7-34.

3
Against Orthodoxy and Reforms: Emergence of Reactionary Movement in Colonial Maharashtra, 1880-1920

Parimala V. Rao

> For ourselves, it would be hard to tell the difference between the modern educated Brahmin and the modern educated non-Brahmin […] This inequality has come to be felt. The spirit of revolt is abroad.
>
> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, 1891[1]

Thus wrote Bal Gangadhar Tilak when the *Age of Consent Bill* was passed. This modest Bill raised the marriageable age of girls from 10 to 12 years. This paper discusses how such an assertion could arise in the land of Vaishnava Bhakti saints who declared universal equality. It addresses the transformation of Tukaram's egalitarian and devotion-based religion to the aggressive Neo-Hinduism of Tilak.

The earliest discussion was started by Gopal Hari Deshmukh, a Chitpavan Brahmin, popularly known as Lokhitawadi (an advocate of the welfare of the world). He attacked gender and caste inequalities, the monopoly of scholarship maintained by the Brahmins and the denial of education to women[2]. Lokhitawadi published his 108 letters known as *Shatpatre* during 1848-50 in the journal «Prabhakar» wherein he castigated the Brahmins «for enforcing superstitious beliefs upon the society which kept the society engaged in unproductive activities»[3]. If the social practices of the Hindu society angered Lokhitwadi to write public letters, Atmaram Pandurang, a Vysya, took an active step and

[1] *What shall we do next?*, in «The Mahratta», March 22, 1891, pp. 2-3 (editorial).

[2] J.V. Naik, *Social Reform Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in Maharashtra – A Critical Survey*, in S.P. Sen, ed., *Social and Religion Reform Movement in the 19th and 20th centuries*, Calcutta, Institute of Historical Studies, 1979, pp. 284-285.

[3] Y.M. Pathan, *Lokhitwadi: Pioneer of Rationalism in Maharashtra*, in S.C. Malik, ed., *Indian Movements: Some Aspects of Dissent Protest and Reform*, Shimla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1978, pp. 215-229.

established the Prarthana Samaj in 1866. The Samaj emphasised the need for compulsory education for all and widow marriage. Mahadev Gobind Ranade, a Chitpavan Brahmin, and Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar, a Saraswat Brahmin, joined the Samaj and led a consistent attack on the disabilities faced by women and non-Brahmins. Chandavarkar argued that «caste is the greatest monster we have to kill»[4]. In the words of B.R. Ambedkar, Ranade struggled to create rights in the Hindu society where none existed[5]. Ranade edited the journal «Induprakash» and contributed articles to «Subodh Patrika» started in 1874 as the journal of Prarthana Samaj. These journals forcefully advocated the abolition of caste, and non-Brahmins conducted the ceremonies in the Prarthana Samaj. Of all the Bhakti saints, Tukaram, an uncompromising supporter of the persecuted and unequivocal opponent of oppression, captured the imagination of the Reformers. Chandavarkar compared Tukaram with Jesus and Buddha[6]. In the Prarthana Samaj meetings, Ranade, Chandavarkar and others sang the hymns of Tukaram that eloquently defined «the Brahmin who flies to rage at the touch of a Mahar; that is no Brahmin. The only absolution for such a Brahmin is to die for his own sin»[7]. This showed the radical questioning of social inequalities. Historian Eleanor Zelliot has pointed out that such a revolt against societal norms sowed the seeds of the modern ideas of social justice[8].

The social revolt was not a new phenomenon. The dissent within Hindu tradition had allowed a host of Vaishnava saints through the ages to critique and question the existing norms of Hinduism across India. In Maharashtra, Dnyashwara (1275-1296, Brahmin) and Eknath (1533-1599, Brahmin), Tukaram (*circa* 1600-1650, Vysya), Namdeo (1270-1350, Shimpi), Gora (1267-1317, Kumbhar), Savata Mali (1250-1295, Mali), Chokha Mela (Dalit), Janabai (1258-1350, Dalit woman) and Bahinabai (1628-1700, Brahmin woman), critiqued the social inequality and upheld essential equality of all human beings. Bahinabai, though a Brahmin, was a disciple of Tukaram and the *Abhangas*, or the poet-

[4] L.V. Kaikini, ed., *The Speeches and Writings of Sir Narayan G. Chandavarkar*, with an introduction by K. Natarajan, Manoranjak Grantha Prasarak Mandali, Girgaon-Bombay, 1911, p. 72

[5] B.R. Ambedkar, *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah*, Address Delivered on the 101st Birthday Celebration of Mahadev Govind Ranade, Held on the 18th January 1943 in the Gokhale Memorial Hall, Poona, Jullandhar, Bheem Patrika Publications, 1964, p. 27.

[6] L.V. Kaikini, *Narayan G. Chandavarkar*, p. 559.

[7] D. Chitre, trans. from the Marathi, *Says Tuka: Selected Poetry of Tukaram*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1991, p. 115.

[8] E. Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit. Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, New Delhi, Manohar, 1992, p. 8.

ry of these saints, was sung by people of all castes[9]. The social revolt was not limited to the Vaishnava tradition, and the Shaivait Brahmins too carried it forward. From 1818 onwards, we have records of Chitpavan priests assigning higher ritual status to several non-Brahmin castes and performing Vedic rituals in their households which were not allowed till then[10]. The Chitpavan caste Panchayat excommunicated these Brahmin priests[11]. Excommunication in pre-modern India was a severe punishment. The excommunicated person lost all rights to the ancestral property or business in a society where the individual property was absent. He could no longer practice his profession. The village community as well as his caste broke all social intercourse with that person. His married daughters were often sent back by their in-laws, who found new wives for their sons, and he and his family were denied access to village wells. It was social and economic death. The fact that these priests took such risks to reject inequality is commendable. Such social revolt could be further seen in the famous religious debate held in Satara in 1830. The Chitpavan Caste Panchayat had denied the Kshatriya status to the Raja of Satara, Pratapsinh Bhosla, and its leader Balajipant Natu, sent letters to all leading Brahmins to prevent all non-Brahmins from using the Vedic rituals in their household. This included the Maratha royal family of Satara, which directly challenged the claims of Pratapsinh Bhosla as Chatrapati. Brahmins from all over Maharashtra came to Satara to debate the issue, and a majority of them supported Pratapsinh Bhosla and decided to perform Vedic rituals to non-Brahmins[12].

If the dissent within the Hindu tradition influenced social reform, Jotirao Phule (1828-1890) derived his ideas of social justice from Western radicalism. Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and *The Rights of Man* had earlier influenced the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. These two books had a profound impact on Phule[13]. Phule established the Satya Shodhak Samaj (Society for the Search of Truth) on 24 September 1873 and campaigned against the caste system. He called the caste system the antithesis

[9] See Ead., *From Untouchable to Dalit*; E. Zelliot, R. Mokashi-Punekar, *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon*, New Delhi, Manohar, 2005; D. Chitre, trans., *Says Tuka*.

[10] U. Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, Calcutta, Stree, 2003, p. 115; Ead., *Rewriting History: The Life and Times of Pandita Ramabai*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, pp. 48-50.

[11] N.K. Wagle, *A Dispute between the Pancal Devajana Sonars and the Brahmins*, in N.K. Wagle, ed., *Images of Maharashtra: A Regional Profile of India*, London, Curzon Press, 1980, pp. 134-135.

[12] R. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 32-34.

[13] Ead., *Caste Conflict and Ideology*, p. 112,

of the principle of equality[14]. Phule analysed these aspects in his first book *Gulamgiri* (*Slavery*), published in 1873[15]. He rejected the Bhakti as a source for reform within the Hindu society and attacked the caste system from the standpoint of rationality and equality[16]. The Satyashodak Samaj removed the mediation of the Brahmin priesthood by introducing simple rituals[17]. The Samaj began to perform marriages according to their own simplified rites, which resulted in the Brahmins seeking legal redress against the members of the Samaj[18]. In 1880, the priests of Otur filed a case against one Balaji Kesaji Patil for performing his daughter's marriage without a Brahmin priest. They claimed they were entitled to a marriage fee, whether or not they had conducted the ceremony. Phule and Patil fought the case all the way to the High Court in Bombay. In 1890, Chief Justice Charles Sargent and Justice Telang, a Saraswat Brahmin, decided the case in favour of Phule[19]. They ruled that «no Brahmin priest had any right to officiate at the ceremony and no fees were to be paid to him if he was not called to act»[20]. Telang upheld the right of the Satyashodhaks to conduct ceremonies without the mediation of Brahmin priesthood and categorically opposed «tyranny of caste and tyranny over caste»[21].

Though Phule rejected Bhakti, the very foundation of the Prarthana Samaj, and unequivocally attacked «Brahmins», yet Sadashiv Ballal Govinde and Moro Vithal Valavekar, both Brahmins, joined Phule in establishing schools for low castes. Valavekar was a founding member of the Prarthana Samaj[22]. In 1875, when Dayananda Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, visited Poona, his public appearance was threatened with violence. Phule and Ranade personally escorted Dayananda through the streets of Poona, braving «stones and sticks» from the hostile public[23]. This shows that various strands of radicalism did not work in isolation but closely interacted with each other.

[14] J.R. Shinde, *Dynamics of Cultural Revolution in the Nineteenth Century Maharashtra*, Delhi, Ajanta Publications, 1985, pp. 56-83.

[15] G.P. Deshpande, ed., *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, New Delhi, Left Word, 2002, pp. 36-99.

[16] G. Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: Non-Brahman Movement in Western India, 1873-1930*, Bombay, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976, p. 108.

[17] R. O' Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, p. 302.

[18] N.H. Kulkarnee, *Hindu Religious Reform Movements in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Maharashtra*, in S.P. Sen, ed., *Social and Religious Reform Movements*, pp. 272-274.

[19] R. O' Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, pp. 279-280.

[20] D. Keer, *Shahu Chatrapati: A Royal Revolutionary,* Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1976, p. 226.

[21] *Speeches and Writings of K.T. Telang,* Bombay, K.R. Mitra, 1916, pp. 239-258.

[22] R. O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, pp. 110-114.

[23] R. Ranade, *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscence*, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1963, pp. 54-55.

1. *Foundations of Neo-Hinduism/Feudal Hinduism*

Dondho Keshav Karve, the Chitpavan reformer, explained that there were

> two classes of orthodox people in our society. One class consists of ritualists who spend hours and hours in repeating *mantras* and going through *havans* and other rites. The other class consists of devout people belonging to the Bhakti school. They would read vernacular hymns composed by Saints, which they understood, and people of this class are generally emotional and broad-minded. They can feel the pangs of the depressed and the oppressed and sympathise with them[24].

By 1880s a third group emerged which was neither Orthodox, nor Reformist, but feudal in nature.

Tilak defined Hinduism as *Varnashrama Dharma* or caste-based privileges and declared that «the Hindu religion owed its existence to the caste system»[25]. Anyone criticising the caste system was anti-Hindu. He attacked both revivalism and reform as both opposed the caste system. Tilak called Lokhitawadi, Phule, and Ranade «destroyers of Hindu religion, culture, and society»[26]. He called the Prarthana Samaj revivalists because, according to him, they proposed to "revive" the Vedic life and religion. He also designated the Prarthana Samaj as an association of «anglicised, denationalised persons» who found that the «caste came in the way of their indulgence; hence they attacked and undermined the caste»[27]. Since the Prarthana Samaj attacked the caste system, Tilak declared that «the Samaj meant violence in its very inception»[28]. He consistently singled out Ranade and Chandavarkar «for advocating substantial reform and asking men and women to stand up against social persecution»[29]. He called Ranade and the Reformers «persons of abused education for housing high-class girls as well as low-class girls in one school» and «demanding absolute and immediate abolition of the caste system»[30]. He also criticised Telang for betraying caste interest by attempting «to see all caste distinctions effaced at once» through the admission of Mahar and Dhed children into schools[31].

[24] D.K. Karve, *Looking Back. An Autobiography*, Poona, Hindu Widows' Home Association, 1936, p. 49.
[25] *The Prospects of Hindu Caste*, in «The Mahratta», July 10, 1881, p. 1.
[26] *Ibid*., May 15, 1887; *Notes on the Present Activity*, *ibid*., April 26, 1896, p. 1.
[27] *The Hon. R.B. Ranade At The Prarthana Samaj*, *ibid*., May 15, 1887; *Mr. Chandavarkar and Social Reform*, *ibid*., Jan. 15, 1899, p. 1.
[28] *The Genesis of the Prarthana Samaj*, *ibid*., Dec. 11, 1898, p. 3 (editorial).
[29] *A New School and a New Apostle of Hindu Reform*, *ibid*., Nov. 20, 1898, p. 4.
[30] *The Hon. Mr. Chandavarkar and Reform from without*, *ibid*., Nov. 27, 1898, p. 3 (editorial).
[31] *Admission of Mahar boys into Govt. Schools*, *ibid*., March 26, 1882, pp. 5-6.

2. *Neo-Hinduism and Brahmanical Orthodoxy*

The newly emerging Neo-Hinduism differed from the Brahmanical orthodoxy in Maharashtra. For instance, the orthodox Brahmin opposition to widow marriage and a rise in girls' marriageable age was purely religious. The basis of orthodox opposition to reform was blind faith in those aspects they considered ordained in the scriptures. Their motto was salvation. The basis of the "Neo-Hindus" opposition was the desire to control society. Hence, their underlying motto was power. As an opponent of reform, Tilak was not orthodox. He criticised the orthodox contributing liberally to «temples and tellers of faith» and concluded: «I am sorry for my countrymen; they will not rise in the scale of civilisation»[32]. Though he repeatedly claimed the leadership of the orthodoxy, he was careful to emphasise his stand as distinct from that of the orthodox:

> We look upon ourselves as distinct from the orthodox Hindu society, and though we tolerate some of their customs as a necessary evil and because we are powerless to remove them, we do not at the same time sympathise with them. […] In all questions of orthodox learning, they do not consult us or, if they do, do not give our opinion the same weight that they give to those of orthodox people […] As long as this continues, we must never hope to succeed[33].

The orthodox Brahmins of Poona and Tilak and Neo-Hindu supporters had an antagonistic relationship throughout this period, whereas they had a cordial relationship with the Reformers. In spite of Ranade's support to widow marriage and the *Age of Consent Act*, the orthodox pundits attended every year, along with reformers, the Summer Lectures Series to deliver lectures on various metaphysical aspects of Hinduism. Tilak ridiculed these lectures as «juvenile», yet he was surprised by «Ranade's ability to command respect from both»[34]. Ranade's emphasis on Bhakti and the singing of the hymns – the *abhangs* of Bhakti saints – at Prarthana Samaj meetings drew considerable support from both the reformist Shaivait Chitpavan Brahmins and the Vaishnavait Deshasth Brahmins as well as from the non-Brahmins. Ranade jointly edited the reformist journal «Indu Prakash» along with an orthodox pundit called Vishnu Parsharam[35]. Tilak himself quoted the example of an orthodox Brahmin «not able to read even the first letter of the English alphabet coming forward and courageously giving his only widowed daughter in mar-

[32] *The Graduates Association*, *ibid*., April 29, 1888, p. 3.
[33] *Some Further Considerations On Mr. Malabari's Notes*, *ibid*., Sept. 21, 1884, p. 2.
[34] *The Summer Series of Lecture at Poona*, *ibid*., Feb. 2, 1890, p. 1.
[35] U. Das Gupta, *The Indian Press, 1870-1880*, in «Modern Asian Studies», II (1977), 2, p. 228.

riage on the ground that both reason and *Shastras* sanction such a course»[36]. An orthodox Chitpavan Brahmin in Poona, Waman Abaji Modak, emphasised that «a person does not become a Brahmin by reason of his birth in that caste, but he has to develop into a Brahmin by good actions». Tilak declared him «an atheist, who had no right to depreciate the *Shastras*» and invoked the example of «Shankaracharya who sought the help of the sword to put down atheism»[37]. So a section of the orthodoxy was ready and open for the change and transformation that was taking place in 19th-century colonial India; Neo-Hinduism was against both reform and orthodoxy. It referred to the orthodox Puranic theology as it accorded Brahmins an enviable position in society, yet it differed from the orthodoxy regarding devotion.

During the *Age of Consent Bill* agitation, Tilak tried to impress the Brahmin orthodoxy through his knowledge of Sanskrit and win them over by offering to represent their voice in the English press – a medium they had no access. The orthodox Brahmins rejected Tilak's attempt to project himself as the real defender of orthodoxy. They asserted that the entire sphere of the debate was whether a raise in the marriageable age of girls was sanctioned by the *Dharmashastras* and had nothing to do with those who passed the stricture – the British government or the caste Panchayats[38].

Mahamahopadhyaya Bhimacharya Zalkikar, an orthodox pundit, told Chandavarkar: «We *Shastris* know the tide is against us, and it is no use opposing. You people should not consult us but go your way and do what you think right, and we shall not come in your way»[39]. Few, like the Diwan of Baroda Raghunath Rao, actively supported the Reformers. Tilak commented that «Diwan Bahadur Raghunatha Rao may be orthodox as any old Shastri, but what are we to say of him when he is perverting the *Shastras*, however honestly, and asking for legislation?»[40]. Tilak attacked the orthodox pundits for behaving like reformers who are «bent upon bringing women out of the house to which the Hindu lawgivers had confined her to»[41].

The conflict between Tilak and the orthodox Brahmins further escalated in 1890. The Punch Howd Mission in Poona invited leading men and women for a

[36] «The Mahratta», May 15, 1887.
[37] *Ibid*., Feb. 14, 1886, pp. 7-8.
[38] *Ibid*., Oct. 18, 1885, p. 1.
[39] L.V. Kaikini, *The Speeches and Writings,* p. 35.
[40] *Some New Discoveries of our Reformers*, in «The Mahratta», Dec. 25, 1889.
[41] *Ibid*., April 17, 1887, p. 1.

public function. The invitees were offered tea; some accepted it, others did not. A few orthodox Brahmins complained to the Shankaracharya, who appointed a Shastri to investigate the matter. Tilak appeared as a lawyer on behalf of those who had taken tea. This naturally angered both the orthodox and the Shankaracharya. Now the orthodoxy became suspicious of Tilak's intentions. All those who attended the function, including Ranade and Tilak, were excommunicated. While Tilak could not secure cooks and priests for his son's thread ceremony, many priests came forward and offered their services to Ranade and the Reformers. In spite of this support from orthodox Brahmins, Ranade decided to undergo penance. Ramabai Ranade cited pressure from the spouses made the Reformers undergo penance against their consciences[42]. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) criticised this compromise, and Ranade responded to it at a later date by saying that «if the Reformers had gone to the Punch Howd gathering for the purpose of making a demonstration against caste distinctions, they would have stood their ground and not cared for the consequences»[43]. Ranade argued that there were five methods of reform: rebellion, introducing reform through caste organisations, convincing *Acharyas* or religious heads, appealing to man's sense of honour, the fifth and eligible being to seek legislative help. He considered all of them equally valid[44]. Ranade preached from the pulpit of the Arya Samaj, read and explained the *Puranas* in an orthodox Hindu temple while upholding the Prarthana Samaj principles[45]. So the Reformers had not alienated themselves from the orthodox as Tilak had done. In spite of the *Age of Consent Bill* controversy, Ranade continued to invite orthodox pundits along with the Reformers to deliver lectures. Summing up the attitude of the Reformers towards the orthodoxy, Chandavarkar stressed that «the Reformers were not against honest orthodoxy and the main thing was not so much whether a man was right, but rather he was upright»[46]. When Bhandarkar conducted the marriage of his widowed daughter, there was no unanimity in excommunication, as many orthodox pundits supported Bhandarkar[47]. The community took six months to excommunicate him, which had little effect.[48]

[42] R. Ranade, *His Wife's Reminiscences,* pp. 136-140.

[43] *The Ex-Communication Troubles*, in «Sudharak», May 30, 1892 (Ranade's letter to the editor).

[44] M.J. Ranade, *The Miscellaneous Writings*, published by Mrs. Ramabai Ranade, Bombay, The Manoranjan Press, 1915, p. 158.

[45] L.V. Kaikini, *The Speeches and Writings*, p. 542.

[46] Chandavarkar's speech in *N.G. Chandavarkar Papers*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 2.

[47] *Dr. Bhandarkar and His Caste*, in «The Mahratta», June 14, 1891, p. 2.

[48] *Ibid*., Nov. 29, 1891, p. 4.

The National Social Conference which had been established by Ranade and other reformers intensified its campaign for the *Age of Consent Bill*. It urged the colonial government «on behalf of the daughters of India» to immediately pass the *Age of Consent Bill*. Tilak criticised it by stating that «the Conference had no right to call itself national as the ideas advocated by it were against the national interest»[49]. The Social Conference sought support from the Shankaracharya, who complied[50]. Immediately the Sanatana Dharma Rakshini Sabha supported the Bill. The Sanatana Dharma Rakshini Sabha, which initially had opposed the *Age of Consent Bill*, later supported the Reformers[51].

Telang drafted a memorial which carried one hundred signatures, including those of the reformers, orthodox pundits, and professionals like editors and lawyers, judges and educationists from both Bombay and Madras Presidency. The memorial proposed that the right age for the consummation of marriage was at sixteen and discussed at length the number of rapes and deaths of girls below the age of fifteen at the hands of their husbands since 1837[52]. Tilak questioned the ability of a Sanskrit scholar like Bhandarkar «to rightly understand the text quoted»[53]. He argued that people like Telang could not represent the orthodox community:

> How can the voice of its members reach the Supreme Court or the English people? The orthodox community speaks only vernacular and its views hardly reach the ears of the government. It is quite necessary therefore that some of the educated should come to its rescue and be its spokesmen […] These spokesmen may not be thoroughly orthodox themselves and individually and for themselves may be prepared for any reform, but we fail to see why they should not unselfishly put forward the views of their orthodox brethren before the public and the government[54].

Tilak's effort to arrogate himself as the leader of Brahmanical orthodoxy did not succeed as the Shankaracharya had not revoked the excommunication of Tilak. So technically and in the eyes of the orthodox Brahmins Tilak was not even a Brahmin at that point in time. The affluent Brahmins and other upper caste pleaders of Poona, who had supported Tilak in his agitation against the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act*, held a meeting without his knowledge and decided to support the Bill. Tilak criticised the pleaders «for

[49] *The Third "National" Social Conference*, *ibid*., Sept. 20, 1890, p. 2 (editorial).
[50] *The Third "National" Social Conference*, *ibid*., Sept. 28, 1890, pp. 2-3 (editorial).
[51] M.J. Ranade, *The Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 173.
[52] «The Mahratta», Oct. 12, 1890, p. 8.
[53] *Shastric Aspect of the Age of Consent Bill. A Reply to Dr. Bhandarkar*, *ibid*., Feb. 8, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).
[54] *Ibid*., Feb. 8, 1891, p. 3.

not calling for a public meeting of all pleaders as he was sure the proposal would have been defeated»[55]. Tilak had no access to professional bodies; however, he could always dominate the public meetings with his few violent but loyal supporters. This proved true within a fortnight when the Reformers called for a public meeting at Kridabhavan in Poona, where Tilak's supporters physically attacked them. Tilak openly supported the attackers.[56]

In spite of opposition from Tilak and his supporters, the *Age of Consent Bill* was passed on 19 March 1891, and immediately Tilak declared that Bhandarkar and Telang had no right to interpret Hindu texts and speak on behalf of the Hindus: «let these Sudharaks form themselves into a separate nationality. They are unfit to be amongst us […] and we ought no longer to allow to be amongst us […] They are the real enemy of the country and the time has come when we should divide»[57].

However, Tilak admitted that he and his supporters were a minority: «the *Age of Consent* agitation has given us an accurate idea of our strength and our weakness»[58]. Criticising «Messrs Bhandarkar, Telang and Co.» Tilak declared:

> A handful of men with an unbridled tongue and uncontrolled pen manufacture stories, create practices and libel a nation in the eyes of the civilised world, go to the government and pray for a measure which permanently leaves scandalous record against the character of innocent and God fearing people. We are very sensitive and we feel nothing so much as an attack on our national character[59].

Tilak felt «sorry» to find the orthodox supporting the Reformers and asked the orthodox not to trust them as they were «veiled insidious enemies». He called on the orthodox «to drive the Reformers out of educational institutions, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha and other associations»[60] and promised that if the stringent measures were taken against the Reformers, «the Hindus will live on to seek their loyal nation slowly rising to eminence»[61].

The Shankaracharya's support to the Reformers in the *Age of Consent Bill* controversy ended Tilak's pretension that he was the leader of the orthodox community. Throughout the debate, he had attacked the Reformers for be-

[55] *The Pleaders of Poona on the Age of Consent Question*, *ibid*.
[56] *The Age of Consent Bill*, *ibid*., March 8, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).
[57] *What shall we do next?*
[58] *Ibid*.
[59] *Ibid*., April 12, 1891, p. 3 (editorial).
[60] *Ibid*., July 26, 1891, p. 2; *Finale of the Excommunication Affairs*, *ibid*., May 15, 1892, p. 4.
[61] *How shall we do it?*, *ibid*., April 26, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).

traying orthodox Hinduism and, on the other hand, tried to appoint himself as the genuinely authentic spokesman of the Hindus. Now he lost the plank. There could not have been anyone more Brahminical and more orthodox than the Shankaracharya, and indeed, the Shankaracharya could not be projected as anti-Hindu as Tilak had done with Telang, Bhandarkar, and Ranade. Now he admitted that the orthodox Brahmins did not support him.[62]

The ridicule heaped on the Reformers, a constant effort to represent the orthodox Brahmins and militant defence of the caste system in the name of Hindu nationalism evoked little support beyond his immediate supporters. This is evident from the fact that even after eighteen years of untiring attacks on Reformers in the name of defending the «Hindu nation» and «orthodox Hinduism» Tilak could not make a dent in the popularity of the Reformers. A Brahmin club in 1899 invited Ranade and Telang for the annual address. Tilak lamented that

> In public assembly, he [the Reformer] finds a place on the dais while his orthodox critic has to stand down with the rabble. Even a Brahmin club invites him without least hesitation for *Pan-supari* on his elevation to legislative counsel. In private he enjoys the company of his friends and relations all the same […] in the matrimonial market the social reformer is even a greater favourite than the orthodox, the latter is looked upon as representative of antiquated stupidity more to be pitied than respected[63].

In the absence of orthodox Brahmin support Tilak called on «the educated Hindus to take it as a duty to defend *Varnashrama Dharma*, as it was the only common factor among the inhabitants of different provinces»[64].

3. *Neo-Hinduism and National Identity*

Tilak, analysing the defects of the colonial rule, stressed «the insecurities of the landed classes, the unwillingness of the government to enforce the caste privileges and caste restrictions, and indiscriminate spread of English education as the chief drawbacks of the British rule»[65]. Tilak stressed that by not enforcing the caste restrictions, the colonial government was violating the religious neutrality promised by the Queen's proclamation of 1858. He repeat-

[62] *The Present Situation*, *ibid*., July 26, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).
[63] *Mr. Chandavarkar and Social Reform*, *ibid*., Jan. 15, 1899.
[64] *Ibid*.
[65] *Ibid*., Aug. 21, 1881, p. 2.

edly appealed to the colonial government to discard religious neutrality and enforce caste restrictions[66]. Tilak linked Neo-Hinduism to the national identity and the concept of Indian nationalism. Accordingly, anyone attacking the caste system was «un-national» or anti-national. He summarily declared Ranade, Chandavarkar, Phule, Telang, and Bhandarkar as «un-national» or those who acted against the «national interest»[67]. He declared that «Ranade strikes a deathblow at the very fabric which has interwoven us into the Hindu nation»[68]. Ambedkar, having analysed these developments, declared that Tilak and Chiplunkar «did greatest harm to the cause of social reform» [69].

Tilak called his group the «*rashtravadis*» or «nationalists» and claimed to defend the interests of «the nation». He elevated the pro-caste movement as a national movement. He equated anti-caste movement as the anti-national movement by arguing that only those who had faith in the *Varnashrama Dharma* could be «*rashtravadis*» or «nationalists» and «the Hindu religion owed its existence to the caste system»[70]. Narayan Vishnu Bapat, a friend of Tilak, organised a large autumn festival called *Hemantotsva* in 1886. The festival aimed to counter «Brahmin reformers, missionaries, and street preachers (Satyashodhaks) attacking on the caste system». The speakers declared that caste distinctions were necessary to maintain «peaceful citizenship»[71]. Speakers asked the government to establish separate schools for non-Brahmin children where subjects like «preparing of soil, the tending of bullocks, and the implements of husbandry» were taught[72]. Tilak printed these long speeches in their entirety in his weekly «The Mahratta».

The Satyashodaks countered such an elaborate organised public display in support of the caste system. They held a large public meeting in Poona in 1888 and conferred the title of Mahatma on Phule[73]. Soon, Krishnarao Bhalekar of the Satyashodhak Samaj started the Din Bandhu Sarvajanik Sabha Free School in Poona. This initiative was supported by M.G. Ranade, Vishnu Moreshwar Bhide, R.G. Bhandarkar, D.P. Shet, Gangaram Bhau Mashke, and Sayajirao

[66] *Admission of Mahar boys into Govt. Schools*, *ibid*., March 26, 1882, pp. 5-6.
[67] *Ibid*., Feb.14, 1886, pp. 7-8; *News Letter, Nature of the Crowd*, *ibid*., Apr. 8, 1888, p. 2; *The Caste and Caste alone has Power*, *ibid*., May 10, 1891, p. 3 (editorial).
[68] *An Eccentric Tendency: How to Meet It?*, *ibid*., Oct. 4, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).
[69] B.R. Ambedkar, *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah*, p. 17.
[70] *The Prospects of Hindu Caste*, p. 1.
[71] *Hemantotsava of the Bombay Hindu Union Club*, *ibid*., Feb. 14, 1886, p. 5.
[72] *Ibid*., Feb. 21, 1886, p. 5.
[73] G.P. Deshpande, ed., *Selected Writings*, p. 3.

Gaikwad – the Maharaja of Baroda[74]. This meeting showed that despite ideological differences, the Satyashodhaks and Prarthana Samajists worked together.

In the 1890s, Tilak realised the death of Phule in 1890 and Lokhitwadi in 1892 – the two prominent anti-caste leaders around whom powerful institutions like the Prarthana Samaj and the Satyashodhak Samaj had grown – did not weaken the power of their followers. Tilak grudgingly accepted that «late Deshmukh's and late Fulley's [Phuley's] attempt to dispel through the land any reverence that might be felt for the Brahmins» was still strong[75]. To counter such social and religious radicalism, Tilak and his supporter began to argue that patriotism and nationalism were closely linked to *Varnashrama Dharma,* and the Reformers were attempting to «kill the caste and with it kill the vitality of the nation». To be patriotic or nationalist meant to have faith in the caste system[76]. So a defence of the caste system became vital to define the distinct identity of the Hindus as a nationality and India as a nation[77]. In 1892, Tilak read a paper on the industrial aspects of the caste system at the second industrial conference in Poona. He stressed that «the caste as an institution would work like a trade union in modern times»[78].

Tilak stated clearly that the Reformers should be driven out of Hinduism as they were «gradually surrendering the power of the caste into the hands of the rulers»[79] and «made the Pundits who had the right of interpreting the *Shastras* to the Hindu laity and who have laid down the religious law for the Hindus for generations into magnificent nobodies». The «reformers», declared Tilak, are «killing the caste and with it, killing the vitality of the nation»[80]. These were «un-national tendencies and against national interests, against the Hindu nation». He further declared that «the Reformers are no longer Hindus as they undermined the caste system, hence they formed a separate nationality»[81]. Therefore he called on his supporters to take over the institutions controlled by Reformers like the Congress and work towards *swaraj* or self-rule[82].

[74] R. O' Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology*, p. 285.
[75] *Notes on the Present Activity*, in «The Mahratta», April 26, 1896, p. 1.
[76] *How shall we do it?*, *ibid*., April 26, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).
[77] *Caste and Caste alone has Power*, *ibid*., May 10, 1891, p. 3 (editorial).
[78] B.G. Tilak, *Hindu castes from an industrial point of view*, in *Samagra Lokmanya Tilak*, vol. VII, *Towards Independence*, Poona, Kesari Prakasana, 1974, pp. 467-469.
[79] *The Caste and Caste Alone Has Power.*
[80] *Ibid*.
[81] *What shall we do next?*, *ibid*., March 22, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).
[82] *Ibid*., March 29, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).

Tilak considered «caste as the basis of Hindu nationality and the right to control Hindu society from within was Swaraj».[83] Tilak repeatedly declared that the basis of «the Hindu nation is caste» which was to be protected, even if it meant seeking the help of the colonial government for that purpose[84]. To Tilak the protection and elevation of the caste hierarchy constituted the basis of national identity.

As he received little response in Maharashtra he began to address people and the organisations involved in defending the caste system elsewhere and sought support for his agenda. One such organisation was the Bharat Dharma Mahamandala, established by the Maharaja of Darbhanga in 1889. The Maharaja openly declared the supremacy of Brahmins which made Tilak to compare it to the Indian National Congress and hoped that «if properly conducted may prove the beginning of an important era in the history of Hindu religion as the Congress has been in that of Indian politics. The Bharat Dharma Mahamandal may be called a Hindu Religious Congress»[85]. The 1892 Session gave directions to establish provincial Dharmamandalas and send preachers (*upadeshaks*) and publish books containing all rules of *Swadharma* and establish Sanskrit schools. It also directed that all Dharma Sabhas and priests of Hindu temples will offer prayers at a fixed time. Tilak endorsed the proposals, but observed that «without establishing the Hindu nation, it is impossible to guide the direction that the society was taking»[86]. Tilak asked the Bharat Dharma Mahamandal «to coordinate different sections and parts of Hinduism»[87]. However, the Mahamandal was challenged by the Arya Samaj for a theological debate (*shastrartha*), and the Mahamandal physically prevented the supporters of the Arya Samaj from entering the venue[88]. The Maharaja of Darbhanga in his address made much of his caste status as a Brahmin and sidelined the larger issues concerning Hindu unity. The followers of Mahamandal openly clashed with the supporters of the Arya Samaj outside the venue and on the streets of Delhi[89]. The Mahamandal held a successful conference in 1906. Addressing it Tilak explained that it was not the first time that Hinduism faced a hostile situation as «the

[83] *Ibid*., April 26, 1891, p 2 (editorial); *ibid*., March 6, 1892, p. 3 (editorial).
[84] *The Prospects of Hindu Caste*, p. 1; *The Caste Alone Has Power*, *ibid*., May 10, 1891, p. 3 (editorial).
[85] *Religious Revival In India*, *ibid*., March 6, 1892, p. 3 (editorial).
[86] *The Bharat Dharma Mahamandal*, *ibid*., March 27, 1892, p. 4.
[87] Tilak's 1906 speech in *Samagra Lokmanya Tilak*, vol. VII, p. 633.
[88] *Bharat Dharma Mahamandal*, in «The Mahratta», Aug. 19, 1900, p. 2.
[89] *Bharat Dharma Mahamandal at Delhi*, *ibid*., p. 1.

Buddhists and the Jains had attacked the Hindu religion» and the «first Sankaracharya preached them in such a way that Buddhism was swept away from the land»[90].

In order to remove what Tilak called such «disreputable display of disunity among the Hindus», he suggested a regeneration of Hinduism carried out on two distinct fronts. The articulate expression of Vedanta was to be used to silence the missionaries and the Western critics of Hinduism which was to be complimented with strict enforcement of the ritual observance of Brahminism to silence the agnostic Reformers and unite the masses[91]. The battle on these two fronts required different skills. Tilak appreciated «Vivekananda's ability to silence Western critics and taking the campaign of aggressive Vedantism into the hearts of the Europeans and Americans»[92]. The conversion of Margaret Noble into Hinduism according to Tilak «did immense good to the self-respect of the colonised»[93]. However Tilak could not completely support Vivekananda as the latter also had pronounced anti-caste ideas as he had called upon the Brahmins to «remember that the days of exclusive privileges and exclusive claims are over» and advised the non-Brahmins «to elevate themselves to the Brahminhood instead of dragging the Brahmins down to their own level»[94]. However, Tilak commented that though Vivekananda was a Vedantin and thereby an Advaitist, he did not hesitate to prefer a Vaishnava Saint Ramanujacharya over Shankaracharya[95]. So, even the articulate spokesmen of the Hinduism could not be relied upon to defend the institution of caste and support Tilak.

4. *The* Gita Rahasya *of Tilak*

Tilak believed that the orthodox text the *Gita* validated his ideas on caste[96], but the existing commentaries on the text did not defend the caste system the

[90] *The Bharat Dharma Mahamandal, Mr Tilak's Speech*, *ibid*., Jan. 14, 1906, p. 22; *The Bharat Dharma Mahamandal*, *ibid*., Feb. 4, 1906.
[91] *Christianity and the Nationhood (Rashtriyatva) of the People in Hindustan*, in «Kesari», May 21, 1901; *The Situation of the Hindus*, in «Kesari», Feb. 17, 1903.
[92] *The Late Swami Vivekanda*, in «The Mahratta», July 13, 1902, pp. 330-331 (editorial).
[93] *Sister Nivedita, Margaret Nobel*, *ibid*., Oct. 5, 1902, p. 421.
[94] *Swami Vivekananda*, *ibid*., May 7, 1899, pp. 3-4 (editorial).
[95] *The Late Swami Vivekanda*, in «The Mahratta», July 13, 1902, p. 330 (editorial).
[96] *Ibid*., Aug. 11, 1895, p. 1.

way Tilak wanted it. So Tilak went ahead to give a new interpretation to the *Gita*. Tilak criticised Shankara, the first Shankaracharya of the 8th century CE, «for having begun a tradition of *Gita* interpretations in which the *Gita*'s plain teaching of the science of *Karmayoga* was bent to make *Jnanayoga* superior to that of action»[97]. «My view of the *Gita*», explained Tilak, «is that of a work on ethics not utilitarian nor intuitional, transcendental, somewhat on the lines followed in Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*. I have compared throughout the *Gita* philosophy with the western both religious and ethical and have tried to show that our system is, to say the least, not inferior to any of the western methods»[98]. He compared the Buddhist and Christian morals with Hindu morals. Tilak accepted that «the Upanishads had placed truth above all other laws», but argued that «it was not possible in a world of villains». He stated that «telling a lie has been found after mature deliberations to be much better than speaking the truth». Similarly he opposed *ahimsa* or non violence – one of the cardinal principle upheld by both the *Upanishads* and the *Dharmasastras*[99]. The *Gita* according to him «substantiated his approach to the ethical flexibility in the observance of the truth»[100].

Tilak also differed from the classical interpretations of the term *Dharma*. Manu, Yagnavalkya, Parashara and other composers of the *Dharmasastras* defined the term *Dharma* in the sense of the laws that govern spiritual and temporal spheres of human beings. But they limited the application of the rules of caste system to the temporal domain and upheld absolute equality of souls in the spiritual sphere. Tilak rejected it and interpreted *Dharma* to mean only «worldly duties [*Karma*] pertaining to the four castes» and declared that «there can be no release [*moksha*] unless the mind [*chitta*] has been purified by means of *Dharma*»[101]. Therefore adherence to and performance of caste specific duties were the only means to spiritual salvation. Tilak argued that if a man is not faithful to his *Dharma* in discharging his worldly responsibilities (*Karma*) he would be unsuccessful in realising *loksamgraha* or universal welfare.[102] Tilak wrote:

[97] B.G. Tilak, *Srimad Bhagavadgita Rahasya or Karmayoga Sastra* (B.S. Sukthankar trans.), Poona, Tilak Bros., 1965, p. 24.

[98] *Mr. Tilak's New Work on The Gita*, in «The Mahratta», Apr. 16, 1901.

[99] B.G. Tilak, *Srimad Bhagavadgita Rahasya*, pp. 46-47.

[100] P.K. Jose, *Gandhi and Tilak: Values in Conflict*, in V. Grover, ed., *Political Thinkers of Modern India*, vol. IV, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak*, New Delhi, Deep & Deep, 1990, p. 386.

[101] B.G. Tilak, *Gita Rahasya, ibid*, p. 658.

[102] *Ibid*., pp. 659 and 927.

> It cannot be doubted that at the time of the *Gita*, the arrangement of the four castes was rigidly enforced, and that it had originally been given effect to for the welfare of society. Therefore I have to mention here emphatically that *loksamgraha* according to the *Gita* means giving to other people a living example of how one can perform desirelessly all the various activities which are allotted to one according to the arrangements of the four castes[103].

Tilak elevated the adherence to caste duties as necessary for universal welfare and spiritual salvation and called it a dynamic social philosophy[104]. This adherence to caste specific duties elevated a man to the position of *Karmayogin*. Traditionally *Karmayogin* was someone who fulfilled ritual duties in accordance with the scripture[105]. So, in the context of Neo-Hinduism, *Karmayogin* was the one who fulfilled the duty of defending the caste system.

Tilak's attempt to subordinate ethics, knowledge and devotion to performing duties according to the caste system was heavily criticised by Aurobindo[106]. Aurobindo does not mention Tilak by name, but «it is obvious who he has in mind when he attacks those who make *Gita* a gospel of works»[107]. Aurobindo «advocated intellectual freedom and a high degree of morality»[108]. Tilak on the other hand advocated freedom under *Dharma*[109] and that *Dharma* was *Varnashrama Dharma* or the caste duties[110]. Aurobindo irrespective of religious connotation considered Buddha, Christ, Mohammed, Chaitanya, Ramakrisna and Vivekananda as *Karmayogins*[111]. To Tilak, a *Karmayogin* was the one who performed action in accordance with caste system. Tilak has also been criticised by various Sanskrit scholars for inconsistencies and self-contradictions in his interpretation of metaphysical aspects. He has been held as «the ethical adversary of Shankara» and they all have declared that «if the sole purpose of the *Gita* was meant to urge Arjuna to fight, exhorting him to violence, it would not have inspired the people of every age». The interpretation of the *Gita* by Tilak has been

[103] *Ibid*., p. 462.
[104] *Ibid*., p. 927.
[105] U. King, *Adapting to a Colonial Economy: The Ideal of Karmayagin as a symbol of Hindu Revival*, in W. Fernandis, ed., *Inequality, its Basis and Search for Solutions. Dr. Alfred de Souza memorial essays*, New Delhi, Indian Social Institute, 1986, p. 231.
[106] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, New York, 1965, p. 28.
[107] P.M. Thomas, *20th Century Indian Interpretations of Bhagavadgita: Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo*, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, Delhi, I.S.P.C.K., 1987, p. 78.
[108] Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, p. 7.
[109] S.R. Talghatti, *Lok Tilak's Moral Philosophy – an outline*, in N.R. Inamdar, ed., *Political Thought and Leadership of Lokmanya Tilak*, New Delhi, Concept, 1983, p. 88.
[110] B.G. Tilak, *Gita Rahasya*, p. 417.
[111] U. King, *The Ideal of Karmayogin*, p. 241.

held to be «absurd»[112]. Tilak's insistence of the meaning of the term *Dharma* to mean only caste duties, though presented in a Vedantic language, betrayed his motive.

5. *Caste Neo-Hinduism*

Tilak's attempt to represent himself as a Sanskrit scholar and an orthodox Brahmin failed repeatedly over a period of thirty five years (1880-1915). However, his vicious and disruptive campaigns left the society fractured. His defence of the caste system did not win the orthodox Brahmins, but alienated non-Brahmins who formed 98 percent of the population of Maharashtra. The insults he heaped on the Maharaja of Kolhapur further angered the non-Brahmins[113]. A vigorous non-Brahmin movement began to demand dismantling the structures of power. The Maratha Education Conference was held in 1915 and was attended by Raghunath Purushottam Paranjape, a Chitpavan Brahmin, and Ramakrishna Bhandarkar. Tilak criticised Brahmin reformers attending non-Brahmin conference and encouraged non-Brahmins to attack the caste system[114]. During the Home Rule Movement, Tilak argued that India needed freedom-*swaraj* because the British rule was responsible for the decay of the Chaturvarna system[115]. Leading non-Brahmin leaders like Bhaskarao Jadhav, Valchand Kothari and Anna Babaji Latthe opposed Tilak's Home Rule League Movement.[116] In order to neutralise them Tilak attended the second All India Depressed Classes Mission Conference at Bombay and declared that both untouchability and the stigma attached to it should go[117]. However, nobody took it seriously as Tilak was opposing the *Inter-Caste Marriage Bill* introduced by Vithalbhai Patel in the Imperial Legislature, which proposed to remove restrictions on marriage between various castes and sub-castes[118]. Tilak and his

[112] G.V. Saroja, *Tilak and Shankara on the Gita*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1985, pp. 131-179.

[113] *The Vedic Ritual Question*, in «The Mahratta», Oct. 20, 1901, p. 3 (editorial); *The Vedokta Prakarana Episode*, *ibid*., March 8, 1903, p. 109; *The Vedokta Affair*, *ibid*., Nov. 1, 1903, p. 506; *The Vedokta Affair*, *ibid*., Nov. 15, 1903, p. 532; *Vedokta Affair Once More*, May 7, 1905, p. 221 (editorial), and July 30, 1905, p. 362.

[114] *Scourge of Maharashtra*, *ibid*., April 11, 1915, pp. 119, 120.

[115] *Brahmins not Brahmins*, *ibid*., Jan. 7, 1917, p. 6; *The Non-Brahmin Movement*, *ibid*., Apr. 29, 1917, p. 207; *Caste Representation*, *ibid*., Oct. 7, 1917, p. 478.

[116] H. Owen, *The Indian Nationalist Movement, c. 1912-1922*, New Delhi, Sterling, 1990, p. 19.

[117] *Our Depressed Brothers*, in «The Mahratta», April 28, 1918, p. 204.

[118] *Ibid*., Oct. 27, 1918, p. 517.

supporters opposed the Bill by stating that «the marriages between the Brahmins and the Shudras are invalid according to the Hindu law»[119]. They asked the Shankaracharya to interfere and stop the Bill from being passed, which elicited no response. The Shankaracharya did not comply. A series of public meeting were organised and presided over by N.C. Kelkar. He ridiculed the Shankaracharya – «Dharmagurus living on public charity and not doing anything for the religion»[120]. Vithalbhai Patel argued that « the caste system was the cause of national degeneration and the Bill would assist in national awakening». Nationalists criticised the Reformers for «upholding individual freedom while political subjugation continued»[121].

When Tilak returned from a trip to England, the Poona Municipality decided to present an address on behalf of the citizens on Poona[122]. Keshavrao Marutirao Jedhe and Raghunath Purushottam Paranjape opposed it and stated that the address should be by the friends and admirers of Tilak and not the citizens of Poona[123]. Tilak for the first time was completely isolated in an attempt to elicit support. He addressed the non-Brahmins by stating that «one man like myself cannot remove the caste distinctions» and declared that «the dichotomous division, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, is unnatural and purely artificial and is brought up by some interested factious men»[124].

> The need of the hour is "Swarajya" and not interdining and intermarrying with Brahmins […] the non-Brahmins should remember that the abolition of caste was once tried by Buddhists but they failed in it; we therefore cannot hang our problem of self-government on this peg of the abolition of caste[125].

In April 1920, the Bombay Provincial Conference was held at Sholapur and according to «The Mahratta» was attended by a record number of 3,229 persons, but Tilak failed to get even fifty supporters. There was pandemonium as Tilak's supporters tried to dominate the proceedings and the police arrived to restore order[126]. Tilak was not going to be an ordinary delegate to the Indian National Congress session of 1920. Soon he died on 1 August 1920.

[119] Tilak to Khaparde, 9 Sep 1918, in *Samagra Lokmanya Tilak*, vol. 7, p. 890.
[120] *Shankaracharya and the Patel Bill I. Need of Religious Organisation*, in «The Mahratta», September 28, 1919, p. 461.
[121] *Shankaracharya and the Patel Bill II*, *ibid*., October 5, 1919, pp. 475-476; *Shankaracharya and the Patel Bill III*, *ibid*., October 12, 1919, pp. 487-488.
[122] *Poona Municipality's address to Tilak*, *ibid*., December 7, 1919, p. 572.
[123] *Grand Reception at Poona*, *ibid*., p. 571; *Poona Municipality's address to Tilak*, *ibid*., p. 572.
[124] *Lok Tilak on Brahmins and Non-Brahmins*, *ibid*., March 21, 1920, p. 138.
[125] *Ibid*., p. 139.
[126] *Moderates' Ignominious Defeat*, *ibid*., Apr. 11, 1920, p. 173.

6. *Conclusion*

The developments in Mahasrashtra during 1880-1920 clearly show that the emerging Neo-Hinduism was not a reassertion of orthodox Hinduism but grew in opposition to it. It was also against reform within the Hindu society. Neo-Hinduism aimed to control 99 percent of population. It was essentially feudal in nature, authoritarian in its character, misogynist in its disposition and, finally, it was ironical that it severely undermined the strength of the Hindus.

4
«When the Servants Become Masters»: Agrarian Distress, Peasant Empowerment and the Emergence of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's Feudal Nationalism

Parimala V. Rao

> The advent of the British government has topsy-turvyed the entire fabric of the mutual relations between the *Inamdars* (rent-free landlords), who should be the king, […] the village officers who should be his servants and the tenants who occupy the place of his subjects[1].

1. *The Origin of Civic Nationalism*

Historically, civic nationalism predates feudal nationalism in India. It did not surface all of a sudden with the establishment of the Indian National Congress in 1885 by a group of Indian and Scottish leaders who were also deeply involved in social, economic and political reforms – A.O. Hume, William Wedderburn, Henry Cotton, George Yule[2]. It had a century-long history of public meetings drafting petitions signed by the local population, some of which I could trace to 1790[3]. Many of these petitions were sent to the British Parliament complaining of «political bondage in which the local government keeps the native residents in the *mofussal* (rural areas)»[4]. There are thousands of petitions available for historical scrutiny in every archive in India. Many of these petitions resulted from extensive public meetings attended by Hindus, Muslims, and Christians speaking multiple languages. One particular petition from the Madras Presidency drafted in 1839 had 70,000 signatures

[1] *Inamdar's Grievances*, in «The Mahratta», November 8, 1903, p. 521 (editorial).
[2] Few important names were Dadabhai Naoroji, Surendranath Banerjea, Pherozeshah Mehta, S. Subramanya Iyer, K.T. Telang. See, W. Wedderburn, *Allan Octavian Hume: Father of the Indian National Congress*, London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1913, p. 58.
[3] V. Narain, *Jonathan Duncan and Varanasi*, Calcutta, Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1959, p. 182.
[4] *Fourth Petition to the Imperial Parliament*, Madras Native Association, Henry Texter, Madras, 1855, pp. 24-25.

in English, Tamil and Telugu. The petition demanded the reopening of 101 modern schools, earlier established by the Scottish Governor, Thomas Munro, which the Madras government had closed down[5]. In these public meetings and petitions, we see the emergence of civil society as early as the late 18th century.

In Maharashtra, the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha was started by Ganesh Vasudeo Joshi, popularly known as Sarvajanik Kaka (public uncle) for his tireless and unselfish efforts for public good, on 2 April 1870 to act as a mediating body between the government and the people of Poona. It was a democratic body consisting of representatives from various castes and communities, each elected by at least fifty inhabitants of a place or locality[6]. This system of electing the delegates was adopted by the Indian National Congress in 1885.

2. *The Origin of Feudal Nationalism*

Running parallel to this culture of the petition were powerful feudal interests that directly negotiated with the colonial administration[7]. By the middle of the 19th century, feudal interests realised that the expansion of modern education empowered the lower classes. Many of the students from impoverished backgrounds went on to become local administrators and judges who regulated the relations between landlords and peasants. This led to structural change in power relations and endangered the traditional power structure through which the landlords wielded enormous power over the peasant communities. There were peasant uprisings in the 1850s and 1860s, and many landlords lost court cases against the peasants[8]. Syed Ahmad Khan's opposition to the admission of *Ajlafs* or lower-class Muslims into schools in the 1860s[9], Peary Mohun Mukherjee and Syed Amir Ali's opposition to the

[5] P.V. Rao, *Beyond Macaulay. Education in India, 1780-1860*, Abingdon, Routledge India, 2021, pp. 134-135.

[6] B.B. Majumdar, *Indian Political Associations and Reform of Legislature, 1818-1917*, Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1965, pp. 106-107.

[7] For a discussion on Indian Feudalism see R.S. Sharma, *How Feudal Was Indian Feudalism?*, in «Social Scientist», XII (1984), 2, Marx Centenary Number 3, pp. 16-41.

[8] See A.R. Desai, ed., *Peasant Struggle in India,* Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 136-158; J. Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, in G.P. Deshpande, ed., *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, New Delhi, LeftWord, 2002, pp. 114-192.

[9] «Education», October 15, 1873, A, Nos. 20-21, Syud Ahmad Khan Bahadoor, Secretary M.A.O.C. Committee, Benaras, to C.A. Elliott, Secretary to the Government of North-Western Province, 5 September 1872.

expansion of primary education in the 1870s, very clearly stated the loss of privileges felt by the landed gentry[10]. Rajendralal Mitra opposed fee reduction for poor boys by arguing that «education is a commodity and there should be no unequal charges for the same commodity»[11]. These attempts were the results of the growing power of the newly emerging English-educated middle class carrying forward radical European ideas[12]. The landed gentry began to organise themselves and, by 1870s, became a formidable force in Bengal. In the 1870s, they defeated Governor George Campbell's proposal to introduce mass education[13].

3. *The Agrarian Distress in Maharashtra in the 1870s*

In Bengal, the big *Zamindars* extracted hard labour, allowed pittance for survival and held peasants' very survival and dignity in their hands. In Maharashtra, the conditions of peasants living under big landlords like *Inamdars* and *Khots* were similar to those of Bengal. There were also large areas under the land tenure called the *Ryotwari* settlement, where the peasants paid taxes directly to the colonial state. Historically, Maharashtra, except for the coastal districts, has been particularly prone to recurring famines. The arid or semi-arid lands depend upon monsoon rains for agriculture and pasture. The widespread famines of 1790 and 1802-3 devastated the entire area. The 1802-3 famine alone reduced half the population in the Krishna Valley[14]. So, even before the British conquest of Western India in 1818, rural indebtedness was widespread[15]. When a peasant borrowed money, the right of occupancy was transferred to the moneylender, who continued working on the same land as a tenant. His wife and children became virtual serfs of the moneylender. In such a situation, the tenant was not a wage labourer but a sharecropper who

[10] T.N. Mukherjee, ed., *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of the Late Raja Peary Mohan Mukerjee,* Calcutta, Tarak Nath Mukherjee, 1914, pp. 31-34; *Report by the Bengal Provincial Committee, 1882*, pp. 217-222.
[11] *Ibid*., pp. 330-335.
[12] For a detailed discussion on how the European radical ideas influenced the students see *Medium of Instruction Debates*, in P.V. Rao, ed., *Routledge Companion to History of Education in India, 1780-1947*, New Delhi, Routledge, 2024, pp. 16-58.
[13] «Education», January 1, 1870, 1-10, A, H.L. Dampier, Secretary to Government of Bengal, to E.C. Bayley, Secretary to Government of India, 30 April 1869.
[14] S. Guha, *The Agrarian Economy of the Bombay Deccan*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 11-12.
[15] R. Kumar, *The Deccan Riots of 1875*, in «The Journal of Asian Studies», XXIV (1965), 4, p. 614.

cultivated the land at the master's will and delivered the share of the crop depending upon how the moneylender chose to calculate the arrears on the debt for which the peasant had lost the land. Usually, it was half the gross produce, half the land assessment, and arrears on debt.[16]

The peasants depended upon the moneylender for survival and to pay their taxes. If a peasant had borrowed 10 rupees at the end of ten years from the date of the loan, his account with his creditor stood thus; he had paid 110 rupees and still owed 220 rupees, thirty-three times the sum actually borrowed[17]. The debt often continued for generations, and the tenants were unaware of the actual source of the debt. The moneylender never returned the land to the cultivator. The Settlement Officer of Hoshangabad reported that «there was hardly a single moneylender who is not a landlord and many of the landlords combine the business of money and grain dealer with that of cultivation»[18]. The colonial judicial system did not help the peasants. The courts were situated at *taluka* (sub-district) headquarters, and a poor, illiterate peasant could hardly dare to attend the court proceedings due to the cost involved. Hence, very often, the cases were settled without the presence of the peasant[19]. In the Bombay Presidency, 90% of peasants were in debt, and half of them were hopelessly involved in it. Many peasant families had mortgaged their entire property for survival. The moneylender (*sowcar*) took away the entire crop at harvest time. The peasants had little choice but to comply to maintain their future credit[20].

4. *The Big Landlords* – Inamdars *and* Khots

At the other end of the spectrum of the rural economy were the big landlords called *Inamdars* and *Jagirdars*, who held large tracks of rent-free land. These lands were rent-free for the services rendered to the village community,

[16] S. Guha, *Some Aspects of Agricultural Growth in Nineteenth Century India*, in «Studies in History», IV (1982), 1, p. 81.

[17] A.K. Bagchi, *Land Tax, Property rights and Peasant Insecurity in Colonial India*, in «Journal of Peasant Studies», XX (1992), 1, p. 38.

[18] Quoted in T.C.A. Raghavan, *Malguzars and Peasants: The Narmada Valley, 1860-1920*, in «Studies in History», I (1985), 2, p. 181.

[19] K. Ballhatcht, *Social Policy and Change in West India*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 153.

[20] N. Charlesworth, *Peasants and Imperial Rule: Agriculture and Agrarian Society in the Bombay Presidency, 1850-1935*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 83. Gujarathi peasants too suffered similar fate (see D. Hardiman, *Feeding the Bania: Peasant and Usurer in Western India,* Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996).

religious purposes, or military services to the former Maratha or the Peshwa governments[21]. Towards the end of the Peshwa regime, there was large-scale unauthorised land alienation when the administration was lax[22]. In Ratnagiri district alone, over 100 villages were held as *Inam* and in the Badami *taluka* of the Belgaum district 76 complete villages and 42 per cent of arable land in the remaining 151 villages were held as *Inam*[23]. When the Inam Commission began its enquiries in 1843, the *Inamdars* retaliated by not allowing the survey of their lands and destroying the land records. The Bombay government did not want to antagonise local elites, which slowed the working of the Commission[24]. The Land Revenue Code of 1879 incentivised *Inamdars* to allow the survey.

The *Khots* were landlords, revenue collectors, administrative controllers, moneylenders, and grain dealers in the coastal districts. They also held all village documentation. This concentration of power in the hands of *Khots* placed them in a formidable position. A majority of *Khots* were Chitpavan Brahmins[25]. The fate of a peasant, beginning with his income, loans and records, and his relation to the government, was in the hands of a single person. The Bombay government attempted in the 1860s to conduct a survey to determine new rent and occupancy rights in the *Khoti* villages. Vishwath Narayan Mandalik, the articulate spokesperson of the *Khots*, was a powerful advocate of the Bombay High Court. He called the survey the «denationalisation of India». In 1870, a compromise was reached between the colonial government and the *Khots*. Accordingly, the *Khots* were conferred upon full rights over their villages. Most of the cultivators became customary tenants with heritable but not transferable rights. This was legalised by the *Khoti Act* in 1880. The Act did not improve the condition of tenants. They had to pay one-half to three-quarters of the gross produce. The tenants also had to perform various forms of labour for a daily pittance of one *anna* or meal[26]. The Mamlatdar (administrator) always sided with the *Khots*. V.N. Mandalik's newspaper, «The Native Opinion», and Tilak's «The Mahratta», opposed any infringement of

[21] N. Charlesworth, *Peasants and Imperial Rule*, p. 27.

[22] S. Guha, *Society and Economy in the Deccan, 1818-50*, in «The Indian Economic & Social History Review», XX (1983), 4, pp. 389-413.

[23] N. Charlesworth, *Peasants and Imperial Rule*, pp. 28-33.

[24] B.B. Misra, *The Indian Middle Class. Their Growth in Modern Times*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, p. 143.

[25] N. Charlesworth, *Peasant and the Imperial Rule*, p. 31.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 189.

the rights of the *Khots* and the Mamlatdars[27]. When Mandalik died in 1889, Tilak expressed concern that «the *Khots* have lost their best and strongest defender […] but we would impress upon them the greater necessity there is therefore to watch their interest with diligence»[28].

5. *The Deccan Peasant Revolt*

The peasant in 19th-century Maharashtra living under the *Ryotwari*, the *Inamdari* and the *Khoti* settlements faced multiple oppressors like the rigid collection of revenue by either the colonial government or the *Inamdars* or the *Khots*, the moneylenders, the shortage of food grains and recurring famine. It was an ideal situation for an agrarian revolt. Many District officials (Collectors) and survey and settlement officers had been pleading to limit the liability of the cultivators for debt contracted to moneylenders[29]. The rural indebtedness was so great that the average interest paid by the villagers exceeded the state revenue demands. The peasants who paid 10 to 20 rupees land tax owed 1,000 to 2,000 rupees to the moneylenders[30].

The simmering discontentment against the moneylenders led to stray but continuous attacks on them for decades[31]. The situation became acute in 1875 due to the scanty rainfall and consequent crop failure[32]. G.V. Joshi and the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha took an active part in defending the peasants. Jotirao Phule, an eyewitness to the events, appreciated Joshi for «removing the scale of pride in caste and looking at the conditions of the peasants»[33]. Vasudeo Balwant Phadke played a dominant role in the Deccan Revolt against the moneylenders. Phadke was influenced by G.V. Joshi and travelled extensively throughout the Deccan

[27] *The Mamlatdar Question*, in «The Mahratta», May 19, 1889, p. 1 (editorial); *The Case of the Guaranteed Mamlatdars*, *ibid*., June 23, 1889, p. 6; *The Mamlatdars and the Government*, *ibid*., September 1, 1889, p. 1 (editorial); *The Mamlatdars Indemnity Bills*, *ibid*., September 22, 1889, p. 1 (editorial).

[28] *The Khots and the Government ibid*., August 25, 1889, p. 2 (editorial).

[29] A.K. Bagchi, *Land Tax, Property Rights*, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, *Occasional Papers*, Calcutta, 1992, p. 49.

[30] N. Charlesworth, *The Myth of Deccan Riots of 1875*, in D. Hardiman, ed., *Peasant Resistance in India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 206.

[31] L. Natarajan, *Maratha Uprising: 1875*, in A.R. Desai, ed., *Peasant Struggle in India,* Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 163-164. The Santhal insurrections of 1855-56 and Pabna Peasant's Struggle in 1873 were also essentially against the moneylenders and *Zamindars* (*ibid*., pp. 136-188).

[32] N. Charlesworth *The Myth of Deccan Riots of 1875*, in «Modern Asian Studies», VI (1972), 4, p. 405.

[33] J. Phule, *Cultivator's Whipcord*, p. 130.

and organised attacks on moneylenders. The rebels systematically destroyed the documents relating to loans. Over 1000 peasants were arrested, and in July 1879 Phadke was also arrested. He was tried and sentenced to transportation of life in 1880. He was kept in a prison in Aden, where he died in 1883[34].

Writers have tried to link Bal Gangadhar Tilak with Phadke and argue that Phadke influenced Tilak[35]. Krishnarao Sharangapani – a classmate of Tilak from 1872-1879 – does not mention such interaction[36]. Tilak condemned Phadke's revolt as a «hair-brained attempt of a misguided person»[37]. He criticised Phadke for «organising bands for the purpose of looting» and suggested that «we assure our traders that the longer the present state of things continues, the more people would be committing the dacoities»[38]. Tilak called Phadke's revolt «dacoities». Most of the moneylenders attacked by Phadke's supporters belonged to the Chitpavan caste. Tilak dedicated his life to defending Chitpavan moneylenders, so linking Tilak with Phadke has been done by the Indian left writers to create an image of an anti-colonial leader.

6. *The* Agriculturists Relief Act *(1879)*

The colonial government appointed the Deccan Ryots Commission to investigate the causes and suggest remedies for peasant indebtedness. It was headed by William Wedderburn, a Scottish judge at Ahmadnagar during the revolt, who had a firsthand account of the situation. Mahadev Govind Ranade, a leading social reformer and a judge, assisted Wedderburn in collecting and analysing the data and suggesting solutions. The Commission recorded numerous instances wherein the moneylenders usurped the land and individually humiliated the debtors. The Bombay government passed the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act* (*DARA*) in 1879. The Act tried to safeguard the peasants

[34] V.S. Joshi, *Vasadeo Balwant Phadke: First Indian Rebel Against the British Rule*, Bombay, V.S. Joshi, 1959, p. 31; Phadke's diary printed in *The Source Material for the History of the Freedom Movement*, vol. I, *1818-1885,* Bombay, The Government Central Press, 1957, pp. 103-125.

[35] V.S. Joshi, *Vasadeo Balwant Phadke*, pp. 41-42; D.V. Tahmankar, *Lok Tilak, Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India*, London, John Murray, 1956, p. 25; C. Sehanavis, *Phadke*, in N.R. Ray *et al*., *Challenge: A Saga of India's Struggle for Freedom*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1984, p. 257.

[36] K. Sarangapani's *Recollections* printed in S.V. Bapat, ed., *The Reminiscences and Anecdotes of Lok Tilak*, Poona, S.V. Bapat, 1925, pp. 65-73.

[37] *The Indian Arms Act*, in «The Mahratta», October 9, 1881, p. 2.

[38] *Ibid*., February 20, 1881, p. 4 (editorial notes).

by insisting on a «valid bond between a peasant and a moneylender drawn up under the supervision of a village registrar». It provided for informal arbitration between the peasants and the moneylenders before the village headman – Patil. If this failed, the peasants and the moneylenders could proceed to newly created Civil (Munsif) Courts situated within easy reach of villagers. The parties in dispute could appeal to the subordinate judges only after going through the conciliators and Munsiffs. «The subordinate courts to investigate carefully the background of debt transactions. The time limitation to the recovery of debts to be extended from three to twelve years». Most importantly, «if the peasant failed to repay the debt, his tools and the land were exempt from attachment, and he could not be imprisoned for non-payment of debt». The government effectively defended the peasants from the moneylenders but did not reduce the land revenue. Wedderburn criticised the government for «leaving the inflexible system of assessment untouched […] thereby causing misery to the Deccan peasants»[39]. M.G. Ranade, too, argued for lowering the rate of revenue assessment; what the government did was adjust the balance of legal procedure in favour of the *Ryots*[40]. K.T. Telang, a social reformer and a judge, criticised the failure of the government to establish «a famine insurance fund»[41]. Wedderburn and Ranade suggested setting up *Shetkari* or Agricultural Banks to provide easy credit to peasants.

Syed Ahmad Khan criticised the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act*. He argued that «it is not true that the moneylenders generally desire to acquire the land and they rarely sue the peasants». He further stated that «the peasants do not appear in the court because they know that the complaint is just». He called the provision of the Act, which insisted on the court enquiring the history of transactions, a waste of «court man days labour» and questioned «why should the fraudulent debtor in the Deccan be exposed to less penalties than a fraudulent debtor elsewhere?[42]. While Wedderburn, Ranade and Telang's criticisms of *DARA* aimed to garner more concessions, Syed Ahmad Khan's criticism aimed to protect the moneylender and portray the peasant as a «fraudulent debtor». However, the most vigorous attack on the *DARA* and a

[39] S.K. Ratcliffe, *Sir William Wedderburn and the Indian Social Reform Movement*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1923, p. 84. Later Wedderburn's proposal to ascertain the causes which impaired the cultivator's power to resist the attack of famine and plague was defeated in the House of Commons (D. Williams, E.D. Potts, eds., *Essays in Indian History in Honour of Cuthbert Collin Davies*, Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1973, p. 166).

[40] R. Tucker, *Ranade and the Roots of Indian Nationalism,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1972, p. 139.

[41] *Speeches and Writings of K.T. Telang,* Bombay, K.R. Mitra, 1916, p. 187.

[42] S. Mohamad, ed., *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan,* Bombay, Nachiketa, 1972, pp. 130-138.

strong defence of the moneylender came from Bal Gangadhar Tilak. In Maharashtra, feudal interests began to assert after the enactment of *DARA* which curtailed their power over the peasants.

7. *Tilak's Anti-Colonial Credentials*

Tilak was born on 23 July 1856 in the Konkan village of Chikhalgaon. His great-grandfather was a *Khot* of Chikhalgaon[43] who later became a Mamlatdar or administrator of Ratnagiri's Anjanvel sub-district (*taluka*) during the pre-colonial Peshwa rule. Richard Cashman writes that rather than serve the new masters, he chose to retire when the British took over. If resentment was the prime cause, then it does not explain how Tilak's grandfather and father loyally served the British as an official in the survey department and as a Deputy Educational Officer, respectively[44]. Tilak's father was also a moneylender and a shareholder in a mill. Tilak's close friends and associates came from similar landed and moneylending backgrounds[45].

The sources for studying the rise of feudal nationalism are the articles and editorials written by Tilak from 2 January 1881 to 1908, except during a brief period when he was arrested in a defamation case and a sedition case from September 1897 to September 1898. All in all, we have 1,196 articles and editorials. This does not mean that the «Mahratta» weekly took a different line in the absence of Tilak. Vasudevrao Kelkar, N.C. Kelkar and K.P. Khadilkar, who edited the weekly when Tilak was away, had identical ideas and admitted that the «Mahratta» was «a propaganda paper of Tilak»[46]. When N.C. Kelkar developed «only a shade of difference» in 1907, Tilak wrote,

> «Kesari» and «The Mahratta» are like most other papers, party papers, more or less, and I wish to maintain them as such, especially as we are building up the party just now […] On all important points and at all important times, both papers must support the same policy with equal vigour [otherwise] it will, I need not say, be extremely painful for me to part with you[47].

[43] V.P. Varma, *Life and Philosophy of Lok Tilak*, Agra, L.N. Agarwal, 1978, p. 7.

[44] R. Cashman, *The Myth of Lokmanya*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1975, p. 46.

[45] N.C. Kelkar, *Life and Times of Lok Tilak*, vol. I, Delhi, Anupam Publications, 1987, p 61. For more details on Tilak's associates, see P.V. Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism: Discrimination, Education and Hindutva*, New Delhi, Orient BlackSwan, 2011, pp. 28-29.

[46] *The «Kesari» and the Press Act*, in «The Mahratta», June 2, 1912, pp. 169-171 (editorial).

[47] Tilak's letter to N.C. Kelkar dated 23 November 1907, in M.A. Vidwans, ed., *Letters of Lokmanya,* Poona, Kesari Prakashan, 1966, pp. 256-261.

So «The Mahratta» represented Tilak's ideas and opinions in their entirety. If we limit our analysis to 1,196 articles and editorials, about 50 per cent of them were against the education of non-Brahmins, lower-class Brahmins, girls, social reforms, and the *Age of Consent Bill*. About 5 per cent were anti-Muslim which covered Muslim education, communal riots and the Shivaji-Afzal Khan episode. The remaining articles consist of about 40 per cent written in defence of big landlords, and the remaining 5 per cent consists of editorial comments on the events of the day. We find a few articles reporting the revolutionary activities in Russia after 1900.

Until 1898, none of the articles and editorials criticised the colonial rule. In fact, when the British wanted to convict Tilak for sedition in 1897, after the assassination of Walter Charles Rand, the chairman of the plague committee, on 22 June 1897 by Damodar Hari Chapekar, the government could not find a single anti-British article written by Tilak. The British advocate L.P.E. Pugh, defending Tilak, challenged the government «to produce a single article against the British rule»[48]. The government had to rely on a contributed article titled *Shivaji's Utterances*, which explained an imagined situation where Shivaji was commenting on the state of India in the 1890s. According to the article, the reason for Shivaji's discontentment was that «when Brahmins break the law they are punished like other persons and the visibility of women in public like railway carriages where men could cast improper glances»[49]. This, of course, had an indirect reference to Rand when he had earlier arrested 11 supporters of Tilak for causing communal riots but nothing to link Tilak to the murders[50]. Rand was the *Khoti* settlement officer in the late 1880s in the Ratnagiri district. Tilak had repeatedly advised the *Khots* in their cases against Rand[51]. These advises were legal suggestions and not anti-British. The court sentenced Tilak for his speech on the Shivaji and Afzal Khan episode, in which he had stated that «god has not confirmed upon the *mlechas* (a generic term for foreigners, N.d.R.) the grant inscribed on a copper plate of the kingdom of Hindustan»[52]. This was a mild criticism of foreign rulers and not necessarily the British.

In direct contrast, the Reformers who have been projected as "moderates" by

[48] «Home/Public», May 1898, nos. 345-376, pp. 41-67.
[49] *Shivaji's Utterances*, in «Kesari», May 4, 1897.
[50] «Home/Public», May 1898, nos. 345-376, p. 194.
[51] *The Khot and the Government*, in «The Mahratta», May 25, 1889, p. 2.
[52] «Home/Public», May 1898, nos. 345-376, p. 68; «The Mahratta», December 4, 1898, p. 4 (editorial).

the Indian Marxist historians were more critical of the British administration. The reformist liberal weekly «Sudharak», edited by Ganesh Gopal Agarkar, sharply criticised the colonial administration. It questioned the legitimacy of the British rule in India. A few articles could be cited here – *Oppression of Plague Committee* and *Why do we weep like Cowards?* on 19 April 1897, *Does not the government make bandobast (arrangements)? Learn to make it yourself* on 3 May 1897, *Loss of Self Respect* on 10 May 1897. The articles questioned the very nature of the colonial rule. Tilak later agreed that «"Sudharak" wrote more violently than myself against plague measures»[53].

If Tilak had not written anything against the British in his articles, which covered most dominant social reform debates of the day and huge communal riots in Belgaum (1890), in Bombay (1893), in Yeola (1893-94), and in Poona (1894), where do we find the origins of his idea of nationalism? They are in his articles defending the big landlords and moneylenders.

8. *Feudal Interest as National Interest*

Tilak established his weekly «The Mahratta» from the resources inherited from his father, part of which he had amassed as a moneylender. The first issue began on 2 January 1881. «The Mahratta» during 1881-1884, that is until the *Age of Consent* debate began, looked like a newspaper of moneylenders (*Sowcar*s) and big landlords. Tilak called the defence of the interests of this class "*rashtravadi*" or "Nationalist" and condemned any reform to support poor peasants as «unnational». He criticised the «alien British rulers» for «destroying the harmony in the villages by interfering on behalf of the peasants» and for «betraying *Sowcar* and for being partial to the peasantry»[54]. He asserted that «the *Sowcar* is the god of the agriculturists» who was «rendering a valuable service by advancing loan to the peasants in times of distress»[55]. Though Wedderburn and Ranade had proposed Agricultural Banks, Tilak singled out Ranade, an Indian judge, as he feared the consequences of criticising a British judge. The extent of peasant indebtedness can be judged by the findings of the subordinate judge of Tasgaon in Satara District, who stated that the debts

[53] *Samagra Lokmamya Tilak*, vol. VII, Pune, Kesari Prakashan, 1975, p. 47.
[54] *The Prospect of an Agricultural Bank*, in «The Mahratta», March 6, 1881, p. 3.
[55] *Ibid*., December 3, 1882, p. 1.

of the agriculturists in the *taluka*, which contained only forty-nine villages there, at not less than three million rupees, equal to about eighteen times the assessment of the villages[56]. Tilak agreed with this and used it to argue that

> The insolvent *ryot* has, properly speaking, no credit. Lending money to him is, at best, a risky speculation in which the moneylender must take his share of the risk […] no legislation can create money, and the Act, therefore, cannot enable the *Ryots* to pay off this intolerable load of paper debt outstanding[57].

Tilak suggested that «if the government therefore does not wish to utterly ruin the *Sowcar*s for having helped, the peasants must pay the debt». Tilak elevated his pro-moneylender struggle to an anti-colonial struggle,

> We have all along been maintaining that the poverty of the agriculturists cannot be dealt with independently. The whole nation is being drained every year of its wealth; its industries are dying through foreign competition, and as a disease first manifests itself in the human body in its weakest parts. So, this natural distress is felt first by the lowest strata of the community. This disease is not local but constitutional; any local remedies, though they would soothe it for a while, cannot eradicate it. The lowering of the assessment can do so a little[58].

Tilak calculated that the average holding of the agricultural population in the Deccan was 13 acres with an annual yield of seven and a half rupees per acre, amounting to nearly one hundred rupees. After paying 8-12 rupees as revenue to the government, the peasant was left with 88-92 rupees, which was insufficient to sustain a family. Tilak accepted that nearly 40 per cent of peasants in the Deccan were in debt, paying 24 to 36 per cent of interest on the loans borrowed from the *Sowcar*s. But he defended the «poor moneylender»:

> The *Sowcar* is not to be blamed for lending his money to the beggarly *ryot* at an exorbitant rate of interest because when he demands a high rate of interest, he gets it on account of two reasons, viz 1. it is a great risk to lend money to the wretched *ryot*; 2. there is very little capital ready to be lent to him, most moneyed men being unwilling to invest their capital in this uncertain trade. In other words, the wretchedness of the *ryot* and the smallness of the capital have conspired together to degrade both[59].

As Tilak openly began to advise the moneylenders to deny credit to peasants, Ranade stepped up his efforts to establish the Agricultural Banks. Tilak criticised Ranade: «We wonder how a man of his talent and information does

[56] *The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act*, *ibid*., March 26, 1881, p. 2.
[57] *Ibid.*
[58] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[59] *M.G. Ranade on An Agricultural Bank I*, *ibid*., May 29, 1881, p. 2; *M.G. Ranade on An Agricultural Bank II*, *ibid*., June 5, 1881, p. 3.

not perceive the positive injury inflicted upon the *Sowcar*»[60]. Ranade called «the peasant indebtedness as chronic, and the immediate objective is to protect the person and property of the peasants from attachment because the moneylender abused power». To this, Tilak replied:

> We are sorry, we cannot understand the above argument […] A *Kunbi* (peasant) cannot avoid the necessity of going to a *Sowcar*. A *Kunbi* has very little or no personal property except implements, husbandry, bullocks and a few necessities of life. These are all exempt from attachment by the civil procedure code. A *Sowcar* who advances money has, therefore, to rely upon the crops for repayment and these, too, have been protected by the Act, then leaving the *Sowcar* no security for his advances[61].

Tilak argued that the *Sowcar* could not be regarded as the sole cause of peasant indebtedness, and it was the rigid revenue system which was at fault[62]. Tilak also stated that the *DARA* interfered with the religious strictures of Hinduism.

> The *DARA* is against the customs and traditions of the Hindus. The Hindu lawgivers have always allowed *Karyadroh*, or prevention from following one's usual occupation, to be enforced by the *Sowcar* to ensure payment of his dues […] If imprisonment for debt is abolished, the only result of that move would be to encourage fraud on the part of poor innocent cultivators. […] by declaring himself insolvent, the debtor incapacitates himself for continuing to be a useful member of society […] abolition of imprisonment will seriously prejudice the cause of social progress. […] History bears testimony to the fact that the tendency of all laws relating to the settlement of all debts or to debtor or creditor, has throughout been that of exposing the debtor to hardship and trouble without in any way destroying or neglecting the interests of the *Sowcar*[63].

Tilak declared that the intention of the colonial government was to ruin the *Sowcars* as a class. He now argued that the peasants were not as impoverished as Ranade and his supporters and the government had portrayed: «*Kunbis* have more than enough unmovable property»[64]. Tilak stressed that «the moneylender was an important member of the village community who had rendered yeoman's services to the society and above all to the *Kunbis* in times of distress […] he is *Kunbi*'s best friend». If the peasants had a choice, they would always choose the moneylender over the colonial government»[65].

[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act VIII*, *ibid*., June 26, 1881, p. 3.
[62] *The Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act IX*, *ibid*., July 31, 1881, pp. 1-2.
[63] *Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt II*, *ibid*., May 7, 1882, p. 2.
[64] *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act*, *ibid*., May 14, 1882, p. 2.
[65] *Agricultural Loans Bill*, *ibid*., December 3, 1882, p. 1.

He also blamed the «English capitalists» behind the scheme of Agricultural Banks, saying that the entire scheme would fail as the bank could not compete with the *Sowcars*. Tilak demanded that «the government should entirely discard the proposal of the Agricultural Banks and repeal the *DARA*»[66]. Tilak's attack on the Act and the Agricultural Banks had its effect. Though the Act was not repealed, in London the Secretary of State for India did not clear the proposal for the bank. Tilak was jubilant: «We have all along opposed the scheme of Agricultural Banks, and the decision of the Secretary of State in the matter is quite in consonance with the desires of the minority that has stood bravely the conflict in the controversy of the propriety or otherwise of the Loan Banks scheme»[67].

The moneylender lobby led by Tilak was powerful enough to prevent the colonial state from establishing agricultural banks. Though the Secretary of State refused permission to start the Agricultural Banks, the government of Bombay approved the establishment of one such bank on a trial basis in the Purandhar Taluk in 1888. Tilak ridiculed the enthusiasm behind the experiment and categorically stated that «philanthropy is out of the question, […] it is certain that an organised body of *Sowcars* would be better able to protect their and their debtors' interests than the present detached individuals[68]. Tilak predicted that the Bank would lose in its cause due to the competition from the local *Sowcar*. He called upon the local *Sowcars* «to organise their operation along the lines of the modern banking system»[69]. As predicted by Tilak, the Bank closed down within a year. With this, the public debate regarding the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act* and the Agricultural Banks came to an end. This crusade firmly established Tilak as an important leader to reckon with.

Tilak not only attacked a simple measure to defend the rights of the peasants but demanded a Bengal-type of Permanent Settlement for the Bombay Presidency[70]. Tilak and his supporters tried to use the newly established Indian National Congress to get all of India's attention to their agenda. In 1886 M.B. Namjoshi argued that «the introduction of Permanent Settlement throughout the *ryotwari* settled provinces as one of the most important steps towards the

[66] *The Agricultural Banks*, *ibid*., December 9, 1883, p. 1.
[67] *Agricultural Banks in India*, *ibid*., January 25, 1885, p. 3.
[68] *Agricultural Banks in India*, *ibid*., April 8, 1888, p. 4.
[69] *Ibid*.
[70] *Ibid*., December 3, 1882, p. 2; *ibid*., January 25, 1885, p. 1.

alleviation of poverty of the masses»[71]. In 1893, Tilak argued at the Congress Session: «coming as I do from Bombay, I do not plead for the *zamindars* but the *ryots* of Bombay. There the necessity of Permanent Settlement is keenly felt by all classes of the community»[72]. He was successful in getting the resolution on the introduction of a Permanent Settlement passed in the Congress session. However, the government did not pay any attention to it.

Due to stiff opposition from the moneylenders led by Tilak, the government did not undertake any measures to improve the condition of the peasants from 1880 to 1896. Though the *DARA* empowered the peasants to protect themselves from the ruthless exploitation of the moneylenders, due to the chronic lack of agricultural capital, the peasant was forced to return to the mercy of the moneylender, who now demanded a complete sale deed against the money lent to the peasants»[73]. So, land alienation continued faster than ever through the mortgage of land in exchange for loans. Wedderburn, assessing the situation, declared that the percentage of holders of land under five acres was fast decreasing and called for making arrangements to provide work for the daily increasing number of labourers[74]. By the end of the 19th century, in some *talukas* of Thana District, 70 per cent of the land had changed hands from the original owner cultivator, tribal and fishermen to non-resident moneylenders from Bombay City[75].

9. *The Famines of 1896*

The monsoon rains failed in 1896, and the merchant-moneylenders bought up and hoarded the grains in the city to capitalise on the anticipated shortage. Grain riots broke out within three months[76]. Tilak was victorious in stopping the establishment of the Agricultural Banks. However, he failed to prevent Ranade's girl's high school from teaching mathematics, sciences and the Eng-

[71] *The Proceedings of the Indian National Congress, II Session 1886*, p. 67.

[72] *The Proceedings of the Indian National Congress, IX Session 1893*, p. 114.

[73] Of the 4528 mortgage transactions examined in 1889, 57.2% specified that if the debt was not paid within a fixed time-span the land automatically went to the mortgagee. A further 23.2 percent cases were « "poklist"» sales: the mortgagee became the formal owner until the payment of debts (N. Charlesworth, *Peasants and the Imperial Rule*, p. 178).

[74] «The Mahratta», May 25, 1884, p. 3.

[75] R. Cashman, *The Myth*, p. 135.

[76] *Ibid*., p. 123.

lish language to girls and lost the battle against the *Age of Consent Bill*, which raised the marriageable age of girls to 12 years. After this, he called on his supporters to seize the public institutions[77]. They captured the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha by driving out the liberals.

When the famine began, the liberals did not have an organisation to help the peasants. They met at Ranade's house during the last week of October 1896 and formed the Deccan Sabha. They emphasised «the spirit of liberalism implied in freedom from caste, creed and regional prejudices and a steady devotion to all that seeks to do justice between man and man»[78]. The Deccan Sabha collected village-wise data and negotiated with the government for a railway line from Barsi to Phandarapur, got the wages of men and women workers doubled and secured subsistence allowance for non-working children, transportation of 4,300,000 cattle and 3,500,000 sheep and goats nearby forests[79].

The quickness with which the liberals could regroup and begin the work under the leadership of Ranade perturbed Tilak. He attacked the establishment of the Deccan Sabha as «nothing short of a complete obstruction of political vision»[80]. He also began his Famine Relief campaign by demanding the government not directly distribute relief work but only in consultations with local leaders. He called upon the grain merchants «to take normal profit» and established a shop to sell food grains at «cheapest rates»[81]. He appointed seven young men, all Chitpavans from landed-money lending families, to travel throughout Deccan to begin a no-tax campaign[82]. They campaigned in *Ryotwari* villages, which paid taxes directly to the government, but not in the *Inamdari* villages, where the taxes went to the big landlords[83]. Tilak supported the demand for «suspension and remission claimed by the non-agriculturists» by stating that «they had done so for the sake of the peasants»[84]. The Bombay government retaliated by ordering the confiscation of property of the richest defaulters, landlords and *Sowcars*, which resulted in immediate payment

[77] *How Shall We Do It?*, in «The Mahratta», April 26, 1891, p. 2 (editorial).

[78] The Deccan Sabha Circular dated November 4, 1896 (*The Deccan Sabha Papers*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library).

[79] J. Monteath to G.K. Gokhale and R.D. Nagarkar, November 21, 1896 (*ibid.*).

[80] *Sarvajanik versus the Deccan Sabha*, in «The Mahratta», November 22, 1896, p. 8.

[81] *The Famine a Dead Certainty*, *ibid.*, October 25, 1896, p. 3 (editorial).

[82] They were N.C. Kelkar, Achut Sitaram Sathe, Shivram Mahadev Paranjape, Shankar Ganesh Lawate, V.K Rajwade, Mahadkar, and Narayan Shivram Barve.

[83] Richard Cashman, *The Myth*, p. 150.

[84] *Suspension and Remission of Revenue*, in «The Mahratta», February 25, 1900, p. 3 (editorial).

of land revenue even by the poor peasants, who otherwise would have been exempted according to the Famine Relief Code of 1879. This period also witnessed plague in both rural and urban areas. Even before the twin tragedies of famine and plague subsided, Tilak and his supporters began to plead with the colonial government to stringently collect revenue from poor peasants in the lands of the *Inamdars*.

10. *Tilak's Defence of* Khots *and* Inamdars

In 1898, the Bombay government attempted to bring about legislation to curtail the power of the *Khots* over their tenants. Tilak was released from prison on 6 September 1898. Being a *Khot*, he immediately entered the fray to defend their interests[85]. The issues Tilak had raised during the no-tax campaign were still alive. The Bombay Presidency was still in the grip of famine and plague. Ignoring both calamities, he began a relentless campaign on behalf of the *Khots*. In 1899, John Nugent, a member of the Bombay Legislative Council, introduced the *Khoti Bill*. As a revenue officer in the Ratnagiri district, he had witnessed the «rapacity of *Khots* and rampant poverty of peasants». Tilak called the proposed legislation «a distinct Act of breach of faith»[86]. The «Mahratta» wrote that «the rack renting of the tenants was unlikely because according to the *Khoti Act* of 1880, the *Khot* could assess the produce in the presence of the tenant or his legal representative and two representatives, one of whom must be able to read and write. It argued that there «is not a single instance where a tenant, when left to himself, has voluntarily complained against the *Khoti* system. The government officers, filled with concern and sympathy for the *Kunbis* (peasants), were actually encouraging them to complain against the *Khots*»[87]. It was a farfetched idea that an impoverished and illiterate peasant would have a legal representative or the power to resist the assessment of the produce by the powerful *Khot*. Tilak called the Bill firstly «the government's intention to remove the buffer and bring the tenants in direct touch»,

[85] G.P Pradhan, *Lok Tilak*, p. 47, and N.C. Kelkar *Life and Times of Lok Tilak,* p. 20, have argued that he derived nothing from it. J.V. Naik states that Tilak was the first Indian to introduce Marxist ideas of labour welfare and class conflict, and has called Tilak's defence of *Khots* as «some chinks in his armour» (*Lokmanya Tilak on Karl Marx and Class Conflict*, in «Economic and Political Weekly», 1 May 1999, pp. 1023-1025).

[86] *The Khoti Settlement Act*, in «The Mahratta», December 25, 1898, p. 1.

[87] *The Khoti Bill*, *ibid*., January 22, 1899, p. 1.

and secondly the long-standing desire to crush the Konkan *Khots* out of their existence altogether». He insisted that «the revenue collected should not be given to the government directly but through the *Khots*»[88]. Tilak argued that the government was determined to «endanger the rights of the *Khots*»[89]. He called on the *Khots* to «organise a movement to legally meet the unjust attack on their legal and customary rights»[90].

The government, on its part, ensured that the proposed *Khoti Bill* «gave the tenants the right to complain to the government about the excess share demanded by the *Khot*». Tilak said this measure would «break down the *Khoti* system»[91], as «it made the tenant independent of the *Khot*»[92]. He argued that «legally the *Khot* had right against the tenant but not vice-versa» and the Bill was «guided by keeping in mind the sweet will of the tenant alone»[93]. The Bill was passed in 1903, according to which the *Khots* got a fixed share, which after paying the rent left the *Khots* with a 25 per cent profit. Tilak called it «ungrateful both for the *Khoti* tenants and the government to turn round and question the useful services rendered by the *Khots*»[94].

The famine of 1896-1900 hastened the transfer of land from the peasants to the *Sowcars*[95]. In the absence of alternative sources of agricultural loans, the peasants were forced to resort to the moneylenders, who in turn asked for the mortgage of land as security for money. The Macdowell Famine Committee (1901) concluded that the *Deccan Agriculturist Relief Act* had failed to reduce indebtedness and land alienation. The Committee noted that land alienation was as high as 70 per cent in certain *talukas*, and the state of affairs demanded not palliative measures but radical legislation. The Bombay government was reluctant to implement radical legislation, fearing further political unrest led by Tilak. The Governor of Bombay, Sandhurst, wrote to Governor-General Curzon:

> We have in Deccan a class possibly small but certainly clever, active and unscrupulous […] who for some past years have been seeking a cry that would secure them the support of the *ryats*. To this end, they have taken up cow protection, the Shivaji and Ganapati movements, the no-rent campaign of 1897, forest grievances, plague measures and active criticism of famine

[88] *The Khoti Bill*, *ibid*., January 29, 1899, p. 3 (editorial).
[89] «Kesari», February 21, 1899; *ibid*., March 14, 1899.
[90] *The Khoti Bill Again*, in «The Mahratta», February 19, 1899, pp. 3-4 (editorial).
[91] «Kesari», March 21, 1899.
[92] *Ibid*., March 28, 1899.
[93] *The Khoti Bill*, in «The Mahratta», September 27, 1903, p. 461 (editorial).
[94] *Ibid*., October 11, 1903, p. 485 (editorial).
[95] N. Charlesworth, *Peasants and the Imperial Rule*, p. 194.

> relief, all in turn: and the proposed scheme for restricting the alienation of land will, it seems to me, give them just what they have been looking for[96].

Tilak opposed the Bombay government's contention that indebtedness led to a large-scale transfer of land into non-agricultural classes as «the records relating to land in Bombay presidency were unreliable, hence could not be used as evidence»[97]. He hoped that the famine commission would find the «right causes and develop steps to remove them»[98]. He also wished that legislation «like the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act*, which crushed the social and political influence of the moneylender over the peasants», would not be brought about once again[99]. The Bombay government passed legislation which restricted land alienation. Tilak called the new Bill «a hobby, a fad of some of the revenue officers»[100], adding that «the restriction of the right of transfer of land […] simply because famine distress and misfortune has rendered the *rayats* unable to pay the arrears is absurd»[101].

During 1896-1900, the Deccan witnessed both famine and plague and by 1900 the Deccan peasantry had not even recovered partially[102]. Within three years of his no-rent campaign, even before the famine ended, Tilak began to personally request the government «to strictly collect the taxes in the *Inamdar*'s lands». Legally the *Inamdars* had no powers to collect the revenue and had to depend upon government officials. Tilak criticised «the village officers who are kept quite independent of all control of the *Inamdars* and collude with the tenants in not collecting the revenue». Tilak stated that «the *Inamdars* have suffered most painfully and most silently during the famine» and urged the Bombay government to order an inquiry into the non-collection of revenue in the Inam lands:

> The *Inamdars* have not the same control over the village officers as the government […] The authority of the *Inamdars* over the village officers is not commensurate with their own dignity […] we make an appeal to Lord Northcote personally and trust his lordship will bestow his particular attention on the subject and earn the gratitude of the *Inamdari* class[103].

[96] Letter dated 7 October 1899 quoted in R. Cashman, *The Myth*, p. 145.
[97] *Famine Commission in Bombay*, in «The Mahratta», February 8, 1901, p. 3 (editorial).
[98] *The Viceroy on Famine*, *ibid*., November 4, 1900, p. 4.
[99] *Ibid*., July 7, 1901, p. 3 (editorial).
[100] *Ibid*., July 14, 1901, p. 3.
[101] *Ibid*., July 21, 1901, p. 3.
[102] S.C. Mishra, *Agricultural Trends in Bombay Presidency, 1900-1920: The Illusion of Growth*, in «Modern Asian Studies», XIX (1985), 4, p. 746.
[103] *The Grievances of Inamdars*, in «The Mahratta», December 9, 1900, p. 3 (editorial).

The government objected to such suggestions on the grounds «that such powers in the hands of *Inamdars* would enable them to misuse it». Tilak, in turn, called it «as the government desire to do away with any active agency between themselves and the peasants».

> The destruction of our village organisations has been an act of deliberate policy on the part of the government. […] The old *Deshmukhs* and the *Deshpandes* who were once a power are no more; the Deccan *Sowcar* has already gone to his doom, and the Konkani *Khot* is following suit; the *Zamindars* are made to understand and feel that the government is bent upon interfering with the relations between them and their tenants so as to weaken the power of the former, and the *Inamdars* are so shabbily treated that they are practically outlanders in their own villages – an object not of terror and respect but of contempt for the *Ryots*[104].

Tilak now elevated the pro-*Inamdar* arguments to anti-British ones as, under British rule, the *Inamdars* had lost their power over peasants, and «the government was encouraging the peasants to revolt against their masters».

> The advent of the British government has topsy-turvyed the entire fabric of the mutual relations between the *Inamdars*, who should be the king, the *Hakdars*, who are his dependents; the village officers who should be his servants and the tenants who occupy the place of his subjects. And as things stand at present, the *Inamdar* has become an outlander or even an outlaw in his own capital; while the *Hakdars* and the tenants who have duties to perform towards the *Inamdars* are indirectly encouraged to defy and even rebel against him owing to the countenance gratuitously given to them by the alien government. […] The *Inamdars* have been grossly sinned against in the recovery of their dues[105].

In order to put an end to the miseries of the *Inamdars*, Tilak called upon the people «to revive the old systems – the traditional village organisations destroyed by the colonial rule»[106]. Tilak once again made a personal appeal to the Bombay government «to invest *Inamdars* with both revenue and judicial powers […] to take prompt measures for preventing tenants from doing away with the field's produce». He also stressed that «powerful *Inamdars* would work as effective local magnets for the government»[107].

With the emergence of Tilak as a national leader after 1900, feudal interests emerged as national interests. He argued that there was a need to oppose colonial rule because «middlemen had disappeared between the government and the peasants»[108]. Defending the interests of big landholders and money-

[104] *Our Village Organisations III*, *ibid*., October 18, 1903, p. 497 (editorial).
[105] *Inamdar's Grievances*, *ibid*., November 8, 1903, p. 521 (editorial).
[106] *Our Village Organisations IV*, *ibid*., November 15, 1903, p. 534 (editorial).
[107] *The Inamdari's Powers*, *ibid*., p. 533 (editorial).
[108] *Ibid*., May 10, 1903 (page number not visible).

lenders and keeping the peasants in servitude remained fundamental to Tilak's idea of nationalism[109]. Even as late as the Home Rule League Movement, Tilak addressed several meetings organised by the landed and moneylending classes and declared that «British oppression – Zulum» was clearly visible in the colonial state's treatment of the landed gentry. India needed *Swarajya* or self-rule because «authority is not in our hands» to rectify it[110]. The newly formed Deccan Ryot Association, representing the voices of all peasants, opposed the Home Rule League Movement of Tilak; he attacked the Association for defending the interest of «the submerged or backward or the untouchable classes»[111].

The landed–business interests linked with caste interest were central to Tilak's *Swaraj*. Tilak opposed the colonial rule because it «had topsy-turvyed master-servant relationship»[112]. It was not the rule of the foreigners or colonialism but the loss of power of the elites that concerned him most. Tilak emphasised that the question was not who ruled India:

> The question is not about those who are to rule over us, but according to whose leadership, by whose orders and under whose guidance that rule is to be exercised. […] If you get the powers to select your Collector it cannot be said with certainty that he would do any more work than the present Collector. Perhaps he may not do. He may even do badly. I admit this. But the difference between this and that is this: this one is selected by us, he is our man, he sees how we remain pleased[113].

The nationalism of Tilak was not a radical or militant form of Indian nationalism, as projected by Indian Marxist historians like Bipin Chandra and others[114]. J.V. Naik, in his enthusiasm, has declared that Tilak was the first Indian to introduce Marxist ideas of labour welfare and class conflict and has called Tilak's defence of *Khots* as «some chinks in his armour»[115].

Tilak's defence of the interests of the landlords and moneylenders was economic and social[116]. The *Kunbi* peasants, driven by chronic indebtedness, were being empowered by the colonial state with pro-peasant legislation and

[109] *Ibid*., February 11, 1912, p. 4 (editorial notes); *The Land Revenue Bill*, *ibid*., February 28, 1913, p. 60.
[110] *Tilak's Speech at Belgaum, May 1, 1916*, in V. Grover, ed., *Political Thinkers of Modern India: Bal Gangadhar Tilak*, New Delhi, Deep and Deep Publications, 1990, pp. 227-244.
[111] «The Mahratta», October 6, 1918, p. 490.
[112] *Inamdar's Grievances*, *ibid*., November 8, 1903, p. 521 (editorial).
[113] *Tilak's Speech at Belgaum*, pp. 229-233.
[114] See B. Chandra *Indian National Movement: The Long Term Dynamics*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1988; Id., *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1979.
[115] J.V. Naik, *Lokmanya Tilak on Karl Marx and Class Conflict*.
[116] «The Mahratta», May 14, 1882, p. 2.

Phule's Satyashodak polemic, which threatened the landed Brahmins (*Inamdars*, *Khots*) and moneylender's control over rural society[117]. This development was complemented by Ranade and other reformers who opposed the unrestricted power of these feudal powers[118]. By opposing the *Deccan Agriculturists Relief Act* and the Agricultural Banks, Tilak attempted to safeguard the feudal interests and emphasise the perpetual subjugation of the peasants[119]. Tilak's defence of the interests of the moneylenders and big landlords was comprehensive and definite. The freedom of India found little space in the idea of Tilak's nationalism. It was simply a question of who should control the society. The colonial state or the landed and moneylending interests? In Tilak's nationalism, 99 per cent of Indians had no place. It was a feudal nationalism, and the freedom of India, or the welfare of all Indians, found no place in it.

[117] *Ibid.,* February 26, 1888, p. 5.
[118] *Ibid.,* May 14, 1882.
[119] *M.G. Ranade on the Agricultural Bank*, *ibid.*, May 29, 1881, p. 2.

5
Our Exceptional Diversity: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism in Millennial India

Srirupa Roy

1. *Introduction*

This essay explains how a particular vision of India's exceptional social and cultural diversity has powered the political ascent of majoritarian Hindu nationalism in recent decades. A lot has been written about the Hindutva (Hinduness) project endorsed by the *Sangh Parivar* or "joint family" of Hindu nationalist organizations in India. Numerous scholars have drawn attention to how Hindutva actors have worked across multiple domains of social and political life in India and among global diasporas for close to a century, to craft and promote a unitary, monolithic "imagined community" of the Hindu nation[1]. Moving beyond this discussion on the homogenizing effects of Hindutva, my main focus here is on its surprising investments in a politics of diversity.

The paradox of a majoritarian nationalism's "diversity roots" is addressed in the discussion below. I begin by reviewing the salience of diversity discourses for contemporary millennial or "new Hindutva." I note how, especially since the formation of a majority government by the Hindu nationalists in 2014, ideas and strategic political engagements with India's "natural and exceptional diversity" have played an increasingly prominent role in domestic as well as international arenas. I assess the political work or functional value of the diversity project to new Hindutva, specifically (i) the *calculus of electoral support* that the diversity dividend is expected to yield, and (ii) the *normalizing and legitimation* functions of diversity repertoires that embed and connect new Hindutva to the mainstream of Indian democracy.

[1] S. Roy, *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2007.

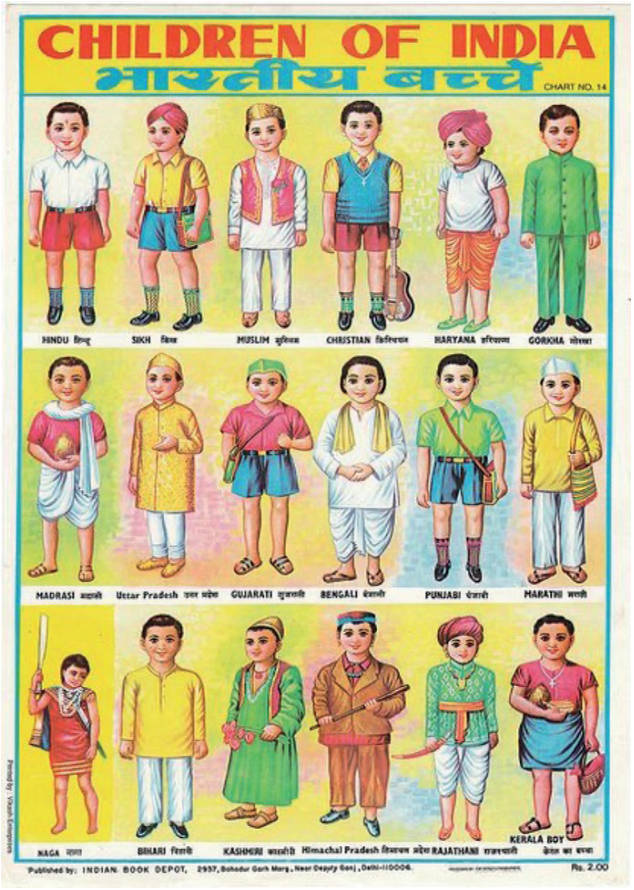

Figure 1. «Children of India» wall chart, Indian Book Depot (Map House), undated.

2. *Diversity Now and Then*

The two images above are iconic representations of India's past and present. Figure 1 is a reproduction of an educational wall chart that was widely circulated in India in the 1980s and 1990s – an analog meme *avant la lettre*, we might say. The chart offers a classic depiction of the "unity in diversity" slogan of official nationalism that dominated the Nehruvian period of postcolonial Indian democracy that followed India's independence from British rule in 1947. Different from the nationalist project of imagining homogeneous community – the well-known definition of nationalism by one of its most intellectually influential theorists, Benedict Anderson – the imagination of state institutions, and the

Figure 2. Viral Twitter meme, c. May 2021. Representative post (accessed March 1, 2024: https://twitter.com/SanjayAzadSln/status/1393457141671813120).

consolidation of the centralized, interventionist state as the frame and ground of nationhood, was the main task of the Indian nationalist project after 1947. More than the creation of communal bonds of national belonging, the specification of authority relations between nation and state was the main preoccupation of the postcolonial project. It was better understood as a *nation-statist* rather than a nationalist enterprise. This in turn put in place a particular vision of India in fragments, a nation constituted in and through its natural diversity, made up of essential and natural cultural differences that could only be unified and protected through the labors of a paternalist state.

The colorfully different children of India on the chart[2] reflect the Nehruvian diversity mosaic that dominated Nehruvian public culture, where the

[2] Note that the depiction of diversity does not include gender differences: all the children are visibly male.

statist injunction to be Indian was about «being something else at the same time»[3]. In the official nationalist imagination of the early postcolonial republic, Indianness was invariably represented as a collage of colorful costumes worn by racially distinct peoples; a kaleidoscope of visibly different lifestyles and religions; a soundscape of multiple languages; a varied geography (the mountains of Kashmir and the seas of Kanyakumari). In the documentary films of the state-owned Films Division of India that were mandatorily screened before commercial film showtimes in movie theaters across the country, the jumpcut/montage was the most common visual device used to represent India as a nation bound together by stark and colorful contrasts.

Figure 2 is another collage. A viral social media meme from 2021, it depicts the contemporary, 21th-century era of Hindu nationalism through a colorful collage of thumbnail photos of prime minister Narendra Modi at various public events around the country. Since 2014, India has been governed by Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, the BJP for short). The BJP is the main political party of the Hindu nationalist or Hindutva movement. It endorses a "Hindu first" or Hindu majoritarian vision of India as a state that reflects the political, social, and cultural pre-eminence of Hindus, the demographic religious majority community in the country[4]. Like the diversity imagery of the Nehruvian wall poster, the register of India's cultural diversity is indexed by the different headgear worn by Modi in the 21th-century social media collage. Here, however, the ideas of unity and uniformity are the dominant visual message. The constant/common countenance of prime minister Modi across all the thumbnails, rather than the diversity of the headgear in each, seems to be the main point.

How did we get from one to the other, from the diversity mosaic to the sameness of Modi? What is the political and analytical relationship between these two images of India and Indianness? The standard answers to these questions involve arguments about homogenization and rupture. Most agree that over time Indian nationalist ideology has embraced homogenous and unitary ideas of nationhood. There is a stark difference between ideas of India now and then. However, these answers are not entirely convincing. For one, Hindu nationalism is entangled and embedded in the older political field of

[3] S. Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India*, in P. Chatterjee, G. Pandey, eds., *Subaltern Studies. Writings on South Asian History and Society*, no. 7, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 1-39.

[4] This idea of a united Hindu religious majority is itself a political project. In other words, the Hindu majority is a "made" or politically crafted construct rather than a "found" or natural entity.

mainstream nationalism that it is usually contrasted with. Hindutva does not fall from the sky: there are social-political lineages and contexts to its emergence and its power that we need to consider. This holds true beyond India as well. Around the world, populist or rightwing authoritarianisms have taken root in established democracies in recent times, many of them liberal democracies to boot. Their emergence is less of a dramatic skyfall or thunderclap than a gradual drift or modulation over time. Democracy does not die but mutates, we might say.

Second, the contrast between present-day homogeneity and the older openness and tolerance of diversity is overstated. As even a cursory glance at the contemporary formations of "governmental Hindutva" shows, Hindutva also has a diversity project. As we have argued elsewhere, this is one of its primary «modes of articulation» that fits or embeds Hindutva within the existing field of Indian democracy[5]. Let us take a closer look.

3. *Hindu Nationalism in India*

To begin with, some background context on Hindutva in India is useful. The nodal organization of Hindu nationalism is the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Organization of Volunteers, RSS). It was established in 1925, influenced by the example of contemporaneous European fascist movements. Mussolini and later Hitler were explicitly cited inspirations for RSS founders.

At the time of writing in 2024, the RSS is 99 years old, which makes it the longest-lasting fascist movement in the world. With an estimated membership of five or six million Indians, it is certainly the world's largest fascist movement. The RSS has a rhizomatic and cellular organizational structure, and it works through numerous affiliates and front organizations that reach out to different sections of the population. These include the political party, the BJP, a women's wing, a labor union, a student organization, a tribal wing, diaspora branches, and so on. Its tentacular spread across diverse lifeworlds

[5] T.B. Hansen, S. Roy, eds., *Saffron Republic. Hindu Nationalism and State Power in India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022; A. Longkumer *"Mitakuye Oyasin – We Are All Related": Hindutva and Indigeneity in Northeast India*, *ibid*., pp. 181-198; S. Waghmore, *From Castes to Nationalist Hindus: The Making of Hinduism as a Civil Religion*, *ibid*., pp. 199-218; L. Vachani, *When Hindutva Performs Muslimness: Ethnographic Encounters with the Muslim Rashtriya Manch*, *ibid*., pp. 219-249; A. Longkumer, *The Greater India Experiment. Hindutva and the Northeast*, Dehli, Navayana, 2022.

is complemented by a cellular organizational form that ensures the pervasive and routinized presence of the RSS in the everyday life of its members. The basic unit of the organization is the *shakha* or the branch. A small, informally constituted voluntary group of boys and men meet every morning at a fixed time in public parks across the country, for a daily set of physical and intellectual exercises. Fun, games, and ordinary practices of quotidian socialization and camaraderie work to reinforce Hindu nationalist ideology as a natural and life-long habitus.

Hindu nationalism in 21th-century India builds upon but also goes considerably beyond this *shakha* form. It forms what we have recently termed «the Saffron Republic»: a governmental project of rule and order rather than an insurgent project of popular mobilization, community-formation, and anti-establishment opposition[6]. The Hindu nationalist political party, the BJP under prime minister Narendra Modi, has formed the national government for almost a decade, after winning elections with a decisive majority in 2014 and again in 2019. Many expect it to sweep the national elections in 2024 as well. Hindu majoritarian worldviews seem to enjoy widespread mass appeal in contemporary India. "Soft Hindutva" themes are a staple of middle-class public culture and media worlds. The BJP controls key "check and balance" institutions like the media, the judiciary, the election commission, and investigative agencies, and enjoys an overwhelming financial advantage over all its partisan rivals. During the 2019 elections, Hindu nationalists spent over 4.5 billion dollars, a sum that far exceeds the 1.1 billion dollars spent on Trump's presidential campaign in 2020.

The Hindu nationalist shift from movement to government, from the work of imagining cultural community that we associate with nationalist movements, to their exercise of state power and institutional authority, is a development that we can observe in many other countries as well. It pushes for at least two kinds of changes in the conventional analysis of religious nationalism. The first requires moving beyond the conventional "anti-establishment" or "insurgent" lens that is turned on such movements. To understand the governmental Hindutva of the saffron republic, we must look *through* the anti-establishment rhetoric of religious nationalists and Hindutva populists, and approach Hindutva as an establishment discourse. Recent scholarship on the sociology of Hindu nationalism has shown that the anti-elitist discourse

[6] T.B. Hansen, S. Roy, eds., *Saffron Republic*.

of India's religious nationalists does not necessarily come from a non-elite social location[7]. Instead, what we see is the making of a new establishment elite; a phenomenon of elite expansion rather than the overturning or upending of social hierarchies. Setting aside inquiries into Hindutva's exceptionalism or disjunctive effects, we might ask: how does Hindu nationalism strive to fit in to and articulate within existing power structures?

4. *Articulation*[8]

This in turn leads to the second analytical shift, namely, to set aside the usual "norm versus exception" binary framework that dominates discussions of Hindutva as a disruptive deviation from secular Indian democracy. Instead of aberrant take on Hindu nationalism, we should examine how it emerges from *within* Indian democracy. An emphasis on articulation considers the unexpected and perverse continuities, affinities, and resonances between contemporary Hindu nationalist politics and older forms of democratic politics in India. As I noted earlier, Hindutva's diversity project is one such articulatory mode. While Hindutva's political ambitions are to produce a homogenous or unitary Hindu community, the means and processes through which such unity is crafted are highly flexible and disaggregated. Since its inception in the early 20th century, Hindutva has worked with a flexible "different strokes for different folks" approach of modifying its message and outreach to different sections of society. Over the years, as the scale and ambition of Hindutva has grown and deepened, its rather thin core tenets (such as "India is a Hindu homeland and Muslims are invaders") have allowed it to further diversify, morph, and co-articulate with a large number of regional histories and specific circumstances. In the 1980s, the sociologist Stuart Hall developed the notion of articulation to capture a process whereby distinct cultural forms and ideological constructs become mobile and floating signifiers that are associated with a range of different social, economic, and cultural circumstances and forces[9]. Racial, gendered, and nationalist fantasies depend on such mobile tropes, Hall argued, capable of being expressed and given meaning and emo-

[7] S. Roy, *Hindutva Establishments: Right-wing Think Thanks and the Mainstreaming of Governmental Hindutva*, *ibid*., pp. 72-106.

[8] This section is adapted from T.B. Hansen, S. Roy, eds., *Saffron Republic*, *Introduction*.

[9] S. Hall, *Culture, Community, Nation*, in «Cultural Studies», VII (1993), 3, pp. 349-363.

tional charge in a wide variety of circumstances. Thinking with the process of articulation illuminates the distinctive organizational form of new Hindutva. Replacing the familiar model of a pre-planned master-minded project of Hindu nationalism that is controlled and orchestrated by a central node, Hindutva partakes in many forms of assemblage politics. It advances through a contingent, decentralized, and flexible series of actions and events that are shaped by localized contexts and imperatives and yet (re)produce a Hindu majoritarian social order.

Since 2014, governmental Hindutva has diversified in four additional ways. First, there has been an increasingly fine-tuned or variegated electoral outreach. As the BJP's electoral ambitions have grown and spread across multiple states, the party's ideological appeals have been further modulated. This is not about a moderation to appeal to a supposedly centrist median voter, but the adoption of a multipronged or polysemic, "speaking in different tongues" approach. Hindu nationalist electoral campaigns have adapted to different local contexts, and have tailored their messages to fit different social and historical realities. For instance, in India's northeastern states, the BJP avoids its usual call for "beef ban" politics. In the state of West Bengal, the party champions local cultural icons like Rabindranath Tagore[10]. In their efforts to court particular caste communities, Hindutva activists have pursued "little traditions" and "vernacular cults" that have meaning only for specific social groups, for example the promotion of the medieval Suheldev movement in central and eastern Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Gokul Jat in western UP, as Badri Narayan has shown. Narayan describes the «memorial politics» of Hindutva as the cultivation of variegated «memory zones»[11].

Hindutva's electorally-motivated diversity projects have proved profitable. The BJP has been able to grow in multiple states where it previously was absent, and this success has been credited to its diversified, locally mutable mode of outreach. This is the case particularly in the domain of caste outreach, where the party's ability to "slice and dice" sub-caste specificities and tailor electoral messages to finely calibrated groups has been widely noted. For instance, the BJP's electoral successes in the UP state elections of 2019 has been credited to the party strategy of carving up the so-called "lower caste

[10] S. Bhattacharya, *Mission Bengal: A Saffron Experiment*, Delhi, HarperCollins India, 2020.
[11] B. Narayan, *Republic of Hindutva: How the Sangh is Reshaping Indian Democracy*, New Dehli, Penguin Random House, 2021.

vote bank". Dissecting the Dalit vote that has traditionally gone to the Dalit regional party, the BSP, and the OBC or "other backward classes" vote bank of the Samajwadi Party (Socialist Party), the BJP strategized to draw away the non-Jatav Dalit voter and the non-Yadav OBC voter with a series of measures explicitly targeting these disaggregated, sub-caste communities. As a media observer put it, the BJP has mastered and not defeated caste politics, in other words, its electoral strategy does not flatten but works along the grain of caste diversity.

A second mode of Hindutva diversification is the political strategy of outsourcing and dispersing violence over the past decade. Anti-minority violence, directed against Muslims and lower caste communities, has proceeded with vigor in the decade since the BJP government has come to power. However, the form that this has taken has generally been that of vigilante or societal violence carried out by myriad private social groups, sometimes even stray individuals whose connections to the ruling government can rarely be proved[12].

Third, contemporary Hindutva openly endorses a social harmony or *samajik samrasta* initiative, and frames its approach to caste as one of harmonizing and recognizing rather than transcending caste differences. The Hindutva organization Samajik Samrasta Manch (SSM) was established in 1983 by the RSS leader Dattopant Thengadi, drawing on ideas of Hindutva ideologue Deen Dayal Upadhyay. An immediate motivation was the upper-caste agitations against the proposal to extend affirmative action quotas (reservations) for intermediate caste groups (OBC groups) in Gujarat, and it has been argued that the SSM initiative was an effort to co-opt and temper Dalit and OBC political assertion. The SSM broadly endorses a naturalization and acceptance of caste differences through metaphors of a united "caste family," and places a heavy emphasis on symbolic acts such as commensality (inter-caste dining). The overall idea is of harmonizing differences, rather than equality or caste annihilation.

A related and parallel move is the post-2014 phenomenon of Hindu nationalist "outreach" to tribals and religious minorities, and even to certain "good" Muslim minorities, as documented by Arkotong Longkumer (research on Hindutva in NE India) and Lalit Vachani (on the RSS front organization, Muslim Rashtriya Manch) in our recent volume[13]. This of course does not mean that the anti-Muslim agenda of the RSS is discontinued in anyway, but that it

[12] C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, Delhi, Penguin India, 2019.

[13] See note 5, above.

proceeds alongside a new targeted program of outreach to model minorities or so-called "good Muslims." For instance, Vachani explores how the MRM is trying to provide a platform for "patriotic" Muslims who recognize and embrace the notion of India as a Hindu nation and homeland. Although MRM has a negligible grassroots footprint among ordinary Muslims, the organization's many public events and carefully staged performances of pro-Hindutva Muslims, and of Muslim clerics without "hatred in their hearts," serve as an illustration and projection of a possible Muslim future in a Hindu India: as an enthusiastically patriotic minority, eager to please and affirm their role as loyal allies. These RSS performances of preferred Muslimness have the media, the RSS rank and file, and the wider Hindu publics as their intended audience, Vachani argues. Despite the language of outreach, Muslim citizens, it turns out, are not the intended target audience of the MRM project.

Finally, governmental Hindutva advocates for diversity norms on the international stage, and presents Indian civilization as the exemplary model of "true diversity" that the world can learn from. There has been a surge of civilizational discourse in India and several other countries in recent years (China, Turkey, Russia, among others), with states presenting themselves as civilizational alternatives to the liberal Western nation-state and the US-dominated unipolar world order. India's current foreign policy and public diplomacy initiatives are dominated by these civilizational themes and their *vishwaguru* or world teacher impulses. *Vishwaguru* projects foreground diversity and its management as a unique and defining aspect of Indian civilizational history[14].

5. *The Political Implications of Hindutva Diversity*

Contemporary Hindutva's "diversity turn" has several political effects and implications. The first has to do with its incorporationist or assimilationist logic. As I have noted above, the Muslim outreach projects of contemporary Hindutva are performative, and they do not substantially temper the anti-Muslim violence of Hindu nationalism. Indeed, there has been a proliferation of different forms of violence against Muslims over the period of the MRM's existence. Anti-Muslim violence has been diversified and thus

[14] In contemporary Turkey's civilizational discourse, there is a similar emphasis on the Ottoman Empire's successful multi-faith *millet* system.

intensified through the invention and perfection of new modes of hate and attack: "love jihad" charges, "corona jihad" charges, Anti-Romeo squads, cow lynching, encounter killings, Boycott Bollywood campaigns launched against Muslim actors or "Muslim-themed" films, and we could go on.

Hindutva's caste inclusion initiatives are performative and limited as well. As we have seen, the emphasis is on *samrasta* or harmony, not equality. The metaphor of the united caste family expresses this well – the family as we know is the most unequal social group, and the agenda of "family harmony" does not involve any radical restructuring of the status quo. Beyond semantics, there is ample empirical evidence on the actually existing limits of *samrasta* initiatives, from the moving personal testimony of the Dalit activist and former RSS member Bhanwar Meghwanshi (*I Could Not be Hindu: The Story of a Dalit in the RSS*), to the empirical record of the lack of caste and minority representation within Hindu nationalist leadership. The appointment of figurehead presidents from Dalit and Adivasi communities whose position is effectively undercut as power is fast concentrated in the prime minister's office, is paralleled by the stark absence of Muslim political representatives of the BJP. At present the BJP has *zero* Muslim parliamentarians out of the 400 MPs that belong to the party. This is in a country of 200 million Muslims, the third largest Muslim population in the world. In sum, the diversity inclusion initiatives of Hindu nationalism continue to work towards the project of building a Hindu-first nation. Minorities are to be incorporated and assimilated within a hierarchical national project.

Moving to the international arena, the embrace of diversity also serves a key Hindutva goal, as it effects a slippage and conflation between Indian/Indic civilization and Hindu. Contemporary Hindutva is distinguished by its "civilizational turn". Hindu nationalists are speaking a new civilizational language in international forums, positioning India as a civilizational state that exemplifies true tolerance and inter-faith coexistence, a land that is defined by our "exceptional diversity" (and our exceptional management of diversity). These civilizational claims enable Hindutva to be internationally mainstreamed, to enjoy a kind of international recognition and acceptance in non-Hindutva milieus. And it is the anodyne and progressive concepts like diversity, tolerance, the celebration of India's "alternative modernity" and "vernacular democracy", the call for "real decolonization" and the critique of Eurocentrism that enable and further this process of mainstreaming.

Finally, Hindutva's diversity turn gives us the opportunity to critically interrogate the normative or mainstream idea of diversity. When Hindu na-

tionalism is located within a narrative of decline, of how India "then" was so much better than India "now", then a nostalgic and restorative political approach seems appropriate. However, these calls for restoration are misplaced. The pre-Hindutva, Nehru-era "unity in diversity" national imagination that has long been held up as a counter to Hindu nationalist ideas of India has its own sets of selective inclusions and erasures. Indeed, the overlaps and entanglements of these national projects leads me to ask whether the problem at hand is not the Hindutva dream of homogeneity, but the very idea of India's natural and exceptional diversity itself. New democratic futures that radically reimagine the national contract beyond the diversity mosaic and the "children of India" frame are in order. Diversity after all is made and not found. It is a political artefact rather than a natural fact – a particular juxtaposition and a contingent matrix of social difference. There are other social and political projects that can be imagined into existence that will arrange human relations of identity and difference very differently, with different implications for power and freedom.

6
Genealogies of Muslim Nationalism in Colonial India: Locating the *Qaum* in Colonial Modernity

Ali Usman Qasmi

Qaum, mulk, sultanat: these three words, which comprise a stanza in the national anthem of Pakistan written by Hafiz Jallandhari in Persianized Urdu, are at the heart of my contribution to the study of citizenship, nationality, and statehood in Pakistan. The national anthem is the heralding of the nation, its moment of arrival in state form, built on the glory of the past with an aspirational march towards the future. *Qaum*, *mulk*, and *sultanat* can be translated as "nation", "country", and "state", respectively. As I have previously argued in a jointly written essay, an etymological survey of these terms reveals that they have embodied various meanings and histories[1] that do not necessarily cohere with those meanings emphasized in the anthem.

The term *qaum* has variously been understood as referring to any kind of collectivity, especially those defined along kinship lines. During the election campaign in 1945-6, Muslim League propaganda denounced *qaum* as antithetical to the universalist conception of a singular, faith-cemented community of Muslims[2]. Despite the nationalization of the term in the anthem, it retains its vernacular usage, referring to kin groups and other claims to ethnic nationhood.

Mulk defines a literary imaginary, an amorphously bounded land. It is distinct from a modern iteration of the word to mean "state" and from related vernacular terms like *watan* for "homeland." As Mana Kia's recent intervention shows, such transformations in meanings are based on the presumption of an empty space upon which political subjectivities are built – a modern phenomenon tied with the specificity of the nation-state's territoriality. Such a conception

[1] A.U. Qasmi, M.E. Robb, *Introduction*, in A.U. Qasmi, M.E. Robb, eds., *Muslims Against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan*, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 10-19.

[2] D. Gilmartin, *A Magnificent Gift: Muslim Nationalism and the Election Process in Colonial Punjab*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History», XL (1998), 3, pp. 415-436.

of space as homogenous and national overlooks various other modes of embeddedness through which individuals and communities ascribe different meanings of homeland to link people and spaces across regions and polities[3]. Manan Ahmad has adopted a similar approach by looking at Hindustani regional histories written in Persian in the premodern period, which Ahmad considers the connective idiom that enables intimacy with the land. Ahmad argues that such a conceptualization – which is not to be reduced to a pre-history of the nation or the nation-state – was lost in the positivist histories of "India" commissioned by the officials of the East India Company[4]. By the mid-20th century, a new term coined for geostrategic purposes, "South Asia", became frequent[5].

Sultanat is a term that is still widely used to denote an empire in the premodern sense. Its usage in the anthem to refer to the state is presumably due as much to metrical limitations as it is for wont of a better replacement.

In this manner, the conceptual equivalence of terms for modern political thought, concepts, institutions, and their histories, shows how such terms draw upon various legal registers, cultural metaphors, and preexisting categories to cultivate and create modern sensibilities, political subjectivities, and collective identities. Words, as Bakhtin and Voloshinov describe them, are «the most sensitive index of social changes, and […] of changes still in the process of growth, still without definitive shape and not as yet accommodated into already regularized and fully defined ideological systems»; they have «the capacity to register all the transitory, delicate, momentary phases of social change»[6]. A genealogical approach, therefore, can help trace the process of transition and translation as words transform to coincide with political processes and institutional change. In the postcolonial context, Muslim nationhood, variously defined and understood throughout the modern period, was at the heart of the movement for a separate state, and also of later nation-making and state-formation projects. Foregrounding the significance of *qaum* as a social and cultural metaphor before that term became a national type or was collapsed with the legal entity of the citizen offers an intriguing point of entry.

[3] M. Kia, *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2020, p. 6.

[4] M.A. Ahmad, *The Loss of Hindustan: The Invention of India*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2020.

[5] For a detailed history, etymology, politics and policy implications of the new term, cf. A. Mohammad-Arif, *Introduction. Imaginations and Constructions of South Asia: An Enchanting Abstraction?*, in «South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal», 10, 2014 (https://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3800).

[6] P. Morris, ed., *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Mededev and Voloshinov*, London, Arnold, 2003, pp. 53-54.

In using the term "metaphor", I have drawn upon the cognitive theorists George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen and literary theorists Paul Ricoeur and Shamsur Rehman Faruqi. All these theorists agree on the need to move beyond the Aristotelian notion of metaphor as a replacement for a word and function of persuasive rhetoric. For Lakoff and Johnsen, human thought processes and conceptual systems are metaphorical[7]. They shift the locus of metaphorical action from words to concepts and from similarity to cross-domain correlations in experiences. Metaphors as conceptual systems are not only historically contingent but also significantly shaped by our bodies' common nature and everyday functionality[8]. Ricoeur is similarly focused on reading the metaphor as a discursive phenomenon rather than simply as a calculated error meant to displace the meaning of a word. «To affect just one word», writes Ricoeur, «the metaphor has to disturb a whole network by means of an aberrant attribution»[9]. Moreover, the disturbance produced by metaphor presupposes a logical order, conceptual hierarchy, and classification scheme operating within the constituted order that is temporarily displaced. What if this constituted order, speculates Ricoeur, is begotten by a similar process of displacement? The question «suggests the idea that order itself proceeds from the metaphorical constitution of semantic fields»[10].

The shared poetic idiom and connected histories and geographies discussed by Manan Ahmad and Mana Kia can similarly be understood as constitutive of a discursive order that delineates metaphors for a premodern notion of *qaum* in Hindustan. Such metaphors continued well into colonial modernity due to the preponderance of Persian as a classical language, a tradition inherited by Urdu as an embodiment of Indic-Muslim religious, political, and cultural thought, and especially by North Indian languages. To a considerable extent, as emerging scholarship on vernaculars shows, many aspects of metaphysical thought in the *qissa* tradition, for instance, were located in the cosmopolitan Indo-Persian epic traditions and tales circulating via land-based trade routes of the Indian ocean, encompassing a vast region[11].

[7] G. Lakoff, M. Johnsen, *Metaphors We Live By*, London, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 6.
[8] *Ibid.*, pp. 244-245.
[9] P. Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, London, Routledge, 2003, p. 23.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 24.
[11] For an excellent example of this emerging scholarship on the importance of reading the vernaculars for an alternative conceptualization about language, literary theory and social history, cf. P.M. Khan's *The Broken Spell: Indian Story Telling and the Romance Genre in Persian and Urdu* (Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 2019). Taimoor Shahid's doctoral research uses the *qissa* of Saif-ul-Muluk – the story of a prince traversing oceans and

As Sudipta Kaviraj has argued, it was the modernity and its twin political projects of nationalism and state formation as new modes of space-making[12] that drove a wedge between the individual/community sense of belonging to the land through the legal-strategic ordering of space and its transformation into sovereign territory of the nation-state. Emphasizing the role of lyricism and poetics in creating an affective surplus, Kaviraj shows how late 19th-century nationalist writers invoked premodern religious and literary traditions whose initial vocalizations were specific to their regional contexts to conjure an image of the nation that claimed a more significant historical tradition and thus spirited people into action for its glory and safeguard[13]. The connectivity of nation through land and language, however, was limited by the inherently majoritarian model of the nation in which the Muslim was the "other". Poetry, as Ali Khan Mahmudabad's work has shown, was equally influential in making a powerful claim to the land on behalf of *all* and in setting a «normative horizon» that was broadly construed[14]. But my main argument is that even if we accept the premise that modern forms of imagining the nation were different – regardless of whether they resulted in a fragmented polity or held the potential for inclusivity – it is the nation as the metaphor for a collectivity, group, or community sutured into a folk – i.e., the people – that requires further scrutiny. It is not only essential to emphasize the richness of language around *qaum*, *mulk,* and *sultanat*, but also to historically locate such terms and analyse the processes whereby – to use a term from literary theory coined by Jauss – a concretization of meanings takes place[15]. In applying the term to political processes, my emphasis will be on ascertaining modernity's impacts on imposing – or the attempts made by nation-states to impose – an overarching hegemonic authority and consistency in thought.

The best way to understand the layered, overlapping, and sedimented literary and political repertoires is through Umberto Eco's concept of the en-

continents in search for his beloved – and traces it in multiple languages across the wide stretches of the Indian Ocean embodying various registers of love and intimacy, and shades of Sufi and Yogic philosophical thought. Retrieval projects of these sort will benefit immensely from Maryam Wasif Khan's recent theoretical intervention where she examines the Orientalist conceptualizations of language, literature and canonical texts to explain the emergence of "classical Urdu literature" in the colonial period. Cf. M.W. Khan, *Who is a Muslim? Orientalism and Literary Populisms*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2021.

[12] S. Kaviraj, *A Strange Love of the Land: Identity, Poetry and Politics in the (Un)Making of South Asia*, in «South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal», 10, 2014 (http://journals.openedition.org/samaj/3756).

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] A.K. Mahmudabad, *The Poetry of Belonging*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2020.

[15] H.R. Jauss, *Literary Hermeneutics*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008, p. XXXI.

cyclopedia as a «multidimensional space of semiosis […] a complex system of shared knowledge that governs the production and interpretation of signs inside communicative contexts»[16]. Eco calls it an encyclopedia because of the heterogeneous nature of this knowledge system. The encyclopedia in this theorization becomes a register within which meanings in a social habitus and cultural unit are recorded, generated, regulated, renewed, and suppressed, or alternately, glossed over. Eco offers "house" as an example, with its correlated meanings of a physically delimited space for dwelling or inhabitation. But, metaphorically, the sky is a house for birds, which does not fall within the same semantic values. What connects them is the idea of shelter: man takes refuge inside the house, and the bird flies into the open sky, yet both are connected through a shared narrative and cultural frame. In this metaphoric transference, shelter and open space are condensed as sky despite the mutual exclusion of their ordinary meanings. In this manner, metaphors subvert semantic orders attached to words or terms by dictionaries and establish semantic contamination[17]. Metaphors, therefore, are central to Eco's description of the encyclopedia, in which, unlike the dictionary, words lack fixed meaning and are on the contrary capable of generating new meanings through subversion, conversion, correlation, deletion, and replication.

Eco describes this understanding of the semiotic system encapsulated in an encyclopedia as resembling the working of the rhizome as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. In this conceptualization, each point is connected with another point, connections drawn as lines that can be broken off at any point and later reconnected following other lines. The rhizome neither has an outside nor an inside and can be broken down into its constituent units and modified. For Eco, the most crucial feature of the rhizome is that «only local descriptions of the rhizome are possible […], every perspective (every point of view on the rhizome) is always obtained from an internal point»[18]. This conceptualization emphasizes the interconnectedness and virtual infinity of multiple interpretations in a given culture. It serves as the encyclopedic repository of truth, where truth is defined as the discourses about a term whereby it

[16] P. Desogus, *The Encyclopedia in Umberto Eco's Semiotics*, in «Semiotica», 2012, 192, p. 501. For an understanding of Umberto Eco's ideas about encyclopedia and labyrinth, I have relied extensively on Desogus' commentary on Eco's works.

[17] *Ibid*., p. 514.

[18] U. Eco, *From the Tree to the Labyrinth: Historical Studies on the Sign and Interpretation*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2014, pp. 54-55.

was posited in any given moment[19]. Thus, it envisages an open-ended system of knowledge and communicative action, though situated locally. The massive accumulation of knowledge in a cultural system requires selective modes of amnesia and remembrance to offset what Eco describes as a «vertigo of knowledge»[20]. However, that which remains in abeyance remains retrievable for future modes of action.

Within this system of signification and interpretants, Shamsur Rehman Faruqi's description of the cultural content of classical poetry's metaphors – and their histories, subsequent developments, attributions, and ascriptions – can be understood. A leading novelist, critic, and literary theorist, Faruqi adds to literary theories on metaphor by tracing its conceptual genesis and discursive shifts *encyclopedically*. According to Faruqi, the thematic focus of classical Urdu poetry derived from Arabic and Persian is limited to a few subjects. Through the concept of *mazmun afrini*, poets strive to create new meanings, extending them beyond given metaphorical limits or the surface meanings of a word, sentence, or couplet. Faruqi takes up *giriya-i-ishq* (wailing for the beloved) as an example: this phrase has been used as a metaphor for the weeping eye (*chashm-i-girya*) in an expansive and exaggerated interwoven web of meanings involving rivers, clouds, rain, greenery (*haryali*), jungle, desolation (*virani*), floods, and so on. Despite its usage for hundreds of years in Persian and Urdu poetry, the metaphor hasn't lost its freshness, as each poet uses it differently[21]. In the same fashion, Faruqi traces religious ideals that seep into poetics through the metaphorical imaginary and contends that they serve as a shared poetic idiom across regions. He cites 13th-century legendary Sufi poet Rumi's famous *har lehza ba shakal-i-aan but-i-ayyar bar-amad* as a classic example of yearning for the One and being one with the Divine. He then traces this concept in the work of poets who followed Rumi hundreds of years later in North India and the Deccan. Divided across time and space, these poets had what Faruqi calls «mutual comprehensibility» when it came to a shared metaphoric understanding of being one with the Divine[22]. The same *mazmun* was replicated in classical Urdu poetry innumerable times, and even by Hindu poets like Swami Ram Tirath (d. 1906), whose *ghazal* carries the unmis-

[19] Id., *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1986, p. 83.
[20] Id., *From the Tree to the Labyrinth*, p. 93.
[21] S. Faruqi, *Sher-i-Shor Angez*: *Jild Chaharum*, New Delhi, Qaumi Council Bara-i-Farugh-i-Urdu Zaban, 2008, pp. 93-95.
[22] *Ibid*., pp. 147-148.

takable influence of Sufi influences as Vedantic in his depictions of Ram and of being one with Ram[23]. Through this broader encyclopedic canvas, Faruqi charts a historical account of how shared comprehensibility across the poetic realm develops and imbibes ideas across cultural and religious traditions. The corresponding impact is that metaphors either fade into oblivion or transform into a new meaning, or wholly new metaphors are coined to reflect changing socio-political contexts.

Such an elaborate knowledge of the semiotic systems through which cultural units develop, derive, forget, ascribe, or resuscitate meanings to concepts, words, and actions help us understand the metaphors of *qaum*, *mulk,* and *sultanat* over the *longue durée*. My project is not to write a detailed history of the Muslim *qaum* but to reflect on the processes and transitions of post-colonial state and nation formation, analysing this metamorphosis through a close reading of texts and performances.

To explain historic processes of change, an exploration of the Muslim *qaum*, the colonial context, and the labeling of minority, community, and nationhood in those contexts are essential. At the outset, it must be said that the existing secondary literature on this topic is almost exclusively focused on North Indian Muslim *ashraf* classes – which also extend into Punjab – and their writings and interactions in Urdu[24]. There is an astonishing dearth of literature on the histories of Muslim imaginaries of community, kin, and vernacular literature for other areas in the late 19th century. The Bengal is an exception that has been covered extensively in the works of Rafiuddin Ahmed, Sufia Ahmed, and Neilesh Bose[25]. Two factors explain the reductive meaning of the Muslim *qaum* thus imagined, suggesting why *qaum* remains a necessary topic of scholarly analysis. First is the nature of the colonial conception of community as religiously bounded and held together by a single set of laws. In colonial India, the individual Muslim subjectivity – with its political interests tied to its recognition as Muslim in identities that were in fact shot through with differences of locality, language, ritual practice, belief, and caste

[23] *Ibid*., p. 149.

[24] Akbar Zaidi's recently published book provides a descriptive account of the *qaum* in colonial North India, which can serve as a point of departure for further forays into more intimate languages of *qaum* in vernaculars in other parts of "Muslim India". Cf. S. Akbar Zaidi, *Making a Muslim: Reading Publics and Contesting Identities in Nineteenth-Century North India*, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2021.

[25] R. Ahmad, *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1981; S. Ahmed, *Muslim Community in Bengal, 1884-1912*, Dhaka, The University Press Limited, 1996; N. Bose, *Recasting the Region: Language, Culture, and Islam in Colonial Bengal*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2014.

– was subsumed within the collective of "the Muslim community"[26]. Second is the predominance of Urdu in the intellectual milieu of North India, which became the language of articulation for Muslim interests, sensibilities, and aesthetics. The Urdu-sphere itself, argues Akbar Zaidi, had discursive boundaries that extended to the Deccan, so that the Muslim *qaum* did not constitute a singular entity; instead it was more of an aspirational project, an attempt by reformist groups and political leaders to create a unified community[27]. This further adds to the importance of retrieving other notions of *qaum* in multiple lingual registers in colonial India and their pre-histories, as they will invariably enrich our understanding of the debate. The current deficiency in the historical literature is responsible for the misconception that the politics of, say, Sindhi or Pashtun nationalism was born only after 1947.

It was the idea of a homogenized Muslim identity articulated via tropes of the past that lay at the heart of Muslim separatism during the 20th century, and thus it is important to take stock of its intellectual genealogy. As Ayesha Jalal rightly points out, the dismissal of Muslim nationalism as communalism – both in the anti-colonial politics of the Indian National Congress in the early 20th century and in later historiographical accounts of that movement – is the result of misapplying a Eurocentric view of the nation to India. At the same time, Jalal is careful to point out internal inconsistencies in the concept of the Muslim *qaum*. She historicizes the articulation of the Muslim *qaum* as a balancing act between the individual quest for autonomy and the need for delimiting communitarian boundaries for rich pickings in a colonial framework that operated on enumeration along ethnic, religious and caste lines[28]. She talks about the complexities of layered belongings arising out of the «Muslim's identification with a non-territorial community of Islam and the sense of belonging to a territorially located community», which meant that «space is both infinite and finite at the same time»[29]. Faisal Devji, on the other hand, theorizes Muslim ontology in colonial India as an unresolved dialectics between the citizen as a universal subject who transcends particular-

[26] A. Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1950*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp. 41-42.

[27] S.A. Zaidi, *Making a Muslim: Reading Publics and Contesting Identities in Nineteenth-Century North India*, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2021, especially the Introduction and Chapter I. In his detailed analysis, Zaidi points out the differences along caste, *baradari* and sectarian lines that had to be addressed or negotiated for the imagining of a unified Muslim community.

[28] A. Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, pp. 40-42.

[29] *Ibid*., p. 10.

ity to become a legal ideal and the universality of Muslimhood itself. «While the citizen is juridically produced as a universal entity, in an ontic-ontological sense, the Muslim exists universally»[30].

In tracing the pre-colonial history of the Muslim *qaum*, Faisal Devji locates «the *moral* city as a site of ethical-political discourse […] created in legal (*shariat*) culture as a public-discursive realm (*am*, *suhbat,* or *jalwat*) which was deemed the arena of Islam *par excellence*». The colonial structures of governmentality and the materiality of colonial power reshaped the notion of *qaum*. Ghalib, a 19th-century doyen of classical Urdu poetry, captures the anxiety of this spatial-political and religious change in the following couplet:

> *Iman Mujhe Rokey Hai Jo Kheenche Hai Mujhe Kufr*
> *Kaba Mere Peeche Hai Kalisa Mere Agay*
> (Faith restrains me while I am tugged at by heresy
> Behind me stands the mosque, the church in front of me)[31].

The loss of the moral city theorized by Devji implied a decline in the Muslim elite's social privilege and the ethical-moral code of the self, threatening the self's link with the spatiality of the moral city. The conversion of Hindustan into India, an empty uniform object, severed traditional ties to the place and ideas about place, which had to be reimagined in *ashraf* geography[32]. With the constitutive public of the Muslim elite rendered obsolete by the new colonial order,

> the Shurafa were able to build the *qawm* as a new sort of private sphere from the wreckage of the moral city […] abstracting from it [i.e., the moral city] areas such as the mosque and the (Islamic) school (the courts and market being surrendered to the amoral public sphere of colonialism), and joining them in a new Muslim privacy with the traditionally private areas of the Sufi shrine and the domestic realm[33].

Writing about Syed Ahmad Khan's work on the monuments of Delhi, Devji points to a cartographic perspectival view wherein monuments are fetishized as monumental representatives of the community or as the historical materiality of the *qaum*. As symbols of the religious past and belonging, they are not only poetically meaningful but also reverential, symbols of the Muslim

[30] F. Devji, *Muslim Nationalism: Founding Identity in Colonial India*, PhD Dissertation, Department of History, University of Chicago, 1993, p. 20.

[31] https://www.rekhta.org/couplets/iimaan-mujhe-roke-hai-jo-khiinche-hai-mujhe-kufr-mirza-ghalib-couplets accessed on 01 October 2021.

[32] F. Devji, *Muslim Nationalism*, p. 45.

[33] *Ibid*., p. 74.

past through which a history of the *qaum* was idealized[34]. Such a sacralization of space, he says, led to the possibility of the offensive politics of designating sacrilege in the 19th century onwards, forbidding the playing of music in front of mosques or entering mosque premises with shoes.

Temporally, the new Muslim self was no longer *filiative* dealing with disparate genealogical temporal orders. The new *affiliative* history interrupted this temporality, thus creating a new ontological space for the *sharif* where the present became an entity rather than a passage from past to future. It was a future that was already known either as the present or a kind of past recoverable by history[35]. The futurity of the historical output of the late nineteenth and early 20th century sought to recover an idealized past of Muslim political supremacy and cultural glory. Much of this creative and literary output was chauvinistically male and approached the *qaum* as a feminine figure embodying male honor.

Another common trope, identified by Zaidi, is that of *zillat*, or utter humiliation, through which much of the debate on *qaum* takes place in print literature, public debates, and religious polemics, especially during the late 19th century[36]. The historical fiction of Abdul Halim Sharar (1860-1926); the didactic, reformist literature of Nazir Ahmad (1836-1912); the nostalgic poetry of Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) about the Muslim Empire; and the many works on the history of Hindustan by Maulwi Zakaullah (1832-1910)[37] are representative popular and intellectual articulations of the Muslim *qaum*. What connects these works is what Koselleck describes as a temporalization of the past, that is, a critical-historical distance from events, texts, and practices, and a recognition of that distinction[38]. Coupling this concept with Anderson's idea

[34] *Ibid*., pp. 77-78.

[35] *Ibid*., pp. 157-163.

[36] See Chapter II of S.A. Zaidi, *Making a Muslim: Reading Publics and Contesting Identities in Nineteenth-Century North India*, New Delhi, Cambridge University Press, 2021. In Zaidi's words, «*Zillat* was both a location/place and a condition or state-of-being in which people had fallen. *Zillat kā maqām*, a phrase frequently used by Muslim writers in Urdu after 1857, signified a condition of being humiliated as much as it showed that people had fallen to a place where they had been subject to this humiliation» (*ibid*., p. 83).

[37] For details about these literary figures and historians, and their creative and intellectual output, cf. M. Hasan, *A Moral Reckoning: Muslim Intellectuals in Nineteenth-Century Delhi*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2007; M.W. Khan, *Who is a Muslim? Orientalism and Literary Populisms*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2021; C.R. Perkins, *Partitioning History: The Creation of an* Islami Pablik *in Late Colonial India, c. 1880-1920*, PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2011; I.S. Sevea, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[38] R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2004, pp. 10-11.

of the awareness of embeddedness in secular serial time enables the writing of the nation's biography. But unlike persons, who have a beginning and an end, nations do not have identifiable births or deaths. In Anderson's words, «the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, "down time" […] the only alternative is to fashion it "up time" […] wherever the lamp of archaeology casts its fitful gleam»[39].

[39] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 2006, p. 205 (firstly published in 1983).

7
Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Changing Cultures of Leadership: Hindu Reformism and the Mobilisation of Space in 1930s India

William Gould

On 20 September 1932, M.K. Gandhi commenced a «fast unto death» in protest against the proposal of separate electorates for untouchables or the «Depressed Classes»[1], contained in a new government provision – the Communal Award. The Award had arisen from the second in a series of Round Table Conferences to decide India's constitutional future. Writing to Kedarnath Kulkarni, Gandhi explained:

> My step has not been dictated by reason; it was inspired by my inner voice. My reason, however told me, "Hundreds of people like you will probably have to die in order to remove the blot of untouchability". Fasting is a very common practice in Hinduism. I have always loved it […] the aim of my fast is not merely to get the decision changed but to bring about the awakening and self-purification which are bound to result from the effort to get the decision changed[2].

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief "untouchable" or Dalit[3] representative invited to the conferences and the main proponent of separate electorates there, reflected later on the event, that «although Mr Gandhi declared a fast unto death he did not want to die. He wanted very much to live […]»[4].

[1] "Depressed Classes" was the term used for an officially defined group of communities who were considered by government and public in India to be of low status along the lines of caste. Typically they were communities who would have been defined in the late colonial period as "untouchable", and were defined through demographic and anthropological surveys through the period of 1870s to the 1930s.

[2] M.K. Gandhi to Kedarnath Kulkarni, 20 September 1932, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (hereafter *CWMG*), Ahmedabad, Publications Division Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1972, vol. LI, no. 176, p. 114.

[3] The term "untouchable" related to a group of castes who, in most cases, were located outside the traditional hierarchies of caste according to orthodox Hindu precepts, and who were subject to social taboos, spatial, social and ritual exclusions in this period. Although it is no longer used in political or public discourse, the term was freely used by caste Hindus and leaders/communities in the late colonial period and will be occasionally used in that context in this article. The term "Dalit" or "broken man" is a more contemporary use of a term to describe the same communities, and is commonly and has been ubiquitously used in Indian politics since the 1960s. It was first coined in the 1880s by Jotirao Phule but did not start to gain traction until the late 1940s.

[4] B.R. Ambedkar, *What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables* (hereafter *CGU*), Bombay, Thacker and Co., 1945, p. 87

Previously Gandhi had disputed Ambedkar's right to represent the Depressed Classes, instead suggesting that he alone would win a poll among the Harijan or «children of god» (a neologism Gandhi had created for his movement to «uplift» them). But now all eyes turned to Ambedkar as, effectively, the only man who could save Gandhi. *Ipso facto*, Ambedkar, as the only person capable of stopping the fast, was the only realistic representative of the Depressed Classes. The Dalit leader decided to go with what he described as the path of «humanity» rather than politics and agreed to a compromise known as the Poona Pact to save Gandhi. Stopping short of full separate electorates, the Pact still granted a weighted proportion of reserved seats in future provincial assemblies. But for Ambedkar, the political power of the Communal Award was thereby lost: a provision that would have offered Depressed Classes the privilege of a double vote. «With this voting strength free to be used in election of caste Hindu candidates», he wrote, «the Untouchables would have been in a position to determine if not dictate the issue of the General Election. No caste Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect the Untouchables in his constituency or be hostile to their interests»[5].

This contribution explores the changing cultures of political leadership in late colonial India that arose from this powerful moment, both the outcome of the clash of personalities and also, crucially, its spatial characteristics. In particular, it argues, firstly, that the strategy of each of our leaders related to a wider powerful development in the idea of Hindu reformism as a modern national project. Secondly, it suggests that both leaders connected local and regional concerns to a concept of the "international" through this event, and reactions to it, and such connections (and the strategies that arose from them) reflected wider developments in political leadership that transformed some of the key debates around representation, rights and the concept of "minority". The Ambedkar/Gandhi conflict of 1931-32 represents a significant moment, I argue, not only in the political development of leadership style of each of our protagonists, bringing some important wider clues on how leadership styles developed in late colonial India; but also as a key turning point in the development of new concepts of citizenship that arose from the configurations of minority rights.

In developing these arguments further, this contribution explores the idea of space, and the intellectual debates that it helped to create. In particular it examines the relationship between locality, region, and globe and how they

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 90.

were combined in strategic discourses for promoting minority rights – in this case, political claims made by Dalits. The paper also looks at particular political spaces in India as spatial jurisdictions, using the example of Uttar Pradesh (in the 1930s, the United Provinces) and its North India hinterland. This region was neither Gandhi's nor Ambedkar's home ground, but arguably the politically most significant region of India by demography and institutions. Beyond this region, the paper explores the significance of international spaces as strategic reference points in the work and thinking of both Gandhi and Ambedkar.

1. *Ambedkar and Hindu Reformism*

The paper first argues that what Ambedkar was fighting against in this clash with Gandhi was not simply a sense of Hindu majoritarianism but rather the effects of Hindu reformism, and uplift, in the interwar period. Proponents of the latter had attempted, via a discourse of modernity, to assimilate minority cultures – whether they be Depressed Class (Dalit) or Muslim. This was clearly shown in the aspects of Gandhi's explanation for opposing separate electorates that Ambedkar selected or highlighted, viz. the point that «Hindu reformers» and orthodox Hindus would take a corporate responsibility by using reform and service to eliminate untouchability[6].

The idea of minority therefore, as posited by Ambedkar, was not just set up against the idea of a Hindu majority, but more specifically against this much more powerful and inherently universal idea of a rationalised, modernised Hindu reformism – a politically radical idea of Hinduism: one not just expressed by the old right wing vanguards of Hindu unity, the Mahasabha, but also against social reformers from within the Congress itself. This concept of minority was developed at length in his later work, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done To The Untouchables* (1945). Here, among other critiques, Ambedkar took specific aim at the pernicious effects of a deliberately limited reformism, driven by a concept of a rationalised corporate Hinduism in action.

Ambedkar's 1945 retrospective exploration of Congress reformism stressed the point that Gandhi and the Congress effectively subordinated the supposed "Constructive" programme for untouchables to the larger quest of national

[6] *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

liberation, or contained it within the latter. Ambedkar specifically picked out Gandhi's article in «Young India» on 20 October 1920, with its concluding point: «[…] though the Panchama question is as dear to me as life itself, I rest satisfied with the exclusive attention to national non-cooperation. I feel sure that the great includes the less»[7].

2. *The Regional Response to the Gandhi-Ambedkar Conflict*

The second theme and argument of the paper looks outside the committees and personal correspondence between the two leaders. Gandhi's fasts against separate electorates for "untouchables" were, crucially, premised on the idea that Hinduism should be viewed less as a religion and more as a national culture. This found a popular manifestation in the responses to the fast in areas like Uttar Pradesh (UP), North India, which effectively naturalised the cultural reference points of modern Hinduism as a normative aspect of politics[8]. Separate electorates, then, were represented not just as pernicious for Hinduism, but also, in the words of a figure writing for the main English language newspaper of UP, M.K. Acharya, «de-national»[9].

Those supporting Gandhi's fast in UP typically represented Hinduism as simultaneously a crucible for liberal democracy and secularism, and as a religion under threat. Hinduism was posited as a culture that embraced or contained inherent impulses to modernity. This allowed Gandhi's inadvertent configuration of Hinduism to draw in figures across the ideological divide. The Hindu Sabha at Hathras (a city in UP), on the issue of untouchability at this time, for example, claimed that its practice was «anti-national» and against what they saw as the «cosmopolitan» aspects of Hinduism in spirit and form. For Congress Gandhians like Acharya Kripalani, looking back on the fasts in 1935, pointed out that the moves to oppose separate electorates via uplift exhibited the civic consciousness of a modernised Hindu society, in which broad political differences were eliminated[10]. For those on the left, the elimination of untouchability through "reform" allowed for an incorpo-

[7] B.R. Ambedkar, *CGU,* p. 38.

[8] For a sense of how this worked in a broader sense in 1930s North India, see W. Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

[9] «Leader» (Allahabad), 16 September 1932.

[10] *Left and Right Wing*, in «Vishwa Bharati Quarterly», I, part 2, August 1935, pp. 54-55.

ration of secular and socialist ideas within the framing of a welfare project – drawing in Hindu Congress socialists in some parts of North India. This was demonstrated perhaps most clearly by Congress party leaders who embraced the reformism of the Arya Samaj in the 1930s, and specifically figures such as Sampurnanand, the province's Education Minister at the end of the decade, who developed the concept of Vedantic Socialism[11]. Simultaneously, Gandhi's fasts incorporated the Hindu Mahasabha, a party of the right, who strongly support Gandhi, leading Nehru to write to him that there was «a danger your methods are being exploited by others»[12].

The forms of Hindu nationalism brought out by the fasts required a deeper engagement by Ambedkar with the content of Dalits' substantive citizenship rights on the ground, and not just their political positioning, since the manoeuvre of Gandhi and his allies, using religion, was a politically totalising one. Therefore, at the Round Table Conferences, Ambedkar had begun to push for *constitutional guarantees of the civic rights* of Depressed Classes, even before and alongside adult suffrage. Proper representation for Depressed Classes would also, according to this plan, have to appear in the places where the state mattered – the judiciary, police, and the civil services at all levels. Abuse of these rights, for Ambedkar, had to be enforced through punitive action and this needed to be upheld too, within the very structures of the state.

3. *The Uses of Different Spaces and International Frameworks*

This brings us to the third theme of the paper, exploring how and why space was so important to this particular debate about minorities. Clearly, Ambedkar's struggle against not only Gandhi, but also the larger reformist milieu behind him, presented almost insurmountable challenges within the territory of India. In its Gandhian versions at least, the idea of the "Hindu community" described an entity coterminous with the nation itself, so any challenge to it necessarily confronted too concepts of the nation and all its cognitive implications: national integration, ideas of modernity and economic development. Standing outside or beyond these frames then, in international spaces, logically gave Ambedkar's strategy a different kind of leverage.

[11] See Sampurnanand, *Samajavada* (1936).

[12] D. Norman, ed., *Nehru, the First Sixty Years*, New York, John Day, 1965, p. 273.

As early as his student days in the late 1910s and early 1920s, Ambedkar had understood this well and it was reflected both in his international lobbying as well as the intellectual publications that arose from it. His London School of Economics PhD, for example, was in Economics but it was not just about monetary policy, but also the nature of public finance and its connection to global colonial systems[13]. Most importantly, inherent in all of his work was the effect of high caste dominated political institutions as a social structure that exacerbated the strong effect of colonial currency policy on labour – a position which made his views on caste inherently international.

Gandhi was also a figure whose entire political career had developed across international spaces and his politics, from the 1910s at least, depended on form of universalism that extended the predicament of colonised Indian subjects to international comparators. From the 1909 text *Hind Swaraj,* penned during an international journey, and which contained broad based critiques of European modernity[14], to the political networks of the Ashram with its international visitors and sojourners, and to his wider global correspondents who filled out his address book, Gandhi's political strength lay precisely in the fact that it was essentially divorced from any particular Indian region.

But whereas the international contexts and connections employed by Gandhi were largely pragmatic, those of Ambedkar were integral to his conceptual formation of the idea of a political minority insofar as it pertained to Dalits. In 1930 for example, at the first RTC in London, Ambedkar drew on internationalist legal frameworks of the minority. The liberal constitutional grounding of Ambedkar's idea of political safeguards for Depressed Classes, presented at the minorities Sub-Committee, drew on a number of parallels, particularly from the USA, in establishing the civil rights of Dalits, in the idea of punishments for infringements, especially in relation to spaces and segregation[15]. Ambedkar was quite explicit about this separate sphere of politics. In one of his speeches at a dinner during the first Conference he pointed out that: «the plight of our 43,000.000 depressed people is not the problem of India alone. It should be international, for it affects the economic and social welfare

[13] W. Gould, *Ambedkar the Activist Research Scholar in 1920s London*, in W. Gould, S. Dass, C. Jaffrelot, eds., *Ambedkar in London*, London, Hurst, 2022, pp. 15-40.

[14] M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Madras, G.A. Natesan and Co, 1921 edition.

[15] "A Scheme of Political Safeguards for the Protection of the Depressed Classes in the Future Constitution of a Self-governing India", explored in J.F. Cháirez-Garza, *Ambedkar, London and the First Round Table Conference*, in W. Gould, S. Dass, C. Jaffrelot, eds., *Ambedkar in London*, pp. 85-107.

of the entire world and it is a case for the League of Nations just as slavery or the drug traffic is»[16]. The international space allowed Ambedkar not just to network across different political contexts, but also to experiment and think through material deprivation and class.

4. *Conclusion: Indian Political Leadership*

The early 1930s clash between Gandhi and Ambedkar, as well as unravelling some of these larger trends, provides a unique lens on the evolving nature of political leadership in 20th-century India too. Firstly, the Round Table Conferences set up an intricate picture for how leaders made use of intersectional alliances – forms of association that might be temporary and rather unstable, but which prefigured forms of coalition building after independence. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar attempted to draw other minority constituencies away from the other by setting out a complex picture that related questions of representation to the core realities of political patronage. Secondly, the clash between Ambedkar's and Gandhi's visions of political society and the state become a frame for thinking about how political leaders more generally in India have drawn upon constitutional precepts. As recent work on the popular purchase of constitutional rights has suggested[17], Ambedkar made effective use of the political messages emerging from regimes of legal rights – an approach that was to have lasting legacies. Thirdly, an exploration of these leaders at this unique moment of spatial integration, provides a lens for thinking about the spatial transformations in leadership strategy. Both leaders made recourse to international forums at different moments in the negotiations, or drew on inter-spatial connections in variable ways depending on context. India's historic colonial networks have continued to shape the ways leaders mobilise soft international power at strategic moments, including the means of shoring up power in localities and regions. Perhaps an instructive example would be the strategic struggle between Indian political parties over the control of Ambedkar's legacies in postcolonial spaces, including London.

[16] *Ibid.*

[17] R. De, *A People's Constitution: The Everyday Life of Law in the Indian Republic*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2018.

8
Colonialism and Nationalism in India: Reassessing the Scholarly Contribution of the "Scandalous" Cambridge School*

Michelguglielmo Torri

1. *Introduction*

In the 1970s, the historiographical debate on Indian nationalism was largely dominated by the appearance of the so-called Cambridge School, signalled by the publication of a special number of «Modern Asian Studies»[1]. That special number helped «Modern Asian Studies» to be acknowledged as a foremost journal of Asian studies and, more specifically, of South Asian studies. Contributing to this result was not only the importance of the essays published in that special issue but the fact that they sparked an intense and generalized debate, which went on for several years, for, but especially against, the Cambridge School. In fact, for largely ideological reasons, this School, in itself undoubtedly extremely ideological and with marked conservative connotations, was more condemned than discussed. Two elements, in particular, added up to determine this outcome. The first was that the new School's line of interpretation was seen as the re-proposition in disguise of the old imperialist and self-justifying historiography that had flourished in British universities in the first decades of the past century[2]. The second element, which had an even greater weight in determining a negative judgement, was the caustic and desecrating tone together with the intellectual snobbery with which most of its members mocked both some of the most cherished myths of the old historiography (e.g., the progressive role of Westernized Indians or the importance of anti-colonialist ideology) and the contributions of some of the leading exponents of the historiography of the 1960s. In this situation, unsurprisingly,

* This essay is a revised English translation of M. Torri, *Colonialismo e nazionalismo in India: il modello interpretativo della scuola di Cambridge*, in «Rivista Storica Italiana», CIII (1991), 2, pp. 483-527.

[1] «Modern Asian Studies», VII (1973), 3.

[2] E.g., C.S. [Colin de Souza], *New Garb of Imperialistic Historiography*, in «Economic and Political Weekly», 9 November 1974, p. 1897.

an unusually bitter and acrimonious debate developed between the members of the new School and some of the better-known exponents of the old one. The adversaries of the Cantabrigians included not only most historians working on the nationalist period, but also some of India's leading historians who, while not specialists in the era of nationalism, were old enough to have participated in person in its last and most glorious phase, namely the Quit India movement of 1942[3].

In such an emotionally charged atmosphere, the debate for and against the Cambridge School caused – again, not surprisingly – more confusion and frustration than a clarification of the theses which were discussed. Finally, during the 1980s, the debate eventually died down without reaching a real conclusion, as the majority of its protagonists either abandoned the field of the history of nationalism and moved on to other subjects, or ceased their work in the field of history[4].

Since then, other historiographical schools have flourished that have undoubtedly further broadened our horizons, but which, polemically, have conducted their analyses with almost total disregard for the contributions of the Cantabrigians. This is regrettable because, despite all its limitations, the individual contributions authored by its members and the interpretive scheme arising from them are essential contributions to a full understanding of Indian history in the age of nationalism and, as such, should be examined and utilised. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to redeem from oblivion the key ideas of the historians of the Cambridge School, highlighting the heuristic model in which they are articulated and the two different interpretations to which this model lends itself[5].

[3] The typical example is that of Tapan Raychaudhuri, then one of the foremost experts in the history of the interaction between India and Europe in the 17th century.

[4] Among the Cantabrigians, David Washbrook and Christopher Bayly went on to study the history of India in the period of transition to colonialism (between the mid-18th and mid-19th centuries). Francis Robinson, author of an analysis of the origins of Muslim separatism that was hyper-critical of Indian Islam and its representatives, ended up – ironically – being won over by what Maxime Rodinson has called «the fascination of Islam» and devoted himself to an empathetic study of Islam as a whole, understood both as religion and culture. Christopher Baker moved from the field of history to that of geography (although he retained his interest in South India). B.R. Tomlinson moved on to the history of British imperialism as a whole. Anil Seal and Gordon Johnson effectively ceased writing to devote themselvesrespectively to administrative work and the editing of «Modern Asian Studies» and the *New Cambridge History of India*. John Gallagher passed away in 1980. Among those who crossed swords with the Cantabrigians in the 1970s, Eugene F. Irschick did not produce any major work up to 1986, devoting himself to the study of India in the 18th century, while Tapan Raychaudhuri wrote an important book on the intellectual history of Bengal in the 19th century.

[5] In doing so, I will leave aside certain elements that, although important, are not vital to the understanding of the

2. *Before the Cambridge School*

As a preface to our review of the ideas of the Cambridge School, it will be helpful to recall the essential features of the historiographical interpretation prevailing until the early 1970s. This was based on the concept of the "Westernized middle class" and the figure and role of Gandhi. Allegedly, "Westernized middle class", or "Westernized elite", was that social formation which came into being through the spread of English culture and language in the Indian subcontinent. These Westernized Indians, originally loyal collaborators of the colonial power – whose children they were, culturally speaking – came to claim the right to self-government precisely on the basis of the principles of British political culture. The pursuit of this goal eventually led, in 1885, to the creation of the Indian National Congress, the first pan-Indian political organisation.

Originally an elite and moderate political structure, in 1920 the Congress underwent its first radical transformation into something akin to a mass party engaged in a revolutionary, albeit non-violent, struggle for complete Indian independence. The architect of this Copernican shift was Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a native Gujarati and a lawyer who, so the story goes, cobbled an alliance between the Westernized middle class, of which he was a full-fledged exponent, the indigenous capitalists (with many of whom Gandhi had excellent personal relations, despite his bitter criticism of industrial civilisation) and, more importantly, the large urban and, above all, peasant masses.

According to the interpretation prevailing in the 1960s, this alliance was based not only on Gandhi's undoubted charismatic qualities – which had earned him the title of Mahatma, "great soul" – but on his ability to offer a methodology of struggle against the British *Raj* which was acceptable to the various Indian social classes and, at the same time, capable of posing a global and ultimately deadly challenge to the colonial regime. This methodology was based on the lucid identification of the Achilles's heel of the seemingly all-powerful colonial state. This was the need on the part of the British to resort to the active or passive co-operation of Indians in order to keep the

model in question. Hence I will not dwell on the question of Muslim separatism, dealt with by Francis Robinson and Ayesha Jalal, or on the role of Gandhi, addressed by R.A. Gordon. However, the problem of the Westernized middle class – dealt with by most of the members of the School, but particularly by David Washbrook – has been discussed by this author in *"Westernized Middle Class", Intellectuals and Society in Late Colonial India*, in «Economic and Political Weekly», 27 January 1990, later reprinted in J.L. Hill, ed., *The Congress and Indian Nationalism*, London, Curzon Press, 1991, pp. 18-55.

colonial apparatus working. Hence the effectiveness of Gandhi's non-violent techniques, which ranged from refusing to use colonial state-subsidised institutions (courts, schools, etc.) to non-payment of taxes. This refusal was coupled with the attempt to build Indian-run counter-institutions designed to create ever-widening spaces of freedom within a colonial regime. This process, once brought to its fulfilment, would inevitably transform the colonial state into an empty shell, soon bound to disintegrate.

3. *The Cambridge School*

The interpretative tendency, whose essential traits I have just recalled, flowered in the late 1960s and early 1970s, dominating the field of Indian studies in the era of nationalism unchallenged. However, as already noted, in 1973 the publication of a monographic issue devoted to India in the journal «Modern Asian Studies» made known the birth of a new school whose distinguishing feature was a radical and devastating critique of the hitherto prevailing interpretation.

This new school – which soon became known as the Cambridge School – was largely made up of scholars who, at the time, were teaching or studying in Cambridge. However, this does not mean that all historians working on Indian history, then active in Cambridge, are to be regarded as members of that school. Not only that; the monograph by the scholar who was generally considered the head of the School, Anil Seal – a book which had appeared a few years earlier[6] – was, to all intents and purposes, one of the most interesting fruits of the dominant interpretation of the 1960s. This led to a certain amount of confusion in defining what the distinguishing features of the school in question were. It is therefore necessary to dwell on the genesis of the School, which can be traced back to a sort of mutation process, whose first link was represented by the attention devoted, almost *en passant*, to the history of India by a distinguished Oxford Africanist, John Gallagher[7].

Gallagher, in partnership with Ronald Robinson, was the author of a series of seminal works on the expansion of European colonialism, in particular

[6] A. Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

[7] On the genesis of the Cambridge School see H. Spodek, *Pluralist Politics in British India: The Cambridge Cluster of Historians of Modern India*, in «The American Historical Review», LXXXIV (1979), 3, pp. 688-707.

in Africa, in which they argued, among other things, that certain groups of non European, who had found it advantageous to collaborate with the Europeans, had played a decisive role in enabling the creation of the colonial system (a system from the maintenance of which these collaborationist groups profited). Gallagher and Robinson took their thesis to its logical conclusion, arguing that it was the failure of this collaboration that had caused the end of colonial rule[8].

Obviously, once it is accepted that the members of the Westernized middle class in India were the counterparts of the African collaborators identified by Gallagher and Robinson, the thesis proposed by the two Africanists is perfectly compatible with that related to India, prevailing in the 1960s. It was precisely following this type of interpretation that a disciple of Gallagher, Anil Seal, wrote a doctoral thesis dedicated to the pre-Gandhian phase of the nationalist movement in India. Revised and published several years later under the title *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, Seal's analysis was, as already mentioned, a brilliant example of the then mainstream interpretation[9]. Seal, however, became the mentor of a group of young scholars who, still following the Ariadne's thread represented by the concept of collaboration between Europeans and natives as a cornerstone of colonial rule, came to profoundly different conclusions from those of their mentor through a series of meticulous and in-depth sectorial pieces of research, later embodied in as many doctoral dissertations. These conclusions, which I will discuss shortly, were echoed in the results obtained, around the same time, by two other young disciples of Gallagher: Christopher Bayly and R.A. Gordon. At the same time, Gallagher himself – in a series of reports and lectures that remained unpublished for several years – developed a new theory on the relevance of the international context in determining the nature of the colonial dependency linking India to Britain.

As just noted, the research of Seal's and Gallagher's disciples resulted in a series of doctoral theses, most of which were soon to be published as mono-

[8] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, in «The Economic History Review», new series, VI (1953), 1, pp. 1-15, later reprinted in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire. The Ford Lectures and Other Essays*, edited by A. Seal, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp. 1-18. The themes discussed in this famous article were reiterated by Robinson in an essay presented at a seminar held in Oxford. See R.E. Robinson, *Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration*, in R. Owen, R.B. Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, London, Longman, 1972, pp. 138–139. See also W.R. Louis, ed., *The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy*, New York, New Viewpoints, 1976.

[9] See above, note 6.

graphs[10]. The essentials of the theses and monographs were previewed to other historians in the form of articles in the July 1973 monographic issue of «Modern Asian Studies». That same issue opened with an article by Anil Seal and concluded with one by John Gallagher[11].

In his contribution, entitled *Imperialism and Nationalism in India*, Seal showed that he had been able to take advantage of the research of both his and Gallagher's pupils. He systematised their conclusions and integrated them with the ideas enunciated by Gallagher in his lectures (ideas that were to be developed in a series of research studies by another of Seal's disciples, B.R. "Tom" Tomlinson). Also in that essay, Seal, displaying a commendable capacity for self-criticism, admitted *apertis verbis* that some of the «suggestions» presented in his monograph had now «dropped through the trapdoor of historiography»[12].

The article in question remains to this day the best introduction to the basic ideas of the Cambridge School, of which it became a kind of manifesto. It is by referring to this manifesto that it is possible to define both the characteristics of the new school and the criteria for being considered part of it. In fact, in the final analysis, what characterizes membership in the Cambridge School is having contributed to the research on which the interpretative model outlined by Seal in his *Imperialism and Nationalism in India* is based, and/or having conducted other research which, accepting the essential elements

[10] The doctoral theses in question are: R.A. Gordon, *Aspects in the History of the Indian National Congress, with special reference to the Swarajya Party, 1919-1927*, University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1970; C.A. Bayly, *The Development of Political Organisation in the Allahabad Locality, 1880-1925*, University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1970; F. Robinson, *The Politics of United Provinces' Muslims, 1906-1922*, University of Cambridge D.Phil. thesis, 1970; D.A. Washbrook, *Political Change in the Madras Presidency, 1880-1921*, University of Cambridge D.Phil. thesis, 1973; C.J. Baker, *Political Change in South India, 1919-1937*, Fellowship dissertation, Queens' College, Cambridge, 1972; B.R. Tomlinson, *Imperialism, Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Indian National Congress, 1934-1942*, University of Cambridge D.Phil. thesis, 1973. The only one of these works to remain unpublished was Gordon's.

[11] Besides Seal's *Imperialism and Nationalism in India*, the essays in the monographic issue in question (see above, note 1) were: C.A. Bayly, *Patrons and Politics in Northern India*; F.C.R. Robinson, *Municipal Government and Muslim Separatism in the United Provinces 1883 to 1916*; R.A. Gordon, *Non-cooperation and Council Entry, 1919-1920*; D.A. Washbrook, *Country Politics: Madras 1880-1930*; G. Johnson, *Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal, 1904 to 1908*; J. Gallagher, *Congress in Decline: Bengal 1930 to 1939*, «Modern Asia Studies», VII (1973), 3, pp. 589-645, reprinted in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall*, edited by A. Seal, pp. 155-211. It is worth emphasizing that Johnson's and Gallagher's articles did not deviate substantially, except in their highly critical tone towards the nationalist movement, from the traditional interpretation. The monographic issue in question was soon afterwards published as a separate volume. See J. Gallagher, G. Johnson, A. Seal, eds., *Locality, Province and Nation. Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973. All the quotations related to these essays are taken from the journal edition.

[12] A. Seal, *Imperialism and Nationalism in India*, p. 326, note 4.

of this model as a starting point, contributed to its further development and enrichment along the same interpretative lines[13].

This means that it is not accurate to believe, as some have done, that the distinctive feature of the Cambridge School is represented by a shift of emphasis, in research work, from the top of the colonial apparatus to the regional or local level. Not only do some contributions by Tomlinson[14], a full member of the School, analyse India as a whole but, in the sector of regional and local research, the Cambridge historians had already been preceded by a group of scholars active in major Australian universities in the 1960s and 1970s[15]. Equally inaccurate, as has already been mentioned, is the idea that all the Cambridge students of Indian history were part of the School. The then dean of Cambridge historians dealing with modern India, Eric Stokes, always maintained a somewhat ironic attitude of detachment towards the contributions of the School, while Rajat K. Ray, who concluded his doctoral studies at Cambridge during the last period of flowering of the School, later became one of its most incisive critics. Again, as has been said, Seal's production itself is largely not attributable to the interpretative model of the new school. Finally, one of Seal's best-known students, Judith Brown, achieved wide fame in the 1970s through two ponderous monographs on Gandhi, of which only the second is somewhat related to the key ideas of the School[16].

In the following paragraphs we will report in some detail the elements in which the model proposed by the Cambridge historians is structured, making reference both to Seal's article and to the contributions of the other members of the School (among which stand out, due to their innovativeness, those of Washbrook and Tomlinson). Before proceeding, however, it is nec-

[13] Note that my definition of the Cambridge School is more restrictive than that given by Spodek, who considers the Cambridge School historians not so much as members of a school, but as part of a «cluster» with rather imprecise boundaries.

[14] E.g., B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, London, Macmillan, 1976.

[15] See the article by H.F. Owen, *Interactions between the National and the Local in Modern South Asia: A Note*, published as an introduction to a monographic issue of «South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies», V (1975), 1, pp. 1-8, which collected a series of articles on the relationships between local realities and national politics in colonial India. All those interventions, except one, had originally been presented at a conference dedicated to that topic, organized by the Australian South Asian Studies Association and held in 1973 at the University of Western Australia in Perth. Other important contributions by Australian scholars had already appeared in D.A. Low, ed., *Soundings in Modern South Asian History*, London, Weindenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, and R. Kumar, ed., *Essays on Gandhian Politics*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971.

[16] J.M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power. Indian Politics 1915-1922*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, and Ead., *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience. The Mahatma in Indian Politics 1928-34*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977.

essary to remember some immediately evident characteristics of the model which, even if not necessarily the most important, played a decisive role in its fortunes, if only because they caused a violent, I would say almost visceral, reaction of hostility on the part of historians of the old school and, more generally, of cultured Indians. These included, first, the complete devaluation of the role played by the Westernized middle class, Gandhi and nationalist ideology. Second, another obvious (and irritating) distinctive feature of the interpretation of the Cantabrigians was the attention to the personal interests of the various protagonists of the nationalist movement, who, in the Cantabrigians' considerate opinion, were swayed by them, and not by the highly idealistic ideals they publicly professed. Third, there was the emphasis on the connections, portrayed as almost mafia-like in nature, between local interests and national organizations with high claims of political morality, such as the Congress. Fourth, as logical complement to this set of ideas, there was the distrust towards the personal honesty of the nationalist movement, including Gandhi[17].

Although the members of the School never cited the name of Lewis Namier in their writings[18], it was pointed out that the elements now mentioned coincide with those present in the studies dedicated by Namier to 18th-century England. Hence the definition of «Namierite», used by some to define the approach of the Cantabrigians[19]. Nevertheless, at least one of the members of the School, David Washbrook, claimed the Marxist dimension of the Cambridge model by highlighting the connection established in it between economic interests (the structure) and the ideological masks on the basis of which the individuals motivated their own behaviours (the superstructures)[20]. As will be seen from the following exposition, this was a Marxism *sui generis*, where the concept of class and the dimension of class struggle are completely absent.

[17] This mistrust also involved the British. Washbrook, for example, highlights how widespread corruption was even among the members of that "incorruptible" body of officials that was the Covenanted Indian Civil Service. See, e.g., D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics. The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976, pp. 29 and ff. But the fact is that most of the attention of the Cantabrigians was focussed on the protagonists of the liberation movement, fiercely criticizing their alleged dishonesty. Generally, this was seen by Indians as an implicit defence of the colonial administration.

[18] See however A. Seal, *Preface: John Andrew Gallagher, 1919-1980*, in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall*, ed. by A. Seal, p. XVIII, who admitted that Gallagher's «view of political man owed something to the Namier approach».

[19] C.S., *New Garb of Imperialist Historiography*, p. 1897, and H. Spodek, *Pluralist Politics in British India*, p. 692.

[20] The above was clarified by Washbrook to this writer during a debate following a conference he held at Berkeley, during the academic year 1975-76.

4. *The Alliance between the Colonial Regime and the Indigenous Notables*

Let us now explain in greater detail the distinctive features of the Cambridge School's interpretative model. As mentioned, the starting point of the analysis conducted by the Cantabrigians is the idea that the colonial regime was based on the organic alliance between the European rulers and certain indigenous collaborators. The latter, however, did not coincide with the Westernized middle class. According to the Cambridge School, it is even doubtful that there existed a "class", in the Marxian or sociological sense of the term, made up of Westernized Indians. Westernized Indians were too few in number and, as a group (that is, apart from very rare individual exceptions), they did not have large incomes, much less did they control the means of production. All this combined with the fact that, at least until the last decade of the 19th century, Westernized Indians did not exercise any notable political influence. This means, according to the Cantabrigians, that the political weight of this group within Indian society was virtually nil. It is no coincidence that the partners in the alliance with the colonial regime were those people who actually controlled more or less large sectors of indigenous society. The power of these notables, or magnates, or bosses – as they are referred to, from time to time, by the Cantabrigians – was primarily of an economic nature. They were large landowners, rich peasants (or dominant caste groups) who controlled the economy of a village or group of villages, usurers (a function which, at a rural level, was often exercised by rich peasants), big merchants, civil or religious notables who controlled the rich Hindu temples of the South, and Muslim holy men who ran communities and schools, receiving huge donations from the faithful. The economic power wielded by this motley set of notables was generally strengthened by ritual sanctions; Hindu notables, when they did not belong to Brahminical *jatis* (as was often the case), took into their service Brahmins who sanctioned the superior socio-religious status of their patrons; Muslim notables, when they were not themselves holy men (*pir*) or experts in Koranic law (*ulama*), were generally in close relation with them. Lastly, the power of the notables was based on the ability to use violence both to keep their subordinates in their place and to face any challenge to their power from other notables[21].

[21] Colonial India, far from being a non-violent society, bore a curious resemblance to the American Far West. The only real difference was that hoodlums serving Indian notables generally used clubs, spears, and swords, rather than Winchesters and Colts.

The alliance between the British and this colourful assortment of notables found its justification in the former's need to extract from India the resources necessary not only for the control of the subcontinent but for the maintenance of the British imperial system in the entire Afro-Asian sector. In the words of Anil Seal:

> The British wanted to pull resources out of India, not to put their own into India. Therefore the administrative and military system had to pay for itself with Indian revenues. At the top, this called for a skilled bureaucracy capable of handling large issues bearing upon the economy and the army. But at lower levels this control had to be looser. There, imperial ends had to be satisfied by more modest programmes. The chief source of Indian revenue lay in land, and it had to be collected from millions of payers. In the localities the main tasks were to secure the cheap and regular collection of revenue and to see to it that the district remained quiet. But these tasks were beyond the unaided capacity of the British administrators on the spot[22].

Given that the *Raj* could not count on the contribution of European colonists, who, especially for climatic reasons, were always extremely limited in number, and considering that the creation of an adequate bureaucracy made up of British people would have been excessively expensive, the only solution was to resort to the help of «influential Indians prepared to work with the regime», since they, «happily», were cheap. But, however cheap, the collaboration of «influential Indians» had a price. To quote Seal once again, in accepting these «influential Indians» as their collaborators at a local level, the British were in fact concluding a barter of a political nature. Its terms were that the British could count on a regular collection of taxes, provided they were not too scrupulous in checking by whom they were paid. Furthermore, the British could consider public order as guaranteed, as long as they did not play too important a role in its maintenance[23]. In other words, in exchange for the regular payment of a pre-established amount of taxes and the maintenance of a minimum of social order, the omnipotent British *Raj* effectively abdicated the exercise of power at the local level in favour of the indigenous notables. This situation can be described as a sort of alliance between the colonial state and Indian notables, which, although informal, was of crucial political importance.

This alliance was exercised on two levels: one overt and the other occult. The first level, the obvious one, was represented by the fact that the notables were encouraged to collaborate with the colonial bureaucracy through the distribution of a series of official positions: treasurer of various branches

[22] A. Seal, *Imperialism and Nationalism*, p. 328.
[23] *Ibid*., pp. 327-328.

of the state apparatus, contractor or subcontractor in the collection of land revenues, contractor for a state monopoly (opium, salt or spirits), honorary magistrate, village chief and others. Since these positions were distributed with the precise aim of economizing the use of the repressive apparatus of the colonial state as much as possible, it was not the position that gave power or influence to the individual; rather the position was given to those who already had autonomous bases of power or influence. Obviously, the investiture by the *Raj* through the distribution of official positions strengthened the personal standing of those who received it, enabling them to advantageously reconcile the service of the colonial state with the promotion of their personal interests. But it is important to reiterate that the power of these notables was in the first instance independent from the support of the colonial state.

The second level in which the alliance between the colonial state and indigenous notables was articulated was, as has been said, occult; that is, it was illegal in nature. The existence of this link was premised on the essentially rudimentary nature of the colonial bureaucracy and the complexity and fragmentation of the indigenous society, which the structures of the colonial state were supposed to control. In this regard, it must be kept in mind that each notable generally dominated a restricted territorial area: a village, a group of villages, the neighbourhood of a city. This multitude of notables should have been controlled by a colonial apparatus which, before the reforms of the 1870s and 1880s, was limited to the fiscal apparatus, represented at the district level – the basic unit of the British-Indian administration – by a member of the Covenanted Indian Civil Service, namely the top echelon of the Indian Civil Service. This top civilian – who had the title of District Commissioner or, significantly, Collector – was responsible not only for the collection of taxes and any other related activity, but for the exercise of practically every other function falling within the competence of the state. To make the situation more difficult, there was the fact that the District Commissioner/Collector was in charge of an administrative area, the district, which, not exceptionally, included up to one and a half or two million inhabitants. Not only that. In Washbrook's words, the Collectors, «in addition to their duties as revenue gatherers, magistrates, local politicians and policemen, […] had to spend hours and hours filling in forms and answering questionnaires from their superiors»[24]. The net result of this state of affairs was that the Collectors, over-

[24] D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics. The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920*, p. 28.

worked, were absolutely unable to personally carry out many, if not most, of the functions within their competence, which, necessarily, had to be delegated to their subordinates. These subordinates were the Deputy-Collectors and a bevy of lower-ranking officials. Like the Collectors, the Deputy-Collectors were chosen by the provincial government, were very limited in number and were frequently moved from one district to another. Conversely, other subordinate officials – charged with the management of first- and second-tier district subdivisions and villages – were co-opted into the colonial bureaucracy by the incumbent Collector and, as a rule, began and ended their careers in the same district. Given that both the Collectors and the Deputy-Collectors, as has been said, were frequently rotated from one district to another, it was the senior members of the local bureaucracy that the Collectors necessarily had to turn to both for reliable information on the local reality and, when it was the case, to recruit new subordinate officials. It was always the members of this local bureaucracy who, in fact, maintained contact with the local notables, to whom they were generally linked by relationships of kinship, caste and religion. To these ties, inevitably, were added those based on interest, given that local officials, who benefited from meagre salaries but enjoyed vast effective powers, had both the opportunity and the convenience of selling their services to notables. In this way the latter, through a judicious distribution of bribes and other favours, could render ineffective those directives of the colonial state that they did not like.

That the colonial administrative apparatus was, at a local level, riddled with corruption, and that, despite the myth of the incorruptibility of the top echelon of the Indian Civil Service, this corruption, not infrequently, also involved District Commissioners and even officials of the provincial governments, was well known to the members of the Covenanted Indian Civil Service. This even if the myth of incorruptibility of the ICS was scrupulously maintained for the benefit of public opinion at home and the apologists of the imperial system[25].

That nothing was done to try to rectify this state of things can be explained by the fact that, at least until the 1870s, widespread corruption could be considered a necessary evil or even a useful lubricant for the functioning of a system that perfectly met the requirements for which it was created. It was a mechanism which was cheap, guaranteed the maintenance of a minimum of social peace and, above all, ensured the collection of adequate tax revenues.

[25] *Ibid*., pp. 28-31.

As if that wasn't enough, the system in question presented an additional and valuable political advantage for the British. This was the fact that each district or, more often, each *taluk* or *firka* (namely each primary or secondary subdivision of the district) formed a separate case, characterized by the existence of local conditions, defined by the particular relationships existing between the local representatives of the colonial power and the single notable or, more rarely, a limited number of notables who controlled any single locality. Local tensions between the representative of the colonial state and local notables did exist, but, according to Washbrook, were more often originated from competitions between two or more notables to obtain the favours of the representative of the colonial state rather than from opposition to the *Raj*[26]. Anyway, this was a state of affairs that made very unlikely that disgruntled local notables hailing from different districts could band together against the *Raj*. As stated by Washbrook: «As virtually no two *taluks*, or even *firkas*, need be subject to the same governmental problems, and as the same social forces in two adjacent areas could be accommodated by governmental authorities in different ways, it was extremely difficult for dissidences to spread»[27].

5. *International Context and Colonial Regime*

The secret of this arrangement, so advantageous for both parties, was represented not only by the fact that the British governed as little as possible, but, according to the Cantabrigians, by a careful self-limitation of the economic demands the colonial state made on its Indian subjects. During the second half of the 19th century, however, a multiplicity of causes, ultimately beyond the control of the colonial state, put the latter in need of changing policy. First, from the 1870s onwards, there was the devaluation of the silver-based Indian rupee against major international currencies, particularly the gold-based British pound. This led to an automatic increase in the so-called home charges that the government of India had to pay, in British pounds, to London. Furthermore, there was a growth in prices within India which continued throughout the last forty years of the 19th century. This resulted in a *de facto* decrease in the resources of the colonial state, given that these resources had, until

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[27] *Ibid.*

then, come almost exclusively from land revenue, namely a tax that, in certain parts of India, had been fixed permanently, while, in the rest of the country, could only be changed after long periods (from one to several decades). As if all this were not enough, two other phenomena led to radical increases in spending. The first was that the Indian domestic market and India's trade surpluses with the rest of the world (with the exception of the United Kingdom) became of fundamental importance, starting from the 1870s, in propping up the declining British economic system. This situation led to the need for the colonial government to support the efficiency of the Indian economy with a series of different interventions, but all having in common the fact that they entailed an increase in spending by the *Raj*. Finally, in the 1880s, the start of the new phase of European expansionism in the world and the enlargement of the frontiers of the Russian Empire in Asia pushed London to increasingly strengthen and use the Indian army. This, in effect, became the armed wing and shield of the British Empire in Afro-Asia, which led to increased military expenditure financed by Indian taxpayers[28].

It was the need to mobilize new resources and better use existing ones that pushed the colonial ruling class to carry out a series of institutional reforms. These meant that India, for the first time, began to be effectively controlled by an administrative apparatus that extended from the imperial and provincial capitals to the most remote locations. Consequently, as this administrative unification became operational and as the imperial fiats of the heads of the colonial apparatus began to translate into concrete changes at the local level, the colourful and segmented crowd of indigenous notables gradually had to realize that they had a common problem. This consisted of the need to influence decisions made by provincial leaders, or the government of India or, in certain cases, the British government and parliament. In the analysis of the Cantabrigians, this opened the way to the process of transition from the colonial to the postcolonial state. More in detail, the administrative reforms saw the coming into being of a process of centralization, expansion, differentiation and, finally, Indianization of the administrative machine. The number of Deputy Collectors – who, as has been said, were appointed by the provincial governments and periodically rotated from one district to anoth-

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51; B.R. Tomlinson, *India and the British Empire, 1880-1935*, in «The Indian Economic and Social History Review», XII (1975), 4, pp. 337-380; J. Gallagher, A. Seal, *Britain and India between the Wars*, in «Modern Asian Studies», XV (1981), 3, pp. 387-414.

er – was radically increased. The Talukdars, who administered the primary subdivision of the district, had their appointment and career regulated identically to that of the Deputy-Collectors. Furthermore, there were constant attempts, although crowned with limited success, to standardize and closely control the entire fiscal apparatus, down to the level of village officials. At the same time, the entire bureaucratic machine was differentiated and expanded. The police and judiciary were strengthened, clearly detached from the fiscal apparatus and subjected to the effective control of the provincial governments. Not only that: in the impossibility of significantly increasing the land revenue, lest of causing dangerous reactions, the provincial governments began to tax the profits of industry and commerce and, for this purpose, a new autonomous bureaucratic department was created. At the same time, other new branches of the bureaucracy came into being, in charge of the promotion of sectors such as agriculture and industrial development, the protection of public health, the creation of credit cooperatives, and the preservation of forests.

The differentiation of the bureaucratic apparatus allowed the provincial governments to have information that enabled them to more easily supervise the work of the various branches of the bureaucracy. The expansion of this same apparatus meant the intervention of the colonial state in sectors of Indian society previously left to themselves. Centralization gave provincial governments the tools to keep local bureaucracy in line.

The effects of the combination of these transformations were momentous. The political lines decided by the provincial governments were now uniformly implemented in the localities. The notables were no longer able to substantially modify these political lines through their hidden connections with members of the bureaucracy at the local level. Those same bureaucrats, if they wanted to advance their careers, could not limit themselves to courting the favour of the Talukdars and Collectors, but had to adapt to the directives of the provincial governments.

The ultimate result of the transformations of the bureaucracy implemented from the 1870s onwards was that a multitude of local interests, which, previously, had not been affected or which had been able to modify the directives of the colonial state more or less to their liking, now found themselves subjected to increasing pressure. This pressure flowed from the top of the colonial apparatus and was discharged in a unitary manner on a base formed by a multiplicity of localities that were autonomous and differentiated from each other. Soon, the notables who dominated these localities realized that the only hope

of dealing with the new situation was to organize themselves in a united way in order to make the colonial apparatus feel their weight[29].

6. *The Rationalization of the Colonial Regime*

The analyses conducted by the Cambridge School demonstrate how the British themselves were «sensitive to the dangers of both rebellion and mistake which could follow from driving forward policies without the advice and consent of some of the people who were affected by them»[30]. Moreover, they were also aware of the fact that the colonial state «contained no machinery by which, short of rebellion, its subjects could attract its attention»[31]. As Francis Robinson's studies demonstrate in particular, in this situation the British – faced with the need to mobilize an ever-increasing quantity of resources to deal with the growing financial difficulties of the colonial state – decided, starting in 1882, to resort to the granting of self-governing institutions at municipal and district levels[32].

The rationale behind this decision was that since the Indian public needed to be taxed further, it was best if this was done by leaders at the local level of Indian society. The latter knew the real situation better than the colonial bureaucracy and could, when necessary, use their personal power to keep taxpayers in line. In any case, as is implicitly demonstrated by the studies of the Cantabrigians, those notables who made mistakes would be personally responsible for them, giving the colonial state the possibility of intervening at a later time, playing the role of dispenser of justice and protector of the oppressed.

Consistent with this logic, local self-government bodies were created as an expression of an electorate drastically restricted on the basis of census criteria, a fact which, from the beginning, guaranteed their control by the notables. This means that the creation of the new self-governing institutions was

[29] This discussion of the administrative reforms of the 1880s and 1890s and their effects on Indian society is based on the works of Bayly, Robinson and Washbrook cited in the previous notes.

[30] D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, p. 60.

[31] B.R. Tomlinson, *India and the British Empire, 1880-1935*, in «The Indian Economic and Social History Review», XII (1975), 4, p. 347.

[32] This thesis – which later became one of the cornerstones of the Cantabrigian model – was stated for the first time in F. Robinson, *Consultation and Control: The United Provinces' Government and its Allies, 1860-1906*, in «Modern Asian Studies», V (1971), 4, pp. 313-336.

the logical continuation of the policy aimed at associating those Indians who mattered with the management of the colonial state.

Each of the newly-created self-governing bodies brought under its jurisdiction not one but several small personal "empires", controlled by indigenous notables. In turn, this forced the notables to gather into factions aimed at conquering the local self-governing bodies. The analyses of the Cambridge School historians (and others) demonstrate how the control of a municipality or a district council gave the possibility of taxing certain sectors of indigenous society instead of others, of carrying out public works such as roads and canals in such a way as to harm certain groups or notables while favouring certain others, to distribute municipal jobs to friends and dependents, to expel from those same jobs the friends and dependents of other notables and, finally, to intervene in the religious customs of the various communities (which the British had scrupulously avoided doing, starting from the great revolt of 1857, which they had assessed as largely caused by their interference in the socio-religious customs of their Indian subjects)[33].

The administrative and taxing powers that were devolved to the local self-government bodies, although previously held, from a formal point of view, by the colonial state, had in reality never been exercised. Instead, in the situation that prevailed after 1882, these powers came to be vigorously used by rural districts and municipalities. This, combined with the fact that the provincial governments continued to maintain considerable powers of arbitration and intervention in relation to the work of the new local self-government bodies, effectively represented another step forward in the centralization process. In the new situation thus created, the recurring attempts to put the faction in power in a bad light or, vice versa, the need to protect one's position when one was in power, pushed the notables to turn their attention to the provincial leaders of the colonial bureaucracy. But, once again, the problem continued to be that there were no official channels of communication between the local notables and the heads of the colonial apparatus.

According to the interpretative scheme of the Cambridge historians, all

[33] These themes were explored in depth above all by Washbrook, Robinson and Bayly, in the works cited in the previous footnotes. For other studies conducted along the same lines by historians not belonging to the Cambridge School, see, e.g., H.A. Gould, *Local Government Roots of Contemporary Indian Politics*, in «Economic and Political Weekly», 13 February 1971, pp. 457-464, and Id., *The Emergence of Modern Indian Politics: Political Development in Faizabad. Part One: 1884-1935*, in «The Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics», XII (1974), 1-2, pp. 20-41.

this pushed large groups of notables to lend a hand to the first pan-Indian political organization founded by Westernized Indians. Against a backdrop of growing tensions and local unrest, major native merchants and bankers, religious leaders, and large and small landowners figured prominently at the annual sessions of the Indian National Congress held between 1885 (the year of its foundation) and 1892. These notables who had discovered a vocation for nationalist politics were people who, in the absence of institutional means of communication with the apex of the colonial power, used the Congress as a platform from which to make their own complaints heard.

The colonial government's response was to co-opt a certain number of Indians at the top of the political-administrative structure of the colonial state. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, a number of positions in university senates came to be filled through elections by graduates of each university; in 1892, the provincial legislative councils were expanded and a minority of councillors was made up of Indians elected according to a complicated indirect system, subject to the approval of the governor; the first Indian Collectors, judges, advocates general made their appearance; some important posts at the top of the provincial administration were given to Indians who were not part of the Indian Civil Service.

From the beginning, the political demands made by the Congress had aimed at obtaining an unequivocal indication from the British that their ultimate political objective was the granting of self-government to India within the British Empire, on the model of the White Dominions, such as Australia and Canada. This clarification of the ultimate objectives of the colonial regime should have been made credible by the immediate implementation of a policy of Indianisation of the top echelon of the Indian Civil Service (which, in fact, coincided with the political class that governed colonial India). From this perspective, the type of response actually given by the colonial state may appear very limited. In fact, far from clearly fixing the ultimate objective of the devolution of political power to the Indians, the British rulers did not alter in any way the existing balance of power, totally skewed in their favour. According to the traditional interpretation, it was this limited response on the part of the *Raj* that caused the crisis of the Congress starting from the last decade of the 19th century. Congressmen found that their polite protests, which had their ideological justification in British constitutional traditions, led to no result. Hence the crisis of the Congress, which found expression in a drastic decline in the number and representativeness of the people who took part in its activities. From here, at a later time, there was the emergence of a

process of polarization within the Congress which led to the advent, alongside the "moderate" majority, of an "extremist" minority. The latter was in favour of the pursuit of complete independence (instead of self-government within the British Empire) and the use of more incisive methods of struggle than those used until then, such as not to exclude the use of violence. The Cambridge School historians, however, turned the traditional explanation on its head. In fact, in their opinion, the just listed developments and, more generally, the crisis of the Congress were not caused by the failure, but by the success of the policy followed up to that point by the Indian nationalist movement. By the first half of the 1890s, in fact, the concessions made by the British, in particular the co-optation of Indians at the top of the administration, justice and universities, had opened new channels of communication between the colonial state and indigenous notables. This deprived the Congress of its role as representative of the notables, a role that was now exercised by individual Westernized Indians co-opted at the top of the colonial apparatus.

7. *The Evolution of the Colonial Apparatus between the Two Wars*

The international constraints that became acute in the 1870s had forced the British to modify the existing political-administrative system and the balance of power on which it was based. As we have seen, this had led to a series of reactions on the part of the Indians and adjustments on the part of the colonial power. By the end of the century, a new balance of power had been achieved, allowing the British to fully realize their imperial objectives without any adverse reaction on the part of their Indian subjects. But it was a balance that could only be maintained to the extent that international constraints did not impose new pressures, forcing the British to mobilize further resources. In a period of ever-increasing international tensions such as the one that opened with the new century, this situation was not destined to last. In the first half of the 20th century, the *Raj* went through three international crises of great importance: the First World War, the repercussions of the global economic crisis of the 1930s and the Second World War. On the occasion of each of these crises, the British resorted to the most efficient political-administrative tools with which they were now equipped in order to make full use of India's resources to shore up the shaky situation of the "motherland" and the British imperial system in the world. Each of these crises entailed the need to grant political compensations in order to ensure the collaboration of the elites that

dominated Indian society. But, at least until the beginning of the 1940s, the political concessions of the British were conceived within a framework whose fundamental determinant was the need to maintain undisputed control of the essential levers of power (in addition to the preservation of another fundamental goal: involving the widest possible range of Indian political and social forces in the maintenance of the colonial system). Over time, this led to a streamlining of the colonial system of control of India, in the sense that the British abandoned all unessential levers of power in the hands of the Indians. In other words, Indians were given the control of all those levers of power which were not directly relevant to the maintenance of what Tomlinson calls the «imperial commitment», that is, the pursuit of what, in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, had become the key objectives of English domination in India. These were basically four: the use of the Indian army, for two thirds made up of Indian troops and completely financed by Indian taxpayers, to protect the British Empire; the control of India's foreign trade for the benefit of British interests; the payment of home charges from the Indian treasury to the British treasury; and the use of Indian treasury surpluses to strengthen the pound[34].

The 1919 reforms entailed, among other things, the devolution of control of self-government bodies at the local level (municipalities and district councils) to Indian ministers drawn from the provincial legislative assemblies, elected by direct suffrage, albeit on a basis drastically limited by wealth. Subsequently, the *Government of India Act* of 1935 introduced a new system which, by devolving the entire management of the provinces to governments expressed by elected assemblies, radically expanded the spaces of power managed by

[34] The relations between India and Great Britain, the bond of dependence of the former on the latter and the repercussions caused by this bond on Indian society are analysed in depth by Tomlinson. See his *India and the British Empire, 1880-1935*; *India and the British Empire, 1935-1947*, in «The Indian Economic and Social History Review», XIII (1976), 3, pp. 331-349; *The Political Economy of the Raj, 1914-1947. The Economics of Decolonization in India*, London, Macmillan, 1979; *Britain and the Indian Currency Crisis, 1930-1932*, in «The Economic History Review», new series, XXXII, 1 (February, 1979), pp. 88-99; *Britain and the Indian Currency Crisis, 1930-1932: A Reply*, in «The Economic History Review», new series, XXXIV, 2 (May, 1981), pp. 305-307; *The Contraction of England: National Decline and the Loss of Empire*, in «The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History», XI (1982), 1, pp. 58-72. The essential elements of his thesis were brilliantly summarized by Tomlinson himself in the short article *The Political Economy of the Raj: The Decline of Colonialism*, in «The Journal of Economic History», XLII (1982), 1, pp. 133-137, where the concept of imperial commitment is also clearly stated. In formulating his theses, Tomlinson had taken inspiration from ideas originally enunciated by John Gallagher during some conferences held in 1972 and 1973, reworked and published posthumously by Anil Seal only many years later. See J. Gallagher, A. Seal, *Britain and India between the Wars*, and J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire*, in Id., *The Decline, Revival, and Fall of the British Empire*, edited by A. Seal, pp. 73-153.

Indians. But, even after the implementation of the 1935 reforms, the British maintained under British central government ministries the use of most of the tax revenues, full control of both the army and foreign policy, and, finally, the "protection" of the Indian Civil Service – in particular of its apex – against possible political interference by Indian ministers. As if that were not enough, vast powers of intervention and veto, which could be used to condition the central parliament and the provincial legislative assemblies, remained in the hands of the viceroy and the provincial governors (the former appointed by London, and the latter appointed by the viceroy)[35].

8. *Anti-Colonial Mass Campaigns and Gandhi's Role*

An important aspect of the model described so far is the idea that the nationalist movement, far from being an autonomous force, of fundamental importance in determining the events of India in the last sixty years of the colonial era, was merely a dependent variable, a function of the institutional changes implemented by the colonial regime. In fact, according to the Cantabrigians, the policy of concessions implemented by the British was in no way determined by the need to cope with the pressures of the nationalist movement (representative or, at least, vanguard of the Indian people as a whole). Instead, this policy had its origins in the constraints imposed by the international context and the need not to displease the notables on whose alliance the fluid and economic functioning of the Indian Empire was based.

According to the Cantabrigians, the consequence of this situation was that the notables had a tendency to mobilize politically whenever the prospect of imminent institutional changes by their colonial masters arose. The unrest that historically occurred more or less in conjunction with the concessions made by the British were not, therefore, the cause of these reforms, but rather the consequence of the decision to implement them, a decision that was taken by the British regardless of the wishes of their Indian subjects. When this happened, the Indian notables, united in factions, tried to make use of all their political weight in order to obtain that the concessions in the making were not only the widest possible, but were shaped according to the interests of the faction to which the individual notables belonged, and, obviously, fashioned

[35] A. Seal, *Imperialism and Nationalism*, p. 331; B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, ch. 1.

in such a way to damage or, at least, not to favour the interests of the other factions. This entailed a characteristic dynamic, whereby the agitations, which arose at the moment in which it became clear that the British were planning institutional reforms, reached their maximum strength in the period which saw the reform process translated into legislative provisions. Immediately afterwards, there was a decline in the social following mobilized by the agitation, given that only a minority of the notables (made up of those who had been penalized by the new system) continued to protest. Often, this decline in social mobilization was accompanied by the radicalization of the techniques used by the agitators. The notables who remained in the field, in fact, had a tendency to go for broke, in the hope of inducing the British to rethink and modify the reforms already granted.

Although the Cantabrigians do not dwell on the analysis of this problem, it is well known that a key modality in the political behaviour of the colonial authorities was the strict adherence to the principle that the decisions of the *Raj* were not susceptible to being modified by the defiant attitude of those who were seen as nothing more than insubordinate subjects. Consequently, as a rule, the agitations led by the notables were fatally destined to reach a stalemate[36]. In fact, soon or later a point was reached when it became clear to all concerned that, no matter what the agitators did, the British would not retrace their steps. When this happened, even the dissident notables generally opted for inclusion in the new system, generously bestowed by the colonial masters, in an attempt to conquer at least part of the power that the new rules of the game had devolved to the Indians. At that point, of course, the anti-colonial agitation completely collapsed[37]. It is this dynamic that, according to the Cantabrigians, explains the widespread phenomenon whereby the same notables and the same politicians (who acted as spokesmen for the notables) were from time to time loyalists, moderate nationalists, extremists, loyalists again, and so on.

How does this type of explanation, apparently so narrow, elucidate both the great anti-colonial mass movements led by Gandhi in 1919, 1920-22 and 1930-34, and that sort of spontaneous revolution that was the Quit India movement of 1942? These were all agitations characterized by such a vast and

[36] But there were exceptions, caused, generally, by London's interference. A most noteworthy instance of this is the annulment of the partition of Bengal in 1912.

[37] This theme is developed above all by Washbrook and Baker. See D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics*; C.J. Baker, *The Politics of South India: 1920-37*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976; Id., *The Congress at the 1937 Elections in Madras*, in «Modern Asian Studies», X (1976), 4, pp. 557-589.

widespread popular following that it seems unconvincing to explain it only with the mobilization of the social clientele of the notables. At this point it must be kept in mind that, as far as the origins of nationalist agitations are concerned, the Cambridge School historians seem to oscillate between two interpretations. According to the first, it was the pure and simple announcement that a devolution of power was being studied that offered the opportunity and, at the same time, imposed the need on the various factions of notables to organize themselves politically to obtain as many political advantages as possible, while possibly denying them to their Indian opponents. According to the second line of interpretation, it was this fact plus the real repercussions unloaded upon Indian society as a whole both by the ongoing international crisis and its management by the colonial authorities that led to the mobilization of the various nationalist organizations and, in particular, of the most important of them, the Congress.

The above is not a trivial difference in interpretation. If we accept the first variant, it follows that the nationalist movement was always an elite affair. In the second case, on the contrary, it is clear that there was, at least to a certain extent and for certain periods, a participation of the masses in the struggle for independence. It follows that, had the Cantabrigians really emphasized the second type of explanation, they would have provided an explanation taking into its stride the existence of a mass following behind the anti-colonial campaigns. In practice, nonetheless, even those Cantabrigians who are aware of the relevance of the social repercussions produced by the great international crises, through the study of concrete cases, tend to corroborate the interpretative line according to which the great anti-colonial mass campaigns were nothing but a mere expression of the opportunism of the notables and their desire to broaden their own power or, at least, to protect their existing positions[38]. According to the Cantabrigians, the reasons for the (apparent) mass following of the anti-colonial agitations were others and, among them, Gandhi's role was of a certain importance (even if it had a completely different nature from that theorized by the historians of the 1960s).

The Cambridge School historians rightly highlight how India was an extremely vast and complex country, characterized at a local level by a multiplicity of tensions that the centralization process only exacerbated. This means that, at any given moment, there were numerous areas where, for the most

[38] This is the case, in particular, of Washbrook and Baker.

diverse reasons, more or less acute conflicts took place between opposing factions. During these conflicts, inevitably, some Indian notables relied on representatives of the colonial state, while others opposed them. It is against this background that Gandhi's political role can be explained. He is seen by the Cantabrigians as a politician characterized by many limitations and some qualities (which did not include either indifference towards power or coherence of political vision). In the Cantabrigians' considered opinion, among Gandhi's abilities was his great skill as a mediator, which enabled him to unite the exponents of the most varied interests around a single political platform. Furthermore, still according to the Cambridge School historians, Gandhi was gifted with an unrivalled illusionistic ability, which allowed him to present as the fruit of a single organized campaign, with coherent objectives, the multiple, disparate and often contradictory spontaneous explosions which occurred more or less continuously at the local level. Gandhi's limitations were that, in assembling his large and varied alliances of notables and politicians, he often ended up being led by them (and by some politicians in particular) rather than leading them. Not only that; his role was ultimately reduced to that of "broker" between these coalitions and the colonial government. Gandhi, therefore, was able to carry out his role of (apparent) leadership only when two developments took place at the same time. The first was the decision of his "followers" to give him a free rein; the second was the decision of the colonial government to consider Gandhi as useful in a role that, ultimately, consisted in facilitating the process of co-optation of the notables, of which he was the spokesperson, into the system created by the British[39].

In any case, beyond the evaluation to be given on Gandhi's abilities as a politician and his sincerity, the fact remains that the explanation that the Cantabrigians favour regarding the mass following of the anti-colonial campaigns is that it was more apparent than real. Apart from the mobilization of the clientele of the notables, the social following of the mass movements was the product of an illusion. This was achieved by presenting a set of spontaneous local agitations, caused by the process of centralization, as the response by the Indian people to the insensitivity of the colonial authorities towards the just demands of the nationalist movement[40]. Obviously, there was not

[39] E.g., D.A. Washbrook, *Gandhian Politics*, in «Modern Asian Studies», VII (1973), 1, pp. 107-115.

[40] A paradigmatic example of this interpretation is the study conducted by Baker on the non-cooperation campaign of 1920-22 in the Madras Presidency. See C.J. Baker, *Non-Cooperation in South India*, in C.J. Baker, D.A. Washbrook, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940*, Delhi, Macmillan, 1975, pp. 98-149.

always a coincidence between the times of the local agitations and those of the campaigns led by the Congress at the national level. This could lead to unpleasantly paradoxical situations; in certain cases, the agitation at the national level could abruptly lose momentum due to a temporary easing of tensions at the local level; in other cases, local unrest could resume forcefully at a time when the notables and their political representatives had opted for a return to the constitutional system[41].

9. *The Causes of the Collapse of the Colonial Regime*

The concept has already been reiterated that an element that differentiates the interpretation of the Cambridge School historians from the classic pro-colonial interpretation to which their historiographical production has often been compared is the idea, underlined in a manner devoid of any indecision and ambiguity, according to which, in granting political reforms, the British always had in mind the need to protect their own interests, so much so that, until the twenty-third hour, the idea of abandoning India in the foreseeable future was always far from their minds[42].

Given this attitude of the British and considering the fact that, as has been said, the Cambridge School historians consider the agitations led by the nationalist movement as something very similar to a series of sleights of hand by Gandhi and the Congress, aimed at obtaining on the part of the British the largest possible distribution of political alms, at first sight the Cambridge School interpretative model does not appear to offer a solution to the problem of the sudden collapse of colonial power in the second half of the 1940s. Despite this apparent difficulty – or perhaps because of it – the Cambridge School historians have given not one but two answers to this problem.

[41] This is a point underlined in A. Seal, *Imperialism and Nationalism*, pp. 345-346.

[42] For example, Tomlinson reports the significant exchange of letters which took place in 1939, on the eve of the war, between the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, and the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland. Linlithgow, referring to rumours then circulating in Bengal that the British intended to leave India within five years, wrote: «No one, of course, can say what, *in some remote period of time* or in the event of international convulsions of a particular character, may be the ultimate relations of India and Great Britain. But that there should be any general impression (if in fact it exists) that […] His Majesty's Government seriously contemplate evacuation [of India] *in any measurable period of time* […] seems to me astonishing». Zetland, albeit in more nuanced terms than those used by Linlithgow, responded by agreeing with the latter's ideas. This exchange of letters took place when there were only eight years left before the end of the *Raj*. See B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, pp. 140-141.

The first solution, proposed by Christopher Baker, is that the British committed a fatal error of evaluation when, with the *Government of India Act* of 1935, they granted complete autonomy to the provinces of British India, while radically expanding the electorate of the new provincial legislative councils. In promulgating the *Government of India Act*, the British aimed to co-opt and cage within a political system whose apex continued to be firmly controlled by London Indian notables and political forces, depriving the Congress of any political following. Accordingly, the electoral systems granted through the reforms of 1919 and 1935 were largely based on separate electorates, demarcated by ethnic-religious and corporate criteria, which had been conceived with the specific goal to favour the rise of a myriad of big and small parties. Furthermore, in 1935, the British were counting on the fact that the Congress, as had already happened in the case of the 1919 reforms, would refrain from entering an electoral contest created by the new reforms, which the Congress had fiercely opposed. What happened instead was that – quite unexpectedly, given the emphasis given in previous years to fighting techniques based on Gandhian civil disobedience – the Congress decided to opt for the electoral struggle.

In doing so, the Congress set as its overriding electoral objective the gathering of as many notables as possible behind its flag. For their part, the notables, faced with the difficulty represented by the presence of an active electorate much larger – and, therefore, much more difficult to control – than the one that had existed up until then, saw the convenience of making use of the organizational machine forged by the Congress during its campaigns of non-cooperation and civil disobedience.

This marriage between the Congress and the notables resulted, on the occasion of the provincial elections of 1937, in the victory of the Congress in eight of the eleven provinces into which British India was then divided. Even more important was the fact that, as was soon to become evident, this alliance was not transient, but became a constant in the Indian political landscape. This permanent change of camp on the part of the notables brought down the lintel on which the entire British colonial system in India rested. From then on, the days of the *Raj* were numbered[43].

[43] C.J. Baker, *The Politics of South India*; Id., *The Congress at the 1937 Elections in Madras*. The reasons for the unexpected change in the Congress's position on the question of whether or not to participate in the elections and, in case of victory, in the government of the provinces are analysed in detail in B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, ch. 2.

The other explanation for the causes that led to the collapse of colonial rule – an explanation that is more articulate and, in this writer's opinion, more convincing than Baker's – is the one given by Tomlinson on the basis of ideas originally presented by Gallagher at a seminar held in Cambridge in 1973. Also according to Tomlinson, that of 1937 was the key turning point, after which the end of the *Raj* became imminent and inevitable. However, it was not due to a misdirection; on the contrary, it represented the logical and inevitable development of a long-standing and, in fact, unstoppable process. That is, it was the moment when the quantitative change in the balance of power between the nationalist movement and the *Raj* – a change that had been going on for at least sixty years – reached such an entity that it became a qualitative change[44].

As mentioned, the British had set themselves the goal of containing the devolution of political-administrative powers to the Indians within a framework that entailed keeping absolute control of the key political levers of the system in British hands. But, according to Tomlinson (and Gallagher), the concessions made by the British developed a dynamic of their own, which, once the crisis that had motivated the granting of reforms had passed, meant that it became increasingly difficult to use India's resources for imperial purposes in the future.

One way to illustrate this dynamic is to take an example from the extensive range of cases illustrated by Tomlinson. Immediately after the First World War, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the crisis within Persia and the eclipse of Russia as a world power had presented Great Britain with the mirage of extending its direct control over much of the Middle East. The main obstacle to the realization of this enticing project was represented by the difficulty of making further demands on the British taxpayer, exhausted due to the sacrifices incurred during the war and, alas, endowed with the right to vote. As a result, the British rulers planned to use – as they had so often done in the past – the Indian army, financed by taxpayers who, although they also greatly penalized by the war effort, fortunately did not have the right to vote. This, that is, had been the situation until the reform of 1919. But now, in New Delhi, there existed a legislative assembly which, although elected on the basis

[44] Tomlinson analyses this process especially in the two articles on India and the British Empire, already quoted. From a theoretical point of view, his positions on this matter are made explicit in *The Contraction of England*. For Gallagher's contribution, from which Tomlinson draws inspiration, see J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival, and Fall*, pp. 73-153.

of narrow criteria of wealth and devoid of any power of legislative initiative and veto against the actions of the colonial government, could, on the basis of the criteria established by the British themselves, proclaim itself the representative of Indian public opinion. Even more important was the fact that, as the Indian Government well knew, the members of the legislative assembly actually represented the Indians who mattered, whose cooperation the colonial regime needed. Clearly, the members of the assembly and the notables for whom they were the spokesmen could not look favourably on the use of the Indian army – which, ultimately, was paid by them – for the pursuit of objectives completely unrelated to their interests. In the political context created following the reforms of 1919, the project cherished by London had become completely unworkable. As the Secretary of State for India noted in a minute dated 24 December 1920: «In short, we must definitely get out of our heads the vague idea too often entertained, that India is an inexhaustible reservoir from which men and money can be drawn towards the support of Imperial resources or in pursuance of Imperial strategy»[45].

The constraints created by the 1919 reforms were transformed into something like a straitjacket by those of 1935. The existence of this straitjacket could only be ignored when the colonial government's policy was not to act, as was the case in the final years of the 1930s, when the most acute phase of the great world economic crisis had been partly overcome. But the last and most serious crisis of the first half of the 20th century, the Second World War, forced the British to break the existing political balance, with catastrophic consequences for the colonial regime's chances of survival. Indeed, Tomlinson shows how, in the years from 1939 to 1945, the massive use of the Indian army on the battlefields of the Second World War caused serious political problems within India and had to be paid for by the British, willingly or unwillingly, with a commitment to political concessions which could not but entail independence in the short term.

This political cost, however, was not the only one that the British were forced to pay. Given the pre-war situation in India, the use of the Indian army was conditional on Britain paying for it. India, having been called upon to finance its own conquest by Britain, numerous British colonial wars, its own participation in the First World War and part of the British one, had always been heavily indebted to Britain. But, by 1945, India stopped to be indebted to

[45] B.R. Tomlinson, *India and the British Empire, 1880-1935*, p. 360.

Britain, becoming its creditor[46]. At that moment, as Tomlinson correctly concludes, the continuation of colonial rule in India was no longer an advantage for Britain, either politically, militarily or economically. The only logical thing to do was to leave, seeking other tools, other than colonial rule, to protect the remaining British interests in India. And that was exactly what the British did in 1947.

10. *The Role of Ideology: Nationalism and Fundamentalism*

These, therefore, are the fundamental traits that characterize the model proposed by the Cambridge School. It is easy to understand how such a radical revision as the one conducted by the Cantabrigians towards the interpretative categories prevalent until then could not fail to involve equally radical criticisms of many of the constituent elements of the new model and of the model itself as a whole. It has already been remembered that the majority of Indian historians rejected the model as a whole, as it was judged to be the re-proposal in disguise of the old colonialist historiography. But even the reaction of those who did not reject unconditionally the contribution of the Cantabrigians was far from being one of full adhesion. It is true that there was unanimous consensus in praising the breadth and meticulousness of the research conducted. Likewise, the Cantabrigians' description of the Indian political scene as divided into three levels – the locality, the province and the whole of British India, which were distinct from each other and characterized by different but interacting political realities – was accepted by the majority of the historians as an important contribution to a more correct understanding of India's history in the late colonial era. Apart from this, nonetheless, there was harsh criticism and substantial rejection of most of the key elements of the new scheme. What was attacked was the idea that politics in colonial India could be myopically seen as a sort of Pavlovian reaction to the administrative manipulations carried out by the British[47], that nationalist ideology had no real weight and that Indian politicians acted only in pursuit of short-term

[46] Tomlinson (*India and the British Empire, 1935-1947*, p. 344) recalls that «by 1946 Britain owed India more than £1,300 million, over 17 times the annual income of the Government of India and almost one fifth of Britain's gross national product».

[47] E.F. Irschick, Review of C.J. Baker, *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1976, in «Modern Asian Studies», XI, 4 (October, 1977), pp. 625-632.

personal gains[48], that Indian society was dominated by vertical patron-client structures[49], and that horizontal social organizations, including the Westernized middle class, were substantially irrelevant[50].

All these criticisms deserve to be re-proposed and discussed in detail. However, for reasons of conciseness and clarity, here I will limit myself to dealing with the issue that became the catalyst for all the attacks on the Cambridge School. This referred to the evaluation given by the Cantabrigians of the role of ideology. This is a particularly important theme, also because, implicitly, it included two others: Gandhi's role and the real political weight of the nationalist movement in determining the collapse of the colonial regime.

According to the interpretation of the Cantabrigians, the only thing that held together those varied and creaking coalitions that formed Indian political parties or movements in the era of nationalism was the pursuit on the part of their leaders of concrete short-term economic advantages, to be redistributed, at least in part, to their own followers. Ideology, therefore, played no role in the political positions taken by the leaders, who acted purely in the unscrupulous pursuit of personal advantages. It is true that ideology had its weight as an instrument for mobilizing the masses, but the ideology that really played a role in mobilizing the masses was not the ideology of nationalism but that of religious fundamentalism, both Hindu and Muslim. It was the unscrupulous use of the most primitive religious passions what mobilized large sections of the population, giving mass support to the requests of Indian politicians. These requests were articulated, when addressed to the British, in the Westernized language of nationalism, in order to give them an appearance of respectability, but were aimed, as has been said, not at the realization of patriotic ideals of a high ethical profile, but at obtaining concrete personal gains.

[48] E.g., E.F. Irschick, *Interpretations of Indian Political Development*, in «The Journal of Asian Studies», XXXIV (1975), 2, pp. 461-472; D.A. Low, *Whatever Happened to Indian Nationalism?*, in «Modern Asian Studies», IX (1975), 2, pp. 261-265; M. Torri, *Social System and Ideology in South India*, in «Economic and Political Weekly», 16 July 1977, pp. 1144-1148; R.E. Frykenberg, *Reconstructing the History of South India*, in «Modern Asian Studies», XII (1978), 4, pp. 687-701; T. Raychaudhuri, *Indian Nationalism as Animal Politics*, in «The Historical Journal», XXII (1979), 3, pp. 747-763.

[49] E.g., B. Robert, *Economic Change and Agrarian Organization in "Dry" South India, 1890-1940: A Reinterpretation*, in «Modern Asian Studies», XVII (1983), 1, pp. 59-78.

[50] E.g., S. Gopal, Reviews of C.J. Baker, D.A. Washbrook, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change, 1880-1940*, Delhi, Macmillan, 1975, C.J. Baker, *The Politics of South India, 1920-1937*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1976, and D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics, 1880-1920*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1977, in «The Indian Economic and Social History Review», XIV (1977), 3, pp. 405-411, and R.K. Ray, *Political Change in British India*, *ibid.*, XIV (1977), 4, pp. 493-527.

The above portrait, however, in addition to being ungenerous and provocative, is clearly absurd. First of all, turning all the major nationalist politicians into unscrupulous opportunists does not take into account the fact that, as a rule, they were individuals for whom the decision to take the field against the colonial regime, far from bringing short-term or medium-term advantages, entailed immediate and considerable costs. The majority of the nationalist leaders – some of whom were members of rich and influential families – were people who had achieved positions of prestige and wealth thanks to the exercise of professions such as journalism or law, before entering politics[51]; in other cases, these were people who, without a shadow of a doubt, would have had no difficulty in conquering positions of prestige and wealth if, instead of dedicating themselves to full-time anti-British politics, had maintained a loyalist or, simply, a not hostile stand towards the colonial power.

Most of these politicians paid for their decision to challenge the *Raj* by renouncing their wealth[52] and those positions that were offered to non-opponents of the colonial system. These were far from irrelevant and included appointments such as advisors to the viceroy or provincial governors, judges of the High Court and vice-chancellors of universities. The power and prestige conferred by these offices could also be made more attractive by the conferment of titles of nobility – not only those specifically created for the subjects of the Indian Empire, such as Rao Bahadur, but those traditionally bestowed by the British monarchy to the British citizens[53]. On the contrary, in the years from the end of the First World War to the end of the Second, the nationalist choice entailed an austere life devoid of any comfort, police persecutions, and dismissals from positions and jobs controlled by the colonial state. In certain cases, there was a risk of confiscation of property and, in some cases, even the loss of life itself. Finally, inevitably, the choice of active opposition to the colonial regime entailed years of prison.

If, therefore, the accusation of opportunism against the leaders of the nationalist movement is to be rejected without hesitation, the discussion regard-

[51] Among the numerous examples that can be cited, there are those of Motilal Nehru and Gandhi himself.

[52] Wealth that was confiscated by the colonial power (as, for example, in the case of the Nehrus) or spontaneously distributed to the nation (as in the case of Chitta Ranjan Das, the Bengali leader).

[53] Among the best-known Indian public figures who preferred to play the parts of the fox and the prince's advisor rather than the lion and the rebel there were Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru and Satyendra Sinha. The latter was the only Indian who, after a spectacular *cursus honorum* which saw him governor of one of the provinces of the Anglo-Indian Empire in the 1920s, received the title of Lord.

ing the role of ideology at a mass level is more complex. Undoubtedly, before the rise of the Cambridge School, there was an underestimation of the role and importance of religious fundamentalist ideologies in the development of Indian political movements in the late colonial era. Many historians of the 1950s and 1960s, following a path traced in his time by an illustrious Indian historian-cum-politician, Kavalam Madhava Panikkar, saw Hinduism as a religion which, during the 19th century, went through a phase of complete regeneration, getting rid of all those encrustations of backwardness, irrationalism and fanaticism which had disfigured it even during the first half of that century[54]. According to this type of interpretation, in the second half of the 19th century Hinduism became an eminently rational and activist doctrine, in short one of the main forces of renewal present in Indian society during the late colonial period[55]. This conception had the result of completely obliterating from historiographical memory the fact that the undoubted process of renewal of Hinduism, begun in the first decades of the 19th century by Ram Mohan Roy, was soon followed by an even more vigorous process of restoration of traditional Hinduism. As the Cantabrigians rightly note, this process of restoration was made possible by the use of both traditional techniques, as the preaching of holy men and the organization of religious festivities, and, paradoxically, techniques made available by the process of modernization, such as the utilization of newspapers and modern means of communication, such as the railway and the telegraph, together with the creation and deployment of cultural-political associations. The moment of aggregation of many of these activities aimed at the restoration of traditional Hinduism were the campaigns for the protection of the cow, which, as the Cantabrigians underline, starting from the 1880s became something very similar to a mass phenomenon in the wide geographical area including the United Provinces, Bihar and the Central Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh – a geographical area which even today, symptomatically, is referred to as the

[54] E.g., K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1953, part 6a, section 2; Id., *Hinduism and the West. A Study in Challenge and Response*, Chandigarh, Punjab University Publication Bureau, 1964. For an in-depth analysis of Panikkar's political career and intellectual contributions, see M. Elli, R. Paolini, *Indian National Identity and Foreign Policy: Re-Evaluating the Career of K.M. Panikkar (1894-1963*), Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.

[55] For a solitary voice who argued against this type of interpretation before the appearance of Cambridge School, see S. Chandra, *Hindu Conservatism in the Nineteenth Century*, in «Economic and Political Weekly», 12 December 1970. See also, again by Sudhir Chandra, a second article on the same topic, written ten years later: *Secular Potential of Early Indian Nationalism*, *ibid*., 26 April 1980.

cow belt)[56]. To what has been said by the Cantabrigians it is worth adding that the reform movements themselves – the typical case is that of the Arya Samaj – truly became mass phenomena to the extent that they conformed to many of the aspects of "counter-reformist" Hinduism[57].

In conclusion, there is no doubt that fundamentalist religious ideologies penetrated deeply into Indian society and, consequently, into the Congress rank and file (which explains, at least in part, the growing difficulties between the Congress and Indian Muslims). This, nonetheless, does not necessarily mean either that all, or even the majority, of Indian political leaders used religious ideology in an instrumental way, or that nationalist ideology did not have its own capacity to mobilize the masses, completely independent of any use of slogans of a religious nature. There are indeed clear cases of Indian political leaders who, being sceptics on a personal level, nevertheless used religion as a tool for the mobilization of a mass following[58]. However, in the vast majority of cases, there is no reason not to believe – on the contrary there are many reasons to be convinced – that those who used religion in politics did not do so in an instrumental manner but on the basis of profound personal convictions[59]. As regards, then, the capacity of nationalist ideology to mobilize the masses, historians have highlighted how the campaigns led by Gandhi involved hundreds of thousands of people and resulted in the detention, sometimes for years, of tens of thousands of activists, the confiscation of their properties and thousands of deaths, due to fire or beatings by the colonial police.

It should be noted that the systematic underestimation of nationalist ideology leads the Cantabrigians to some revealing incidents along the way. Elsewhere I have highlighted how Washbrook makes a factual error in re-

[56] This phenomenon has been analysed mainly by Francis Robinson and Christopher Bayly. For an investigation on the same topic conducted by an American historian, see A.A. Yang, *Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-Cow Killing" Riot of 1893*, in «Comparative Studies in Society and History», XXII (1980), 4, pp. 577-596.

[57] Already in the 1960s and 1970s, this implicitly emerged from a careful reading of existing analyses of the evolution of the various Hindu reform movements in the late colonial era. See, for example, C.H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1964; K.W. Jones, *Arya Dharm. Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1976; Id., *Social Change and Religious Movements in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, in M.S.A. Rao, ed., *Social Movements in India*, vol. II, New Delhi, Manohar, 1979, pp. 1-16.

[58] Two exemplary cases are those of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mohammad Ali Jinnah. But even the cases of Tilak and Jinnah cannot be dismissed in a too hasty and simplistic manner like those of two opportunist politicians. In the opinion of this writer, both, although personally sceptical on a religious level, identified deeply with Hinduism and Islam respectively, understood as cultures.

[59] Here Gandhi's case is exemplary.

constructing an episode in which, consistently with the preconceptions of the Cantabrigians, an Indian politician is described as an opportunist who, nonchalantly, switched from nationalist to loyalist positions, in the pursuit of his own personal gain[60]. Here, it is perhaps not useless to focus on another example which demonstrates how the ideological prejudices of the Cambridge School historians contributed to obscuring the evident role of nationalist ideology as an instrument of mass mobilization. This was a role which, by the way, if one reads the work of the Cantabrigians carefully, is confirmed by their own writings.

11. *The Role of Ideology: the Case of the Turning Point of the 1930s*

We have already recalled the centrality in the analysis of the Cantabrigians of the turning point that occurred as a consequence of the provincial elections of 1937, called following the introduction of the *Government of India Act* of 1935, which granted complete self-government to the provinces of India. Tomlinson and Baker reiterate the well-known fact that the objective of the 1935 law was to encourage the emergence of a multitude of parties on regional, corporate and confessional bases, broadening a trend which had been already present since the reforms of 1909 and of 1919.

The prosecution of this objective aimed at the fragmentation of the Indian political forces, in particular reducing the strength and legitimacy of the Congress, so as to deny its claim to be the sole representative and spokesperson of the Indian people. In a situation characterized by the presence of a multiplicity of parties, the governors of the provinces (who were high officials of the colonial bureaucracy, appointed at the sole discretion of the viceroy and endowed with extensive powers of initiative and veto) could have played a decisive role in the formation and maintenance of regional governments. As has already been recalled, what instead happened was that the Congress gained a resounding electoral victory, emerging as the party with the absolute majority

[60] The episode concerns P.S. Sivaswami Iyer, who organized the Moderate Conference in Madras, in opposition to the Home Rule movement led by Annie Besant. According to Washbrook (*The Emergence of Provincial Politics*, p. 311), Sivaswami Iyer switched from a position of support for the Besant movement to one of hostility when this gave him hope of obtaining the favour of British official circles. In reality, archival sources I consulted demonstrate that Iyer, far from having initially been favourable to the objectives of the Home Rule movement, had never shared nationalist political positions and, consequently, had always been hostile to the Besant-led Home Rule movement (M. Torri, *Social System and Ideology in South India*, p. 1147).

in five provinces, coming close to this result in another (with 49% of the seats) and obtaining the relative majority in two others. Furthermore, the Congress' participation proved indispensable to the formation of any government in yet another province. Ultimately, the Congress came to power in nine of the eleven Indian provinces, while the party's central committee – the Congress Working Committee – became India's shadow government.

What were the reasons for this turning point? In the analysis of the Cambridge School historians, the electoral victory of 1937 was the result, as already explained, of the alliance between the Congress and the notables who dominated Indian society at the local level. The Congress, which lucidly placed this alliance as a key objective of its electoral strategy, selected its candidates on the basis of three principles. The first involved the acceptance of the "creed" of the Congress, which set as the overriding goal of its political strategy the achievement of independence, albeit in an indeterminate future. The second favoured those potential candidates who were able to self-finance their electoral campaign. The third favoured the choice, as candidates, of those who, objectively, already had a strong probability of winning in any case.

As in the India of the 1930s there was basically no one who found the achievement of independence objectionable, these principles meant that the Congress had decided to offer its support to those candidates who already had a concrete personal basis of political influence (the third principle) and economic power (the second principle).

The Cantabrigians argue that while the advantages that the Congress could gain from fielding rich and politically influential candidates are immediately obvious, it should not be forgotten that the help offered to the latter by the Congress was itself noteworthy. As Tomlinson argues, this consisted in the possibility of using the organizational structure of the Congress as an electoral machine. This was an organizational structure that had no equal in India and that was made additionally valuable by a political context characterized by the radical enlargement of the active electorate compared to that of the previous twenty years[61]. In the words of Tomlinson,

> Congress politicians, skilled in the mass canvassing techniques of agitational politics and in getting out the votes for the Congress elections, and supported by an army of political work-

[61] As Tomlinson recalls, in 1919, the active electorate in provincial elections was 7,049,372 people throughout India, or 2.75% of the population. In 1937, the active electorate was increased to 35,982,000, or 13.3% of the population (B.R. Tomlinson, *The Indian National Congress and the Raj*, p. 71).

> ers, had an immense advantage. In a country such as India – with a largely pre-industrial, peasant economy, slow communications and a low literacy rate – merely printing new franchise qualifications was no guarantee at all that a significant number of the new electorate was aware of their powers, much less use them. So the first priority of Congress campaign-managers was to ensure that as many as possible of the voters were informed of their rights by Congress workers. This accomplished, the canvassing machine went into top gear and bands of white-capped, *khaddar*-clad volunteers became a feature of the rural landscape[62].

Tomlinson's thesis undoubtedly represents a possible explanation for the unexpected victory of the Congress but, certainly, not the only possible one and, perhaps, not even the most convincing. To be persuaded of this, it is enough to reflect on the fact that, according to the official report published by the Government of India on the elections, the Congress obtained the highest share of seats in absolute and relative value (74%) in the Madras Presidency, a region where, notoriously, the organizational structure of the Congress was extremely weak. Furthermore, in the United Provinces and Bihar, voter turnout was the same in both the general electorates and those reserved for Muslims only. This despite the fact that the Congress, which in those provinces did not present candidates for the seats reserved for Muslims, had not carried out any form of electoral campaign among the Muslim electorate.

All this becomes less disconcerting if we assume the following:

a) a decisive element in the victory of the Congress was, indeed, the decision of the notables to embrace its cause;
b) this decision was *not* based on the desire to have the support of the electoral machinery of the Congress (and, in fact, it can be argued that, in many areas, especially rural ones, it was the notables who set up their own organizational machinery, formally part of the Congress);
c) what pushed the notables to enthusiastically accept the alliance proposed by the Congress was the desire – and political convenience – to be able to make use of the prestigious mantle of nationalist ideology, of which the Congress had become the only legitimate spokesperson.

The counterproof of the validity of this thesis is that the Congress won where it had the support of the notables, even if the party organization was weak (as, indeed, in Madras) and lost where the notables and the socially dominant elites did not support it (as in Punjab and Bengal), even if its organizational machinery was apparently strong (as, again, was the case in Bengal).

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 72.

The problem here is that the Cambridge historians, flattening their interpretation on that given at the time by the senior bureaucrats of the Indian Civil Service, do not realize – just as the English Civilians in the late 1930s had not – that, at the time, nationalist ideology was no longer (as it had been on the eve of the First World War) the exclusive preserve of a small group of Westernized intellectuals, but had penetrated deeply into extensive strata of the social body. The Home Rule movement led by Annie Besant and Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and, to a greater extent, the non-violent mass campaigns launched by Gandhi in the twenty years preceding the 1937 elections, had brought about a true cultural revolution. The mantle of legitimacy, which once covered the colonial power, had now passed onto the shoulders of Congress[63]. It is probable that the notables who accepted the candidacy in Congress during the 1937 elections made their choice on the basis of selfish considerations; and it is even possible that, as Tomlinson maintains, the decision of those congressmen who, in 1940, following Gandhi's instructions, offered themselves as volunteers for the English prisons, once again did so because of opportunistic considerations. But this only goes to show that nationalist ideology had become a political force so important – evidently due to its ability to determine the behaviour of the electorate – that an ambitious politician would literally prefer to go to prison rather than ignore it.

12. *The Two-Faced Cambridge School's Model*

At this point, after this excursus on the problem of ideology, it is necessary to return to the examination of the overall interpretative model proposed by the Cambridge School, giving an overall judgment of its heuristic capacity. The model created by the Cantabrigians can be seen as divided into two parts. On the one hand there is the description of Indian society, whose characterizing elements are seen as: (a) the presence of clientelist structures headed by notables, (b) the opportunism of these notables and their political representatives and (c) the irrelevance of Gandhi, the Congress and nationalist ideology. On the other hand, there is the identification and analysis of the colonial link between Great Britain and India and the consequences of this link on Indian

[63] But it was a legitimacy which was not accepted by the Indian Muslims. From the late 1930s, as far as the Indian Muslim community is concerned, the mantle of legitimacy was donned by Jinnah's Muslim League.

society and political system. Even from the synthetic re-proposition of the Cambridge School model made here, it appears clear that there is a certain degree of discrepancy between these two parts: regardless of any other consideration, the description of Indian society made by the Cantabrigians can convey the impression that no fundamental antagonism existed between it and the colonial regime. However, the analysis conducted by the Cantabrigians on the colonial bond uniting India to Great Britain in a position of dependence conveys a completely different picture, as it cannot help but unequivocally reveal the fundamental contradiction existing between the maintenance of the colonial system and the well-being of Indian society, including those privileged indigenous social groups, whose collaboration was necessary to maintain the colonial bond.

All this means that we are confronted with a two-faced model. There is no doubt that the analysis of Indian society, whose fundamental interpretative elements are largely the work of Washbrook, lends itself to the construction of a pro-colonial and anti-nationalist scheme. On the other hand, the analysis of colonial dependence, carried out especially by Tomlinson, if taken to its logical consequences, can only be devastating for any pro-colonialist and anti-nationalist stance. By a singular irony, those who were decried as the late intellectual followers of colonialist historiography, dragged by the breadth and depth of their work, ended up giving counter-proof of the importance and accuracy of that theory of imperialism, or drain theory, developed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, altogether independently of Karl Marx, by the first and most brilliant theorists of Indian nationalism: Romesh Chunder Dutt and Dadabhai Naoroji. In reaching this result, the Cantabrigians have highlighted the mechanisms through which, historically, the bond of dependence, already identified and described by Dutt and Naoroji, revealed its nature of fundamental contradiction. It was a fundamental contradiction which eventually disintegrated, in successive waves, the very foundations of colonial domination.

Here it is worth noting that, during the bitter debate of the 1970s for and against the Cambridge School, this second aspect of the Cantabrigians model went virtually unnoticed. A possible explanation for this is the fact that Tomlinson's writings appeared later than both Seal's famous article and the bulk of not only Washbrook's production, but also that of Robinson's and Baker's, who reiterated the theses and the particular *Weltanschauung* so well exemplified by Seal's essay and by the entire monographic issue of «Modern Asian Studies» in which it appeared. Furthermore, Tomlinson himself, in his first

book, seemed to uncritically espouse Washbrook's basic theses. Only in the simultaneous publication of two dense articles (symptomatically in an Indian journal, the prestigious «Indian Economic and Social History Review») and in the subsequent publication of a second book and a series of articles, inspired more by Gallagher's unpublished conferences than by the elaboration of Washbrook, Baker and Robinson, Tomlinson gave the necessary emphasis to the bond of colonial dependence (already foreshadowed by Washbrook) and highlighted its consequences for Indian society.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Tomlinson's entry into the field did not save the Cambridge School historians from the accusation of pro-colonialism and from the harsh criticisms which hit practically all the constituent elements of their analysis of Indian society. Now, after such a long time, it is possible to examine with detachment the overall value of the contribution of the Cantabrigians. In any case, their extensive and in-depth research has brought to light a series of very important information and data, which need to be reused. Apart from this, once we leave aside as (rightly) irrelevant both certain moralistic judgments on the honesty of individuals and the clearly over-the-top emphasis on short-term personal interests as the driving force of Indian politics, what emerges from the Cantabrigians' research acquires a new configuration and a very different relevance once Tomlinson's analysis of British imperialism and its relations with Indian society is taken into account. Even the model's major deficiency, the irrelevance of nationalist ideology, can be overcome when taking into account Tomlinson's analysis of the bond of colonial dependency tying India to Britain. Nationalist ideology was the way in which this dependency and its undoubted negative consequences for Indian society were described by nationalist politicians. Not by chance, nationalist ideology spread on a mass level to the extent and at the times in which the bond of colonial dependence became the conduit of increasingly devastating shocks for Indian society as a whole.

In conclusion, the overly critical and provocative tone of much of the Cambridge School's scholarly output should not lead us to throw a number of contributions of exceptional importance and depth into the dustbin of historiography. Their reuse in the light of necessary critical considerations can only be a decisive contribution to a better understanding of the history of India in the late colonial era. It is the hope of this author that this modest essay may be a stimulus in this direction.

9
Recent Developments in the Tradition of the Cambridge School of Imperial and Colonial History*

Teodoro Tagliaferri

1. *Overcoming Eurocentrism: the First Step*

One of the chief sources to have inspired the international revival and renewal of world history, which has been going on for about thirty years now, must certainly be located in the reconceptualization in a polycentric key that has invested, during the same period, the field of studies dealing with "The Expansion of Europe"[1].

This expression refers to the object of investigation and teaching privileged by a well-defined scientific and academic tradition, predominantly British or pan-Britannic, but with significant ramifications also elsewhere, like in the United States and the Netherlands, whose path has been followed, in earlier stages of their career, by paradigmatic exponents of the new world and global history like Christopher Bayly and John Darwin[2].

It is worth trying to outline a summary profile of this scholarly tradition because the works of its today's best heirs suggest historiographical ideas which seem to me very useful in order to emancipate the ongoing controversy about the role of Europe in the history of the modern and contemporary world from the *aut/aut* in which this debate, especially here in Italy, risks too often to become entangled. I intend to refer to the false alternative between the polemical demand of «provincializing Europe» (which has been advanced

* This essay is the revised English translation of T. Tagliaferri, *L'espansione europea nella prospettiva della nuova storia globale*, in «Il mestiere di storico. Rivista della Società Italiana per lo Studio della Storia Contemporanea», XI (2019), 1, pp. 5-25.

[1] On the theoretical and ethical-political premises of the development of world history in the past thirty or forty years, see T. Tagliaferri, *Christopher Bayly e «the Return of Universal History»*, in Id., *La persistenza della storia universale. Studi sulla professione di storico*, Rome, Bordeaux, 2017, pp. 13-72.

[2] C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004; J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*, London, Allen Lane, 2007.

in particular by the Indian postcolonial and subalternist historian Dipesh Chakrabarty) and the uncritical re-proposal, in reaction to the radical assault against Eurocentrism, of a notion of European centrality which is undoubtedly in need of a profound rethinking[3].

"The Expansion of Europe" is actually the name of a prestigious and long-lived examination paper set up by the Cambridge History Department in 1945. It echoed pretty obviously the phrase "The Expansion of England", that is the title of a famous course of lectures held in Cambridge at the beginning of the 1880s by the founding father of the British imperial historiography, John Robert Seeley[4].

At the end of the 1970s the examination was split into a first part, which kept the old denomination of "The Expansion Europe", and a second part dedicated to the period after 1918, entitled "The West and the Third World" (but popularly known as "the West and the Rest"). And the first part is the direct ancestor of the current (2019) Paper Twenty One of the Historical Tripos, "Empires in World History", which corresponds to the World History course dealing with the period from the Iberian colonization of the New World to the Great War (the Historical Tripos being the name given to the series of written examinations which have to be passed by undergraduate students in order to obtain the bachelor's degree in History at Cambridge)[5].

According to the original program approved by the Council of the Faculty of History in April 1945 (a few weeks before the end of the Second Word War in Europe), the courses related to the European expansion would have dealt «in outline with the political, economic and cultural contacts of the principal countries of Europe – including Russia – with the remainder of the world in the period since 1400» to the present. The subject-matter of the teaching is de-

[3] See D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, and, for a recent example of an extreme form of historiographical Eurocentrism, J.B. Hirst *Breve storia d'Europa. Le origini, gli eventi e i personaggi*, translated into Italian by R. Serù, Milan, Bompiani, 2017 (original edition *The Shortest History of Europe*, Collingwood, Black, 2012), which on the cover promises to give the reader «an essential distillation of facts and characters from the Old Continent and *how have determined the fate of the whole of humanity*» (my italics). On the whole question, see A. Stanziani, *Eurocentrism and the Politics of Global History*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillam, 2018.

[4] J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England. Two Courses of Lectures*, London, Macmillan, 1883; T. Tagliaferri, Greater Britain, *Stati Uniti, India nella visione imperiale di John R. Seeley*, in Id., *La nazione, le colonie, il mondo. Saggi sulla cultura imperiale britannica (1861-1947)*, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018, pp. 51-147.

[5] R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge,1881-1981: Founding Fathers and Pioneer Research Students*, in «Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History», XXIX (2001), 3, pp. 75-103, reprinted in Id., *Understanding the British Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 479, 486.

scribed in a list of contents that can be read in *The Student's Handbook to the University and Colleges of Cambridge* for 1947. These are the great

> voyages of exploration; the relevant missionary, humanitarian and political movements; the development of overseas trade and investment; the reaction of extra-European countries to European influence, including the effects on peasant economy of the opening of international markets and the industrialization of colonial territories; the foundation of colonial empires, with the general features of the imperial policy of the principal European countries; the problems of native self-government; international relations in the colonial sphere, with the relevant military and naval history[6].

In the next decade also the organization of the research at Cambridge was formally adapted to the introduction of this remarkable didactic innovation, with the launch of a specific research seminar on the history of European expansion[7].

But in order to fully grasp the meaning and the historiographical implications of these initiatives, it is essential to dwell for a few moments on the motivations put forward by their academic supporters and on the intellectual attitudes of some of the initial architects of their successful and rapid taking roots.

Among the latter, a prominent place certainly has to be given to the young John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, the two eminent revisionist historians of British imperialism. Starting in 1953 (the same year in which they jointly published a very influential article written in four hands on *The Imperialism of the Free Trade* in the «Economic History Review»), and for about thirty years, Gallagher and Robinson held for the most part, simultaneously or in turn, the two introductory courses on the fundamental outlines of the European expansion before and after 1850, namely the series of lectures dedicated to the synthetic presentation and macro-historical contextualization of the phenomenon of the European expansion[8].

According to the proponents, the need to introduce the systematic study of the European expansion stemmed from the blatant inability of the colonial

[6] *The Student's Handbook to the University and Colleges of Cambridge*, Supplement for 1946-47, Cambridge, University Press, 1947, p. 99; *Statutes of the University of Cambridge and Passages from Acts of Parliament relating to the University; Ordinances of the University of Cambridge, to 1 October 1952*, Cambridge, University Press, 1952, p. 206.

[7] Even the «Seminar in Commonwealth and European Expansion» created by Nicholas Mansergh in 1958 is regarded by Hyam as «the forerunner of today's World History Seminar» (*The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, p. 487).

[8] *Ibid*., p. 483. See J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, in «The Economic History Review», new series, VI (1953), 1, pp. 1-15; P. Di Gregorio, *«Il più grande impero che il mondo abbia mai conosciuto»: alle origini del revisionismo sull'imperialismo britannico*, in «Storica», XIV (2008), 41-42, pp. 89-122.

and imperial history that was taught at Cambridge to provide satisfactory answers to the questions raised by the momentous changes which were underway in the «European position in Asia and Africa» on the eve of decolonization. Many pupils and young teachers and researchers, including Gallagher and Robinson themselves, had recently had the opportunity of personally experiencing these epochal changes by serving in the armed forces on the different non-European fronts of the Second World War. In their diagnosis, the fault of colonial history was its excessive concentration on the «imperial factor» and neglect of the role played by the colonized people, whom the events of the war and its aftermath were bringing to the fore[9].

The adoption of the broader category of "European expansion", in the place of that of "Expansion of England", responded first of all to a need of relativization and demythization of the British imperial experience[10]. But it was intended also to remedy a too narrow conception of colonial history still mostly focused in an almost exclusive manner on the victorious protagonism of European actors, so that – to quote the testimony of Christopher Bayly referring to the state of things which subsisted at Oxford until the 1960s – «Indians and Africans were rarely more than a backdrop to the doings of colonizers, missionaries and merchants»[11].

One of the main purposes of the introduction of the new paper was therefore to widen the analytical context in which the empire-building processes and the different types of European presence and influence in the world had to be studied, so as to include within it the contribution of non-European forces which were recognized now able to interact dynamically with the Europeans and to condition the deployment and the outcomes of their colonial initiatives.

A well-known historiographical exemplification of this approach, and of its vast methodological repercussions, is offered to us by the much-debated theory of imperialism advanced by Gallagher and Robinson themselves. An essential element of this theory is its vigorous emphasis on the «Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism». According to them, even at the

[9] J.W. Davidson, *The Study of Pacific History*, An Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Camberra on 25 November 1954, Camberra, The Australian National University, 1955, pp. 7, 9; R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, p. 482.

[10] On Imperial History as a source of legitimation for Victorian colonialism see T. Tagliaferri, *Legitimizing Imperial Authority: Greater Britain and India in the Historical Vision of John R. Seeley*, in «Storia della Storiografia», LVI (2012), 1, pp. 75-91.

[11] C.A. Bayly, *What is Third World History?*, in J. Gardiner, ed., *What is History Today?*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, p. 158.

height of the so-called «triumph […] of European domination» in the final decades of the long 19th century, British and European expansion and colonial power constantly depended on a multitude of forms of «collaboration», and therefore of compromise and negotiation, actively involving non-Europeans, albeit in a subordinate position[12].

Later research influenced by the so-called Cambridge School has showed, among other things, how the imperative necessity of making sectors of the elites and other key strata of the native societies willing participants in the formal or informal control of the non-European peoples gave imperial government and domination the character of a «cross-cultural enterprise»[13]. This crucial circumstance offers a plausible explanation of why the representations of the non-European "otherness" that can be found in the rhetoric of official legitimation of the imperial authority elaborated in the European Metropolis usually abstain from resorting (at least in the British case) to the most derogatory stereotypes of cultural differentialism and biological racism (even James Mill's derogatory representation of the Hindus in his 1817 *History of British India* didn't deny, after all, the possibility that the Hindus could be ultimately civilized) or to the language of the Kiplingean «white man's burden». This partially contradicts, or renders indispensable to rectify, Edward Said's well-known thesis about the relationship between colonial culture and colonial power. The exercise of colonial power did not necessarily imply the utter stigmatization of the colonized. We can see therefore how, in this important instance, the awareness of the interactive nature of the relationship of colonial power reveals itself an essential prerequisite for a truly historical, non-ideological approach to the theme of the culture of imperialism, risen to the top of the agenda of the European and American studies in the last generation[14].

At the very beginnings of the Cambridge School we may recognize therefore that very propensity to organically connect within the same interpretative framework the dynamics unfolding in the European and non-European scenarios of expansion, which we found, in a more developed form, in the work

[12] R.E. Robinson, *Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration,* in R. Owen, B. Sutcliffe, eds., *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, London, Longman, pp. 117-142, translated into Italian by S. Calamandrei and F. Grillenzoni in *Studi sulla teoria dell'imperialismo: dall'analisi marxista alle questioni dell'imperialismo contemporaneo*, Turin, Einaudi, 1977, pp. 137-169; P. Villani, *Trionfo e crollo del predominio europeo. XIX/XX secolo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1983.

[13] L. Colley, *Captives. Britain, Empire and the World, 1600-1850*, London, Cape, 2002, p. 371.

[14] T. Tagliaferri, *La cultura metropolitana e il mito di legittimazione dell'Impero britannico (1858-1947). Saggio d'interpretazione*, Napoli, Giannini, 2015.

of Christopher Bayly[15] and which we will find in John Darwin's book on the global empires discussed below. This methodological attitude suggests a second qualifying aspect of the «Expansion studies» paradigm[16], on which I would like to draw attention, and that I would define, in a first approximation, the synoptic ambition cultivated by the major exponents of the Cambridge tradition.

It is highly probable, of course, that the appeal exercised by the newborn discipline of "The Expansion of Europe" after the Second World War reflected, to a large extent, a growing interest for the knowledge of the extra-European worlds. The Expansion of Europe course provided the students with one of the rare opportunities to pursue this interest in the English universities at the time. We see here the prodromes of a trend that from the mid-1960s would have continued in the most congenial form of the disciplinary autonomization of the regional studies (the so called area studies)[17].

The fact remains that the Expansion of Europe course had been conceived and would have been kept alive, until its explicit transmutation in the World History course which is presently (2019) taught at Cambridge, for a more specific institutional purpose. This didactic aim was to delineate the wider world historical and comparative horizon within which the more specialized teaching and study dealing with individual non-European regions or the history of the British Empire and Commonwealth would have to find their place[18].

At the heart of the idea of «universal history» that informed the thought of the Cambridge historians after the Second World War, it is easy to see a persistent tendency to imagine the European expansion as a «many-sided» but intrinsically unitary phenomenon and to identify it, at the same time, with the vector of a process of «unification of the world» which, in the contemporary era, had reached the critical phase of its fulfillment. This tendency dated back to the 19th-century historiography (Seeley himself, the founding father of imperial history as an academic discipline, had been one among its foremost exponents during the Victorian age) and had recently resurfaced, in an updated form, in the writings of Arnold J. Toynbee[19].

[15] T. Tagliaferri, *Bayly's Imperial Way to World History*, in M. Griffo, T. Tagliaferri, eds., *From the History of the Empire to World History. The Historiographical Itinerary of Christopher A. Bayly*, Naples, Federico II University Press, 2019, pp. 69-113.

[16] R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, p. 498, n. 19.

[17] *Ibid*., pp. 473, 485, 495.

[18] T. Tagliaferri, *Christopher Bayly*, pp. 34-35.

[19] A.J. Toynbee, *The Unification of the World and the Change in Historical Perspective*, The Creighton Lecture in History for 1947-1948, delivered at the University of London, 17 November 1947, in «History», new series,

Even for Gallagher and Robinson, in fact, the «expanding» entity, driven by the «expansive energies of Europe», and in particular of the British industrial society, was properly the «Western civilization»; and the various dimensions of its expansion had to be regarded as «radiations» in different shapes of the same «social energies», and constituted therefore «interconnected» «parts» of a «whole. Within this «totality», the European imperialism assumed a more informal or formal character according to the variable conditions of the extra-European areas which the civilizational movement impacted in its worldwide advance. Considered as an aspect of the expansion of Europe so conceived, British and European or Western imperialism fulfilled «the political function» of «integrating new regions» if and when its help was needed to this purpose – as it was not at all inevitable that always happened[20].

In its holistic impetus, the Cambridge School also conceives the temporal manifestations of the expansion of Europe as moments in a single centuries-old sequence of events that embraces together both the modern and the contemporary ages and requires an appropriate internal periodization of its own. The historians belonging to this tradition see the ubiquitous spatial manifestations, both material and ideal, of the European expansion, as ramifications of «one great» geohistorical «movement»[21]. The national subcurrents

XXXIII (1948), 1-2, pp. 1-28, reprinted in A.J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, London, Oxford University Press, 1948, pp. 62-93; J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, in «The Economic History Review», new series, VI (1953), 1, pp. 1-15, reprinted in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire*, edited by A. Seal, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982 (from where it is quoted from now on), p. 7; T. Tagliaferri, *Storia ecumenica. Materiali per lo studio dell'opera di Toynbee*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2002; Id., *Christopher Bayly*, pp. 36, 38-41; Id., *Legitimizing Imperial Authority*. William McNeill argued that, if Toynbee had not declined the 1947 offer from the Labour government and the University of Cambridge to succeed George N. Clark in the prestigious and influential post of Regius Professor of Modern History, the *Cambridge Histories* tradition inaugurated by Lord Acton could have been enriched with «a new and genuinely ecumenical history of the world» (W.H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee. A Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 209 and 324, note 8). It is also worth noting the impact exerted on the institutionalization of the study of European expansion by W. Keith Hancock's *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, published in two volumes between 1937 and 1942 and significantly influenced by its author's engagement with the Toynbee's ideas (R.E. Robinson, *Oxford in Imperial Historiography*, in F. Madden, D.K. Fieldhouse, eds., *Oxford and the Idea of Commonwealth. Essays Presented to Sir Edgar Williams*, London, Croom Helm, 1982, p. 42; R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, pp. 79, 80, 83, 498, note 24; J. Davidson, *A Three-Cornered Life. The Historian W.K. Hancock*, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2010, pp. 148-185).

[20] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, pp. 6, 7, 8; J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, in by F.H. Hinsley, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History*, vol. XI, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1962, pp. 593-640, reprinted in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall*, p. 71; J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire* (The Ford Lectures 1974), *ibid*., p. 75. On the conception of world history that prevailed among economic and social historians in the period between the two wars, cf. T. Tagliaferri, *La nuova storiografia britannica e lo sviluppo del welfarismo. Ricerche su R.H. Tawney*, Naples, Liguori, 2000, pp. 251-288.

[21] R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, p. 481.

of this movement, that is the expansions promoted by other European people and states, of which the English expansion would be «only the largest and the latest of a whole species», are regarded by these scholars as contributions to a common «European» or «Western» historical work[22]. Last but not least, the Cambridge School regards the European and neo-European irradiation poles of the expansive movement and its non-European destination areas as internal articulations of a single large, virtually ecumenical theater of trans-regional and transcultural interactions.

Such methodological propensities seem to have been particularly pronounced in John Gallagher, who was an academic mentor both to Bayly and Darwin. In Gallagher's intellectual personality, however, the holistic, «all-embracing» ambition[23] coexisted, in a rare and fruitful combination, with a historiographical realism that appears indebted to the elitist empiricism and «anti-impressionist positivism» which came to dominate the British historiographical scene after World War Two under the influence of Lewis Namier (1888-1960)[24].

It was in Gallagher's teaching to undergraduates, however, that his leaning towards macro-history found its most congenial vent. Some former pupils, including Darwin himself, who in *After Tamerlane* declared to have learned from Gallagher to consider world history «as a connected whole»[25], have witnessed (or suggested at least) that Gallagher, as university teacher, availed himself of a «global» approach so as to make the expansion of Europe the reconstructive principle of a synthetic presentation of world history. Gallagher used to inaugurate his annual preliminary course on the fundamental outlines of the European expansion by warning his listeners that the subject-matter of the lessons would actually lead him to deal with the entire «Tokyo to Tipperary (in Ireland, N.d.R.) group of civilizations»[26].

[22] P.D. Curtin, *The British Empire and Commonwealth in Recent Historiography*, in «The American Historical Review», LXV (1959), 1, p. 73.

[23] R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, p. 483.

[24] A. Seal, *Preface: John Andrew Gallagher, 1919-1980*, in J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall*, p. XVIII; R. Cobb, *Jack Gallagher in Oxford*, *ibid*., p. XXVI; T. Tagliaferri, *Individui ed entità collettive: Sir Lewis Namier tra approccio tipologico e comprensione storica*, in D. Conte, E. Mazzarella, eds., *Il concetto di tipo tra Ottocento e Novecento. Letteratura, filosofia, scienze umane*, Napoli, Liguori, 2001, pp. 297-332; M. Griffo, *The British Roots of Indian Politics: Bayly and the Cambridge School*, in M. Griffo, T. Tagliaferri, eds., *From the History of the Empire to World History*, pp. 15-27.

[25] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, cp. XI.

[26] R. Hyam, *The Study of Imperial and Commonwealth History at Cambridge*, p. 483; Id., *The Oxford and Cambridge Imperial History Professiorate, 1919-1981: Robinson and Gallagher and Their Predecessors*, in Id., *Understanding the British Empire*, p. 523.

This last testimony provides us with a precious clarification about the true theme of the history of the European expansion, because it shows as the founders of the Cambridge School conferred a privileged status to a hemispherical space (to which they were uncertain whether ascribing or not Sub-Saharan Africa) that they regarded as profoundly different from the transoceanic new worlds. Here, in the transoceanic new worlds (including South Africa), the Western civilization expanded in the form of more or less homogenizing «gains» (i.e. acquisitions)[27] which were promoted by the neo-European societies, that is, by the white colonial societies created by immigrants from Europe and their descendants. In the Americas and Oceania, in other terms, the Western society expanded by unrelentlessly pushing forward its own frontiers[28]. In the Eastern hemisphere, on the contrary, Europe expanded by establishing «contacts» with people which possessed a kind and a degree of civilization comparable with their own. The Western expansion in the extra-European world acquired in this case the character of «contacts between civilizations in space»[29]. But this last circumstance has to be taken into the highest consideration not only because it peculiarly shapes the dynamics of expansion in the Old World in various ways. The fact is that the group of the Eurasian «civilizations» are ultimately the co-protagonists of a common history. This common history is given its structural unity, from a certain point onwards, by the «Western» expansion. At the same time, the common Eurasian history possesses a further meaning, which consists in the final convergence and reciprocal integration of the various regional societies into the contemporary global society[30].

[27] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, p. 71.

[28] See also A.W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism. The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986 (new edition 2004).

[29] A.J. Toynbee, *Contacts between Civilizations in Space (Encounters between Contemporaries)*, in *A Study of History*, 12 vols., Issued under the Auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, Oxford University Press, 1934-1961, vol. VIII (1954), pp. 88-629.

[30] In consideration of the privileged status it conferred to the Old World, in line with an attitude deeply ingrained in the metageography of British imperialism (T. Tagliaferri, *Dalla* Greater Britain *alla* World Society*: Impero, internazionalismo e multiculturalismo nel discorso coloniale britannico tra l'Otto e il Novecento*, in Id., *La nazione, le colonie, il mondo*, p. 153), the Cambridge School can rightly be accused of a certain proclivity to replace historiographical Eurocentrism with a form of «Eurasian Centrism» (M. Berg, *Global History: Approaches and New Directions*, in M. Berg, ed., *Writing the History of the Global. Challenges for the 21st Century*, Oxford, Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2013, p. 5, explicitly asserted after all by John Darwin («the center of gravity in the history of the modern world resides in Eurasia – in the troubled, conflicted, connected and intimate relationships of its great cultures and states, stretched in line by the European "Far West" and the Asian "Far East"», *After Tamerlane*, p. 19), which risks overshadowing those dynamic interactions and resulting regional dif-

To make altogether explicit the historical-universal assumptions which are at the basis of the original paradigm of the historiography of the European expansion have been a couple of those non-British scholars, who, as I mentioned at the beginning, were involved in its launch alongside their British colleagues. The most complete definition of the post-war concept of history of the European expansion (among those which are known to me) was given by the Dutch historian Henk Wesseling when he described the institutional mission of the homonymous Center («Geschiedenis van de Europese Expansie» in Dutch) which was created at the University of Leiden in 1974. Studying the European expansion, according to Wesseling, amounted to concentrating research on the intertwining of a triple order of phenomena. The first theme was the «history of the encounters between different systems of civilization» generated by the European expansion. The second theme was the relationship of mutual «influence» that had established itself between these civilizations. The third theme was their «gradual growth towards a global, a universal system of civilization»[31].

A further tacit key element of the Expansion of Europe paradigm is vividly illuminated by an observation that I draw from an essay published in 1959 by the American scholar Philip Curtin, the distinguished historian of the Atlantic slavery turned world historian in the subsequent phases of his professional career. Since the mid-1950s Curtin himself had held in various universities of the United States a course on «The Expansion of Europe» later renamed «The World and the West»[32]. According to Curtin, the basic assumption of the new discipline was that during the modern and contemporary age «the impact of the West» had been «the most important single factor in the history of any single country» of the extra-European world which experienced it and therefore, at the same time, «the unifying factor» in the history of the extra-European world taken as a whole. Focusing on the «impact of Europe», the historiography of the expansion could therefore legitimately aspire to sketch an organic, general and «comparative» outline of world history as a whole[33].

ferentiations within the "Far West" that Marcello Carmagnani has recently returned to underline (*Le connessioni mondiali e l'Atlantico, 1450-1850*, Turin, Einaudi, 2018).

[31] *Expansion and Reaction. Essays on European Expansion and Reactions in Asia and Africa*, edited by H.L. Wesseling, Leiden, Leiden University Press, 1978, p. 4. Cfr. H.L. Wesseling, *A Cape of Asia. Essays on European History*, Leiden, Leiden University Press, 2011.

[32] P.D. Curtin, *On the Fringes of History. A Memoir*, Athens, Ohio University Press, 2005, pp. 67-69.

[33] Id., *The British Empire and Commonwealth*, p. 73.

The conceptualization of the expansion of Europe that was elaborated at the dawn of decolonization recognized therefore a real capacity to interact with the West to the non-Europeans (or at least to the "civilized" non-Europeans of the Eastern hemisphere). But it continued to rest on a theoretical framework that circumscribed their agency within very narrow limits. Non-European agency was mainly described in terms of reactivity or response of worlds which were in themselves stagnant to an exogenous jolt or challenge. This first, genuine attempt of overcoming Eurocentrism left largely intact old stereotypes, remounting in some respects to James Mill, in so far as it still relegated the past of the Oriental societies prior to the «encounter» with the West to a kind of historicity (or kinds of historicity) which was qualitatively different, if not antithetic, to European historicity[34].

The persistence and pervasiveness of such stereotypes should not be forgotten by those who today, faced with the opposite excesses of which the radical critics of historiographical Eurocentrism are too often guilty, regret indiscriminately the time (which is after all, and fortunately, as far as I'm concerned, far from being yet over) when «in general historical representations Europe occupied a central place» – as the late Professor Giuseppe Galasso declared in one of his last interviews[35].

I limit myself to an example taken from one of the university textbooks of contemporary history on which I studied at the beginning of the 1980s. I refer to the volume of Alberto Caracciolo on «the age of the bourgeoisie and revolutions» published by Il Mulino in 1979, which is an example – I immediately add – made in my eyes all the more significant by the authoritativeness and particular intellectual distinction of its eminent author. Caracciolo's book was part of a Series published by Il Mulino whose other three volumes – on the Middle Ages, on the «formation of the modern world», on the «triumph and collapse of European dominance» between 1870 and the present – were also authored by big names of the Italian and European historiography of the time such as Giovanni Tabacco, Alberto Tenenti and Pasquale Villani. The editorial project of the Series presupposed (a little too optimistically, perhaps,

[34] This is ultimately the unsurpassed limitation of the attempt to overcome Eurocentrism undertaken by Arnold Toynbee, still within the horizon of liberal imperialism, during the period between the two wars: cf. T. Tagliaferri, *Il futuro dell'Occidente e il «contatto fra le civiltà»: Toynbee interprete del primo dopoguerra*, in Id., *La nazione, le colonie, il mondo*, pp. 274-279; Id., *L'imperialismo liberale, la missione civilizzatrice e la globalizzazione del nazionalismo*, *ibid*., p. 305.

[35] M. Armiero, *Galasso: «La Storia è in crisi ma è ancora maestra di vita»*, in «Il Corriere del Mezzogiorno», 23 September 2017.

even by the standards of the time) the existence of a potential market that was composed not only of «university students», but of a wider and growing audience of «cultured» readers, to whom the general presentation of the Series ascribed a keen interest in the «basic processes of the modern world». To the questions posed to history by these readers the Series promised to offer «overall but rigorous answers» in the form of «a carefully updated interpretative synthesis» and focused – let's note – on the history of «European civilization» considered «as a whole» spanning the «ten centuries» from the Middle Ages to the «late 20th century». The four volumes of the Series would have followed the «long process» of development of the West «in its successive expressions until today's crisis»[36].

To mark the overall macro-historical framework of this series of university textbooks was therefore the conviction that students and readers could gain an adequate and intellectually satisfying understanding of the entire genesis of the modern and contemporary world – of their own world – by retracing, under the guidance of their distinguished authors, the stages which had prepared and rhythmed, in the course of a thousand years, the rise of Europe to the «gradual rule over all the known world», culminating in its 19th-century «triumph» and 20th-century «collapse». The Eurocentric perspective adopted by the editors of the Series was clearly stated indeed in its very title: *The European Civilization in World History*[37].

The volume of the series authored by Alberto Caracciolo has a paragraph entitled «The European civilization takes off», in which a student could read that, starting from the Industrial Revolution, which Caracciolo located in the second half of the 18th century, there had emerged in the world a division of mankind into two parts. There was «a part of humanity» which remained «underdeveloped», by which Caracciolo meant that it was «nailed to a substantial stasis and repetition of its own condition». And there was «another» part which was «involved», on the contrary, «in an ascending dynamic, in short in a practically uninterrupted "development"». The developed and developing part of mankind, moreover, was rising to «a dominant position over all others» parts which were still underdeveloped, including those peoples – «Muslims or Indians, Chinese and Japanese» – who «retained […] the elevat-

[36] P. Villani, *Trionfo e crollo del predominio europeo*, p. 5.
[37] *Ibid.*

ed levels of their traditional civilizations», despite the alleged immobility and the cyclicity of their histories[38].

The category of «traditional»[39], understood as the opposite and the antithesis of "modern" and "progressive", is central to the general vision of the European expansion advanced by Gallagher and Robinson. Their macro-historical ideas are brilliantly summarized, in their characteristic non-academic if not anti-academic writing style, in the epilogue of another four-handed essay on *The Partition of Africa* which was published in 1962 in the *New Cambridge Modern History*.

According to the co-authors, the European expansionism and imperialism of the long 19th century had been «the engine of social change» in the «totally not-European» regions of the world, namely Asia and Africa. And these past transformations promoted by the European expansion were at the roots of the «world revolution» which was unfolding on the contemporary scene, that is decolonization and the rise of the postcolonial State. Gallagher and Robinson described indeed «colonial nationalism» itself as both a product and an «auxiliary» of the social changes triggered by the Western global empires, so much so that «colonial nationalism» had to be regarded as «the continuation of imperialism by other means». The European expansion had unleashed gigantic «disruptive forces upon the indigenous structures». In this way it had fulfilled the function, «of the first importance» from a world-historical point of view, «to wear down or to crack open the casings of societies» which had been «governed hitherto by traditional modes». The «many-sided» European expansion had subjected these traditional non-European cultures and societies to the rough treatment, based on «cuffs» and «hustles», which was necessary in order to remove them from the «postures of tradition» and to introduce them into «a new era of change» and «transformation». The impact force of the expansion of Europe had therefore triggered and favoured «rapid» processes of «social mobility», formation and «rise of new elites», «change of values», conflicts between traditional potentates and «emerging groups». In these ways the Western expansion had put Asians and Africans in front of what Gallagher and Robinson called, with an expression borrowed from Arnold Toynbee, «the Western question»[40].

[38] A. Caracciolo, *L'età della borghesia e delle rivoluzioni, XVIII-XIX secolo*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1979, pp. 90, 91.
[39] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, p. 71.
[40] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, p. 16; J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, pp. 71, 72.

In a book published in 1922, entitled *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey. A Study in the Contact of Civilizations*, Toynbee had drawn attention to the fact that the Expansion of Europe had forced upon the civilized non-Europeans (or non-Westerners, in the case of the Russians) a choice concerning what attitude to assume towards Europeanizing modernization and towards all those groups – Europeans or non-Europeans – who were promoting and carrying on it. This dilemma, this «Western question», and the different responses evoked by it, was the most single important process unfolding on the contemporary historical scene[41].

And it is precisely in the various possible «responses»[42] to the inescapable challenge represented by the «Western question» that Gallagher and Robinson in 1962 (as already Toynbee since 1922) identify the limited terrain of exercise of the restored historical agency of the non-Europeans. This means that Gallagher and Robinson circumscribed the field of the global – that is, the field of interaction and integration between the «civilizations» entered into «contact» with each other following the European expansion – exclusively to the phenomena pertaining to the chain of actions and reactions started by the European initiative.

It goes without saying that the option towards which the two British scholars manifested their greatest sympathy was not the «romantic, reactionary» «response» of the «Zealot», fundamentalist movements that reacted to the «shock» of Western-induced change by integrally opposing it, such as, for example, the theocratic Sudanese Mahdism. Gallagher and Robinson showed a strong appreciation toward a range of «more positive responses» to Westernization that saw as protagonists the much «defter nationalisms of Egypt and the Levant» (that is of the Ottoman Empire), the Confucian Occidentalism of the so-called «Scholars of New Learning» committed to modernize the late 19th-century imperial China, the different sections of the Indian National Congress of the origins (who pursued a program of modernizing nation-building without severing India's connection with the British Empire) as well as «the separatist churches of Africa» (that is the autochthonous, non-missionary Churches created by the initiative of the indigenous Christian Africans themselves). This second type of response amounted to an at-

[41] A.J. Toynbee, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey. A Study in the Contact of Civilisations*, London, Constable, 1922; T. Tagliaferri, *Il futuro dell'Occidente*, pp. 270-279.
[42] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, p. 72.

tempt made by non-Europeans to make use of the resources of various kinds put at their disposal by the encounter with the Western civilization in order to «re-form their personality and regain their powers by operating in the idiom of the westerners». They opted, in other terms, for a strategy of «sophisticated collaboration», by virtue of which the non-Europeans themselves became the agents of European expansion and strove at the same time to decline it according to their own cultural codes and to bend it to their own interests[43].

According to the «ex-centric» interpretation of imperialism advanced by Gallagher and Robinson, the novelty of the local crises produced by the «proto-nationalist awakenings», which were ultimately imputable to the consequences of the previous phases of the expansion of Europe (such as, for example, the nationalist revolt headed by Colonel Urabi that provoked the British military intervention in Egypt in 1882) played a crucial role in determining the late nineteenth-century turn towards «formal» imperialism. Starting from the 1880s, it became more likely than in the past that the Europeans could choose to impose their «formal» control on extra-European territories rather than keeping to the methods of «informal imperialism»[44]. It was so because the expansionists did not prove to be sufficiently «creative» and audacious to adapt themselves to the changed conditions of «collaboration» with the non-Europeans that their own expansion had generated. They failed to adopt also towards the new, modernizing «emerging groups» – in a form corresponding to the novel, unprecedented social and cultural characteristics of these groups – their old policy which had consisted in negotiating an alliance with the «more dynamic» elements in the extra-European society in order to ensure optimal conditions for the expansion at the minimal cost. And a very relevant aspect of this diminished creativity was the deafness of the West to the authentic historical significance of the turbulences that manifested themselves in the wider world – the Europeans' unwillingness to read in the extra-European tensions and crises anything else that «the signs of decrepitude and crack-up». For Robinson and Gallagher, on the contrary, the whole range of the late 19th-century «awakenings» (including,

[43] A.J. Toynbee, *Survey of International Affairs 1925*, vol. I, *The Islamic World since the Peace Settlement*, Issued under the Auspices of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, Oxford University Press, 1925, pp. 6, 7; J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, p. 72; Qichao Liang, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*, translated by I.C.Y. Hsü, with a Foreword by B.I. Schwartz, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 113.

[44] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Imperialism of Free Trade*, pp. 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 15, 16; J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, pp. 25, 72; R.E. Robinson, *Non-European Foundations*, Italian translation, pp. 166-167; J. Gallagher, *The Decline, Revival and Fall*, p. 75.

that is, the Zealots' more seemingly archaistic responses to the Western question) reveals the existence in the Afro-Asiatic societies of «growth points», of fruitful seeds which were destined to mature in the «modern struggles against foreign rule» and in the colonial nationalism which was called to carry forward the Promethean work initiated by industrial imperialism[45].

It is only too evident, if we follow attentively Gallagher's and Robinson's argument, and take also into account the eloquent metaphors which corroborate its logic, that the only possible «growth points» to be found in the non-European soil still completely coincided, for the founders of the Cambridge School, with the seeds implanted *ex novo* and *ex nihilo* by the Western historical enterprise.

2. *Reconceptualizing the Expansion of Europe, I: the Interactive Emergence of British Colonialism in India*

Until now I've insisted on the unsurpassed limits of the genuine efforts which were made by the founding fathers of the Cambridge School in order to overcome the Eurocentric approach to the theme of the expansion of Europe. To underline these conceptual limitations is essential for exactly measuring and qualifying the further progress made by their pupils and successors, among whom Christopher Bayly and John Darwin, in the direction of a more complete de-ideologization and historicization of the phenomenon of European expansion.

The profound «rethinking» of which «the Expansion of Europe» has been made the object since the mid-1980s is well illustrated by the title and by the program of the today's course of World History in which, as I've already mentioned, the examination paper instituted in 1945 has progressively evolved at Cambridge since then: "Empires in World History from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War"[46].

As can be seen from various syllabuses published in the last years, the architects of the course (among which Bayly, who was Professor of Imperial History at Cambridge from the early 1990s to the beginnings of the last decade) continue to believe that the empirical study of causes, phases and modalities

[45] J. Gallagher, R.E. Robinson, *The Partition of Africa*, pp. 71, 72.
[46] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, cit., pp. 14-27.

of the ascent of the «European and Atlantic world» to a «dominant» position «in the world economy and world politics», with particular reference to «what […] that dominance meant for the rest of the world», is able to provide a unifying theme for the history of humanity during the period in which «the modern world came to be». But a crucial didactic innovation has to be seen in the fact that the course now proposes to deal with these issues by considering «the "expansion of Europe"» (the expression appears in inverted commas in the particular syllabus I'm quoting from) in close connection with the «major changes and developments» which also took place «in other world societies» of Eurasia, starting from the phase of consolidation of the great Asian empires during the early modern age and until the initial emergence of 19th- and 20th-centuries colonial «nationalisms»[47].

In the revised and updated version that has taken shape in recent years, the expansionist paradigm reveals itself, in other words, in substantial agreement with the primary methodological requirement of the coeval revival of world history, which consists in an invitation to reimagine the intensified cross-cultural interactions catalyzed by the Western initiative, from which the globalized society of our time emerged, like the convergence, the confluence and the coalescence of the histories – of all the histories and of the whole histories – of a plurality of dynamic macro-regional spaces[48].

This means that, on one hand, the Empires in World History course, as well as the works of synthesis that share its changed conceptual structure (like Bayly's *The Birth of the Modern World* and Darwin's *After Tamerlane*), continues to employ as an indispensable narrative axis the histories of the European colonial empires, including (like the original Expansion of Europe course) the «multiple geographical directions of the Russian expansion». And yet the Empires in World History course professes and prides itself not to be «a European-centered course», not only because it emphasizes the transregional «movement of ideas, peoples and trades» which «bypass Europe», involving, that is, two or more other historical regions, but also and in the first place because – as declared in one of syllabuses – «it stretches the compass of empire» so as

[47] *Paper 21: Empires in World History, c. 1400-1914*, 2011-2012, p. 1 (https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/3986370/paper-21-reading-list-faculty-of-history); Historical Tripos, Part 1, Paper 21, *Empires in World History from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War*, Reading List, 2012-13; University of Cambridge, Faculty of History, Historical Tripos, Part 1, Paper 21, *Empires in World History from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War*, Course Guide 2016-2017.

[48] T. Tagliaferri, *Christopher Bayly*.

to include among the factors to be taken into account in order to understand the making of the modern world the «strategies of expansion» related to the early modern processes of empire-building and culture-building promoted also «by the Ottomans, the Mughals and the Qing and other polities beyond the West»[49].

The Empires in World History course does not cease, therefore, to reserve «central stage» to the phenomena of «resistance and adaptation of non-European peoples to western economic penetration, political dominance and evangelization», and to the «non-western modernities» or «religious resurgences» (in the case of Islam, for example) which emerge from them. It is worth repeating that the attention paid to the non-European or non-Western responses is not in itself a novelty in the tradition of the Cambridge School. The real and very important novelty has to be seen in the fact that the «reactions» to the European expansion are no longer interpreted solely as a function of the «social change» induced by the «impact of Europe». The non-European reactions are regarded now, at the macro-historical level, as moments and phases of pre-existing, prolonged and uninterrupted currents of historical life and activity which saw the «non-European peoples» as their agents and protagonists[50].

I have to repeat also, in order to avoid misunderstandings, that in the new historiography of the Expansion of Europe the revaluation of the performances of non-European «cultures, economies and states» does not aim at calling in doubt the relative exceptionality of the European case and the temporary, contingent centrality and preponderance of the Europeans in the hierarchies of world power. On the methodological plan, this further step forward in the overcoming of Eurocentrism reflects in part the scientific need to reconsider the periodization, the geography, the morphology, as well as the legacies to the present, of the global interactions which mark the rise and decline of European dominance in the light of the empirical results of area studies. The growing research conducted in this field has documented the presence in the rest of Eurasia, during the centuries of the early modern age and prior to the actual «impact of the West» on its regions, of endogenous dynamics of change which were for long time considered an exclusive prerogative of Europe[51].

[49] Historical Tripos, Part 1, Paper 21, *Empires in World History from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War*, Reading List, 2012-13.
[50] *Ibidem*.
[51] *Ibidem*.

We may disagree with Bayly's opinion that these other early modern Eurasian transformations can be regarded as «passages to modernity» which went parallel or were analogous to the European development. What remains true is that, within the theoretical horizon of the Cambridge School, such early modern Afro-Eurasian changes strongly suggest the following two new questions: what is the actual historical relationship, if any, between the acquisition by Europeans of the control of a particular area of the wider Eurasian world and the previous and long-lasting transformations in which this particular area now appears to have been involved? and in which ways, if any, did the antecedent endogenous changes contribute to defining the real terms in which the «Western question» arose for the Eurasian societies and influenced the «reactions» of their elites to the «challenge» of Europeanization?[52]

The argumentative strategies employed in order to answer these questions are well illustrated by John Darwin's book *After Tamerlane. The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400-2000*.

Darwin's work is based on a long experience of teaching imperial and global history not at Cambridge but at Oxford (where Gallagher, his mentor, had moved for a period from 1963 to 1970). It represents the largest and, in my opinion, one of the most successful attempt realized up to now of reorganizing the overall field of the Expansion studies[53].

In addition to covering a vast subject-matter, *After Tamerlane* presents a historiographic structure that is both highly synthetic and, at the same time, very articulate and complex. Moreover, we fail to do justice to the book if we neglect to take fully into account how Darwin deals with the properly European, metropolitan and international sides of the expansion. For the limited purposes of this essay I will dwell upon two aspects of the book which show with particular clearness the enlargement of the category of «dynamic interaction»[54] firstly introduced by the founding fathers of the Cambridge school and the resulting redefinition of the expansionist paradigm pursued by its most recent representatives. These two topics are 1) Darwin's interpretation of the genesis of British domination in India between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries and 2) Darwin's interpretation and evaluation of the attempts at «"self-strenghtening"» through the adoption of «European meth-

[52] C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, pp. 49-83.

[53] Cfr. M. Jasanoff, «*Who rules the World-Island commands the World*», in «The Guardian», 12 May 2007.

[54] W.R. Louis, *Foreword*, in *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, 5 vols., Editor-in-chief W.R. Louis, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998-1999, vol. 1, *The Origins of Empire*, edited by N. Canny, p. VII.

ods» which were made by the empires and states of the «Afro-Asian world» during the 19th century[55].

Darwin is not a specialist of pre-colonial and colonial India, but his analysis of the connections between the history of Indian society and the European imperial expansion in the Asian subcontinent shows a clear affinity and complementarity with the somewhat controversial theses which have been advanced by the current of Indianist studies which counted among its major representatives Christopher Bayly[56].

Darwin inserts the formation of the British Empire in South Asia in the broader context of a turning point in the balance of power between European and non-European societies, which can be located in the eight decades or so between the Seven Years' War and the First Opium War. This «Eurasian revolution» – as Darwin calls it – coincides essentially with the initial phase of the prolonged transition process between two types of «global "connectivity"». The first type – the starting point of the transition process – consists in the global network woven by the Europeans in the quarter of a millennium following the beginning of the oceanic explorations, during which among the societies of Eurasia there persisted, however, a situation of «equilibrium». The second type of «global connectivity» – the (temporary) point of arrival of the transition started from the «Eurasian revolution» – is, for Darwin, the «limited» «Europa-centric» «global imperial order» that emerged in the decades preceding 1914, which was sapped at the foundations by the First World War and its aftermath, but was destined to survive, albeit on a reduced scale, in very precarious conditions and at the price of considerable modifications, until the Second World War and the decolonization[57].

The «Eurasian revolution» is indeed the period in which the economic and technological effects of the industrial revolution began to modify, to the advantage of the Europeans, the relations between "the West and the rest" of Eurasia. But another component of primary importance of the Eurasian revolution (and an essential prerequisite for the take off and the maximizing of the global impact of industrialism) lies for Darwin in a two-phased «geopo-

[55] R. Hyam, *The Primacy of Geopolitics: the Dynamics of British Imperial Policy, 1763-1963*, in «The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History», XXVII (1999), 2, special issue, *The Statecraft of British Imperialism. Essays in Honour of Wm. R. Louis*, edited by R.D. King and R. Kilson, pp. 27-52, reprinted in Id., *Understanding the British Empire*, cit., p. 79; Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, cit., p. 269.

[56] T. Tagliaferri, *Christopher Bayly*, pp. 48-55.

[57] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, pp. 6, 49-99, 101-155, 157-217, 295-364, 368, 441, 496.

litical revolution». Its first phase is marked by the progressive intensification, radicalization and globalization of the inter-European struggles culminating in the defeat of Napoleon. The second, post-Congress of Vienna phase sees the tendential limitation of the international and ideological conflict between the European states, that left the two lateral Powers of the system, i.e. England and Russia, relatively free to pursue their expansionist «ambitions» towards the East[58].

On the broader extra-European stage (which includes, let's never forget, the New World) the «geopolitical revolution» had the result of shattering the barriers that, still in the first half of the 18th century, decisively hampered European expansion. The defeat of France, for example, weakened the resistance that the indigenous societies of North America had been able to continue to oppose to the advance of the white settlement colonialism by exploiting the inter-European rivalries and brought to an end the mercantilist compartmentalization of world trade preparing the terrain for the advent of free trade. In another sector of the non-Eurasian «"Outer World"» – the sector of the globe comprising «the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, island South East Asia and Oceania» – the inter-European competition of this period also provided an incentive for the annexation of Oceania to the area at disposal to the European settler societies for the construction of the colonial «neo-Europes»[59].

But as far as the equilibrium between the regional societies of the Old World is concerned, the further revolutionary geopolitical novelty of the period was that European Powers proceeded, for the first time, to the building of «territorial empires in Asia and Africa», among which the one built by the East India Company[60].

In the case of India, it appears even more clear that the geopolitical revolution, given its chronology, precedes and is relatively independent from the advent of industrialism. Territorial empire-building in the subcontinent turns out to be the result of the synergic interweaving that now for the first time establishes itself between European history and Asian history, between the increased expansive movement of Europeans and certain peculiar regional conditions and dynamics that can ultimately be traced back to the *Pax Mughalica*

[58] *Ibid*., pp. 162-185.
[59] *Ibid*., pp. 173-174.
[60] Historical Tripos, Part 1, Paper 21, *Empires in World History from the Fifteenth Century to the First World War*, Reading List, 2012-13.

of the early modern age and to the crisis in which it had entered in the late 17th century. For Darwin, recent historiography has falsified and debunked the «simplistic black legend» which for so long credited the idea that in the half century before the battle of Plassey (1757) and the acquisition of the *diwan* of Bengal by the East India Company (1765) India had sunk into a chaos of «political disintegration», «economic decline» and anarchy from which only the British conquest could raise it. And a correct diagnosis of the crisis of the Mughal Empire, which has been made both indispensable and possible by recent historical research, is precisely the key to a more realistic understanding of the specific historical meaning that the «Eurasian revolution» assumes in the subcontinent[61].

To summarize it in brief, Darwin subscribes to the thesis that, starting from the 1750s-1760s, the East India Company, driven among other things by the rivalry between England and France, was compelled or catched the opportunity to become part of a number of contending states into which the Mughal imperial space had been disarticulating itself for some time. But the «centrifugal» forces which, in the case of the Mughals as well as in the partially analogous case of the Ottomans, favoured the disintegration of the Islamic empire were the product of processes of modernization of the Indian society which had been encouraged by the grandiose constructive work of unification, pacification and internal organization of India initiated by the Timurids in the 16th century: demographic growth, extension, specialization and commercialization of the agriculture, integration of India in the networks of the long-distance world trade – both terrestrial and oceanic –, development of the manufacturing activity, urbanization, rise of a class of landowners linked to localities and forms of mercantile capitalism. At the roots of the political changes which formed the presuppositions and the background for the advent of European colonialism there was therefore a shift in the balance of power in the subcontinent to the advantage of new peripheral elites, that were directly or indirectly the protagonists of a «new phase of Asian state building» whose most distinctive feature was an attempt to adapt the ideology and the institutions of the imperial epoch to the «regional» (i.e. provincial) scale. The ultimate origins of European domination are to be searched, in short, in the transformation of the Company into an «Indian power» – into one of those new model Asian states which were at the

[61] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, p. 146.

same time the gravediggers, the continuators of the work and the would-be heirs of the Mughal Empire[62].

Understanding to which extent European expansionism in India was in the condition and revealed itself capable of intercepting and exploiting for the purposes of empire-building pre-existing currents of indigenous political, social and economic change also constitutes, for Darwin, the indispensable premise for trying to answer the historiographical problem posed by the «exceptionality» of the Indian case[63].

In India, in fact, the process of colonial conquest, precociously started around the middle of the 18th century, prolonged itself without interruption and «more completely than in almost every other part of Afro-Asia» until the eve of the rebellion of the sepoys in 1857-1858. Conquest was carried on, in other terms, well into the new period of the history of expansion which can be located between «the first epoch of global imperialism» from 1760 to 1830 and the "new imperialism" of the late 19th century. During these intermediate decades, the British and the Europeans showed themselves reluctant to proceed to new territorial acquisitions in «Afro-Asia» (this happened, in a sense, in India too, where, after the Great Mutiny, the British made the choice to let the remaining "princely states" survive as polities governed by native rulers on which they exercised their ultimate control through methods of "indirect rule")[64].

Generally speaking – Darwin argues – in order that the growing disparity of the respective levels of power could translate itself into the imposition of an effective European control over Afro-Asian peoples and territories it was necessary that certain minimal conditions of possibility realized themselves. The most basic of them pertained, on one side, to the circumstances of those very peoples and territories, on the other side, to the willingness of metropolitan countries to shoulder the burdens of colonial conquest and government. The reasons of the presence of these conditions in Indian society are not to be found in its backwardness, but, on the contrary, in those conspicuous traits of «"modernity"» that were the legacy of the pre-colonial period[65].

[62] *Ibid*., pp. 138, 144, 264.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 262.
[64] *Ibid*., pp. 256-262; C. A. Bayly, *The First Age of Global Imperialism, c. 1760-1830*, in «The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History», XXVI (1998), 2, special issue, *Managing the Business of Empire. Essays in Honour of David Fieldhouse*, edited by P. Burroughs and A.J. Stockwell, pp. 28-47.
[65] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, pp. 263, 264.

India's «openness» to world trade and the sophistication of its commercial and financial life meant that English merchants, whose activity was not confined to port cities like in the Canton system in China, could conduct their business directly with prosperous indigenous merchants and bankers who were much freer from the control of indigenous potentates than their Chinese counterparts. In maritime India, therefore, the Company could always count on the alliance with (and on the collaboration of) local economic elites for whom the investment opportunities offered by the British had become increasingly important[66].

But even more obvious (so obvious as to be most often overlooked) is the extent to which the special advantages that the Company could exploit to expand its power into the huge continental mass of inland India stemmed from «developments» that India had known in the course of early modern age. India possessed an extensive and efficient credit system, thanks to which the East India Company was able to pay its wars without having to draw only on its commercial resources, but also relying on the services of Indian bankers. Furthermore, starting from the acquisition of the right to collect taxes in Bengal, the Company could employ the monetary revenue deriving from the consolidated system of taxation of land of Moghul origin (which presupposed in turn a sufficiently commercialized and monetized economy) in order to meet the costs of its fiscal-military apparatus without falling into the vicious circle of imperial oversizing. In this way, the Company could pursue a strategy of territorial expansion which sustained itself at the expense of the Indian society itself rather than the English taxpayer. Even the well-known dependence of the Company's army on the recruitment of a vast indigenous infantry, which had to be loyal, of course, to its foreign employer, presupposed the modernizing process by which, especially in the great central-northern plains of India, soldiering had become a profession, overcoming the feudal or tribal logic which prescribed that a soldier should be primarily a loyal follower, owing personal allegiance to a military leader who was at the same time his lord or clan chieftain[67].

But alongside this more numerous category of indigenous «collaborators», the most significant manifestation of the openness, fluidity and social dynamism from which European expansion benefited in India remains for Darwin the extraordinarily rich and various range of regional elites among which the

[66] *Ibid*., pp. 263-264.
[67] *Ibid*., p. 264.

British colonizers could select their strategic partners – from the ancient diasporic communities of Farsi merchants in Bombay to the new educated Hindu middle class who was supplanting the older Muslim elites at the top of Bengali society[68].

Some historians – Bayly among them – starting from historiographical premises which are substantially similar to the theses subscribed to by Darwin, have gone a long way in attempting to overturn the stereotype of an «immobile» India, «ready to allow itself to be subdued» by a foreign conquest of which it would be a purely passive «spectator and victim». They seem inclined to believe that the active «collaboration» of components of Indian society in the construction and functioning of the European colonial regime should be read as the continuation, in other forms, of an attempt which was already being made by the modernizing elites of a world vibrant with change and innovation to remedy its political instability and to modify the balance of power in the subcontinent to their own advantage. Darwin does not exaggerate to this point the co-protagonism of the indigenous historical actors in the making of the colonial society. On the other hand, there is no doubt that even for him the reason why the European expansion succeeded in India was that it responded to needs arising from historical transformations promoted by the «local forces» to which it, in turn, was obliged to «rely»[69]. As described in *After Tamerlane*, European imperialism announced itself – to paraphrase an aphorism by Gallagher and Robinson that I mentioned earlier – as «the continuation of the Indian way to modernity by other means».

3. *Reconceptualizing the Expansion of Europe, II: Asian «Self-strengthening» and its Legacies*

The theme of the continuity and «resilience» of the long-term stories of the Ottoman, Persian, Chinese and Japanese Empires in the period *after* the «Eurasian revolution» plays a central role also in the pages that Darwin's book dedicates to the «answers» which the respective dominating elites gave to the

[68] *Ibid.*, pp. 264-265.

[69] C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire* (*The New Cambridge History of India*, Part II, vol. I), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 5; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Préface*, in C.A. Bayly, *La naissance du monde moderne, 1780-1914*, traduit de l'anglais par M. Cordillot, Paris, Le Monde diplomatique en collaboration avec Editions de l'Atelier, 2006, p. 13.

challenge of Europeanization (which is the second topic on which, as mentioned, I would call attention for the purposes of this essay)[70].

For Darwin, the "success story" of Japan (which starting from the 1868 Meiji Revolution reacted to the «Western question» by undertaking an original experiment in modernization from above) is not to be considered as a *unicum* with respect to a series of failed attempts to stop the decline and disintegration of the other Eurasian empires. Darwin rather represents the Japanese case as one extreme of a *continuum* of reforming initiatives whose balance sheets show, in varying degrees, some not negligible lights in the middle of the prevailing shadows. Again, the essential point in Darwin's argument is that the uninterrupted legacy of the experiences of «consolidation», «reconstruction», «expansion», «exceptional transformation» experienced by all the non-European imperial spaces (or non-Western imperial spaces if we include also Russia in their number) in the age of the Eurasian equilibrium made available to them decisive resources for resisting in some measure «the impact of the West» during the 19th century. The resources they had accumulated during the early modern age allowed the Ottoman, the Persian, the Chinese and the Japanese Empires to escape, after all, the fate of foreign conquest that had befallen the Mughals, leaving in turn important legacies to the nation-states which succeeded them and which survive until now as key protagonists of contemporary (and future) world politics. But also in the very different cases of India or Egypt the legacies of the imperial past allowed the respective conquered or semi-conquered societies «to retain or construct a distinctive identity that transcended the limits of a colonized culture»[71].

In all the other cases, «the states that the Europeans faced» during their 19th-century expansion «were *anciens régimes* in need of renewal, not broken-backed states that had fallen to pieces»[72]. The Qing and Ottoman statesmen and intellectuals who were called upon to deal with the «Western question» could count, not unlike their Japanese (or Russian) counterparts, on «tenacious traditions of political and cultural autonomy». This last important circumstance allowed them to escape the rigid alternative between having to succumb to the expansion of the Europeans for refusing to adopt «European-type armies, bureaucracies, schools and technologies» and jeopardizing

[70] Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, cit., p. 6.
[71] *Ibid*., pp. 40, 73, 87, 125-126, 128, 132, 137, 497.
[72] *Ibid*., p. 498.

internal «solidarity» and «social cohesion», which were equally indispensable to the survival of their kingdoms, through the imposition to their subjects of «an alien blueprint» that was incapable of arousing their «loyalty». The Eurasian modernizers were able to «graft new European political methods on to the original stock» of a historical past which was still alive. And this helped ensure that their efforts were not completely lost or a mere factor of further weakening and decline of the Eurasian empires[73].

The reforming seasons that followed each other after the two Opium Wars (1839-1842, 1856-1860) in the history of the Chinese Empire, dominated by the foreign Manchu dynasty since the middle of the 17th century, preserved and renewed the «huge residual strength» that China derived from the possession of a «unified culture» and a «working political system». The so-called *yangwu* movement of the 1860s-1880s, for example, pursued a devolution policy which favoured the hegemony of the provincial gentry in the countryside and its integration into an imperial elite made more homogeneous by an increasing rate of Sinicization (that means the growing presence within it of the ethnic Chinese, or *Han*, element). These Westernizing initiatives are therefore to be counted among the key factors of the «resistance» that imperial China was ultimately able to oppose to its degradation to a «mere semi-colonial periphery» of the «Eurocentric world system». The Qing Empire was able to retain to the end almost unchanged the borders it had reached at the top of its «expansion» in the 18th century (which are still largely those of contemporary China) and to transmit to the subsequent Republican period (from 1911 onward) its own «idea of China», which is still recognizable under the new appearance of *Han* nationalism[74].

Similarly, even in the case of the eternally moribund Ottoman Empire – the 19th-century «sick man of Europe» – Western domination remained after all an «unfinished business». Its «Anatolian core» managed to survive the «partition» that had been planned by the winners of the First World War to transform itself, largely cleansed of its Christian minorities, in the new Turkish national state erected «on the foundations of the Ottoman reforms». What made all this possible – at least in those parts of the Ottoman state where the necessary preconditions of «cultural cohesion» existed – was precisely the cumulative effect of a policy aimed to the «deliberate grafting of Western tech-

[73] *Ibid*., pp. 269, 497, 498.
[74] *Ibid*., pp. 125-132, 350, 353, 354, 395, 496.

nique on to the social and political structure» of the Empire that had been adopted by Ottoman reformers, modernizers and Westernizers since the early decades of the 19th century[75].

4. *Two Conclusions*

In John Darwin's general view of modern and contemporary history, the «resilience» revealed by non-European societies and cultures to the «impact of the West» confirms the original polycentric character of the Eurasian space. But this conclusion provides us at the same time, according to Darwin, with a historical precedent which authorizes us to suppose (or strengthens our actual perception) that this geohistorical space, even in our era of hyper-globalization, will continue to oppose «resistance» to cultural homogenization and to the hegemony of «a single great ruler»[76]. On the other hand, as I have tried to point out, in Darwin's updated version of the old expansionist paradigm, the «resilience» and the polycentrism of contemporary Eurasia are fed in various ways by the same European expansion, configuring themselves as a result of the mutual interaction and permeation between European and non-European histories.

All this suggests a couple of conclusions.

Firstly, the most recent outcome of the Cambridge tradition points a way out from the too often ill-posed problem concerning the place to be assigned to Europe and European studies in global historiography to which I alluded at the beginning of this contribution. I will try to formulate it by using, entirely instrumentally and without any pretension of hermeneutical correctness, a quotation taken from an essay by the great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga. Writing around the mid-1930s, Huizinga maintained that the European civilization is the first to consider «its past the past of the world», that «our history is the first to be world-history»[77]. The phrase in itself can be understood in different ways – in the sense, for example, that in an era of planetary inter-

[75] *Ibid*., pp. 284, 360, 387, 497, 498. On Ottoman imperial reformism cf. C. Aydin, *The Idea of the Muslim World. A Global Intellectual History*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2017, translated into Italian by F.A. Leccese, Turin, Einaudi, 2018, pp. 30-39.

[76] J. Darwin, *After Tamerlane*, p. 506.

[77] J. Huizinga, *A Definition of the Concept of History*, in R. Klibanski, H.J. Paton, eds., *Philosophy and History. Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1936, p. 8.

dependence, there is no history, no people in the world whose past does not become relevant, at least virtually, for us Europeans[78]. But Huizinga's words can also mean that European civilization, during its modern and contemporary «axial age» of expansion[79], has been inscribing significant parts of its past in the past of the whole world. This implies that any scholar or student or citizen sincerely interested to understand the characters and the problems of the contemporary world (whether he/she be a European or not) cannot neglect to study, among many other things, the indelible traces impressed by the European expansion in the past of each of the human groups coexisting in the globalized society with the realistic spirit and the ethical tension inherent to the historical discipline. What is at stake is nothing less than a full and widespread awareness of the vast, albeit tragically contradictory background of «common experience» capable of giving a realistic foundation to the ethical-political project of «a rational and humane Cosmopolis» based on mutual understanding[80].

Secondly, the imperial history of the last half-millennium, as brilliantly reconstructed by John Darwin, would seem to deliver to our post-imperial age a diagnosis of its present predicament that has much in common with the thesis advanced by several scholars of international relations. According to them, after the bipolarism of the Cold War, and after the hegemonic universalism pursued by the US and the West during the quarter of a century following the demise of the Soviet Union, mankind has just entered – in the last fifteen years or so – in a transitional age whose main distinguishing feature is the emergence or the reemergence of a pluralist world-system of sovereign states. In this new epoch the chance to reach a stable word order and some sort of international government of such global issues as international migrations, environmental problems, pandemic crises etc. will mainly depend once again, like in the European past, on the establishment of a constantly shifting balance among a small group of Great Powers and the full operativity of a "concert" between them. This approach presents a number of implications such as, for example, a decisive shift towards a more realist and minimalist paradigm in the treatment of international affairs and the renunciation to more idealist

[78] T. Tagliaferri, *Storia ecumenica*, p. 37.

[79] C.A. Baily, *The Birth of the Modern World*, p. 83.

[80] R.I. Moore, *World History*, in M. Bentley, ed., *Companion to Historiography*, London, Routledge, 1997, p. 933; T. Tagliaferri, *Christopher Bayly*, pp. 67-72. Cp. G. Acocella, *Etica sociale e storicità*, in G. Cacciatore, A. Giugliano, eds., *Storicismo e storicismi*, Milan, Bruno Mondadori, 2007, pp. 188-199.

and constructionist notions of a viable world order (such as those centered on international organizations like the United Nations)[81].

It could be argued, in retrospect, that the tragic chain of events triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in recent years shows how the prophets and proponents of a return on a global scale to a post-Westphalian or neo-Rankean international order were perhaps too optimistic in drawing the consequences of the resurgence of Eurasian polycentrism. Like the infra-European polycentrism of the age of the Great Powers, the new polycentrism could in fact very well prelude to something else, namely the destructive anarchy of a catastrophic «time of troubles» – an expression borrowed by Arnold J. Toynbee from Russian history in order to indicate the stage following the «breakdown» of a civilization and preceding the advent of a «universal state»[82]. The new polycentrism therefore re-proposes, with increased urgency, the pressing need of disciplining the behaviour of international actors on the basis of a notion of "common good" based not merely on the convenience of all peoples to avert the threat of some common calamity (like in so many Hollywood disaster movies), but also and first of all on the high degree of cultural convergence between world societies that has been developing in last centuries as a result of the intensification of global interactions. The ideal of pluralistic cosmopolitanism, of which the COVID-19 pandemic had returned to testify with force the vitality, seems to have again lost much terrain in «this extremity of fever, kindling the rain-washed evening sky to a fiery glow»[83]. But the empirical study of world history – of the common past of contemporary humanity –, although certainly not able to offer any guarantee as to their realization, is far from discouraging, as without any realistic foundation, the hopes of all those who, despite everything, continue to be inspired by the values of the best parts of mankind's ethical and political traditions.

[81] T. Tagliaferri, *A Note on the Global Politics of the «Post-Post-Cold War»* (2017), https://www.academia.edu/88146191/A_NOTE_ON_THE_GLOBAL_POLITICS_OF_THE_POST_POST_COLD_WAR_.

[82] A.J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, vol. I (1934), pp. 52, 53.

[83] I'm quoting from the finale of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.

Index of names

About the authors

William Gould is Professor of Indian History at the University of Leeds. He specialises in mid-20th-century histories of citizenship in South Asia. He has recently worked with a street theatre/political lobbying organisation in Western India, to produce a historical documentary detailing the situation of India's Denotified and Nomadic Tribes. Among his works, *Boundaries of Belonging Localities, Citizenship and Rights in India and Pakistan* (with Sarah Ansari, Cambridge 2019) and *Hindu Nationalism and the Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge 2004).

Maurizio Griffo is full Professor of History of Political Doctrines at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Naples Federico II. He is the author of *L'India coloniale dalla "autocrazia" costituzionale alla proto-democrazia. Il dibattito sulle riforme e l'Indian Civil Service, 1908-1919* (Milan 1999). He has edited, with Teodoro Tagliaferri, *From the History of the Empire to World History. The Historiographical Itinerary of Christopher A. Bayly* (Naples 2019).

Kama Maclean holds the Chair of History in the South Asia Institute at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, and is Honorary Professor in the Department of Humanities and Languages at UNSW, Sydney. She is the author of *Pilgrimage and Power* (Oxford 2008), *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India* (Oxford 2015), and *British India, White Australia: Overseas Indians, Intercolonial Relations and the Empire, 1901-1947* (Sydney 2020). She is currently working on a DFG-funded research project on Sonic Aspects of Anticolonialism in Interwar India.

Diego Maiorano is Associate Professor of Contemporary Indian History at the University of Naples L'Orientale. He is also Visiting Research Fellow at

the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore. He is the author of *Autumn of the Matriarch: Indira Gandhi's Final Term in Office* (Oxford 2015) and co-author of *The Politics of Poverty Reduction in India* (with J. Chiriyankandath, J. Manor, L. Tillin, Hyderabad 2020).

Ali Usman Qasmi is Associate Professor of History at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS). He is the author of *Questioning the Authority of the Past: The Ahl al-Qur'an Movements in the Punjab* (Karachi 2011). His second monograph, *The Ahmadis and the Politics of Religious Exclusion in Pakistan* (London 2014) was the recipient of Karachi Literature Festival (KLF) Peace Prize in 2015.

Parimala V. Rao teaches History of Education at the Jawaharlal Nehru University of New Delhi. Among her books *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism: Discrimination, Education, and Hindutva* (New Delhi 2010) and *Beyond Macaulay: Education in India, 1780–1860* (New Delhi 2020).

Srirupa Roy is Professor and Chair of State and Democracy at the Centre for Modern Indian Studies (CeMIS), University of Göttingen, and a founding co-director of the Merian-Tagore International Centre for Advanced Studies "Metamorphoses of the Political" (ICAS:MP). Her books include *The Political Outsider: Indian Democracy and the Lineages of Populism* (Stanford 2024); *Saffron Republic: Hindu Nationalism and State Power in India* (co.-ed. T.B. Hansen, Cambridge 2022); *Visualizing Secularism and Religion: Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, India* (co-eds. A. Çinar and M. Yahya, Ann Arbor 2012); *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism* (Durham, NC, 2007), and *Violence and Democracy in India* (co-ed. A. Basu, Kolkata 2006).

Teodoro Tagliaferri teaches Global History and Contemporary Historiography at the University of Naples Federico II. He is a member of the Doctorate in Global History & Governance of the Scuola Superiore Meridionale and PI of the PRIN 2020 "Myths of Legitimation and Government of Difference in the European Imperial Regimes during the Modern and Contemporary Age". Among his works *La nazione, le colonie, il mondo. Saggi sulla cultura imperiale britannica* (Rome 2018), *La persistenza della storia universale* (Rome 2017), *Alle origini dell'Organizzazione Internazionale del Lavoro: governo mondiale e pace universale* («Diritti Lavori Mercati», 2021/2).

Michelguglielmo Torri is the doyen of the Italian historians of India. He has published several essays in well-known international journals («The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society», «The Indian Economic and Social History Review», «Economic and Political Weekly», «Modern Asian Studies»). An expanded and updated English version of his *Storia dell'India* (Bari 2000) has been recently published in three volumes by Manohar (New Delhi 2024).

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Scuola delle Scienze Umane e Sociali
Quaderni

1. *Studi e ricerche di scienze umane e sociali*, a cura di Roberto Delle Donne, prefazione di Lucio De Giovanni
2. Raffaele Carbone, *Medicina e scienza dell'uomo. Paul-Joseph Barthez e la Scuola di Montpellier*
3. Wilhelm Dilthey, *Materiali per il secondo volume della Introduzione alle scienze dello spirito. Scritti inediti (1880-1893)*, a cura di Giovanni Ciriello
4. Richard Avenarius, *Osservazioni sul concetto di oggetto della psicologia*, a cura di Chiara Russo Krauss
5. *Agli inizi della storiografia medievistica in Italia*, a cura di Roberto Delle Donne
6. Antonella Venezia, *La Società Napoletana di Storia Patria e la costruzione della nazione*
7. Le strane vicende di mia vita – *Il carteggio di Giuseppe De Blasiis*, a cura di Antonella Venezia
8. *Il carteggio fra Robert Michels e i sindacalisti rivoluzionari*, a cura di Giorgio Volpe
9. *Erudizione e cultura storica nella Sicilia del XIX secolo. Il carteggio tra Michele Amari e Raffaele Starrabba (1866-1900)*, a cura di Serena Falletta
10. *La Fenomenologia dello spirito di Hegel: problemi e interpretazioni*, a cura di Alessandro Arienzo, Francesco Pisano, Simone Testa
11. *ASMOD 2018. Proceedings of the International Conference on Advances in Statistical Modelling of Ordinal Data*, editors Francesca Di Iorio, Rosaria Simone, Stefania Capecchi
12. *GRETL 2019. Proceedings of the International Conference on the Gnu Regression, Econometrics and Time-series Library*, editors Francesca Di Iorio, Riccardo Lucchetti
13. *Ontologia relazionale. Ricerche sulla filosofia classica tedesca*, a cura di Antonio Carrano e Marco Ivaldo

14. Essere e Tempo *novanta anni dopo: attualità e inattualità dell'analitica esistenziale*, a cura di Anna Pia Ruoppo

15. *Il Segretario, lo Statista. Aldo Moro dal centro-sinistra alla solidarietà nazionale*, a cura di Alessandro Sansoni, Pierluigi Totaro, Paolo Varvaro

16. Chiara Russo Krauss, *Dall'empiriocriticismo al positivismo relativistico. Joseph Petzoldt tra l'eredità di Mach e Avenarius e il confronto con la relatività einsteiniana*

17. Mario Cosenza, *All'ombra dei Lumi. Jacques-André Naigeon* philosophe

18. *Immagine e immaginazione*, a cura di Leonardo V. Distaso, Anna Donise, Edoardo Massimilla

19. *Le aporie dell'integrazione europea. Tra universalismo umanitario e sovranismo: idee, storia, istituzioni*, a cura di Anna Pia Ruoppo e Irene Viparelli

20. *Ragione, razionalità e razionalizzazione in età moderna e contemporanea*, a cura di Maurizio Cambi, Raffaele Carbone, Antonio Carrano, Edoardo Massimilla

21. Antonio Carrano, *Questioni kantiane*

22. *La Russia e l'Occidente (Россия и Запад)*. Atti della Giornata di studio (Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, 9 giugno 2022), a cura di Giovanna Cigliano e Teodoro Tagliaferri

23. Fortunato Maria Cacciatore, *Miseria della critica. Spengler redivivo*

24. *Κατ' ἐπιστήμην καὶ εὔνοιαν. Scritti scelti di Giovanni Indelli*, a cura di Giancarlo Abbamonte, Giuliana Leone e Francesca Longo Auricchio

25. Bernhard Arnold Kruse, *Introduzione a* Siddhartha *di Hermann Hesse*

26. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Idee per la filosofia della storia dell'umanità. Libro XIV*, introduzione, traduzione e note a cura di Eliodoro Savino

27. *Le parole della filosofia. Le metamorfosi del vocabolario del pensiero nella storia*, a cura di Anna Motta e Lidia Palumbo

28. Marica Magnano San Lio, *Psichiatria e filosofia. Le radici epistemologiche della* Allgemeine Psychopathologie *di Karl Jaspers*

29. *Eleatic Ontology from the Hellenistic Period to Late Antiquity*, edited by Anna Motta & Christopher Kurfess

30. *Profili dell'aristotelismo medievale. In ricordo di Valeria Sorge*, a cura di Fabio Seller e Roberto Melisi

31. *Transizione in questione. Dialettica, struttura, differenza*, a cura di Marco Rampazzo Bazzan, Fabrizio Carlino, Anna Pia Ruoppo, Irene Viparelli
32. *Lingue, scritture e società nell'Italia longobarda. Un percorso di sociolinguistica storica*, a cura di Elisa D'Argenio, Roberto Delle Donne, Rosanna Sornicola (in preparazione)
33. Giovanni Savino, *Traiettorie della destra politica russa nel Novecento*
34. *Nations in the Empire. The Many Faces of Indian Nationalism*, Proceedings of the International Conference held in Naples, Federico II University – Department of Political Sciences, 20-21 June 2023, edited by Maurizio Griffo, Diego Maiorano, Teodoro Tagliaferri

Tutti i testi sono sottoposti a *peer review* secondo la modalità del doppio cieco (*double blind*)

Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II
Scuola delle Scienze Umane e Sociali

This volume is the outcome of a conference held at the University of Naples Federico II as a part of the scholarly initiatives of the PRIN 2022 "Myths of Legitimations and Government of Difference in the European Imperial Regimes during the Modern and Contemporary Age". The participants were invited to offer insights on one among the most crucial core-periphery relationships in 19th-20th-century world history, namely that between the British Empire and its Crown Jewel, India. Through an exploration of the nature of the conflicts as well as the collaboration and negotiation between different nationalisms and the British Empire, the Conference proposed to elucidate five main issues: How did the British Empire manage India's diversity, and what was the response from Indian society? Has recent historiography gone beyond the dichotomous characterization of the British *Raj* as a project of "divide and rule" or as an impartial arbiter between conflicting communities, as the imperial myth claimed? To what extent were different nationalisms a product of India's own contradictory modernization, and this in turn an effect of the encounter/clash with the Empire? In which sense were India's nationalist projects genuinely "national" – as opposed to "communal" – and how did they challenge or reinforce the British imperial politics of difference? To what extent has the variegated and internally conflictual nationalist movement in India and the imperial response to it shaped Independent India discourses on national identity and societal conflicts? More specifically, the contributors develop analyses grouped around two perspectives. Firstly, the comparative examination of different "religious" nationalisms, in particular Hindu and Muslim; and, secondly, the role of key figures representing different strands and different phases of the Indian nationalist movement, from Gandhi to Tilak, from Bhagat Singh to Ambedkar. In addition, the concluding essays aim to provide the reader with key elements of the historiographical background of the ongoing debates and controversies about the Indo-British relationship, namely the contribution and the evolution of the so called "Cambridge School" of colonial and global history.

Maurizio Griffo is Full Professor of History of Political Doctrines at the University of Naples Federico II.

Diego Maiorano is Associate Professor of Contemporary India at the University of Naples L'Orientale.

Teodoro Tagliaferri is Full Professor of Global History and Contemporary Historiography at the University of Naples Federico II.

ISBN 978-88-6887-317-2