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Foundations of Gokhale's Nationalism
Between Nation and Empire

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

I began this research with the purport to analyse the idea of the nation elaborated by Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), an Indian intellectual and prominent leader of the Indian National Congress from 1901 until his premature death. However, the final outcome of my work turned out to be rather different from what I had expected.

It will be seen that Gokhale's conceptualisation of the nation has been dealt with mainly in the last section of this study, though there are references in earlier sections, when ideas of the other leaders of the Indian nationalist movement are taken into consideration. As a matter of fact, several important issues, without which the analysis of Gokhale's ideology would have been incomplete, if not incomprehensible, have taken up more space than I thought: I hope my decision to pay more attention to the context will help the reader understand the complexity of the historical period in question. In particular, I made special reference to the influence of European ideas on Indian intellectuals and how these were able to blend the old and the new in a creative process of synthesis. Indian liberalism, the theorisation of modernity, and the conceptualisation of the nation in the modern meaning of the term were all by-products of this process. This challenges the argument that the making of modern India was the result of the mechanical application of 'Western' values and models. It also disputes the logical consequence of this argument, *id est*, that Indians had no historical agency, but were only passively appropriating what the British rulers over-imposed. Moreover, I have taken into account some aspects of the political thought of the most relevant leaders of the Indian anti-colonial movement, inside and outside the Indian National Congress, in order to reconstruct the intellectual debate in which Gokhale was involved. What appears is that, since the beginning, Indian nationalism was never homogenous. It will be seen that the anti-colonial movement was made up with several voices, often diverging, which advocated different concepts of freedom and were more or less in favour of, if not against, a just social order for the nation in the making. Thus, I suggest that it might be better to speak of an anti-colonial movement, since this term helps deconstructing the impression, created *ex post* by the Indian nationalist historiography, of nationalism as a monolithic and uniform phenomenon, whereas it was internally much diversified; in certain cases, it opposed Indians - Muslims, Dalits, women and the

economically underprivileged - more than the British rulers. In studying this movement, the context of Maharashtra, namely the region from where Gokhale hailed, has been taken into consideration in order to explain how certain questions were transferred from the political regional stage to the national one: also the contradiction between cultural and political nationalism that characterised the Maharashtrian political discourse from 1870s reached the all-Indian political fore, as the context between Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gokhale shows.

Let us now turn our attention to Gokhale in order to briefly introduce what I have attempted to investigate in the course of this work. Gokhale is a pivotal figure in the political history of India, because he was one of the first intellectuals and politicians to frame a modern and secular concept of the nation and to use the platform of the Indian National Congress to familiarise Indians with that same concept. Gokhale elaborated a liberal and political nationalist ideology, in which the existence of the modern state was the precondition for the building of the nation. The nation, in fact, was defined by the enjoyment of political and civic rights. So, thanks to the policies of the British *Raj*, India - a geographical and cultural unity - had also become a political unity and all Indians had been unified under the same polity. In Gokhale's political discourse, Indians, being subjects of the British Crown, were entitled to citizenship rights: that is why Gokhale did not want India to get rid of the British connection; rather, he aspired to the status of dominion for the British colony. For this reason, he asked for increasing Indian participation in the colonial administration, since he regarded self-government as an essential precondition to steadily instil into the Indian people a sense of common good and belonging to the same nation. In this sense, the continuance of the British *Raj*, although progressively Indianised, would contribute to keep together the nation, while religion, caste and community divisions would become irrelevant under the wider national consciousness. By and large, Gokhale's nationalism advocated the amelioration of India's economic and social structure and admitted the possibility of using the colonial agency to create a juster society. Freedom for the nation was not exclusively freedom from the foreigner, but from any kind of injustice, regardless of the fact that it was an Indian or a British to perpetrate it. The nation was to be built in the future and the common progress that lay ahead was one of its binding factors.

Since his nationalism was universalist and never anti-British, Gokhale was often belittled and called a collaborator of the British rulers by his contemporaries, Tilak *in primis*. In the same way, Indian historiography, especially the nationalist one, has judged Gokhale's and

Tilak's respective thoughts and actions more from the perspective of the coloniser-colonised opposition, rather than taking into consideration the nation they were envisioning. Tilak, then, emerges as the most uncompromising and heroic champion of the freedom struggle of the time, even though caste and gender disabilities were the mainstay of his nationalism. So, my work wants to be a contribution - although far from being exhaustive - to the comprehension of Gokhale's idea of the nation, beyond the contradiction between colonised and coloniser. I hope that the analysis of the Gokhalean conceptualisation of the nation will help to bring the deserved attention to the central role attributed by the Congress leader to internal freedom and equality.

Unfortunately, due to the paucity of time, I could not deal with the relationship between Gokhale and Gandhi. Notwithstanding the fact that Gandhi regarded Gokhale as his political *guru*, I believe that what the two had in common is much less than what is generally understood. In fact, a preliminary investigation into the matter has convinced me that differences, rather than similarities, stand out between Gokhale and Gandhi. The most evident shared aspect is the emphasis both gave to moral and ethics in handling political situations, namely the so-called spiritualisation of politics, the priority of the means over the end. Moreover, if Gandhi upheld Gokhale's secularism and, like the latter, maintained that all Indians were members of the nation irrespective of their creed, the Mahatma took an ambivalent stand as far as the institution of caste was concerned. By adopting (Hindu) religious symbols and by mobilising the masses around religious questions, like, for instance, the Khilafat movement, Gandhi left behind Gokhale's teachings and contributed to insert religious elements in Indian politics. However, I hope that, in the near future, I will have a chance to look into the elements of continuity and change between these two pivotal figures of Indian history.

Let me just conclude with a few words on the sources I have used to carry out this research. I spent the most part of my field-work period in New Delhi, where I could consult a great deal of material, both unpublished and published primary sources, but also secondary sources to which I could not have been able to have access in Italy. The most important sources for the analysis of the idea of the nation have certainly been Gokhale's Private Papers and the collection of the *Speeches and Writings of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*. Gokhale's Papers, kept in the National Archives of India, is a valuable collection, from which I could see Gokhale's vision outside the public official discourse; the perception that Gokhale had of the other leaders of the Congress and of the anti-colonial movement; his concerns about painful and complex issues such as the Hindu-Muslim question or the

terrible conditions of Indian indentured labourers in South Africa. Nevertheless, it is the *Speeches and Writings* that were of particular relevance, because it is in the public discourse that a certain concept of the nation is circulated and given authoritative voice. Besides these two fundamental groups of sources, I have used numerous private papers and newspapers of the time to see how Gokhale's nationalism was received in the public sphere and which were the reactions to it. Since I do not know Marathi, the primary sources I have used are exclusively in English. However, majority of the documents among Gokhale's papers are in English. In fact, during the period in question, the elite had already adopted the English language as *lingua franca.*

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INTRODUCTION

Why a Research on Gokhale?

The 15 February 2015 marked the centenary of the death of Gopal Krishna Gokhale. As it is said, commemoration is generally a good moment to reinterpret history. Yet, my interest in this eminent political figure is not really biographical. As a matter of fact, I have decided to do a research on him in order to try to fill a historiographical void in terms of history of political thought. For, as a young scholar approaching the history of the anti-colonial movement, I realised that a great deal of attention was paid to nationalism, whereas the theory of nation has been left aside, if not, at least in part, for what concerns the juggernauts of the period following Gokhale, namely Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

The significance of the formulation of the idea of the nation is not to be minimised since it was the response that Indian nationalists put forward vis-a-vis the colonial discourse, according to which India was not a nation, but only a subcontinent and, as such, characterised by multiplex and insurmountable differences. Nonetheless, Indian nationalism was not a 'derivative discourse', since, in many respects, it adopted European ideas in a selective manner to challenge the British subjugation and to decolonize the Indian mind. Ideas produced in Europe, inserted in the colonial context and appropriated by the Indian thinkers, acquired different meaning, autonomy, and power once they got in touch with indigenous ideas.

On this backdrop, it is fascinating to see how Gokhale, among others, having internalised certain new concepts thanks to the Western system of education introduced in India by the colonial state, re-used them in order to create some conditions for freedom and democracy in the future of his country. Liberalism played a pivotal role in the elaboration of the thinking of Gokhale, who, like many other Indian nationalists, subscribed to it, albeit keeping a discerning and critical attitude.

Taken into consideration this scenario of intellectual exchange, I began to understand how India, since the nineteenth century, had become part of an international, though small, public sphere[1], within which ideas could easily circulate and move in different directions

[1] C.A. Bayly, "Rammohun Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India, 1800-1830" in *Modern Intellectual History*, 4 (1) 2007, 25-41, here 28. This public sphere consisted for instance of public meetings, press, political movements, newly created institutions.

and not only, as certain historiography holds, from the 'centre' to the 'periphery'. As a matter of fact, investigating the history of political thought and ideas can help to deconstruct certain misleading schematisations that, since too long, have been trying to draw boundaries between ‘West’ and ‘East’, identifying the former with a rational, scientific and modern approach to the world, and the latter with an other-worldly, irrational and static mentality. Such schemata depict the contact of India with the ‘modern West’ as the factor which set into motion a process of modernisation, perceiving it either as a positive factor, indispensable for the history and the development - both political and social - of the subcontinent, or as a disruptive force which spoiled the real essence of Indian civilisation. On the contrary, there are hues and gradations that cannot be ignored, otherwise we run the risk to miss the significance of the process of synthesis to which the coming in touch of different civilisations usually contributes.

Any similar dichotomising approach leaves open the question of what ‘West’ and ‘East’ are. These are not unified by a common culture/civilisation. For instance between e.g. Indian and Chinese civilisations the differences are as profound, and maybe more, than the ones setting apart e.g. Indian and European civilisations[2]. Another dangerous consequence of those interpretative models that consider Western and Eastern countries as watertight compartments is that certain concepts and values are rejected as ‘imperial categories’, regardless of the fact that they were achievements for all humankind, just because they were originated in that part of the world from where imperialism started. These are, broadly speaking, the premises on which I started to work at my research.

At this point, I will try to explain to which elements the historiographical inattention for political thought is ascribable. To better clarify this, it is necessary to briefly - and so with some unavoidable generalisations - describe the characteristics of Indian historiography, with particular attention to the post-independence one. It is possible to identify several currents, some of which are more or less interwoven.

With the establishment of the British rule in India, history became a contested realm. As a matter of fact, the writing of history represented for the colonial officials an important instrument through which they could justify their domination in India. The initial admiration and respect that British scholars (who were often also administrators of the East India

[2] A good starting point on this problem is William H. McNeill’s classical work, *The Rise of the West. A History of the Human Community*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1963.

Company and, afterwards, of the *Raj*) had for the past and rich culture of India[3] was gradually substituted by a contempt for it: the more the British power increased, the more the disdain for Indian history grew. So, according to the European conception of history, - whether the unfolding of history was considered as the realisation of the utilitarian principle, or as a progressive movement from the imperfect to the perfect, or as a class struggle that would lead to the victory of the proletariat - India was uncivilised, ahistorical and backward. India, in a word, was Europe's past[4]. Yet, it could fit with the promise of universal progress and be redeemed thanks to the contact with Europe and by emulating the latter: substantially, history provided the exculpation of Western dominance over the subcontinent and historians were instrumental in producing a discourse of cultural superiority and control[5].

As a consequence of the portrait made by the British of their society, Indians reacted writing their own history[6]. Thus, the nineteenth century saw a considerable flourishing of historical works, both regional and national, written especially in the vernacular languages, but also in English[7]. On the one hand, these histories retained certain cliches of colonial historiography, while, on the other hand, they started rejecting some of its distorting aspects. Therefore, even before the formation of an anti-colonial political scene, history became a battlefield, where Indians could regain the historical agency denied by the British. Through history, the colonised conceived his own identity and pitted it against the

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[3] For example, Mountstuart Elphinstone and William Jones compared the ancient culture of India to that of Greece and Rome. Elphinstone was the Governor of Bombay from 1819 to 1827, while William Jones was a Judge in the Supreme Court of Calcutta, where he founded the Asiatic Society.

[4] Therefore, according to Henry Maine, Professor at Oxford and Cambridge in the second half of 19th century, Europe could find its entire past history there (Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994, 66.

[5] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 11.

[6] It is beyond the scope of this work to dwell on the British argument that Indians had no historical sense. Suffice to say here that the historical method adopted by the Indians adapted gradually to the scientific, Rankean method which had developed in Europe since the beginning of the nineteenth century. See for example the first chapter of Vinay Lal, *The History of History. Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2003, 27-78.

[7] For instance, the *Bangalar Itihas* (History of Bengal, 1848) by Ishwar Chandra Bidyasagar and the Bharatbarsher Itihas (History of India, 1859) by Kedar Nath Datta appeared in this period (Georg G. Iggers, Q. Edward Wang, Supriya Mukherjee (edited by), *A Global History of Modern Historiography*, Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh 2008, 103). Note must be taken of the fact that the work of Nath Datta was the first history of India written by an Indian.

foreign one, while starting to theorise new forms of permanence and change[8]. So, for example, Dayananda Saraswati, founder of the *Arya Samaj*, Rammohun Roy and Swami Vivekananda, although not historians but social reformers, understood very well the importance of the historical discourse as an instrument to romanticise the original Indian essence, which seemed threatened by absorption into a universalized Europe"[9]. Therefore, they started to produce a counter-history and held that in ancient Hinduism reason and technology played already a pivotal role. What needed to be done was to try to resuscitate that pure, old Hinduism which had been corrupted in the course of history by wrong practices and by fallacious interpretations of the scriptures[10]. Significantly enough, the authentic past of India was Hindu and the advent of Islam was one of the elements which caused its deterioration.

Substantially, besides being the bedrock of collective self-understanding, history became 'a guide for positive change', namely the way to progress. That is why many social reformers were much attracted to it. So, since the 1870s, along with a revivalist interpretation of history, a new strand of historical thinking emerged, one that secularised the cause of reform and started questioning the possibility of Indian progress under certain conditions of the British rule. The most important exponents of this trend were Dadabhai Naoroji, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Romesh Chunder Dutt who, although loyal to the Empire, started criticising the British domination taking into account historical data, relying on British blue books and using parameters similar to the Marxist ones to inform their analyses. Furthermore, they disputed the concept of an ancient Hindu Golden Age and portrayed the Muslim dynasties and the other regional kingdoms as benevolent and inherently part of the history of India[11].

With the achievement of freedom from the British *Raj,* which represented a major turning point in the history of the subcontinent, and, more generally, with the end of the Second World War, historical thinking underwent quite understandably a crucial change. On the

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[8] Michael Gottlob (edited by), *Historical Thinking in South Asia. A Handbook of Sources from Colonial Times to the Present,* Oxford University Press, Delhi 2003, 2. As Gottlob shows, the influence which Western historical thinking wielded on India is still visible in the way Indian history is periodised as, accordingly, Ancient, Medieval, Modern with a stress on the dichotomy between tradition and modernity or as pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial, again keeping into account an external perspective. Historians like Romesh Chunder Majumdar retained the classical periodisation, started by James Mill in his *History of British India* (1817), in a Hindu, a Muslim and a British era, where alien invasions and cultural influences are the major historical breaks.

[9] P. Heehs, "Shades of Orientalism: Paradoxes and Problems in Indian Historiography", in *History and Theory*, vol. 42, 2 (May 2003), 169-195, here 195.

[10] Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 101-102.

[11] Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 108-109.

one hand, the rewriting of the history of India (and Asia) originated from the exigence of understanding the present, the new global order, which had so rapidly changed. On the other hand, the rethinking of history and the reappropriation of a collective memory assumed the form of a grandiose mission for Indians: the target was promoting the national project and refuting two hundred years of Eurocentric, Orientalist historiography which had depicted the encounter of India with the 'West' as the key factor which set in motion the engine of change and modernisation in the immutable, timeless and static subcontinent. Thus, history, being a powerful means to consolidate power, started to be encouraged by the new Indian nation-state and gained a great deal of momentum. After 1947, liberated from foreign rule, "the formerly passive objects of Orientalism had turned into active subjects who could reflect autonomously on their historical perspective"[12] and longed to do away with the distorted colonial interpretation of their past. The time had come to "judge our judges", as the poet, Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore had said.

Nevertheless, since history is never the mere narration of facts, this field kept being, not surprisingly, a battleground where "ideas of post-colonial agency moved in divergent directions"[13]. Ergo, even though Indians could become masters of their historiography, this did not mean a less controversial interpretation of the past. In fact, past, being always interwoven with the forging of identity, was susceptible to different and diverging readings according to the kind of identity that one wanted to legitimise and according to how the present was to be explained. This fact, together with the understandable urge to retrieve the centrality on the stage of history produced sometimes outcomes which were no less misleading than the old colonial historiography.

It was mainly the patronage of Jawaharlal Nehru, himself thinker and valuable historian, to promote the study of history and, through it, to endorse the idea of the nation which he had elaborated. The first Prime Minister of independent India (1947-62) saw his country as a 'cultural palimpsest', formed over the centuries by the stratification of different civilisations, among which also the European modernising influence had to be included[14]. The greatness and richness of India were attributable precisely to its mixture of indigenous

[12] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 64.
[13] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 67.
[14] The contrast with the anti-modernist and ahistorical Gandhian outlook is rather strong. See ahead.

and foreign elements, its inclusivity and diversity[15]. Nehru's definition of India was a powerful instrument that "envisaged a knitting together of India's many communities into a political fabric in which all could have a sense of civic citizenship"[16].

By and large, the new Asiacentric historiography endorsed a reversal of the previous interpretations of history. So, for example, the European penetration into Asia which had been depicted by the British as a golden age leading towards progress appeared to Indians as a period of decadence and crisis, whereas the nationalist movement and the decline of the empire was now described as an age of dynamic transformation and redemption. This new historiography, mainly nationalist or Marxist, but often inspired by both trends, had the merit not only to dispute the one-sidedness of the colonial version of history, but also to broaden the historical panorama thanks to the attention given to aspects of social and economic history which had been ignored beforehand. It acknowledged and utilised the scientific method for the historical research, by giving priority to facts and by separating clearly history and fiction, and often adopted a Marxist perspective, without being doctrinally and dogmatically circumscribed into the Marxist ideology. Thus, especially in the work of the most eminent historians, it contributed to explain the awakening of modern India and to identify the most important turning points in the evolution of Indian society[17].

Yet, this historiography definitely presented objective limits. For instance, it considered the Rebellion of 1857 as the first Indian war of independence or attributed the English Industrial Revolution to the conquest and spoliation of Bengal. However, its most important characteristic is that it perceived the Indian nationalist movement as a monolithic bloc, as a stream which flowed in one direction, without irregularities or deviations. The struggle for independence was represented as the apex of the history of India, its historical vendetta

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[15] On the Nehruvian synthesis, see Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 237-38. The most important works by Jawaharlal Nehru are *The Discovery of India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1995 (first published 1946), in which the first Prime Minister defines his idea of nation, and *Glimpses of World History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1989 (first published 1934), which confutes the Euro-centric interpretation of world history.

[16] Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 238.

[17] Giorgio Borsa, *La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia Orientale. La penetrazione Europea e la crisi delle società tradizionali in India, Cina e Giappone*, Rizzoli, Milano 1977, 7-9. The two main state-sponsored projects of Indian historiography were the reconstruction of the freedom struggle (this expression was considered preferable to independence movement as it conferred more significance to Indian agency. It was suggested by the educationist, journalist and education adviser Tara Chand. See Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 239) and the collection of the works of the most influential figures of this period, such as Gandhi, Patel, Nehru and Ambedkar, something which favoured the collection and preservation of a huge amount of primary sources. See also the enlightening contribution by Giorgio Borsa, "L'India moderna nelle storiografie britannica e nazionalista indiana", in *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 50, 3-4 (1996), 328-366.

and, therefore, something sacrosanct, whose justness was indefeasible[18]. For this reason, attempts to analyse it in a more objective and honest mould were perceived as attempts to justify imperialism and again as a demonstration of the assertiveness and persistence of the colonial vision of the world. Another major consequence of this approach was that Nehru and Gandhi[19] - and the latter in particular - were perceived as the champions of the freedom struggle and as those who were able to gather around the Indian National Congress the whole nation, thanks to their capacity to instil into it new force and dignity and to lead it towards victory against the overbearing 'West'; they were the protagonists of the process of rehabilitation of India and they somehow dwarfed most of those intellectuals, politicians, ideologues and thinkers who had come before and who had equally greatly contributed to the awakening of the nation and to create an anti-colonial discourse.

The hegemonic 'Nehruvian' historiography, along with its inclusive definition of the nation, underwent the most virulent attacks by the 'primordialist' historians. According to the latter, the Indian nation had always existed, but its evolution had been interrupted by the several invasion of which the subcontinent had been victim all over the centuries. In order to revive this primordial nation, it was necessary to rediscover it in the past. In such vision, the past was the Indian authentic tradition which could be found in India before the advent of the

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[18]See for example Bipan Chandra, 'Nationalist Historians' Interpretations of the Indian Nationalist Movement', in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, (edited by), *Situating Indian History: For Sarvepalli Gopal*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986, 194-238. The recently deceased historian maintains that since 1880s there were only three historiographical schools in India: imperialistic, nationalist and marxist. He considers the nationalist historiography as a somewhat homogenous bloc, despite providing the reader with the caveat that there are several differences between author and author. The biggest weakness of these historians, according to Chandra, was that they did not take into account the fact that colonialism had a distinct impact on the several sections of Indian society. Yet, he as well, by defining the nationalist movement as a a movement of the people and for the people, conceives it in a similar way, minimising the internal divergences: "Whatever the extent of the actual disillusionment or participation in the actual movement by different social classes or strata or groups at any particular stage, the movement represented the interests of the Indian people as a whole vis-a-vis colonialism" (*idem,* 218).

[19] Of late, Nehru has been object of several scathing critiques within the academic world, both in India and abroad. His concept of modernisation and secularism in particular have been attacked for having been borrowed from the West and imported into India and the expression "Nehruvian socialism" has acquired a very negative connotation. Otherwise, Gandhi is still kept in the pantheon of the freedom fighters and is looked at as the most relevant Indian ideologue, since he was against western modernity and drew inspiration from the Indian tradition to formulate his idea of nation. This is true especially in respect to the academic establishment. Other sections of the society, such as dalit or independent scholars, have criticised Gandhi, especially for his conservative social outlook. Interestingly enough, when Gandhi is attacked as a casteist by non-brahmans, that it socially and politically accepted, as it is perceived as a non threatening, biased viewpoint. When it is people like Arundhati Roy, coming from the upper castes, who do that, then it is a betrayal, something to condemn.

Muslims[20]. Therefore, this view retrieved the nineteenth-century conceptualisation of "a distant Golden Age which was both indigenous and in accord with modern values"[21]. It was a clever solution of the contradiction between preserving tradition and appropriating modernity; in fact, those elements useful for the modernisation of society had already been inherent, at least *in nuce*, in Indian society but their diffusion had been hindered by the Muslim conquest[22]. So, everything having its origin in Europe and imported into India through colonialism had to be condemned; not even democracy and progress were spared, since their 'genuine' versions had always been intrinsically part of Indian civilisation. It was the task of the historian to provide evidence of it from the tradition[23]. By and large, this perception of history was a by-product of that same Orientalism which it wanted to combat, as it accepted the assumption of India as utterly different from the 'West' and not eligible to historical change, since what was useful for the future was already existing in the past[24]. There was no need for cultural negotiation, being 'East' and 'West' watertight compartments, whose natures could not communicate. Also historical thinking was alien to India, which had other means to understand its Self and claimed its own subjective way to appreciate history, for example through mythology. The European

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[20] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 33-44.

[21] Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*, Hurst & CO, New Delhi and London 1996 (first published 1993), 11.

[22] Such for instance was the interpretation of Radha Kumodh Mookerji (*The Fundamental Unity of India*, Longmans, London 1914; *Nationalism in Hindu Culture*, Theosophical Publishing House, London 1921) and Kashi Prasad Jayaswal (*History of India 150 AD to 350 AD*, Low Price Publications, New Delhi 1990, first published 1933).

[23] The historian had "to investigate and unfold the values which age after age have inspired the inhabitants of a country to develop their collective will and to express it through the manifold activities of their life" (quoted in Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 67 from K.M. Munshi, 'Introduction', in *History and Culture of the Indian People*, I, Bombay 1951, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 8). Munshi, a Gujarati literary figure and scholar who wrote several novels in which he exalted the glory of Hindu India and its decline with the advent of the Muslims, was the founder of the educational institution and publishing house *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan*, which is still today dedicated to the promotion of Indian, but more specifically Hindu civilisation. He got the financial support of the powerful industrial tycoon G.D. Birla for the writing of the multi-volume *History and Culture of the Indian People*, whose editor was Romesh Chander Majumdar, a renowned Bengali historian. The ambitious project wanted to replace the biased History of British Indian (1817) by James Mill, but it proved to be no less distorted in certain interpretations.

[24] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 43. Interestingly enough, the classic British periodatisation of Indian history in the three macroperiods (Hindu, Muslim and British) was not rejected. All the more, the Muslim era was looked at as a dark age. K.N. Panikkar has clearly stressed the fact that "the resurrection and reinterpretation of the past was not inherently retrogressive, it was only a means for self-strengthening and not a basis for a vision of the future". Yet, even if it represented a way "to reassert the cultural identity of the colonised" and was only "cultural defence", the result was the same as that produced by an intentional cultural revivalism (K.N. Panikkar, "The Intellectual History of Colonial India: Some Historiographical and Conceptual Questions", in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar, *Situating Indian History,* 403-433 (here 432, 428, 433).

pretence of a universal scientific approach to history was just another form of dominance and was to be rejected[25]. A quote by Gandhi, who certainly cannot be fitted with the group of those nationalists promoting an exclusive Hindu polity, but who with them shared some commonalities of thinking at least in his perception of history and in the language he used, is quite interesting to make this concept clearer:

> "I have no desire to engage the reader's attention upon my speculations on the value of history considered as an aid to the evolution of our race. I believe in the saying that a nation is happy that has no history. It is my pet theory that our Hindu ancestors solved the question for us by ignoring history as it is understood today and by building on slight events their philosophical structure. Such is the Mahabharata"[26].

The most direct consequence of this argument[27] was that if the Hindu essence was what India needed in order to retrieve its lost identity, then everything which had contributed to contaminate and weaken it had to be eliminated as incompatible with the revivalist project. So, with the demise of the British rule, the Other became the Muslims, *a fortiori* after the 'vivisection of the Motherland', that is to say the terrible trauma of the Partition. Not surprisingly, this historiography sponsored a strongly biased reconstruction of the past and provided the theoretical justification for Hindu nationalism. It was especially Vinayak

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[25] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 66.

[26] Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 228, quoted from M.K. Gandhi, 'My Jail Experiences - XI, in *Young India* (11 September 1924), in *Collected Works*, CD ROM. According to Gandhi, history was never a guide to action, since it was corrupt at the source (See Lal, *The History of History*, 60-67). Yet, it is important to note, as Balakrishna Govind Gokhale [see 'Gandhi and History, *History and Theory* 11 (1972), 214-25] has shown, that the idea of progress was not absent for Gandhi's thought. It was connected with the concept of soul force, which implied improvement for man through the making of a new juster history.

[27] The roots of this perspective lie in the theorisation against British colonialism and modernisation done in the previous century by Vivekananda, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Aurobindo Ghose, Dayananda Saraswati, Bal Gandadhar Tilak, ect., even though, in this revisitation - especially in Savarkar's view - it was more extreme and chauvinist.

Damodar Savarkar in his *Hindutva* ('Hinduness', 1923)[28] who paved the way for this interpretation, emphasising the irreconcilability between Hindus and Muslims. In fact, Savarkar, a national hero for the Hindu right and the ideological forerunner of Hindu political fundamentalism, theorised that Hinduism and Hinduness were two different concepts; the former was a religion, deriving from the latter, which was actually an ethnic identity. Thus, in his elaboration of Indian identity, Savarkar merged geography, racial connection and common religious practices: by marginalising other religions, the Hindu nation became the only legitimate Indian nation. Sikhs were included in the Hindu realm, because their religion had developed in India, where their main shrines were located, whereas Muslims and Christians had "divided loyalties"[29], because, although part of the India population, their holy lands lay outside India. In this polarising vision of history, Nehru and those who, like him, had fought for a multicultural and inclusive nation had betrayed the Hindu cause and contributed to contaminate the pureness of Hindu India[30].

Another historiographical trend opposed to the nationalist-Marxist and to the *Hindutva* ones was the 'orthodox' Marxist school which, generally, considered the national movement and the Congress as bourgeois phenomena. Often stuck in mechanical and narrowly ideological application of the Marxist theory, it focused mainly on the working and peasant classes which were left out of the national narrative and did not benefit at all from the independence, which, in this view, was a mere change of the vertex of the society. The penetration of the capitalistic mode of production was possible thanks to colonial domination, which, for this reason, was a seminal factor for the introduction of modernisation and of the communist ideology and for the political awareness and class consciousness of the masses. Hence, the main figures of the independence movement

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[28] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindutva*. *Who is a Hindu?*, Bharti Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi 1989 (first published 1923). As noticed by Jaffrelot, Savarkar established an equation between Hindutva and 'Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan', so that religion, culture, language and a sacred territory are put together in order to create the perfect ethnic nationalism [Christophe Jaffrelot (edited by), *Hindu Nationalism. A reader*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2007, 15]. This work is generally considered by Hindu nationalists as one of the most authoritative books and is useful to understand their theorisation. Savarkar basically pushed forward the religious homogenisation theorised by Tilak and others and in order to do this he understood that it was necessary to democratise the Hindu community by including also Dalits within it. In this, he was definitely unorthodox and even rebellious, so much that he was attacked by several Brahmans for his positions (G.P. Deshpande, *The World of Ideas in Modern Marathi, Phule, Vinoba, Savarkar*, Tulika Books, Delhi 2009, 23-24).

[29] Iggers, Wang, Mukherjee, *A Global History*, 231.

[30] It is noteworthy that it was a supporter of *Hindutva* and former member of the Hindu militant youth organisation Rashtra Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Association, RSS) that assassinated Gandhi. No matter how much Gandhi was against modernisation and the West, his position towards the Muslims was too soft to be accepted by the Hindu right.

were members of the elite, they did not represent the voice of the masses and their action was not such as to change the course of history in favour of the people[31]. The historiography promoted by Nehru and embracing the Nehru consensus, was, in this outlook, an ideological means used by the Indian bourgeoisie against the colonial historical discourse and, therefore, no less specious. Even its interest in social history was exclusively motivated by the will to include the masses of peasants and workers into the freedom movement, "but obviously it was a false image of nationhood", aimed at confusing the masses and insert them in the hegemonic culture of the middle classes[32].

Definitely more influential than the previous one was the so-called Cambridge school, formed in the 1970s at the University of Cambridge. Its main assumption was that the real intent of the leaders of the national movement was to replace their British masters. This perspective was undoubtedly ideologically biased as it tried to underestimate the ideas and ideology of the Congress and, more generally, of the struggle for independence. It stressed the self-interest of the 'westernised middle class', disparaging their personal integrity and giving importance to the connections between the local interests and the political organisations at the national level, Indian National Congress *in primis.* If, on the one hand, such interpretation underlined for the first time the division of the political scene in the local, provincial and all-India level, on the other hand it left no space to the role of ideology, therefore reducing the independence movement to the capacity of mobilisation of the powerful Indian notables. Ideology was only a smoke screen, functional to the attainment of power, namely the sole and ultimate purpose of the Indian leaders, flattened into a big, homogeneous bloc. There existed no autonomous Indian politics, but only a reaction to the British administrative decisions, since all 'stimulating forces' were Western. Ideas and the entire intellectual history had no role in creating an ideological basis for a modern society, or at least for a society alternative to that promoted by the colonial order.

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[31] On Marxist historiography in India Ashok Rudra, *Non-Eurocentric Marxism and Indian Society*, People's Book Society, Calcutta 1988. See, among the works of Indian Marxist historians, Mahabendra Nath Roy, *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1987; Shripad Amrit Dange, *India: From Primitive Communism to Slavery. A Marxist Study of Ancient History in Outline*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi 1949 and *Selected Writings*, Long Vangmaya Griha, Bombay 1974. For the works of Rajani Palme Dutt, another Marxist historian, consult http://www.marxists.org/archive/dutt/index.htm (visited 1st October 2014). Considerable exception to this dogmatic historiography which deserve mention are the works of Bipan Chandra, Sumit Sarkar, Irfan Habib and D.D. Kosambi, who, although defining themselves Marxist historians, are not easily identifiable with a specific school. According to Bipan Chandra, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarvepalli Gopal and A.R. Desai were Marxist historians (Chandra, "Nationalist Historians' Interpretation of the Indian National Movement", 195).

[32] Gottlob, *Historical Thinking*, 50-55. Quote idem, 55 from Dange, *India: From Primitive Communism to Slavery*, 12.

In essence, rebellion was the outcome of the failure to achieve an adequate position in the government[33]. No wonder that this historiography was accused of being neoimperialist by many intellectuals, not only from India[34].

One of the reactions to this historiography, but more generally to elitist-nationalist historical strands, was the creation in 1982 of the 'Subaltern Studies' school[35]. It originated mainly out of the critique of the nation as expression of the upper castes and the upper strata of society and represented the bitter disillusionment provoked by the repression of the 'Emergency' period[36]. The dream of the nation endorsed by Jawaharlal Nehru had failed and it was now time to give voice to the fragments of that betrayed nation and to assert the priority of local, narrow identities over national ones. Subaltern studies seemed to imply that writing history in India and on India was nothing but a demonstration of "the collusion of imperialist and nationalist forces, just as they were singularly lacking in any theoretical impulse"[37]. The former just minimised or completely dismissed the significance of any form of resistance among Indians, whereas the latter depicted Indian nationalism as a magnificent enterprise in which the agency of the subalterns was denied by the indigenous elite. Therefore, it was only the elite who had retrieved the centre of the historical stage to the detriment of the underdogs of society. On the one hand, this historiography encouraged the study of social history and claimed that there existed no fixed notion of modernity, because such an assumption meant the relegation of Other modernities into the realm of Europe's past; on the other hand, it aroused doubts - even

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[33] See the sharp critique of Cambridge school historiography elaborated by Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Indian Nationalism as Animal Politics" in *Historical Journal* 22 (1979), 747-63.

[34] The main exponents of this historiographical outlook were John Gallagher, David Washbrook, Christopher A. Bayly, Francis Robinson, Christopher Baker, B.R. Tomlinsons, Anil Seal and Gordon Johnson. Not all of them have kept on adhering to the criteria of the school, which was however quite heterogeneous since its onset. For an accurate reconstruction of the Cambridge school's interpretation see Michelguglielmo Torri, *Regime coloniale, intellettuali e notabili in India. Politica e società dell'era del nazionalismo*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1996, 19-61. Among the works of the Cambridge school historians see Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Late Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1968; Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism: Bombay and the Indian National Congress 1880-1915*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1973; D.A. Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics. The Madras Presidency, 1870-1920*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1976; B. R. Tomlinson, *The political economy of the Raj, 1914-1947: The economics of decolonization in India,* Macmillan, London 1979.

[35] In this year the review *Subaltern Studies. Writings on South Asian History and Society* (Oxford University Press) was founded and edited by Ranajit Guha. It was a collection of essays mainly by South Asian scholars. For an overview on the works of this historiographical trend see https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/spa/zohkohb0i282t94/Area%20Studies/public/subaltern/ssmap.htm (visited on 3rd October, 2014).

[36] Lal, *The History of History*, 19.

[37] Lal, *The History of History*, 192.

among some the very founding members of the schools - about whether an academic elite could make the subaltern speak. Moreover, was not the concept of a subaltern community as much totalising and misleading as a Eurocentric interpretation of Indian past? Did it make sense to reject *in toto* nationalism for being something originated in the 'West' and even more to draw a clear-cut dividing line between 'Orient' and 'Occident'[38]?

It is not very surprising that in such historiographical scenario, the history of political thought has been almost completely ignored[39]. As a matter of fact, for nationalist, left-leaning, secular historiography the focus had to be mainly on the freedom struggle, since intellectual history was concerned only with eminent personalities and this could give the misconceiving impression of a resistance movement led from above which had no contribution from the grassroots level of society. Ideas were important only when they could be proof of the Indianness of the national movement and this explains the over-emphasis on Gandhi and his anti-modernity *Weltanschauung*[40]. Moreover, a great deal of attention was given to those nationalists, like Tilak, who combined a certain satisfaction with orthodox Hindu mores[41] (although this is not easily admitted by certain Indian historians) with a bold, defying attitude towards the British *Raj*. Again, this was aimed at stressing the power of Indian resistance and at claiming that independence was achieved after a tough struggle and was not a gracious concession conferred by the British. The fact that for revivalist historiography everything somehow connected with the corrupt 'West' -

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[38] For a brief introduction and critique to the Subaltern Studies see Lal, *The History of History*, 186-230. Some reviews of the works of the school are Sumit Sarkar, "Orientalism Revisited: Saidian Frameworks in the Writing of Modern Indian History", *Oxford Literary Review* 16, n. 1-2 (1994), 205-24; Ramachandra Guha, "Subaltern and Bhadralok Studies" in *Economic and Political Weekly* 30 (19 August 1995), 2056-2058; Rosalind C. Morris, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, Columbia University Press, New York 2010. Later, some 'subaltern' scholars have been infiltrated by postmodernist ideas and maintained the impossibility of a subjective historical inquiry, being history a creation of the mind of the individual. See, among others, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Radical Histories and Question of Enlightenment Rationalism" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 30, n. 14 (8 April 1995), 751-759.

[39] See also the reflections by C.A. Bayly, "Liberalism at Large: Mazzini and Nineteenth-century Indian Thought", in C.A. Bayly, Eugenio F. Biagini (edited by), *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism (1830-1920)*, Oxford University Press for the British Academy, Oxford 2008, 355-374, here 356.

[40] It is worth mentioning at this point that Indian historians in the 1950s and 1960s were influenced by the historical interpretation of the eminent historian and diplomat K.M. Panikkar, who justly maintained that Hinduism, purified from its elements of irrationality and fanaticism, had become a fundamental element in the elaboration of the programme of nationalism. This historical standpoint was undoubtedly functional to reiterate that nationalism had mostly Indian sources. Yet, at the same time, it tended to neglect the opposite development, that is to say the restoration of traditional and conservative Hinduism. See Torri, *Regime coloniale, intellettuali e notabili in India*, 54-55.

[41] See apropos of Tilak's conservative social vision Parimala V. Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism. Discrimination, Education and Hindutva*, Orient BlackSwan, New Delhi 2010.

and intellectual history and history of political thought are difficultly circumscribable in well defined geographical areas - was hardly worthy of any consideration and that for Marxists most ideas were nothing but a facade for material interests is quite self-explanatory. As seen above, there was no space for intellectual history also in the Cambridge school interpretation[42], while in the Subaltern studies perspective, given its stress on the elements of continuity between British *Raj* and independent India, it was not really important, as political ideas had not proved to be something useful, since anyway, they had failed to mould a new, better, less elite-oriented society. At the most, the attention paid by the scholars of the subalterns to novels and to the unheard popular voice rather than to politics made them interested in the ideas of the people; yet, cultural and social history were disconnected from political history.

What I have mentioned above is *a fortiori* valid if liberalism is taken into account. And this is quite understandable. In fact, liberalism was the core ideology which justified imperialism, it implied the *mission civilisatrice* of the coloniser over the colonised and it confined the attainment of freedom only to members of advanced societies, from which India, among others, was excluded. Therefore, as C.A. Bayly has illustrated in a recent work, Indian liberals attained several derogatory labels in the course of history. Generally, they were considered mendicants by the radical supporters of the *swadeshi* movement, self-seeking members of the bourgeoisie by the Marxist historians, office-seeking collaborators by the Cambridge schools and elitists using and circulating imperialistic categories by certain post-colonial studies[43].

In the first place, such flattening approaches do not leave space to important questions, namely why Indians ideologues and thinkers felt at ease with liberal ideas and why they used them to confront foreign domination. As a matter of fact, it ignores the fact that liberalism was, to Indians, "a conjunctural phenomenon, rather than simply a lineage or influence diffused from Europe to Asia, from metropole to colony. It reflected attempts by people - not all of them elite - to grapple with the consequences of globalisation, the intrusion of colonial state and the collapse of embodied authority of popes, mandarins, or Brahmins which had all happened within a generation"[44]. Liberal ideas gave Indians not only the opportunity to understand the new society in the making, but also the tools to

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[42] The Marxist outlook of the Cambridge historians - that is the significance conferred to the connection between structure and superstructure - was asserted by David Washbrook. Torri, *Regime coloniale, intellettuali e notabili in India*, 28-29.

[43] C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties. Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi 2012, 343.

[44] C.A. Bayly, "Liberalism at Large", 355.

transform their society the way they wanted it to be, now that, thanks to the penetration of Western education, the links with clan, caste, tribe, region were starting loosening and intellectuals had begun speaking of nation and its building. This did not imply by any means that what was there before the advent of the British had to be invariably wiped out, because Indian intellectuals were all quite aware of the fact that 'Western' ideas could be installed on the Indian ones. The clear-cut division between a putative ‘East’ opposed to a putative ‘West’ - by-product of the Eurocentric history of the world which developed since the European fifteenth-century conquests with the main purpose to understand the differences between the white man and the other and to maintain that the former was better than the latter - is not conducive to understand, if at all, intellectual history, since it is not possible to draw boundaries between ideas. And this is arguable with greater reason for Europe and Asia, which had been interconnected over the course of history, through different flows of influence, both in the material and in the intellectual realm. India was never sealed off from the rest of the world and ideas could move freely over boundaries. The trade which had unified the Indian Ocean since the first century AD and the invasions, after the Aryan migration, of Hellenic Greeks, Arabs, Persians, Afghans, Mongols, Mughal and Europeans had a strong cultural impact on the subcontinent[45]. So, both Eurocentric and Asiacentric approaches - the one holding that there are specific factors in European civilisation that made it superior and the other rejecting certain values because of their geographical origin - are equally misleading and do not help explain why certain phenomena originated in a particular area of the world and became significant in other areas.

Secondly, if it is true that liberalism had several undeniable limits, such as the fear of the majoritarianism of the masses and hence its exclusionary worldview, it is simplistic to think of it as big homogeneous bloc. In fact, there were considerable differences between authors, which Indians themselves did not ignore. There was liberalism, but then there were individual liberals, as much as there was colonialism and colonial individual administrators.

Ultimately, the dismissal of liberalism as something intellectually naive or socially dangerous does not take into account that ideas change according to the context in which

[45] For example, as shown by Robert Marks, the Indian Ocean was the single most important crossroad of trade between 650 and 1750 [Robert B. Marks, *The origins of the Modern World. A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-first Century*, Second Edition, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers 2007 (first published 1989), 52.

they are applied and to whom decides to apply them and for which purport[46]. Considering liberal Indians like clumsy emulators of the British and denying them the capability to adopt certain ideas and values in a specific context in order to change it contributes to the imperialistic version of liberalism which perceived history as a line in which the 'West' was followed by the rest[47]. On the contrary, admitting that there existed a selective appropriation and re-elaboration of ideas and values acknowledges the significance of intellectual exchange in the decolonisation of the mind.

Thus, the recent efforts made by certain historiography[48] to pay new attention to intellectual history, political thought and especially liberalism represent a groundbreaking task which is going to bring useful historical interpretations outside "the narratives of the nation and empire that have constrained scholarship"[49]. In point of fact, "Indian liberalism was both wider in scope, and more specific in its remedies, than what is commonly called nationalism"[50].

Having considered this framework, Gokhale, whom has been so far frowned at as a soft-spoken, conservative friend of the British rulers and to whom Tilak and Gandhi have been easily preferred, acquires considerable importance. In the last decades, Gokhale's thinking was seldom subjected to an in-depth analysis and was underestimated as something which did not deserve particular attention, given its presumed lack of originality. Apart from few good historical researches, Gokhale has indeed nearly disappeared from the academic panorama and has fallen almost utterly in oblivion.

Notwithstanding this general tendency, I believe that Gokhale is a valuable representative of Indian liberalism and, as such, worth studying attentively. For, Gokhale embraced a version of liberal thinking purged from capitalistic and imperialistic attitudes; free market was condemned as an ideological means to force the underdog countries to remain in a position of disadvantage; it was a false argument, according to him, that deep social and moral change were the bedrock for political representation, because it was thanks to the latter that the former could be achieved, as freedom always required power. These

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[46] India became an experimental field. See for example this question from the British perspective in Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire. A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*, University of Chicago Press, London 1999. The author's point is that ideas which were supposed to have an universal reach were transformed when they got in contact with the unfamiliar, that is to say Indian reality (*idem*, 8). See also Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, *passim*.

[47] See Niall Ferguson, *Civilization: the West and the Rest*, Penguin, New York 2011

[48] See, besides the works already mentioned by Mehta and Bayly, the special issue of *Modern Intellectual History* 4, 1 (2007), and Andrew Stephen Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire. An Alternative History.* California University Press, Berkeley 2014.

[49] Shruti Kapila, in Preface of *Modern Intellectual History* 4, 1 (2007), 4.

[50] Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 1.

elements and many others which I will try to describe in the course of this work are some of the foundations of Gokhale's outlook and I think that they are quite telling of the specific mould attained by liberal thought in a context of political subjugation. By and large, liberalism became *Indian* when it was implanted in peculiarities belonging to a social-cultural reality completely different from the one in which it was originated and evolved. Therefore, from being the ideology which justified British rule in India, liberalism was mutated into an instrument of dissent and resilience against that same rule and, significantly enough, against those variants of nationalism that, in the name of social order and cultural authenticity, did not recognise any liberty to the single individuals, much less to women, economically unprivileged and untouchables. In this sense, far from being a conservative system of thinking, liberalism became a radical tool in the hands of a subjected people, trying to defy at the same time the colonial and the pre-modern feudal order.

Then, revisiting Gokhale's nationalism is seminal not only in order to reconsider him as an influential exponent of liberalism, but also to better appreciate the very nature of the anti-colonial movement, which, since the creation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, was by no means unidirectional and uniform. On the contrary, to follow the argument made above, there was nationalism and there were nationalist leaders. And not all of them had the same concept of freedom, as for some it meant independence from foreign rule in order to recreate the pre-colonial social feudal order, namely a caste-oriented and conservative society, whereas for others freedom was the liberation from the British yoke so that a modern nation-state founded on democratic principles could be pursued. The Congress party itself was only one expression of the multifaceted nature of the anti-colonial movement[51].

Having tried to delineate the reasons why the history of political thought has kindled so less interest and why it should instead be a subject of investigation, as it is actually becoming, it is now time to examine some of the most relevant historiographical works on Gokhale and see how he was generally perceived.

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[51] Parimala V. Rao, (edited by), *New Perspective on the History of Indian Education*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2014, 36. The editor very interestingly shows how the history of education is an important field in order to deconstruct the schematisation coloniser/colonised and caste/class. The attitude held by the leaders towards the issue of education, since it is a fundamental social lift, is useful to understand what kind of society they aimed to and, therefore, whether they defended their class and caste interests or they wanted a collective social progress (See *idem*, Introduction and, by the same editor, "Compulsory Education and the Political Leadership in Colonial India", 151-175).

It has been said above that Gokhale, together with other leaders labelled as Moderates, was for a long time considered a gullible politician, manipulated by the British and incapable of conferring the national movement a large-scale impact. This view was encouraged by the fact that the Moderates, for a series of conjunctural factors, saw their power tarnished by the Extremist politics and were afterwards totally shadowed by the advent of Gandhi. Therefore, the so-called Extremists, by virtue of their powerful position in the Congress before it was taken by Gandhi, were considered worthy of more consideration, since they had been able to raise their voice against the British and to undermine the gutless Moderate establishment.

As a reaction to such attitude, some friends and disciples of Gokhale, in particular members of the Servants of India Society, authored several books on him out of devotion and admiration. Most of these works, not surprisingly, are characterised by an apologetic and defensive posture, but have the merit to have encouraged the collection of documents by Gokhale, such as his speeches and writings, in addition to reproducing - although sometimes in a biased or altered way - some personal aspects of Gokhale's life, which cannot otherwise be grasped by working only with archival material. Therefore they have paved the way for future researches[52]. Among this works, the short book by Gandhi is certainly worth mentioning, all the more because the Mahatma considered Gokhale his political *guru*[53]. In Gandhi's opinion, Gokhale's religion was a civic religion, which implied pureness of means towards the ends, courage, patience, humility, sense of justice, straightforwardness and perseverance in the common interest of the nation. Gandhi respected Tilak, since he could captivate the imagination of his people, but he felt closer in spirit to Gokhale, despite several differences in their outlook[54]. For instance, in terms of social customs, Gandhi did not share his *guru*'s stand about widows' marriage, even though he agreed that the condition of women had to uplifted. They differed utterly in their estimate of Western civilisation and democracy and in the usefulness of industrialisation,

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[52] Unfortunately, not being a Marathi-speaker, I can mention only English-written books. Among these works see, for example, Vaman Govind Kale, *Gokhale and Economic Reforms*, Arya Bhushan Press, Poona 1916; T.K. Shahani, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale: A Historical Biography*, R.K. Mody, Bombay 1929 John Somerwell Hoyland, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale: His Life and Speeches*, YMCA Publishing House, Calcutta 1933; T.N. Jagadisan (edited by), *My Master Gokhale: A Selection from the Speeches and Writings of Rt. Hon'ble V.S, Srinivasa Sastri*, Model Publications, Madras 1946; P. Konanda Rao, *Gokhale and Sastri*, Prasaranga, Mysore 1961.

[53] Mohandas Kharamchand Gandhi, *Gokhale, My Political Guru*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad 1955.

[54] Nonetheless, as it has been noted by several scholars, if on the one hand Gandhi retained Gokhale's vision about the spiritualisation of politics and about the primacy of means over ends, on the other hand, he adopted Tilak's methods in order to mobilise people. The utilisation of a religious language to speak to the people is an example.

being Gandhi against them and Gokhale a sponsor of them. Moreover, the public display of religion was something Gokhale did not agree with, because it roused the passion of the 'ignorant' masses, whereas it was exactly what made Gandhi so popular among the people. By and large, Gandhi considered Gokhale his master, because he had taught him and Indians that political life, but also life in general, had to be spiritualised and to become a self-negating mission. In this respect, Gokhale was, in Gandhi's view, a real *sanyasin.* Therefore, Gandhi accepted the theoretical frame in which, according to Gokhale, political life had to be inserted, but rejected some core ideas of which Gokhale's thinking consisted, namely democracy and liberalism.

D.B. Mathur[55] depicts Gokhale as a conciliator, who tried to surmount the breaches between Indians and British, Hindus and Muslims, within the Congress, as well as within Hinduism. He was the champion of fair play and respect towards the opponents. The author maintains that the labels 'Extremist' and 'Moderate' are not adequate to explain the different strands present in the two formations. Nevertheless, this work lacks any explanation about the reasons why Tilak and his faction could mobilise people in Maharashtra more easily than Gokhale did.

An important work by Stanley Wolpert appeared in 1961 with the title *Tilak and Gokhale. Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India[56].* The author takes into account the simultaneous political careers of the two Pune leaders and creates a scheme in which they occupy antithetical positions. In fact, even if both their outlooks were a reaction to the colonial ideology, the outcome was quite opposite. So, Tilak was socially conservative and perceived 'East' and 'West' as utterly incompatible. Therefore, it was preferably to him to keep a reactionary social outlook, rather than accept the modernisation - whatever it was - coming from Occident. Substantially, according to Wolpert, Tilak's strong traditionalism was tactical as it represented a polemic contraposition to the British *Raj* and was then a form of nationalism. India had no need to import methods and tactics from outside because through the revival of Hinduism, namely the richest heritage of the Indian civilisation, the society could achieve *swarajya*, that is to say Hindu rule, and be redeemed from the colonial curse. On the contrary, Gokhale, fervent admirer of European philosophy and political thought, from which he drew a great deal of inspiration, had a relativistic approach to political and social issues; he blamed the backwardness of Indian society on

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[55] D.B. Mathur, *Gokhale, a Political Biography: A study of his Services and Political Ideas*, Manaktala, Bombay 1966.

[56] Stanley A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale. Revolution and Reform in the making of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1989 (first published 1961).

Hindu orthodoxy and on the mistaken overlapping of religious belief and social practice. The attainment of self-government was crucial for the progress of the nation, but not enough to liberate it from its social evils. The solution consisted in the spread of education and in the introduction of radical social reforms in order to uplift the masses. By and large, Wolpert properly underlines the divergent views held by Tilak and Gokhale in terms of social questions, comparing their conflicting opinion about progress and evolution. Yet, the weakness of this interpretation is that Gokhale is portrayed as champion of modernity, while Tilak as the representative of tradition. The corollary of such schematisation is that Gokhale's thinking is the result of the progress and rationality achieved by the Indians thanks to the contact with the British, whereas Tilak is weighed down by the Oriental irrationality. The outcome is a dichotomising simplification of the two politicians. Moreover, the author applies this schematisation also to their political vision, underestimating the fact that, especially after the death of Gokhale, Tilak founded the Indian Home Rule League and supported the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms with the purport of exploiting British rule through constitutional methods and in order to obtain self-government and the dominion status within the empire[57].

Another seminal work, which is a reference book for anybody interested in Gokhale is B.P. Nanda's *Gokhale. The Indian Moderates and the British Raj*, first appeared in 1977, but recently republished in an omnibus edition[58]: this is by far the best and most complete biography on Gokhale. The author does not take an hagiographical or sympathetic stand, but makes a reliable and judicious reconstruction of the Maharastrian leader's life and of the relations between the Congress and the British *Raj*. Nanda maintained that it was somehow thanks to Tilak that Gokhale could become a politician at the all-India level, since he was deprived by the rival of an effective political base in Poona. According to the

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[57] Another remarkable work on Tilak, which emphasises the significance of the utilisation of myth as a means to politicisation where mass mobilisation is difficult, is Richard Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1975. The author writes ""“To the majority of western scholars Gokhale exemplifies the values of the academe, liberalism, scholarly integrity and detachment from the rancour of professional politics. Tilak is disdained for his obvious relish for political infighting and is blamed for later Poona manifestations of regional chauvinism and Hindu revivalism” (*idem*, 4). Yet, according to Cashman, Tilak understood the very nature of power and the demands of leadership (5), he was modern and liberal, but had to cope with a traditional society (217-221). For a compendium about the interpretations of Tilak thinking and political action see Biswamoy Pati (edited by), *Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Popular Readings*. Primus Books, Delhi 2011.

[58] B.R. Nanda, *Three Statesmen. Gokhale, Gandhi and Nehru*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2004. Along with *Gokhale. The Indian Moderates and the British Raj*, it includes also *Mahatma Gandhi. A biography* (first published 1958) and *Jawaharlal Nehru: Rebel and Statesman* (first published 1995).

author, the difficulties which the founders of the Indian National Congress had to face were not totally appreciated by the following generation, who tended to denigrate the Moderates as mendicants and representatives of their own class interests. Nonetheless, their work was crucial. In fact, they paved the way for their successors, because "the evolution of an Indian nationality was not so simple or inevitable a phenomenon as it may seem today. But for the skill and tenacity of a few able and outstanding men, Indians and Britons, it might have been delayed, if not halted altogether"[59]. That view was somehow justifiable in the 1920s, as the new leaders wanted to overcome the previous methods and discourses - deemed to be the main cause of the Congress failure, whereas actually they were the only viable ones in the period of zenith of British domination - in order to give a new intensity and a larger political base to the nationalist movement. Yet, such interpretation of the Moderates persisted for long, so much that, even today Tilak is certainly better remembered than Gokhale in the collective imagination. In substance, Nanda gives back to Gokhale his rightful place among the leaders of India, significantly situating him at the same level of Gandhi and Nehru

Although not a book specifically on Gokhale, Parimala Rao's *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*[60] is worth mentioning, since it pays a great deal of attention to the internal contradictions within Indian society and how they reflected into the national movement. Rao compared Tilak's ideology with that of other liberal thinkers and politicians from the same region, including of course Gokhale. The overall picture is that social reforms had from the very beginning a divisive effect on the anti-colonial movement. With their emphasis on the individual uplifting, in fact, social reformers implied the nullification of certain particularistic high-caste privileges, namely landlord and moneylender interests, and the end (or at least the reduction) of the paternalistic and patriarchal characteristics of the social structure, which the members of the so-called Extremist faction, which Rao calls Nationalists using the term preferred by Tilak to define his own group, wanted to safeguard. In other words, Nationalists represented the landed elite of Maharashtra and they were equally against Reformers, or Moderates, and colonial rule, being both a threat to their dominant social status. Rao's book is groundbreaking, since it describes in a very accurate way how Tilak wanted to reinforce social and economic discrimination in the name of nationalism. Moreover, it deconstructs the misconception - dating back to the colonial period and retained by certain historiography - that Brahmans, especially *chitpavan* Brahmans, that is to say the caste to which most leaders of the region belonged,

[59] Nanda, *Gokhale*, 480.
[60] Parimala V. Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*.

Gokhale and Tilak included, constituted a homogenous, monolithic group. In addition to this, Rao shows that both Reformers and Nationalists equally appealed to the Government, but their demands were clashing, since they wanted opposite social orders; Naoroji, Ranade, Agarkar and Gokhale were in favour of social change which could bring about a juster society, whereas Tilak and his following wanted the restoration of the *status quo*, before the coming of the British. As a consequence, the interpretation of Gokhale as British *Raj* supporter and elitist and of Tilak as nationalist mass leader is finally refuted.

All things considered, it is now time to revisit Gokhale in the light of the most recent studies and beyond his political leadership, failures and successes, but looking into the questions that characterised his thinking. It will be therefore the purport of this work to try to investigate his idea of the nation, his concept of liberalism and his elaborations of a more equitable social order. This is not meant to be a retreat to elite history - something which anyway cannot be easily dismissed, considered the pivotal role played by elites in the making of history - but a new, maybe small, tesserae in the still partly unexplored mosaic of Indian intellectual history and history of political thought.

The significance of Gokhale in Today's India

However, before starting, a question comes spontaneous to the scholar of history. As a matter of fact, as the eminent Italian historian Benedetto Croce maintained, history is always contemporary history[61], that it to say that the interest kindled by the past originates from the need to illuminate and understand the present in which we are living. It is exactly this urge to explain the contemporaneity and its roots that differentiates the engagé historian and the erudite historian. So, if it is quite indisputable that Gokhale was an important politician and that his 'humane, secular, liberal nationalism' contributed to shape the aftermath India, it is necessary to appreciate why he was forgotten and, above all, why it would be constructive to bring him back to memory in today's India. This question is even more crucial in the turn that India has taken of late, with the reawakening of an alarming religious nationalism and with the crisis of secularism. It is quite difficult to give an exhaustive explanation of what happened and this introduction is not meant to be such. Yet, it will be conducive to try to delineate shortly the developments which made possible a change of direction in terms of secularism and inclusivity and to identify the breaking points which contributed to produce deep changes in Indian society.

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[61] Benedetto Croce, *La storia come pensiero e come azione*, Bari, Laterza, 1938, p. 5.

After independence, India became a democratic, secular country. Nevertheless, this was not an inevitable or granted development. On the contrary, without the commitment of Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders both in the Congress and outside it, India could have turned into the Hindu counterpart of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In fact, as we have seen, both religious nationalism - otherwise called communalism[62] - and secular nationalism were inherent in the anti-colonial movement since its beginning. Both these versions of nationalism were equally a byproduct of modernisation and the outcome of the process of the forging of Indian identity; both utilised elements of modernity and tradition to respond to the colonial critique of India's being a non-nation. Religious nationalists considered the nation as the community of all the coreligionists, or, in its extreme version, religion was transformed in ethnic identity, while to secular nationalists equality towards different religious communities and multiculturalism were the foundation of the nation.

The British officials of the Indian colonial Government were well aware of the fact that the administrative unity which for the first time had embraced the whole subcontinent had spurred a sense of national belonging in India and, in the name of this, Indians had started contesting the British rule, at least in certain aspects. Therefore, for the sake of the continuance of their hold over India, the British did not hesitate to play an active role in creating religious and religious-caste identities in the subcontinent. In fact, thanks to the methodological instruments of new social sciences such as anthropology and sociology, scholars at the service of the British *Raj* "demonstrated" that communities based on religion and caste had political functions which dated long back and these deep divisions were permanent and irreparable, so much so that any legitimacy to the national claims of the Indians could be denied, as they were Hindu, Muslims, Parsis, Brahmans, etc. rather than Indians belonging to the same nation[63]. Furthermore, for instance, census operations were carried out taking into account the belonging of the individuals to a specific religious

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[62] This means the transformation of the Hindu and Muslim communities in political categories. In Gyanendra Pandey's opinion the term 'communalism' is a legacy of Orientalism, since in the colonial ideology it was employed to indicate a form of politics imbibed with religion which was different from the secular state politics promoted by the British. See Gyanendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1990, 8-9. According to Shabnum Tejani, Communalism was never defined in a clear-cut way and it was often used by the majority in a rather arbitrary way as everything which was asked or said by the minority vis-a-vis what was asked and said by the majority (Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism. A social and Intellectual History 1880-1950*, Permanent Black, New Delhi 2007, 260).

[63] Torri, “Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano in India nell'era coloniale”, in Mario Mannini (a cura di), *Dietro la bandiera. Emancipazioni coloniali, identità nazionali, nazionalismi nell'età contemporanea*, Pacini editore, Ospedaletto (Pisa) 1996, 139-99, here 163-64.

community and to a specific caste (ranked in a hierarchical order)[64]. It is quite easy to appreciate that the legitimation by the state of such divisions not only made them more rigid, but also encouraged them to become socio-political formations which could interact with the government[65]. As a consequence, religious communities started having their own leaders, in order to better convey their grievances to the colonial officials and to obtain advantages, indeed reenforcing the argument that the belonging to a certain religious community meant having different economic, social and political interests[66].

These communities had of course existed before the colonial rule but had never been politically organised as separate groups and so had never had the function of political forms of aggregations. Before the nineteenth century, more than horizontal organisations like class and caste, the most important connections within Indian society - but this is true also for Europe - were of a vertical kind. In fact, the vertex and the basis of society were connected top-down through patron-client relations which created links of solidarity that cut across religious and caste groups. In short, only the upper stratum of society, regardless of their religious belonging, shared the power. Moreover, until late eighteenth century, identities were extremely parochial and were generally limited to kin and village and also caste identity had a very local dimension[67].

On the other hand, liberalism with its stress on the individual, and secularism with the emphasis on the private dimension of religion, penetrated into India thanks to Western

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[64] The first all-India census was carried out in 1871, after being tested in some provinces of the Raj. It aimed at collecting data for the whole of India in terms of age, caste, religion, occupation, education and infirmities. Religion represented a fundamental category and "in the minds of the census officials was not merely a basic category but a factor which cut across nearly all of human existence. This pervasive character of religion did not disappear from later census reports, but increased" Moreover, "the census reports provided a new conceptualisation of religion as a community, an aggregate of individuals united by a formal definition and given characteristics based on qualified data. Religions became communities mapped, counted, and above all compared with other religious communities" (Kenneth W. Jones, "Religious Identity and the Indian Census" in N. Gerald Barrier, *The Census in British India. New Perspectives*, Manohar, Delhi 1981, 73-101, here 80-81, 84). On the shaping of communities see also Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 132-148.

[65] In the interpretation of others, this division had existed since the Eighteenth century in a form not very different from that of the Nineteenth century. See for example Christopher A. Bayly, "A pre-history of Communalism? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860", *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 2 (1985), 177-203. Nonetheless, the extent of such rivalry was never at the All-India level

[66] Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 19.

[67] Torri, "Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano", 165. There are important works which confute the colonial discourse of the antiquity of such communities. Among others, see Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1707-1740*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi 1959; M. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1968; Robert C. Hallissey, *The Rajput Rebellion Against Aurangzeb*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia 1977; Michelguglielmo Torri, "The Hindu Bankers of Surat and their business world in the second half of the 18th century", in *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, 2 (1991), 367-401.

education. If these ideologies were instruments for the colonial rule to legitimise the permanence of British domination, namely they were imperial categories in the Indian context, they became soon functional for certain Indian nationalists to contest that same colonial order. Therefore, the foundation of the Indian National Congress represented in the eyes of its creators the epitomisation of the project of a nation *in fieri* which was predicated on the progress of society and on the application of those very principles of liberalism. So, the Congress turned into a powerful tool, a constructive platform which could help overcome the innumerable socio-religious divisions extant in Indian society. Then, being Indians meant playing down the objective elements of divisions, such as race, religion, language, culture, while stressing the subjective will to be part of the nation in the making[68]. In this framework, secularism was perceived as a way to reduce the risk of strife between communities; it did not deny freedom of religion to the single individual and in the private sphere, but it rejected to confer any value to sect and caste belonging[69].

Nevertheless, there were certain limits which prevented the masses from being included in the early nationalist liberal discourse. In fact, even if not particularly rich or not rich at all, the Congressmen were a group of privileged people compared with the average Indian; in most cases they belonged to the higher castes[70], whose culture emphasised society as an organic whole. These cultural factors, along with the internalisation of the fear of the masses inherent in the liberal ideology, made the intellectuals of the Indian National Congress generally reluctant about the advisability of mobilising the lower strata of society. Therefore, they deemed more convenient for the sake of the unity of the anti-colonial movement to provide the 'ignorant', illiterate masses with means of self-elevation, such as for instance education and patronising social reforms[71]. Of course, this social project of gradual change was feasible only in the long-term and in the meanwhile the masses remained marginalised. Thus, either liberalism or secularism could wield hardly any influence on them.

This situation created impatience among certain political leaders, who saw the 'hinduisation' of the concept of nation as an easy way out of it. As a matter of fact, Hindu

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[68] Torri, "Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano", 160-62.

[69] This is not to say that the liberal leaders of the nationalist movement were not themselves influenced by religion. They certainly were, as they were part of families in which religion was still an important element in everyday life, but they hoped that religion could be relegated in the realm of the personal, whereas in the political sphere all Indians would become only citizens of the state, regardlessly of their creed or caste.

[70] Romila Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient history and the modern-search for a Hindu identity', *Modern Asian Studies*, 23 (2), 1989, 209-231, here 229.

[71] Torri, "Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano", 168.

associations like the *Hindu Mahasabha*[72] and the *Arya Samaj*[73], which had gained momentum thanks to the Renaissance of Hinduism in the course of the nineteenth century, started becoming strongly aggressive and promoted campaigns such as the cow protection movement, which proved crucial to mobilise the people against the British but, unfortunately, also and especially, against the Indian Muslims[74]. Not surprisingly, not only was Hindu nationalism perceived as an alarming threat by the Muslim minority, - who felt already jeopardised by the fact of being educationally and socially backward in comparison with their Hindu compatriots - but also the Congress started being increasingly regarded as the party in the service of the Hindu majority[75]. In fact, the *Arya Samaj* and especially the *Hindu Mahasabha* had close links with the Congress and constituted its traditional section. It follows that Hindu nationalism represented a serious challenge from within for the supporters of a secular and inclusive idea of nation, who often had to come to terms with the representatives of a culturally defined nation.

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[72] For an insight about the *Hindu Mahasabha* in the pre-independence period see part I of Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 11-79.

[73] On the Arya Samaj and the thought of its founder see J.T.F. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati: His Life and Ideas*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1978. The *Arya Samaj* had some doctrinal similarities with Sikhism, for example in its iconoclasm and in its posture against the superiority of Brahman priests and this can maybe explain its diffusion mainly in Punjab. Yet, significantly enough, it retained the protection of the cow, a brahmanical ritual, as its warhorse (Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 91-92).

[74] In fact, for Muslims, the sacrifice of a cow during the festival of *Bakr-Id* is a significant ritual in Islamic religion which commemorates Abraham's offer to Ishmael. The sacrifice of the cow became a strong symbolic issue: on one side the Hindus who wanted to protect the *gau mata*, on the other side the Muslims which did not give up their right to carry out their celebrations. Furthermore, the associations above-mentioned adopted also forms of proselytism, which had never been inherent in Hindu tradition until then, but they were justified by the argument that it was just to convert Muslims, since for the great majority of them, Hinduism was the religion of their ancestors.

[75] This does not mean that the Muslims left the Congress en masse after the formation of the All-India Muslim League (1906). Furthermore, there were several moments in which the Congress and the League worked in concert in order to find a solution which could safeguard the Muslims in the would-be independent India. Yet, given the narrow-mindedness and violent posture of the Hindu nationalists and the shortsightedness of the most influential Congress leaders, from the late 1930s onwards, the leader of the Muslim League, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, transformed his discourse of protection of the Muslim rights within a unitary India in a demand for an independent state for his coreligionists, in order to avoid their annihilation. Therefore, the emergence of Indo-Muslim nationalism was a reaction to the aggressiveness of Hindu nationalism, rather than to colonial power. Despite its vital importance for the future of the subcontinent, I am not encompassing here this question. Suffice it to say that the Muslim community was very heterogeneous and it was the depiction that certain Hindu leaders made of Islam as the cause of Indian decadence that contributed to its consolidation as a national group. The British, in tune with their divide-and-rule strategy, took advantage of the malcontent of the Muslims to stoke them against the Indian National Congress and supported very actively the formation of the All-India Muslim League. See, among many others, Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930*, Manohar Publications, Delhi 1991; Torri, "Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano"; Ayesha Jalal, *The sole spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Partition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985.

The bifurcation of the national movement in two variants, that is to say, on the one hand a secular and inclusive one vis-a-vis on the other hand a religious and exclusive one, represented since the 1880s a rift within Indian society which would perpetuate itself. It is not difficult to appreciate why in a country like India, characterised by an extremely high level of illiteracy and deeply infused with religious sentiments, the religious version of nationalism could obtain a great deal of success. People could understand better the language of religion than that of secularism, with which only the more educated people were familiar[76]. Therefore, religion and myth constituted easier means towards politicisation and mass mobilisation, as the examples of Tilak and Gandhi demonstrate. In short, Hindu nationalists had the advantage to operate in a socio-cultural context in which religion could easily be accepted as a strong element of identity. By injecting religion into politics, they contributed to hinder the process of secularisation which had just falteringly started in the urban areas, where people were more exposed to a public sphere within which the new ideas of liberalism and secularism had started to circulate.

Hinduism, by virtue of its social relevance, could wield a certain political influence on the state even after independence, although the Indian Constitution incorporated the principles of freedom of worship, which had to be private and personal, and left no space for religious, sect and caste identities[77]. The concept of Indian secularism, as it was included in the Constitution, had its foundation in the equal respect for all religions and not, unlike the Ataturk or Soviet version of it, an equal hostility to any form of religion[78].

The political project of secularism at the state level, which was supposed, in concert with modernisation, to favour the secularisation process at the cultural level - and at the same time to be strengthened by it, inducing a virtuous circle - was carried on by Jawaharlal Nehru[79]. Although Partition created favourable conditions for the expansion of Hindu

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[76] See Kaviraj, "Languages of Secularity" in EPW, *Revisiting Secularisation*, 93-94.

[77] The reservation policy in favour of Dalits advocated by Ambedkar was supposed to be temporary and not aimed at perpetuating the existence of caste. According to Ambedkar, minorities should not perpetuate themselves as much as majorities should not discriminate minorities. The aim of the reservation policy was to facilitate the merging of the two in the future (Tejani, *Indian Secularism*, 260).

[78] Rajeev Bhargava, "Reimagining Secularism. Respect, Domination and Principled Distance" in EPW, *Revisiting Secularisation*, 79-92, here 87-91.

[79] Nehru personally was not attracted at all to religion. In his view religion was ""closely associated with superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs and behind it lay a method of approach to life's problems which was not certainly that of science. There was an element of magic about it and uncritical credulousness, a reliance on the supernatural" (Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 26). Therefore, India had to reduce its attachment to religion and confide more and more in scientific method and reason.

nationalism, Nehru by the 1950s, was able to impose secularism as the 'legitimate norm'[80] in Indian political system and to make it an 'index of legitimacy'[81] in the political scenario. He showed admirable promptness in limiting the sphere of action of Hindu nationalists by crashing those groups who wanted to mobilise people over sensitive issues such as the *Ramjanmabhoomi*[82] or the protection of the Hindus in East Pakistan. Nehru was adamant in resisting not only the forces of *Hindutva*, but also those traditionalists within the Congress who often advocated the Hindu cause and pushed for a more condescending posture towards the majoritarian religion[83].

Notwithstanding Nehru's efforts, as Peter Van Der Veer argues, the Congress somehow detached from the commitment to secularism in order to conform to the Gandhian legacy and to the Hindu discursive tradition. In fact, the Congress political discourse was:

> "not secular but it imagines a common ethnic culture of India in terms of religious pluralism. In this moderate view the different communities that populate the nation have to be represented in the state. This implies that the legal system has to acknowledge pluralism in personal law and that the educational system has to pay attention to a plurality of languages and religions. When conflict arises between groups with different ethnic and/or religious identities – that is, between subnationalities – the state is seen to represent a superior common interest and to stand above the conflicting parties, so that it is able to arbitrate. At the same time, the state must promote the idea of religious tolerance in a pluralist society, which it can only do by emphasising the *commonality of spiritual pursuits*. Thus the state is not secular. Rather it promotes a specific view of "religion" as an universal characteristic of Indian ethnicity. The different religions are only refractions of

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[80] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 106.
[81] P.C. Upadhyaya, 'The politics of indian secularism', *MAS*, 26 (4), 1992, 815-853, here 851.
[82] Namely the birthplace of Ram, the god-hero of the epic poem of Ramayana. According to the baffling interpretation of Hindu nationalists, it was located in Ayodhya and marked by a temple which had been destroyed and replaced by the Babri Masjid, or Mosque of Babur, built in the sixteenth century by a general of Babur, the founder of the Mughal dynasty. Yet, this issue is based on local belief, since there is not archeological evidence of the existence of the commemorating Hindu temple. However, significantly enough, the British paid heed to this story, to the extent that they created a separate space outside the m mosque for the Hindus, so that they could worship the place (Van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 2).
[83] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 112.

one great Indian spirituality, which the state provides equally for in its education system"[84].

In the Gandhian spirit, those who were different, namely inferior according to the Hindu orthodox realm, such as the Muslims and the Dalits, had to be uplifted and purified. Nonetheless, in order to achieve elevation they had to respect certain Hindu practices, like *in primis* the protection of the cow. As a matter of fact, the preservation of the Hindu sacred animal was a form of moral superiority which ensured the inclusion of, and reconciliation with, others. According to Gandhi, Hinduism, given its unique spirit of tolerance - and this was significantly in line with the Orientalist interpretation of Hinduism as a "universal religion" - could embrace other religions, provided that they adapted to it. His idiom therefore remained Hindu despite his talking of tolerance and pluralism[85].

This is not to deny that the ideology of the Congress was intended to create a multicultural and peaceful society. No doubt it was. Nonetheless, especially in the Gandhian version of it, its framework was that of Hinduism[86] and this left an ideological space within the party for those who held less progressive outlooks and who constituted a 'brake on the development of secularism'[87]. Moreover, in several occasions, Nehru took advantage of the moral ascendancy that he had achieved in virtue of his close relationship with Gandhi and presented himself as the Mahatma's successor. On the one hand, this conferred him the 'charismatic legitimacy' necessary to deal with certain issues which involved direct confrontation with the influential traditionalist section of the Congress. On the other hand, by invoking Gandhi's heritage, Nehru employed 'the latter's sometimes less than democratic methods'[88] and his Hindu-advertising religious language. Therefore, even if secularism emerged as the pillar of the state and had the upper hand for more than

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[84] Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 23. Italic is mine.

[85] Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 94-99. "Gandhi aligned himself with a long tradition of Hindu expansion that operates through hierarchical incorporation and assimilation but has, in the end, little to do with a pluralist acceptance of the equality of different tradition" (idem, 95-96). Moreover, the author maintains that the emphasis on religious tolerance was a derivation of the Western discourse of modern nation-states, since the emphasis on tolerance legitimised the marginalisation of religious institutions in Europe and allowed the end of religious wars. This idea was then applied to Hindus and Muslims in the Empire. The Muslims, being the old enemies of Christianity were stigmatised as fanatic and bigoted and it was thanks to their intolerance that they could overwhelm the mild Hindus (idem, 66-67).

[86] On the Gandhian ideology and concept of nation see Torri, "Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano", 173-76.

[87] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 112.

[88] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 98.

three decades, there were elements within and outside the Congress that made it vulnerable.

With regards to the *Hindutvawadis, id est* the supporters of the *Hindutva* ideology, their contention was that secularism was not the solution for India. Since India was a Hindu country, it was the duty of the state to encourage Hinduism, which had been the way of life of Indian people for millennia and not simply a religion. The attack against secularism was enforced by the argument that it was the dream of a small, undemocratic westernised elite completely out of touch with the masses, whereas the truth was that the nation was deeply infused with religious feelings.

However, the forces of *Hindutva* could not promote in the open the Hindu cause, since that would have been counterproductive in the secular framework of the government, beside being against the Constitution. Therefore, the main Hindu party, namely the *Bharatiya Jana Sangh*[89] struggled to consolidate the Hindu vote at the all-India political level avoiding to appeal to its ethno-religious identity, but without much success. The effort proved useless not only for the 'untouchability' of the communal politics in the context of the Nehruvian consensus, but also because of the internal divisions of the Hindu community and due to the influence limited to the north of the country of both the party and its military arm, the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteer Association) a strongly militant right-wing Hindu organisation. After Nehru's death, the *Jana Sangh* nullified its distinctiveness from the Congress by adopting Indira Gandhi's same nationalist and populistic themes and could not achieve its purpose to gather the votes of the Hindus under the same flag[90]. So, in stead of the *Jana Sangh*, it was the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP, World Hindu Council), a cultural organisation created in 1960s by the RSS which had the task to create a Hindu electorate, something which it could pursue more openly being outside the political scene[91]. The VHP, aimed at the protection of Hindu values and spirituality in India and abroad[92], very dynamically organised sensitising campaigns over Hindu issues, such as cow protection, which were supported even by traditionalists within the fold of the Congress, who after the demise of Nehru, felt free to express their views.

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[89] The *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* was founded in 1951 by Syama Prasad Mookerjee, a Bengali leader connected with the *Hindu Mahasabha*. Mookerjee, after serving as Minister of Industry and Supply in Nehru's Government in the aftermath of independence, decided to oppose the Prime Minister consensus project and to promote the protection of the Hindu identity of India. Its aim was the foundation of a Hindu *Rashtra* (Hindu state) in order to counterweigh Islamic Pakistan. Today the BJP still draws a great deal of its ideological mooring from Mookerjee.

[90] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 252.

[91] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 193.

[92] Walter K. Andersen, Shridhar D. Damle. *The brotherhood in saffron: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu revivalism*. Westview Press, Boulder, London 1987, 133.

The hoped-for mobilisation of Hindus at the national level could be achieved only in 1980s. By then, certain factors conducive to the emergence of Hindu nationalism had aroused and, however unfortunate it might seem, it was the Congress of Indira Gandhi which was partly responsible for it. As a matter of fact, although believing at least in principle in secularism and democracy, in the early 1980s the Congress underwent a shift from Nehruvian neutrality to the promotion of the Hindu cause. Indira Gandhi started adopting a lexicon of political Hinduism and displaying her religiosity in public in order to gain political advantage by accommodating certain political organisations. Moreover, during the electoral campaigns, Gandhi showed openly a biased attitude against non-Hindu minorities, increasingly depicted as a serious threat against the Hindu community. Therefore, the identification of Sikh extremism with the internal enemy of the national integrity, along with certain initiatives which could be easily interpreted as anti-Muslim[93] created a sense of fear which overlapped, at least partially, with that of the Hindu nationalists, so much that several RSS volunteers preferred to vote for Indira Gandhi, than for the for the successor of the *Jana Sangh*, that is the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP, Indian People's Party)[94]. The BJP, in fact, had initially decided to keep the same moderate tones of the *Jana Sangh.* Nonetheless, it adopted the ideology of the *Sangh Parivar*[95] towards

[93] These initiatives was for example the removal from office of Farooq Abdullah in Jammu and Kashmir; the non-condemnation of the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union; the reference to the Gulf money as the main cause behind the en masse conversions of Dalits to Islam in 1981 in Tamil Nadu; the identification of Pakistan as the foreign enemy (see Diego Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch. Indira Gandhi's Final Term in Office*, London and New York: Hurst&Co./Oxford University Press, 2014, 118, 131).

[94] In addition, the credibility of the Congress as a secular party was tarnished by certain initiatives by some of its sections which Indira Gandhi did not bother to crush, not to mention the posture held by the party with regard of the anti-Sikh riots which followed the assassination of the Prime Minister by her Sikh bodyguards. For the communalisation of politics under Indira Gandhi see Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 329-333 and Maiorano, *Autumn of the Matriarch*, 130-135.

[95] The family of the *Sangh*, namely the family of the RSS, which grouped the pro-*Hindutva* political and cultural associations.

the creation of a Hindu state when the Congress started exploiting communalisation for its political advantage and abandoning its commitment towards secularism[96].

In the meanwhile, at the cultural level, the VHP had grown considerably and its network was no more constrained in the north but was spread all over the country[97]. Moreover, the pro-*Hindutva* bodies grouped changed their tactic and recognised that questioning secularism as such was counterproductive, whereas pointing at the Congress as a pseudo-secular party pursuing a set of unjust policies was more effective[98]. So, thanks to this tactical turn, the Hindus became the victims of discrimination by the Congress, which, behind the smoke screen of secularism, in reality favoured the Muslims, although these were a minority whose loyalty towards India was dubious[99]. Therefore, Hindu nationalists systematically carried out a demonisation of the Indian Muslims by popularising a

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[96] Note must be taken that, in the same years, even in the intellectual realm a certain scepticism towards secularism started to emerge, in the West and in India. The two most influential voices in the anti-modernist attacks on secularism were those of T.N. Madan and Ashis Nandy (Sen, “Secualrism and its Discontents”, in *Secularism and its Critics* on the ‘Anti-modernist Critique’, 454-485, here 477-81). Madan maintained that the secular project was never completely carried out, since it was the dream of a modernist minority, which wanted to impose it on the religious majority. Therefore, its very foundation was undemocratic and intolerant [T.N. Madan, “Secularism in its Place”, Journal of Asian Studies 46.4 (1987), 747-759]. Nandy, on the other hand, held that secularism is the by-product of modernisation and progress, blamed for the spread of violence and folly at the global level. So secularism is to be condemned as much as modernity, a fortiori given that traditional ways of life have their internal principles of tolerance [Ashis Nandy, "The politics of secularism and the recovery of religious tolerance." in *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 13.2 (1988): 177-194]. Even if it was not the intention of these two intellectuals to support the arguments of the Hindu right - they actually wanted to start a debate on the need of further investigations about the meaning of secularism in religious contexts - they somehow contributed to reinforce the conviction that secularism was out of place in India. This posture against secularism is ascribable to certain academic inclinations, very common today (and not only in India), which define and condemn as Eurocentric whatever idea was born in Europe, regardlessly of the results achieved in terms of improvement of societies. In name of the deconstruction of the colonial ideological system, these assertions, more or less intentionally, contribute to what Hobsbawm called the “reversal of the project of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, namely the establishment of a *universal* system of such rules and standards of moral behaviour embodied in the institutions of states dedicated to the rational progress of humanity” [Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Abacus, London 1998 (first published 1997), 335. Italic in the text].

[97] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 200.

[98] For this change of position by the forces of *Hindutva*, see Sudipta Kaviraj, "Languages of Secularity" in the special issue of Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), *Revisiting Secularisation*, December 14, 2013, vol. XVLIII, N 50, 93-102, here 96-97.

[99] See Amartya Sen, “Secularism and its Discontents”, in Rajeev Bhargava (edited by), *Secularism and its Critics*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1998, 454-485, for what he calls ‘Favouritism Critique’ see 464-467. By and large, the argument of the forces of *Hindutva* was that being Hindus a majority, they were qualified to have more rights granted, regardless of the fact that "majorities relevant to democratic decisional processes are deliberative, and not identity majorities" and democracy would be the negation of itself without the safeguard of minorities (Kaviraj, "Languages of Secularity", 96).

politicised version of history[100] which minimised and devalued the contribution of Muslim rulers in Indian past and increasingly poisoned the mind of the Hindu people by depicting their Muslim fellows as conspiring for the annihilation of the 'Hindu race'[101].

Strong signs that things were changing for the worse soon appeared when from the early 1980s onwards inter-communal riots started breaking out in several places. In the 1990s, vitriolic national campaigns started being organised in order to mobilise the 'patriotic Indians'. Among other sensational techniques, *yatras*, namely processions inspired by Hindu pilgrimages to holy places in all the country, were utilised to create a sense of solidarity and national (Hindu) integration.

The most spectacular and effective amidst the *Hindutva* campaigns was the revival of the *Ramjanmabhoomi* movement. Aiming at the demolition of the *Babri Masjid*[102], it contributed, thanks to its powerful language and to its effective means of mobilisation, to make the idea of the discriminated Hindus very popular. The tactic proved so successful that the ancient mosque was demolished in 1992. This single issue was functional to give the *Hindutva* movement widespread support and to politically organise and consolidate the 'national pride' of many Hindus. It was a painful event in the history of contemporary India; it created deep social wounds in Indian society and represented a dangerous culmination in the marginalisation of the Muslim community, a process which had started much before and to which, as seen above, also the Congress had contributed[103]. The destruction of the *Babri Masjid*, generally depicted by the Hindu enthusiasts as the vendetta for the shame of

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[100] The painstaking attempt of secular, professional historians to confront the revisitation of Indian history by political groups moved by political agendas and to emphasise the scientific nature of the historical discipline remained confined to the mostly English-speaking academia and intelligentsia. Therefore, they proved less successful that the putative pro-*Hindutva* historians in reaching the popular common sense. Among others, Romila Thapar fought this communalist interpretation of Indian history through her seminal works on ancient India (see by Romila Thapar, *Early India: From Origins to AD 1300*, Penguin, New Delhi 2002; *Cultural Pasts: Essays in Early Indian History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2003; *Somanatha: The Many Voices of History*, Verso, London, New York 2005). There was a general effort encouraged both by the official discourse and by independent scholars to argue against it (See for instance Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History,* People's Publishing House, Delhi 1969*).*

[101] Other tactics very conducive to sensitise people were utilised in the process of saffronisation of culture and education. They included, among others, the telecasting of the Ramayana serial before the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* and the introduction of several thousand of RSS-run schools. All this considered, the bewildered and dismayed reactions of certain intellectuals and journalists who depict the ascent of Modi as a bolt out of the blue are, to say the least, very naive.

[102] For an account of the sequence of events at Ayodhya see Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*, 2-12).

[103] Moreover, note must be taken that some of the most reputed and dear icons of the Hindu nationalists, such as Malaviya or Villabhbhai Patel, were very powerful members of the Congress, of which they constituted the right-wing.

hundreds of years of slavery under the Muslims, was followed by a strongly polarised and tense climate, which resulted in inter-communal riots in several parts of the country. The atmosphere of Islamophobia kept on escalating in the following years, boosted also by the general posture against the Muslims at the global level. The BJP and its affiliated organisations very cleverly rode the wave of the moment and did not hesitate to stoke the rage of the Hindus against their Indian Muslim fellows.

Significantly enough, it was in the BJP-ruled Gujarat that anti-Muslim violence flared up on a large scale in February 2002. In the town of Godhra, the death in a train fire of more than fifty Hindu devotees and religious workers coming back from a religious pilgrimage in Ayodhya[104] triggered the mass killings of Muslims, accused of being the culprits of the burning. From Godhra, riots spread to other centres, included the state capital Ahmedabad, and to rural areas and went on until mid-June 2002, a period during which

[104] For the reconstruction of the train burning see Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA), 2007, 17-18.

more than 2000 Muslims died and thousands more were injured[105]. The crimes committed in those months were of the most heinously cruel nature; not even children were spared from being mutilated and burnt alive by the Hindu mobs. It was a violence of a unique extent, intensity and savagery[106]. Along with killings of people, also Islamic buildings, such as tombs and mosques were destroyed during the riots.

Human rights organisations, sections of the media, opposition parties and the community of academics agree that the riots could take place because members of the government of Gujarat and the state police turned a blind eye to what was happening. Some even say that the massacre had been carefully planned and coordinated, since it was a clear attempt to carry out an ethnic cleansing to the detriment of the Muslim minority of the

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[105] Eamon Murphy, "'We have no orders to save you'. State terrorism, politics and communal violence in the Indian state of Gujarat, 2002", in Richard Jackson, Eamon Murphy and Scott Poynting (edited by), *Contemporary State Terrorism, Theory and Practice*, Routledge, New York 2010, 86-103, here 86; Christopher Jaffrelot, *Communal Riots in Gujarat. The State at Risk?,* Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics, Working Papers n. 16 (July 2003), 16 (http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/4127/1/hpsacp17.pdf, retrieved 28 October 2014). Leaflets circulated during the weeks of the riots are quite telling of the intentions of the Hindus to annihilate their Muslim compatriots: "We do not want to leave a single Muslim alive in Gujarat. [...] Annihilate Muslims from Bharat [...] when there were kings, the Muslim kings forced Hindu brethren to convert and then committed atrocities against them. And this will continue to happen till Muslims are not exterminated [...]. Now the Hindus of the villages should join the Hindus of the cities and complete the work of annihilation of Muslims" (in idem, 16). Gang rapes were ordinary practice and were encouraged by the diffusion of appalling poems promoting the dishonour of the Muslim women, escape goats of their lusty, over-reproductive husbands:
"The people of Baroda and Ahmedabad have gone berserk
Narendra Modi you have fucked the mother of miyas [derogatory term for Muslims]
The volcano which was inactive for years has erupted
It has burnt the arse of miyas and made them dance nude
We have untied the penises which were tied till now
Without castor oil in the arse we have made them cry
Those who call religious war, violence, are all fuckers
We have widened the tight vaginas of the `bibis'
[term referring to married Muslim women]
Now even the adivasis have realised what Hinduism is
They have shot their arrow in the arse of mullahs
Wake up Hindus there are still miyas left alive around you
Learn from Panwad village [a village in Panchmahals district that was the scene of serious rioting] where their mother was fucked
She was fucked standing while she kept shouting
She enjoyed the uncircumcised penis
With a Hindu government the Hindu have to power to annihilate miyas
Kick them in the arse to drive them out of not only villages and cities
but also the country" (Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 114).
[106] Murphy, "'We have no orders to save you'", 87.

state[107]. The Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi was accused of being condescending towards to rioters and of condoning violence[108]. The responsibility of Modi for the Gujarat massacre was debated until 2013, when he finally got a clean chit, which enabled him to contest and win the general election, assuring the BJP an outright majority in the Lok Sabha for the first time since 1984[109]. Nevertheless, the sentence of the Supreme Court, motivated with the lack of evidence against Modi, has not appeased the voices of those who consider the present Prime Minister guilty, at least politically, for the riots and perceive him as a danger for the stability of India. Unfortunately, it seems that those voices were properly hushed-up by the media, which almost unanimously supported Modi in the electoral campaign[110].

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[107] Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, 50–51; Murphy writes that the mobs, armed with sword, explosives and several weapons, had also at their disposal "computer printouts obtained from government officials, listing the addresses of the homes of the Muslims and their businesses (…). Many attacks were made close to police stations and in view of the police but no attempts were made to stop the violence. Frantic calls by terrified men, women and children were answered by the police: 'We have no orders to save you'. In some case the police fired on Muslims who attempted to defend themselves" (Murphy, "'We have no orders to save you"', 90).

[108] According to a report by Tarun Tejpal, former director of the Indian magazine Tehelka, Narendra Modi gave Hindu militants three days to do whatever they wanted to take revenge against the Muslims (See http://www.democracynow.org/2007/12/5/explosive_report_by_Indian_magazine_exposes (retrieved 28 October 2014, in Murphy, "'We have no order to save you"', 90).

[109] He then resigned from the office of Chief Minister of Gujarat, which he held since 2001.

[110] The media kept stressing the high level of corruption and nepotism within the Congress (two characteristics which could be equally attributable to the BJP), without making any mention of the inclusive social and economic policies (such as the MGNREGA and the food security schemes) carried out by the Congress during the years it was in power. Even if it is too early to judge the performance of the BJP at the national level (but signals of an inversion of tendency in terms of economic inclusion can be already perceived), the performance of the BJP in Gujarat is not an example of inclusive growth. On the contrary, the model of development promoted by Modi in the western Indian state, which he ruled for 13 years since 2001, was absolutely pro-corporate and in favour of the big capitalism, a reason why he got the enthusiastic support of the new vibrant 'middle class'. On the "Gujarat model" see the recent book by Indira Hirway, Amita Shah, Ghanshyam Shah (edited by), *Growth or Development. Which Way is Gujarat Going?*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 2014. That Modi's reputation had remained virtually untarnished had been already demonstrated by the success in December 2002 in the state elections of Gujarat, which confirmed Modi as Chief Minister. The anti-Muslim discourse had proved the winning move in order to consolidate the BJP power and to gain the support of the low and high caste Hindus and *adivasis*. Again the argument was the discrimination of Hindus, which had been deprived for decades of resources in name of the affirmative action pursued by the Congress in favour of the Muslims. It is interesting that both Dalits and *adivasis* had been for a long time victims of the same arguments made by the BJP, until they were also included in their discourse, having their vote become useful for the consolidation of the Hindu nationalist party.

That Modi could be elected Prime Minister is very telling of the easiness with which the plight of the Indian Muslims was forgotten[111]. The incredible 'ascent to respectability' of Modi was possible not only in virtue of his seeking a new identity in the form of economic development so as to leave behind the 2002 carnage, but also thanks to "quasi-Westernised Indians in the corporate-owned media and mysteriously well-funded think-tanks, magazines and websites"[112], something which, needless to say, contributed to reduce dramatically the secular voices and dissents in the media. This clearly means that Modi is not, as one might think, supported only by overheated, fanatical RSS volunteers, fascinated by his powerful language gleaning from Hindu symbolism. It is also and above all the up-and-coming middle class and the *crorepatis*, greatly benefited by the policies of liberalisation and globalisation, who enthusiastically believe in Modi and contributed mostly to his coming-of-age. In fact, Modi's vision very profitably has combined the chauvinist idea of a West-rejecting Hindu India with the promise to extend to the rest of the country the pro-big-business Gujarat model of development. By doing so Modi has unified under the same flag the *Hindutvawadis* and those well-off sections of Indian society impatient towards the pro-poor policies carried out by the Congress (and often also sympathisers with the Hindu cause). This synergism has proved successful so far.

An in-depth analysis of the reasons which made possible Modi's ascent to power lies outside the scope of my research. Nonetheless, it will be useful to draw some conclusions, before getting to the heart of this work. It is quite astonishing to compare the future of the nation as it was imagined by the Indian secular nationalists in the second half of the nineteenth century with what India has actually become with the rally of Hindu nationalism more than hundred years afterwards. This is not to say that the secular idea of nation had more possibilities to be translated into reality, nor that the emergence of a Hindu India was inevitable. In fact, as even the most naive student knows, history is not a predictive science and there are not fixed rules which regulate its course. What is important to the historian of colonial India is to understand that the elaboration of a certain idea of the nation is intrinsic in the politics of the building of identity and that myth and invention are

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[111] Not only in India, but at the international level. For example, the US lifted Modi's nine years visa ban immediately after he won the general election. What is more, Modi and Obama coauthored an article in the Washington Post where they delineated the future partnership of US and India (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/narendra-modi-and-barack-obama-a-us-india-partnership-for-the-21st-century/2014/09/29/dac66812-4824-11e4-891d-713f052086a0_story.html, accessed on 28 October 2014).

[112] Pankaj Mishra, *Modi's Idea of India*, New York Times, 24 October 2014 (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/25/opinion/pankaj-mishra-nirandra-modis-idea-of-india.html?_r=0 , retrieved 28 October 2014).

always essential to this process, since 'getting history wrong is an essential part of being a nation'[113]. It follows that no idea of nation is more legitimate than another, since all are expression of a specific political agenda. Howbeit, it is the duty of the engagé intellectual and of the citizen of the world to judge the results that such extremely powerful ideologies have on the real world in terms of peace, inclusiveness, social and economic justice, namely desirable values and goals from which every people should be benefited. Therefore, an idea of the nation like the one formulated by the moderate Congress leadership which emphasises the commonalities of the members of the nation and which aims at creating citizens beyond their religion or caste belonging is certainly more conducive to the common good than a 'cultural' idea of the nation, which stresses differences and divisions and assumes a classification of citizens in superior and inferior ones[114].

Ergo, I argue that reflecting on the nation imagined by Gokhale is very meaningful even in today's India. It is true that amidst the Congress leaders contemporary of Gokhale, several embraced his same vision. However, my choice to focus specifically on Gokhale as the subject of my research is explainable by the fact that he in particular gave priority to the overall improvement of society as imperative for the would-be nation. As a matter of fact, in Gokhale's outlook, thanks to the impact of education and of liberalising ideas a modern, secular socio-political context would be created and within it the social relevance of creed and race would dissolve in a new political identification. That Gokhale's project was not simply idealistic but well-grounded in India's reality and needs is proved by the fact that Gokhale advocated the Muslim cause. Indeed, he appreciated, unlike most of the Congressmen who followed him, that in order to set the process of common advancement in motion it was necessary to allay the fears of the weakest sections of the society by accommodating certain requests put forward by them.

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[113] Hobsbawm, *On History*, 9. The quote is by Ernst Renan, quoted in *idem*, 35.
[114] Michelguglielmo Torri, "The Idea of Nation in Late Colonial India", paper read at the 18th International Congress of Historical Sciences, 27 August - 3 September 1995, Montreal, 5-6.

It is quite a significant indicator of the emphasis laid by Gokhale on inclusiveness that he was kept in high esteem by Ambedkar[115] and Jinnah, leaders respectively of the *Dalit* community and of the Muslims. And despite the fact that Gandhi looked up to Gokhale as his political guru, it was not the Mahatma, embodiment of the ancient tradition of India, to take up the forward-looking message of his master. Interestingly enough, the spirit of Gokhale resonated in the words of Jinnah during his first speech to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan in August 1947:

"If you change your past and work together in a spirit that everyone of you, no matter to what community he belongs, no matter what relations he had with you in the past, no matter what is his colour, caste or creed, is first, second, and last a citizen of this State with equal rights, privileges, and obligations, there will be no end to the progress you will make. We should begin to work in that spirit and in course of time all these angularities of the majority and minority communities, the Hindu community and the Muslim community – because even as regards Muslims you have Pathans, Punjabis, Shias, Sunnis, and so on, and among the Hindus you have Brahmins, Vaishnavas, Khatris, also Bengalis, Madrasis, and so on – will vanish. We should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State"[116].

So, it is hardly surprising that eleven years before the *Quaid-i-Azam* had concluded an address at the Dayal Singh College in Lahore by saying "Give me more Gokhales!"[117]. But, unfortunately for the underdogs of India, it seems that there was none left in the ranks of the Congress.

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[115] Ambedkar wrote to the editor of the Bombay Chronicle in March 1916 that "[i]n a country like India so badly situated socially, economically and politically, the paramount need of the hour is for honest leaders to take upon themselves the enormous task of regeneration, such leaders were found in the persons of the late Messrs, Gokhale and P.M. Mehta, both of whom were entitled to everlasting gratitude for the zeal and sacrifice with which they represented our cause" (quoted in Surendra Ajnat (edited by), *Letters of Ambedkar,* Bheem Patrika Publications, Jalandhar 1993, 19). On the contrary, the thinking of Ambedkar and Gandhi were strongly conflicting in terms of social reform (See Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution. The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*, Hurst &CO, Delhi and London 2003, 19-25).

[116] Zafar Anjuman, *Iqbal. The Life of a Poet, Philosopher and Politician*, Random House Hardback 2014, 57.

[117] A.G. Noorani, *Jinnah and Tilak. Comrades in the Freedom Struggle*, Oxford University Press, Karachi 2010, 96 from Waheed Ahmad (edited by), *Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah: The Nation's voice. Speeches and Statements*. *March 1935 – March 1940*, Quaid-i-Azam Academy, Karachi 1992. Vol. I, 30.

THE EMERGENCE OF INDIAN NATIONALISM

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the emergence of Indian nationalism, with special reference to the intellectual history of the leading figures of the nationalist movement.

The fundamental development of nationalism in the Indian subcontinent was mainly the outcome of two different phenomena. On the one hand it was the by-product of the consolidation of the colonial state. On the other hand, it originated from the elaboration of the idea of the nation in the modern meaning of the term by Indian intellectuals.

In the course of the chapter, then, I will try to explain the role played by the colonial state. This exerted a centralising action by administratively and economically unifying India for the first time in the course of history, creating a common political platform. Nevertheless, at the same time, the colonial state categorised its subjects according to criteria of race, religion, and caste in order to crystallise divisions that could guarantee the permanence of the Empire and stall the formation of the Indian nation. Therefore, unifying and dividing forces were at play and interacted with the definitions that Indian intellectuals and ideologues were starting giving to their nation vis-à-vis the British coloniser.

Further, the ideological effort of Indian intellectuals will be dealt with. The powerful influence of a modern system of education, predicated on rational thinking, will be taken into account: it will be show how the encounter between ideas coming from Europe (and North America) and indigenous ideas created a vibrant cultural atmosphere. The familiarity that the educated Indians acquired with concepts such as freedom, representative government, territorial unity, and nationality kindled a new interest in the political situation of India. The status of colonised was compared with the achievements of the British people in their history: the striking contrast made them realise that they needed to ask their dominators for more liberties as prescribed by the values and principles of British liberalism and constitutionalism. Then, Indians started claiming political rights on the basis of the conviction that, Indians, being members of the British Empire, were entitled to the same political rights enjoyed by the other (white) subjects of the Empire. When this was denied and motivated by historical, cultural, and, above all, racial reasons, Indians developed a modern idea of the nation. In other words, being declined the possibility to

become citizens within the space of the Empire, Indians started demanding their national rights.

Then, it will be shown that the idea of the nation, conceptualised by the so-called moderate leaders of the Congress and to which Gopal Krishna Gokhale gave substance, considered all the inhabitants of the Indian territory, geographically and administratively united, as one nation. The innumerable divisions of India would be overcome by the participation of the would-be Indian citizens to the common project of improvement and elevation of Indian society. This inclusive definition of the nation was then predicated on the subjective consciousness to belong to the nation as a political entity. Inspired by the political liberal nationalism à la Giuseppe Mazzini, it stressed the elements of unity and emphasised the building of a common future.

Yet, this liberal idea of the nation was since the beginning challenged by the one formulated by the extremist leadership of the Indian national movement, Bal Gangadhar Tilak *in primis*,. This was informed by the naturalistic, cultural nationalism that was becoming dominant in Europe. Thus, the Indian nation was defined on the basis of Hinduness. Looking back to a glorious Hindu past and envisioning the Indian nation has an entity that had always existed in history, this conceptualisation aimed at the popularisation of the nationalist movement. Nonetheless, the mobilisation of the masses around the Hindu flag meant to brand all non-Hindus as the Other. Not surprisingly, the exploitation of religion for political ends had the negative effect to lead to a rift between Hindus and Muslims.

So, these different ideas of the nation had different effects on Indian society, something which shows that not all responses to colonialism were conducive to create a fairer social order. On the contrary, advocating freedom from the colonisers did not necessarily mean to promote union or, in the long run, peace and democracy.

India: Subcontinent or Nation?

"The feeling of degradation, from being governed by foreigners, is a feeling altogether European. I believe it has little or no existence in any part of Asia". This is what James Mill, the famous author of *The History of British India* (1817), maintained in 1831. In a period when nationalism was moulding Europe and its politics, Mill denied its force and

importance for the Indian subcontinent[118]. This is no surprise, for, as I have tried to show in the previous chapter, the Indian people were seen as characterised by an overwhelming passivity. In the opinion of Mill, what mattered to Indians was the material advantages obtainable from this or that rule. And certainly, for the well-known thinker, the British domination was much better than any other previous regime, so that there was no reason for Indians to be dissatisfied with it.

Significantly enough, Mill's *History* became one of the most influential historiographical works on India for the whole colonial period, despite the fact that several British and Indian scholars had pinpointed the scientific defects of its arguments[119]. Its clout was a clear sign of the transformation of the cultural atmosphere. Mill was taking active part in defending the legitimacy of the conquest of India and his views were in tune with the change of Western attitude towards Asia.

In fact, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the previous global order was reorganised in favour of few Western nations[120], which could take advantage of their political, military and economic superiority to model a new world system where they occupied the top of the hierarchy and had the upper hand on the rest of the world. This positive conjuncture for the Western powers was brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the American and French Revolutions which contributed to a radical transformation of the economy and the political scenario. And since an unjust and unbalanced global order cannot be predicated only on force and violence, this change was accompanied by an ideological evolution aimed at justifying it[121]. So, the respect and admiration that Enlightenment intellectuals had shown for some Asian civilisations had now become out of place and were being wiped out by despise, contempt and, from the

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[118] Lynn Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1994, quoted, 23. Mill was an administrator for the East India Company. In the 1830s he was Examiner of Correspondence and was responsible for overseeing the dispatches to India in all departments of the trading company. Like many other influential scholars of India, he never visited the Asian country and knew it only through official despatches and orientalist literature.

[119] See David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969, 236-41. The *History* was adopted as a textbook at Haileybury College, where the administrators of the EIC were trained.

[120] These nations were initially England, Russia and France and in the second half of the nineteenth century the United States, Belgium, Italy, Germany and Japan.

[121] For an explanation of this change of global order and for a critique of the Eurocentric paradigm see the sixth chapter of Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age*, Vistaar Publications, New Delhi 1998, 258-320. The dominance of the Western nations on the rest of the world was only possible thanks to its contingency with other developments at the global level. It was not inevitable and much less was it determined by 'exceptional, let alone superior, ethnic, rational, organisational, or spirit-of-capitalist advantages' (*Ivi*, 283).

second half of the same century onwards, even racism[122]. Orientalism, in its new variant, became an intellectual instrument of legitimisation.

The argument on the lacking of national feelings made by James Mill was the same advanced few decades later by John Seeley and by other scholars and administrators of the British *Raj*. Indians could have no sentiments of patriotism, or if they had - the British conceded - it was limited to the regional area they belonged to. For India was a subcontinent, as big as Europe, with a population of 250 millions of inhabitants and, what is more, divided in terms of race, religion, language and culture. In brief, those elements considered to be fundamental for the definition of the idea of nation in Europe during the nineteenth century were missing in India.

Nevertheless, in spite of the British convictions and in virtue of the conditions imposed by their domination, a national consciousness started arousing amongst a small section of the Indian population. The emergence of nationalism was a complex and long process, not an event, and it was set in motion by several factors. It can be considered a consequence and a reaction to the British *Raj*. In fact, nationalism was a consequence of the unifying effect of the modern and efficient state that the British had created in order to respond to their imperial needs and at the same time it was a reaction to the oppressive nature of that very state and to the racism that increasingly characterised the British-Indian relationships.

As Christopher Bayly observed, forms of patriotism[123] by all means similar to the European ones had already existed in India and this is demonstrated by the existence of

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[122] James Mill was strongly influenced by the values of Scottish Enlightenment and believed in social progress and in the power of education. Mill refuted the myth of a golden age of ancient Hinduism that had become so popular among Orientalists. Their view, according to Mill, was preposterous because it was based on few ancient books, whereas to measure the level of civilisation of a certain society it was necessary to take into account its laws, customs and institutions. Through the analysis of these elements, Mill concluded that India was a rude society. Since he maintained that progress developed on a linear progress in the course of history, it was impossible that India's past had been characterised by civilised manners and advanced institutions. Therefore, British could not rule India according to its corrupted local principles. On the contrary, they had to import into India the values of Enlightenment, because India could improve through the assimilation of Western culture (See Zastoupil, *John Stuart Mill and India*, 11-14). The capability of improvement started being denied with the increasing racist posture that the British held towards Indians. At that point, the latter's inferiority, due to the unchangeable category of race, was not amendable even in virtue of westernisation.

[123] These are what Hobsbawm (Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1870. Programme, Myth and Reality*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990, 46-79) and Bayly (C.A. Bayly, *Origins of Nationality. Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1998, 98-132) call respectively proto-nationalism and old patriotism, even though the latter term does not imply teleology and is maybe preferable. According to Bayly, old patriotisms are the navels of nationalism.

ancient words and by political discourses concerning good government[124]. Every human collectivity has a sense of place, a subjective sense of connection and belonging to its native environment with its physical features, its political institutions, its social constructs and cultural traditions. Between 1400 and 1800 the process of state-building - which for example in Mysore under Tipu Sultan had reached high levels of modernisation - and a dynamic commercial expansion had been accompanied by the creation of a wider sense of community and by the sharing of common institutions, culture and history at least at the regional level[125].

The Indian national movement that emerged around the 1870s and 1880s undoubtedly presented a certain continuity with traditional social patterns, memories, sentiments and doctrines which had been informed in the pre-colonial period. Yet, it also appropriated itself of ideological elements coming from Europe and North America. Movements like the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and Republicanism, the American Revolution, and the British liberal tradition had been universally important and their influence was felt also in colonial India. Their ideas and beliefs spread in the space of the Empire and were fostered by the diffusion of a modern system of education in the subcontinent. Here, they represented powerful intellectual and cultural instruments of innovation when they came in contact with Indian thought and culture. In fact, by emphasising individualism and rational thinking they questioned the traditional lines of authority and religious institutions. As a consequence the links with clan, caste, tribe, region were broken and intellectuals started speaking of nation and its building, overcoming the past elaborations of a common identity.

Therefore, elements of change and permanence coexisted and their relationship and interaction shaped the contradictory nature of the anti-colonial movement. What was really new was the fact that the Indian nationalist leaders started talking of (and thus shaping) an all-India national consciousness, whose existence in the pre-colonial times can hardly be proved. It is true that terms like the Arabic *al-Hind*, the Greek *India* and Persian *Hindostan* had already appeared in the past, but they had no precise geographical connotation[126]. And even when those terms defined India as a polity carved out between the Indian Ocean

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[124] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 1-2. See also by the same author chapter 6 of *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, Blackwell, Oxford 2004.

[125] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 8.

[126] According to Irfan Habib (edited by) the ancient terms for India implied an inherent geographical unity, whereas for example Sanjay Subrahmanyan underlines the fact that the Arabic term 'al-Hind' from which 'India' originated had a vague meaning, which included northern India but was not clear about the peninsular area of the subcontinent. Moreover, the term could extent to Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia.

and the Himalayas, it does not necessarily mean that its inhabitants felt a sense of belonging to it.

Colonialism, Modernisation, Education

As Ernest Gellner maintained, “colonialism was not simply a matter of one set of people dominating others; it involved a move from one kind of a society to a profoundly different one”[127]. Under the pressure of British colonialism, Indian society underwent a radical process of transformation, which was painful and complex, since it fostered the disruption of the traditional Indian social structure, the disintegration of the traditional economies and the questioning of traditional values.

As a matter of fact, after the Industrial Revolution and the British military conquest of India, the subcontinent started being looked at as a market for the goods of the new British industries, as a huge basin from which raw materials for those same industries were siphoned off and, later on, as a market for foreign capitals. The imposition of money economy caused the dismantlement of the previous economic and social order. If, on the one hand, this new economic system paved the way for modernisation, on the other hand it contributed to the creation of a stagnant and backward society. In fact, village handcrafts and porto-industries were ruined by the penetration of cheap industrial goods from Europe. Peasants, having taken to cash crops, were deprived of food security and economic stability, since the new cultivations were subjected to the fluctuations of the market. A growth in population, the emergence of new classes of absentee landlords and the introduction of alien legal concepts, like private property[128], tore to pieces the village social relationships. The major urban centres started being flooded by people from the rural areas and underwent increasing processes of impoverishment and proletarianisation[129].

It was especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, when the colonial state had become hegemonic in the subcontinent, that the effect of modernisation became stronger. The British *Raj* needed a centralised system in order to extract systematically as many resources as possible to the advantage of British economy. To achieve this, a set of

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[127] Ernest Gellner, *Encounters with Nationalism*, Blackwell, Oxford 1994, 159.

[128] A major cause of economic distress was for instance the fact that the British demanded the payment of the land revenue in cash, without providing the alternative to pay for it in nature, an option that had always been conceded in the pre-colonial past, even when a monetary collection was requested. Also the land inalienability and mortgage, if on the one hand monetisation and circulation of money possible, on the other hand created a stratum of landless labourers.

[129] Giorgio Borsa, *Le origini del nazionalismo in Asia Orientale*, edited by G. C. Calza, Università di Pavia, Pavia 1965,121-129.

reforms was gradually introduced. These included the establishment of a modern administration for the more efficient collection of revenue; the institution of a uniform judiciary system in the European mould; the development of railway, navigation and telegraph networks which connected several parts of India and India with the world[130]. In a nutshell, to serve the imperialistic purposes, a modern 'nation-state' was created and the subcontinent was unified under the same administration[131].

But modernisation[132] at the political level would not be enough without a parallel change at the cultural level. Indeed, the British had realised that compactness and unity for the colony were not attainable without introducing Western education. The East India Company Act[133], introduced in 1813, required the English trading company to allocate one lakh (100,000) of rupees for the promotion of education among Indians[134]. Yet, that measure remained dead letter, because the question of education had been the focus of an heated debate between two opposite sections of Britain, namely the Orientalists and the Anglicists. The recommendation of the Charter Act of 1813 was a consequence of the fact that, as per the Act itself, the territories under the control of the EIC would be taken over by the British Crown. Therefore, the principle of sovereignty of the Crown placed

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[130] Torri, "Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano", 145-46.

[131] As a matter of fact, the subcontinent in pre-colonial history was unified under the same administration only for short periods. It was the administrative and economic unification of India under the British rule which for the first time made India a political unity for about a century. The last area of the subcontinent to be conquered by the British was the Kingdom of Punjab in 1848. Yet a decisive battle for the British hegemony over India had already taken place in Assaye in 1803 during the second Anglo-Maratha war, after which the Maratha confederacy was defeated and placed under the control of the EIC.

[132] Of course, the modernisation in question was just partial. The several reforms of the socio-political system were in fact aimed at keeping the colonial order, namely at achieving obedience for the central power. Colonial modernisation, according to the very logic of colonialism, had not the scope of transforming the Indian subjects into citizens, much less was it sensitive to the principles of equality or to the expansion of franchise. It was the Indians that started asking for civil - and afterwards national - rights.

[133] The East India Company Act, also known as Charter Act of 1813, represented a remarkable turning point in the colonial affairs and in the India-*Raj* relationships. Besides affirming the principle of the sovereignty of the Crown over the EIC territories and encouraging the promotion of education of Indians, among its most important measures were the abolishment of the commercial monopoly of the English trading company and the nullification of the prohibition of missionary activities in India. It was the end of the non-interference to which the EIC had conformed according to its nature of trading firm. Therefore, the act had heavy repercussions on Indian society. On the one hand, the abolishment of the EIC monopoly and the following penetration of British industrial goods into India exposed the subcontinent to a market, monetary economy. As a consequence, new social classes, both in the rural and urban areas emerged. On the other hand, the new moralistic stand of the rulers towards their subject contributed, more or less directly, to the growth of nationalism.

[134] This was a very meagre sum and corresponded approximately to the pension conferred to a minor prince like the Nawab of Surat when he was deprived of his authority by the British in 1800.

upon the British sovereign and Parliament the moral responsibility for the welfare of the population of the colony[135]. The diatribe was about what kind of education deserved to be sponsored. The Orientalists were in favour of the enhancement of the traditional system of education in the vernacular languages. Substantially, in their opinion, if the traditional teaching - both for Hindus and Muslims predicated on religion - was potentiated and developed, it would be possible to implant a modern and western culture on it. For the time being, the translation of the most relevant European books in the main Indian language was enough. Opposed to this view were the Anglicists who, driven by the faith in progress and bred in the evolutive vision of history, supported the introduction of a modern English-based educational system. Their conviction was that the vernaculars were not suitable to express modern, rational and scientific concepts; the monopoly of the literate classes[136] was not to be perpetuated; the translation of the most representative books of the 'West' was too costly; ultimately and more importantly, the permanence of traditional religious education was not conducive to the formation of a class of Indian collaborators who could help the British ruling over India. In few words, bringing the old schooling system to an end would be equally beneficial for Indians and British.

Eventually, it was the Anglicist school that had the upper hand. At that time, the cultural terrain was in their favour, thanks to the spread of utilitarianism and of evangelic humanitarianism. Utilitarians, who had Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill as their most influential contributors, saw India as the abode of irrationality and obscurantism. Believing in reason and progress and considering moral action as the maximisation of utility, namely economic well-being and happiness for the majority, they maintained that the colonial rule should commit itself in guiding India along the path of civilisation and modernity. On the other hand, according to humanitarians, Indians were a people of pagans who had to be converted to Christianity. It was therefore a moral obligation for the British colonisers to advocate the material and moral progress of the people over which they ruled. Thus, both the exponents of these two schools of thought, although informed by very different principles, agreed that India had to be civilised; the introduction of a system of education based on the English one would be the bridgehead of such process of civilisation. This

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[135] The state responsibility for education in England had been enacted, after a long debate, in 1833.

[136] Among the Hindus, the great majority of both teachers and students were brahmans. The *pandit* would teach how to write, basic maths and grammar, and holy religious texts. The quality of the schools was very diverse; it was better in the urban areas, where education was based on sanskrit. The Muslims were taught Arabic and Persian and read the Quran. At the university level, there were a few centres, sort of academic religious institutions, where scholars learnt religious doctrines, philosophy and literature.

image of India as a backward place was, as seen above, consistent with the increasing contempt towards everything Indian. With the strengthening of British rule, not surprisingly, India had ceased to be a place to love and dream of. Now that it was firmly dominated, it needed to be shown the right path. Cultural equality was questioned and the British considered themselves morally and historically superior. So, also the philosophical consideration of the utilitarians and the humanitarianists provided, more or less unwittingly, the justification for the British colonialism.

Then, apart from moral motivations, the British had practical reasons to encourage the diffusion of European culture and English language. In fact, they needed to recourse to the collaboration of certain sections of the Indian society in order to administer a country as big and complex as India. The British in the colony had always been few and they occupied only the top ranks of the bureaucracy and of the army, whereas for the intermediate and lower positions they had to rely on the natives[137]. Moreover, the Charter Act of 1833 established that no Indian could be discriminated from entering the service of the Company on the ground of birth, skin colour, or religion[138]. So, in order to create a class of collaborators and to comply with the recommendation of the Charter Act, in 1835 a resolution of the Government of India (also known as Bentick Resolution from the name of the then-Governor-General) paved the way for the creation of new publicly-financed schools, based on the study of English and of western subjects taught in English[139]. The famous *Minute of Education*[140] by Thomas Babington Macaulay, young member of Parliament of Scottish origins and would-be well-known historian, proved to be decisive in giving the colonial cultural policy this new turn.

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[137] This was due on the one hand to climatic reasons, being Indian climate utterly unfavourable to Europeans, and on the other hand to the fact that the cost of maintaining British employees on the spot would have been too high and would have resulted in siphoning off part of the resources aimed at carrying out the imperial designs. This pattern was quite common in the history of the subcontinent, since also during the Islamic empires, the conquerors, in scarce number and lacking the experience to rule the country, had to resort to the collaboration of those learned castes which by tradition were employed in the service of the state.

[138] *First session of the Eleventh Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland*, Act LXXXV (28th August 1833), par. LXXXVII.

[139] Few years before, in 1829, English had substituted Persian as the official language for the administration of the *Raj*.

[140] For the role of Macaulay in the debate see Antonio Recupero, “Macaulay, l’ “interpretazione *whig* della storia” e l’istituzione della lingua e dell’istruzione inglese in India (1813-1835)”, in *Le Carte e la Storia*, 9.2 (2003), 47-57. For the complete text of the Minute of Education see G.O. Trevelyan, *The Competition Wallah*, Macmillan, London 1866, 317-330. For further details see by the same author, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay*, Macmilan, London 1908 (first publ. 1876).

Nonetheless, be it clear, neither the resolution nor the minute were implementing acts. On the contrary, they were no more than suggestions for the colonial government[141]. Thus, for example, among British officers, several stood against the diffusion of English and, if they wished to, they were free, if not to overtly oppose such policy, at least not to promote it[142].

Therefore, the diffusion of the imperial language and of western ideas was not an imposition from above. Actually, there was no need to impose it. In fact, the exigencies of commerce, especially in those areas where it was more developed like Calcutta and Bombay, had led many Indians to learn English, although often only in a superficial way. Clerks, writers, interpreters employed by the EIC had to be somewhat comfortable with that language. More importantly, those castes of intellectuals[143] that by tradition had been working in the service of the state did not fail to realise the advantages that the knowledge of English could bring. So, being an indispensable element to enter the huge administrative system of the colonial state, the rulers' tongue started to circulate among Indians before the British decided to encourage its learning as a means of cultural assimilation[144].

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[141] Parimala Rao (edited by), *New Perspective on the History of Indian Education*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2014, 14.

[142] Before the resolution of 1835, it was possible to have only rudiments of western education provided by the company chaplains and a few European or Eurasian single individuals. Yet, there were few exceptions. In Calcutta, in 1816 the people of Calcutta had raised money so that the Anglo-Indian Vidyala College could be founded. Here English and modern subjects were taught. This school had much success and received the plaudit of Rammohun Roy, staunch promoter of a new system of education, based on rational thinking. In Bombay, the creation of the English School in 1825, which did not have any government support but was funded by Indian private contributors, mainly from the affluent Parsi community. (J.C. Masselos, *Towards Nationalism. Group affiliations and the politics of public associations in nineteenth century Western India*, Bombay Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1974, 22). This school suffered from many attempts from Elphinstone, the governor, who wanted to close it down [Parimala Rao, "Promiscuous Crowd of English Smatterers: the Poor in the Colonial and Nationalist Discourse in Education, 1835-1912", in Contemporary Education Dialogue, 10 (2), 2013, 232]. The success and popularity attained by these institutions explain the keenness of Indians to expand their knowledge.

[143] These were mainly Brahmans and other writer castes, who by tradition and birth were men of learning. Historically they worked in the administration and as bureaucrats in all Indian states, also in the Muslim ones. So, during the Islamic period (1200-1700) the members of these castes became proficient in Persian, as much as, during the British period they learnt English to be hired by the European rulers.

[144] Not only Brahmans mastered English. The enrolment data in schools and colleges during the 1840s show that also lower and artisanal castes took to English education, whereas in this period Brahmans dominated only the Sanskrit colleges. It was by the 1870s that Brahmans dominated English education in the Presidencies of Bombay and Madras (Aparna Basu, *The Growth of Education and Political Development in India, 1898-1920*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1974, 152.

Apparently, so far so good for the British, who did not have to trouble much to have at their disposal a class of collaborators. Yet, the introduction of English language and culture and its diffusion at the all-India level had very soon huge repercussions on Indian society. It was a phenomenon of the utmost importance for the future of colonial India, since it provided for the first time Indian intellectual classes with a *lingua franca*, a common platform of thought, and, last but not least, with profound knowledge of the British liberal political culture. These so-called westernised middle-classes became carrier of a modern and rationalistic outlook and unveiled the inherent contradictions of colonialism. For this reason, while appropriating western education, the educated Indians became crucial catalysts for modernisation while fighting against superstition, inculcating rational thinking and struggling to empower the lower classes through the new system of education.

But before dealing with the seminal role of the intellectuals, let us try to look more into the question of the new English schools, where the complexity of the coloniser-colonised encounter is particularly evident.

Indians and Modern Education

The opening of educational institutions after the Bentick Resolution did not follow any systematic pattern. As has been seen, the administrators were free to shut down English schools as much as they could open new vernacular ones[145]. But even if there were enthusiastic British in the administration, willing to promote an English-based educational system, the financial resources allocated by the government at their disposals were modest, with the obvious consequence that the number and the quality of the schools left much to desire[146]. Naturally, the flaws of this system could not be ignored by the Indians. Therefore, the defects of the government schools were somehow compensated by the foundation of several English schools by Indian individuals or by progressive voluntary

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[145] Rao, *New Perspectives*, 15.

[146] In the words of the eminent historian and diplomatic K.M. Panikkar "Nowhere was education more official, more directed to the maintenance of the status quo, to the discouragement of curiosity and enquiry as in India. That was inevitable. The system of education under the British rule was meant, to a very large extent, to uphold the status quo. It was no part of British educational policy in India to encourage curiosity or a sense of intellectual adventure". Yet, although Panikkar see the educational system as an imposing system built up by the colonial state, he recognised that "it helped to create a common Indian mind; and a reasonable uniformity of standards all over India" [in K.M. Panikkar, *The State and the Citizen*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1960 (first pub. 1956), 149]. Of course, standardisation reached only those who had access to education, which were still a small minority. The great majority in fact was still part of the traditional cultural milieu [K. N. Panikkar, *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance*, Oxford University Press, 2010 (first published 2007) New Delhi, 48].

associations which often had the support of British liberals and missionaries[147]. These schools struggled in order to include in the fold of education also girls and low caste or untouchable children. The colonial state provided Indian with a space that could allow them to bring about far-reaching changes in the educational field and gradually widen the opportunities for non-Brahmins, even if inequalities were not erased. As a matter of fact, for a long time high castes had more chances than any other caste thanks to their traditional inclination for knowledge and administrative activities.

The founders of these schools were people who believed in the diffusion of education and in the innovating social power inherent in the acquisition of a new rationalistic and scientific knowledge. They understood that in the colonial context there were new needs, new intellectual aspirations and thus the traditional system of thought was not enough to respond to the challenges of the changing times. The knowledge imparted by these schools was not aimed to the obtainment of clerical jobs in the colonial administration, but a wider scope, since it was modelled on the European curricula, with a wide choice of subjects such as higher mathematics, sciences, English literature and radical philosophy[148], which rarely were taught in the government schools[149].

Thus, the significance of the introduction of a modern education with English as teaching medium by no means can be reduced to the fact that it represented an opportunity to find a job in the colonial administration, as maintained by some writers. No doubt, it had practical advantages and allowed the Indians to climb the social ladder, but it was not only that. Indians were not passive receivers of the language of the dominators and did not apathetically assimilate the cultural and social values inherent in such language. They

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[147] Both the imperialist view and the post-modernist school deny the participation of Indians in creating and funding education in India. For example Martin Carnoy (*Education as Cultural Imperialism*, Longman, New York 1974) does not take into consideration the Indian effort in expanding education; whereas Gauri Vishwanathan, *Masks of Conquest. Literary Study and British Rule in India,* Columbia University Press, New York 2014 (first pub. 1989) does not pay the due attention to the fact that it was part of the vibrant Indian tradition to appropriate itself of new ideas and that British culture and literature were incorporated in their system of knowledge. For a scathing and convincing critique of these works see the introduction in Rao, *New Perspectives*, 1-42.

[148] Rao, *New Perspectives*, 20.

[149] Note must be taken that as a consequence of the poor quality of government schools, also *Arya Samaj* and *Anjuman* schools were established in Northern India. Therefore, if on the one hand a liberal and secular education contributed to the creation of a common Indian mind, on the other hand, a community-based kind of education divided students and teaching along religious lines.

were “ready to assimilate anything useful that came from anywhere”[150], adopting it in, and adapting it to, the colonial context.

As a matter of fact, the curiosity showed by the British to know Indian civilisation - even though, as well-known, it was often part of the imperial agenda - was mirrored by the same curiosity of the Indians to know western civilisation. Therefore, Indians had an active role in diffusing a European model of education and were not mere object of a colonial over-imposition of an external and alien system. They were scholars and as such, to them, knowledge had no flag nor boundaries.

Thence, in this sense it is improper and misleading to look at the spread of the imperial language and western education with a dichotomising approach, even if it might be tempting to consider it as a mechanism of British conquest vis-à-vis Indian resistance to it. In fact, when it comes to encounters between different cultures, things are always much more complex. It is true that the colonisers wanted to achieve the cultural assimilation of the colonised in order to better rule them. It is also true that the new Indian need and desire to learn English was a result of colonialism itself, in a way similar to today’s urge to learn English under the pressure of americanisation. Nevertheless, the new knowledge did not mean to break with the past and to reject in toto indigenous ideas. On the contrary, education provided the tools whereby Indian thought and culture could be rediscovered, re-assessed, criticised. Western ideas where absorbed in a critical way and inserted in the larger frame of local ideas. The by-product of this process was often a creative and productive synthesis, as I will try to show for what concerns the formulation of the idea of the nation. Therefore to draw a clear-cut line between modern and traditional education does not make sense and takes us back to the ‘East’-‘West’ division of which the British were so fond. In the same way, to depict the British as over-imposingly introducing English is just one side of the question. If undoubtedly some of the colonial administrators held that education had to perpetuate a conservative social order and that peasants classes and lower castes had to be kept out of its reach, there were others that sincerely contributed to the spread of education and supported with their own means the private schools that were

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[150] Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Abacus, London 1998 (first published 1997), 220. This had always been a characteristic of Indian history, since India, much before the arrival of the Europeans, had been inserted in the highly developed and complex system of trade of the Indian Ocean where the merchant ships connected the Western and Eastern coasts of India respectively with the Arabic Peninsula and the Eastern Coast of Africa and with Malacca and the Moluccan and Banda Islands. This fascinating trade system had favoured the circulation not only of goods but also of ideas, which were often appropriated, braided with traditional beliefs and implanted in the the Indian social and cultural contexts.

emerging thanks to the initiative of Indians[151]. Also Hindu priests, notorious for not being radical in their outlook, in certain areas of India such as Maharashtra supported the Indian reformers and tackled caste restrictions[152]. On the other hand, many Indians - often western educated and generally landlords and members of those social groups that benefitted from the preservation of a feudal social order - strongly advocated a two-tier system such that higher education was confined to upper castes and vocational education for the masses. They stalled the effort to establish compulsory education in the name of defending Indian identity. This pattern could be seen during the attempts to introduce mass education in 1870 and in 1910-11, which notwithstanding the support of some influent colonial authorities were both defeated by Indian conservative forces who were against the social mobility that a universal education could carry[153]. A western, English-based education, then, did not necessarily make its beneficiaries modern.

That there was a certain concern in the British and Anglo-Indian circles about the new secular education in India is evident. The fact that western education could be the British's 'highroad back to Europe'[154] was not ignored by the colonisers themselves. When the Chapekar brothers murdered two British officials in Pune, English education was blamed for it. In that respect, the Secretary of State wrote to Lord Curzon:

> "I think the real danger to our rule in India, not now but say 50 years hence, is the gradual adoption and extension of Western agitation and organisation; and if we could break the Hindu party into two sections holding widely different views, we should, by such a division, strengthen our position against

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[151] In this sense the examples of Francis Warden and Annie Besant are very telling. The former, member of the Governor Council of Bombay in the 1820s, opposed the policy advocated by the Governor Elphinstone of limiting education to Brahmans alone in a region were by tradition vernacular education had been quite inclusive (see Parimala Rao, "A Century of Consolidation and Resistance. Caste and Education in Maharashtra 1818-1918", in *History and Society*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Occasional Paper, n. 54, Delhi, 2014, 8-9) The latter on the contrary was in favour of a religious and moral kind of education, as the institution of the Hindu Banaras College proved. Gokhale was contrary to it and refused Besant's proposal to be the Hindu representative of the would-be college (See *Gokhale Papers*, NAI, From Besant to Gokhale, 1st May 1907).

[152] Rao, "Caste and Education", 11.

[153] Parimala Rao, "Compulsory Education and the Political Leadership in Colonial India" in Rao, *New Perspectives*, (151-175). The first attempt was an initiative of the colonial state, coinciding with the Elementary Education Act in England. The second was made by Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

[154] This was a comment made by the Governor of the Presidency of Bombay, Mountstuart Elphinstone quoted in Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Social Policy and Social Change in Western India, 1817-1830*, London, Oxford University Press, 1961, 249.

the subtle and continuous attack which the spread of education makes upon our present system of Government[155]".

In the *Bengalee,* edited by the liberal leader Surendranath Banerjea and printed in Calcutta, we find an illuminating editorial that gives us further idea of the debate going on about the system of education in India. Banerjea's article was a rejoinder to a previous piece by Theodore Morison appeared in the *Times,* according to which secular education was not suitable for the people of the subcontinent. Banerjea reported Morison's opinion, which was applauded by the Anglo-Indians:

"A system of purely secular education in this country has destroyed our religious consciousness - lowered our character, spoilt our manners, in a word has made us a class of mere intellectuals. Too exclusive a study of European literature, modern science and modern philosophy, has undermined our traditional habits of thought, and has alienated us from our ancient loyalties, giving rise to a spirit of irreverence and self-assertions, which from the political point of view is a fact of the most disquieting nature"[156].

Banerjea's brilliant reply, worth quoting, disputed the labels foisted on Indians as per the British convenience. He rejected the orientalist cliché of India's otherworldliness and claimed that Indians had the right and capability to be equally masters of their spiritual and material welfare. He asserted therefore the primacy of reason in the temporal affairs and advocated the separation of state and church in line with the secular principles. He acknowledged the conservative social function of religion in inculcating into people a mindset less reluctant to criticise authority and object to social rules:

"To keep the educated Indians riveted to their moorings, the only thing necessary is to teach them the dogmas of their respective religions. Has not Tolstoy pointed out that the Church in Europe has ever been the most powerful ally of the King? When the Church succeeds in capturing the soul, the government finds no difficulty in ruling the body. From the point of view of the autocracy, the ideal people are those whose intellect has been drugged

[155] Hamilton to Curzon, 20th September 1899, *Curzon Papers*, NAI.
[156] *Bengalee*, "Secular education in India", 29th January 1907.

> and paralysed. [...] The *Pioneer* which only the other day accused the educated Hindus of being grossly superstitious and votaries of a degraded form of religion, now humbly turns round and accuses them of being soul-less sceptics [...].But our journalistic critics who today are disconsolate over our so-called scepticism are the very men who get fearfully perturbed at any signs of the life of our religions that may appear on the surface. One day we are soul-less materialists, the very next day we are the followers either of militant Hinduism or jehad-preaching pan-Islamism. [...] It would be a most comfortable arrangement if we could be persuaded to look only after our spiritual welfare and have all temporal affairs in the hands of our English rulers [...]. But we advice our Anglo-Indian friends to leave our religion alone and not to trouble themselves with our souls and to remember that the only relations we have with them are in this world and that we mean to have those relations modified according to the needs and regulated by the standards of this world and not those of the next"[157].

By reading this and similar articles, it is not difficult to understand the vibrant atmosphere that characterised India in this fermenting period. In the words of Masselos "[i]t must have been exhilarating to be a graduate (…), to belong to a small and select group possessed of a sense of mission and a belief in the possibility of effecting change. Exhilarating also to be caught up in the excitement of new ideas, in their discussion and in their spread"[158]. The new intellectual instruments and the new cultural references provided by education brought a lively cultural change in the class of literati, who soon became catalyst of a somehow revolutionary process of modernisation.

The Reaction of Indian Intellectuals to the Process of Modernisation. Giorgio Borsa's Theory of Modernisation

The question of modernisation deserves further reasoning[159]. Often the word 'modernisation' is being interchangeably used as a synonym of europeanisation or westernisation, with both negative or positive connotations according to the ideological

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[157] *Ibidem*.

[158] Masselos, *Towards Nationalism*, 79.

[159] For obvious reasons of space, it is not possible here to pursue an in-depth analysis of the debate that has been going on for a long time and that has dealt with modernisation along with democratisation and development.

stand taken and therefore as something to reject or to support. Such interpretations are not useful for a better comprehension of the problem, because they consider cultures as single blocks, immutable entities, not rarely judged and rated by Western scholars according to how far they promote human progress, that is to say, in many cases, capitalism[160].

The hegemonic thinking of the 'clash of civilisations' along with the concept of 'historical irreducibility' of cultures has further contributed to crystallise these positions[161]. On the one hand, the Eurocentric historiography holds that modernisation is a paradigm of progressive change that has been originated in the superior 'West' and propagated horizontally to 'the rest'; in this deterministic view, by and large, the unmodernised countries should learn from the lessons and experience of Europe and its cultural appendices. On the other hand, both the neo-orientalist scholarship and the different religious fundamentalisms focus on the essential specificity of each culture and maintain that in virtue of this essence cultures are unchangeable[162].

So, mutual influence between cultures is always superficial, if not impossible, because a channel of communication does not really exist. It is true that it was in Europe (and North America) that the main changes in the political, economic and social spheres took place after the Industrial Revolution and the American and French Revolutions. Nonetheless, despite the European temporal advantage, seeing modernisation as a process of exportation and diffusion of European institutions, values, and techniques is simplistic and misleading. In fact, modernisation is a complex, multidimensional, phenomenon, that may appear in different spheres with different timings and outcomes. No society is completely modern or completely traditional. On the contrary, elements of modernity and tradition are present in all societies and political structures, even if in variable proportions. In societies generally considered traditional there can be individuals who struggle to reinvent and contest their own culture in order to make it modern. They fight to dissolve oppressive social customs and practices adopted to the detriment of certain sections of society; they try to universalise education and to create a cultural substratum that is more favourable to

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[160] See, for instance, how the definition of 'Third World' has been misused [Vicky Randall, "Using and Abusing the Concept of Third World: Geopolitics and the Comparative Political Study of Development and Underdevelopment" in Mark T. Berger (edited by), *After the Third World*, Routledge, New York 2009, 32- 43].

[161] See Michelguglielmo Torri, Guido Abbattista, and Guido Samarani. "La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia orientale, di Giorgio Borsa." *Contemporanea* 11 (1), 2008, 115-138, here 116.

[162] See how Karen Armstrong in her work *The Battle for God. Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Harper Perennial 2004 (first published 2000) depicts fundamentalism, despite its apparent being wedded to the past, as a modern reaction to modernisation.

a scientific and rational system of thought; they tackle the most dehumanising aspects of religion and foster a separation between secular and religious identities.

Unquestionably, the fact that Europe underwent deep transformations which allowed it to reach a certain level of modernisation in the political and economic sectors before the rest of the world had huge consequences. As a matter of fact, this chronological favour position allowed the Old Continent to export through colonialism its models - which had inevitably European peculiarities - to the places with which it got in contact and to bring about at least some factors of change. Outside the original context, the modernising process did present similarities but also differences from the European one, because modernisation cannot be but a global historical process which has its own characteristics; it is a synergic phenomenon of interaction between cultures, values, institutions, techniques and varies according to the particular historical, political, economic and cultural circumstances. Thus, modernisation is not a prerogative of the Western world, nor it is something culturally alien to the rest of world. By and large, its development is constructive and dynamic only if advanced by the local elites and moulded by the intermingling of groundbreaking ideas and deep-seated local tradition and according to the indigenous needs.

If we look at India, modernisation was by no means shaped exclusively by the new European values which percolated into the subcontinent through colonialism[163]. Yet, it was a painful, laborious, disruptive development for Indian society, since it provoked a profound and long-lasting crisis to which the local elites responded in different, often contrasting ways. The modernising process imposed by the British domination was instrumental to pursue the colonial exploitation and was predicated on the establishment of new administrative and physical infrastructures; in fact, the achievement of the ‘imperial commitment’[164] was possible only in a system that presented at least some characteristics of modernity. Therefore, quite obviously, to modernise the political institutions and structures of power of the colony was not conceived to benefit the Indian subjects. So, this modernising development, being a by-product of colonisation, implied undeniably violence

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[163] The Anglo-saxon and American academias have been generally less inclined to perceive modernisation as a creative process which implies adaptation to indigenous cultures. On the contrary, their view has been quite Eurocentric, since it is held that unmodernised countries should learn from the experiences and lessons of the superior 'West'. See for example Niall Fergusson’s constant justification of British and American imperialism in this sense. Such neoconservative and neocolonial positions have been acerbated by today global Islamophobic wave.

[164] B.R. Tomlinson, "The Political Economy of the Raj: The Decline of Colonialism." *The Journal of Economic History* 42.01 (1982): 133-137. The term ‘imperial commitment’ indicates the payment of the Home Charges, the expenses for the Indian Army and economic policies aimed at creating the free circulation of British manufactures. Of course, it was the Indians that were burdened with these costs.

and sufferance for the colonised. But this fact should not prevent us from seeing that the response of the Indian elites to the British hegemony was not necessarily homogeneous and compact, much less invariably shaped by closure and resistance. Foreign domination produced different kinds of reactions among Indian intellectuals, who, deprived of any political influence[165], started to question the colonial dominance in the cultural sphere, namely where they could still exercise their agency thanks to the intellectual means at their disposal. Therefore, they were the first to investigate the reasons why Europeans could impose their hegemony over India and to elaborate diverging strategies vis-à-vis the perturbing transformations that were taking place. The answers given by the intelligentsia mirrored the disquieting cultural conflict within Indian society triggered by the British dominance and inherent in every process of modernisation[166].

In this regard, it is worth taking into account the interpretation that the Italian historian, Giorgio Borsa, gave as early as in the 1960s and 1970s[167]. According to Giorgio Borsa the process of modernisation in India, and more generally in Asia, was given momentum by the impact of the European colonialism and by the following crisis of the traditional societies. Yet, from a certain point onwards, modernisation ceased to be an external imposition. Instead, it became a conscious will, an endogenous process motivated by the need to elaborate an indigenous idea of modernity: the development of modernisation could be achieved only thanks to the autonomous initiative and effort of the Indian intellectuals. Therefore, the modern world was the result of two dialectic moments: on the one hand, European domination and, on the other hand, the Asian reaction to it.[168]

Western ideas had to be re-elaborated and fruitfully combined with the Indian ones in the attempt to defy the European hegemony. In this process of appropriation, domestication, refusal or circumvention of exogenous ideas in the framework of endogenous ideas, the results could be different and diverging. The synthesis of the new ideas could be more or

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[165] Not only Indian intellectuals, but Indians in general were excluded from the highest levels of the political and economic systems.

[166] These cultural conflicts explain also certain phenomena of the contemporaneity that are characterising areas like the Middle East, where extremist fringes reject in toto modernisation as an intrusion of western culture aimed at wiping out local traditions. Religion, in its most fanatic forms, is perceived as the only sphere in which it is possible to find shelter from the modern, aggressive, secular world. Fear is always enemy of liberal attitudes.

[167] I am grateful to Professor Michelguglielmo Torri for suggesting Borsa's theory as an useful instrument to understand the process of modernisation in Asia. Its modernity remains still today, after several decades from its elaboration. The theory of modernisation was formulated mainly in Borsa, *Le origini del nazionalismo* and in Giorgio Borsa, *La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia Orientale. La penetrazione Europea e la crisi delle società tradizionali in India, Cina e Giappone*, Rizzoli, Milano 1977.

[168] Borsa, *La nascita del mondo moderno*, 10.

less affected by European or Indian ideas. Hence, also those ideas formulated by the indigenous intellectuals and regarded as traditional and essentially Indian, had a certain component of 'modern' ideas.

In his interpretation, Borsa identified three different phases in the responses that Indian intellectuals and ideologues gave to the colonial penetration. The first two were opposite, but equally abortive.

So, the first strategy that some Indian intellectuals used to counter the foreign domination was one of sheer refusal of European ideas and institutions. Modernisation was condemned as an aggressive attack to Indian tradition and identity. In this view, Indian culture was by no means inferior to the European one. On the contrary, the decline of its ancient essence had been caused by Buddhism and by popular versions of Hinduism (Vaisnavism). These, and not the innate superiority of the conquerors, had made possible the penetration into India of Muslims and Europeans. By and large, according to this essentialist approach, the solution to overcome the decadence of Indian civilisation was to bring back the Hindu, high-caste dominance in order to recapture the genius of the golden age and to revive the forgotten system of thought and institutions[169]. Foreigners were a threat to this project, ergo the rejection of any imported liberal institution. Yet, however understandable this attitude of closure was, it had the main defect of not taking into account that the technological-military superiority of the Europeans had been achieved thanks to conditions and processes that had been generated by the application of certain ideas in the political and economic spheres. Therefore, it was totally incapable to cope with the challenge of the 'West'. Moreover, in a spirit of polemic contraposition, the supporters of this position could attribute a highly symbolic significance even to practices that, despite inhumane, were expression of the Indian identity and therefore became warhorses of resistance against colonial interventions (in this light the dispute over the *sati* ritual or child marriage should be looked at). Again, the battle against the infiltration of modern ideas became fiercer whenever the social prestige and influence of the traditional landed classes was at stake, as the struggle taken up by certain sections of Indian society against the universalisation of primary education starkly demonstrates. This phase, in Borsa's opinion, corresponded with the Revolt of 1857[170].

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[169] See J.H. Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society, Twentieth century Bengal*, University of California press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1968, 16. The author deals with Bengal, yet the approach of the revivalists was the same in the other regions of India, being a typical response to the penetration of modernisation.

[170] Borsa, *Le origini del nazionalismo*, 140-148.

The second response, epitomised by Bengali *babus*[171], was contrary to the above-mentioned one. Some of those Indians who had access to an English-based education and were more exposed to the contact with Britishers rejected their own culture, abandoning and, not rarely, even ridiculing social habits that were still very meaningful in the Indian context. Nonetheless, this path was altogether abortive. In fact, those who, very superficially, adopted British manners and customs not only were ostracised by their Indian fellows - often so much as to be victims of social death - but they were also despised by their dominators, who, especially from the second half of the nineteenth century, embraced an increasingly racist ideology[172]. Notwithstanding the level of westernisation reached by their subjects and regardless of the sincerity and enthusiasm in espousing the manners of the white man, the British did not change their stand in considering them inferior human beings and unworthy of being included in the ruling ranks. Unfortunately for the Indians, already estranged from their own society, this British treatment added insult to the injury. All in all, the westernised Indian suffered from the same "better than thou" attitude which he used to judge the social habits of his compatriots and which made him distant from them. Furthermore, the uncritical internalisation of western culture made him reluctant to oppose to the colonial state.

The third strategy - a sort of compromise between the previous two - was the most taxing, long and complex. It demanded an effort of reflection and critique of the Indian culture which would result in a sort of adjustment between tradition and new ideas. It was an attempt to find an alternative, indigenous, and autonomous formulation of the idea of modernity, that eventually ended up in becoming a form of resistance against the colonial system. In fact, Indian intellectuals appreciated that, in order to defy the British superiority, it was necessary to deeply modify the Indian socio-political system. But this could not be achieved without a grandiose cultural transformation. So, the work of the Indians that adopted this strategy was highly significant, since it advocated new forms of social behaviours which questioned the traditional mindset.

How this transformation had to be realised depended on the outlook of the Indian intellectuals. The Indian liberals believed that it had to rest on three main pillars, namely

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[171] Giorgio Borsa, "Nationalism and the beginning of modernisation in Eastern Asia/Il nazionalismo e l'ingresso dell'Asia Orientale nel mondo moderno", *Il Politico* (1964): 320-356, here 342-343. See for example Harry Derozio [Michelguglielmo Torri, "L'Indianistica italiani dagli anni quaranta ad oggi", in Giorgio Del Zanna and Agostino Giovagnoli (edited by), *Il mondo visto dall'Italia*, 2004, 247-263, here 255].

[172] Racism escalated especially after the so-called Great Mutiny of 1857 and was corroborated by the publishing of "On the Origin of Species" in 1859 in which Darwin exposed his theory of evolution.

the expansion of educative institutions, the critique of the social mores and the reform of religious tradition. By and large, they struggled to provide their Indian fellows with equal opportunities vis-à-vis birth-privileges, to create wider spaces of social freedom and to set in motion a process of emancipation from religion, which had to be revised through the lenses of rationality and equality. This creative synthesis could result in a new revitalised and improved society, liberated from those backward elements which characterised a feudal and patriarchal order. To these Indian intellectuals, the colonial state was agency of liberal values. Great Britain indeed was at the time the most liberal country in the world. British history, which with the springing up of the new system of education was taught in schools, was imbibed of the struggle for civil liberties and individual rights. The political events that characterised Europe all over its history inspired Indians. Enlightenment, positivism, radical humanism, liberalism, Jacobinism and nationalism started becoming familiar to the Indian intelligentsia. With the French Revolution, liberalism as a programme of social action and as political thought had a dramatic and universal reach[173]. Equality, fraternity, liberty and a social and political organisation liberated from the obscurantist influence of the Church turned into topics of debate also among Indian literati. To them, learning English language and embracing liberal ideals promised a wider, better world. Caught in the ferment of the new ideas, then, these Indians had their reasons for accepting the British presence. They trusted that England would confer India that same liberty for which English people had fought in the course of history[174].

Nonetheless, also the intellectuals that took an anti-modern and anti-British stand accommodated elements of European modernity in their ideology and advocated their own conceptualisation of modernity. Significantly enough, figures like Tilak, Gandhi or Savarkar, in whose thought the weight of the traditional ideas was undoubtedly greater, pursued a modern curriculum of education. Both Tilak and Savarkar were inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini and by his concept of secret societies, whereas Gandhi's philosophy was deeply impacted by Lev Tolstoy's and John Ruskin's ideas. What is more, their formulation of the idea of the nation was a modern phenomenon. They defined the Indian nation in the modern sense of the term and, in doing so, they drew both from indigenous, 'traditional' elements and from European ones. But this process of adoption and adaption of the latter to the Indian context was not always acknowledged by the Indian ideologues, who often tried to show that elements of modernity had already existed in the Indian tradition, and

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[173] Borsa, *Le origini del nazionalismo*, 151-152.
[174] See Torri, Abbattista, Samarani. "La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia orientale, di Giorgio Borsa.", 117-19.

then ideas coming from outside were redundant. So, the Indian nation, with its glorious history had just to be revived.

Therefore, the encounter of ideas and their combination created a vibrant cultural renaissance. The outcome was different, because the relationship between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ ideas was mutable. Yet, as Giorgio Borsa maintained, *all* the ideologies that resulted from such variable synthesis represented autochthonous and original ideas of modernity. They were far from being a mere imitation of the European modernity.

What is particularly praiseworthy of Borsa’s sophisticated theory of modernisation is that it was formulated with great clarity very early, especially if we take into consideration the fact that only of late some scholars of India, mainly in the British and American academic world, have started dealing with modernisation as a process of exchange and interaction and not as a phenomenon that, originated in Europe, reproduced itself identically in the civilisations with which it got in contact. In other words, Borsa rejected the Eurocentric argument - still very popular in certain environments - that modernisation was inherently European, an expression of the Western civilisation and, as such, it manifested itself always and everywhere with European characteristics: in Borsa’s view, on the contrary, modernisation is not a liquid that could be transferred from a civilisation to the other[175], since it acquired local cultural peculiarities according to the historical experience and cultural backgrounds of the different civilisations of the world. For this reason, Borsa’s theory is still a very useful intellectual instrument and interpretative model to understand the origins of the modern world and to counter those interpretations of history that draw a clear-cut line between 'East' and ‘West’.

In fact, even forty years later the publication of Borsa’s *La nascita del mondo moderno in Asia Orientale*, the cultural transformation that characterised Indian in the nineteenth century is still target of never-ending polemics in the scholarly world. What creates particular disquiet in the scholarly minds, especially in the post-colonial countries, is the appropriation of liberalism. Often defined as cultural hegemonisation and Brahmin liberalism, this phenomenon is superficially dismissed by some scholars as naive self-colonialism.

If it is true that sometimes, as seen above, Indians found themselves in the bewildering - yet not unusual - situation of those who love and ape their enemy, we must keep into account that the vogue of liberalism and more generally European ideas cannot be looked down on as an eccentric vagary of a few privileged Brahmans. As a matter of fact, the

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[175] Borsa, *La nascita del mondo moderno*, 10.

curiosity - sometimes compulsive - towards everything European was expression of needs and requests inherent in Indian society. In the same way, the liberalism by which Indians were inspired was “a conjunctural phenomenon, rather than simply a lineage or influence diffused from Europe to Asia, from metropole to colony. It reflected attempts by people - not all of them elite - to grapple with the consequences of globalisation, the intrusion of colonial state and the collapse of embodied authority of popes, mandarins, or Brahmins which had all happened within a generation”[176]. Literature, philosophy, history were the spheres where Indian civilisation was compared to the European one and subjected to analysis, revisitation, rediscovery. The use of civil religion; the fight against superstition; the dignity to the individual vis-à-vis the oppression of family and community; the condition of peasants, women, outcaste; the role of the state; the condition of Indian economy; all these were topics that created a lively atmosphere in the press and in the universities and whose discussion was favoured by the encounter with a different culture. It was allowed also by the new space of action provided by the colonial state in the sense that this did not implement excommunication if somebody did not conform with the prescribed social rules imposed by the constraints inherent in Hindu society.

This is not to say that the nineteenth century was Anglophile. Of course it was not. The backdrop of the cultural rebirth was that of a country appallingly impoverished by the colonial state, where Indians were excluded from power and were branded as an inferior breed, where the wounds of the Revolts of 1857 were still open and sore. What can be certainly said is that the nineteenth century was an extremely significant period for the history of India, fundamental for the building of the cultural identity of the subcontinent. Furthermore, it is hardly deniable that it was a century when British and Indian culture were very close to one another, despite - or because of - colonialism. This relationship was not an unidirectional movement from the Indian side. On the contrary it was favoured also by the British, or at least by the most enlightened ones, who were willing to foster those ideals that, in theory, were at the very basis of the British rule and who wanted to facilitate a dialogue between Indians and British. So, without questioning the violence, hatred, and cultural shock always innate in the dynamics of colonialism, we should not fail to see that the century in question was one of the most important in the Indian intellectual adventure. The origins of the philosophical and - later on - scientific renaissance of the subcontinent must be found in these decades of cross-fertilisation of ideas which created new

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[176] C.A. Bayly, "Liberalism at Large: Mazzini and Nineteenth-century Indian Thought”, 355-374, here 355 in C.A. Bayly, Eugenio F. Biagini (edited by), *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalisation of Democratic Nationalism (1830-1920)*, Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2008.

generations of scholarship in which novel combinations of heterodox ideas were incorporated in the fold of Indian culture[177]. Western ideas of rational criticism and enquiry along with ethical philosophical concepts were inserted in an indigenous context. In this way, the new classes of modern-educated people were never totally detached from their Indian fellows[178].

The Role of Indian Intellectuals in Indian Society

Of course, this revolutionary cultural change, although not completely limited to the educated Indians, could not percolate top downwards to the grassroots level of Indian society, where the great majority was still illiterate and too busy to live by the day. Nevertheless, this should not adumbrate the social importance of educated Indians. They were undoubtedly pivotal agents in the transformation of traditional society and could act independently from their class and caste of origins. As a matter of fact, Indian intellectuals were making an effort to create a public opinion and a civil society. In virtue of the appropriation of the postulates of liberal thought, Indians started promoting the idea that "both individually and collectively men are endowed with qualities which enable them to look beyond selfish or class interests". Therefore, Indian intellectuals and, among them, social reformers saw "the possibility of an objective view of social and political action"[179]. The instruments utilised by the enlightened Indians to sensitise people on matters of public interest were several. An outstanding phenomenon of the nineteenth century was the spontaneous flowering all over India of public voluntary associations, which promoted social and educational activities. Their purports were mainly the expansion of education, the discussion of political issues, the reform of religious tradition and the critique of social

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[177] A similar phenomenon can be seen, *mutatis mutandis*, in the period between the middle of the 12th century and the middle of the 13th century in Europe, where, thanks to the encounter with the Islamic culture, a flourishing intellectual renaissance took place, especially in the Euro-mediterranean area. The emergence of scholastic philosophy, logics and dialectics has its roots in that period and was promoted by the effort made by princes, merchants, translators, priests and monks in order to circulate the most important works of Islamic thinkers. So, military conflicts, epitomised by the Crusades, were only one aspect of the relationships between Islamic world and Europe, which were characterised by deep mutual influence, both in the material and in the intellectual field. For a reconstruction of the Islam-Europe relationships see Franco Cardini, *Europa e Islam. Storia di un malinteso*, Laterza, Bari 2003 (first publ. 1999), passim.

[178] Or at least one can argue that the divide between educated and non-educated classes was not wider than the one which existed between the few people that commanded a vernacular literature language and the multitude familiar only with the spoken version of the same vernacular. The divide between educated and non-educated individuals existed also for people speaking the same vernacular, given the difference between spoken and written, literary language.

[179] K.M. Panikkar, *In Defence of Liberalism*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay 1962, 38.

mores. These associations often had more than one branch in the same region. They addressed the government with memorials and petitions, whereas in order to educate the people, they ran meetings, public explanations, lectures. Another very important means in the hands of intellectuals was journalism. Thanks to the diffusion of the lithographic press, an enormous number of newspapers could be established, both in English and in the vernaculars of the region to which they belonged, often bilingual or at times even trilingual[180]. They dealt with debates which concerned international, national, political and social issues and their articles demonstrate how ideas were fresh and vivid in the subcontinent[181]. Their perusal show that "British radical doctrines concerning education, civic responsibility and constitutional empowerment […] found appropriate 'ecological niche' in India at this time because of the particular conditions that prevailed in the subcontinent"[182]. In line with the centuries-old characteristic of the subcontinent to exchange and appropriate exogenous ideas, Indian intellectuals were endowed with a great ability "in reconstructing and relocating these arguments within their own traditions that they were beginning to historicise"[183].

So, for instance, in the opinion of eminent social reformists like Ramakrishna Gopal Bhandarkar and Mahadev Govind Ranade[184], espousing the principles of rationalism, Enlightenment and humanism did not mean to reject their own culture. Engaged in the effort to give dignity to the individual vis-à-vis the dictates of the castes, Bhandarkar found an historical justification for social reform, claiming that custom and religion were two different things and so the old religious texts had to be interpreted according to the requirements of the times. Ranade agreed with this 'method of tradition' and tried to

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[180] By the 1870s the variety of Indian newspapers owned and edited by Indians was strikingly huge. Yet, the official figures of their circulation are not completely reliable to give the right impression of the extent of sensitisation they were raising. In fact, the oral tradition was still in existence and the newspapers were often read out at public spaces so that also people who could not afford to buy them or who were not able to read had the chance to be informed of what was happening. The colonial government was well-aware of this and feared the danger of newspapers read out loudly in "the bazaars". See Uma Das Gupta, "The Indian Press 1870-1880. A Small World of Journalism", in *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (1977), 213-235, here 230-231.

[181] The Vernacular Press Act of 1878 demonstrates that the vernacular press was by no means less abreast with the most debated topics of the time. It gives an idea of how much the colonial government had become preoccupied about the circulation of 'seditious writings' in vernacular newspapers.

[182] C.A. Bayly, "Rammohun Roy and the Advent of Constitutional Liberalism in India, 1800-1830" in *Modern intellectual history,* Vol. 4, no. 01 (2007), 25-41, here 41.

[183] *Ibidem*.

[184] They were active in the Bombay presidency where the influence of European ideas had been felt very early thanks to the reform of the educational system introduced by the governor Mountstuart Elphinstone (1819-27). Significantly, Ranade was the political guru of Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

corroborate the importance of social reforms by using scriptural citations and the egalitarian teachings of the saint-poets of the *bhakti* tradition[185]. In polemic with the European critics who considered the 'Oriental races' doomed to backwardness and even extinction unless they made way for the western spirit of social emancipation and religion, Ranade maintained that it was a peculiarity of the history of India to be reinvigorated after all invasions. In fact, "the nation (…) after a temporary submerging under the floods of foreign influences, has reared up its head - absorbing all that is best in the alien civilisation and polity and religions"[186]. That process had always been a catalyser towards social evolution. In the same way, it would not be a break with the past to absorb what Europe could teach the Indian nation, provided that the longed-for change "from credulity to faith, (...) from status to contract, from authority to reason, from organised to unorganised life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a sense of human dignity"[187] occurred in respect of the cultural tradition. These reformists did not idealise the past, but relied on history to validate their projects of social reformation. The approach adopted by Ranade and Bhandarkar was a strategic way to involve the masses, but not only that. More importantly, it was part of the wider process, undertaken by the Indian intelligentsia, of societal reconstruction on the basis of the re-working of European ideas in the light of their local traditions. Essentially, instead of being passive objects of the western model of modernisation, Indians were shaping their own model of modernity by creatively intermingling values coming from their own tradition and values coming from the European one[188]. This reformist and modernising movement was not limited to Hinduism. The Rahnumai Mazdayashan Sabha had been formed in oder to elevate the social condition of the Parsis and to bring Zoroastrianism back to its original pureness. The Muslims had a great reformer in Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), who founded the British Indian Association in 1866 and the important Anglo-Muslim College in Aligarh few years afterwards with the purpose to introduce the Indian Muslims to a new modern form of education. Ahmed Khan elaborated a new reading of the Quran in the light of reason against the petty interpretation formulated by the ulema that opposed any influence of the European ideas.

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[185] Aravind Ganachari, *Gopal Ganesh Agarkar: The Secular Rationalist Reformer,* Popular Prakashan, Mumbai 2005, 19-20.
[186] *Sudharak* (Reformer), "Social Evolution", 16 October 1893.
[187] *Ibidem.*
[188] It is worth taking note of the fact that a process of restoration of orthodox, brahmanical Hinduism ran parallel to the process of its reformation. See ahead.

Hence, both Indian press and voluntary associationism played a remarkable role as organs of public education and political consciousness; through these powerful means, educated men in India, although a small group, could exert some influence on a large "bank" of people and could knit together the different parts of India. Along with the subjects taught in the new schools, newspapers and associations acted as a powerful social solvent to link one generation to the other and diffused the liberal spirit that would characterise the nineteenth century. In fact, thanks to the newly acquired familiarity with the history of Great Britain, imbibed with the struggle for the achievement of civil liberties, thanks to the interest kindled by British political philosophy with its stress on individual and people freedom, and thanks to the discussions which revolved around the principles of equality and nationality, which marked contemporary European political events, the Indian public achieved a new political awareness of the problems which affected their own society. They compared their own situation with the one of the most advanced European countries and found that there was no space for the concepts of nationality, freedom and unity in India's reality. The analysis of the Indian political and social conditions unveiled the fact that the lofty ideals celebrated in British history had no equivalent in India and that the paternalistic and benevolent principles enunciated by the Charter Acts had no practical fulfilment there. By and large, Indian intellectuals realised that what some European countries had previously achieved was not exclusively a by-product of the ''West'', but more broadly a by-product of human reason and therefore every human being and every people were entitled to equality and freedom. The liberal Indians were not dazzled by the ''West'', nor were they showing a servile behaviour towards the British rule by appropriating themselves of certain ideals. Colonial agency, both in its institutional and intellectual form, was used initially to empower the marginalised groups of Indian society and later on to judge and denounce the same foreign rule.

The role of intellectuals in the colonial Indian society is worth analysing further, although briefly[189]. The fact that the educated Indians after 1857 started defining themselves as a class had a confusing effect on the following studies that attempted to understand the role of this section of the Indian society. When Indians like Surendranath Banerjea, Gopal

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[189] For this section I referred to Michelguglielmo Torri, *''Westernized Middle Class'', Intellectuals and Society in Late Colonial India*, in John L. Hill (edited by), *The Congress and Indian Nationalism: Historical Perspectives*, Curzon Press, London 1991, 18-55 and Michelguglielmo Torri, *Regime coloniale, intellettuali e notabili in India. Politica e società dell'era del nazionalismo*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1996, 63-107. The author, like Sumit Sarkar (see his conclusions in *Swadeshi Movement*, 431-438), applies convincingly the concept of traditional intellectual to the educated Indians and to analyse their social function.

Krishna Gokhale or Aurobindo Ghosh defined themselves as part of a new dynamic class of people, they sincerely felt to be part of it. They also felt the responsibility of having an important mission, that is to bring progress and liberty to the Indian ignorant masses, something which attributed them a legitimate social importance. Substantially, they perceived themselves as a westernised middle class. In the colonial officials' perception, on the contrary, the educated Indians were a Westernised elite, a closed caste group, incapable of representing the views of the *chota log*, because unaware of the real popular needs. It is between these two definitions that the historiographical interpretation of the educated classes kept on oscillating.

However, in the 1970s, the Cambridge school generally questioned the very existence of a westernised middle class. According to the Cambridge historians, the Westernised Indians could act only on behalf of magnates (moneylenders, heads of villages, merchants, landlords): they were just compradors, mediators between the colonial administration and the influential local leaders. Therefore, they had no independent agency. In this interpretation, then, Indian intellectuals were not protagonists, but mere objects of Indian history, whereas, as seen, their action in the colonial society cannot be easily dismissed.

To help us understand better the social relevance of Indian intellectuals, Antonio Gramsci's considerations on Italian history and Risorgimento can be a useful tool. In Gramsci's interpretation intellectuals are not an autonomous and consolidated social group. They are the most advanced group within a very internally diverse middle social stratum, whose creation is favoured by the process of modernisation. The importance of intellectuals does not derive from their belonging to a particular social class, but from their their capability to act as spokesmen, ideologues, organisers, and leaders of social classes different from their original class of belonging. Thus, they have no common economic interests.

If we use Gramsci's theory in the Indian situation, we can see that also Indian intellectuals were distinct from the rest of the society, not for caste or class belonging, but for their knowledge and for their capability to discern, better than others, long-run tendencies[190]. It is true that Indian intellectuals were indeed a small group, mostly coming from high castes, definitely proud of their origin and having a certain contempt for manual occupations from which they kept off, concerned to preserve social harmony and to bring about social changes only in a gradual and pondered way. Yet, they did not form, nor were

[190] See also Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*, 1903-1908, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2013 (second impression of the second edition 2010, first edition 1973), 436.

they the representative of, an elite[191]. On the contrary, they were becoming ideologues and organisers of social groups that, in certain cases, were still in the process of acquiring a definite shape. So, they could act as mediator of powerful patrons, but not all politically conscious and active Indians were mediators, as the Cambridge scholars maintained. Moreover, the groups of Indian intellectuals and Westernised Indians did not necessarily overlap, even though they considerably intersected. As a matter of fact, not all intellectuals were westernised, since some had studied in vernacular schools (even though they were affected by the overall cultural climate) and not all westernised Indians were intellectuals or in favour of modernisation.

What is important to understand at this point is that, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a politically dominant middle class in the modern meaning of the term had not consolidated yet. The most influential Indian classes were still conservative and in favour of the pre-colonial social order. So, the Indian society, despite the cultural change triggered by the colonial penetration and by the activities of Indian intellectuals, was still under the cultural hegemony of the traditional classes. For this reason, it would have been impossible for the intellectuals to pursue the sought-after social reforms. It was in the name of social reform that, at the beginning, the educated Indians accepted the British rule. They were moved by the conviction that the condition of subjugation of their country would be overcome thanks to the providential contact with England. In their view, the colonial state could be instrumental to bring social reforms that could improve India in terms of inclusivity and gradually return political power to the Indian people. Liberal Indians like Ranade, Chandavarkar, Agarkar and Gokhale firmly believed that “the British rule had given India time and opportunity to rebuild, renovate, and repair its economic and social structure and consolidate itself into a single nation”[192]. Nevertheless, how society had to be reformed

[191] Namely, they did not have a big proportion of wealth or political power. Some were actually very poor and it would be difficult to define them elite or subalterns.

[192] B.R. Ambedkar, *Ranade, Jinnah and Gandhi*, Jullandhar, Bheem Patrika, 1964, 49. Maybe, Ambedkar’s position towards imperialism is too soft. Yet, what is interesting is the fact that, unlike the nationalist historiography, he realised that criticising and fighting the British rule did not necessarily mean to tackle the oppression and injustice perpetrated by Indians to the detriment of other Indians.

was a controversial issue and motive of clashes between different social groups[193]. In such a situation, the position of the social reformers was not tenable. Isolated in respect of both their social classes and their extended families, they were victims of social ostracisation and incapable of attaining any political respectability or social clout. For this reason, the choice to provide the Indian National Congress with an exclusively political programme was certainly sign of political realism and understanding of the Indian situation, since it proved more persuasive if traditional and emerging social groups were to be gathered around the flag of the all-India party. This led to an evolution in the role played by the intellectuals, who became organisers of those social groups that were increasingly turning hostile towards the British *Raj*, because the collaboration with this did not guarantee any longer mutual - although uneven - advantages.

Indian intellectuals, then, were a crucial social force, because they were able to elaborate a strategy that united various social groups in an inter-class and inter-caste alliance. By and large, Indian intellectuals became the spokespersons of those groups that were progressively undergoing the contradiction existing between the interests of the Indian people and those of the colonial state.

Therefore, since the foundation of the Congress, its leadership decided that the pursuit of social reforms was not responsibility of the party. Instead, the battle against social evils had to be carried out - if it ever was - by other organisations, such as, for instance, the Servants of India Society, created by Gopal Krishna Gokhale. But this and similar organisations remained quite marginal. Substantially, the Congressmen, namely the politicised intellectuals, appealed to the government for political reforms, presenting a set

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[193] Every Indian, 'moderate' or 'extremist', realised that the advent of the British rule over India meant 'the loss of political power and prosperity' [Ratan Khasnabis, "Evolution of Economic Thinking in Modern India" in S. Bhattacharya (ed.), *Development of Modern Indian Thought and the Social Sciences*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2007, 7]. In the same way, all wanted freedom for India. Yet, on the one hand, the liberal reformers realised that in order to build the nation it was necessary to create citizens that had equal rights in front of the law and equal social opportunities regardless of their race, religion or caste. Hence, their stress on the importance of the spread of education so that everybody could be included in the nation *in fieri*. They were aware that a huge work of social rejuvenation had to be taken up and that freedom from the British yoke would not suffice. On the other hand, the so-called extremists, politically near to the notables that had been allies of the British rule, appealed to the colonial state until it proved in favour of the permanence of the feudal order, whereas when political and social reforms jeopardised the hegemonic control of the landed elites, they started asking for independence. The contest around the spread of primary education is ideologically very meaningful, because it is indicative of the opposite vision for the future nation.

of grievances[194], that could mediate between the different and diverging interests of the Indian society. So, thanks to the Congress the discussions on the Indianisation of the Civil Service, the expansion of representative institutions and responsible government, the degradation of Indian economics, the role of the colonial state and its merits and faults were brought to the all-India political arena, something which made the British worriedly aware that things were changing.

The foundation of the Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress, formed in 1885 as an umbrella to put together the previously-formed regional associations[195], became the all-India political platform used by the Indian 'professional agitators' to convey their malcontent to the British dominators. Rather than a party *stricto sensu*[196], the Congress was a sort of parliament[197] where all the regional delegates gathered once a year for few days to discuss and decide the most pressing matters to be dealt with and for which to agitate in the Imperial and Legislative Councils. It presented demands to the government, but it had no means of forcing the government to concede them.

The ideological cohesion within the all-India organisation was possible thanks to the fact that its pattern was basically made by a handful of men. This was mainly due to the open nature and to the loose structure of the Congress. As a matter of fact, the Congress had

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[194] Many of these were predicated on accurate investigations carried out by eminent scholars, mainly economists, like Naoroji, R.C. Dutt and Ranade, just to mention few. Having revealed the predatory nature of the British Raj and questioned the fact that the latter was aimed at the wellbeing of its subjects, these scholars were given *a posteriori* the designation of nationalist economists by the historiography. Their studies signed the beginning of the application of the scientific method in the economic field and they work was extremely meaningful to question certain putatively universal and axiomatic principles of economic liberalism, such as free trade and non-interventionism of the state. See Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*, *Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership 1880-1905*, Har-Anand Publication, New Delhi 2010 (first published 1966) and the more recent article by Jayati Ghosh, "Dissenting Economists. The late nineteenth-century Indian tradition", in Claudio Sardoni and Peter Kriesler (edited by) *Keynes, Post-Keynesianism and Political Economy, Essays in Honour of Geoff Harcourt*, Vol. 3, Routledge, London 1999, 94-109.

[195] Of these, the most important were the British Indian Association, the Indian Association, the Poona Sarvajanika Sabha, the Bombay Presidency Association, the Madras Mahajan Sabha. Their leaders became important personalities within the Congress.

[196] It was only thanks to the Constitution of Nagpur in 1920 elaborated by Gandhi that the Indian National Congress was transformed from a movement into a party in the modern sense of the word. See, among others, Michelguglielmo Torri, "L'Evoluzione del Congresso da movimento a partito dominante e il ruolo di Gandhi (1919 – 1939)" in Giorgio Borsa (edited by), *Nazionalismo e società in India, Il congresso nazionale indiano 1885-1895*, Centro studi per i popoli extraeuropei dell'Università di Pavia, Franco Angeli, Milano 1988, 84-154.

[197] The name was significantly inspired by the Congress of Philadelphia of 1774.

no formal constitution, because its members realised that, since there was an uneven representation and support according to the different provinces, this could create quarrels around the predominance of stronger provinces such as Bombay, Madras and Bengal. The non-official spokesmen for the single regions were the well-established provincial associations which acted more or less officially as Standing Congress Committees and sent their delegates to attend the yearly Congress. This meant that the Congress could be set up in a locality wherever there was an organisation which lent it its support. Yet, the Congress had hardly any real control over these bodies and could not instil a certain directing spirit into them. Moreover, politics at the provincial level was vey important, especially the one in the most influential provinces, and it was reflected also at the all-India level, where it found in the Congress an authoritative national platform. Also the Subject Committee, that is the most important committee until the twentieth century that decided the issues to be debated during the Congress, until 1903 was composed as per the choice of the Congress circles rather than by province and had a non-specified number of delegates. The logic behind such loose and informal composition was that the Congress needed to be consolidated, to enlarge its basis and so everybody was welcomed. Moreover, to the Congress leaders, it was important to give their party at least the appearance of a representative body. Nonetheless, given the absence of a formal hierarchy, it was the secretary of the Congress and the leaders of the most active political associations that dominated the Congress[198].

The Congress leaders at the time of its foundation did not distinguish themselves for wealth, property, social and ritual status (or if they did, it was not the main reason why they could lead the Congress). On the contrary, they owed their position at the head of Congress to their proficiency in the English language and to their knowledge of the functioning of the administrative machinery, indispensable criteria to have access to the all-India political arena. By and large, their group partly overlapped with those Indians reformers[199] - who attempted to take advantage of the new space of action created by the penetration of colonialism in order to revolt against the constraints inherent in Indian

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[198] Gordon Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism. Bombay and the Indian national Congress, 1880 to 1915*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1973, 36-52.

[199] It can be said that the reformers tried to carry out those changes in Indian society that the Congressmen, for political realism, could not pursue using the platform of the All-India party. As a matter of fact, the issued related to social reforms were polarising and divisive and Indian politicians were well aware of it. As a consequence, they preferred to focus their action on political reforms. Yet, the work of the reformers at the cultural level was extremely important and complementary to the action of the Congress. For example, it was Reformer newspapers that initially denounced British racism.

traditional society by bringing about a cultural transformation, often appropriating themselves of new ideas coming from Europe. More specifically, they were a by-product of that distorted and complex process of modernisation that the colonial state had set in motion. This, in order to impose the obedience to its central power to the Indian subjects, had gradually deprived the local notables of their authority. The notables - usually landlords, merchants, religious authorities, moneylenders, etc. - were traditionally the most powerful elements at the apex of rigid vertical structures within which, as happened elsewhere in feudal societies, they were connected in the role of patrons to several clients in a relationship of reciprocal dependency[200]. These notables - otherwise called bosses or magnates by the historiography of the Cambridge school - had had the function of collaborators since the aftermath of the Revolt of 1857. Their collaboration had been very important for the good working of the system, in a period when the colonial administration could not yet penetrate to the very bottom level of society. So, in exchange of the maintenance of social order and of the payment to the *Raj* of a prefixed amount of tax revenue, the authority of the notables, although reduced, was preserved. This system of collaboration started changing with the centralising action of the colonial state, which, dictated by the need to optimise the administration efficiency and to mobilise more resources, gradually eroded the long-standing informal alliance with these most influent groups of Indian society. The progressive dissolution of the vertical structures paved the way to the formation of mixed horizontal segments that grouped people coming from different castes and classes. The Indian intellectuals were the most advanced elements in this heterogenous group and included also the leading lights of the Congress. As seen above, although numerically and economically[201] non influent, they had the intellectual capability to articulate and give voice to the claims of new emerging social groups, besides their own. Substantially, according to the theory of Gramsci, they were intellectuals and thanks to their function of theorists and ideologues, they could organise an anti-colonial movement gathered around the Indian National Congress.

The foundation of the Indian National Congress was a major achievement of the anti-colonial movement and it represented a huge step forward in terms of organisation of the

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[200] A clear example is the *Jajmani* system, that is a system of relations between upper and lower castes, where the lower castes performed certain services and functions for the upper caste and received grain in exchange.

[201] The education based on English and on European subjects was an important social elevator. Therefore members of rich and powerful families did not have any necessity to acquire that kind of education. Those who engaged in it generally came from high caste families with modest financial means who invested in the education of one or more members of the family with the hope that they could achieve a job in the bureaucracy or in the liberal professions.

movement at the all-India level. If we take into account the several divisions within Indian society it appears all the more as a remarkable feat. Yet, this is explainable with the impact that the colonial state had on India.

From political rights to national rights

The wave of enthusiasm and hope roused by appointment to the Viceroyalty of the liberal Lord Ripon (1880-1884) and the introduction by the same of the Indian Government Resolution of 1882[202] which transferred into Indian hands the responsibility of local bodies did not last long. The process of institutional reforms, furthered with the Indian Council Act of 1892[203], involved gradually more Indians in the administration, but the key levers of power remained in the hands of British officials[204]. Furthermore, the Vernacular Press Act, the controversy about the Ilbert Bill[205] and the Arms Act had starkly demonstrated that the Anglo-Indian community, whose strong core was the bureaucracy of the Indian Civil Service[206], had no sympathy for the people over whom they ruled. Lord Ripon's successor, Lord Dufferin, not only reduced the public expenses in favour of the construction of strategic railways in Quetta, but also refused the participation of Indians in voluntary

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[202] With the reform scheme of Lord Ripon, municipal and local boards were created in most of the provinces. The effect was a raise of new taxes in localities and provinces to run the cost of these new institutions. It was a way of lowering administrative costs (For a critical comment on the reforms implemented by the British Raj, see Bidyut Chakrabarty, Rajendra Kumar Pandey, *Indian Government and Politics*, Sage Publications, New Delhi 2008, pp. 235-268).

[203] The Indian Council Act increased the number of non-official Indians in the councils. It became mandatory for the government to consult the representative bodies and institutions, approved by the government, before selecting nominees for the councils. The act gave no right of elections but the provision relating to the drafting of the regulations gave permission to various bodies of Indians to recommend people for nomination. This right was conferred on university senates, corporations, municipalities and district boards, chambers of commerce and associations of landholders.

[204] Something that not surprisingly kept characterising the reforms, the Government of India Act of 1935 included. Beyond the appearance of being concessions conferred by the British benevolence, the main purpose of reforms was to placate popular discontent and to control mass agitation.

[205] This was the *casus belli* for a violent campaign of opposition against Lord Ripon in *The Times* and other Anglo-Indian newspapers. The bill aimed at eliminating an anomaly which characterised the Indian judiciary system, according to which an Indian magistrate operating in a district tribunal could not judge an Englishman, while that could be done by an English magistrate hierarchically inferior to the Indian one. Although the bill's consequences would have not been of any particular significance, the Anglo-Indian community could not accept the very principle on which that measure was predicated, namely racial equality. The Bill was defeated in the British Parliament and Lord Ripon resigned in favour of Lord Dufferin.

[206] This was the above-mentioned Covenanted Civil Service, reserved to the British. It was the group that actually ruled India together with the Viceroy, who was not part of the bureaucracy, but appointed by the Prime Minister in London. As in the case of Ripon, there could be diverging views between the Viceroy and the members of the Civil Service. The latte was very powerful and often had the upper hand.

military corps aimed at the defence of the north-western borders. Not surprisingly, the Viceroy's decisions attracted Indian opposition, since they corroborated the fact that British imperial interest had the priority over Indian people's interests. Besides, by rejecting Indian volunteers, it was shown to which extent the British dominators distrusted their subjects. This reflected the new atmosphere which characterised the British-Indian relationships. In fact, the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the nadir for the liberal ideals that, at least on the paper, were the foundation of the British presence in the subcontinent. The British attitude was, generally speaking, one of scorn, contempt, and disregard towards the Indians, who were more and more systematically victims of racism[207]. The prevailing ideology of the British in India became, if not paternalistic, openly autocratic and authoritarian. With the triumph of imperialism over Asia and Africa, the bombastic discourse of the *mission civilisatrice* became meaningless. British absolute rule in India was justifiable *per se* and not because it preluded representative government. The only justification was the superiority of the British people, which now was cultural, moral, climate-related and racial. According to Stephen, it was preposterous that the empire professed to be progressive or rational. It was, in fact, informed by power, not by liberty:

> "How can you possibly teach great masses of people that they ought to be rather dissatisfied with a foreign ruler, but not much; that they should express their discontent in words and in votes, but not in acts; they they should ask from him this and that reform (which they neither understand nor care for), but should on no account rise in insurrection against him"[208].

This development greatly contributed to change the nature of the Indian National Congress. Substantially, at the moment of its foundation, the all-India organisation had not a well-structured nationalist ideology. Its leaders, in fact, did not initially elaborate a nationalist discourse. What they actually asked for in the late nineteenth and early

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[207] The cleavage between the British and the Indian communities had started growing deeper after the Great Mutiny of 1857. The discrimination perpetrated in the aftermath against Indians contributed to a great extent to create among them a sense of separateness, of different identity that in the following decades would become nationalistic.

[208] In Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire. A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*, University of Chicago Press, London 1999, 29. Stephen was legal member of the Imperial Executive Council (1869-72) and judge of the Indian High Court (1879-01). He was the main theorist of the new imperial ideology.

twentieth century was the entitlement to civic and political rights *within* the Empire, on the basis of the Queen's Proclamation of 1858[209].

Even though in the opinion of colonial writers and officials they represented exclusively the bourgeois interests, and the Hindu nationalists who afterwards came to the political fore ridiculed them as political beggars, if not traitors, for their 'pray, please, protest' attitude, the reality is that the Congress leaders gave India a 'global voice'[210]. It was the Congressmen who produced the 'authoritative statement' to show the world what the people of India wanted[211]. By and large, they demanded as their prerogative those same rights that should have been conceded them according to the British political liberal tradition. In fact, they aspired to become *citizens* of the British Empire, because they were subjects of the Crown and, as such, they had to be admitted into the rights of the British people. So, for instance, in Manchester, 1909, Banerjea stated:

> "India in the enjoyment of the blessings of self-government, India prosperous, contented and happy, will be the most valuable asset of the empire, the strongest bulwark of Imperial unity. And the Empire thus knit together upon the basis of common civic rights and obligations, may bid defiance to the most powerful combination that may be formed against it, and may gaze well serenity and confidence upon those vicissitudes which, as all history tells us, have wrecked the fortunes of States and thrones which relied upon the security of physical rather than upon the paramountcy of those moral laws

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[209] This was promulgated after the termination of the EIC administration in India after the revolt of 1857. By proclaiming the sovereignty of the Crown over British India, the Proclamation declared that all the inhabitants of India were considered subjects of the Sovereign, they would enjoy equal treatment and protection in front of the law and they would not be discriminated on the basis of creed or race in having access to offices.

[210] C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*. *Indian Though in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*, Cambridge University Press, Delhi 2012, 204. Note must be taken that the gradual modification of the rigours of imperialist domination and the introduction of self-governing institutions in the British colonies were, at least to some extent, the result of the pressure and of the work of sensitisation of Indian liberal leaders. They contributed to the awareness of the condition of India both among their people and among British people in Great Britain. To think of democracy in India and other British colonies as the outcome of British liberal government is misleading and unconvincing. On the contrary, Indians were conscious that they were dealing with the most liberal country in Europe and they believed that sympathy for, and advancement in, their cause could be achieved more easily in England, somehow trespassing the autocratic colonial government. See for example the Speech by Surendranath Banerjea, "Faith in England", quoted in W.T de Bary, *Sources of Indian Tradition*, Columbia University Press, New York 1958, 678.

[211] Robert Osborne to P.M. Mehta, 18th April 1884, *Mehta Papers*, NAI.

which represent the index-finger of Divine Providence in the dispensation of human affairs"[212].

While acknowledging the benefits that the British Raj had carried in terms of internal peace and security, Banerjea emphasised also the mutual advantage that a united Empire could have both for Great Britain and India. But such unity was durable only if Indians could enjoy civic and political rights in the space of the Empire.

The claim to become imperial citizens, formulated before the conceptualisation of the Indian nation, was based on the premises of the liberal ideas of citizenships that prescribed justice and liberty. It transcended the Indian identity, in order to claim a wider imperial subject identity. In other words, for the colonised Indian, it was a tenable strategy for self-definition and a reasonable discourse to counter colonialism without being anti-British[213]. Yet, the British kept on regarding Indians as only subjects, and not as citizens.

So, the leaders of the Congress grew increasingly disenchanted with the effects that the British domination was having over India. The fact that the *Raj* and the welfare of Indians were incompatible could not go further unnoticed. As a matter of fact, the Congressmen and other important figures linked to them carried out accurate and rigorous scientific studies and analyses of the official data of the colonial state that highlighted that the poverty of India was man-made. More precisely, British domination was considered the cause of a continuous flow of wealth funnelled out of India in favour of England. So, the studies of Indian economists demonstrated that, regardless of the bonhomie of official proclamations, the real objective of the *Raj* was the systematic extortion of the resources of the subcontinent to the advantage of Great Britain and the creation in India of a market for British industrial products. This "drain of wealth"[214] was the main reason of the progressive impoverishment that the Indian subcontinent was undergoing. Thus, as

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[212] Surendranath Banerjea, *A Nation in Making*, Oxford University Press, London 1927, 266.

[213] It is worth mentioning that the concept of citizen of the Empire did not exist in the late nineteenth century when Indians were asking for it. Only with the idea of a British Commonwealth of Nations, the word 'citizen' started featuring in British common law. Therefore, what Indians wanted to enjoy was not a codified status, but a potential one (see Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens. Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2010, 5).

[214] There is not need to insist on the well-known theory formulated by R.C. Dutt and Dadabhai Naoroji [Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and un-British Rule in India*, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Delhi 1962 (first publ. 1901) and Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India*, A.M. Kelley, New York 1969, 2 Vol. (first publ. vol.1, 1902, vol. 2, 1904)]. Suffice it to say that the expression 'drain of wealth' became a catchy phrase that had a great nationalist resonance among Indians. It immediately pointed out to the condition of subjugation and exploitation of the Indian people at the hands of the British: it was a powerful critique of imperialism.

Gokhale underscored in the numerous powerful Budget speeches he delivered as a non-official member of the Imperial Legislative Council, the colonial rule was not responsible to Indian people. Indeed, since the British rule was at the origin of Indians' material sufferings, the trust in it was not unconditional. Gokhale stressed this when he explained that "when Indians talk of loyalty to British connections it is not similar to that of feudal Europe or Rajput India but based on Enlightened self-interested"[215].

Therefore, there were reasons for creeping malcontent. As has been seen, the huge difference between ideological currents in the 'West' and the social practices applied in the colonies contributed to fade Indian expectations. But what really created an unbridgeable rift between Indians and British was the rampant racism that permeated official decisions and behaviours. That Indians within the space of the Empire were by no means perceived by the British as the citizens they wished to be was confirmed by the colonial policies towards Indians in South Africa and in other colonies where they were exploited as bonded labour[216]. This condition of inferiority among Indian people inevitably created antagonism, competition and vulnerability, namely those factors that determine the growth of nationalist feeling in a people. Threatened in their identity and deprived of the possibility of being considered on a level of equality with the British people, Indians started developing a sense of separateness and otherness; it provoked a reaction by which Indians implicitly defined themselves as the people who were targeted by the racist attitude of the British. Such a discourse brought about a reformulation of the Congress ideology, that became more clearly nationalist[217], that is to say, aimed at the achievement of national rights. The dream of England as mirror of the Indian future[218] was not going to be realised in (un)British India.

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[215] *Speeches of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Madras, G.A. Natesan 1928, 299.

[216] British policy in South Africa became a sort of litmus with which the Congress judged British in general [David Omissi, "India: Some Perceptions of Race and Empire" in D. Omissi and A.S. Thompson (edited by), *The Impact of the South African War* (Basingstoke; Palgrave 2001) chapter 2; especially 219-20, here 27].

[217] A brief clarification is here needed. The use of the terms 'nationalist' and 'nationalism' creates always confusion, especially in the European context, where it retains a negative connotation. As a matter of fact, when in Europe we talk of nationalism, we automatically associate it with the overbearing and violent versions of it, namely the one based on racial and cultural identity, which became very influential in the European continent in the nineteenth century and was responsible for the wars that divided Europe until the Second World War. In India, *e contrario*, it still has a positive undertone, since it was the ideology and movement which gave India freedom from its dominators. Nonetheless, both liberal and race/culture-based forms of nationalism can be found all over the world. For example, in Italy, the nationalist ideologies formulated by Mazzini and by Crispi were very different. In India, Gokhale and the reformers imagined a nation that was opposite to the one of Tilak's and his acolytes.

[218] K.N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, New Delhi 1995, 22.

In other words, the British discrimination to the detriment of their subjects made the latter discover a new individuality for themselves, something which at the beginning was not in contradiction with the will to remain part of the British Empire. It was a sense of distinctiveness that had already been perceived in the past[219], but for the first time it was articulated at the All-India level. What is important to emphasise here is that such novel consciousness of Indianness could emerge because, differently from previous historical periods, the geographical wholeness of the Indian subcontinent, so clearly marked out by the sea and the mountains, was now also politically and culturally constituted[220]. This new awareness of India as a territory for the nation *in fieri* had been favoured equally by the unified administration and by the educational system. In particular, from 1848 onwards the political borders of the British *Raj* overlapped with the geographical borders of India, so that Indian people were gathered around the same polity. On one side the Indian Army, the railways, the system of post and telegraph, and on the other side the constructive action of the press and the Congress with its emphasis on national problems exerted a synergic action which provided Indians with new cultural, social and geographical knowledge and experience. Therefore the Indian nation could be described as formed by the people inhabiting India, now a territorial unity[221].

The influence of liberalism on Indian nationalism

This concept of close relationship between territory and nation was a typical characteristic of the British liberal nationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries[222]. Indeed, European liberalism was a major source of inspiration for the leaders of the Congress in their formulation of the idea of nation and the ideology that would remain the foundation of the all-India party in the future. The Indian leaders who guided the Congress until the first two decades of the twentieth century made no mention of an eternal, innate, natural Indian nation, contrarily to certain naturalistic nationalist trends that had started circulating in India and had become dominant in Europe. The idea of nation formulated by the Congressmen in this period was enlightened, open, and far-reaching because it was aimed at the

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[219] See above.
[220] Panikkar, *Colonialism, Culture and Resistance,* 92.
[221] According to Christopher Bayly, from the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate onwards, the term 'Hindustan' acquired the meaning of land inhabited by Muslims and Hindus and in this sense it is possible to appreciate Akbar's project to create a common peaceful space of co-living for Hindus and Muslims (See Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 38).
[222] Torri, "Nazionalismo Indiano e Nazionalismo Musulmano", 160.

peaceful coexistence of a multitude of identities, and, as a consequence, it insisted on the individual will of becoming part of the nation. It was mainly Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the most important spokesman of the moderate leadership of the Congress, who gave voice and power to this concept. Through his powerful speeches, Gokhale made public and promoted the idea of nation that he and other liberals wanted to build. According to this view, a nation could be 'made' in the future, if there was a common project for whose realisation every individual, every citizen would bring about their contribution. In other words, Indian liberals, sensitive to the huge diversity of their country, did not see any limit in the lack of objective elements of cohesion such as a common language, a common religion and a shared history. In point of fact, those elements were by no means relevant bonds in the imagined nation, since what would tie Indians together was the promise of future progress and freedom[223]. This vision was insightful because it did not advocate a single cultural denominator, be it of caste or religion[224]; in a society as diverse as India, the superimposition of a narrow identity would lead to exclusion and oppression, to resistance and protest, and eventually to the failure of the national project itself. Therefore, in this phase, the ideologues of the Congress, although in great majority Hindus, did not see any religion as the cement that could keep the nation together. They were secular because nationalism to them meant the overcoming of any form of particularism and communalism. It was a secularism that had to be realised at the political level and circulated through political education, something which, later on, would percolate to the cultural level. In sum, they believed that secularism and secularisation had to interact; a secular state would generate a secular culture, where reason would have primacy on *mythos* and

[223] In the period taken into consideration, freedom did not mean independence from Great Britain. Indian leaders were endowed with great political realism. They understood very well the economic and political context in which India was inserted and knew that it was idle talk to speak of independence. Only in 1930, under the leadership of Gandhi, the Congress explicitly asked for *poorna swaraj,* that is complete independence. But by then, the relationships between India and England and the international scenario had much changed and India had more space of negotiation.

[224] Although most of the Indian people neither shared their Parsi religion nor understood their mother tongue, the fact that Dadabhai Naoroji and Pherozeshah Mehta gave voice to the Indian cause is a significant example to comprehend the nature of this nationalism.

superstition[225]. It was not an anti-religious or irreligious ideology, because it conferred equal freedom to all religions. Although intended to prevent religious strife, this secular outlook was inherently weak, because it did not take into consideration the fact that the separation between the public political sphere and the cultural and religious private sphere promoted by the British *Raj* was fictitious. For, in the colonial state, the religious preoccupations of Indians did not remain confined to the private sphere but found a legal space in the public political arena. For this reason, later on, the "discourse and politics in the public arena became so easily tinged with interests which were more narrowly communitarian than broadly 'national' in character"[226]. Proof of this was the way in which in the future Hinduism could exert a strong political influence on the decisions of the Congress.

It is very interesting to see how the liberal idea of nation had several sources of inspiration. One was certainly Giuseppe Mazzini, whose conceptualisation of nation echoes in the words of a few Indian nationalists in this period. Maybe the best example of the appropriation of the spirit of Mazzini's nationalism resounds in what Surendranath Banerjea wrote in 1909:

> "Is India already a nation? If not, what can be possibly be meant by Indian nationalism? How can we adore or worship an entity that exists only in some people's imagination? Questions of this ignorant and unreasoning kind are being perpetually asked by men whose understanding seems to have developed as little as their emotions. in truth nationalism is as much a faith and a creed and is as much the embodiment of an aspiration as any of the commonly accepted religions. The yearning of the heart, the aspirations of

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[225] On the complex question of secularisation I have already referred to the discussions in EPW, "Revisiting Secularisation". What is important to underline here is the different starting point that the discourse on secularism and secularisation had in India. In fact, if we consider modern secularism in Europe, it has its roots in the historical process of cultural secularisation which formulate theories on the secular nature of government. In the course of history, then, secularism and secularisation strengthened each other, because the two processes were somewhat parallel, and religion gradually lost its function of social control. On the contrary, in India secularism and nationalism emerged together and when Indian nationalist began to talk of secular state, the hold of religion on society was still very strong. That is why scholars like T.N. Madan talk of secularism in India as an over-imposition from a handful of members of the westernised elite to the detriment of the masses, with whom they were out touch and to whom religion is still the lens through which interpret the world. The legal doctrine of secularism was not corroborated by the historical process of secularisation, therefore, Madan concludes, secularism is not suitable for India (Triloki N. Madan, "Secularism in its place." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 46.04 (1987), 747-759).

[226] Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and community in South Asian Islam since 1850,* Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2001, 91.

> the soul, which religion in its usually accepted sense, has always endeavoured to satisfy, this new faith and new creed satisfies as much as any other [...]. Nationalism does not mean mere nation worship. so understood, it may easily degenerate into a glorified form of selfishness, as it has actually done in some Western countries. it means that the point of view from which life and its many problems are to be looked at is not the good of the individual, but that of the nation, that the nation itself is to be regarded as a living entity, as real and as concrete as the individual, and which has as clear and as decided functions in the life of Universal Humanity and in the system of relations that we see around us, in one word, in the immanent life of the Absolute, as the individual has in the life of the nation"[227].

The Italian Risorgimento thinker, who never dealt with India or generally with Asia in his works, held a fascination for Indians because the context in which he had operated was very similar to the Indian one. In other words, Italy, like India, having been divided in regional states for centuries, was a very heterogeneous polity; like India, it had been sacrificed in name of imperialism. In the eyes of an Italian who wanted to formulate a national discourse for Italy, it was preposterous to try to convince an inhabitant of Naples and an inhabitant of Milan that they had the same blood and that they shared the same history. Even mutual comprehension was very difficult, since they spoke two vernacular languages that had very little commonalities. Yet, if they had not been Italians in the past, they could become such in the future. Then it was the moral and political task of the nationalist ideologue to give the would-be citizens of Italy a reason, a strong motivation to be part of the nation in the making. So, in Mazzini's opinion, nationality was a common thought, a common aim and a common principle; these, in his view, were the only essential elements to make a nation[228]. By and large, in Mazzini's thinking, national consciousness had to be built thanks to a common project of moral revolution that would be prodrome of political revolution. Nationalism thus had to be transformed in a sort of secular and humanising religion and the nation was not only based on the popular will, as the French Revolution had taught, but also from above, that is from God. The national

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[227] *Bengalee*, 17th July 1909. See also Surendranath Banerjea, "Joseph Mazzini" in *Speeches and Writings of the Hon. Surendranath Banerjea* (Madras 1907), 391-415.

[228] Simon Levis Sullam, "Mazzini and Nationalism as Political Religion", in Bayly, Biagini, *Mazzini and the Globalisation*, 107-124, here 112, quoted from 'Nationalité': quelques idée sur une constitution nationale', La Jeune Suisse, 19, 23, 30 September 1831, in *Scritti Editi e Inediti*, vol. 6, 125.

mission became a mission of divine origin that did not clash with being part of the universal humankind. In Mazzini's words: "When God places a people in the world and says to them: Be a nation! He does not say: isolate yourself; enjoy life as a miser with his treasure. He says: March, your head raised, among the brothers I gave you, free, without constraints, as is fitting for the one that carries my word in his chest"[229]. These words definitely appealed to Indians who were trying to conceptualise their nation. Mazzini's this-worldly spirituality combined well with the process of reformation of the religions in India[230]. The Mazzinian inspiration is easily brought to our mind by Gokhale's words:

> "Public life must be spiritualised. Love of country must so fill the heart that all else shall appear as of little moment by its side. A fervent patriotism which rejoices at every opportunity of sacrifice for the motherland, a dauntless heart which refuses to be turned back from its object by difficulty or danger, a deep faith in the purpose Providence that nothing can shake – equipped with these, the worker must start on his mission and reverently seek the joy which comes of spending oneself in the service of one's country"[231].

The 'worker' was, in Gokhale's outlook, the educated Indian, that is the brain of the nation. They had cleared the jungle and laid the foundations for the future work of political education and national advancement. Thanks to them, 'the idea of a united and renovated India' was no more 'idle dream of a few imaginative minds'[232]. The role of education, for

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[229] *Ibidem.*

[230] It is significant that the most popular and translated wok of Mazzini was *On the Duties of Men* (*Manushyon ke kartave* in Hindi). It sold thousands of copies. The work of the Risorgimento thinker dealt with a modernising religion which empowered the individual and the race in a march towards the Divine Spirit, very similarly to what the Brahmo Samajists advocated. The essence of divinity was the unity and wisdom of the human race (Bayly, "Liberalism at large", 362). It is also interesting, as Bayly notes, that the the association Young Bengal, founded in the 1840s was the non-conspirational version of the Giovine Italia and that the 1857 Mutiny was interpreted by Indian as the abortive attempt by Italians to get rid of the Austrian domination in 1848 (*Ivi*, 357-58). This shows that Mazzini exerted his influence when he was still alive.

[231] G.A. Natesan (edited by), *Speeches of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Natesan, Madras 1920, 915.

[232] *Ivi*, 914.

Mazzini[233] as much as for Gokhale, was pivotal in creating a public, common consciousness.

Also Mazzini's belief that the amelioration of the life of the people was responsibility of the state was meaningful in the Indian context, where Indians had to advance requests to the colonial state for their welfare. Like Mazzini, they did not embrace the principle of laissez-faire dictated by orthodox liberals. Nonetheless, as a further demonstration of the creative exercise of appropriation of exogenous ideas by Indian thinkers, the political thought of Mazzini could be selected or rejected according to the changing circumstances in which ideas could have a better application[234]. So, for instance, Mazzini inspired also Aurobindo Ghosh[235], whose nationalism was very different from Banerjea's or Gokhale's one. The *Abhinav Bharat Mandal*, the secret association founded by the Hindu nationalist Savarkar, Tilak's pupil, moved from the most revolutionary of Mazzini's ideals and adopted terroristic methods such as the "guerra per bande" (guerrilla warfare). The Mazzinian association planned the assassination of Gokhale, that was avoided thanks to the intervention of Savarkar himself. According to the ideologue of *Hindutva*, the attacks done by Gokhale on revolutionary and secret societies in England provoked some members of the *Abhinav Bharat Mandal*, that, at a secret meeting passed, the resolution to kill Gokhale. In occasion of that meeting, Savarkar was present and stood up and defended Gokhale and his fervid patriotism. Savarkar spoke of deep affection and reverence for each other[236].

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[233] "EDUCAZIONE, abbiamo detto; ed e' la gran parola che racchiude tutta quanta la nostra dottrina. La questione vitale che s'agita nel nostro secolo è questione d'Educazione ... Si tratta dunque di trovare un principio educatore ... che guidi gli uomini al meglio, che insegni loro la costanza nel sacrificio ... E questo principio è il DOVERE. Bisogna convincere gli uomini ch'essi, figli tutti d'un solo Dio, hanno ad essere qui in terra esecutori d'una sola legge" [Levis Sullam, "Mazzini and Nationalism as Political Religion", 122, quoted from 'I Doveri dell'Uomo', (1860), Scritti Editi e Inediti, vol. 69, 16].

[234] That Mazzini was a thinker to which Indians were attracted can be seen also by the reading of the newspapers. An article in a newspaper of Allahabad, *Maryada*, in Hindi, on 16th February 1911 traced a comparison between patriot and devotee, saying that the former is superior to the latter because it gave the formidable advice to 'attain liberty by devoutly serving the national God' to his countrymen and seeks no reward for his services. he quoted the instances of Shivaji, Maharana Pratap and Guru Govind Singh, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Washington and Horatius. They add to the love for God the love for the country (See Native Press Report for the United Provinces 1911, NAI).

[235] See *Bande Mataram*, 22nd September 1907: "Nationalism is simply the passionate aspiration for the realisation of the divine unity in the nation, a unity in which all the component individuals, however various and apparently unequal their functions as political, social or economic factors, are yet really and fundamentally one and equal. In the ideal of nationalism, which India will set before the world, there will be an essential equality between caste and caste, between class and class… while we insist in reorganising the nation into a democratic unity politically we recognise that the same principle of reorganisation ought to inevitably assert itself socially".

[236] *Selected works of Veer Savarkar*, *My transportation for life*, Vol. 2, Abhishek Publications, Delhi 2007, 177.

Besides Mazzini, whose echo abounds in the writings and speeches of the Indian nationalists, a range of other figures enriched Indian thinking. Remarkable was the influence of Edmund Burke on Gokhale, among others. The eighteenth-century Irish liberal recognised in India the potentiality of nationhood and saw the British presence as a hindrance to it[237]. Significantly enough, Burke's well-known *Reflections on the French Revolution*[238] became a very popular textbook in Indian colleges because the British considered it appropriate to counteract the effect of the French revolutionary ideals thanks to its emphasis on gradual change and social order. But when Burke became source of political inspiration in the national sense in virtue of his view on liberty, which to him was birthright of the humankind, Lord Curzon wanted to remove it from the texts of the Calcutta University, because 'dangerous food for the Indian students'[239]. Further, John Stuart Mill, in Gokhale's opinion, had greatly contributed to moulding the 'new India'[240]. Mill's influence is very much felt in the speeches of Gokhale, even though certain aspects of his thought were ignored, because prejudiced against Asian societies. Friedrich List's *National System of Political Economy*[241] played a considerable role in Indian economic thought of Naoroji, Ranade, G.V. Joshi, and Gokhale who framed a sophisticated critique of the colonial economic system. Ranade was strongly influenced by List's argument that weak economies necessitated systematic state protection in order to achieve industrialisation. Also Gokhale mentioned the economist of German origins in the Imperial Legislative Council while stressing the need of state intervention to compensate the unbalance created by the free market to the detriment of the poorest countries:

> "When a country, industrially backward, with antiquated methods of manufacture, dependent largely on manual labour, comes into the vortex of

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[237] Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire. A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought*, University of Chicago Press, London 1999, 189. The author makes reference to J.F. Taylor (edited by), Edmund Burke, "Speech on the State of Representation of Commons in Parliament", in *Writings and Speeches*, Little Brown, New York 1901, (7), 94-95.

[238] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the French Revolution*, London, Penguin 1968.

[239] Suresh Chandra Ghosh, "The genesis of Curzon's University Reforms, 1899-1905" in Rao, *New Perspectives*, 224-268, here 235, quoted from Curzon Papers, Letter from Curzon to Maclean, 14th February 1900, letter 44. Yet, the Senate of the University, still independent from the governmental control before the reforms later on introduced by Lord Curzon, could refuse the proposals in terms of textbooks advanced by the Viceroy and by the government (*Ibidem*).

[240] *Gokhale Papers*, NAI, From Gokhale to John Morley, 9th May 1897.

[241] Friedrich List, *The National System of Political Economy*, London 1885. List took part in the debates of economic development in 1820s in the United States of America and was inspired by Hamilton's Outline of American Political Economy (Philadelphia, 1827). The purpose of national economy in List's opinion was to encourage capitalist industrialisation (See Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, 29)

> universal competition - competition with countries which use steam and machinery and the latest researches of science in their production - the first effect is to sweep off local industries, and the country is thrust back on agriculture and rendered almost entirely agricultural for some time. but then, here, he [List] says, comes in the duty of the state. When such a situation is reached, the state, he [List] says, should step forward, and by a judicious system of protection it should foster such industries as are capable of being fostered, so that the country may once again enter on its industrial path with the aid of the latest appliances ad ultimately stand successfully the competition of the whole world"[242].

But how, Gokhale wondered, could it be realised, since the protection of Indian industries clashed with the principle of colonialism and Indian interests were not represented in the government[243]? Furthermore, it is worth noting that List clearly formulated the liberal concept that a nation to have historical justification had to be of a certain size[244], assertion which Indian nationalists, with their emphasis on territory, concurred with.

On the contrary, the theory of free trade of Smith was not that attractive for India - but the same can be said about Canada - which was struggling to develop their economy in contrast with the more powerful British one. Also Ricardo's theory of rent was rejected on the basis that rent conditions were very different in India[245].

So, an interesting, twofold phenomenon was taking place in India. On the one hand nationalism was a reaction to the morally, materially, and intellectually unbearable European domination. On the other hand, the principle of nationality and the idea of nation on which it was predicated, but also liberalism and its critiques, were European values which, after an attentive perusal, Indian nationalists, selectively and critically re-read and incorporated in their ideology. Yet, this is not necessarily a contradiction. In fact, the anti-colonial movement is a further, very significant, demonstration that Indian intellectuals and nationalists, when looking for alternatives routes to escape from the yoke of the British

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[242] "Import Duty on Sugar', in R.P. Patwardhan, D.V. Ambekar (edited by), *Speeches and Writings of Gopal Krishna Gokhale*, Deccan Sabha, Asia Publishing House, Vol, 1, Poona 1962, 9th March 1911, 335.

[243] In its moderation and intellectual balance, Gokhale maintained that neither protectionism nor free trade had to be taken as absolute dogmas; they had to be rejected if considered universal unquestionable truths; in fact, also protection could make the rich richer and the poor poorer (See *The Leader*, Editorial, 11th April 1911).

[244] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 30.

[245] Gosh, "Dissenting Economists", 97.

rule, did not elaborate a theory where Indian past and western modernity were non-communicating watertight compartments. In other words they did not always idealise the past and condemn the modernity which came from the 'West'. There were many productive in-between ways. Then to define Indian nationalism as a derivative discourse originated exclusively from the post-Enlightenment European rationalism grossly oversimplifies this fundamental development of Indian history. The definition of derivativeness might be accepted only if it suggests that nationalist discourse and thought had many different sources and did not derive only from the 'West'. But is it not redundant to make such an argument? Is not the history of world, of which the history of India is part, a crossroads where not only goods but also ideas travel and create common patterns that emerge in all cultures, even though conjugated according to the different human experiences?

It is true that the material domain of the state was perceived as the founding moment of modernity[246] and the Congress itself gave meaning to the colonial state as strategic agent of major qualitative changes at the political and social level. Yet, this is not a convincing justification to "subsume Indian history into the history of imperial institutions or political discourse (…). For we need to consider both the indigenous inheritance of the Indian state and the pattern of class formation within Indian society under colonialism which appropriated this foreign political apparatus"[247]. The colonial state was not created *ex novo*. On the contrary, the Mughal empire bequeathed a legacy of cultural and institutional cohesion, bureaucracy and a system of knowledgeable rules that were inherited by the British *Raj*[248]. Moreover, in pre-British Indian history the reactions to certain practices and policies of British rule were grounded on popular ideas of political morality and good

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[246] Sugata Bose, Ayesha Jalal, *Modern South Asia. History, Culture, Political Economy*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1998 (Revised edition 2004, Sixth edition 2013), 99.

[247] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 293. Also the opposite posture is by no means commendable, because "a national culture that does not have the confidence to declare that, like all other national cultures, it too is a hybrid, a crossroads, a mixture of elements derived from the chance encounters and unforeseen consequences, can only take the path to xenophobia and cultural paranoia" (Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Is Indian 'Civilization' a Myth?*, Permanent Black, Delhi 2013, 7).

[248] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 295. So, for example, the 'Institutes of Akbar' (a mix of maxims for good kingship), Islamic ethnology and revenue and military details, along with the police reporting (Akhbarat-i-kotwali, pre-colonial daily reports of the police chief of a city) can be considered the forefathers of British surveys, mapping, and police reporting. In the same way, many elements of the colonial discourse on crime, caste, thagi, sati had precedents in the Mughal state, even if for the British they had the purpose to create an international hierarchy for racial rule (*Ivi*, 294).

government that had been used in the past as forms of popular resistance against indigenous rulers[249].

Then, Indian nationalism was determined by a combination of the distorted all-pervading effects of the colonial state with the structures and ideologies of the Indian past. The idea of the Indian nation was in the same way by-product of the synthesis of Indian culture and British culture, both characterised, in varying proportions, by elements of modernity and rationality.

Nation in the unmaking. The dividing effect of the British *Raj*

The members of the Indian government did not hesitate to define the Congress, despite its moderate tones, a 'factory of sedition'. Civilians like Valentine Chirol and Reginald Craddock qualified its members as part of a small westernised elite[250], an insignificant 'minuscule minority', totally patronising and unrepresentative of the Indian masses[251]. Yet, this belief did not turn out to be very appeasing. There was somebody that perceived the leaders of the Congress as a potential modernising middle class, not different from the ones that had operated in the Italian Risorgimento or in the American war for independence[252].

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[249] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 14.

[250] Significantly the same category that has been used later on by several historians to define the Indian intellectuals.

[251] Even twenty years after the creation of the All-India party that in the meanwhile had grown stronger and had carried out important campaigns, Lord Minto, the Viceroy, wrote: "What is going on in India is altogether peculiar in comparison with other revolutions. Gambetta and Clemenceau and before them Cavour, Garibaldi and Mazzini were fighting for what they believed to be the liberties of the people and had the support of a great majority of their fellow countrymen. I have always thought the regeneration of Italy a very fine story, though it was led by extremists who were not over scrupulous; but here the position is entirely different. There is no popular movement from below. The movement such as it is, is impelled by the leaders of a class very small indeed in comparison to the population of India, who, if by some miracle they obtained the reins of Government, are totally incapable of ruling and would not for an instant be tolerated by the people of India as a whole" (*Minto Papers*, NAI, Letter from Lord Minto to Lord Morley, 4th November 1906).

[252] "All that you say about Indian revolution as compared with French or Italian ditto is extremely interesting, for you are at close quarters and on the ground with these new agencies. Of course, I go with you in general reading of the situation. The only question is whether the clever, enlightened, educated fellows will ever have the influence and power enough to draw the mass after them against British rule. Every revolution that I have ever heard of, came from above and not from below in the first instance – a few applying a match, the many bringing torches after. Try this in USA, in our civil war, in the work of Cavour, Mazzini & co, of Rousseau and so on" (*Minto Papers*, NAI, Letter from Lord Morley to Lord Minto, 30th November 1906). This letter was a reply to the consideration made by Lord Minto in the letter quoted in the previous footnote.

Therefore, on the one hand, the *Raj* tried to support and circulate the idea that speaking of India as a nation had neither historical, nor logical foundation; in this view, such a discourse was preposterous because India did not possess 'any sort of unity, physical, political, social, or religious; no Indian nation, no "people of India", of which we hear so much'[253]. India was rather a subcontinent, which was tied together only by the action of the colonial state, which was the guardian of peace and social order.

On the other hand, the colonial state started adopting *divide-et-impera* policies in order to create conditions as to perpetuate, demarcate and officialise social, political, and religious divisions, so that the dreaded making of the nation could be postponed, if not prevented. As a matter of fact, in view of setting apart the subjects of the subcontinent and favour the imperial interests, the colonial state set up a work of social engineering (accomplished through new social sciences like sociology and anthropology, but also more practically through censuses) so that new supra-local caste and religious categories could be redefined, and in some cases invented. Hence caste and religious communities were now interpreted as rigid and impermeable groups, having a well-defined identity since ancient times[254]. The British definition of community in religious terms - which deliberately did not take into consideration class, region, language - and the use of religions as a social demarcator to enumerate and govern the complex Indian social fabric was a denial of the policy of non-interference with religious matters. It created the concepts of majority and minority and consequently the claims of the Hindu majority and the muslim minority in petitioning with the Raj on the basis of their religious belonging.

The second step undertaken by the colonial officials was to provide these newly-formed social constructs with patronage, so that resources were delivered by the colonial state according to communal criteria. As a consequence, the newly-defined communities were brought into the political fore and pushed to consolidate their identity vis-à-vis the other communities and in contrast with the wider national identity that was contemporaneously

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[253] This is how the question of the Indian nation was dismissed by John Strachey in his authoritative *India*, London 1888, 5.

[254] The construction of the Indian Muslims and the Depressed Classes must be inserted in this framework of exercise of the colonial power.

emerging[255]. So, one community was pitted against the other, because each one started being depicted - but also perceiving itself - as a group with political, economic, and social interests different from, if not divergent with, the ones of the other communities. In other words, the data collection and classification by tribe, caste, community accomplished by scholar-officials of the colonial state heavily contributed to create a misleading understanding of the groups in which Indian society was divided. In fact, within the structure of the colonial political system, religion and caste became for the first time strong forms of ethnic identity, fixed, identifiable and connected with political action[256]. Just to mention a few examples, by 1880s the entire Indian army was defined by caste and ethnicity. So for instance the 'martial races' were opposed to the effeminate Bengali people. In the same way, titles conferred to 'natural leaders' were different according to the religion of the person awarded. The criteria of religion and caste were introduced in

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[255] The emergence of communalism has been object of study for many scholars. For reasons of space, we cannot insist too much on it. Suffice it to say that the term itself has created polemics since it implies the illegitimacy of the development of nationalisms different from the mainstream one. Reducing Muslim nationalism to the level of communalism means to ignore the reasons that drove Muslims leaders to formulate a separate idea of nation for their community. It is a strategy not to recognise the responsibilities of the majority community. To define communalism as a false consciousness and as the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion, they have common social, political and economic interests is a tautological explanation [See Bipan Chandra, "The Indian National Movement and the Communal Problem" in *Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi 2010 (first pub. 1979), 262]. According to the Cambridge historian, Christopher Bayly, Muslim and Hindu conflict had a pre-history and it is not a by-product of the British rule (C.A. Bayly, "A pre-history of Communalism? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860", *Modern Asian Studies*, 19 (2), 1985, 177-203). Social and ideological forces, before the advent of the British, were giving shape to a particular antagonism between the two communities: "If 'communalism' was 'constructed' during the colonial period (as many Indian academics think) (…) then it was certainly constructed in part from materials already at hand: from memories, antagonisms and aspirations which already existed, albeit set amongst competing and antithetical sentiments" (See Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 49). Yet, Bayly's interpretation neglects how conflicts that might have existed at the local level were transferred at the All-India level. Among the numerous works on communalism, see: Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1989; Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984; Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims, 1880-1923*, Paperback, Cambridge 1994; Farzana Shaikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1989; Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1990; Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1991.

[256] Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, 225. By hedging a Muslim community as an electoral constituency "the British inevitably created arenas for ritual competition in which over time personal commitment to Islam melted with public assertions of religious solidarity to create a newly politicised vision of community. The result was the flowering of a new communal rhetoric and, ultimately, of the Pakistan movement" (*ibidem*).

censuses and the institution of separate electorates in 1909, 1919 and 1935 constitutional reforms administratively implemented the colonial dominant thinking[257].

At this point, in order to avoid confusion, what is important to clarify, although briefly, is that religious and caste communities had never before constituted a factor of political mobilisation. This by no means implies a negation of the fact that such communities were long-standing entities and that for centuries they had been regulating the existence of Indians by prescribing certain social practices. Yet, their relevance was exclusively social and they had no clout at the political level. Caste communities had generally only a local reach, that is to say that endogamy was practised in the range of small areas, at best of a city; whereas people of the same religion were very diverse in terms of ritual practices, social status, language and ethnicity. So, for example, most probably, a Hindu peasant and a Muslim peasant had much more in common between each other than with their coreligionists, who were part of the elite classes. Further, it is unlikely that the masses of the people identified themselves with Hinduism; rather, they defined themselves as devotees of the one of the multifarious religious traditions that made up what later was categorised as Hinduism. And the same can be said of Muslims, who were divided in Shias, Sunnis, and other sects, and were more or less influenced by Sufism or by the religious interactions with Hinduism. The truth is that, before the consolidation of the British *Raj* in the course of the nineteenth century, the most important relationships in Indian society were the pyramidal structures that linked patrons and clients, namely relationships of economic and political dependency based on mutual convenience that generally characterise pre-modern societies. These patron-client relationships cut across caste and religious links, since the interaction between different caste and religion members was commonplace. In sum, the sense of belonging to the communities in question had always been heterogenous, fluid, and indistinctly defined, mainly because diluted by clientelistic solidarities. Later on, with the consolidation of the colonial state, what took place was an horizontal crisis that commonly characterises a society which is undergoing the pressing development of modernisation. This crisis pitted some social groups against others in the struggle to be entitled to rights or to be benefited from the allocation of the resources of the state.

Nevertheless, because of the divide and rule strategy pursued by the British dominators, a more clear-cut sense of identity started being defined within the same caste or religious group, as being member of a specific group became a requirement in order to get benefits.

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[257] See Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, The New Cambridge History of India, III.4, Cambridge University Press, 1994, chapter 4, 113-159.

In other words, being clearly and unmistakably identified as part of a certain religious community or even caste became at a certain point expedient to ask for political power and state protection. The extension of the elective principle intensified the demands based on religious, class, local, regional basis[258]. This afforded 'a restricted say to a handful of Indians in local and provincial bodies occasion[ing] new strategies to balance the interests of the individual and the community'[259]. Individuals claimed to represent the interests of internally differentiated communities so the balance was always very precarious. The elites claimed to be speaking on the behalf of the masses of their community, even it was very heterogenous and it was difficult to a actually represent it as a whole.

So, it is undeniable that the colonial state was a catalyst of this collective discourse and that it created a fertile ground for the forging of community identity. Yet, what actually came into being was a system of interactions between, on the one hand, the manipulative practices of the colonial state and the responses of Indians to such practices, and on the other hand between the different groups of Indians - tribes, castes or communities[260]. Thus, for instance low caste leaders, needing new ideological basis to question the old

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[258] The more recent interpretation of Indian history as a clash between different religious communities is legacy of the colonial argument that archaic and watertight religion-based or caste-based communities had always been a characteristic of the subcontinent. Often, as a consequence of the same argument, the Partition of India is interpreted teleologically as a necessary, inevitable development, because Hindus and Muslims had always been divided by an unbridgeable cultural rift. Nevertheless, this view is no less preposterous than the view that sees Indian nation as a timeless presence in the history of India. In reality, the emergence of Muslim nationalism was the outcome of the effect of British colonial policies on the one hand, and the reaction to the novel Hindu aggressiveness (also this being, at least partially, a byproduct of the colonial action) on the other hand. Moreover, the relationships and understanding between Muslims and Hindus was affected by the changing power relations in the course of history. The reconstruction of history runs parallel to this change. On the intensifying Hindu and Muslim interaction in the between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, see the enlightening work by Vasudha Dalmia, Munis D. Faruqui, (edited by), *Religious Interactions in Mughal India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2014. For the conceptualisation of a Muslim nation see the groundbreaking work of Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985; Torri, “Nazionalismo indiano e nazionalismo musulmano”, *passim.* On the consolidation of new religious and caste identities see Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1994; Rosalind O’Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, Ayesha Jalal, ‘Exploding Communalism: The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia’, in Sugata Bose and Ayesha Jalal (edited by), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1997.

[259] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 87.

[260] On the contrary, Susan Bayly [“Caste and ‘Race’ in the Colonial Ethnography of India”, in Peter Robb (edited by), *The Concept of Race in South Asia*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1995, 165-218] and David Washbrook and Christopher Baker [*South India, Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940*, MacMillan Co. of India, Delhi 1975] maintain that this interaction was mainly dictated by the self-interest of ‘the opportunist magnate and caste association boss’. Indians ideas are once again dismissed in favour of the ever sought-for material interest.

social and religious order, gave new meaning to certain existing symbols, rituals and historical contests[261].

But there were also other forces operating in the magma of Indian social fabric that fuelled animosity between social groups. The aggressive discourse of Christian missionaries strongly contributed to make the local religions feel jeopardised and threatened. The reaction of Hindu religious reformers was the attempt to rationalise and simplify Hinduism, that had been until then a polymorphous aggregate of many religious traditions rather than a homogenous religion *stricto sensu*. Therefore, Hindu reformers selected the system of thought of few Hindu traditions - generally those close to Brahmanical worship because it was to brahmanical castes that this intellectuals belonged - in order to provide Hinduism with elements of coherence and uniformity so that it could turn into an authoritative and powerful counterweight to challenge the intrusiveness of Christianity. Unfortunately, yet, also Muslims became target of the new aggressive posture acquired by Hinduism. Hindu militancy manifested itself also with a strong proselytising action in order to reduce conversions to Christianity but also to bring Hindus converted to Islam back to the fold of the new mould of Hinduism. Religion, then, was transformed into a polarising factor between religious communities[262]. So, for example, the ban on cow-slaughter promoted by the Hindu revivalist *Arya Samaj* spurred tension and hostility between Muslims and Hindus[263]. This process of restoration of a 'pure' Hinduism ran opposite to the effort made by figures such as Rammohan Roy or Ranade to free Hindu religion from its most irrational and fanatical aspects. The colonial state rode the wave and gave impetus to the enmity between communities. Mr. Beck, principal of the Muslim Aligarh College, branded the Indian National Congress as a Hindu body that wanted to monopolise power and government appointments; the societies for the protection of cows, that were emerging all over India, were just a telling instance of what the Muslims would experience at the hand of a powerful Congress[264]. Again, in Pune the government

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[261] A striking example of this is the manipulation of the figure of Shivaji in the contest between Brahmans and non-Brahmans in nineteenth-century Maharashtra. See O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology,* passim.

[262] For this process of semitisation of Hinduism see Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity", in *Modern Asian Studies*, 23 (2),1989, 209-231.

[263] According to the Islamic tradition, a cow is sacrificed during the celebration of the *Id-ul-Adha*. It was the decision of the British raj in 1888 by the Northwestern Provincial High Court in Allahabad not to consider the cow as a holy animal and to punish with imprisonment anybody who said that Muslims by practicing the sacrifice during Bakr-Id had offended hindu religion that gave momentum to the movement.

[264] *Sudharak*, (Reformer), "Mr Beck and the Mahomedans", 5 February 1894.

prohibited the playing of music - essential in the celebration of Hindu festivals - in the neighbourhood of any place of public worship “where congregational worship in silence is enjoyed”, which meant mainly mosques. The prohibition had been enforced notwithstanding the fact that playing music outside religious places had never given rise to disturbances until that moment. Moreover, the Muslim leaders, consulted by the British authorities, had not objected to the celebration with music of Hindu festivals. Yet, the colonial measure created a legal space where what until then had been considered a normal religious practice could be turned in a motive of grievance and communal antagonism[265].

Thus, the picture we have now is very complex. The Congress leaders had to fight against the colonial state, but also against identities that were slowly emerging and were being legitimised by the colonial action. What is more, since its foundation, the Indian National Congress was received by the educated Muslims[266] with mixed feelings. For example, *The Pioneer* of Allahabad ridiculed the Congress for claiming to be a national party, whereas the *Azad* of Lucknow denigrated *The Pioneer* for spreading discord[267]. In fact, note must be taken that the condition of the Muslims after the end of the Mughal Empire, and especially after the Great Mutiny of 1857, was generally worse than that of the Hindus. Regarded by the British as the main responsible for the revolt, the Muslims had not been favoured by colonial policies and attitudes. These aimed to preserve tradition and hierarchy according to the new line of non-intervention adopted after the rebellion and were generally in favour of the Hindu high castes. On the contrary, most of the Muslim middle classes had kept aloof from western education, industry, and trade. This condition of inferiority in political, social, and economic terms contributed in making Muslims even more wary of the Congress, whose unwillingness in accommodating safeguards that could ameliorate the situation of their Muslim fellows made these believe that there was no space for them in the party and that this was expression of the Hindu majority. Moreover, reformers like Syed Ahmed Khan played an important role in instilling suspicion in his coreligionists towards the all-India party. According to the founder of the Anglo-Muslim

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[265] *Sudhrak* (Reformer), “Uncalled for Activity”, 13th August 1894. Note must be taken that the word ‘communalism’ used with the connotation that acquired in the 20th century was never used to indicate the episodes of violence flared in 1880s and 1890s. The press talked of two castes, two sects, two classes, but never of two communities or communalism, which was not considered the cause, being these bigotry, ignorance, religious prejudice, materially based social and political rivalries (Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 85).

[266] These were members of the ashram classes, who knew Persian and Urdu, and played a role very similar to those played by the Hindu brahmans in terms of political and social reform.

[267] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 90-91.

college, it was the cooperation with the British *Raj* that could lift the condition of the Muslims and not the participation in the Congress[268]. This is not to say that there was no Muslim taking part in the Congress. Actually, if some kept aside, others saw the opportunity to use the platform of the Indian party to press for the advancement of Muslims in terms of education and public employment achievements. Generally, though, the participation of the Muslims to the Congress in the first years was lukewarm to say the least. Between 1885 and 1905 they were around one tenth of the Congress delegates, even if the Muslim population of India was around one fifth of the total population[269]. This went to corroborate the idea that there was a cleavage between the two communities, namely the Hindu majority vis-à-vis the Muslim minority. So, for instance, when a Muslim was elected President of the 1897 Congress, a leading Muslim newspaper, the *Moslem Chronicle* wrote in an editorial that "the Muslim community, in clear and unmistakable terms and in emphatic protest, had made known their view that he [Sayani, the Congress President] did not, would not and could not represent them"[270]. That this was the opinion of the entire community is rather difficult to believe, in the first place because there was no consolidated community at the time. What is sure is that among the educated Muslims a sense of separateness was surfacing. The Congress was growingly regarded as a Hindu organisation and this caused a great deal of uneasiness among the Mohammedans. As has been above, in fact, certain sections of Hindus were showing impatience towards their Muslim fellows, as the activities of the *Arya Samaj* and the cow protection associations demonstrated. The fact that even after the alliance between the Congress and the Muslim League marked by the Lucknow Pact of 1916, national leaders - Tilak *in primis* - kept talking of the nation in terms typically Hindu and to identify it as the *Gau Mata*[271] to be protected did not help stimulating a sense of comfort and security in the Muslims[272]. It is

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[268] Ahmed Khan is generally considered the father of Muslim separatism because of his pro-British and anti-Congress posture. Actually he never formulated a clear idea of Indo-Muslim nation, mainly because he considered the Muslim community as integral part of the Indian nation. And this was generally the belief of the Indian Muslim leader and ideologues until the 1930s. For a short biography of Syed Ahmed Khan see Rajmohan Gandhi, *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1985, cap. 2.

[269] Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 157.

[270] In K.K. Aziz, *A History of the Idea of Pakistan*, Vol. 3, Vanguard Books, Lahore 1987, 818.

[271] The mother cow.

[272] For example, during a speech to promote the Home Rule League, in order to invite more volunteers to subscribe to it with a contribution of one rupee each, Tilak reminded the audience (they were especially Hindu merchants) that an ancient Hindu tradition prescribed to donate one anna for every rupee earned for cow protection [Stanley A. Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale. Revolution and Reform in the making of Modern India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 1989 (first published 1961) 279].

not surprising that the latter started developing a sense of distinctive identity vis-à-vis the Hindu one. Even if that was a 'negative identification', in a few decades, it contributed to unify the divided Muslims of India.

The Congress and the masses

Therefore, while the Congress was still envisioning, negotiating, contesting, creating its nationhood, others were emerging and were being defined. How could the Congress peacefully subsume these diverging identities within their nationalist discourse? How could Congressmen acquire legitimacy as the leaders of the people, in a country where the great majority of Indian population was appallingly poor? How could they carry along the poverty-stricken masses and sensitise them to the national cause? The leaders of the Congress were aware of the innumerable divisions that cut across Indian society. From this awareness stemmed their decision to concentrate on (at least putatively) unifying issues and to avoid to press for social reforms. Unity was the most important goal[273]. It has been seen above how the idea of nation formulated by the ideologues of the Congress insisted on freedom as something that could be achieved only after a slow and tough process of political, economic and social maturation. Then, for the Congress leaders, talking of democracy could not be disconnected from education, because, in line with the principles of liberalism, only a mature people was fit for democracy. It was the task of the leading lights of Indian society to guide and empower the masses and gradually bring about the necessary political, economic, and social transformations in order to create a cultural substratum where liberty could easily flourish. In this sense, the words of Surendranath Banerjea, Bengali moderate leader, are explicative of what the Congressmen meant:

> "I feel that, if we have to advance in social matters, we must, so far as practicable, take the community with us, by a process of steady and gradual uplift, so that there may be no sudden disturbance or dislocation, the new being adapted to the old, and the old assimilated to the new. That has been the normal path of progress in Hindu society through the long centuries… beneficent are the activities of the *Brahmo Samaj*, but behind them is the

[273] For instance, since 1888 no subject could be discussed if a majority of the Hindu or Muslims delegates objected.

slower but larger movement of the general community, all making towards progress"[274].

Such paternalistic approach was not exclusively result of the liberal influence of thinkers like Edmund Burke or John Stuart Mill. On the contrary, the traditional culture of the high castes, to which most of the Congressmen belonged, gave priority to the preservation of social harmony and discouraged mass upheavals. So, certain liberal values and ideals, such as the importance of gradual change and tradition or the distrust towards the masses so recurring in authors like Burke, gained ground because they corroborated, at least in part, the ethos of the high castes[275]. Caught in between the contradictions of the period of transition they were experiencing, the Congress liberal leaders were sincerely in favour of the expansion of democratic institutions, but at the same time they were concerned to preserve the social order in which they were still occupying a position of privilege. Split between identities of spiritual and temporal individuals, they struggled to find a balance between the two. The mobilisation of the masses was not considered a viable solution, *a fortiori* because it could jeopardise the very national project by creating deep social fissures. According to this view, then, the soundest path towards national elevation was to promote political reforms. Thanks to these, Indians could experiment to exercise freedom - and no less to dispute the colonial discourse that they were unfit for it - and, more importantly, to learn to be citizens regardless of their caste or creed. But such approach of the Congress leaders, generated by a naive faith in progress, failed to address the plight of the masses, on behalf of whom the Congressmen claimed to speak. This is not to say that the Congress was not aware of the conditions of the peasants and workers. On the contrary, thanks to the economic analysis accomplished by Congress leaders or by scholars politically close to the all-India organisation, the causes of Indian poverty had been authoritatively pinpointed. Moreover, the Budget speeches in the Imperial Legislative Council, wonderfully mastered for more than a decade by the eloquence of Gokhale, reveal how the amelioration of the situation of the lower strata of society was indispensable for the building of the nation. As a matter of fact, the poverty of the indian masses, even if the Congressmen did not advocate the class interests of peasants and workers, was considered an issue of the maximum importance and was included among

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[274] Banerjea, *A Nation in Making*, 398.

[275] According to the *varnasharna dharma*, that is the moral law that regulate the life of the Hindus, everybody needs to abide by the duties attributed to each social condition. It is the duty of the superior classes to guarantee social conservation.

the requests to be advanced in front of the colonial government since the foundation of the Congress - but even before by other previously-formed Indian associations. Yet, from the practical point of view, urging questions for the improvement of peasant conditions, land policies *in primis*, were never really tackled for the main reason that any rearrangement of the land system could arouse the hostility of the landlords, who were increasingly joining the Congress. Also the other requests of the Congress did not involve any immediate beneficial effect for the impoverished masses. For example, in the proposal to reform the Legislative Council, according to which half of the members had to be elected there was no mention of mass votes, but the right to elect was restricted to 'those classes and members of the community, prima facie, capable of exercising it wisely and independently'[276]. Again, universal franchise was not taken into consideration as a possible option for India, if not in the long run, because the electorate had to be educated first. Furthermore, the demand for introduction of simultaneous examinations in India and England, aimed at increasing the number of Indians in the civil service and to facilitate their access to higher posts, did not really affect the masses. Contrarily, it unveiled how the potential redistribution of public employment could be a controversial question amongst Indians. As matter of fact, employment in the service of the colonial state had been prerogative of a small class of individuals, that is the traditional literate communities and those who knew English[277]. Therefore, this privileged group perceived the enlargement of public job opportunities as an open door for the penetration of new social groups to their detriment[278]. The issue of simultaneous examinations, then, was not indiscriminately considered a desirable measure. As reported in a letter to Naoroji by Dinshaw Wacha in

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[276] Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism*, 15.

[277] We have seen how also these were mostly belonging to high castes, because the requirements to be proficient in English, the familiarity with new administrative procedures, the experience with Indian society, both urban and rural, gave the Brahmins more chances, having them an older attitude towards studying and knowledge.

[278] Broomfield provides a useful interpretative framework in his work and shows how the Hindu *bhadralok* (dominant elite of nouveau riches in Bengal who were economically dependent on landed interest, bureaucratic jobs and clerical activities and who belonged to high castes, whose prescriptions they conformed with) were split between giving priority to birth or ability, to democracy or privilege. In the author's words: "They [the Hindu *bhadralok*] wished to develop the adopted institutions which had served them so well in the nineteenth century and yet they were concerned to preserve the social order, with its ascribed advantages for themselves. They knew that further institutional development would bring increasingly insistent demands from the lower orders for accommodation: for the wider opening of the doors of the schools, colleges, and offices to non-Bhadralok. They were understandably apprehensive of the social effects of such accommodation and uncertain of their own ability to control the pace and direction of change", in Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society,* 318. The contest between new social groups, no more dependent on the patronage of superior groups, for capturing new opportunities in terms of economic and political resources is a critical phenomenon, inherent in modernisation.

his role of member of the Public Service Commission, Hindus and Muslims alike in Northern India had unanimously given their evidence against simultaneous examination[279]. On the contrary, the introduction of communal representation divided public opinion along religious lines. So, what clearly appears is that it was extremely difficult for the Congress to raise questions that, despite thought of for the common good, did not provoke resentment and discontentment in one or more sections of the nation.

In this scenario, it was very difficult to provide the anti-colonial movement with a popular basis. The main problem was that the idea of nation formulated by the Indian leaders, although appreciably moderate and advocating unity and a common better future, could hardly be a factor of mobilisation. It could be understood exclusively by those Indians who had a certain level of education and who shared the same liberal, democratic values. It goes without saying that for the most of India's population the Congress ideology was idle talk; the Indian masses could not be satisfied by a promise of progress postponed in an undefined, vague future which was not combined with concrete political contents and measures aimed at ameliorating the living conditioning of the poor. The fact is that there were different levels of politics and the good politician at the all-India level needed to speak the language of the dominators, rather than that of the masses at this historical moment. And this is something that some leaders knew very well. For example, Gokhale was conscious of the fact that his work was popular only among the educated classes, whereas he had no sympathisers or supporters among the ignorant masses, who had no idea of who he was and which work he was doing[280]. We cannot say by the context what exactly Gokhale meant by saying this, whether he was regretting to be unable to speak the same language as the masses or not. Yet, what matters here is that he was aware of the fact that one important part of his work was to be carried out amongst the educated classes, who had to be trained in the 'religion' of the nation, so that in the future, in their role of intellectuals, they could contribute to enlarge the basis of the nation in the making. It was a sort of cascade effect that, although slowly, would eventually reach down to the masses. But, in the meanwhile, the masses were kept aloof from the nationalist movement.

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[279] Wacha to Naoroji, 9th March 1888, *Naoroji Papers*, NAI, quoted in Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Nationalism*, 27.

[280] Gokhale was reported saying this in 1909. Moreover he maintained that in the mofussil he counted 2 percent of the educated classes as his supporters and sympathisers, 15 per cent in Poona, and 50 percent in Bombay (quoted in Johnson, *Provincial Politics and Indian Nationalism*, 117 from Weekly Report DCI, 20 February 1909, in *Home Political B*, June 1909, 104, NAI).

That the nation elaborated by the intellectuals of the Congress was informed around principles of rationality and equality is confirmed by the innumerable speeches and writings of the nationalists against caste and gender disabilities, among other issues. So even if the nationalist intellectuals did not contemplate the populistic mobilisation of the masses, this did not mean that they were not sincerely working to create the conditions for a better future for all the members of the nation. The effort made to introduce elementary education was an important step in that direction because the Congress leaders knew that elementary education - free and universal - was an indispensable intervention to create equal opportunities for all. Moreover, the very logic to welcome different groups of interest within the Congress allowed increasingly more people to take part into the building of the nation. Yet, this inclusive stand became a factor of weakness for the all-India party, as the most progressive forces within its fold were confronted by the conservative elements that had joined the party in the course of time. The split of Surat in 1907 made the leaders of the Congress reflect about the fairness of excluding the dissidents, led by Tilak. Gokhale maintained that it was preposterous to believe that "democratic methods can be *at once* applied to-day in this ancient land, caste-ridden, and priest-ridden for long centuries"[281] and that it was a paradox to include in the Congress exponents of currents that were not in line with the party ideology and that jeopardise the existence of the party itself. In Gokhale's opinion there had to be a certain homogeneity, because "the Congress is not a legislative assembly, where all interests must be represented. It is a propagandist movement whose effectiveness for advance must depend upon the unanimity with which its operations are conducted and which must be paralysed in proportion as it has divided counsels at its heart"[282]. Following the split of Surat a new constitution was introduced under the supervision of Gokhale and according to it only members of associations affiliated with the Congress could join this one. The schism within the Congress and the exclusion of the extremist strand left the moderates at the head of the all-India party, being Gokhale and Mehta the most important figures until their deaths, both happened in 1915.

Nonetheless, following the radicalisation of Indian politics, the Congress and its methods had lost credibility in the new context. As Banerjea wrote in the *Bengalee,* the oft-mentioned progress had become a void word:

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[281] Gokhale to Besant, 5th January 1915, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI. Italics is mine.

[282] Gokhale to Bupendranath Basu, 14th December 1914, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI. The reconciliation took place only at the Lucknow Congress in 1916, after Gokhale's and Mehta's death the previous year.

> "It is only when Mr. Gokhale tells the country in effect that there is practically no limit to the amount of political progress achievable under present conditions that he, in a way, lays himself open to criticism. Not that we are prepared for a moment to deny that any amount of political progress is consistent with India's forming a part of Empire. But how is this progress to be achieved? Mr. Gokhale seems to imagine that the only question here is a question of character, capacity and qualification. But how are we to develop our character, particularly our capacity for the exercise of freedom, or to qualify ourselves for Self-government, if the bureaucracy will not place us in a position to do so? […] Not only cannot the qualities on which Mr Gokhale so rightly insists be properly developed except through a transformation of the life which our people live and the concrete institutions of the country, political and social, but one serious obstacle in our way is the reluctance of the bureaucracy to part with power"[283].

According to Banerjea, it was necessary to organise the forces of public opinion and exercise pressure on the bureaucracy in order to overcome the situation of stalemate of the pan-Indian party. How public opinion had to be organised and mobilised was not clear. This remained the main weakness of the moderates after the 1909 reforms and with the increasingly enlargement of parliamentary system. As Broomfield has shown in his work on Bengal, Banerjea's group was unable to speak the languages of electoral politics while relying on their respectability to get votes. Therefore, they did not understand that electors were concerned with personal advantages and obligation to the candidates, regardless of the latter beliefs or experience in the political field[284].

The Hinduisation of Politics

The split of Surat and the rift which was opened in its aftermath within the Indian National Congress has been object of many studies and an in-depth analysis of it does not lie in the compass of this research. What is expedient to draw attention to here is that Tilak was the promoter of a new form of nationalism that had emerged concomitantly with, and in opposition to, the liberal and moderate version of nationalism. Tilak in the Bombay province, along with Lajpat Lal Rai in the Punjab, and Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra

[283] *Bengalee*, 8th July 1909.
[284] Broomfield, *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*, 58.

Pal in Bengal - calling themselves nationalists or *rashtravadi* - became exponents of this neo-nationalism which had no admiration for the British sense of fair-play and justice, for its tradition of democracy and individual freedom. In their opinion, the Congress was just an obstacle against a deeper and decisive development of the political situation of India. It was a safety-valve and a party of beggars. This nationalism, and the idea of nation envisioned by it, was influenced, on the one hand, by the romantic-naturalistic discourse on nation that was becoming dominant in Europe and, on the other hand, by the new conservative religious tendencies, epitomised especially by the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission that had surfaced as a reaction to the social reformist movement. Such religious matrix of the extremist nationalism was very conservative; this stemmed from the threat that western influence posed to the soul of Hindu cultural identity; as a reaction to such menace, it was necessary to spread the traditional faith and oppose the westernising activities of the reformers, who were not representative of the ethical consciousness of the nation; rather, they were lackeys of the British rulers, antinational, and serving their own self-interest.

This double influence had a twofold outcome. In the first place, it was a clear departure from the voluntaristic, liberal nationalism that the intellectuals of the Congress had embraced. It revolved around the main concept that the nation was a cultural fact and every people who had a common history and culture had an innate and eternal right to gather and form one nation; the more their culture was ancient and pure, the more the nation could succeed in its consolidation. Therefore, it gave priority to the cultural commonality and did not attribute any relevance to the individual will to be part of the nation, since the latter existed *a priori* and could not be disputed. In this outlook, the nation became object of a sentimental and irrational adoration, since it embodied the essence of the civilisation of a certain people. The nationalism of the extremist strands of Indian resistance, then, was not forward-looking, but stood on a romantic and uncritical adoration of a glorious (often invented) past and was based on sentiment rather than reason. It was a militant and intransigent form of resistance, that had no patience towards any compromise with the colonial state. Violence was a legitimate means to fight those who opposed and hindered the existence of the perpetual nation[285].

The second outcome was that, in the extremist perspective, the revaluation and glorification of Hindu tradition, religion, and culture corresponded increasingly to their identification with the authentic Indian civilisation. Hinduism was the unifying factor,

[285] The constitutional agitation advocated by the Congress admitted every form of opposition except rebellion, collusion with a foreign invader and terrorism. Violence therefore was rejected.

supported by a set of Hindu and Vedic unificatory myths, such as for instance the figure of Shivaji, who, from Tilak onwards, was depicted by the Hindu right as a champion of Hindu religion against the Muslim invaders. Consequence of this was that also Muslims started being perceived as outsiders, as a separate body within the Indian nation; the numerous phenomena of cultural and religious interactions between Hindus and Muslims were systematically ignored or dismissed as something that had contributed to contaminate and weaken the Hindu pureness. Religion therefore turned into a powerful means to popularise this cultural form of nationalism and awaken the masses to their national consciousness. All this could not but alienate Muslims' sympathies. In addition to this, any intervention by the colonial state or any campaign by the social reformers aimed at mending certain discriminating aspects of social practices prescribed by religion was fought as a intolerable intrusion to the preservation of the Hindu law. This catchy association between foreign domination (and what in the extremist view was its cultural appendix, that is the reformers and the Congress) and the fear of imperilment for the Hindu religion was, not surprisingly, much more appealing to the concerns of the ordinary people than the promise of progress in the long run. Thus, as we will see ahead, what was presented as a revolutionary and uncompromising national battle against the foreign oppressor enforced and encouraged the continuation of a social system predicated on traditional loyalties; fighting against westernisation meant to be condescending with those social disabilities perpetrated in the name of religion. Democratic freedom was not contemplated in the independent India envisioned by the extremists. Then, their socially reactionary ideology was not at variance with their putatively politically progressive ideology.

The Swadeshi movement and the cleavage between Hindus and Muslims

The aggressive imperialism of the Viceroy Lord Curzon[286] (1899-1905) accelerated the deepening of the fissure between the liberals and the neo-nationalists, but also between Hindus and Muslims[287]. In reaction to the meagre success of the Congress, stigmatised for

[286] The Viceroy had withdrawn some of the concessions granted by his predecessors in the fields of academic education and local government. He had restricted the autonomy of universities from the officialdom and reduced the representation of non-official Indians in the municipalities. What is more, Lord Curzon had decided to implement the Partition of Bengal. On the partition of Bengal, along with Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement*, see J. R. McLane, "The Decision to Partition Bengal in 1905" in *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 2 (3) 1964, 221-237; G. Johnson, "Partition, Agitation and Congress: Bengal 1904 to 1908" in *Modern Asian Studies*, 7 (3), 1973, 533-588.

[287] There were also fringes of anarchic terrorists that resorted to violence against officials of the colonial state and attempted to organise a rebellion through the activities of secret associations. Among them there were for example Vasudev Balwan Phadke and Har Dayal.

its ‘mendicancy’ strategy, the cultural nationalism of the extremists, calling for a bolder approach against British rule, gained momentum at the all-India level. What contributed to give the anti-colonial movement a wider dimension was especially Lord Curzon’s decision to partitioning Bengal (1905-1911), a masterpiece of the divide-and-rule British policy[288]. Officially justified by the need for better administrative efficiency, the Partition of Bengal was actually a clear political move. It had a double purpose. On the one hand, it was meant to be a punishment for Bengal, focus of the political resistance against British rule; on the other hand, the creation of a Muslim-majority province was motivated by the need for captivating the support of the Muslim population vis-à-vis the anti-colonial movement. Several Muslim zamindar and patrons seized the opportunity of the partition to get the share of power denied until then. Among them there was Khwaja Salimullah, Nawab Bahadur of Dacca. The British pro-Muslim patronage resulted in their advocacy in the creation of the All-India Muslim League in 1906. The protest against the Viceroy’s drastic measure marked the beginning of the swadeshi[289] movement: following the Partition, the swadeshi movement stopped to be only intellectual but became something which attracted emotional support. It covered the years between 1905 and 1908 and spread in the urban areas of Bengal, mainly Calcutta, in some parts of Maharashtra and of the Madras Presidency and in Punjab. The swadeshi movement involved mainly the Hindu middle classes[290] that had adopted measures such as boycott of British goods and institutions and picketing. On the contrary, the Muslims in Eastern Bengal and Assam had welcomed the creation of a province where they were the majority of the people and where, as such, they could better control the educational institutions and government jobs that were generally prerogative of the Hindus. Thus Muslims - also in West Bengal - opposed the anti-partition movement organised by the Congress, because they perceived the creation of a Muslim-majority province as a measure aimed at providing chances to ameliorate the conditions of their community. But there were other reasons why the Muslims did not partake into the protest, some of which had their prodrome in the previous years.

The protests against the partition of Bengal brought to the forefront the extremist, cultural, intransigent nationalism promoted by Tilak. This, allied with Bepin Chandra Pal, emerged

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[288] The province was divided into two administrative units, West Bengal and in East Bengal-Assam. In the latter, the majority of the population was Muslim.

[289] Literally meaning ‘one own country’s’.

[290] The social strata involved in the protests were mainly the intellectual proletariat, that is young students and educated professionals; some big zamindars, mainly Hindu; amlas or officials and dependants of patriotic landlords, employees in the government offices, private firms and certain industries (Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, 427).

on the national scene and started speaking of Indian nation, rather than of Mahratta nation as he had done so far, in Hinduised terms. He used the same tactics that he had adopted in the Bombay Province, that is the introduction of religion as a factor of mobilisation of the masses. Yet, the manipulation of the sacred cult of the motherland, identified with the Goddess Kali, the worship of Ganesh, and the ablutions in the Ganges excluded the Muslims and gave inevitably the swadeshi movement a Hindu connotation that created a further gulf between Muslims and Hindus. Moreover, the swadeshi Indian manufacture was more expensive and this went to the detriment of the poor peasant, who was mostly Muslim. This was combined with the fact that there was no real social programme that could attract the masses for long. The violence perpetrated by bands of angry individuals against those who did not want to rebel and boycott the cheaper British goods contributed to further alienate the support of the lower classes. Overall, the swadeshi movement had a limited success. It contributed to enlarge the market for Indian goods and to stimulate some capitalistic experiments, but indigenous industries were still too few and also national schools and colleges were not widespread enough as to satisfy the needs of the country. All in all, in 1908 the imports from Manchester were bigger than in 1905[291]. It was the organisation and the decisions of the leaders that prevented the protests against the tyrannical Lord Curzon from growing into a great *opus pacis* and make the movement really national. The Hindu undertones of the movement could not but create a strong division between Hindus and Muslims. The Muslims, being the focus of a discourse that considered them as invaders and as the main factor of deterioration of the Hindu religion, remained unconvinced. A striking example of the Hindu posture was the celebration of the Shivaji festival for the first time in Calcutta in 1906: with it, the image of the Muslim looters

[291] Richard Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1975, 178.

crossed the lines of the region and became national[292]. As intelligently pointed out by the *Soltan*, a Calcutta newspaper:

> "The man who advocates the holding of such festival cannot help stigmatising the Musalman rule in India as tyrannical and highly oppressive towards Hindus, because Shivaji's spirit of nationality, bravery and patriotism cannot be shown in bold relief, unless placed on a dark background of Musalman anarchy, oppression and lawlessness.
>
> The exploits of Shivaji may justly be compared with those of Chenghiz Khan and Tamerlane, with this difference, that while the latter plundered vast dominions, the devastations wrought by the former were limited to provinces only. And it had yet to be shown that Shivaji had any vast patriotic schemes in his contemplation. It may be that towards the end of his life he turned his attention to the work of doing good to his country and countrymen.
>
> We know that the object of our Hindu brethren in celebrating the Shivaji festival is neither to wound Musalman feelings nor to vilify the reign of Aurangzeb. But the noble purpose with which they are working has an inseparable connexion with the history of the Musalman rule in India. In order to give high praise to Shivaji, one cannot but censure Musalman rule. Cannot the annals of the Hindu race point to a single hero whom even the tongue of slander dare not call a chief of dacoits or a treacherous men? How can our Hindu brethren wipe away from the page of history the record of Shivaji's inhuman conduct towards Afzal Khan and his army?[293]".

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[292] The depiction of the Muslims as invaders and persecutors was not something new even in Bengal. Just to give an impression of how widespread that image was, it is worth mentioning that in 1870s Romesh Chander Dutt, the eminent economist, had written some novels in which Muslims were described according to that same commonplace stereotype. Also Gokhale had delivered a speech in the Imperial Legislative Council on the Seditious Meeting Bill in 1907 in which he implied that Muslims were not Indians, at least not Bengalis. He said: "But surely it cannot be beyond the resources of statesmanship to devise a scheme whereby while the expected advantages of the partition of Bengal are fully secured to the Muhammadans*, the people of Bengal* may also have their grievances removed". If some have seen this as the justification for the judgement that between 1885 and 1909 the Congress "in reality was the 'tip of the iceberg' of Hindu self-consciousness" (Aziz, *Idea of Pakistan,* vol. 3, 818), I rather see this statement as a confirmation of the strong anti-Islamic feelings circulating in India, from which also liberals like Gokhale were not completely immune.

[293] *Soltan*, 8th June 1906, in Native Press Report for Bengal 1906, NAI.

The author condemned the manipulative appropriation and reinvention of the historical figure for political purposes and registered the divisive potential of denouncing the Muslims as invaders and exploiters.

A dangerous process of communal crystallisation - a blissful delight for the British - was taking place in both sides. Those who had been benefitting from the Partition of Bengali did not hesitate to stoke ill feelings between Hindus and Muslims. For instance, the Nawab Salimullah accused Gokhale - on the basis of a forged interview appeared on the *Chitisaka* of Dacca - of sowing the seed of sedition and rousing the Bengali people against the Partition[294]. Sectarian literature started circulating and forging an atmosphere of mutual distrust. The spread of the print was instrumental to increase the level of tension. So, for example, another Calcutta newspaper, the *Mihir-o-Sudhakar.* certainly less liberal in outlook that the *Soltan*, reported a poem that, although maybe not expressing the sentiments of a reactionary, sectarian Islam, tended to create them:

> "Alas, Alas! (they) incited Seraj-ud-dowla,
> the crafty intriguing nation,
> by thus denouncing Englishmen before him.
> Still the Hindu brothers call upon the Mahomedans
> to make them comrades.
> Never be beguiled, never, never
> For the sake of the treacherous.
> This is not Seraj, this is the Englishman.
> This is not Mirjafar,
> He by worshipping whom the Hindus were rulers, is always
> humble.
> To whom Agir and Agin all are subjects.
> And who are worthy to be worshipped by the Hindus!
> For the trifling insignificant Hindus.
> Say, why need he fear?
> Oh Mohammedans beware
> of the perverted swadeshi.
> Let nobody mix, let nobody combine
> With the crafty Hindu.

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[294] *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 17 October 1906 retrieved among the paper clippings in Miscellaneous, *Servants of India Society Papers*, NMML.

The king does what he pleases.
Is it proper for the subject to quarrel with the King?
Beware, beware of Mahomedans,
our religious book prescribes loyalty to the King!
This is why I say, you brother, son of Moslem, sing joyously glory to
the Britisher!"[295]

The Congress was steadily more identified with the interest of the Hindu community. In the words of Mohamed Ali, the eminent Muslim leader, the Congress was 'avowedly Hindu' in its 'sympathies and aspirations' and it drew 'its energising forces from Hindu religion and mythology'[296]. The editor of the *Comrade* wryly believed in Indian unity, yet he disliked the kind of sneaky Hinduised nationalism that tried to exclude the Muslims pretending to represent the all nation. He also labelled Gokhale as 'the mild Hindu of Poona'. Of Gokhale was also said that he was a man animated by religious prejudices, because in a speech in Manchester, he had represented the Swadeshi movement as an outcome of resentment against the Bengal partition scheme, thereby proving that he had gone to England to support the cause of the dissatisfied Bengalis alone and not that of the whole of India[297]. In this scenario, it is not surprising that inter-communal violence flared up in several districts, both in West and East Bengal.

The annulment of the Partition of Bengal in 1911 generated bitter disappointment and anger among Muslims, who felt betrayed and ridiculed by the colonial state. This exacerbated the communal dissonance between Hindus and Muslims: the former were considered by the latter responsible for the colonial decision and blamed for conspiring

[295] *Mihir-o-Sudhakar*, 25th December 1908, in Native Press Report for Bengal 1908, NAI.
[296] *Comrade*, 19th August 1911.
[297] *Riyaz-ul-Akhbar*, 24th February 1906, in Native Press Report for Untied Province 1906, NAI.

against the elevation of the Muslim condition and for being selfishly unable to concede protection to the minority.[298].

What is more, the creation of separate electorates[299] for Muslims in the Morley-Minto Reform Scheme in 1909 had expedited that process of development of distinctive religion-based communities, which started organising themselves around their own political agenda. In fact, in the debates over the separate electorates in the years before the 1909 reforms, it was maintained by the British that territorial electorates were not suitable for India, for the fact that they would have benefited the urban middle-classes/upper-castes who had taken advantage from the British *Raj*, mainly journalists and lawyers, and who, not by chance, supported the nationalist movement. Communal representation was thus held to be better[300]. The electorate system had to be the reflection of a society which was divided in watertight compartments along lines of caste and religions. The Muslims were made a constitutional minority and conferred separate electorates at all levels of representation. This went to the advantage of the Ashraf classes, namely those that had sought for British patronage to create the All-India Muslim League few years before. The Morley-Minto Reforms created an historical precedent. Thereby, it legitimated in the political arena a religious minority that had never had a common history of organised

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[298] Among those who were against the reunification of Bengal there was Mohamed Ali. A letter from a reader, a certain Birbal, to the *Comrade* disapproved Mohamed Ali's "consistent and persistent attempt to underline the differences between the Hindu and Mahommedans [which] could not have conduced to the advancement of our people, a thing which both you and myself equally desire. Progress is what we all want, and progress depends on a profound faith in tomorrow not on a superficial acquaintance with today. There is no great future for those who are occupied with the littlenesses of the present. I do not for a moment deny that there exists conflict of interests between the different communities which constitute a society. One cannot ignore the obvious. But to turn a fraction into a faction is not a highly commendable thing. Religious differences, at any rate in these modern days, need not, and as a matter of fact do not, create real divisions among men. The fundamental divisions are all due to economic causes. The problem of the conflict of interests between landlord and tenant, capital and labour, master and slave cannot be explained but has to be resolved. And the reason is that life is infinitely more insistent in its demands on poor humanity than after life. In future the real fight between the different communities in India will not be over faith, but over bread" (*Comrade*, 19th October 1912).

[299] The introduction of separate electorates for the Muslim population was based on the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Decentralization of 1907, to which also Gokhale presented his evidence, written and oral.

[300] Dietmar Rothermund, "Emancipation or Re-Integration. The Politics of Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Herbert Hope Risley" in D.A. Low (edited by), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1968, 131-158.

political activity and that had been multifarious in terms of regional, economical and ideological belonging[301].

Conclusion

Therefore, having dealt with the emergence of nationalism in India, let us draw few considerations to conclude this chapter. The contradiction between cultural nationalism and liberal ideas of the nation were inherent in the Indian national movement right from the beginning. Illiberal, exclusive and rightist forces were ideologically a very organic part of Indian political discourse since the nineteenth century. The political leadership of the 1880s and 1890s envisioned a united, secular, modernist, and democratic India. But the unity, fragile and superficial, had to be realised in the future after a common effort, with the steady involvement of the different strata of society. The growing disillusionment with British liberalism and democracy gave strength to deeper traditionalist and religious loyalties. The nationalism of the extremists encompassed such trends in order to enlarge its basis and make it more comprehensible to the common man. So, the identification of the nation with the Hindu majority was a shortcut in order to give emotional popular support to a movement that was incapable to involve the masses and to fill the cultural gap that stood between the leaders and the people. Stoked by symbolism, the masses responded promptly to the nationalist appeals. Hinduism was seen as an easy way to popularise this nationalism and to give it a more indigenous connotation. Religion, often in its most fanatic and narrow-minded tones, was tactically made use of in order to readily mobilise the masses 'reservoir'. If this afforded the nationalist leaders, at least provisionally, a mass following, the repercussions on society were heavy and remained in the long run. Muslims, already uneasy towards the Congress, felt excluded from the

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[301] It is worth mentioning that amongst the issues discussed during the debates over the reforms, also the important question of untouchables was raised. The point was whether the untouchables had to be considered part of the Hindu community or regarded as a minority and, as such, conferred separate electorates. The issue was raised by the Aga Khan in his letters to Minto in which the former maintained that being the untouchables non Hindus, then the Muslim minority, bigger in proportion to the Hindus, needed to be awarded a larger ratio of the separate electorates. Yet, the opposition of the Congressmen led to the withdrawal of the provisions which wanted a separate electorate for untouchables as well (See Shabnum Tejani, *Indian Secularism. A social and Intellectual History 1980-1950*, Permanent Black, New Delhi 2007, 202-203). It is worthy of note that until the advent of Gandhi on the political fore, masses were not included, except for short periods of time. On the contrary, Muslims kept being excluded from the discourse of the Congress, except for short periods. The inability of the Congressmen in carrying Muslims along, combined with the British strategy of 'divide-and-rule' eventually created a point of no return and Muslims leaders elaborated their own nationalism and their own idea of nation.

discourse on Indian nation that was becoming dominant with the decline of the moderates. The response of some Muslim leaders and intellectuals was to use the same methods adopted by Hindu nationalist leaders and invoke religion as a means to consolidate their community vis-à-vis the Hindu one, as happened during the swadeshi movement. The action of the colonial state in taking advantage of such tense situation made things worse.

So, the Congress found itself dovetailed between a liberal discourse, undoubtedly inclusive and rational, yet hardly able to captivate and carry along the people, and a Hindu discourse that, not only more or less unwittingly led to the exclusion of the Indian Muslims, but also was by no means more 'national' than the liberal one, since it was based on an idea of the nation that did not advocate the end of social and economic disabilities, much less the empowerment of the Indian people. The liberal leaders could not contrast such new populistic forces and at the same time had to accommodate some requests of the religious sections of society in order to confirm its representative nature and have their support. After Gokhale and Mehta passed away, figures like Tilak, Besant and Gandhi took over the control of the Congress. Their public religiosity and their political language further advocated the impression that the Congress was a Hindu body and that India was imagined mainly as Hindu.

This is the reason why to talk of an undefined, monolithic nationalist movement is equivocal and confusing. It means to ignore the origins of patterns that implied inclusion or exclusion, democratic or undemocratic principles, equality or disability. Even though there is no idea of the nation intrinsically more legitimate or authentic than another, the results achieved by them in society in terms of peace, democracy, and inclusion are a gauge to evaluate them. When, on the one hand, the Marxist and 'postmodern' views consider the anti-colonial movement as an altogether bourgeois phenomenon and, on the other hand, the nationalist historiography treats all Indian nationalists as saints, they attain an ideological *reductio ad unum* of the different ideas of the nation. Since the different repercussions carried by these ideas are swept aside, such historiographical perspectives hardly provide any answer to the political and social crises of the last century of Indian history.

GOKHALE'S IDEA OF THE NATION. BETWEEN NATION AND EMPIRE

Introduction

In this last chapter, I will attempt to analyse Gokhale's idea of the nation. In order to deal with it, it will be necessary to draw attention to Maharashtra, namely to what during the British rule was called Bombay Presidency. This region, where Gokhale was born and was publicly active in the first part of his political career, underwent the sway of British liberalism since 1818, when it fell under British control. Here the traditional Hindu society found its antithesis more in those educated classes that - influenced by the modern Western ideas and ideologies - advocated social reform, rather than in British rule and Christianity. This created social tensions resulting into conflicts between those who were in favour of a pre-colonial feudal order and those who supported modernity. The same clashes would be later transferred to the national political fore. It was in the context of Maharashtra that Gokhale got in touch with the Indian version of liberalism, purged from some of its Western exclusive and discriminating attitudes, so that it could fit with the Indian colonial situation and be interwoven with some indigenous humanitarian elements. It is this kind of liberalism, inspired by the new ethos in favour of the liberation of the individual from those restrictions that stalled his freedom of action, that constitutes the bedrock of Gokhale's nationalism. It was in the spirit of liberalism that Gokhale formulated his idea of the nation. As will be shown, the Gokhalean nation was predicated on the need to create an Indian civil society, spread education, encourage socio-religious reform, and apply constitutionalism to politics. Gokhale's thought is also relevant to understand the ideological foundation of the Congress leadership, since it was Gokhale that broadened and systematised ideas already embraced by the liberal Indian politicians.

Nationalism, Nationalisms

As seen in the previous chapter, the contact with Europe through colonial domination brought modernisation to India. This is to be intended in the sense that European influence, having caused the disintegration of Indian society, provoked among the educated Indians a response that set in motion an autonomous and autochthonous process of modernisation. The conscious will of the Indian intelligentsia to pursue an education moulded on the European one gave them the intellectual means to formulate, on the one hand, a critique of the colonial order and, on the other hand, a re-assessment

and, then, re-working of their own tradition and reform of their society by trying to eradicate social evils. By and large, European ideas, values, principles, ideologies, and political theories were seen by the Indian intelligentsia as invaluable achievements for the republic of literati, who selectively appropriated and inserted them in the framework of local traditions and values. The syncretic result shaped a new form of modernity, that was different from the European notion of it: it was Indian, because predicated on the need and peculiarities of India in the colonial context. So, far from being an 'imperial category' or a 'derivative discourse' - unless by 'derivative' we mean that it derived from the encounter of ideas coming from different strands - the modernity promoted by the Indian intellectuals was part of the complex societal transformation that they had undertaken in order to defy the British hegemony, which was increasingly identified with an hindrance to India's progress. Therefore, modernity became an indispensable building block to define Indian identity vis-à-vis the British one.

Thus, the elaboration of a nationalist ideology and of the idea of the nation in the modern meaning of the term implied the acceptance of the modern world. Yet, nationalism celebrated also a precise historical-cultural identity and an ancient tradition - however invented they were - as essential Indian elements that needed to be defended against the impact of modernity, since those elements differentiated the Indian people from the British. So, nationalism was also the refusal of that same modern world from which it originated. In other words, nationalism was caught in between the acceptance of European values and the negation of the traditional ones. This impasse could be overcome thanks to the different blends of tradition and modernity, which presupposed a difficult process of re-elaboration of Indian culture. But the outcome was never of a clear-cut or definite kind, since in the course of its development, Indian nationalism had always two souls: one was liberal and modernising and the other traditional and conservative. And these influenced and penetrated one another to a variable extent[302].

What acted as the engine for the elaboration of the idea of the nation and of a nationalist ideology was the colonial state, that overlapped with the geographical unity of the Indian subcontinent. This state was not a reproduction of an European state. On the contrary, the colonial state drew much on the Mughal system in terms of personnel, army, police, bureaucracy, but also ethos, discourse, and knowledgable rules[303]. In fact, the Mughal

[302] Borsa, *Origini del nazionalismo*, 6.
[303] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 293-95.

emperor Akbar[304] had built a centralised and bureaucratic empire that presented some characteristics of modernity very similar to the European absolute monarchies. Even if its consolidation was interrupted by Akbar himself[305], the Mughal state remained significant for the EIC and the British *Raj.* Not only did the Mughal-colonial continuity give legitimacy to the British domination, so that, for instance, the personnel recruited by the British perceived themselves as men who perpetuated the irenic rule of Akbar under his successors, although these were *de facto* powerless; it also provided the colonial state with practical instruments such as the Akhabarat-i-Kotwali, namely daily reports from the police chiefs of the different cities, islamic ethnology, revenue and military data that represented the precedents of colonial surveys, mapping and police reporting[306]. Both colonial and modern India, thus, were shaped by the encounter of ideas, that is by the fusion of British/European and indigenous elements. That is way, as Bayly said, "any attempt to subsume Indian history into the history of imperial institutions or political discourse is patently self-defeating. For we need to consider both the indigenous inheritance of the Indian state and the pattern of class formation within Indian society under colonialism which appropriated this foreign political apparatus"[307].

The political unity conferred by the colonial state to the Indian territory was a necessary, but not sufficient condition for the emergence of a sense of nationality. As explained by Gellner, nationalism is a political principle that prescribes the coincidence between political and national unity[308]. State is a *conditio sine qua non* of nationalism, the latter being a by-product of the former. And nations in their modern meaning exist only as functions of a particular kind of territorial state or of the aspiration to establish one, but also in the context of a particular phase of technological and economic development. So, "nations do not make states and nationalisms, but the other way round"[309].

Another fundamental component in the formulation of nationalism is the role played by the educated classes. The Indian intelligentsia, thanks to a conscious political action, struggled to confer a national character to the political unity. By doing so, they tried to

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[304] On the Islamic secularism of Akbar see Michelguglielmo Torri. "La grande tradizione dell'Islàm laico nel subcontinente indiano", in *Rivista storica italiana* 120.3 (2008), 859-882, here 870-80.
[305] Douglas E. Streusand, *The Formation of the Mughal Empire*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1989, 41-43.
[306] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 294.
[307] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 293.
[308] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1.
[309] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990, 10. See also the fundamental works of Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism. A study in its Origin and background*, Transactions Publishers, New Brunswick 2005 (first publ.1944) and Carleton B. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York, 1931), *passim.*

forge a new national culture, that is, what Gellner defined 'cultural homogeneity'. So, a basic precondition for the formulation of nationalism was the link between state and culture: nationalism cannot exist without a homogenous culture, as shown by the diverging efforts made by Gokhale and Tilak. But, again, as clearly explained by Borsa's theory of modernisation, the culture appropriated by nationalism and proposed as national was a re-invention, both in its modernising and traditionalist version. Even if presented, as Tilak did, as an ancient, forgotten culture, expression of a glorious past, it was just a modern re-elaboration of one of the pre-existent cultures that, in the nationalist view, had to become dominant and cement the nation in the making. Yet, the selective nature of nationalism and its advocacy of a 'pre-culture'[310], in this case the Hindu one, to the detriment of others was fraught with danger for social integration, as, in the ideology of *Hindutva,* belonging to a certain religion meant to have certain advantages or disadvantages. Being an Indian Muslim corresponded to having an inferior social status. Also the emphasis given to the introduction of a modern system of education should be inserted in this framework of culture-state connection, because it provided the basis of a common culture from which Indian liberals could start conceiving their own national culture. The attempts by Gokhale to introduce universal, mandatory education should be seen as the conscious need to unifying the nation around a new culture aimed at creating citizens. Both strategies, then, were aimed at giving a new form of superior culture to the Indian political unity in the making.

Also the English language, promoted thanks to the diffusion of the print and to official administrative mechanisms, was a meaningful factor. Even though not differentiating the Indian people from the British people, English became the *lingua franca* that created a community of intercommunicating elite. In the same way, Hindi was artificially constructed as the national language and promoted thanks to the printed works in order to afford it more prestige, if not an aura of 'eternity'[311]. It is interesting that in the 1930s Gandhi attempted to develop and maintain a single Hindi language combining the Hindu and Muslim variants of the common language of North India, while at the same time providing a national alternative to the language of the colonisers. However, Gandhi's effort was

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[310] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 48-49.

[311] Ayesha Jalal has shown how also poetry and oral tradition contributed in creating national identity, more than maintained by Anderson. See Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, 47.

opposed by a powerful pro-Hindu and anti-Urdu group took over the *Hindi Sahitya Sammelan* formed by the National Congress to propagate the language[312].

Not differently from Europe, namely where nationalism had its original home, also in India nationalism was a recent phenomenon, that had its foundation moment in the colonial modern state. And as happened in Europe, it was Indian nationalism that made the nation politically relevant[313]. Nations, in fact, are not 'as old as history'. And it was nationalism that, far from awakening them, created them anew. So, nations are essentially modern entities, emanating from nationalism and national consciousness. The opposite primordialist assumption that holds that nations are natural and, as such, have alway existed in the course of history is itself an argument of the nationalist ideology, that ignores the fact that, only in the Age of Revolution, the nation acquired its modern connotation. In England, the nation emerged in the course of the seventeenth century, whereas in the rest of Europe it raised between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries and was corroborated by the 'principle of nationality' form the 1830 onwards[314]. It was in this period that the sense of belonging to the nation prevailed over any other loyalty[315]. Beforehand, then, the catalyser of European history was the loyalty to a fief, a town, a patron or monarch, a religious confession: these criteria of self-identification could overlap or be contrasting according to the different historical circumstances. On the contrary, following

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[312]J. Bhattacharyya, "Language, class and community in Bengal', in *South Asia Bulletin*, VII, 1 and 2, Fall 1987, 56-63. According to Gandhi, Hindi was the language of the people and of village India, and it opposed English rather then Urdu. He was in favour of a colloquial form of Hindi which he called Hindustani. When the Congress held in Nagpur in 1920 declared Hindi-Hindustani the national language of India, so that as far as possible all proceedings of the Congress were to be held in that language, Muslim members resented and felt excluded [Vasudha Dalmia, "Introduction: Hindi, Nation, and Community", in Shobna Nijhawan (edited by), *Nationalism in the Vernacular. Hindu, Urdu and the Literature of Indian Freedom*, 42].

[313] This is not to say that the development of nationalism followed a certain necessary pattern, because this would imply to embrace a determinist vision of history. What I am trying to say is that certain concepts and categories, although to a changing degree, always characterise nationalism, even if they mutate according to time and space. No nationalism is identical to the other, in the same way as no historical phenomenon exactly repeats itself in different circumstances.

[314] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 20.

[315] So, when Anthony Smiths (Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford 1986, 10-13) indicates the way Greek or Romans looked at other peoples, diplomacy and relations between political entities, the defence against invaders as evidence of the presence of a modern kind of nation also in ancient times, he ignores the fact that belonging to a nation did not mean to give priority to the common interests vis-à-vis the particular ones, to common good vis-à-vis privilege. The fact that citizenship was conferred to Italian populations and, afterwards, to the populations of the all Roman Empire after the Edict of Caracalla favoured a process that was similar to the formation of nation in modern sense. Yet, that process was stalled by the fall of the Roman Empire (Torri, "Nazionalismo Indiano e nazionalismo Indo-Musulmano" in Mario Mannini (edited by), *Dietro la bandiera. Emancipazioni coloniali, identità nazionali, nazionalismi nell'età contemporanea*, Pacini Editore, Ospedaletto (Pisa), 139-99, here 147.

the consolidation of the modern nation-states, nationalism became the cause of social unification and integration: it was the force that contributed to overcoming particularisms in order to gave uniformity to the state and legitimate it among the people, but also to emancipate oppressed peoples from foreign domination.

Therefore, once the nations emerged, also the need to prove that they had always existed manifested itself in order to give historical legitimacy to the new political entities. But such explanations were political and ideological, by no means they had correspondence in the historical or anthropological reality.

By and large, there were two main conceptualisations of the nation: according to one, prevailing in Germany and theorised by Herder, Fichte, and Hegel among others, nations were defined by objective elements such as race, language, religion, culture, common history and the occupation of a well-defined territory; in this view, nations had always existed and were by no means a recent phenomenon. Humankind, according to Johann Gottfried Herder, had always been divided in nations, which were essential and closed groups, because defined by natural and immutable characteristics.

According to the other conceptualisation of the nation, mainly defined by Voltaire, Rousseau, Renan, and Mazzini, it was the voluntaristic element, the individual will, that made the nation, even if some objective elements were also necessary[316].

Apart from these explicit definitions of the nation, another important form of nationalism was the English one, which followed the revolutions of the seventeenth century. The Cromwell Revolution had an anti-feudal and anti-monarchy character that fostered the development of a popular national consciousness. Such national awareness was combined with the Puritan principles of the value of the individual and of his liberty against the power of the state and the church. It was especially the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 that accorded English nationalism an even more marked liberal connotation. The outcome was a blend of liberalism and nationalism, being the latter the spontaneous integration of the individual into the nation. So, by the close of the seventeenth century, national consciousness permeated the English people so deeply that nationalism stopped having

[316] See Federico Chabod, *L'Idea di Nazione*, Laterza, Bari 2011 (first published 1961), 70-75.

any problematic connotation[317]. The faith in the British constitutionalist tradition was also the foundation of the nationalism of the New World: it was Thomas Paine, with its *Common Sense* (1776), that contributed to the theorisation of the American Revolution, that he regarded as an historical event that had not roots in the past, but looked to the future of a new free nation in the making predicated on British liberal values and ideas of the French Enlightenment. Since the American nation had no historical or cultural shared elements that could serve as objects of nationalism, it was the voluntaristic element to be emphasised in definition of the idea of the nation[318].

Indian nationalists were inspired, to a different degree and for different reasons, by all these three kinds of nationalisms. The models of other nations were important precedents to imagine their own nation. But in their conceptualisation, Indian intellectuals made use also of precolonial patriotisms[319] and political discourses on good government, that significantly were shared between Hindus and Muslims. If we consider patriotism as "love of country", that is to say an emotion of kindness, sympathy, fidelity, and loyalty that people feel towards their land and their political institutions[320], it is very probable that there were analogies between European and Indian patriotism and that some developed simultaneously. As Bayly argued "popular ideas of political morality and good government, represented in this ethical literature, remained an encompassing discourse of South Asian politics well into the nineteenth century. These ideas informed political debates and instances of popular resistance under indigenous rulers. They also informed reactions to

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[317] According to Borsa, this explains why "il nazionalismo nella storia seguente del popolo inglese sia stato più spesso qualche cosa di sottinteso e di scontato che di proclamato e come il pensiero politico inglese del secolo XIX, che pur vide il nazionalismo britannico esasperarsi nell'imperialismo, offra così poche meditazioni sul nazionalismo, sulla sua teoria e sulle conseguenze a paragone con il pensiero continentale contemporaneo"(Borsa, *Origini del nazionalismo*, 17). See also Hayes, who maintained that "[in] England the seventeenth-century conflict between king and Parliament was settled towards the close of the century in favour of the later. Henceforth the king was a figurehead, a kind of animated banner. But this did not lessen English patriotism or stay the progress of English nationalism, Autocratic monarchy had already accomplished its nationalising function in England. Popular loyalty to a king had passed into loyalty to his law and now it passed definitely into loyalty to the nationals state. The political philosophy of John Locke, the Whig, and that of Lord Bolingbroke, the Tory, might differ in emphasis and detail, but not in glorification of the English nation and the "British constitution". England pioneered in the new popular nationalism" (Carlton J.H. Hayes, *Nationalism: A Religion*, New York, Macmillan 1960, 41-42).

[318] "Patently what distinguished the American colonists from King George and his supporters as neither language nor ethnicity, and conversely the French Republic saw no difficulty in electing the Anglo-American Thomas Paine to its National Convention" (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 20).

[319] In India it can be found in certain regions between 1400 and 1800. Nineteenth-century Indian nationalists wrote about this period as nationalities-in-making.

[320] Hayes, *Nationalism*, 10.

policies of British Government and resistance to it. Ultimately, some of them passed into and influenced conceptions of popular nationalism and nationality in the nineteenth century[321]". Yet, patriotism, while instinctive in its origin and root and connected to the experience that people have of space and geography, is more naturally and readily felt by a small community in a restricted area than with a large nationality in a broad expanse of territory[322]. It can be turned into nationalism in the modern meaning only in the presence of a state that will make local groups of people become thoroughly aware of it as a political unity. Patriotism then was more advanced in the pre-colonial times in those periods when commercial expansion was more dynamic, that is when people had a sense of the space beyond the village and when the process of state building was more advanced[323]. An example was the Mughal period. Akbar's state building has already been mentioned. His advanced concept of state was carried on by Akbar's successors, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, but interrupted by Aurangzeb. In the period between Akbar and Aurangzeb, Hindustan was a communication unity: Persian letters circulated and reached clerical elites and bureaucracy. In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, the institutes of Akbar, the empire is depicted with a strong sense of place, set of regional communities, holy men, territorial aristocracy, fine products and marvels[324].

After the decline of the Mughal Empire and before the consolidation of the British domination, what characterised the political history of the subcontinent was a process of formation of a system of states not different from the one existent in Europe. It is likely that such state formations, once consolidated and stabilised, could have been basis for as many nations. Yet, the British conquest brought to a halt this process and a new state that englobed all India and its innumerable communities - not yet gathered in one or more nations - was created[325]. Then, it was the European presence to give another shape to the sense of belonging and identities which were earlier emerging, and did not create them *ex nihilo*.

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[321] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 14.
[322] Hayes, *Nationalism*, 10.
[323] Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 8. In this sense what Gellner said about illiterate and not industrialised societies being unable to have sentiment of community which went beyond the village is disputable. This field needs further investigation. Yet, it is a very complicated sphere of research since we have to take into consideration also the sentiments of the illiterate who were the overwhelming majority of the population before the twentieth century. As rightly noted by Hobsbawm, it was the elite who wrote about the ideas and feelings of the illiterate. But we cannot extrapolate from the elite to the masses (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 48).
[324]Bayly, *Origins of Nationality*, 38.
[325] Torri, "Nazionalismo Indiano e Nazionalismo Musulmano", 159.

Hence, before its unification under the British *Raj*, India did not possess any of the elements among those attributed in Europe to the concept of the nation: it was utterly fragmented from the ethnic, linguistic, and religious viewpoint. Even history was not an element of commonality, since India had never been entirely under the control of the same political entity, apart from short periods of imperial unification. History, then, was the history of the states into which India had been divided in the course of history. The only characteristic of unity, thus, was a well-defined territory, separated from the rest of the continent by the Ocean and the Himalayan mountains[326].

What emerges from the above brief discussion is that nationalism is not an event: it is a process, a very complex process indeed. And this is made even more complicated, if possible, in the colonial context, where the elite that has the task to popularise the idea of the nation and to mobilise the masses and sensitise them to the nationalist cause is different, ethnically and culturally, from the rulers. What is interesting about the nationalism promoted by the Indian National Congress is that it was never anti-British and it did not absorb those characteristics that nationalism was acquiring in the same period in Europe, where it was taking a dangerous ethnic and rightist turn. British individuals contributed to the advancement of the Indian nationalist battle from the foundation of the Indian National Congress until the end of the British *Raj.* The contest between Indians and British, colonised and colonisers, took place in the political public sphere, but at the state level, the two groups collaborated and the suggestions and advice offered by the Indian politicians and intellectuals were often incorporated in the ideologies and practises of the colonial state. To Aurobindo, the posture of the 'Moderate' Congressmen was expression of the intellectual contrast between subjection and independence, something which he regarded as 'the half-way house between life and death':

> "Their ingenuity discovers an intermediate condition in which the blessings of freedom will be harmoniously wedded with the blessing of subjection; and to this palace in fairyland they have given the name of colonial self-government (…). But the Moderate delusion is really a by-product of the Loyalist delusion (…) the Moderates are a hybrid species, emotionally Nationalist, intellectually Loyalist. It is owing to this double nature that their delusions acquire an infinite power for mischief. People listen to them because they claim to be

[326] Torri, "Nazionalismo Indiano e Nazionalismo Musulmano", 145.

> Nationalist and because a sincere Nationalist feeling not infrequently breaks through the false Loyalist reasoning. Moreover by associating themselves with the Moderates in the same platform the Loyalists are enabled to exercise an influence on public opinion which would otherwise not be accorded to them. The gospel according to Sit Pherozshah Mehta would not have such power for harm if it were not allowed to represent itself as one and the same with the gospel according to Mr Gokhale"[327].

In other words, in Aurobindo's opinion, the 'Moderates' had been culturally hegemonised by the British rulers. That the Moderates looked gullible to the young impatient new nationalists such as Lajpat Rai and Aurobindo is comprehensible, especially, as seen above, when at the turn of the century there was general lack of enthusiasm towards the Congress. A new idea of the nation was taking shape, not only in the sense that a nation, to be regarded as such, had to claim and fight for its rights, rather than begging for them - a concept that already been present in Tilak's idea since his coming to the fore[328]. But also, and more importantly, the Indian definition of the nation was undergoing a transformation similar to the definition of the European nation in the period between 1880 and 1914, emphasising objective elements, like 'race' and 'blood', and therefore the nation as a separate unity. A passage from Aurobindo's writings is useful to illustrate the difference in tones of the period:

> "All political ideals must have relation to the temperament and past history of the race. The genius of India is separate from that of any other race in the world, and perhaps there is no race in the world whose temperament, culture and ideals are so foreign to her own as those of the practical, hard-headed, Pharisaic, shopkeeping Anglo-Saxon. The culture of the Anglo-Saxon is the very antipodes of Indian culture. The temper of the Anglo-Saxon is the very reverse of the Indian temper. His ideals are of the earth, earthy. His institutions are without warmth sympathy, human feeling, rigid and accurate like his machinery, meant for immediate and practical gains. The reading of democracy which he had adopted and is trying to introduce first in the

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[327] "The Empirical Argument", April 1907, in Sri Aurobindo, *Nationalism, Religion, and Beyond. Writings on Politics, Society, and Culture* (edited by Peter Heehs), Delhi and Ranikhet, Permanent Black 2005, 138.

[328] According to Tilak, 'no nation rules another for altruistic reasons' (Wolpert, *Tilak and* Gokhale, 189). If Indians wanted equality and liberty, they had to seize them and not simply agitate for them.

colonies because the mother country is still too much shackled by the past, is the most sordid possible, centred on material aims and void of generous idealism. In such a civilisation, as part of such an Empire, Indian can have no future. If she is to model herself on the Anglo-Saxon type she must first kill everything in her which is her own. If she is to be a province of the British Empire, part of its life, sharing its institutions, governed by its policy, the fate of Greece under Roman dominion will surely be hers. She may share the privileges and obligations of British citizenship - thought the proud Briton who excludes the Indian from his colonises and treats him as a lower creature, will perish rather than concede such an equality - but she will lose her Indian birthright. She will have to pass a sponge over her past and obliterate it from her life, even if she preserves the empty records of it in her schools. The degradation of a great nation, by the loose her individuality, her past and her independent future, to the position of a subordinate satellite in a foreign system, is the ideal of the Convention. It is sheer political atheism, the negation of all that we were, are and hope to be. The return of India on her eternal self, the restoration of her splendour, greatness, triumphant Asiatic supremacy is the ideal of Nationalism. It is doubtful which ideal will be more acceptable to the nation, that which call in it to murder its instincts, sacrifice its future and deny its past for the advantage of an inglorious security, or that which asks it to fulfil itself by the strenuous reassertion of all that is noble and puissant in the blood it draws from such an heroic ancestry as no other nation can boast?"[329].

Along with the depiction of the Congress as the advocate of political servitude, the Nationalists[330] elaborated a systematic critique of liberalism. For example, Tilak's interpretation of the *Gita*[331], namely the most important part of the epic poem

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[329] "India's Mission", May 1908, in Sri Aurobindo, *Nationalism, Religion, and Beyond,* 142-143. Note how Aurobindo, while professing the essential separateness between British people and Indian people, used an Orientalist argument that depicted the former as earthy, worldly, material and the latter spiritual and endowed with an 'eternal self'. The Convention is here used to indicate the Congress after its break-up at Surat.

[330] When I use this word with capital letter I mean the self-definition that the 'Extremists' gave to themselves in opposition to the Moderates. Of course, this had the main purpose to indicate who the 'real' nationalists were.

[331] Tilak wrote it in the jail of Rangoon, where he spent six years. The Gita was translated from Sanskrit into Marathi and published in 1915. See Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Srimad Bhagavad-Gita Rahasya or Karmayoga Sastra*, trans. B.S. Sukthankar, Tilak Brothers, Poona 1971.

Mahabharata, was a critique of liberalism. It contained Tilak's political and ethical philosophy and was received in India as a political text more than a religious one. The *Gita* was the will to action, the theory of individual action. It presumed a collective unconscious that had to be made conscious. British liberalism was criticised because of its 'will to live' and its over self-interest. Liberalism, in Tilak's view, was a set of obligations and duty to institutions like the state, where primacy was given to the interest, and not to ethics: it was therefore unacceptable[332]. But apart from the anti-liberal stand, Tilak sought support from the *Gita* for his defence of caste: he saw caste duties as essential for universal social regeneration and spiritual salvation[333]. This reminds us once again that some of the 'extremist-Nationalists' who were louder in opposing the colonial rule were defending their pre-colonial caste privilege.

The refusal of liberalism - with all its consequences - was, in the Nationalists' opinion, a necessary position in order to defy the 'incomplete nationalism' of Indians like Banerjea or Gokhale and to formulate a nationalism that was authentically Indian. Therefore, liberal nationalism was shunned as un-national, because it was in favour of the state institutions and thus of the permanence of the colonial order.

Let us just anticipate what will be dealt with below, that is to say that the concept of Indianness, defined in more or less inclusive ways by the different nationalist ideologues, was not the most important factor of Gokhale's nationalism. Emphasising the potential of becoming citizens of the Empire, Gokhale wanted to overcome the discrimination against Indians that the new Victorian liberalism prescribed. In this sense, being subjects of the Crown was more important than being Indians in order to be admitted into the rights of citizens and to be able to participate to representative institutions and build the nation. Then, Gokhale's idea of the nation was transitional between Empire and nation: its study is helpful to understand that claiming citizenship by appealing to the status of subjects could be more fruitful than appealing to the status of Indians. As shown by Sukanya Banerjee, this was a strategy of several groups and individuals between metropole and colony that had a sense of imperial belonging while identifying themselves as Indians. The articulation of an imperial citizenship was based on the concept of abstract equality inherent in liberal values and proclaiming each individual equivalent to every other, irrespective to class,

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[332] Shruti Kapila, "Self, Spencer and Swaraj", in *Modern Intellectual History*, 109-127, here 118-120.

[333] Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 305. See also G.V. Saroja, *Tilak and Sankara on the Gita*, Sterling Publishers, Delhi 1985, 131-79.

race, language, etc[334]. So, to be, or to aspire to be, imperial citizens was more advantageous to be 'racialised' Indians in the Indian colonial context.

Renascent Maharashtra

The comparison between Gokhale and Tilak does not lie within the compass of this work. What is worthy of note is that both came from Pune in Maharashtra[335] and belonged to the same caste group, that is the Chitpavan Brahmans, who represented "a unique case in Indian history of priests who had both temporal and spiritual power"[336].

Maharashtra was the country of Shivaji Maharaj (1627-1680) the warrior king that defied the hegemony of the Mughal Empire during the rule of Aurangzeb Alamgir (1658-1707). Maharashtra was also the country that fell under the EIC rule only as late as in 1818[337].

As in the rest of India, also here the individual was subordinated to the community by the institution of caste. But there were regional variations in the formation and rigidity of such an institution. The region of Maharashtra followed the south Indian pattern of twofold division of caste - 'Brahmin and the rest, consisting of warriors, traders, peasants, artisans and untouchable castes called non-Brahmins or *Brahmanetar'*[338]. The dominant caste, that is the Brahman elite, denied spiritual and temporal space to the masses, who, as a reaction, gave life to the popular *Vaishnava Bhakti* movement, devoted to Vishnu, instead of Shiva, worshipped by the Brahmans. The *Bhakti* spiritual leaders, who came from different caste background and comprised even some women, denied any social or spiritual value to caste and, because of this, were often subjected to persecution by Brahmans[339]. Brahminism and *Bhakti* developed independently and interacted only marginally. Yet, after the rise of Shivaji there were important changes in the social structure of the region. On the one hand, a powerful caste of Marathas emerged: it was formed by

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334 Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizenship*, 11.

335 Area where Marathi is the dominant language, mentioned since the first century AD, but only from the seventh-century evidence, it was possible to map the region. During the British *Raj* it was divided between the Presidency of Bombay and the Central Provinces and other princely states.

336 Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 2.

337 Even after the establishment of the British Raj, though, many Maharashtrians wanted a revival of the *Peshwai* and tried to re-establish the *svarajya* in 1844 and in 1857, but both these attempt were abortive. Another rebellion against the British was attempted in 1879. For the history of Maharashtra before the defeat of the *Peshwai* see Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas, 1600-1818*, (Vol. 4) Cambridge University Press, Delhi 2009 (reprinted, first pub. 1998), *passim.*

338 Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 2. The Bengal pattern of caste formation was totally different and had allowed a certain level of mobility (Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872-1937*, K.P. Batch, Calcutta 1990).

339 Eleanor Zelliot and Rohini Mokashi-Punerker (edited by), *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon*, Monahar, Delhi 2005, 27.

those who fought with Shivaji[340]. On the other hand, Shivaji's son Shahu appointed an influential Chitpavan[341], Balaji Vishwanath, as his *Peshwa* (Prime Minister) in 1713. This took over the power and founded the so-called *Peshwai*, by which Chitpavans achieved the control of the state and used their position to enforce the Brahminical code of social behaviour and to perpetuate the stratification of society. This was a strategy to counter the new opportunities opened up by the consolidation of the Maratha polity. By and large, "those coming from lower castes and achieving high positions and prosperity in this manner naturally vied for a higher ritual status [social and ritual status were in fact interdependent]. On the other hand, their sudden rise aroused jealousies of the higher caste-groups, who would look for some opportunity to humiliate them, mainly on the grounds of caste. Vying of the lower caste-groups for higher ritual status on the one hand, and an equally strong opposition to their claims by the jealous higher caste-groups on the other, caused constant friction among different caste-groups"[342]. Therefore, during the *Peshwa* rule, it was the government that enforced caste rules, so that what was custom in other parts of India was enforceable legally in Maharashtra. In fact, the Peshwas were defined *go-brahmina pratipalak,* namely protectors of the holy cow and of Brahmans[343].

When the British established their hegemony in Maharashtra, they found advantageous to use the know-how of the elite, that is to say the Brahmans, in terms of administration. But the British officials also wanted to avoid to overturn the position of the Brahmans, towards whom they felt a positive fear, particularly towards the Chitpavans, since these were the immediate pre-British rulers of the Deccan and could represent a threat to the new colonial rule. The governor Elphinstone, that is the man that controlled the territories of Bombay after 1818, although hating the institution of caste, did not want to undermine

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[340] Note must be taken that the use of the term 'Maratha' in the nineteenth century is not related to casteist Maratha groups, but as a name of a nationality, as Tilak and Phule, despite in different ways, did.

[341] The Chitpavans were a Brahman jati (sub-caste), also defined as Poona, Deccan or Maratha Brahmans. The other jati of Brahmans were the Deshasthas, who were not as ahead as the Chitpavans in terms of education, wealth, occupations in the colonial bureaucracy but were however important in the social and economic structure of the village in banking, trading, accountancy activities and regarded themselves as the real aristocracy, since the Chitpavans were relatively new to Maharashtra (Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, 19).

[342] Sudha V. Desai, *Social Life in Maharashtra under the Peshwas*, Bombay Popular Prakashan, Bombay 1980, 40. See pages 30-61 of the same book for the complex question of caste. See for example the controversy between Brahmans and Prabhus over the eligibility of the latter to perform the thread ceremonies. The Prabhus, an economically strong community with a percentage of literacy inferior only to the Brahmans, were regarded as a threat for the consolidation of the Chitpvans' power in the state.

[343] Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 8. See also Hiroshi Fukazawa, *The Medieval Deccan: The Peasants, Social System, and States*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1991, 91-108 for cases of government enforcement of rules according to caste prescriptions.

the fabric of Maharashtra society. Notwithstanding the fact that he saw the Chitpavans as "intriguing, lying, corrupt, and licentious race of people"[344], he understood the value of the Brahman caste to preserve the social order and wanted to win them over Western ideas in order to introduce slow and gradual changes and to try to limit the access of education to them so that they could reconcile with the foreign rule[345]. Elphinstone's rule then was conciliatory in the sense that Brahmans could keep their prominence thanks to their literacy and adaptability and benefitted the most from the new educational institutions founded by the British[346]. This position of advantage afforded by their professional competence gave them the respectability in the eyes of the colonial rule and of the people. Moreover, the rational disciplines introduced with European education slowly undermined the traditional values of some of Brahmans, who adopted an open-minded approach towards certain social issues and took advantage of the space of social freedom guaranteed by the colonial rule.

Despite the sympathy that, to different degrees, the colonial officials could have towards the institution of caste as a practical means to keep social order, the colonial state led to the dilution of caste restrictions since it did not contemplate the enforcement of the rules prescribed by caste and the implementation of excommunications when those rules were broken. More importantly, if, in the past, not complying with their own caste prescriptions implied social death, with the British rule, there was the possibility of alternative employment in the form of low-salary white-collar jobs. Thus, the reformers who married widows, forbidden by the Hindu law, or infringed other caste restrictions could have alternative means of livelihood other than their ancestral occupation[347]. Then, the colonial rule resulted more favourable for questioning the inherent constraints in Maharashtrian Hindu society. For example, a section of the Brahman priests performed Vedic rituals also to non-Brahmans, something forbidden by the *Dharmashastras*[348]. Moreover, the English education, as seen in the previous chapter, acted as powerful social solvent and the English-educated reformers started bringing change in terms of mentality and social practices. Among them there were radical figures such as Jotirao Phule, who, influenced

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[344] Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, 23.
[345] Ravinder Kumar, "The New Brahmans of Maharashtra", in D.A. Low (edited by), *Soundings in Modern South Asian History,* Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1968, 95 – 130, here 98.
[346] M.S. Gore, *Non-Brahman Movement in Maharashtra*, Segment Book Distributors, Delhi, 1989, 43.
[347] Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 10.
[348] Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 7. The *Dharmashastras* are literary texts in Sanskrit that deal with the Hindu Dharma, namely the Hindu religious and social duties.

by the Christian missionaries, completely rejected the value of the *Dharmashastras*[349]. Phule, significantly, never used the term 'Hinduism': he regarded it as 'brahmanism' because to him, Hindu religion was a preserve of the Brahmans.

The process of interaction between colonial 'modernity' and Indian 'tradition', with which we have dealt quite extensively in the course of the second chapter, was particular flourishing in Poona, the 'hub of Maharashtra', also during the *Peshwai*. Several schools were founded with the purpose to spread new ideas and to extend education to larger sections of the populations. The Poona English School, the Deccan College and the New English School were just the most influential among the educational institutions that were created in this period by enlightened Indians. These, namely the by-product of the new cultural and intellectual climate change, were generally Brahmans who believed that it was impelling to liberate Maharashtra from the social evils of caste and superstitions before achieving political freedom. It was the British rule, as the social reformer Lokahitawadi Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1832-1892) maintained, that had opened the eyes of the Indian intelligentsia[350].

In order to comprehend the vibrant and creative atmosphere of this period, let us briefly go through some of the most relevant figures of social reform in Maharashtra and the public organisations founded by them in order to a new common sense about important social and political issues. Bal Shastri Jambhekar (1812-1846) was a journalist and social reformer that opposed child marriage and supported women's education. He started a movement in favour of the remarriage of widows and another one in favour of the readmission of Hindus who had converted to Christianity. He founded two newspapers, the *Bombay Darpan* and the *Dig Darshan*, and made them instruments of social reforms[351]. Jambhekar's articles in the *Darpan* such as 'The Evidence of Ram Mohun Roy in England (22 June 1832), 'Knowledge is Power' (24 August 1832), 'Influence of a free and impartial public Press' (12 October 1832) are imbibed with liberal ideas[352]. Ramkrishna Vishwanath,

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[349] The most authoritative work on Phule is Rosalind O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict and Ideology. Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century Western India*, Cambridge 2002 (first published 1985). I would suggest also the reading of Phule, Jotīrāva Govindarāva Phule, *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule,* (Govind P. Deshpande, edited by), LeftWord Books, Delhi 2002.

[350] Kumar, "The New Brahmans of Maharashtra", 110.

[351] Ganachari, *Agarkar*, 16.

[352] See G.G. Jambhekar (edited by), *Memoirs and Writings of Acharya Bal Shastri Jambhekar (1812-1846)*, Vol. 2, Pub. G.G. Jambhekar, Poona, 1950, 44-47, 50-57, 64-69 quoted in Raja Dixit, "Liberalism in Renascent India with special reference to J.S. Mill and Maharashtra" (draft paper), presented at Conference on *Motilal Nehru and his Times* at NMML, New Delhi, 16 and 17 January 2014, 5.

Lokahitawadi, Hari Keshowaji, and Krishna Shastri Chiplunkar, all conversant with western economic and political thought, produced works in Marathi on economics that show the influence of liberal thought and formulated a sort of blue-print for the industrial development of the country. Vishwanath, in particular, in his *Thoughts on ancient and present conditions of Hindustan and the fitter consequences* (in Marathi, Bombay 1843) elaborated a critique of the economic nature of the *Raj* and maintained that the only way for India to be rescued was to develop a scientific and industrial culture. Lokahitawadi, the Tharkhadkar brothers and Bhau Mahajan (1815-1890) attacked the dictatorship of the *dharmashastra* and advocated gender and caste equality and education for all[353]. In particular, Bhaksar Tarkhadkar (1816-1847) and Bahu Mahajan denounced the exploitative nature of the British rule, while acknowledging the significance of scientific thinking in the Indian context. Moreover, Mahajan was the first to introduce the literature on the French Revolution to the Marathi-speaking public through the *Prabhakar*, the reformist newspaper he edited[354]. Daboda Pandurang Tarkhadkar (1814-1882), brother of Bhaksar, wrote against caste and superstitions which enslaved the country. According to him, a general change had to be pursued in line with rationality and social equality[355]. Ganesh Vasudev Joshi (1828-1880)[356] was with Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) founding member of

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353 J.V. Naik, "Social Reform Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries in Maharashtra: a Critical Survey", in S.P. Sen (edited by), *Social and Religious Reform Movements in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, Indian Institute of Historical Research, Calcutta 1979, 284-85.

354 Raja Dixit, "Liberalism in Renascent India", 5.

355 Ganachari, *Agarkar*, 17.

356 Joshi is an extremely fascinating figure. He was called *sarvajanik kaka*, public uncle, for his interest in public questions. He defended the interests of peasants through the Sabha and was the first to publicise *khaddar*, that is the hand-spun cloth vis-à-vis the British textile manufactures in order to provide job to the rural poor and to oppose the abolition of the tariff on British imports introduced in 1870. He was also the lawyer of Vasudev Balwant Phadke, the man that started the revolt of the Deccan peasants in 1876-77. Phadke, a young Chitpavan that worked as a clerk in the Military Finance Office in Poona, underwent the influence of Joshi and started promoting the peasant's cause. He organised those groups who were oppressed by the moneylenders and who finally rebelled against them. The revolt, dictated by a class consciousness, was unsuccessful, but represented a warning for the colonial government, besides being very alarming for the landed interests and the moneylenders. See Parimala V. Rao, "New Insights into the Debates on Rural Indebtedness in 19th century Maharashtra", *EPW*, 24 January 2009, 55-61, here 56-57.

the Poona Sarvajanika Sabha (PSS)[357], which was created as a mediatory body between government and society. Joshi also tried to give the peasants of the Deccan the support of the PSS against the Revenue and Survey Department[358]. He was an economist that greatly contributed to framing an elaborate critique of the economic policies of the British *Raj*. Joshi, Ranade and Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) broadened and systematised the economic analyses elaborated by the early economists. Ranade and Narayan Ganesh Bhandavarkar (1855-1923) were among the founders of the Prarthana Samaj, that had many commonalities with the Brahmo Samaj created by Rammohan Roy in Calcutta. The main purpose of the Prarthana Samaj was the democratisation of Hinduism, inspired by the Bhakti tradition, especially by the seventeenth-century saint Tukaram[359], who was compared to Buddha and Jesus. Only those who were willing to eat bread made by a Christian and drink water fetched by a Muslim - practices normally forbidden by caste - could become members[360]. The Sabha had also a paper, the Subodh Patrika, that advocated the abolition of caste, being 'the greatest monster we have to kill'[361]. V.R. Shinde (1873-1944), a graduate in comparative religion at Oxford, was close to Ranade and his Prarthana Samaj. He started being interested in the interaction and conversation between religions, especially Hinduism and Christianity. His thought shows the notable role played by non-Catholic Christianity in democratising Hinduism. Shinde was the first to use the term 'bahujan' to indicate the mass of the people as opposed to 'abhijan', the elite,

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[357] The PSS was formed in 1870 and made up of a committee of Brahmins, the members had to prove that their mandate was wanted by at least 50 adult men from any caste or community (108, see also the Constitution of the PSS). The majority of the members were part of the professions and were mostly Hindus and Brahmins (Johnson, "Chitpavan Brahmans and Politics", 108). Their main concerns were: education, taxation, land revenue, public employment and they submitted petitions and organised agitations. They supported the Ilbert Bill and were in favour of an extension of local self-government and of the reform of the legislative council. Moreover, they wanted the Indianisation of the civil service. This were questions that interested all politicians in the subcontinent. In fact, the PSS had a leading role in the Congress. He was seized by Tilak and his group in 1895, after Tilak's ideas became incompatible with those of Gokhale, Ranade and Agarkar.

[358] Yet, the *Poona Sarvajanika Sabha* was not in favour of the redistribution of land and opposed the restrictions over land acquisitions. Its members held that the only adequate measure to ameliorate the plight of the peasants was to encourage agricultural economy through investments carried out by the landowning classes (G. Johnson, "Chitpavan Brahmins and Politics in Western India in the late Nineteenth and Early Twenties", in Leach and Mukherjee (edited by), *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, pp. 95-118, here 115-16).

[359] For the poetry of the Bhakti poet-saint see Dilip Chitre (trans.), *Says Tuka: Selected Poetry of Tukaram*, Penguin, Delhi 1991. "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 (*Ibidem*, 115).

[360] Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 12.

[361] L.V. Kaikini, The Speeches and Writings of Sir Narayan G. Chandavarkar, MGPM, Bombay 1911, 72.

and, like Phule, saw the Indian society as dichotomised[362]. Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856 -1895) was a fearless agnostic and pure rationalist. He was closely cooperating with Gokhale in the publishing of the *Sudharak or Reformer,* refused any divine explanation to deal with mundane society and had very advanced views in terms of social issues, that led him to dissociate from Tilak[363]. Jotirao Phule (1828-1890), a non-Brahman, attacked the caste system even more vigorously and accused Hinduism, and not the British *Raj*, of being the real cause of Indian decadence. He wanted all non-Brahamns, untouchables included, to emancipate themselves by providing them with a new common identity that could challenge Brahmans' hegemony[364].

By and large, it was mostly Chitpavan Brahmans that were in the vanguard of social reform. They could take advantage of their literacy to impose their authoritativeness also in this field. To foster their causes and disseminate their ideas, as seen, they started several papers and favoured the growth of journalism, transforming Marathi in a language suitable to express modern ideas and knitting together the centres of Marathi-speaking areas thanks to the print[365]. They founded public organisations and societies aimed at volunteering activities and at creating a common space of intellectual exchange[366]. Yet, their influence did not derive from their ability to organise themselves as a caste for political goals, much less as a class as among the them there was not any pattern of poverty or affluence[367]. Notwithstanding the common history and common bond that gave them a sense of pride, superiority, and consciousness of their identity, the Chitpavans' responses to the British rule and to the the problems inherent in Indian society were different. There was a bitter competition among them and they never formed a united front at all. Rather they embraced diverging ideological positions[368]. So, some started to be

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362 Govind P. Deshpande, *The World of Ideas in Modern Marathi, Phule, Vinoba, Savarkar*, Tulika Books, Delhi 2009, 18.

363 See Ganachari, *Agarkar*, *passim*.

364 Significantly enough, though, among the higher strata of non-Brahman castes there was discontent about being associated with the 'bottom' of Hindu society (O'Hanlon, *Caste, Conflict, and Ideology*, 279).

365 Johnson, *Chitpavan Brahmins and Politics*, 105.

366 See for example the S*tudent's Literary and Scientific Society*, founded in 1848 by students and professors of the Elphinstone College. Almost all educated Indians of Bombay were its members. They had several branches, besides three Marathi schools and four Gujarati schools for girls under their care (Ganachari, *Agarkar*, 18).

367 Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 23-36.

368 Maybe this was fostered by the wider area of discretion left to the individuals since there were no caste panchayats or formal system of organised interference in domestic matters, unlike other caste groups). Wide area of discretion to the individuals (Gordon Johnson, "Chitpavan Brahmins and Politics in Western India in the late Nineteenth and Early Twenties", in Leach and Mukherjee (edited by), *Elites in South Asia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, pp. 95-118, here 100.

influenced by the ideas of Europe and to think that the British were a Godsend, whereas others were convinced that they were the cause of Hindu misery. Thus, the progressive outlook of some Chitpavans was counterbalanced, especially from the 1870s onwards, by the conservative and orthodox perspective of others, that had their main representative in Vishnu Shastri Chiplunkar (1850-1882) and, as I have already said, Tilak (1856-1920). Chiplunkar and Tilak belonged to an economically powerful class and were personally concerned with the defence of land interests. Also outside Maharashtra their support came from the landed classes. They looked at the social reformers as betrayers of caste interests, they called them un-Nationalists, while defining themselves Nationalists. Therefore they identified the nationalist cause with that of the moneylender and the big landlord. They opposed the education of non-Brahmans and the revisitation of the institution of caste. Their attitude towards the land issue is a gauge through which it is possible to evince their stand in terms of preservation of the social order. As a matter of fact, the possession of land in India equated to having 'a little kingdom'[369], because it implied a master-servant relationships between the landowner and his agricultural labour in a such a way that the former had total control over the latter and his family. That Tilak did not want to see such relationship revised was unequivocal. In fact, he attacked the colonial rule for "changing the traditional well-established master-servant relationship by giving power to the servants to appeal to the government against his master"[370]. He forcefully opposed the Reformers for the same reason, since he thought that through their teachings they endangered the social structure on which the immense authority and power of the landed elites dwelled. He blamed the government and not the moneylenders for the peasant's indebtedness and, unlike Naoroji or Ranade never asked consistently the reduction of the land revenue[371]. When the Government of Bombay, following the Deccan famine (1875-76) and revolt (1876-77), passed the Deccan Agriculturist Relief Act (DARA) in 1879, Tilak criticised such measure saying that an alien government had no right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Hindu society and that, by intervening on behalf of the peasants, the harmony of the villages would be destroyed[372]. Very candidly, Tilak wrote in

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[369] Shan Mohammad, *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, Nachiketa, Bombay 1972, 26 in Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 28.
[370] "The Khoti Bill", Editorial, *The Mahratta*, 29 January 1899.
[371] See Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 54-95.
[372] Rao, "New Insights into the Debates on Rural Indebtedness in 19th century Maharashtra", 55-61, here 57. The article provides further evidence of the opposite stands taken by Tilak's group and the reformers.

1883 that is ever “a nation should spring up in India, that will be able to govern itself, it will be a nation with Poona Brahmans [Chitpavans] at its head”[373].

So, though Ranade, Chiplunkar, Tilak, Gokhale, ect. were all Chitpavans, it is misleading to place them in the same group. However, this is exactly what the British officials did: they perceived the Chitpavans as a homogenous group and did not see the inherent contradictions in such a multifarious social group. Richard Temple, Governor of Bombay (1877-80) wrote to the Viceroy Lord Litton (1876-80) that:

> “They are inspired with national sentiment and with an ambition bounded only with the bounds of India itself (…). They will never be satisfied till they regain their ascendancy in the country as they had it during the last century. And British rule is the one thing which is an absolute bar to their aspirations.”[374]

The fact that the British stereotyped the Brahmans and oversimplified their variety and responses to the colonial presence was dictated mainly by ideological reasons. In other words, being the most politicised group in the region, the Chitpavan Brahmans were perceived as a dreadful threat by the foreign rulers, who found expedient to delegitimate their authority by depicting them as detached from the masses and therefore incapable of representing them. Valentine Chirol in his well-known *Indian Unrest* (1910) corroborated that ‘conspiracy theory’ by holding that Brahmans were tainted with disloyalty and preserved an unbroken tradition of hatred towards British rule[375].

Among new powerful ideas coming from Europe, whose revolutionary potential the educated Indians did not fail to appreciate, also ideas about history and historical methods penetrated into India, both thanks to the establishment of educational institutions and to the circulation of Anglo-Marathi journals. History, in the scientific and Rankean meaning of the term, became part of a pedagogical programme according to which every would-be government employee had to undergo. So, the scope and understanding of history greatly

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[373] “Brahmins at New York”, *The Mahratta*, 6 March 1881.

[374] Johnson, “Chitpavan Brahmins and Politics in Western India in the late Nineteenth and Early Twenties”, 108.

[375] Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, 32. At the same time, the British formulated also the ‘usurper theory’ according to which the Brahmans had become Peshwas by seizing illegitimately the power of the non-Brahmans. James Grant Duff with his *History of the Marahtas* (1826, with a more widely circulated edition of 1863) and Edward Forster with *A passage to India* were the most influential to spread this theory and create a set of stereotypes that would in the future be appropriated by the anti-Brahman movement (*Ibidem*, 25-26).

changed in comparison with the previous popular historiographical tradition[376]. At Bombay University, history was taught in English to BA students, who became familiar with works on Europe, constitutional and political history of England and the history of India, especially Mill's work. Maratha history was introduced as a separate subject from the 1870s, with Grant Duff's *History of the Marahtas* as the principal text. In the teaching of history, Western/modern was always opposed and superior to Indian/myth.

Grand Duff's work was part of a series of historical surveys to study the process of the establishment of the Company rule over the Peshwai, accomplished in 1818. It marked the beginning of a new historiographical discourse, which had a number of publications by European historians, especially British, as its main expression. The main arguments that emerged from Grant Duff's historiography was that the Marathas could rise only because the states over which they imposed their dominions had been previously weakened by a set of factors. Even though it perpetuated certain prejudices, *in primis* that the Brahmanical character of *Peshwai* was treacherous and deceitful, the significance of Grant Duff's book lay in the fact that it took into account the specificity of the Marathas, not anymore considering them a minor segment of the narrative of the Mughal Empire, and this gave them a sense of separate identity. Grant Duff had, of course, the purpose to celebrate the glory of the British conquer and to show how the Marathas were now inserted in the pattern of the *Pax Britannica*. Although in line with the Eurocentric historical philosophy according to which human actions unfolded along a process of evolution from barbaric to civilised societies, Grant Duff's history played an important role in stimulating the rise of Maratha nationalist historiography[377].

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[376] Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts. Historical Memory and identity in Western India, 1700-1960*, Permanent Black, New Delhi 2007, 87-88. Before the advent of the British rule, there were two forms of Marathi historiography. The first were the *bakhars,* written in Marathi by Brahman eulogists. They were prose of historical narrative, in the stylistic form of letters, mainly produced in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century Maharashtra, even though the earliest dated back to the sixteenth century. They focused on families events and prominent figures' lives. Events were presented in sequence. After the British conquest of the Maratha region they did not completely disappear, but were used in order to articulate different claims. Of course the historical narratives presented by the bakhar was extremely different from the kind of positivistic history promoted by the British. that follows that the use of exaggeration, the inconsistency in using dates and names, mythological references did not make them 'history' and this contributed to the British argument that India lacked a sense of history (*Ibidem*,19). In the *bakhars,* Shivaji is represented as a divine figure which fights the Muslims. He is the Hindu leader par excellence (Gordon, *The Marathas*, 3). then, there were the *povadas*, oral and poetic forms of heroic commemoration, contemporaneous to the *bakhars*, transmitted by professional performers, with a wider circulation than the latter. They represented and narrated "a collective space for ordinary people and soldiers to identify with a larger political tradition while simultaneously enabling loyalty to military chiefs" (Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 13).

[377] For the early British historiography on the Marathas, see Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 71-77.

It has already been stressed how history was an integral part of the colonial discourse that exalted Western superiority and triumph over the Orient. Yet, while British wanted to use history to hegemonise the Indian mind, Indians used another kind of history to spur a nationalist consciousness. History re-writing thus turned into a field of contestation over which Indians struggled to take control in order to refute the British discourse and express collective identities of different kinds[378]. The new Indian interest in history was also kindled by the dialogue between Christian missionaries and Brahman priests, an exchange that fostered the moulding of identity of one's Other[379]. That historical narrative and identity were closely linked was plain to Indians. As early as 1881, the publication of the PSS, the *Journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha*, complained about the un-national nature of history teaching:

> "What can we expect from a system under which our students read more of Milton, Racine, and Goethe than of Ramdas and Tukaram? However much we may deplore it, it is an undeniable fact that the gulf is widening by slow degrees between the educated classes and the masses of the country. While our university-men, trained under a system of linguistic studies, at once exclusive and ahistorical, disconnect themselves from the history of the country, the vernacular masses who have little else to stand upon except the traditions of the past, set their faces firmly against the abstract lectures we read to them, feel no sympathy with our unhistorical descents on national degeneracy, and give us little help in our theoretical projects of reform"[380].

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[378] Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 80. It is worthy of mention that historical plays and novels remained important popular sources of historical narrative. Marathi historical plays, which were much more produced than historical novels and circulated among the population of both urban and semiurban population, had a huge boost with the unrest of national politics. Marathi playwrights like N.B. Kanitkar (A *Drama in Four Acts*, 1898) and N. Dhavale used their plays to decry the Reformers and their ideas (*Ivi*, 155). Moreover, in both historical plays and historical novels what generally appeared was that the Maratha nation was under constant thereat from Muslims. So, the duty of the Peshawar, the warriors, etc., was to protect Hindu women, cows, and Brahmans. Maharashtra was depicted as the male protector of the women, while the woman symbolises the nation (*Ivi*, 161). See *Ivi, passim*, for the diverse rebuttal of Marathi historians. Some of them were also the advocates of social reform and of the nationalist cause: the building of the nation and the writing of history went on *pari passu.* This historiographical reaction had, among other things, the merit to spur a search for documents about the Maratha polity, with the discovery of important family sources.

[379] Gordon, *The Marathas*, 3.

[380] "Indian Vernaculars and University Reform", *Journal of the PSS*, October 1881, in *Writings and Speeches of the Hon. Rao Bahadur G.V Joshi*, Arya Bhushan, Poona 1912, 1016.

Aware of the important role that history could play to legitimise nationalist claims, George Clarke (later Lord Sydenham of Combe), Governor of Bombay (1907-13) sent periodically instructions to make history a non-compulsory subject and to remove the history of England from the curriculum at the Bombay University. Mehta and Gokhale strongly opposed Clarke, but he finally won his battle[381]. In sum, Indians vindicated a 'national' history. Ranade's *The Rise of Maratha Power* (Bombay 1900)[382] was the history of a people reacting to foreign domination. Ranade used the historical narrative to show how nationalism had unified Maratha society in the previous century and how Shivaji, depicted as a secular and national leader, by integrating the different castes, had followed the heterodox and egalitarian spirit of the Bhakti poets. The spirit of moderation and toleration was, for Ranade, the most stable element of the Maratha 'empire', whose period was characterised by unity rather than by reaction towards the Muslims. In Western India, the Muslims were few and they had undergone the influence of the Hindus. Ranade also rebutted the myth of the usurper theory[383], because a spirit of nationalism had always been the characteristic of the Maratha people and had united all classes and castes; the interests of all members of the Maratha society were essentially compatible[384]. The Bhakti, according to the Marathi intellectual, was a set of religious values in which Hinduism and monotheistic Islam were blended and the brahmanical values and differentiation of caste were rejected. To him, patriotism was a combination of religious and political ends, not different form the European Reformation of the sixteenth century[385]. Both in the Bhakti and in the Reform there was a spirit of heterodox religiosity that had instilled new life and energy into the nation by revolting against the corrupt religious authorities.

Ranade's interpretation of history is useful to understand the nation that he envisioned, something relevant also for Gokhale's conceptualisation of the nation. Gokhale, Ranade's pupil, was in fact greatly inspired by his master in his political thought. Ranade was influenced by the Varkari tradition, a strand of the Bhakti that emphasised universalism and radical humanism. In his view, the consolidation of the Maratha power was the

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381 Aravind Ganachari, "Imperialist Appropriation and Disciplining the Indian Mind (1857-1917)", in *EPW*, Vol. 43, n. 5, (Feb. 2-8 2008), 77-87, here 78. See also Nanda, Gokhale, 62-63 for Gokhale's defence of the teaching of the history of England.

382 M.G. Ranade, *Rise of the Maratha Power*, Bombay University Press, Bombay 1961. The book was strongly criticised by Tilak for its 'unjustified generalisation of the contribution of Bhakti Saint poets in the formation of Maratha nationalism', whereas 'only Ramdas and not others contributed to the synthesising of best elements of Brahminism and the warrior caste in a determined combination' (*The Mahratta*, 9 February 1901, 4 in Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*).

383 See above footnote 74.

384 Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya*, 43.

385 Ranade to Gokhale, 24 June 1899, in *Gokhale Papers* (NAI).

'glorious political culmination of the socio-religious enlightenment experienced by the Maratha people under the inspiration of the Varkari *sants*'[386]. In his interpretation Shivaji was the peak of the universalist forces and he had a vision of a state based on something called Maharashtra Dharma[387], that is an inclusive, tolerant and pluralistic ideology, namely the political concretisation of the Bhakti spirit. The Indian nation in the making had to be built on equally rational and humane foundations, following a sort of climax in which Varkari - Shivaji - Peshwa - Maharashtrian/Indian nation[388] came in succession. This was in stark contrast with what Tilak thought of Shivaji, whom he saw as a Hindu leader who had been able to mobilise large strata of the society against foreign invaders, namely the Muslims[389].

Gokhale's Idea of the Nation

Gopal Krishna Gokhale: a Premise

Before starting dealing with the conceptualisation that Gokhale elaborated of the Indian nation, let us just briefly pinpoint the factors that constituted his intellectual framework and the surrounding context.

In the first place, it is worth specifying that Gokhale's period was one of transition. Indians had just started to painfully acknowledge the predatory nature of the British *Raj* and were trying to reconcile with the fact that the European modernising ideas, which had led to a

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386 J. Lele 'Caste, Class and Dominance: Political Mobilization in Maharashtra' in Frankel F. and M. S. A. Rao (eds.) *Dominance and State Power in Modern India. Decline of a Social Order*, vol. II, Delhi University Press 1989, 115-211, here, 149.

387 Gordon explains that the only formulation of Maharashtra Dharma appears in a text that predates Shivaji by four hundred years and, as it is interpreted by the nineteenth and twentieth-century Marathi historians, it is an artefact of the researchers. It is only a detail of the relations between the several castes and does not include any kind of Hindu national programme (Gordon, *The Marathas*, 65-66). Contrary to Ranade, Vishwanath Kashinath Rajwade (1863-1926), deeply influenced by the conservative Chiplunkar, saw Maharashtra dharma as an clear political ideology aimed at protecting the Hindu nation from the Muslim invasion (Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, 105). Instead, in Phule's opinion, there was no continuity between Shivaji and the Peshwas, being the latter oppressive Brahmans that had broken the previous social order and imposed their hegemony (See Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Pune 1976, *passim*).

388 Even if not as explicitly as in Chiplunkar or Rajwade, also in Ranade's humanism, with its stress on historical periods were brahmanical spiritual and political dominance was very strong, Brahmans were given a central position. On Ranade there are no recent works. For his life and thought see Ramabai Ranade, Ranade, His wife's Reminiscences, Government of India, Publications Division, New Delhi 1963, *passim*; D.R. Jagirdar, Mahadeo Govind Ranade, Government of India, Publications Division, New Delhi 1971, *passim;* Richard P. Tucker*, Ranade and the Roots of Indian Nationalism,* University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1972, *passim.*

389 See Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, on the Shivaji Festival, 158-66. This was equally against the cultural revolt advocated by Phule and the Ranade's pluralistic national vision.

complex process of cultural induction, did not find application in the vision of the colonial state. The trust in the benevolence of the British domination could not be guaranteed, unless the foreign rulers started lending an ear to Indians's grievances. It has already been shown how the responses to the British *Raj* were diverse and complex and how any watertight category is not self-explanatory, much less satisfying. *Lato sensu,* we have identified three different responses to the colonial rule: the traditionalist approach, which rejected en bloc all that was Western; the revivalist approach, that idealised the past and regarded it as better than the present: religion was rational and society had been historically fairer[390]; utlimately, the approach of the liberals who did not embrace either of the two previous perspectives: their standpoints varied, ranging from conservative postures to uncompromising rationalism. These categories are conventionally helpful only with the caveat that in such fluid context, clear-cut definitions of the ideologies of the members of the Indian intelligentsia cannot be readily used. Since there were many contradictions and ambivalences in the intellectual and political mindset of the individuals of this period, it is problematic to connote them as definitely orthodox, progressive, or conservative. Their values, principles, and ideas often encroached upon one another. Additionally, it must be taken into account that homogenising explanations and simplifications are often legacy of the colonial historiography, either by-product of its political purposes or of its lack of interpretation instruments, and hence misleading.

Secondly, liberalism was a seminal informing element in Gokhale's worldview. In the Indian colonial sphere, British liberalism turned into a different political philosophy and became Indian. It was sectioned and underwent a profound probing so that individualism could be combined with more equality and social justice, both within Indian society and vis-à-vis the British coloniser. Indian liberalism altogether served the twofold purpose to fight the British Empire using the latter's intellectual and ideological weapons and to challenge the reinforcement of social and economic inequalities carried out in the name of nationalism. To keep this into account helps the researcher not make the mistake to look at Indian nationalism only in a 'coloniser vis-à-vis colonised' perspective, but to attentively look into the contradictions inherent in the movement itself.

Modernity, as a consequence of the cultural appropriation of liberalism and other sets of ideas, is another important concept with which Indians had to start dealing with after the encounter with Great Britain. Gokhale, like many other educated Indians, realised that it

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[390] So for example, there were revivalists like Bishnubava Brahmachari that, although looking up to Vedas for moral customs and rituals and maintaining that also directions for social reform could be found there, were also interested in the emancipation of women (Ganachari, *Agarkar*, 21).

was the achievement of modernity in the course of its history that had led to English superiority in terms of power of organisation, patriotism and capacity for government[391]. India had to appropriate those elements that had allowed the advancement of the European nations to set in motion a radical transformation of society. The predominance of the 'West' was not static nor unchangeable, something corroborated by the rise of Japan[392]. Thanks to a receptive approach towards a modern and scientific Weltanschauung, a new vision of life for the individual could be embraced and a humane, democratic and secular society could be reached through the instrumentality of the British rule. For this reason, in Gokhale's opinion, the consolidation of the colonial state over India was one of the most relevant phenomena of modern times. It was exactly the function of bridge of the colonial domination that made the liberals cautious in attacking the British *Raj*.

A further important aspect of the reception of liberalism is that, through it, Gokhale internalised some of the notions of Orientalism. Ergo, a certain idea of India as spiritual and otherworldly was embraced; India had been stationary for many centuries; 'East' and 'West' were perceived as essentially opposed in the course of history. Yet, a past characterised by backwardness and obscurity was not an insurmountable obstacle for the building of the Indian nation, which had to be realised by looking forward, towards a better future. What could stall the national project were other, more dangerous, stereotypes, which Gokhale, in fact, rejected. Among these, there were for example the perception of Hindus and Muslims as belonging to different, incompatible civilisations or having different race characteristics. So, while fighting for Indian unity, Gokhale had to defy these prejudices, often misused by certain nationalists to achieve leadership and political mobilisation.

By and large, then, liberalism was important at different levels. For the transformation of society in terms of a new balance between individual and community; for the conceptualisation of the nation, envisioned as including all the people inhabiting the Indian territory unified by the British *Raj* and moving along the line of progress; for imagining India as separate and opposed to the 'West'; and finally to delineate a concrete state project that had to rest on a constitutional political system inspired by the British liberal tradition and that would gradually represent the Indian people, irrespective of their cultural differences.

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[391] See Gokhale's fascinating "East and West in India", paper read at the Universal Races Congress held in London, July 1912, *Speeches and Writings of Gokhale*, Vol. 2, 380-88, here 381.
[392] Gokhale, "East and West in India", 383.

Ultimately, another significant point to clarify is that Gokhale was not part of the Indian elite. As a matter of fact, Gokhale came from an impoverished background. His father had to abandon his studies because of paucity of economical means and accepted a petty job position in a village. Gokhale could pursue his education only thanks to the brother's willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of Gopal Krishna's education. In those years, Gokhale lived in such poverty that, in order to save some money, he had to read under the light of a street lamp[393]. If Gokhale was privileged, he was such only in virtue of the awareness of his family, who gave him the best English education: being Chitpavan Brahmans, they belonged to a caste group that in the past had achieved religious, social, and political clout thanks to their literacy[394]. Thus, it was not difficult for them to recognise the invaluable significance of education as a means of elevation. Gokhale, then, could become influential in the Indian colonial situation thanks to the intellectual instruments that he achieved in the top educational institutions in Western India, namely the Deccan College in Poona and the Elphinstone College in Bombay. It was here that Gokhale became familiar with new sets of ideas and started becoming familiar with the innovations introduced by the Western coloniser and originally interpreting them. This form of interaction with the European element is what shaped India and, in this sense, the educated classes had a seminal social function, although having no power, nor political responsibility. In playing this role, they were advantaged by the free power of criticism, that, despite the systematic attempts of the colonial government to restrict it, was a constant characteristic of the period, embodied in the powerful instrument of the press. Liberty of communication had become for the Indian intelligentsia a 'political Doctrine'[395].

In trying to unfold the narrative I will not dwell on Gokhale's biography. I will just consider such aspects as those that played a crucial role in moulding his thought[396]. As far as the idea of the nation is concerned, particularly significant issues such as education, amelioration of society, discrimination, civil rights, Hindu and Muslim relationships, and the role of history will be dealt with.

In the course of my research, I have consulted many primary sources. Yet, Gokhale's private papers (*Gokhale Papers*, National Archives of India, New Delhi) and Gokhale's

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393 T.K. Shahani, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale. A Historical Biography*, RK Mody, 1929, 29-33.

394 Yet, Gokhale, like Tilak, was married by the family to a ten year-old girl from the same caste when he was only fifteen year-old.

395 Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, 167.

396 I have already indicated Nanda, B.R. Nanda, *Gokhale. The Indian Moderates and the British Raj* (First published 1977), published more recently in *Three Statesmen. Gokhale, Gandhi and Nehru*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi 2004 as the best Gokhale's biography.

Speeches and Writings[397] have certainly been the most helpful. Gokhale's private papers are useful instruments to see Indian politics from a backstage perspective. It is interesting to see how certain clashes between Indian political figures were not brought to the political fore by Gokhale in order to keep the credibility of Congress intact and not to leave it vulnerable to the British attacks. Moreover, among the recipients of Gokhale's correspondence, along all the span of his life, there were several British individuals that were more or less linked to the all-India political party: their advice was highly reputed by the Indian politician, who never adopted an anti-British posture. That Gokhale acquired a huge visibility and became a 'public men' far beyond India and Great Britain borders is evinced by the numerous letters that he received from Indian individuals and organisations scattered throughout the space of the Empire that appealed to Gokhale in order to find in him a supporter of their battles. These - of which the most important is of course the battle for Indian rights in South Africa - generally revolved around questions of citizen rights in the Empire and are evidence of the fact that to look at Gokhale only from the angle of the nation cannot suffice. There was a continuous interaction between 'centre' and 'periphery', but also between nation and Empire, between 'periphery' and 'periphery' and one influenced somehow the other. It is also worthy of mention the fact that the 'man' Gokhale as he appears from his private correspondence was, especially in the second part of his life - that is when he was elected to the Imperial Legislative Council as non-official member - influenced by the religious teachings of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and the Ramakrishna Mission. Yet, this did not have an effect on the 'politician' Gokhale, who kept his secular vision of the nation.

The *Speeches and Writings*, though, constitute the most important documents in terms of nation-making, since it is exclusively through public addresses that a certain idea of the nation can be popularised and legitimised. In fact, a conceptualisation of the nation that remains limited to the private sphere has no purpose: it has no political relevance, no power; it is a mere intellectual exercise. The collection includes speeches in English and English translations of speeches in Marathi or Hindi, directed to different kinds of audiences, from the members of the Imperial Legislative Council, to Indian students and British organisations interested in the Indian cause. Also Gokhale's most important writings, such as the written evidences for several commissions of which Gokhale was member in order to investigate political or economical issues, can be found among the volumes. What appears especially from the Budget Speeches, apart from the wonderful

[397] I have used the latest version, that is the one published in the 1960s.

capacity of mastering the English language that recurs in the entire work, is that Gokhale's arguments were always based on reason and accurate statistics, never aimed at rousing irrational passions. This was mainly due to the training from which, since 1887, Gokhale benefited under Ranade in questions of revenue, finance, and general administration. In his speeches in the Imperial Legislative Council, Gokhale showed how indian economic problems had to be considered and looked at from the economically unprivileged classes point of view. He understood the importance of giving protection to the cultivator, of providing free and compulsory education to the children employed in the indian factories, of liberating the destitute form the excessively burdening taxes. Moreover, he proved how poverty in India was man-made and not an innate characteristic of India. If the British had brought the invaluable Pax Britannica, their domination was also responsible for the plight of the poverty-stricken masses.

Engaged in Social Reform

With these current themes Gokhale dealt, since the beginning of his public life in Pune, in the English section of the *Sudharak*[398], the Anglo-Marathi weekly that Agarkar founded in 1888 when he dissociated from Tilak because of their incompatible views on social issues[399]. In the articles of the weekly it is possible to discern a young Gokhale's views on many issues. Also the ascendancy of Agarkar's agnosticism can be noticed.

Gokhale had reached a certain degree of intimacy with both Tilak and Agarkar during his teaching years in Pune at the New English School, which was created by the two men[400]. These, together with Ranade and Naoroji, were surrounded by an aura of myth and public respect that did not leave Gokhale indifferent. Yet, thanks to his apprenticeship at Ranade's feet and in virtue of the conservative standpoint that Tilak had in respect of social reform - a standpoint that was at the antipodes of Ranade's attitude - Gokhale increasingly leaned towards Agarkar, with whom he collaborated until 1895, when the latter

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[398] In the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, in New Delhi, only the issues from the 30 May 1892 to September 1895 are kept. Even in Pune, where I have visited all the main libraries and archives, I could not find further issues.

[399] According to Shahani, the differences between Tilak and Agarkar emerged in 1882-83 when the two, imprisoned on a charge of sedition, were forced to share the same room for a few months and realised their 'impassable gulf in thought' (Shahani, *Gokhale*, 60).

[400] The awareness that only a minority was touched by the benefits of the British education began to spread and this is why Agarkar, Tilak and Chiplunkar decided to start the New English School, which was animated by a missionary spirit and was competitive compared to the government institutions because the fees was much lower. It was a success and the founders had to create the Deccan Education society in order to administer the New English School and in order to found new schools in the country.

died precociously. The disenchantment towards the *rashtravadis* came after the controversy over the Age of Consent Bill[401] that aimed at raising the age for consummation of marriage from ten to twelve years. Mating with a girl below that age was equivalent to rape. Although the government measure was just cosmetic and did not really ameliorate the plight of girls, it roused a terrible wave of protest by the conservative sections of Indian society that saw it as a serious offence to the Hindu wives and an intolerable interference in Hindu religious matters. The Bill became the terrain on which Tilak and his party confronted the reformers, among whom there was also Gokhale. The reformers organised a meeting to sensitise the people on the need to support to bill, but it was interrupted by a group of local rowdy students, supporters of Tilak. The episode made Gokhale take a more decisive stand towards Tilak and his acolytes:

> "The conduct of 'leading men' of Poona which culminated in the disgraceful rowdyism of Wednesday last had fairly sickened me. It has exercised a deciding influence on my wavering mind and I am now most exceedingly anxious to be relieved of the necessity of keeping up any kind of connection with them (…). I am longing for the time when I shall have nothing to do directly with these people"[402].

Gokhale started working at the New English School in 1886, where he taught English language and literature. When the following year the school developed into what would become the prestigious Fergusson College, Gokhale started lecturing also in History and Economics. Shahani, who was a student at the college when Gokhale was assistant master, wrote in his teacher's biography that among the books adopted there were Burke's *Reflections*, from which Gokhale dwelled especially on the speeches on American taxation and conciliation; the trial of Warren Hastings; John Bright's speeches; Milton's *Paradise Lost*; Macaulay's history of England: Southey's *Life of Nelson* and other works that made the would-be Congress leader familiar with the history of the colonisers and with the first British thinkers[403].

In 1887, as previously mentioned, Gokhale started his collaboration with Ranade. Ranade's prominent political programme was to raise the position of the Indian people

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[401] It was a Parsi journalist, Behramji Merwanji Malabari (1853-1912) that agitated for the abolition of infant marriage.
[402] Letter from Gokhale to G.V. Joshi, 3 March 1891, *Gokhale Papers* (NAI).
[403] Shahani, *Gokhale*, 53-54.

under the British *Raj* and in order to do so, the Government of India and the British Parliament needed to be made aware of the views of the people. It was the task of the representatives of the people - who were actually self-appointed since there was not franchise by which the masses could choose them - to fill the void between the government and the common man and to strive in the diligent application and investigation of those subjects which they meant to agitate. In these years, Gokhale was engaged in writing articles for several organs and compiling petitions and memorials for the government, especially on the behalf of the Poona Sarvajanika Sabha, the 'mother of the Indian National Congress'.

It was particularly during the meeting of the PSS that Gokhale and the young men that gathered around the leading figure of Ranade discussed about relevant questions on society and politics. During these formal meetings, the members drew petitions and appeals, often after having carried out thorough investigations among the people in order to appreciate the responses and effects that certain policies had on the masses. But apart from institutional meetings, the Sabha Hall was a space where every evening animated discourses of an informal character took place. All possible subjects likely to engage the attention of the educated men were dealt with. The history and the political philosophy of the West were read and discussed and their possible relevance and application in the conditions of India were thoughtfully examined. The presence of a set of circumstances peculiar to India and vastly different from that of the European countries was prominently upheld by Ranade in the propagations of his views. Economic questions and the feasibility of reviving Indian industry on modern scientific lines were freely discussed; and perhaps no other subject kindled more interest than the poverty of India[404]. It is here that Gokhale became familiar with Ranade's thought and from the foundations acquired from the exchange with his *guru* he elaborated his own views. It is here that Gokhale could also benefit from the scholarly advice of Ranade's friend and collaborators expert on economic issues, Ganesh Vyankatesh Joshi, with whom he kept a constant friendly and professional relationship, mainly through correspondence.

Nonetheless, in 1896, the PSS fell under the control of Tilak and his supporters, who wanted to seize public institutions after having faced the defeat in the Age of Consent Bill, eventually passed in 1892. The Reformers created another body, the Deccan Sabha, whose meetings were held at Ranade's house. The Sabha, proclaiming the 'spirit of liberalism implied in freedom from caste, creed and regional prejudices and a steady

[404] Shahani, *Gokhale*, 68.

devotion to all that seek to do justice between man and man'[405], was established in 1896 in order to counter the famine broke out the same year. Its members, among whom there was also Gokhale, did not hesitate to coordinate and cooperate with the Bombay Government in order to carry out measures to provide relief to the people affected by deprivation. Yet, the Deccan Sabha was systematically attacked by Tilak, who faced its competition by denigrating its members as having 'no legs of their own to stand on the political platform'[406]. In Gokhale's words, the aim of the PSS in Tilak's control was 'to drive out of public life all workers who sympathise with the cause of social reform by discrediting them with the masses by all manner of means'[407].

From this vibrant period in the PSS and from the closeness to the great reformer thinkers of the time, Gokhale inherited the capability to look at any matters from a rational and open-minded standpoint; he embraced the conviction that the colonial state was a pivotal agent for changes in society. State intervention was not necessarily an evil. Yet, the colonial state could be a key actor in bringing qualitative changes in Indian society and state. It could be helpful to take advantage of its powerful agency. As Ranade explained, "the state in its collective capacity represents the power, the wisdom, the mercy and charity, of its best citizens"[408].

Moreover, there was no inherent contradiction between national and rational spirit. If Ranade accepted the fact that in the past India had often been moved by blind religious prejudices, it was now time to look ahead. A deeply religious man, Ranade did not hesitate to reject fatalism, superstition, and credulity. Overcoming such degrading attitudes was the

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[405] The Deccan Sabha Circular dated 4 November 1896, quoted in Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 85.

[406] "The attack on the Poona Sarvajanika Sabha', *The Mahratta*, 22 November 1896, quoted in Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 85.

[407] Gokhale to Naoroji, 3 September 1896, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI. Not bearing the influence that Ranade wielded in political matters, Tilak thought he might strike at the root of Ranade's influence and take the PSS from his hands. In a latter to G.V. Joshi, Gokhale said that "they [Tilak and his group] gained their object by introducing into the Sabha, on the day of the annual meeting, a large number of new members who practically turned out the old man raging committee and pointed a new one, composed for the most part of men who simply hate Mr. Ranade for his opinions in social and religious matters, and who are unable to understand - and who have never cared to take interest in politics. They further appointed an Assistant Secretary, who, during the days of the Consent Act agitation, had gone to the length of trying to get hold of some draft or other in Mr. Ranade's hand and forward it to the Government and this put the Government in possession of positive evidence of Mr. Ranade's doing the work of the Sabha" (Gokhale to G.V. Joshi, 8 February 1896, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI). Gokhale was so much affected by the all story that he wanted to be relieved of all public responsibilities and lead an entirely retired life (*Ibidem*). Tilak's imprudence in managing the activities of the PSS led to a ban from the Government just after twelve months (Gokhale to Besant, 5 January 1915, *Servants of India Society Papers*, NMML).

[408] M.G. Ranade, *Religious and Social Reform*, Bombay 1902, 103.

necessary step towards social evolution and regeneration, an indispensable, though slow, process that could afford India the possibility to achieve progress and internal freedom, according to its own peculiarity and historical experience:

> "Our European critics are more wise in their generation and some of the wisest among them have demonstrated to their own satisfaction that all oriental races have had their day and that nothing is now left to them but to vegetate and die, and make way for their betters political elevation and social emancipation, religious of spiritual enlightenment - these gifts have not been and will never be, according to their philosophers vouchsafed anymore to the Indian races. (…) [H]appily for us these prophecies are not true and what is more it is in our power to falsify them. (...) If indeed history and science both declared against us, we might find necessary to pause. But the history of this great country is but a fairy tale, if it has not illustrated how each invasion from aboard has tended to serve as a discipline of the chosen race and led to the gradual development of the nation to a higher ideal of not of factual facts at least of potential capabilities. The nation has never been depressed beyond hope of recovery but after a temporary submerging under the floods of foreign influences, has reared up its head - *absorbing all that is best in the alien civilisation and polity and religions*. (...) [W]hat is it, some of you ask, that you require of us to do in this work of internal freedom? I would reply the evolution that we should seek is a change from constraint to freedom - constraint imposed by our own weaker nature over the freedom of our higher powers. It is a change from credulity to faith, from credulity which behoves without grounds to faith which builds itself a firm foundation (...) from status to contract, from authority to reason, from organised to unorganised life, from bigotry to toleration, from blind fatalism to a sense of human dignity. This is what I understand by social evolution, both for individualism and societies in this country"[409].

The egalitarian and humanitarian message of the saint-poets of the Bhakti tradition, which, as seen, Ranade rightly saw as a syncretic experiment that braided Hinduism and Islam and denied caste belonging as an indicator of spiritual progress, could contribute to

[409] "Social Evolution", speech held by Ranade at the sixth National Social Conference in Allahabad in 1892, *Sudharak*, 16 October 1893. Italic mine.

create a universal spirit that transcended religious differences and rejected caste restrictions. The Shastras were meaningful for their spirit, and not to be taken to the letter. Only an internal evolution guided by reason and self-conscience, which did not ignore Indian past and tradition, could lead to an amelioration of Indian society that followed an autonomous pattern[410].

Gokhale became thus convinced of the fact that religious injunctions had to be turned into civil restraints which could be more conducive to change, progress, and adaptation to the new spirit of the time. Yet, this development, he recognised, was problematic. Gokhale did not regard religion *per se* as a divisive factor. On the contrary, as he had learnt from his master, there was a universal spirit that transcended all religions. But when religion crystallised into a tradition that was resilient to social transformation, that tradition had to be overcome for the sake of the common good and individual's dignity. The different religious communities of India had to work together in order to achieve the objectives for the benefit of the whole nation[411]. The Hindu-Muslim controversy - at the time the term communalism had not gained ground yet - was one of the biggest concerns of Gokhale, the others being compulsory education as the bedrock for lasting national progress and the future of the Servants of India Society, founded in 1905, and embodying the dreams and devotion for the Indian nation.

Unfortunately, though, we have seen how there were forces working in opposite direction and how the need of self-preservation created new social tensions. A secular, liberal, and rational approach to Indian problems was not considered appropriate for India. That this made social reform even more problematic had been quite clear to Gokhale since the beginning of his activities among the reformers. As the Poona situation clearly showed,

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[410] According to G.V. Joshi, Ranade's close friend, "Ranade's was a lofty patriotism, not merely a nationalist's narrow-minded zeal for his country's good, and had its roots deep down in his religious convictions. He had an unflinching faith in the high destiny of India (…). As a student of history he regarded India as a nation specially marked out by Providence for the leadership of the world's progress in its highest passes. Otherwise Indian history had no intelligible meaning.. Norther nation on earth has been having such a prolonged course of training and discipline (…). His firm conviction - it was a religious conviction - was that India was emphatically the 'Land of Promise' and that we were God's 'elect' - the chosen people - under training and discipline during long centuries for the high function of guiding and leading the world on the final goal" (G.V. Joshi to Gokhale, 25 July 1901, *Servants of India Society Papers*, NMML). Gokhale did not agree, because he believed that the source of his activities was secular. In fact, for some years "Mr. Ranade was an agnostic and though he soon emerged from that stage, his interest in public questions and his patriotic activities were as earnest and devoted during his agnostic day as later. This, is my humble opinion, supports my interpretation of his life's work more than yours" (From Gokhale to Joshi, 5 March 1906, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI).

[411] "The Hindu-Mohamadan Question", Gokhale's speech at the Deccan Sabha in Marathi, 11 July 1909, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 308.

political and social causes could be aporetic. The elevation of the woman's condition, for instance, resulted particular sensitive in Indian patriarchic society:

> "Let us not content ourselves with only attending the national congresses and the provincial conferences like the holiday patriots we are said to be, but for our own well-being and for doing to others what we expect others to do towards us, endeavour with pure hearts and clear consciences to do what we can for the proper elevation of our womankind and assigning her her just position in human society. (…) [H]ere we have to fight not with the intelligent rulers from whom we demand rights and claim privileges, but we have to deal with men, who have for ages enjoyed the sweets of tyranny, and are not to part with any of their real or supposed rights, and their so-called natural leaders who, instead of trying to disabuse them of their ideas do all they can to perpetrate the error only for the gain of cheap notoriety [clear reference to Tilak]. Let us awaken those who are apathetic and neutral, and enlisting their sympathies on the side of truth and justice, secure an addition to the despairing band of reformers. Or political activities meet with less opposition only because they entail no self sacrifice, while that constitutes the chief title to be enrolled as a real social reformer. The battle of social reform had further to be waged against man's organised appetites and hence the necessity for greater struggle"[412].

The reformers in Poona had made much effort to enforce widow re-marriage, seeing that as a consequence of the institution of child marriage, something which also hindered women's education. Ranade and Lokahitawadi had arranged the first widow re-marriage in 1896, encountering the scathing criticism of the anti-reformers and the threat of excommunication from the orthodox. Tilak compared Rakmabai, a woman from Pune who forcefully advocated education for women and denounced the lot which they had to bear, with thieves, adulteresses and murderers. Like criminals, similar women had to be punished[413]. It is quite clear that, apart from the willingness to defend 'orthodoxy', such positions were in favour of keeping certain strata of society in their obscurity, so that they could be more readily exploited. On the contrary, Gokhale had a very progressive position about women and supported their empowerment during all his political career. As early as

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[412] "Hindu society and reform", *Sudharak*, 16 October 1893.
[413] "The Law for the Restitution of Conjugal Rights. As it stands and Should be Amended", *The Mahratta*, 12 June 1887.

in 1897, he spoke in London about female education in India. In Gokhale's view, the need of education for women was even more urgent due to the fact that rigid and bigot religious beliefs affected much more women than men, being shut out from all other intellectual pursuits, making their lives stationary and difficult to keep the pace of the civilised world. Also Gokhale held child marriage as the main responsible for the degraded condition of women. It set in motion a vicious circle, as it was not possible to eradicate the inhumane practice of child marriage without the spread of education, but a wide diffusion of education was not feasible as long as child marriage persisted. The situation was slightly better among the Brahmins of Bengal, the Parsees and the Native Christians, whereas it was appalling for the whole of the Mahomedan community and the vast bulk of the Hindu one[414]. Only education could emancipate them from superstition and ignorance. He said:

> "It is obvious that, under the circumstances, a wide diffusion of education, with all its solvent influences, among the women of India, is the only means of emancipating their minds from this degrading thraldom to ideas inherited through a long past and that such emancipation will not only restore our women to the honoured position which they at one time occupied in India, but will also facilitate m ore than anything else, our assimilation of those elements of Western civilisation without which all thoughts of India's regeneration are mere idle dreams"[415].

In 1912, namely almost at the end of his life, in supporting the Special Marriage Bill[416], Gokhale maintained that:

> "It is quite true, as we have seen from opinions expressed both in this Council and outside, that the Bill represents ideas which are in advance of the views of the bulk of the Hindu and Muhammadan communities today; but I am quite sure that with the spread of higher education among indian women, with late marriages coming more and more into vogue - and late marriages must lead to choice marriages, i.e. to free choice by the marrying parties - with these things coming with the dignity of the individual freedom

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[414] "Female Education in India", Educational Congress, London 1897, *Speeches and Writings,* Vol. 2, 178-79.
[415] "Female Education in India", 178.
[416] This had been advanced by Bhupendranath Basu in the Imperial Legislature. It aimed at revising the Hindu Marriage Act of 1872 and made the institution of marriage from a sacrament to a civil contract.

> realised better and better, and last, but not least, with the steady fusion of different creeds and different races, which is bound to take place under the stress of our growing nationality (…). It is quite true that a very large majority of our countrymen are strongly against the Bill. At the same time even the strongest opponent of the Bill cannot deny that there is a very influential and enlightened minority in support of the Bill"[417].

A speech on the 'depressed classes'[418] is also useful to understand that, in Gokhale's envisioned nation, neither progress nor freedom were achievable without social equality. For this reason, the conditions of the depressed classes had to be improved with utmost commitment of every and each individual not only on grounds of humanity, but also in terms of national interests. Both Gokhale and Ranade perceived the appalling inhuman treatment of low caste Indians by higher caste Indians as worse than the treatment reserved to 'coloured' immigrants in the white colonies. In front of the Dharwar Social Conference Gokhale delivered a speech that is worth quoting at length:

> "The condition of the low castes - it is painful to call them low castes is not only unsatisfactory, it is so deeply deplorable that it constitutes a grave blot on our social arrangements; and further the attitude of our educated men towards this class is profoundly painful and humiliating (…). I think that all fair-mined persons will have to admit that it is absolutely monstrous that a class of human beings with bodies similar to our own, with brains that can think and with hearts that can feel, should be perpetually condemned to a low life of utter wretchedness, servitude and mental and moral degradation and that permanent barriers should be placed in their ways so that it should be impossible for them ever to overcome them and improve their lot, this is deeply revolving to our sense of justice (…) We may touch a cat, we may touch a dog, we may touch any other animal, but the touch of these human beings is pollution! (…) When everyone was expressing himself in indignant terms about the treatment that our countrymen were receiving in South Africa, Mr Ranade (during one of his speeches in occasion of Gandhi's visit from South Africa) came forward to ask of we had no sins of our own to answer for in that direction (…). Mr Ranade very justly asked whether it was

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[417] "Special Marriage Bill", 26 February 1912, Imperial Legislative Council, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 264-65.
[418] This is how the British *Raj* had defined the outcaste and low-caste people.

for those who tolerated such disgraceful oppression and injustice in their own country to indulge in all that denunciation of the people of South Africa"[419].

Gokhale rebuffed any cultural-historical justification of the discrimination prescribed by the institution of caste:

"It is sometimes urged that if we have our castes, the people in the West have their classes, and after all, there is not much differences between the two. A little reflection will, however, show that the analogy is quite fallacious. The classes of the West are a perfectly elastic institution, and not rigid or cast-iron like our castes"[420]. (…).

If castes were said to be eminently useful for the preservation of society, they were utterly unsuited for purposes of progress. In fact, "modern civilisation has accepted greater equality for all as its watchword, as against privilege and exclusiveness, which were the root-ideas of the old world"[421]. Therefore, the elevation of the depressed classes was a question of justice, humanity and national interest. The work ahead would be hard and demanding strenuous effort, but it was the higher and holier duty, for which especially the young educated men of the nation had to struggle:

"How can we possibly realise our national aspirations, how can our country ever hope to take her place among the nations of the world, if we allow large number of our countrymen to remain sunk in ignorance, barbarism or degradation. Unless these men are gradually raised to a higher level, morally and intellectually, how can they possibly understand our thoughts or share our hopes or co-operate with us in our efforts? Can you not realise that so far as the work of national elevation is concerned, the energy, which these classes might be expected to represent, is simply unavailable to us? I understand that that great thinker and observer - Swami Vivekananda - held this view very strongly. I think that there is not much hope for us as a nation unless the help of all classes, including those that are known as low castes, is forthcoming for the work that lies before us. Moreover, is it, I may ask, consistent with our own self-respect that these men should be kept out of our

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[419] "The Elevation of the Depressed Classes", Dharwar Social Conference, 27 April 1903, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 3, 260-61.
[420] "The Elevation of the Depressed Classes", 261.
[421] "The Elevation of the Depressed Classes", 263.

> houses and shut out from all social intercourse as long as they remain within the pale of Hinduism, whereas the moment they put on a coat and a hat and a pair of trousers and call themselves Christians, we are prepared to shake hands with them and look upon then as quite respectable?"[422]

Then, it was a matter of social evolution, without which the material and moral elevation of the nation could not be attainable. How could the inhabitants of India become and *feel* Indians if they were continuously reminded that they were second-class individuals?

Even though Gokhale preferred to pursue a political career within the Congress and to fight for the political advancement of the country, he never abandoned completely his battles to reform Indian society. So, if, on the one hand, his commitment to constitutional methods qualifies him a moderate, yet, on the other hand, this category does not explain his advanced and powerful stand in favour of the disadvantaged sections of the nation. For this reason, in 1905, Gokhale founded the Servants of India Society in order to put in practice the ideals that he wanted to see realised in the nation in the making. It aimed at building up the future of the Indian nation by propagating social and political ideas inspired by liberalism. It was also aimed at compensating the loss of influence that the Congress was undergoing, affected by apathy and lack of enthusiasm. According to Gokhale, what India needed was the energy of young educated men, sort of national missionaries, who could renounce their material interests and dedicate themselves to the secular cause of the nation, as the *sanyasins* did in the service of God[423].

That preamble of the constitution of the society was a confession of Gokhale's political faith[424]. There we find clearly formulated his idea of the nation:

> "A stage has been reached in the political education and national advancement of the Indian people, when, for further progress, the devoted labours of a specially trained agency applying itself to the task in a true missionary spirit, are required (…). The growth, during the last fifty years, of a

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[422] "The Elevation of the Depressed Classes", 262.

[423] Already in 1903, while urging the elevation of low castes, Gokhale had asked: "Cannot a few men - five per cent, four per cent, three, two, even one per cent - of hundreds and hundreds of graduates that the University turns out every year, take it upon themselves to dedicate their lives to this sacred work of the elevation of low castes? My appeal is not to the old or the middle-aged - the grooves of their lives are fixed - but I think I may well address such an appeal to the young members of our community (…). What the country needs most at the present moment is a spirit of self-sacrifice on the part of our educated young men" ("The elevation of the Depressed Class", 262).

[424] Nanda, *Gokhale*, 171.

> feeling of common nationality, based upon common tradition, common disabilities and common hopes and aspirations, has been most striking. The fact that we are Indians first, and Hindoos, Mahomedans, Parsees and Christians afterwards, is being realised in a steadily increasing measure, and the idea of a united and renovated India, marching onwards to a place among the nations of the world worthy of her great past, is no longer a mere idle dream of a few imaginative minds, but is the definitely accepted creed of those who form the brain of the community – the educated classes of the country […]. The results achieved so far are undoubtedly most gratifying, but they only mean that the jungle has been cleared and the foundations laid. The great work of rearing the superstructure has yet to be taken in hand, and the situation demands, on the part of the workers, devotion and sacrifices proportionate to the magnitude of the task […]. Public life must be spiritualised. Love of country must so fill the heart that all else shall appear as of little moment by its side. A fervent patriotism which rejoices at every opportunity of sacrifice for the motherland, a dauntless heart which refuses to be turned back from its object by difficulty or danger, a deep faith in the purpose Providence that nothing can shake – equipped with these, the worker must start on his mission and reverently seek the joy which comes of spending oneself in the service of one's country."[425]

The Mazzinian tone of 'religious' nationalism is strongly perceivable here. Nationalism was spiritual because the mission of the nation was divine. The nation became the ideal to actuate in the future; from memory of the past it had to be transformed in aspiration, from sentiment to concrete will. In Mazzini's words:

> "Una nazionalità comprende un pensiero comune, un diritto commune, un fine comune: questi ne sono gli elementi essenziali (…). Dove gli uomini non riconoscono un principio comune, accettandolo in tutte le sue conseguenze, dove non è identità d'intento per tutti, non esiste Nazione, ma folla ed aggregazione fortuita, che una prima crisi basta a risolvere"[426].

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[425] "Servants of India Society", *Speeches of Gopal Krishna Gokhale* (edited by G.A. Natesan), Natesan Pub., Madras 1920, 914-16.
[426] Giovanni Mazzini, *Nazionalità, Qualche idea sopra una costituzione nazionale; Scritti editi ed inediti*, Edizione Nazionale, VI, 125-126, quoted in Chabod, *L'Idea di Nazione*, 71.

The Servants of India[427] had to be inspired by fervent patriotism and serve the cause of the country in a religious spirit, promoting the national interest through constitutional means. They had to be animated by a deep faith, a spirit of selfness service and not to be disheartened by difficulty or danger. The objectives of Gokhale's association, which had its headquarters in Poona[428], as per the constitution were: creating among the people a deep and passionate love of motherland; organising the work of political education and agitation and strengthening the public life of the country; promoting relations of common good-will and cooperation among the different communities; assisting educational movements,

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[427] The first three recruits of the society were G.K. Devadhar, who would become the greatest Marathi social reformer, A.V. Patvardhan and N.A. Dravid. The Servants of India Society had a Jesuitical discipline and was under the authority of the First Member, namely Gokhale. The aspirant members had to take seven vows that prescribed a simple life in the service of the country and undergo five years of special discipline and supervision aimed at building their characters and at internalising the spirit of the organisation. Moreover, as part of their training, the recruits had to tour several months throughout India. That this strict discipline could endanger the freedom of the individual was not ignored by Gokhale: "My difficult for some time was the one to which you have so prominently referred, the danger of individual liberty. But in the end it was thought necessary to run the risk involved in it, as otherwise, there was but small chance, with our disorganised and undisciplined public life, and the want of self-restraint which characterises most of our young men if any really useful work being done by the society" (Gokhale to Krishnaswamy Iyer, date not specified, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI). Wolpert speaks of autocracy of the First members. We found the same judgement in Gordon Milburn, who maintained that the spirit which animated Gokhale was the same of the rules of the Servants of India Society, that is of a society of Jesuits "with Mr Gokhale himself as its virtually autocratic head" (Gordon Milburn, *England and India,* George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London 1918, 22). From the exchange of letters between Gokhale and the members of the Society, though, the autocratic attitude of the First Member cannot be evinced. Rather, what appears from the correspondence is that, due to hierarchy within the Society, some young members complained about the excessive power of the senior members and about the lack of democracy. Abuses and indifference towards the wishes of the junior recruits were reported. Gokhale was aware of the perfectible nature of his creation and was willing to accept changes in the constitution. About the criticism on the internal management of the Society, he wrote: "All this talk of autocracy, inner and outer circles, and so forth shows a spirit which I can only deplore. If members thought more of how they might serve the country and the society and less of what power they personally enjoyed themselves, it would not occur to them to make these complaints. I don't say that the Constitution of the society is perfect; but last year on my return to India, we had a special session, in which all important suggestions were considered and I was given to understand that every one - except Basu - was satisfied with other deliberations. However I see that the sore is still running. Well, the best way to find a remedy - if one can be found, of which I am not sure, - is to ask every member to draft definite amendments to our rules and regulations; they met, if they like, even draft altogether new constitutions (…). I don't mind how radical or even revolutionary the changes are and I certainly don't want any part of the constitution not be regarded as sacrosanct (…). We might then have a special session in December for this one matter alone, at which after stating my view at the beginning of the first meeting, I will leave all decisions to be arrived at in my absence and by a majority of votes. My only object is that the strength of the Society will be built and nothing will give me greater pleasure than that it should be built up with the co-operation of all" (Gokhale to Deva, 10 July 1914, *Servants of India Society Papers*, NMML).

[428] The headquarters of the Servants of India Society are still in Pune, in the same compound of the prestigious Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics.

especially those advocating the education for women and backward classes; spreading industrial and scientific education; elevating the depressed classes[429]. This goals were, in Gokhale's opinion and in accordance with the Congress line, more easily achievable if India remained part of the British Empire. It was a strategic move towards the long-term goal of nation-building. In other words, India would fall apart, balkanised as it was, if it did not benefit, for the necessary span of time, of the political unity brought by the British *Raj.* Apart from being a way to gain, if not benevolence, at least neutrality from the government, the declarations of loyalty to the Raj were sincere, because Gokhale was convinced that peace and order, which only the colonial state could guarantee, were indispensable conditions of 'our mastering the first lessons of the new polity' and fundamental requisites of progress[430].

Nevertheless, despite the acceptance of the British connection 'as ordained in the inscrutable dispensations of Providence for India's good', Gokhale's national association roused suspicion and even hostility among British officials. For example, Lord Curzon did not trust Gokhale's Servants of India Society, because 'you cannot awaken and appeal to the spirit of nationality in India and, at the same time, profess loyal acceptance of British rule'[431]. Unlike for Indians, nation and Empire were not compatible.

By and large, the Servants of India Society was a sort of political academy, which emphasised political culture and intellectual development[432]: when its members were in Poona, they had to attend courses in history, economics, public finance, law and journalism in order to prepare themselves to get in touch with the realities of Indian life[433]. It was very different from the *ashrams* created by Gandhi, where inmates were trained in

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[429] It is worthy of note how industrialists wanted to sway their influence on the Congress and on the organisations close to it. In fact, the great industrialist Ratan Tata, who was, with the Aga Khan (Sir Sultan Muhammed Shah, 1877-1957), the greatest sponsor of the Society wrote to Gokhale that among the purposes mentioned in the pamphlet there was no mention to future efforts to stimulate the industrial development of the country (Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 164), something that was added later on. Also Motilal Nehru, G.A. Natesan, Tej Bahadur Sapru helped raise funds in favour of the society.

[430] V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, *My Master Gokhale. A Selection from the Speeches and Writings of Hon'ble V.S. Srinivasa Sastri*, (T.N. Jagadisan editor), Model Publications, Madras 1946, 54.

[431] Lord Curzon to Lamington, 24 July 1905. *Curzon Papers*, NAI.

[432] Nanda, *Gokhale,* 466.

[433] About the library at the headquarters of the Servants of India Society Gokhale wrote that it had as its central idea "the growth of freedom all over the world. You will find in it an account of all nationalistic and humanitarian movements that have ever been started in any country. There will also be there standard histories of every country in the world. Books bearing on the ancient greatness of the three races inhabiting India at present – the Hindus, the Mahomedans and the Parsees – will also be there" (Gokhale to Krishnaswamy Iyer, 29 September 1906, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI).

ascetic self-restraint and moral discipline, away from modernity. It is worthy of mention what Gandhi thought of Gokhale's Society:

> It is simply an indifferent imitation of the West. (…) What do these 'servants' think of religion? Why should there be large buildings in India? Why should not huts be enough? It is like digging up a mountain to kill a mouse. When will the mission undertaken by Prof. Gokhale end? How much money will it cost? What a superstition that only an M.A. or B.A. could become a 'servant'! It is like the castor-oil plant passing for a mighty tree in a barren land. I do feel that the aims of Phoenix [first ashram established by Gandhi in South Africa in 1904, based on a self-sufficient village economy] as well as the way of life there surpass those of the Society (…). What we are doing here is the real thing, what goes on in Poona is, leaving aside the motive, unreal. The motive is good, but what is being done is bad (…). The work of Mr. Gokhale's 'servants' cannot be regarded as proper. It is likely to add to our slavery. If I tried to turn East into West, I also would sigh like Gokhale and lose heart (…). We do not aspire to improve India; we want to improve ourselves. That alone can be our aspiration, the rest is all false (…). We have to rid ourselves of the fetish of literacy and mundane knowledge"[434].

Not only was there a wide intellectual gulf between Gokhale and Gandhi, but also their worldview was strongly antithetical: in Gokhale's view, the basis of life was material, whereas, in Gandhi's view, it was spiritual. Gokhale, of course, realised that material progress and moral progress had to move forward together: the elevation of the unprivileged, for instance, was certainly a moral issue, but also a material one, because without social equality the would-be nation was destined to fail. Then, moral advancement was not attainable without basic improvements in the 'mundane' field. The spread of education among the masses, was one such improvement. All in all, modernisation had to be morally acceptable. But the modernisation promoted by Gokhale was not, differently from what Gandhi maintained, a mere imitation of the 'West'. Rather, according to Gokhale, the advent of the British in India had brought the two currents of 'Eastern' and 'Western' civilisation in mutual contact, so that the new India could be built on the

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[434] Gandhi to Maganlal Gandhi, 27 January 1910, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 10, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, Navajivan Trust, Ahmedamad 1963, 137-140.

absorption of the best elements of both and placed in the far-reaching path of human progress. 'East' and 'West' could communicate and influence one another.

India: the land of an ancient civilisation

Of course, Gokhale was a men of his time and, as we have mentioned, there are recurring Orientalist themes in his thought. Gokhale internalised the stereotyped image of India as a cultural entity that had been static and dormant for centuries. Refractory for a long time to progress and to the concept of liberty, yet India had woken up after the encounter with England and Western knowledge and was then ready to raise its head:

> "[Indian] people did not develop a love of free institutions; they paid no attention to political questions, and for that they were now paying the penalty. Their religious ideals had been largely responsible for their having been content to live under the rule of foreigners. Their religion taught them that their existence in this world was only a temporary sojourn to qualify them for a better state of things in the next world. Brought up under a teaching like that, it was not surprising that their people had been content to allow the task of government to be undertaken by anyone sufficiently strong to grasp it, provided they were not oppressed too much, and were allowed to have freedom in the exercise of personal and domestic duties. Their great desire, indeed, was to be free to pursue the higher purpose of existence as they understood it. But now they were coming under new influences, for a spirit of nationality had been aroused in India, and it was making steady progress. The more the people came to understand the dignity of free institutions the greater would be their progress in this new direction"[435].

Thus, while accepting some cliches of the Orientalist scholarship, Gokhale elaborated a reaction to the hegemonic historiography on India, mainly epitomised by James Mill's work on British India. Since Gokhale was not an historian, his vision of history is not systematic. Unlike Ranade or other nationalists, he did not wrote any history book. Nevertheless, he also contributed to create a new narrative of history to counter the demeaning historical vision of the British dominators. This appears in several speeches.

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[435] "Indian View of Indian Affairs", Address to the Fabian Society, London, 9 October 1905, *Speeches and Writings,* Vol. 2, 327.

In the first place, what was India for Gokhale? India was a territory, a sacred territory on which Indians had been living for centuries, defined by precise geographical boundaries and characterised by an ancient civilisation. This perception of India came from British historical works on India, but also from more recent Indian ones. It is important to take into account, in fact, that Indian historiography had undergone a very important turning point. Stimulated by the new attention attributed to history by the colonial government in terms of education and, at the same time, willing to show that Indian civilisation was not what the Orientalist paradigm wanted it to be, Indian historians wrote the first histories of India, both in English and in vernacular languages. India was, in the new historiography, the territory under the administration of the British *Raj.* So for example, in the 1850s, Tarincharan Chattopadhyay's and Kedar Nath Datta's *Bharatbarsher Itihas* (History of India, 1859) were published in Bengali. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) emphasised the political significance of history, whose writing was a collective act that could gave rise to a national collective consciousness. Radha Kumodh Mookerjii (1880-1964) and Kashi Prasad Jayaswal (1881-1937) portrayed the evolution of the political system of ancient times and showed that an idea of India *in nuce* could already be found in Ashoka, Chandragupta and Harsha[436]. Also for those scholars that adopted a more scientific approach towards history and utilised the economic method to explore it, such as Naoroji and Dutt just to mention the most illustrious names, India was the space whose population and resources were exploited by the British *Raj*. In the same way, also to Gokhale, India was the land inhabited by an ancient race since centuries. Gokhale attributed to that race a high degree of civilisation, reached 'long before the ancestors of Western nations understood what civilisation was'. It was preposterous to hold that 'because we came under the rule of foreigners, (…) we are like some savage semi-civilised people whom you have subjugated'[437]. That civilisation had found expression in the flourishing of philosophy, literature, sciences and arts. So, India was not only the birth-place of great religions. Yet, India in the past was not known for that love of liberty, the appreciation of free institutions, and the national idea which one finds to be so striking characteristics of the West. Moreover, "the country which was once the cradle and home of a noble religion, a noble philosophy, and science and art of every kind, is at present day steeped in ignorance and superstition and all the moral helplessness which comes of such darkness"[438]. In ancient

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[436] Iggers, Qang, Mukherjee, *A global History of Modern Historiography*, 229-32.
[437] "England's Duty to India'. Speech delivered at the National Liberal Club in London, 15 November 1905, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 340.
[438] "Female Education in India", 177.

India people were learned, knew many languages, were accorded the respect of the community, had an important role in performing rituals, both Vedic and Buddhist. Yet, this prosperous period of contribution to the human progress ended in the eleventh century with the coming of the Muslim invaders: it was the beginning of the age of darkness, the seven centuries of obscurity, from which India had emerged only thanks to its connections with the West[439]:

> "A great Eastern civilisation, stationary for many centuries, is being once again galvanised into life by reason of its coming in contact with a younger and much more vigorous civilisation of the West. The retention of all that is great and noble in our national life, as it has come down to us from the past, and the fullest absorption of what is great and noble in the life of the West, as revealed to us by our connection with England - this is now the work which has to be accomplished before we can once more hold our head high as a nation. How far such an ideal union of the different elements constituting the two civilisations is possible time alone will show".[440]

Gokhale, thus, accepted the periodisation of Indian history based on the one proposed by James Mill and articulated in a Hindu, Muslim, and a British period[441]. But this should not make us believe that Gokhale perceived Hindus and Muslims as belonging to two different and conflicting civilisations. For India, according to Gokhale, was inhabited by three ancient great races, that is to say the Hindus, the Muslims, and the Parsees[442]. Moreover, in Gokhale's open-minded and universalistic view, in addition to retaining "many of those characteristics which once placed us in the van of the world's civilisation – the depth of our

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439 "Female Education in India", 180.
440 "Female Education in India", 178.
441 Michelguglielmo Torri rightly notes that "since Mill's time, the only change has been a cosmetic one: the Hindu period has become the Ancient Period, the Muslim Period has become the Medieval Period, and the British Period has become the Modern Period, whereas for the period after independence the label 'Contemporary Period' is sometimes made use of" (Michelguglielmo Torri, "For a New Periodisation of Indian History", in D.N. Jha (edited by), *The evolution of a Nation. Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial, Essays in Memory of R.S. Sharma*, Manohar, Delhi 2014, 39-60, here 40. It should not surprise us, then, if Gokhale adopted the same periodisation. His main source was Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Civilisation in Ancient India.* In the smaller version of *The Civilization of Ancient India* that I could consult, namely *Civilization of India*, Ballantyne & Hanson, 1901 London (first edition 1900), Dutt did not speak explicitly about that period as a dark age, but held that most of the people were not touched by any change. They continued their lives at the village level and their possibilities of following a certain religion was not precluded.
442 Gokhale to Krishnaswamy, 29 September 1906, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI.

spirituality, our serene outlook on life, our conception of domestic and social duty", India had been enriched by those other peoples that have "come to make their home here [and] have brought their own treasure into the common stock. The India of the future will be compounded of all these elements reinforcing one another"[443].

What Gokhale deeply disliked about the stereotypes of India, apart, of course, from the most denigrating ones, such as those that stigmatised Indians as uncivilised, was the reading of the Indian past only in spiritual terms, whereas India had reached outstanding results in numerous fields of human development. As early as 1894, the young journalist Gokhale scathingly criticised Annie Besant for her new creed, namely Theosophy, and for the way this added to the fallacious idea of other-worldly India, something which was pernicious for a people already blinded by religion:

> "The Hindus are already over-religious, overfond of their past, loving the acquisitions of knowledge, the ease in philosophy and legendary lore so much that it has unnerved them for action in this age of progress and keen competition. It is no secret that they like the persons who play to their feelings with regard to the past and dislike those that try to open their eyes to the task, the Herculean task before hem, in the presents and in the future. Mrs Besant (...) made them idolise her as their guru and talk of her in the highest oriental complimentary style. She speaks of their past and only of he spiritual past and that too in most glowing colours without reference to any other sphere of activity. (...) The class most affected will be the upholders of the old order of things and those that are already the reactionaries in social reform"[444].

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[443] "East and West", 388.

[444] "A strong Current", *Sudharak*, 5 February 1894. In the same article, some booklets on Besant are suggested as further readings (Theosophy exposed or Mrs Besant and her *guru*; Who is Mrs Besant and why has she come to India; I did Past and Present). Unfortunately, I could not find them. It seems, anyway, that in this period, Besant did not have a good reputation. This had nothing to do with the fact that she was British, since it was mainly the liberals that criticised her, given her conservative positions as far as religion was concerned. In fact, the attacks against Besant continued in an other article ("Ideals and Forms"*, Sudharak,* 16 July 1894) in which it is said that she accepted also disputable practises of the Hindu religion, such as the nauch girls, sold and attached to the temples, or the overall concept of the extended family: "it is no use quoting from Manu Smriti to show that in that sage's time the woman had a higher and nobler place in the social hierarchy. In that same book are to be found sentiments diametrically contrary. And the same is the case with our books (..). In it is not what the Shruties or the Smrities contain but it is what you actually find now here that should lead you to form your estimate of persons and things".

To keep emphasising the 'spirituality' of India meant to deny its capability to accept modernity and progress. In Gokhale's vision, then, religion was not the most important element of cultural identity, especially if it was the legitimation for inhumane practices that denied human dignity. Religion had a social significance only as the foundation of private moral and it had therefore to be relegated in the individual sphere. What characterised India was its spirit of adaptation, its cultural cross-fertilisation, and its flexibility in absorbing useful elements and refusing redundant ones. In general, although conscious of the meaningfulness of the revisitation of history to corroborate the nation, Gokhale was convinced that the future held more than the past had yielded.

It was especially the realisation of the despotic and racist nature of the British rule in India that legitimised the revisitation of the Orientalist vision of history, namely the forced-upon image of a changeless and unresisting 'East'. The 'West' could no longer vindicate a moral superiority over India and the 'Eastern' world in general. That traditional view:

> [C]ould not go on forever, and the protest of the Eastern world against it, as evidenced by the steady growth of a feeling of national self-respect in different Eastern lands has now gathered sufficient strength and volume to render its continuance on old lines extremely improbable, if not altogether impossible. The victories of Japan over Russia, the entry of Turkey among constitutionally-governed countries, the awakening of China, the spread of the national movement in India, Persia and Egypt, all point to the necessity of the West revising her conception of the East – revising also the standards by which she has sought in the past to regulate her relations with the East"[445].

The time had come to reset the power relations between 'West' and 'East' 'on more equal terms' and for India to retrieve its centrality on the historical stage, according to that process of rewriting history that commonly runs parallel to the process of nation-building.

Between Nation and Empire

[445]"East and West", 380.

> "I am by birth a Hindu, but for many years it has been the earnest aspiration of my life to work for the advancement of this country only as an Indian"[446].

This is how Gokhale defined himself in 1911, after almost one quarter of a century dedicated to the public of India. After a perusal of his documents, it is difficult to deny that he gave a truthful description of himself. Gokhale never regarded his being Hindu as a relevant factor in terms of political choices. His idea of the nation was clearly inclusive and his nationalism uncompromisingly secular. In a country religiously as diverse as India, the separation between politics and religion was just logical. The nation in the making had to be built on what was a cultural and territorial unity, namely the geographical space administered by the British rule. All the inhabitants of that space, regardless of their religion and caste belonging, were Indians.

For the India of the future, Gokhale advocated a liberal egalitarian society and a united nationality based on citizenship. Political representation was an essential element to create an Indian public sphere and to educate politically the nation: it was a way Indians could work together, side by side, and bind themselves together into a nation by aspiring to their common progress and elevation. The attainment of freedom, although a long process, made by small steps, frequent disappointments and trying failures, was bound to happen.

The nation would not identify itself with a particular culture, but it would be expression of the unity in diversity: all cultural elements, equally legitimate and rooted in the country, would be safeguarded by the state, which had the role of an arbiter. The well-being of India could not be limited to a particular community. For this reason, Gokhale laid great stress on Hindu-Muslim unity: he accepted separate electorates for Muslims, because he thought it was the only way to bring both communities together and win the distrust that the Muslim minority felt toward the Hindu majority.

Yet, besides regarding India as a nation in the making, Gokhale regarded it also as part of the British Empire. He highly reputed the providential connection between England and India and hoped that the latter could be benefitted by the former's guidance in the

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[446] "The council regulations", 24 January 1911, speech by Gokhale in the Imperial Legislative Council, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 76. Gokhale appealed to Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946) not to press for the resolution moved by him in the Imperial Legislative Council in order to appoint a Committee which could consider which changes had to be introduced in the regulations of the Morley-Minto reform as to correct the inequalities in the treatment and concessions of the different communities. According to Gokhale this could create a wider gulf between Hindus and Muslims.

assimilation of those elements of 'Western' civilisation without which Indian regeneration would have been difficult. In Gokhale's opinion, the British people had come to India as the representatives of dynamism and progress and for that reason their rule had been accepted by Indians. In the first stage, British imperialism was noble, in the sense that it "would work for the elevation of all who are included within the Empire"[447]. The benefits were the introduction of a Western type of administrative machinery and the creation of infrastructures of which Indian had taken advantage and which had united the country; the uninterrupted peace and order, for which only the Englishmen stood for 'at present state of things'[448], whereas for a few centuries before the advent of the British the subcontinent had been characterised by an overwhelming chaos; the fair dispensation of justice between Indian and Indian, while 'when it comes to be a matter between Indian and Englishman, it is quite another story'[449]; Western education with freedom of speech and freedom of writing. This, in particular, was crucially consequential for the Indian nation, because it made inevitable that 'the people of India, having been brought up on Western knowledge, would in course of time demand European institutions in the government of the country'[450].

Though, the advantages enjoyed thanks to the contact with England were supposed to be a means to a greater end, and not an end *per se*. They should be aimed at the interests - material and moral - of the people of India[451]. In fact, the educated Indians that started the political work from the platform of the Indian National Congress, while acting 'as interpreters between the rulers and the ruled to explain, on the one hand, to the people the intentions of the government, and to represent, on the other, to the rulers the grievances of the people', claimed the full rights of that British citizenship to which Indians were admitted *de iure*, as per the Parliament Statute of 1833 and the Queen Proclamation of 1858[452]. Nevertheless, the promise that 'there would be no governing caste in that country and that the rule would be one of equality for the two races in that land' was just a 'legal fiction'[453]. British imperialism, in fact, had become narrow, one 'which look[ed] upon the world as though it was made for one race only and which is found in season and out of season of

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[447] "Our political situation", Speech delivered by Gokhale in Madras, 25 July 1904, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 177.
[448] Gokhale to Vamanrao Pathwardhan, 15 May 1908, *Servants of India Society Papers*, NMML.
[449] Speech by Gokhale at the New Reform Club, London, 14 November 1905, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 339.
[450] "England's Duty to England", 342.
[451] "England's Duty to England", 344.
[452] "Our Political Situation", 174.
[453] Speech delivered at the New Reform Club, 333-334.

setting up an image of its own achievements and standing in adoration before it"[454]. This brought about the tendency of repudiating concessions and the following change in the relationships between Great Britain and India. The point was the meaning attached to the word 'Empire'. If it meant inclusion under the British flag, then India was part of the British Empire. On the contrary, if by 'Empire' it was meant ascendancy of race, 'then India was only a possession of the British Empire, and not part and parcel of it'[455].

This situation of over-imposed inferiority demanded that Indians engaged in a political work of the highest character. As a matter of fact, Gokhale maintained that

> "A subject race has as much right and as much reason as, and perhaps more right and more reason, to have politics of its own than the races which are self-governing and dominant. You have to fight against the ascendancy of a dominant class, you have to fight to get admittance into those ranks of power which are at present closed to you"[456].

Gokhale saw Lord Curzon's Viceroyalty (1899-1905) as a dramatic turning point in the attitude towards Indians. To Gokhale, Lord Curzon's rule was comparable only with Aurangzeb's 'despotic' rule: it was the negation of the ideals of liberalism. As a matter of fact, in Lord Curzon's view, liberty was not 'a factor of human progress'[457], at least not for the subject race:

> "Lord Curzon, who dearly loves debating, thought it proper to attack the educated classes in regard to their constant reference to this Proclamation. He said in effect: "You base your claim for equality in the Queen's proclamation. But what does it promise you? It says that you will have equality when you are 'qualified' for it. Now, here we have certain qualifications which can only be attained by heredity or race. Therefore, as you cannot acquire race, you really cannot have equality with Englishmen in India as long as British rule lasts". (…) [L]ook at the unwisdom, the stupendous unwisdom, of the whole thing, telling the people of India that unless they were content to remain permanently a subject race in their own

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454 "Our Political Situation", 177.
455 "An Indian View of Indian Affairs", 328.
456 "Our Political Situation", 177.
457 'Congress Presidential Address', Benares, Decemebr 1905, in *Speeches and Writings of Gokhale*, Vol. 2, 190.

> country, their interests and those of the British rule were not identical. After this, how can any Englishman complain if my countrymen regarded, as they have latterly regarding, your rule in India as maintained, not to promote their interests, but for a selfish purpose?"[458]

The disdain and contempt that British had towards India was justified by the fact that in the past "we [Indians] have shown no disposition to quarrel with despotic forms of government".[459] Yet, the British domination was morally unacceptable. Gokhale explained that:

> "We could put up with it under the Mughals and in the Native states, because it was their form of government. They did not rule us in one way and themselves in another. But it is not your method and you cannot apply it to us without despising us"[460].

Therefore, Curzon's rule denied the liberal principles which, as England had professed, would enable the Indian people to govern themselves according to the higher standards of the West[461]. It represented a radical change of course for the British policy until then pursued in India and embodied the triumph of centralisation and bureaucratisation of the Indian political system. Moreover, it excluded the educated classes, who alone were the real spokesmen and public opinion of the country. In short, it was not a responsible mode of governance, since nobody could be identified with the interests of the Indian people. Gokhale saw in the worsening of the political situation a consequence of the consolidation of the colonial power; the officials, supported by a well-structured and modern apparatus, did not need anymore the approval of the people and could show the real face of their domination[462]. The worst feature of British rule was that racial discrimination had become a systematic phenomenon, something unacceptable from the moral side, because the

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458 Speech delivered at the New Reform Club, 334.
459 Gordon Milburn, *England and India,* 18. See in particular the second chapter (17-22), where the author reports a talk he had with Gokhale.
460 Gordon Milburn, *England and India*, 18.
461 Speech by Gokhale at the New Reform Club, 337.
462 Speech by Gokhale at the New Reform Club, 337-339.

constant ‘atmosphere of inferiority’[463] was ‘steadily destroying our capacity for initiative and dwarfing us as men of action’[464]. But also on the material side, it had resulted in a fearful impoverishment of the people, because India was ‘for members of the dominant race a country where fortunes were to be made to be taken out and spent elsewhere. Thus, to the racial ascendancy of Englishmen, ‘absentee capitalism’ had been added[465].

The reason of all this was a plain absence of coincidence of interests between the Government of India and the people: actually, ‘the real interests of the people [did] not occupy the first place nor the second place nor even the third place on the slate of the Government”[466]. Indians were excluded from the high level of offices; they had no power to affect the position of the Government; they were deprived of their natural right to bear arms to defend themselves; in South Africa their humiliation was even more complete since they were treated outside the pale of civilisation. From the economic standpoint, the situation was disastrous to say the least and made the verdict against British rule even more emphatic. The annual income in India was £2 per head according to official estimates, whereas according to non-official analysis it was only a little more than £1 vis-à-vis the £42 per head in England. Four-fifths of the people depended upon agriculture, but

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[463] “Welby Commission Written Evidence”, 1897, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 1, 488. Few years later, Gokhale experienced in the first person racial discrimination. During his journey to South Africa, he was forced to pay for an entire cabin, usually for two people, because the Company did not want to cause inconvenience to any European who might happen to book his berth in Gokhale’s cabin. Gokhale complained with the Company: “I feel it is strongly unjust that I should be penalised and compelled to pay more than my fare because some Europeans have a prejudice against travelling with Indians. I think your company should give me one berth and then leave it to those who come after me to take the second one or not as they like. Moreover how does anybody know that no Indian or no European who has no objection to travelling with an indian will not apply for a berth now for 5th October? I feel keenly the injustice and indignity involved in the Union Castle Company's demand. It is not the ten extra guineas that matter. Had this indignity not been offered to me, I might myself not have been unwilling to consider whether I should not pay ten extra guineas for the extra comfort of having the exclusive use of the cabin. But the position of the Company that I must pay ten guineas extra, whether I want a whole cabin or not, simply because some Europeans have a prejudice against travelling with Indians, is to my mind most unjust and it involves a principle against which i deem it my duty to enter an emphatic protest” (Gokhale to the Union Castle Company, 29 July 1912, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI).

[464] “Congress Presidential Address”, 203.

[465] “Congress Presidential Address”, 203.

[466] “England’s Duty to India”, 347. “Nearly half the net revenue is eaten up by army charges. Large salaries are paid to English officials and the charge on their account is steadily rising. Nearly one-third of the net revenue is withdrawn from India to be spent in this country for purposes of the Government. Railway extension has taken the precedence of irrigation in the past, because English capitalists are interested in the former. The progress of the people is obviously bound up with the spread of primary education - but how little so far has been done may be seen from the fact that, at the present moment four villages out of five are without a school-house and seven children out of eight are growing up in darkness and all the moral helplessness which comes of such darkness. The present need of the hour at present in India is industrial education, and yet there is not a single decent technical institution the whole country” (Ibidem, 347-48).

that sector had been steadily deteriorating and not given adequate attention by the Government, compared to other sectors such as the railways, that could grant more wealth to England. The masses of India were poverty-stricken and subject also to more frequent famines and plagues, with consequent rising mortality rates. Thus, 'this fearful impoverishment was bound to result from the peculiar character of British rule'[467]. The only solution to such hapless situation was to transform the bureaucratic form of administration along more liberal lines so as to associate the people of the country with that administration[468]. If twenty years earlier, Gokhale had maintained that "[t]he very presence of this or that dominant foreign power in India sufficiently proves the incapacity of Indian peoples for self-government"[469], now he regarded Indians as politically mature and therefore ready for self-government. Also the officials, in theory, admitted the necessity of associating the people with the government of the country. Yet,

> "[T]hey object to admitting only a small proportion of the population to a share in the administration and they ask us to wait till the mass of the people have been qualified by education to take an intelligent part in public affairs!"[470]

Having all this said, it was not surprising that 'things have moved even in dreamy and contemplative India' and that the educated classes ceased to believe that 'the sole aim of British rule in India was the welfare of the Indian people, and that, under that rule, no distinction would be made between Indians and Europeans in the government of the country on grounds of race or creed to colour'[471]. Instead of their professed noble and progressive values, the Englishmen in India had become guardians of a static and conservative order, according to the most rigid tradition of despotic rule, which was epitomised by the bureaucratic system, with its utter contempt for public opinion, its arrogant pretensions to superior wisdom, its reckless disregard of the feelings of the

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[467] "England's Duty to India", 344- 47.
[468] Indians did not ask for democracy at once. The immediate demands were: in the Imperial Legislative Council half of the members must be elected with right to move amendments; in the Provincial Councils Indians should be given the opportunity to influence the financial decisions; three members of the ten of the Secretary of State's Council should be Indians; six Indians of the 670 members of the House of Commons should be Indians so that such representatives could be definitely associate with the body that controlled the whole Empire, while raising India's status and giving firsthand view of things on the colony ("England's Duty to India", 348-349).
[469] "A stale and insipid sermon on conservative India", *Sudharak*, 11 March 1895.
[470] "Self-Government for India", paper read at the East India Association, London, 11 July 1906, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 355.
[471] "Self-Government for India", 350.

people, and its cool preference of colonial interests to those of the governed[472]. They had betrayed the highest principles of British liberal tradition and history. What is interesting, though, is that Gokhale still appealed to those same principles and never took an anti-British stance in order to ride the wave of popular discontent. Rather, he kept on expressing his loyalty to the the British Crown and valuing England's connection with India. The reference to the 'great Proclamation of 1858 on which we take our stand so largely in our constitutional struggle' and to the Queen-Empress's influence in favour of a 'policy of justice and sympathy towards the Indian people'[473] recurs in Gokhale's speeches, even soon after the bitter humiliation of the Partition of Bengal. This is significant because it meant that British rule in India was actually un-British and it was necessary to address the British Parliament and Throne to denounce the bitter exasperation all round that Indians were experiencing.

Hence, the nationalist discourse elaborated by Gokhale was bidirectional. On the one hand, it had to appeal to the British liberals in the Parliament and to the Crown in order to make sure that India could attain its rightful place among the self-governing colonies of the British Empire. On the other hand, Gokhale spoke to his compatriots, to all sections of Indian population, in order to rouse a common impulse towards national progress and against the common wrong of colonialism. In this sense, it can be argued that Gokhale's principle of nationality was conservative, since it did not advocate the end of imperialism *per se*, but only of narrow-minded and exclusionary imperialism. Internally, it opposed social unrest in name of gradualism and of future progress for everyone.

India as part of the Empire

To imagine the nation in the making inserted in the wider space of the Empire was essential in Gokhale's nationalist ideology, and more generally in the Moderates' ideology. In fact, Gokhale's nationalism was a universal one, never requiring his fellows to hate foreigners just because foreigners. The making of the Indian nation was not in contrast with its belonging to the far-flung British Empire, that 'great Empire', whose major blessing was 'what may be called modern civilisation'[474]. When Gokhale envisioned self-government within the Empire, he demanded the enjoyment of those civic and political rights as per the principles of the British political tradition and in accordance with the liberal ideals of citizenship that prescribed justice and liberty. Being subjects of the Crown,

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[472] "Congress Presidential Address", 191.
[473] "Congress Presidential Address", 187.
[474] "Female Education in India", 177.

Indians had to be admitted into the rights of the British people. In 1893, Surendranath Banerjea wrote on the columns of the *Bengalee*, that

> "We are nor Englishmen or men of English race or extraction, but we are British subjects, the citizen of a great and free Empire; we live under the protecting shadows of one of the noblest constitutions the world has ever seen. The rights of Englishmen are ours, their privileges are ours, their constitution is ours. But we are excluded from them"[475].

Also Gokhale was asking for a common status in the imperial space, in line with the idea of a common and equal status across the Empire that gained currency toward the end of the nineteenth century, as the Imperial Conferences, held from 1887 onward, tried to codify[476]. According to Gokhale and to other Indian liberals, it was a way to transcend their being Indians and to offset their inferior racial status. India's claim to equality was, in Gokhale's opinion, question of 'vital importance'. In fact, Indians were British subjects and, as such, they were supposed to be rights-bearing subjects. To subsume Indians' discriminated racial status into imperial citizenship[477] meant to be recognised as a familiar category, and not as the 'Other', and to counterbalance a condition of inferiority. Therefore, Gokhale adopted the rhetoric of political rights, based on formal equality, on the 'legal fiction' of the Parliament Statute of 1833 and of the Proclamation of 1858, which despite being generally ignored by the colonial state, kept on providing 'the cornerstone for Indians claims to a citizenship based on universalist notions of equality'[478]. Moreover, by becoming citizens of the British Empire and thanks to the achievement of equal civic and political rights, Indians could more easily overcome all those caste and religion divisions that represented an hindrance to unity and progress, that is to say to the building of the nation. Becoming citizens of the Empire, then, contributed to the making of the Indian nation in a contest where religion, caste, community could be put aside because they did not matter. Hence, while demanding imperial citizenship, Gokhale was trying to mould the secular and liberal nation.

The British government, on the other hand, kept an ambivalent position as far as imperial equality was concerned. For example, in 1897, addressing the premiers of the self-

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[475] *Bengalee*, 14 January 1893.
[476] Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 23.
[477] Be it remembered that the category of citizen was not formally codified in British nationality law until well into the twentieth century.
[478] Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 23.

governing colonies (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa), Joseph Chamberlain stated that Great Britain sympathised with "the determination of the white inhabitants of the Colonies which are in comparatively close proximity to millions and hundreds of millions of Asiatics that there should not be an influx of people alien in civilisation, alien in religion, alien in custom, whose influx, moreover would most seriously interfere with the legitimate rights of existing about population", but at the same reminded his audience that the traditions of the Empire made no distinction in terms of race to colour[479].

It is especially from a speech held at a public meeting in Allahabad in February 1907 (of which an excerpt has been already quoted above) that we can see how asking for self-government within the Empire and building the nation were by no means contradictory aspirations, rather they were complementary aspects of the same matter. According to Gokhale, India was undergoing a most important conjuncture, 'one of those decisive moments when the mind of the people is about to take a great step forward and when a right judgement means so much new strength added to the nation and a wrong judgment is fraught with consequences far graver than on other occasions'. The situation was to be regarded with deep satisfaction in several respects. In fact,

> "The new century has begun well for the East. We have seen a great drama enacted before our eyes, which is exercising a profound influence over the relations between the East and the West. The very air around us is charged with new thought-currents. A new consciousness of power is stirring within us - a new meaning of our existence is breaking upon our mind. Lord Curzon's repressive measures have only proved a blessing in disguise. The rapid growth of the Swadeshi sentiment all over the country - and Swadeshism at its highest means a fervent, passionate, all-embracing love of the motherland - must make every true Indian heart glow with pleasure and pride"[480].

Nonetheless, there were also motives for anxiety and misgiving. There was, in fact, a small body of foreign officials holding in their hands practically a 'monopoly of all political power', whereas on the other side, a vast mass of people appallingly poverty-stricken, lay inert and apathetic, only starting showing here and there signs of a new life. Between them there stood the educated class 'already exercising extensive influence over the mass of

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[479] Banerjee, *Becoming Imperial Citizens*, 23-24.
[480] "The Work before Us", speech delivered at a public meeting in Allahabad, 4 February 1907, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 215-16.

the people and bound by its capacity and education, its knowledge of the needs of the situation, its natural aspirations and its patriotism to leas the people in the new struggle'. This class was no more so-well disposed to British rule and was now determined to attain 'a political status worthy of the self-respect of civilised people'[481]. Their goal, although not theoretically perfect, but practical attainable, was self-government within the Empire. The question was 'not merely of dreams, but also of muscle and character, of capacity, of organisation, of sacrifice'. The cases of the French in Canada and the Boers in South Africa had shown that there was room in the Empire for a self-respecting India[482]. Gokhale acknowledged the extreme difficulty of the task and understood - yet he did not justified - the stand taken by some nationalists[483] that under the belief 'that this goal could never be attained, had begun to talk of another goal, even more impossible of attainment. They were like persons who sought to fly from the evils they knew of to those that they knew nothing about'. Moreover, the goal of self-government was in line with gradual change, as it would not dangerously topple over the entire established order. It would involve 'a minimum disturbance of present ideas, and it meant proceeding along lines' which they understood, while enlisting on their side 'all that was high-minded, freedom-loving and honourable in England', according to the genius of the British people that, 'as revealed in history, is on the whole made for political freedom, for constitutional liberty'. That goal could be reached only by successive steps, each perhaps small, and not through any sudden or violent cataclysm. It could be reached exclusively by means of constitutional agitation, whose field was a very wide one, occupying the spectrum of possibilities from prayers and appeals to passive resistance, 'including even its extreme form of non-payment of taxes till redress was obtained at the other end'. Only physical force in the form of rebellion, aiding a foreign invasion or resort to crime were excluded[484]. It was premature to agree with the 'loose talk' that the Congress methods had failed, because the Congressmen had not yet exhausted one thousandth of the possibilities included in constitutional agitation. What was particularly dangerous was he idea of political boycott,

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[481] "The Work before Us", 216.
[482] "The Work before Us", 217.
[483] He referred to Aurobindo, Bepin Chandra Pal, and Tilak who were asking for absolute *swaraj.*
[484] "The Work before Us", 218. Gokhale perfectly justified Gandhi in resorting to passive resistance. In Gokhale's words, "passive resistance to an unjust law or an oppressive measure is a refusal to acquiesce in that law or measure and a readiness to suffer the penalty instead which may be prescribed as an alternative. If we strongly and clearly and conscientiously feel the grave injustice of a law and there is no other way to obtain redress, I think refusal to acquiesce in it, taking the consequences of such refusal is the only course left to those who place conscience and self-respect above their material or immediate interest" ("The Indians in the Transvaal", 9 September 1909, Bombay, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 414).

whose feasibility was absolutely preposterous. In the first place, the building up of national schools and colleges all over the country out of private resources would take years and years. And anyway, the more thoughtful advocates of national education urgeg the supplementing, and not the destruction, of the work done by Government in the field of education. In the same way, the boycott of Local and Municipal Boards and on Legislative Councils would mean to waste what little powers of administration and control Indian possessed to serve their people[485]. The work of the Congress was invaluable because it had enabled Indians to 'think and feel nationally', and had taught people the duties and burdens of public life. However, Gokhale said, the main work was to build up the strength of the nation. That work was three-fold:

> "First, the promotion of a closer union among the different sections of the Indian community - between the Hindus and Mahomedans - and among the different sections of the Hindus themselves; secondly, the development of a stronger and higher type of character, firm of purpose, and disciplined in action; and thirdly, the cultivation of an intense feeling of nationality throughout the country rising superior to caste and creed and rejoicing in all sacrifice for the motherland, accompanied by a spread of political education among the masses"[486].

It was especially the Hindu-Muslim question to be most difficult: it required the exercise of great tact and forbearance. But political education was largely doing an helpful work in he matter and creating a common platform of thought.

By and large, then, in Gokhale's opinion, political emancipation through the medium of self-government had to be attained before national emancipation. It was political emancipation itself that could lead to the decomposition of the Indian individual into religious man and citizen. Only the emergence of a political subjectivity and the equality in front of the law in accordance with the liberal ideals of citizenship could make India a unified nation.

The priority of the issue of 'imperial' citizenship emerged vigorously when the disturbing condition of Indians in South Africa produced a lively debate in India on civic rights, political autonomy, civil liberties, equality and right to vote. The question had interested Gokhale since as early as 1897, when he had written an article for the *India*, the organ of

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[485] "The Work before Us", 221.
[486] "The Work before Us", 219-20.

the Congress published in London, in which he had denounced the fact that Indians in India and in the rest of the Empire, could enjoy only 'paper-equality, something that brought to mind that 'after all, we are only British slaves, and not British subjects'. Thus, even if, at the beginning of the century, England 'nobly strove for the emancipation of the slaves', still in the closing years of the nineteenth century 'some of her children would endeavour to proclaim the doom of practical slavery for three hundred millions of people under her own flag - for one-sixth of the whole human race - and that she would quietly look on while this outrage was perpetrated in her name!' What was ironical, moreover, was that

> "The Government of India has always been prompt in giving adequate protection to its English subjects, in whatever quarter of the globe they may need it. Will it not raise even a feeble protest, when the members of a British colony insult its Indian subjects in the most shameful manners, say that they are only black vermin, and not men, that they can live on the smell of an oily rag, that they breed like rabbits, and that it was a pity that they could not shot down and so on and so forth?"[487]

The assertion that Indians were British subjects, or that they had a Government to look after them was just 'bitter mockery'.

At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, in South Africa there were about 150,000 Indians, most of them, around 120,000, in Natal. They were mainly indented labourers, ex intended labourers or their descendants[488]. This gives an idea of the mobility of labour within the space of the Empire, where, after the abolition of slavery, a urging need for cheap labour was felt. In the Imperial Legislative Council in 1912, Gokhale moved a resolution to press for the abolition of the system of intended labour, whose victims were easily comparable with slaves. The very fact that the system came into existence soon

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[487] "British Indians in South Africa", written by Gokhale and appeared in *India* (June 1897), in *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 399. Gokhale wrote this article to draw attention to the facts connected with an anti-Indian demonstration that had taken place in Natal on 13 January 1897 that was intended to prevent the landing of certain Indian passengers and which had culminated in an attempt to lynch a 'highly-cultured and respectful gentleman', a crime that was still going unpunished. It is somewhat telling that what raised disgust was the fact that the abused man was an individual of independent means. Gokhale, most probably, wanted to tap the bourgeois British conscience.

[488] "South African Impression", speech in the town Hall of Bombay after returning from South Africa, 14 December 1912, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 445. Gokhale had spent four weeks on Gandhi's company to inquire into the situations of Indians in the South African federation.

after the abolition of slavery in 1834 was a sufficient explanation of its nature. Even though the matter had attracted the attention of the British Parliament in several occasions and the system was discontinued and resumed several times, the government provided 'illusory and ineffective' safeguards to the labourers. The reason for this was that the magistrates and protectors, supposed to protect labourers from abuses and defend their interests, were members of the Colonial governments and, generally, there was an identity of interests with the white planters[489]. Gokhale also questioned the positive aspects which usually were adduced in favour of the system, namely that it ensured the continuation of the activity of sugar industries and other industries. But those were not ethically acceptable justifications, because any industry which fed such a system had to cease to exist. Also the fact that the labourers sent remittances home was misleading, as their salaries were of such a small entity that their remittances were at best Rs. 150, savings that could be much more easily attained in the mills of Bombay. Lastly, the people who decided to settle in the colony were not welcome at all[490]. An aggravation for India was that it was the only country at the time that provided indentured labour: it was a demeaning degradation and an insult for the all nation. Gokhale, in sum, did not restrain himself to make public the hypocrisy of the imperial government, both in dealing with the indenture system and with slavery. He said, in fact, that

> "[T]he friends of the planters in the House of Commons, when the question was brought forward there, said that the slaves were contented and they could not understand why the abolitionists wanted to disturb the contentment and the harmony of their lives. The Hon'ble Member [Mr. Fremantle, official member of the Council who spoke against Gokhale's motion] said that Indians in the colonies certainly would not thank me for bringing forward this Resolution. Sir, I am quite content that he should earn their thanks by opposing the Resolution. Be his the thanks which the champions of slavery expected to receive from those who were anxious to continue in slavery! Be mine the denunciation, with which the advocated of abolition were threatened by those champions at the hands of slaves, unwilling to be free!"[491]

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[489] "Prohibition of indentured labour", Imperial Legislative Council, 4 March 1912, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 1, 352-55.
[490] "Prohibition of indentured labour", 358.
[491] "Prohibition of Indentured Labour", 364. The resolution was rejected.

It was particularly in Natal that Indians were victims of a strong sense of contempt, notwithstanding the fact that they had greatly contributed to reviving the country thanks to their work. Durban, for examples, and other towns along the coast had been built mainly by Indians. Ill-treatment was directed also towards the community of traders, who were around 15,000. These once possessed political and municipal franchise, but the former had been withdrawn in 1866 and several attempts were being made to withdraw the latter as well. Also in Transvaal the situation was quite harsh and Indians had no right to land property, nor to vote. In front of the discrimination of Indians in the colonies of the Empire, Gokhale asked

> "What is the status of us, Indians, in this Empire? Secondly, what is the extent of the responsibility which lies in the Imperial Government to ensure to us just and humane and gradually even equal treatment in this Empire? And thirdly, how far are the self-governing members of this Empire bound by its cardinal principles? Are they to participate in its privileges only and not to bear their share of its disadvantages?"[492]

Gokhale held in high esteem Gandhi's struggle, because it regarded it as in furtherance of the future interests of India:

> "For better or for worse this country is now included in the British Empire and our progress must be towards complete equality with out English and other fellow subjects in that Empire. Here again as practical men, er are prepared to recognise that the attainment of such equality and the obliteration of race distinctions which it involves can be but a slow affair. But we have a right to insist that the movement must be in the direction of a steady removal of these distinctions which are numerous in all conscience and not towards adding further to them. In fighting for the principle that no humiliating disabilities shall be imposed by the statute-book of a British Colony on Indians as Indians, Mr. Gandhi is fighting for the assertion of our claim to that equality with which our hopes for the future are bound up"[493].

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[492] "Indentured Labour for Natal", 25 February 1910, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 1, 193.
[493] "The Indians in the Transvaal", 414.

Furthermore, Gandhi's movement was expression of 'great moral force', because it united Indians without being anti-British:

> "Look at the splendid manner in which the whole movement has been managed. Hindus, Mahomedans, Parsis, all held together as one man, forgetting their usual differences and suffering with wonderful self-restraint (…). Again look at the fact that though the struggle has gone on in an acute form all these months, not even the worst opponent of Mr. Gandhi has suggested the least suspicion about his loyalty or his general attitude towards the British Government"[494].

It was duty of the Imperial Government to secure justice to other subjects besides white residents of self-governing colonies. The root of Indians' disgraceful condition in the colonies lay in the fact that 'our status is not what it should be in our own country. Men who have no satisfactory status in their own land cannot expect to have a satisfactory status elsewhere. Our struggle for equal treatment with Englishmen in the Empire must therefore be mainly carried on in India itself'[495]. India's future as a nation in the Empire was involved in the struggle in South Africa.

Therefore, it was increasingly felt how race had become a conclusive disqualification which would last as long as the British rule lasted[496], as was evident, *inter alia*, from the restricted Indian access to the ICS[497]. Hence, in India as well as in the space of the Empire, Indians did not enjoy the sought-after equal citizenship, because Indians were not equals to Europeans:

> "If we were absolutely equal subjects to the King, we should in the first place be able to go to South Africa on the same terms as the Europeans and secondly, when we are there, we should be able to live in that country on the same terms as the Europeans. That also involves the question of free and equal British citizenship. Now, this second equality, if I may call it so, (…)

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[494] "The Indians in the Transvaal", 414.
[495] "Indians in the Transvaal", 415-16.
[496] "Budget Speech", 29 March 1905, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 1, 83.
[497] Data showed, in fact, that there was no steady increase of Indians in the service of the Government of India: most of the new government posts created between 1897 and 1903 had gone to Europeans or Eurasians. Indians, thus, were still excluded from offices of trust and responsibility and regarded as unfit for the exercise of particular tasks ("Budget Speech", 29 March 1905, 84).

means that if we were equal subjects of the King in South Africa when we go there and settle there, we should be able first of all to leave the country temporarily when we want to leave it and go back to it when we want without hindrance or trouble or difficulty. An Indian who wants to go to India and come back should experience no more difficulty than an Englishman experiences every time he goes to England and comes back"[498].

Moreover, Indians were discriminated in their mobility from province to province, in their ability to own land and property. They could not trade on equal terms with Europeans and could not follow any other avocation. Indians could not provide the same sort of education that Europeans could give to their children; they were excluded from government service and from franchise. They were victims of social disabilities, since they could not stay in hotels, sit on benches in parks, walk on footpaths, or enter theatres. Indians were in no respect treated on terms of equality with Europeans.

It was this painful and delusory exclusion from citizenship, rather than its common enjoyment, that eventually created the political justification for the claim of national rights: Indians were equal in their suffering from common disabilities, sacrifices and sufferings. But for the time being, the Indian leaders kept demanding that Indians were recognised as British citizens and that all Indian subjects, naturalised or residents in India, were regarded as equal before the law[499].

India as a Nation

But how, in Gokhale's view, was it possible to make the nation? We find an answer to this question in several speeches and writings by him. According to Gokhale, it was exactly the participation of Indian people to the government that would make them feel part of a shared project. In the first stage, self-government at the local level was greatly useful for that purpose since 'it teaches men of different castes and creeds, who have long been kept more or less apart, to work together for a common purpose'[500]. What Gokhale wanted

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[498] "South African Report", Speech delivered by Gokhale in the session of the Congress in December 2012, Bankepore, Behar, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 461-62.

[499] Sundara Sastri Satyamurthy, *Rights of Citizens*, Appendix B, Madras, Cambridge Press, 1919. This was a resolution adopted by the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League, which emphasised that the Statute of the Government of Indian Act of 1919 to be passed by the British Parliament should include the declaration of the rights of the people of India as British citizens (quoted in Banerjee, Becoming Imperial Citizens, 192).

[500] "Mofussil Municipalities Bill", speech delivered at the Bombay Legislative Council, 12 February 1901, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 124.

for India was ‘a voice in the government of the country, not for the whole population, but for such portion of it as has been qualified by education to discharge properly the responsibilities of such association’[501]. Of course universal franchise was not contemplated. The educated classes would prepare the people for self-government. Gokhale thus disputed what was said in the official circles that the interests of the educated classes and those of the bulk of their countrymen were distinguished: it was just a device to seek to repress the legitimate aspirations of Indian people and to ignore the requests made by the educated Indians. These spoke on behalf of the other classes and their influence was much bigger than what their number would suggest. They were the ‘natural leaders of the people’: theirs was the Vernacular Press, whose contents did not fail to reach the masses; they had access in a hundred ways to the minds of the latter[502]; whatever public opinion existed in the country, it reflected the views of the educated classes[503]. Hence, in Gokhale’s opinion, the intellectuals were the most advanced social stratum in Indian society. Gokhale perceived the intellectuals as a class, even though they came from different social classes (in the Marxian meaning of the term): he attributed them a social role that was not determined by class belonging, but by their capability to operate as spokespersons, ideologues, and leaders of the masses. Then, even though Sarojini Naidu depicted Gokhale as not immune from “the conservative pride of his brahminical descent which instinctively resented the least question of its ancient monopoly of power”[504], he never maintained - explicitly or implicitly -, unlike Tilak, that Brahmans should be the leaders of the country. Rather, the leading lights of the society were, in Gokhale’s view, the intellectuals, the educated classes. It was the task of the ‘brain of the nation’, to work for a united and renovated India, so that this could move forward and aspire to find its place among the other nations of the world. The intellectuals had to sensitise Indians so that everyone could participate in the concretisation of a better future and in the consolidation of the nation. In this taxing mission, Indians would be benevolently benefited from the guidance of Providence that, according to Gokhale, as Ranade taught him,

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501 “Congress Presidential Address”, 205.
502 “Congress Presidential Address”, 206.
503 “Self-Government for India”, 351.
504 In the file ‘Sarojini Naidu Collection’, among Gokhale’s private papers, there is a booklet, *Gokhale the Man*, written by Sarojini Naidu, published in Hyderabad in 1915 da Pillai & Sons. In the same book, Sarojini tells an anecdote regarding Gokhale during the All-India Social Conference in Calcutta in 1911. At that conference, talking about the so-called Depressed Classes, Sarojini said that their inhuman condition was mostly due to “the tyranny of arrogant Brahmins in the past”. Gokhale, resented, told her in private that “it was no doubt a brave and beautiful speech, but you sometimes use harsh, bold phrases”. And he added “You – in spite of yourself – you are typically Hindu in spirit. You begin with a ripple and end in eternity”.

governed the universe and the actions of men and of nations. It was the intellectuals' responsibility to provide the 'ignorant and unresponsive' masses with a guidance, to carry them along and open their eyes, to moderate their susceptibility over religious issues. In this sense, it is possible to argue that Gokhale's ideas are enclosed in a bourgeois perspective. Yet, Gokhale did not see the interests of the educated and uneducated classes as basically antagonistic. Education 'had merely put a tongue into the mouths that were dumb before'[505]. The educated Indians played a relevant social role because they had been the first to realise the strong impact that the encounter with the 'West' was having on their country. Thanks to the medium of Western education, they adopted 'the Western way of looking at things'. As a matter of fact, they established within the society the conditions for future progress, something that required 'a long process of discipline and purification and real adjustment'[506]. They understood that, although complex and painful, such process was necessary, because only progress could lead to curbing the most retrograde aspects of tradition and eventually bring national unity. Under the influence of Western ideas,

> "[T]hey [the first Western-educated men] bent their energies, in the first instance, to a re-examination of the whole of their ancient civilisation – their social usages and institutions, their religious beliefs, their science, their art, in fact, their entire conception and realisation of life. This brought them into violent collision with their own society, but that very collision drove them closer to the Englishman in the country, to whom they felt deeply grateful for introducing into India the liberal thought of the West with its protest against caste or sex disabilities and its recognition of man's dignity as man – a teaching which they regarded as of the highest value in serving both as a corrective and a stimulant to their old civilisation"[507].

This peculiar development introduced into India factors of great complexity and strong conflicts within Indian society. These manifested through a wave of reaction and revivalism that was likely to injure the idea of an Indian nationality that was slowly developing. In fact, Gokhale argued that the advancement of revivalism would deepen the lines of cleavages between the several sub-nationalities in India and the cause of united action would

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[505] 'Reflections suggested by the Fifth Indian National Congress', *Sarvajanik Sabha Quarterly Journal*, January 1980, 8.
[506] "East and West", 388.
[507] "East and West", 382.

suffer[508]. The anti-English and anti-liberal sentiments that had started to grow and that were directed indiscriminately against everything done by the British were regressive and dangerous. Such postures were suicidal because they implied also the refusal of British institutions. Revivalism was just not feasible for the welfare of a society. It was only possible to look ahead and build the future. Revivalist tendencies denied the fact that half a century of Western education and a century of common laws, common administration, common grievances, and common disabilities weakened the divisions of caste and creeds[509].

This was also the reason why Gokhale opposed sectional representation as it was proposed by the Bombay government in the Mofussil Municipalities Bill[510]. It is well-known that, a few years later, in occasion of the so-called Morley-Minto Reforms, Gokhale would back the introduction of separate electorates for Muslims at the centre level as a way to overcome the differences that had emerged between the Hindu and Muslim communities. In the same way, Gokhale, at this stage, had no objection to Government providing for sectional representation by means of elections, provided that a minimum of half the seats was guaranteed to the general ratepayers. Gokhale maintained that there were already "causes for differences enough among the different sections in this land, and (…) the Legislature should not, in the best interests of the country, without the very strongest reasons, give any statutory recognition to these differences"[511]. There was nothing, according to Gokhale, in the nature of local self-government which implied any conflict between the interests of one section and another. The only chance of a conflict of interest arising between the two communities was over the question of slaughter-houses. But, in the case in which Hindu Councillors neglected to construct slaughter-houses for the benefit of Muslims and bother inhabitants, that it was in the power of the Government to require recalcitrant Municipalities to perform that duty[512].

What is interesting, apart from the fact that Gokhale did not deny to non-Hindus the possibility of having slaughter-houses at their disposal, is that the Hindu community was not considered by him as a whole by itself. Among the Hindus "there are so many castes

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[508] "Revivalism and Nationality", part of a speech by Gokhale reported in *The Mahratta*, 19 October 1902.
[509] "Self-Government for India", 351.
[510] Since 1884, the Government retained the power of nominating up to a maximum of one-half of members of the Municipal Corporations to represent sections and minorities. In the Bill discussed, thought, besides retaining that same power, it was proposed that sections and minorities should have seats specially assigned to them out of the minimum of one-half, thrown open to election. To Gokhale that was a step back ("Mofussil Municipalities Bill", 117-18).
[511] "Mofussil Municipalities Bill", 124.
[512] "Mofussil Municipalities Bill", 124.

and sections (…) and some of them stand so wide apart from one another, that it will be necessary to recognise their differences, and then where are the Government going to stop?"[513] According to Gokhale, the state was the arbiter between the different sections of the society. Already as early as 1893, writing in the *Sudharak*, Gokhale had expressed such view in occasion of the Hindu-Muslim riots occurred in Bombay, maintaining that it was high time that "government should proclaim the equality of law and impartiality of justice to all classes, and not leave the thing to be done by the representatives of both sections"[514]. In that unfortunate occasion, according to the young journalist, the Government had taken a biased stand in favour of Muslims and the Anglo-Indian press had been systematically engaged in the divisive activity of 'sensitising' the Mohammedans on "what their state would be if the vote in the commons regarding the Simultaneous examinations were practically carried out and the consequent danger realised of having the ranks of the civil Service crowned with the Hindus"[515]. Gokhale saw the dangerousness of spreading the belief that Muslims were jeopardised in their religion by the Hindus, because "in a nation constituted as this Indian nation is, where different sections holding divergent views and opinions regarding politics, society and religion, it is always imprudent to allow such a belief to grow in one section, for it will ever prove a source of mischief and disaster"[516]. According to Gokhale, what Government reported about Muslims feeling 'gradually but surely edged out of the position that have hitherto held in the country' and that 'the tendency of European systems of administration is to increase the influence of the Hindus at their expense', was preposterous because:

> "[A]t the present day neither the Hindus nor the Mahomedans occupy any position or have any status to speak of; that both of them are mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and that if there is to be any edging out on the part of the Hindus, it must be in regard of the Anglo-Indians class and not to the Mahomedans who do not possess any greater dignity or power than themselves. (…) Short-sighted and narrow-minded officers of Government, who hate the Hindus for their political activity, never lose an opportunity to

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[513] "Mofussil Municipalities Bill", 124. Gokhale's amendment, put on the vote, lost.
[514] "Who is to Blame?", *Sudharak*, 21 august 1893.
[515] "Who is to Blame?". It is worth mentioning that in the issue of the *Sudharak* of 25 September 1893, Gokhale denounced pro-Hindu meetings organised by Tilak, as he thought they were not conducive for reconciliation. It was the moral responsibility of the educated individuals of both communities to set the example and try to bring about a climate favourable for peace and dialogue.
[516] *Sudharak*, 8 July 1895.

> flatter the Mahomedans to the top of their bent, thereby leading them to believe that government actually cherishes at heart a greater regard for them than for the Hindus and that it would shut its eyes if now and then they have just a little row with the Hindus to remind them of their physical feebleness"[517].

It is important to note that, from a perusal of Gokhale's private papers, it is unquestionably evincible that the Indian politician always repudiated the narrow-mindedness of certain forms of nationalism. He passionately believed that, in order to achieve national independence, it was first necessary to have a united nation, without politicised communities and caste divisions. The fact that the country never had a training in freedom and representative institutions was an urging caveat that a premature independence from the foreign domination could turn into the tyranny of one man over the other. This strong conviction, though, did not prevent Gokhale from accepting separate electorates[518]. These, as Gokhale himself explained, were an expediency to minimise the friction and ensure representation of minorities[519].

Nevertheless, Gokhale's limit was that he was too optimistic in his imagination of the nation. In his vision, in fact, the India of the future would almost inevitably succeed in bridging the gulf existing before different interests and diverging ideologies. His trust in future unity appears from various letters, and not only in public speeches. In a letter to Lawrence Jenkins he wrote that:

> "Some assurances to Mahomedans had become necessary, but there was the danger of its being given in a manner which could have caused bitterness among Hindus as also among other minorities. Happily there is no room for such bitterness now. Personally I have always been, as you are aware, in

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[517] "The Bombay Government and the Bombay Riots", *Sudharak*, 15 January 1894.

[518] Note is to be taken of the fact that Gokhale saw certain limits in reservation policies which were not based on merit. Writing on a memorial presented by the Belgaum Sarvajanik Sabha about the rules for the recruitment in the provincial service, Gokhale expressed his agreement with the lines suggested by the local Sabha. According to Gokhale, "the service should be left open to open competition and promotion for lower grade irrespective of any distinction based on class or creed. Backward classes and classes in minorities should no doubt be encouraged by special privileges in all matters that concern their improvement moral and intellectual; but it will be always dangerous and destructive to push the principle so far as to justify their employment merely on grounds of caste and class" (Sudharak, 3 June 1895). Education was the warhorse to overcome inequalities and privileges.

[519] *The Tribune*, 16 July 1909, quoted in Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal politics in India 1885-1930*, Manohar, New Delhi 1991, 86-87.

favour of separate Mahomedan representation. To my mind the most important thing just now is not to let any section feel any real or reasonable grievance, so that the new arrangements may be started with the utmost goodwill on all sides. And as regards Mahomedan representation particularly, what I value above everything else is to free the community from dependence upon government nomination. When this is done, their interests are generally far identical with ours that they are bound before long to come and range themselves by our side"[520].

A few months later, Gokhale wrote to Wedderburn that he thought likely that, if the details of the Morley-Minto Reform scheme were worked out in the same liberal spirit as that in which the scheme itself was conceived, a new channel for the expression and even the education of public opinion could be supplied by the council[521]. Moreover, he felt confident that their backward colleagues, namely the Mohammedans and the landlords – and the constituencies that were behind them - before many years would be over, would 'come into the same line with ourselves'. Then the full benefit of the reforms would be enjoyed by everybody[522].

So, we can argue that Gokhale did not realise two important things. The first one is that, however right or wrong the Muslim fellows were in having the 'impression' that they could be vulnerable vis-à-vis the Hindu majority, what is important is that that impression turned into something dramatically real with the emergence of the 'Extremists''s cultural nationalism. Thus, for example, as a result of the cow protection movement, the Muslims started fearing that their religion and traditional habits were at risk. Even if the riots spread only in certain areas, all the body of the country was affected, so much that the tension between Hindus and Muslims acquired an all-India connotation. By and large, once certain

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[520] From Gokhale to Lawrence Jenkins, 29 January 1909, *Gokhale Papers,* NAI.
[521] From Gokhale to Wedderburn, 24 September 1909, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI.
[522] From Gokhale to Wedderburn, 3 December 1909, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI. Gokhale made these considerations although he regretted the fact that the Muslims were accorded an excessive representation in the Viceroy's Council, so much that he defined it 'monstrously unjust' (*ibidem*). In the same letter, Gokhale reported a excerpt of a letter from Pherozshah Mehta, another advocated of the Hindu-Muslim unity, who, nevertheless, was 'disgusted' by the final reform scheme: "The Hindus will probably have sometimes no representative and sometimes only one! And this when they are about half the population of the [Bombay] Province and in point of education, wealth and public spirit by far the more advanced. In East Bengal too, things will be equally bad (…). What I, however, particularly dislike is the matter in which representation has been so arranged as to neutralise in practise the non-official majorities that have been created in the Provincial councils" (*ibidem*).

forces had been released, it was very difficult for the respective elites to keep the masses under control. The negotiations and conciliations at the political level had not necessarily a direct effect at the cultural level. Even if Hindu and Muslim leaders were often ready to negotiate and come close to each other, at the popular level there were massive riots in many places all over India[523].

Secondly, when separate electorates were introduced by the Morley-Minto Reform, the division between the two communities was substantiated at the political level and became the platform from which renegotiating the power relationships in the new space created within the colonial machinery.

Therefore, the preconditions were established both for communal tensions at the grassroots level and for communal politics at the elite level. This is not to say that the Partition of India was bound to happen in 1947. Of course, several politicians struggled to try to find a viable solution for unity. Nevertheless, the political situation was extremely complicated and required a marked capability to find compromises. Working together, as Gokhale hoped, would not necessarily be enough to fight for the same demands.

As far as the Hindu-Muslim relationships are concerned, it is expedient to further draw our attention to a letter that Gokhale wrote to Wedderburn in 1907[524], after violence between the two communities had flared up in East Bengal, during the protests against the Partition of Bengal[525]. In that letter, Gokhale tried to inquire into the 'unhappy disturbances' and to understand who was to blame. We have seen in the previous chapter how the Swadeshi movement was mainly led by the Hindu youth belonging to the middle classes, whereas Muslims kept aloof from the protests, since they saw the division of the Bengali province as an opportunity to get rid of their Hindu landlords. In his letter, Gokhale attributed responsibility to all three parties, that is to say Hindus, Muslims and British officials, even though to a different extent:

> "There is no doubt that the officials have allowed the impression to spread (and have even openly encouraged it) that the Hindus were in their bad books and that the Mahomedan community was the special object of their favour and patronage. There is also no doubt that when the present

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[523] For example, in 1917, at the time of the cooperation between the Muslim League and the Congress, there were huge riots in Howrah and other places in UP, Bihar, and Bengal. The union in political objectives did not correspond to the union of the masses.

[524] Gokhale to Wedderburn, 24 May 1907, *Gokhale Papers* (NAI), published in H.D. Sharma, *100 Best Letters: 1847-1947*, Harper Collins Publishers India, New Delhi 2000, 100-104.

[525] The riots continued over the year 1909 in several localities of the region.

> disturbances first began, there was a marked tendency to wink at Mahomedan rowdyism and leave the Hindus more or less to their own fate […]. The supineness of the Executive in dealing with the situation even when it became clear that Mahomedan rowdies were getting altogether out of hand on all sides has made a painful impression in the country and unless a searching inquiry is made into how this temporary break down of the Government machine took place, the harm that has been done will not be remedied."[526]

In Gokhale's view, the benevolent posture of the British officials towards the Muslim community was, very obviously, a stratagem aimed at damaging the nationalist movement and blaming it for the Muslims' grievances, so that the latter would dissociate from the Congress and exclude the possibility of an *union d'entente* with the Hindus (and Muslim Congressmen). Such 'charges and counter-charges' between the two communities were, in the eyes of the Indian politician, extremely harmful to the real interests of both. The quarrel was deeply painful and humiliating to those 'whose best hopes for the future lie in the two communities working together and whose best energies are given to promoting relation of harmony and co-operation between them"[527]. The matter was overall frustrating because it had 'put back the clock progress by several years'.

Gokhale imputed the violent outbursts carried out by the Muslims to their belonging to 'the more ignorant and fanatical sections'[528] of their community. Their ignorance was demonstrated not only by the circulation of the *Red Pamphlet*[529] that exhorted the Muslim brothers to engage in a *jihad* against the Hindus 'not on account of the boycott, but on religious grounds', but also by their gullibility in believing the dominators' promises of protection and patronage.

What Gokhale did not appreciate, though, was that the fanaticism of the Muslim community supplied only a partial explanation. As Sumit Sarkar maintains, in fact, "the

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[526] *100 Best Letters*, 102. Significantly enough, Ibrahim Khan, the author of the provocative *Red Pamphlet* was let off with a warning, while Liakat Husain and Abdul Gafur, two among the few Muslim Swadeshi Leaders that advocated unity, were hounded down for sedition (Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, 67).

[527] *100 Best Letters*, 103.

[528] The expression appears twice in the letter. According to Gokhale, Muslims were burdened with fewer divisions than Hindus, their social structure rested on a more democratic basis, they had more cohesion among them, and they were more easily roused to action ("The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 307).

[529] It called on Muslims to refuse doing their services to Hindus in what it proclaimed was to be a 'swajati' movement, a social boycott in reverse (Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement*, 281). The full text of the pamphlet was printed in the *Bengalee,* 5 may 1907.

more important explanation lies in facts of social structure, creating a kind of built-in advantage for Muslim separatists, who could safely indulge in considerable anti-landlord and anti-mahajan demagogy directed against the predominantly Hindu, land-based *bhadralok* community of East Bengal"[530]. Then, the exhortation to bring back the glory of Islam was an easy medium to mobilise the Mohammedan masses, not different from Tilak's adoption of Hindu symbols to politicise Hindu people. And the Partition was celebrated as the deliverance from the yoke of the *zamindar* and the *mahajan*, mostly Hindu. Therefore, Gokhale's interpretations of the riots did not take into consideration the class factor and, as a consequence, he perceived the masses' behaviour as irrational and fanatical. This is ascribable to the fact that, as a liberal, Gokhale adopted a paternalistic approach towards the common man, 'the vast mass of the people of the country lying inert and apathetic, except when under the sway of a religious impulse'. These, being 'plunged in abject poverty and ignorance', needed the support and advice of the educated classes[531]. Moreover, Gokhale was of opinion that a special responsibility lay with the Hindus "who had an advantage over the other community in regard to the spread of education and who were therefore in a better position to appreciate the need of a growing nationality. They could also do a great deal towards the establishment of better relations if someone of them devoted themselves to education and other useful work among Mahomedans for the special benefit of that community"[532].

By and large, then, Gokhale attributed an active, positive role to the Hindu educated classes - privileged compared their Muslim fellows -, since they had 'so far contributed far more than the other community to the present national awakening in India' and, thanks to their more marked awareness in political matters, they could provide the Indian Muslims with the instruments of self-elevation.

Gokhale regarded the foundation of the Muslim League as "undoubtedly a cause for sincere congratulation that their Mahomedan brethren had at last shaken off their apathy of years in political matters". At the same time, he did not fail to see that a separate organised movement of Muslim leaders, with a comprehensive programme of their own, to win special concessions for Muslims as a community in the administration of the country and demanding special concessions did not tend to diminish the growing difficulties of their public life[533].

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[530] Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement,* 67.
[531] "The Work before Us", 216.
[532] "The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 308-9.
[533]"The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 307.

Nevertheless, as seen above, Gokhale considered just temporary the controversial situation occurring between Hindus and Muslims and was somewhat sure that a common view would develop so that the objectives for the benefit of the whole nation could be achieved. In Gokhale's view, in the long run, the Muslim League 'must inevitably merge itself sooner or later into the larger and older organisation of the National Congress'[534]. Significantly enough, then, preceding Nehru and Gandhi in what they would think more than thirty years later, in Gokhale's view, the Indian National Congress was the only political organisation worthy of representing the nation[535].

But in order to attain national unity, it was necessary to overcome the most divisive aspects of the respective religions, that is what Gokhale called 'tradition', something that had played an important part in creating a breach between the members of the two communities in the past. So, even though the bulk of Muslims and Hindus did not differ in terms of race and both contributed greatly to the progress of the world, now they found themselves embracing different mentalities, so much so that the task to bring them back together at times appeared 'well-nigh impossible'. But "spread of education, a wide and efficient performance of civic duties, growth of national aspirations and a quickening of national self-respect in both communities were among the forces which would ultimately overcome the tradition" and lead to a spirit of co-operation in all public matters[536]. Therefore, what Hindus and Muslims had been in the past did not matter in the India of the future. For that reason, any claim advanced in the name of historical importance or higher loyalty was not acceptable[537]:

> "It [is] urged that the Mahomedans had ruled in India for five centuries. It must not however be forgotten that the Hindus had ruled for countless centuries before them and even afterwards, before the British came on the scene, the Mahomedan power had been broken and displaced over nearly the whole country by a revival of Hindu rule. Then it [is] said that there were a large Mahomedan populations in other countries – some of them self-governing countries – and that invested the Mahomedans of India with

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534 "Self-Government for India", 351-52.
535 Writing to Wedderburn on the situation in India during the Swadeshi movement, Gokhale said that the Hindu League and the Muslim League that had emerged in Upper India were respectively anti-Muslim and anti-Hindu and both anti-national (Gokhale to Wedderburn, 24 September 1909, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI)
536 "The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 308.
537 "The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 310.

special importance. [But that could not matter] in determining the extent of the representation which the Government of India should grant to its own subjects, unless it [is] on the assumption that in the administration of this country, those whose whole heart [is] not with India [are] to have preference over those whose [is]. Moreover the same could with equal reason be urged by Indian Christians and by Buddhists. Lastly, as regards the higher traditional loyalty of Mahomedans to British rule, the claim [is] not historically tenable. And even during the last two or three years Mahomedan names [have] not been altogether absent from the lists of those speakers and writers against whom the Government [has] thought it necessary to proceed, though it must be admitted that the number of such names [have] been extremely small"[538].

While opposing the view of those who urged that the Muslim community was specially important and should therefore receive the representation in excess of its fair share - with the undoubted and irresistible implication that the other communities were comparatively inferior and should receive less than their fair share -, Gokhale was in favour of separate electorates, but in the sense that they provided not the whole representation to which the communities were entitled, but "only so much as it was necessary to redress the deficiencies and inequalities of general elections". He maintained that in the vested interests of Indian public life and future, first there should be elections on a territorial basis in which all communities without distinction of creed or race should participate and, then, special separate supplementary elections should be held to secure the fair and adequate representation of such important minorities as had received less than their full share in the general elections. According to Gokhale, in the circumstances of the country of the time, that was the only course which reasonably safeguarded the interests of all communities and prevented injustice to any of them in practice[539]. Absolute unity in the country and union among the different elements of the society were the highest aspirations of the Congress. The Congress movement in fact was

"A national movement, because it has fostered the consciousness of a political entity between the different nationalities in India (…).True nationalism

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[538] "The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 310-11.
[539] "The Hindu-Mohammedan Question", 309. The Government of India's original scheme for which Gokhale had agitated had been very much on those lines.

would oppose tyranny and injustice by even native tyrant with the same vehemence as injustice by foreigners"[540].

Indians had to realise what was wrong in their country and what the situation really required. It was only 'by combining what was best in the West with what was best in the East that they could hope to march forward'[541]. Gokhale added that

"The India of the future, let us remember always, could not now be only a Hindu India, or a Mahomedan India; it must be compounded of all the elements which existed at present in India – Hindu, Mahomedan, Parsee, Christian, aye, and the Englishman who adopted India as his country. And they all could do something for that great cause. Every word they uttered, every action they performed, should help to promote by a continual process greater solidarity among them all, seeking in one way and another to remove those differences which had, unfortunately, kept them so long apart"[542].

For his appeasing position towards the Muslims and for his liberal and secular nationalism, Gokhale was attacked by the 'Extremists' in the columns of the *Mahratta* saying that in his anxiety 'to please the Mahomedans, you have forgotten to perform your duty to the Hindu Community'[543]. The Marathi *Hindu Punch*, another Poona newspaper, and the Bengali *Bande Mataram* even accused Gokhale of having conspired with Lord Morley in order to attain Tilak's imprisonment for six years in 1908. The *Hindu Punch*, in particular, wickedly defamed Gokhale who was unjustly accused of having gone to England with public money to fall at the feet of the Secretary of State. In the same newspapers, Gokhale was called the honourable parrot and cartoons depicted him as a rat begging at the feet of the British or as a horse ridden and whipped by an Englishman[544]. Also the Ganapati Festival in Poona in 1909 was used as a platform to discredit Gokhale and correlate the accusations that he was the man behind Tilak's deportation. It was especially "songs sung before large mixed audiences of students, women and children by

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[540] Speech by Gokhale quoted in "Liberalism and Nationalism", *The Mahratta*, 11 July 1909.
[541] "Indian Reception to Gokhale", Speech delivered by Gokhale in London, 19 July 1912, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 395.
[542] "Indian Reception to Gokhale", 393-94.
[543] "An open letter to the Hon'ble Mr. G.K. Gokhale CIE, *The Mahratta*, 18 April 1909.
[544] In the Gokhale Papers, there is a file 'Hindu Punch defamation case", in which cartoons and translations in English are provided. The newspaper shut down because it had to pay a fine following the case filed by Gokhale against it.

several *melas*, particularly by the *Sanmitra Samal Mela* [that] contain[ed] vile criticism and false, unfounded, and filthy charges against our respected fellow-townsman Hon. Mr. Gokhale"[545].

Gokhale's liberal conceptualisation of the Indian nation had been already criticised by Tilak, who said that it was preposterous that so many religious nationalities could be brought together under the same political head in India:

> "It is simply the height of narrow-mindedness in them who suggest that the inductive method of regenerating and perfecting parts before the regeneration of the whole should be given up in favour of one in which the regeneration of the whole is to be attempted before that of its parts"[546].

Gokhale, on the contrary, asserted that:

> "I recognise no limits to my aspiration for our motherland, I want our people to be in their own country what other people are in theirs, I want our men and women, without distinctions of caste or creed, to have opportunities to grow to the full height of their stature, unhampered by cramping and unnatural restrictions, I want India to take her proper place among the rest of the nations of the world, politically, industrially, in religion, in literature, in science and in arts. I want all this and feel at the same time that the whole of this aspiration can, in its essence and its reality, be realised within this Empire"[547].

Then, from a position of loyalty towards the British and from his acceptance of Western ideas, Gokhale envisioned the possibility of socially and politically integrating the India over which the British *Raj* had imposed a viable unity. Indians had lo learn how to live together. Only once the Indian nation was moulded, then there would be no further need for foreigners to govern them and India could become a self-governing dominion.

The existence of the nation found its natural limits in the interest of the other nations and in the general interest of the well-being of whole humanity. According to the *Mahratta*, instead, the man who sought to embrace humanity was nearly off hist feet and universal

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[545] *India*, 5 November 1909.
[546] "Revivalism and Nationality", *The Mahratta*, 19 October 1902.
[547] "The Work before Us", 217.

benevolence was useless for the purpose of effective practical action. Moreover, the individual's rights had to be surrendered to communities[548].

Educating the Nation

Even if Gokhale left the field of social reform to focus on the political one, he was never indifferent to those efforts to which he had dedicated himself at the beginning of his career. He always laid great emphasis on the need for the amelioration of the poor and on providing the masses with opportunities and means of self-elevation. The spread of primary education was pivotal in this sense. In fact, only if the entire population of India became literate, unity and progress in all its aspects - social, political industrial - would be hastened and facilitated. For this reason, free and compulsory elementary education became the object of one of Gokhale's most important battles, carried out - and unfortunately lost[549] - in the last part of his career and life. The Servants of India Society was instrumental in supporting Gokhale's effort at the grassroots level.

We have seen above how in the Bombay Presidency, education was dominated mainly by Brahmans and the lower castes were generally disadvantaged. Yet, the reformers campaigned for the spread of education, which was in their opinion a fundamental medium to liberate the masses from superstition and ignorance and to further India's regeneration. The Poona Sarvajanika Sabha and the Deccan Education Society had been very active at the time of the Hunter Commission[550] in promoting the need for introducing compulsory primary education with the economic support of the government and in opposing the substitution of secular education with a religious one[551]. Nevertheless, due mainly to the protest of landlords and political leaders, the Hunter commission did not recommend the introduction of compulsory primary education. In general, it is important to note that

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548 "Liberalism and Nationalism II", *The Mahratta*, 25 July 1909. The Mahratta attacked liberal nationalism in a series of three prolix editorials published on the issue of the 18 and 25 July and 1 August 1909.

549 Free and compulsory education was attained only after Independence.

550 It was an Education Commission appointed in 1882 by Lord Ripon to inquire into the state of education with special reference to the role of the government in maintaining the educational institutions and to the kind of education to be imparted. In the 1890s, the government handed over the management of the primary schools to elected municipalities. Here, were Indian Nationalists were in power, they could pursue their political agenda and exclude the undesirable people, that is lower classes and castes. For example in the municipality of Dapoli in the Bombay Presidency a supporter of Tilak, Vishnu Hari Barve, refused to give education to untouchable children, who had to sit in the veranda. Same thing in the Poona Municipality where nationalists were in power and defeated for 30 years the resolutions on compulsory education (Rao, *New Perspectives*, 163).

551 This had been suggested by the missionaries and by the Nationalists (Rao, *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism*, 140-141).

opposition was not against Western education, because that was considered acceptable and a social elevator in high schools. Opposition was substantially against the indiscriminate spread of education which could fill the gap between masses and elites. The Indian leaders, as a matter of fact, advocated a two-tier system such that higher education was confined to upper castes and vocational education for the masses[552].

With the formation of the Indian National Congress, the supporters of mass primary education used the Congress platform to promote the cause. It was Gokhale that became the staunchest advocate of the spread of elementary education. What Gokhale wanted to introduce was very different from the 'national' education about which Hindu or Muslim leaders[553] spoke and which was substantially based on religious identity. Also some leaders of the Swadeshi movement such as Aurobindo Ghosh, Bipan Chandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai were in favour of introducing religious subjects together with secular ones. Lajpat Rai introduced religion in the schools of the Arya Samaj in Punjab, whereas Vishnu Govind Vijapurkar established national schools in the Bombay Presidency and maintained that education was based on the caste system and the theory of rebirth[554]. Gokhale, on the contrary, was against religious education, because it was of no use for the material and moral advancement of the nation[555].

In 1908, Gokhale had demanded the abolition of school fees, so that also the poorest families could take into consideration the possibility to send their children to school. In his view, the importance attached to education was a great breakthrough in the history of human civilisation. It was thanks to this attention that, in Gokhale's opinion, during the nineteenth century, the Western world could reach three fundamental achievements for the furtherance of progress, namely the application of science to industrial processes, the employment of steam and electricity to annihilate distance, and the rise of democracy[556]. It

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552 Rao, *New Perspectives*, 162.

553 Among these, for instance, there were Tilak, Syed Husain Bilgrami, Bishan Narain Dhar.

554 Rao, *New Perspectives*, 165.

555 In a letter from Annie Besant to Gokhale (31 March 1907, *Gokhale Papers*, NAI), Besant asked Gokhale to sign some articles of the constitutions of an Indian university, the Hindu Banaras College, that she was about to create. They were to be signed by representatives of the great religions and Besant wanted Gokhale to be one of the representative Hindus. In the document attached to the letter it was mentioned that religion and ethics had to be part of true education. From a following letter, we understand that Gokhale declined. Besant wrote: "Dear Mr Gokhale, I am not quite sure what your objection is. If it is that you think that religion should not be an integral part of education. That it should be is with me a fundamental principle and we must agree to differ (...). I believe that India has a been materialised, vulgarised and denationalised by leaving religion out of education and all my efforts are turned to returning religion to its proper place" (Besant to Gokhale, 1 May 1907, Gokhale Papers, NAI).

556 "Elementary Education", resolution moved by Gokhale in front of the Imperial Legislative Council to start free and compulsory education, 18 March 1910, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 3, 73.

was the introduction of the employment of steam and machinery that afforded a significant material advantage to the 'West' so that it could impose its industrial domination over India[557]. While making a comparison with other European states, where the percentage of population receiving education was still small, Gokhale invited the Council to consider the insignificant progress made by India, which was even more backward. In fact, notwithstanding the commitment of the EIC Despatch in 1854 and of the Education commission of 1882, Gokhale maintained that the data showed a progress of primary education since 1882 only from 1.2 to 1.9, even keeping into account the pupils going to unrecognised schools[558]. Gokhale admitted that the principles of liberalism condemned the very idea of compulsion, but that, as also Gladstone had to admit, was the only feasible way in which a state could attain the spread of education and reach out to all the strata of society[559].

If, initially, Gokhale pressed for the education of girls - since, as seen above, it was fundamental to raise the status of women to solve important social issues and to lead to all round development of national life -, he began with promoting school as compulsory only for boys, being aware that it was necessary to proceed with caution, since the issue of women education could be greatly divisive, as the clashes in Pune had taught in the past. By and large, Gokhale was induced to moderate his demands and to content duration and quality of education, so long as the principal of universality and compulsion were accepted.

In the first resolution presented in front of the Imperial Legislative Council in 1910, Gokhale proposed compulsory education for children (only boys) between 6 and 10. During this period, employment of them as labour would be prohibited and subjected to a fine. The financial burden of this scheme would fall on the State and Local bodies with the proportion of 2 to 1. Gokhale's expectation was to get the entire population of school-age boys at school in 20 years. Elementary education had to be made compulsory by the local bodies, enabled by an Act that had to be passed, in their areas. The principle of compulsion had to be applied only in those areas where already 33% of the male population was at school, in order to avoid compulsion as a premature measure in certain areas. Wherever compulsory education had to be introduced, it also had to be free. Anyway, the children with parents whose income was below 25 Rs a month, should have

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[557] "The Swadeshi Movement", 9 February 1907, Lucknow, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 2, 225.
[558] "Elementary Education", 76.
[559] "Elementary Education Bill", Imperial Legislative Council, 16 March 1911, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 3, 95.

free education[560]. If Gokhale had initially proposed that education had to be first free and only in the second place compulsory, he had to come to terms with the official opinion, according to which, as the financial situation had changed and new taxes had be introduced, the principle of compulsion had the priority, while free and compulsory education still remained the ultimate aim.

Gokhale's proposal took a definite shape in the Elementary Education Bill of 1911. Gokhale's Bill was based on the Irish Education Act of 1892 and the English education Acts of 1870 and 1876. Notwithstanding its moderation, the Bill was met with widespread hostility from different sections of Indian society and of colonial officials. Contrary to the official point of view, according to which mass education was a Western idea and, as such, it was not suitable for all the countries of the world, Gokhale reminded that the data of schooling children provided by the despatch of the Court of Directors in 1854 showed the Indian situation as better before the arrival of the EIC. It was therefore disputable that mass education was a concept belonging exclusively to the 'West' - in fact it was a comparatively recently development also there. Yet, what mattered was that the principle of mass education had to become universal: in those countries where education had been made free and compulsory, it had turned into a powerful factor of change[561]. Also for India, it was 'the question of the question'. Upon it depended the well-being of thousands of children, the increased efficiency of the individual, the higher general level of intelligence, the stiffening of the moral backbone of large sections of the community[562]. Against the official objection that India was not ready for such a groundbreaking reform, Gokhale responded that similar objections had always been urged against every proposed reform and therefore note should not be taken of them. Also the official objection - a colonial warhorse since the formation of the Congress - that the educated classes wanted to represent the will of the people, which diverged in reality from theirs was rebutted by Gokhale, who said that "the educated classes might be in favour [of the Bill]; but what does it cost them to be in favour? The question does not really concern them, and mere heroic

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[560] "Elementary Education", 81-82. Yet, in 1912, Gokhale changed his mind regarding the gratuity of primary education. If, as a matter of fact, it was decided that it was not free for all (and only those children whose family's income was below 10 Rs. were entitled to free education, so that the limit had be lowered compared to the previous idea), it was only to conciliate official opinion and he had decided to come to terms with that to convince the British majority to introduce the law. Yet, Gokhale admitted: "I have failed in my object. Official opinion has not been conciliated; and I do not see why I should allow room for a division in our ranks by adhering to this provision. I shall therefore be glad to go back to my original proposal in this matter that, where education is compulsory, it should also be free" ("Elementary Education Bill", 18 March 1912, 128).

[561] "Elementary Education Bill", 93.

[562] "Elementary Education", 84.

resolutions in favour of this proposal do not really count for much. On the other hand, if members of the backward communities assemble and express themselves in favour, the argument is used, what do they understand of the Bill? They have not the intelligence to understand what would be the effects of the Bill"[563]. Gokhale mentioned as an example that a short time before, a meeting of 2,500 Mahars, that is 'one of the most depressed classes', was held in Berar and passed a resolution in favour of the Bill. He added that he did not know if every member of that body had understood what the Bill was, but 'they must have a fairly general idea that the Bill was intended to make education compulsory and that under it their children would be compelled to go to school so hat they might derive the benefits of education'[564].

However, formidable opposition came from the Indian leaders, especially from the 'Extremists' and from some sections of the Muslim League, something which is very telling of the contrasting social vision that characterised the nationalist movement. They wanted a national education different from the one proposed by Gokhale, because also the nation they envisioned was different. Among the members of the Legislative Imperial Council, R.N. Mudholkar, Mazhar-ul-Haq and a young Mohammad Ali Jinnah were in favour of free and compulsory education, whereas Gangadhar Chitnavis, leading landlord and money lender and supporter of Tilak through his Berar Provincial Association, was against the Bill, whereas M.D. Dadabhoy supported child labour and was therefore against a measure that would deprive capitalists of cheap workforce. Their position, Gokhale maintained, was dictated by mere class-interests. Subalterns were to remain such[565]. Some Muslim leaders feared that the compulsory classes of the Bill could be utilised to compel Muslim boys to learn non-Muslim languages. In order to remove all apprehensions on that point, Gokhale introduced an agreement according to which where there were 25 children speaking a particular language attending a school, provision should be made for teaching those children in that language, and further, where the number was less than that, it should be left to the community itself to say whether the children should come under the compulsory clauses of the Bill or not. Gokhale said that he had discussed that matter with several leading Muhammadan gentlemen - something which appears from his private papers - and he understood that such compromise would meet their view[566]. Gokhale saw those who could not understand the intrinsic value of mass education as incapable of comprehending

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563 "Elementary Education Bill", 138.
564 "Elementary Education Bill", 138.
565 "Elementary Education Bill", 18 March 1912, 132.
566 "Elementary Education Bill", 18 March 1912, 129.

the dignity of man as a man, since they regarded 'the poorer classes of the country as made solely to serve those who are above them'[567]; whereas others were against the bill because the officials were against it and preferred to embrace the official view on the matter because the latter have much to give or because 'they are so constituted that official favour is to them as the breath of their nostrils and an official frown is a heavy misfortune, and because they think nothing of bartering the birthright of our common humanity for something even less substantial than the proverbial mess of pottage'[568]. Certain zamindars said they were against the Bill, because they did not want to contribute with their money. Moreover, they were concerned that the spread of child education would have made difficulty to find servants and other menial workers for the country. What is more, it was not commendable that children of the upper classes were forced to sit in the same classroom with children of the lower classes. Others commented that children of poor classes could become gentlemen, something that Gokhale did not even want to comment. Further objections referred to the risk of an education which could be prejudicial towards a certain religious community, to which Gokhale replied that education had to be secular in order to avoid any kind of prejudice or religious bias. To those who ridiculed the Bill as a limited measure that provided the masses only with the capability of writing and reading, Gokhale said that literacy, although basic, was better than illiteracy[569]. But also the Moderates were divided in their response to the Bill. Surendranath Banerjea, for instance, was against it because funds would be syphoned off from higher education, whereas Pherozshah Mehta wanted the Government of India to take care of the responsibility of primary schools and not the municipalities and districts because that would have been a pretext for government inaction. Those who were in favour of the Bill were some members of the educated classes and the backward communities.

With such complicated scenario, it is not surprising that Gokhale's Bill was defeated. Gokhale came out exasperated saying that the opponents were only concerned about "providing better dividends for the capitalists"[570]. The failure to introduce the Elementary Education Bill was not ascribable to poverty or colonial rule, but to the reluctance of the Indian political leadership to place the interests of the nation above caste and class interests. The attitude towards an inclusive kind of education as the one proposed by the

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[567] "Elementary Education Bill", 18 March 1912, 113.
[568] "Elementary Education Bill", 18 March 1912, 113.
[569] "Elementary Education", 88.
[570] G.A. Natesan (edited by), *Speeches of Gopal Krishna Gokhale,* Natesan, Madras 1920, 623.

Bill, although reasonably cautious, is a litmus of the pattern of inclusiveness and exclusiveness that divided Indian nationalist leaders[571].

Conclusion

To conclude, during his public life, Gokhale was involved in building a liberal, secular nation. The idea of the nation articulated by Gokhale was predicated on the concept that India was mainly a political and territorial unity. Its inhabitants would become Indians once they would feel the individual consciousness of being part of the nation and take part into its progress and amelioration. Only such national awareness could make the nation capable of consolidating itself within its space, while joining the other nations of the British Empire and of the world. The nation imagined by Gokhale then was indissolubly connected with humanity.

By adopting a political idea of nationhood which was opposed to a narrowly cultural one, Gokhale articulated a form of nationalism that celebrated differences vis-à-vis parochial identities and challenged the concept of nationhood - quite rooted both in Europe and in India by the end of the nineteenth century - according to which a country that did not possess blood and cultural bonds could not aspire to be a nation.

Gokhale's idea of the nation was defined, on the one hand, by the principles of the British liberal tradition and, on the other, in contraposition to the illiberal British rule in India, which violated and insulted those same principles. Gokhale's conceptualisation of the nation was in sum a by-product of liberalism and its 'other'. In Gokhale's thought, liberalism was a safeguard against the oppressive colonial state, but it was also the catalyst for a radical social transformation against the internal evils of Indian society. It advocated freedom for each individual, regardless of his or her race, religion, class or caste. It was this liberal ideology, which wanted to ensure all-round liberties to the individual, to be attacked time and again by the 'Extremists', because it jeopardised, more than the colonial rule, the

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[571] Although Gandhi considered Gokhale his political guru and retained his secular ideas, in terms of education he reflected much more the ideas of Tilak. Gandhi opposed Gokhale's compulsory education Bill (*Young India*, 14 August 1924). Moreover, by advocating the abolition of the salt-tax and making this the landmark of his campaign against the government - whereas Gokhale had promoted the tax on salt as 8 anna to fund primary education - Gandhi nullified Gokhale's plan to use the same tax to fund primary education. Further, Gandhi opposed the implementation of compulsory elementary education by the Maharaja of Baroda. By and large, modern education for Gandhi, like for Tilak, was alienating for the masses, textbooks were useless, if not harmful, and what kept society together were high loyalties such as faith, parents and dharma. Gandhi claimed to be defending Indian spiritual tradition and to find an alternative to 'Western' modernity (Rao, *New Perspectives*, 171-73).

persistence of the master-servant relationships that characterised Indian society. The stratagem was to identify Gokhale and the 'Moderate' leadership of the Congress with the collaborators of the colonial rule, committed to promote colonial modernity to the detriment of the traditional Hindu ethos.

In short, then, the nation envisioned by Gokhale was inclusionary, individual-based, forward-looking, based on a common future in which economic and social discrimination would be finally overturned. It was predicated on an idea, rather than on external symbols. And exactly this was its weakness: being too rational and far-sighted, it did not arouse deep and compelling passions. Gokhale's speeches and appeals were addressed not to the masses, but to the educated Indians. Gokhale did not work among the masses, but for the masses. His political programme was based on political principles that could hardly be captivating for the 'ignorant' Indian people until they reached a certain level of education and political awareness. Therefore, the Indian masses had to be included gradually in the active political life of the nation. Gokhale, thus, did not theorise an oligarchy for India. On the contrary, he laid emphasis on the fact that "any progress we make as a people must now be on a democratic basis (…). And for this purpose it is not a few towering individuals that will suffice, but the average strength of the mass of the people must be raised"[572]. Three were the fundamental factors that could facilitate this scope: the spread of education, *sine qua non* for the creation of a national culture and crucial medium to foster national unity and material and moral advancement; the enjoyment of self-government as the only hope for Indians to safeguard their rights and interests and discover their common purpose as a nation; the continuance of the British connection, so that India could be trained in the practice of liberty and free institutions and remain within the space of the Empire and under the guidance of British liberal sway.

Gokhale's merit was certainly that of familiarising their countrymen with the concept of Indian nationality and of providing his successors within the Indian National Congress with the powerful and far-reaching ideal of a human, secular, and democratic nationalism. To this principle the Congress continued to be inspired even when it was transformed, thanks to Gandhi's action, into a militant political party capable of employing 'new symbols and slogans which appealed to the minds and heart of millions of men and women who had hitherto remained practically untouched by politics'[573].

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[572] Speech at Calcutta, 2 September 1911, *Speeches and Writings*, Vol. 3, 244.
[573] Nanda, *Gokhale*, 492-93.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this work we have seen how liberalism, especially in its Indian version, namely what Indian intellectuals thought functional in the colonial context, played a pivotal role in creating a new ethos that, for the first time in the course of Indian history, advocated not only the freedom of the individual from social and religious restrictions, but also equality between individuals. Liberalism thus constituted the foundation of Gokhale's ideology and the bedrock of his political nationalism, which placed the political individual at the centre of the nation. So, Gokhale envisioned the Indian nation as the political entity where everybody was entitled to civic and political rights and equal in front of the law. All were citizens being inhabitants of the British Empire and according to the British liberal tradition.

Antithetic to Gokhale's political nationalism was the cultural nationalist ideology which was based on the concept that the most important section of the society was the culturally-defined group. But this cultural nationalism, promoted by Tilak and later on systematised by Savarkar, identified itself with the Hindu culture, depicted as the only authentically Indian culture of the subcontinent, even though, as seen above, Hinduism as a monolithic religion was a by-product of the socio-cultural change brought by colonialism and therefore outcome of modernity. However, since Hindu culture was presented as the only social and moral binding factor of the nation and described as ancient, pure and characterised by permanent traits, the most logical consequence was an attitude of resistance against influences coming from other cultures. In a reality as diverse as India, such a vision of the nation could not but lead, besides to the obvious rejection of everything British, to the exclusion of the Muslim minority, who, in this nationalist discourse, was regarded as one of the historical agent that had greatly contributed to the contamination and decline of the glorious Hindu past.

Of course, both political and cultural nationalism were innovating and modern. Tilak's ideas were by no means more traditional than Gokhale's ones. As seen above, in fact, nationalism is always a modern phenomenon. Indian nationalists, then, embraced and blended ideas loosely taken both from the European and Indian history and the respective intellectual legacies. The combination was different because the nation they imagined was different and therefore they needed strategies that could better serve their purposes.

Gokhale's imagined nation was cultural, political, and territorial. But in the Congress leader's ideology, it was the voluntaristic element, that is the individual consciousness of being part of a given nationality, the most powerful sentiment that made the nation capable

of constituting itself. Belonging to the same culture - and, as seen, Indian culture was, in Gokhale's outlook, very different from what Tilak or Savarkar maintained - was not enough to unite the nation. In order to achieve national unity, what was crucial was the political will to participate to the well-being of the nation.

With his emphasis on the individual and his concept of the nation as medium to proceed along with the other nations - and not to the detriment of the other nations - on the path of human progress, Gokhale is significantly kept in the background nowadays. According to Gokhale, and his life provided an example of what he meant, religion had to remain relegated into the private sphere and be logically separate from politics, especially in a nation with several confessions like India. The individual then had to be decomposed into religious man and citizen: this decomposition would be encouraged by political emancipation, carried out through education and an increasing association in self-government. Religious neutrality, thus, was the only way to bring together the different communities and include them on a level of equality into the nation. It is quite telling, in this respect, that various members of the Muslim League looked up to Gokhale and appealed to him to ask for concessions. Mohammad Ali Jinnah said that it was his ambition to become the Muslim Gokhale. Also Ambedkar, the eminent leader of the Dalit community, highly reputed Gokhale and his socio-political vision and thought that the Congressman was entitled to everlasting gratitude for his zeal and sacrifice.

The fact that the leaders of the weakest sections of the Indian society valued Gokhale's work explains that his liberal conceptualisation of the nation accommodated the needs of the different Indian communities. By advocating a liberal, secular, and egalitarian society, free from religious and caste prejudices and an Indian nationality based on citizenship, Gokhale suggested that all members of the nation were equal and bore the same rights. From this ideological position, not only did Gokhale ask for a greater Indian participation in the colonial government, but he also endorsed the creation of a fairer society, which could not be realised without the eradication of the master-servant relationship inherent within Hindu society.

All in all, then, Gokhale's nation was not felt as an exclusionary value, to the detriment of the 'Other'. On the contrary - and in this sense the spirit of Mazzini's nationalism resonates in Gokhale's thought - the highest duty of the nation rested on the accomplishment of the supreme end, namely humanity. In Gokhale's nationalist ideology, thus, beyond the individuality of the nation, we find the universalism of humanity, epitomised by the Empire. It was in the welfare of the other nations that each nation had its natural limits. Such a vision could only be predicated on the principle of inner and outer liberty. In other words,

the freedom of the Indian nation was not only about who controlled society, but also and more importantly, about the welfare of all Indians, regardless of their religion, class, or caste. And this is, I believe, the greatest lesson that Gokhale bequeathed.

Therefore, Gokhale's idea of the nation remains important in today's India for two main reasons. In the first place, it is a powerful antidote against the narrow-mindedness of certain outlooks that consider one's culture as a watertight container, resistant to the influence of the Other's culture. The danger of such an approach, which requires one to hate what is foreign just because it is foreign and denies even the highest achievements of different civilisations while admiring its own customs regardless of their effect on the freedom of the individual, is self-explanatory. Gokhale, rather than being dazzled by the 'West', appreciated the values and principles of the Enlightenment because he thought they could contribute to the amelioration of the Indian society, therefore they were not simply a product of the West, but conquests of human reason.

In the second place, in a context like the contemporary Indian one, where religion keeps on being a ritualised public performance that determines one's belonging (or non-belonging) to the nation, the concept of liberty formulated by Gokhale is meaningful because it stands for liberty for all citizens, irrespective of their religious or caste identity. Gokhale's freedom, then, is foundation of a secular state that accords the same rights, duties, and dignity to the followers of every religion. According to Gokhale, in fact, in a country as culturally rich as India, the state had to be secular, neutral, and equidistant from every religious confession. This is particularly significant today as a bulwark against the ideology of *Hindutva*, against the state that identifies itself with the Hinduness of the majority and elaborates a discourse that excludes non-Hindus

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