Chapter One

Introduction: Appropriation of Indian History

On December 6th 1992, various Hindu organizations successfully collaborated in demolishing a Mosque at the supposed birth site of a Hindu God, Ram, in Ayodhya, India. Justification for this act was attributed to an unverified historical evidence. According to the evidence, in the sixteenth century a Mughal emperor destroyed the Hindu temple that was originally at this site. Even the claim about the place as being the specific birth site of the Hindu god Rama remains unproven. This is but one example of the political appropriations of history in the name of a Hindu majority in India. Appropriations of history must be contextualized in order to show them up as politically motivated. Within these political appropriations, minority groups like the Indian Muslims are excluded or merely listed. However, it is not only politics that makes dubious claims to historical evidence, but also historiography itself. By privileging certain interpretations and masking or excluding others, historiographies are complicit in the act of political appropriation.

This dissertation relates itself to the examination of Indian history's dominant historiographical modes which favourably analyze Gandhian nationalism. The tilt towards Gandhian nationalism masks Hindu nationalism. More specifically, the dissertation is interested in seeing how this tilt deals with the history of subaltern, especially tribal groups. In order to understand the position of tribal groups, Gandhian nationalism and its subscription to Hinduism have to be explored.

India's colonial period, marked as it is by the intermingling of diverse groups, is a site of conflict, protest and repression. British rule made an indelible impression

on every aspect of Indian life. Therefore, analytical distinctions between Indian and western used by many scholars have to be viewed in their combined constitution of social relations. In doing so, other analytical distinctions, between, for example, materiality and ideology, and tradition and modernity are also found wanting. Indian nationalists and historiographers have attempted to construct a cultural identity for Indians by mobilizing these distinctions. In their attempt to create the illusion of a Hindu majority in India, histories have generally been written on one side of the dichotomy, that of traditional and ideological. This method of writing history leaves aside the material dimensions of inequality.

In the construction of this cultural identity, as a project of Indian nationalism, the model used has been that of the hierarchical structure of caste, as incorporated within the label Hinduism. Nationalists of the colonial period, and subsequent historians, have privileged a particular version of Hinduism, and projected it onto an idyllic conception of a pre-colonial Indian past. This model of Hinduism subsumes within its fold most of the diverse elements, without attention to the disjunctures in social reality. What results in histories, therefore, is a marginalization or silencing of large segments of the Indian population who occupied a subaltern position with reference to the Hindu elites.

Defining what constitutes Hindu is a complex task. The term originally dates back to encounters with the Greeks, but its contemporary political form originated during the colonial period. It was meant to incorporate a large number of diverse groups and sects, which were neither Muslim nor Christian. As such, during different points in the colonial and post colonial period, the term Hindu has been used to refer to tribal groups, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and members of other dissenting sects

(Omvedt 9). However, members of the afore-mentioned known as Hinduism was only gradually consolidated out of several traditions crystallized as a religion based on appeals to the Vedas and to the authority of Brahmans (9). The Brahmin privilege that is emphasized in this term Hindu creates a philosophy that is more accurately termed Brahmanism. Brahmanism is synonymous with Hinduism.

Brahmanism is, however, the privileging of the ritual status of the upper caste. Caste is a term that has been used to refer to both *varna* and *jati. Varna* is the hierarchical division of society into four groups: the Brahmins at the top are traditionally associated with the priesthood and higher levels of administration; the *Kshatriyas*, the warriors and nobility; the *Vaishyas,* merchants and businessperson; and the *Shudras,* the peasantry, artisans and other group who toil for the above three. In reality, however, in the *jati*—often translated as a sub-caste—which determines the general rules of social relations within and among different groups. *Jati* was originally an extended kin network, while emerged later superimposing a ritual, ideological division on *jati*. Tribal groups lie outside the ideological system of subsuming the terms *varna* and *jati*.

During the British rule, upper caste elites attempted to create an inclusive Hinduism "that claim[ed] the whole mythologies of the Puranic traditions as deriving ultimately from a *Brahmanic*; Vedic, and Sanskritic core, that incorporate[d] and yet subordinate[d] all the various 'subaltern' traditions—and that [was] posed in radical contrast to such 'non- Indian' religions as Islam and Christianity" (10). Hindu assertion reemerged at the turn of the 19th century. At that time, a group of the nationalists known as extremists invoked ancient post-Vedic Hindu traditions which had, in the medieval times, been transformed so as to ensure the Brahmins'

superiority. This notion has developed as the politics of *Hindutva*—a jingoistic attempt to create a hegemonic Hindu identity in post-independent India.

Gandhi arrived on the screen soon after the extremists gained dominance within the Congress Party (the political party associated with India's freedom struggle). His version of Hinduism is particularly important. While Gandhi severely criticized western civilization and industrialization, especially as the latter had flourished at the expense of the Indians, his approach was founded in his own interpretation of an ideal of Hinduism. As numerous scholars have pointed out, Gandhi's alternative to western industrialization was based not on the modern principles of human freedom and equality, but upon the notion of the self-sufficient village community. This village community was to function according to an idealized *varna* system where "the paternalistic rule of kings" would be "regulated by intellectuals" (12). As Gandhi was also a shrewd political leader, has ability to strike compromises between groups of high castes and peasants allowed the inequality to be subsumed in the larger project of a hegemonic appropriation of subaltern groups. This attempt at appropriation of the disadvantaged groups in India society was conceived within the project of building a Hindu majority which would ideally be generous and tolerant to the diverse ways of living and believing of the non-Hindu minorities.

Tribal groups have been the topic of much academic discourse. Yet there is no consensus in India around the definition of tribe. The term tribe emerged during the colonial era and was used by the British to distinguish a group of people who did not easily fit into the category of caste. Because of the lack of specificity, the term is used to describe vastly different groups of people. Suranjit Kumar Saha, for example, defines tribal of people as those who during the centuries of Indian history underwent

"resident Hindu incorporation" (275). The incorporation started during the migration of the Vedic people towards the east. According to Saha, they increased their number by incorporating in a select fashion member of the indigenous groups, and thereby forming a Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance which comprised approximately 5-10% of the population (285). While many tribal groups were assimilated into the caste framework, others resisted this Hindu incorporation (282). Until British rule there were rugged mountainous areas, where tribal group remained relativity untouched by caste relations.

As the British consolidated their rule over India, the secluded tribal areas were forced open to the conversion activity of British missionaries. During this period, the accounts of the tribal groups were based on two sources: ethnographies conducted by colonial officials on manners and customs and Hindu attempts by leaders of Hinduist movements to prove the Hinduness of the tribes. The tribes were treated as static social isolates comprising noble savages in need of protection by missionaries and the colonial government. The nationalists looked upon the tribes as an assimilated sub-system of Hindu.

For British administrative purposes, it was necessary to bring the whole of India under central control and colonial administration. Therefore, it sent its officers and missionaries into tribal areas. At the same time, caste Hindu traders, shopkeepers, moneylenders and suppliers provided support for the colonial endeavour in these areas. What resulted was an entrenching of the caste/tribe division in the tribal areas. Various changes introduced by the British brought previously autonomous tribal communities in contact with caste Hindu society, which significantly changed tribal life.

The introduction of the *zamindari* system of land tenure moved the tribals into a cash economy, and away from the communal character of their villages (Sachchidananda 283-284). The British also extended the role of the traditional moneylender, to include that of a middleman. The middleman was a creature of the colonial system. He performed a variety of functions as a moneylender, as a trader who controlled production of food-grain through the system of advanced credit and as a land-grabber.

English missionaries, however, tried to organize the tribal people into cooperative societies to fight against oppressive Hindu landlords, operating under the land tenure system. This created the idea that missionaries were the benefactors of tribals. Many tribals were thus converted to Christianity, creating a schism between the converted and the non-converted. The missionaries also perpetuated the idea that caste and tribal identities were different. At the same time, nationalists began lobbying for tribal welfare. As much of the nationalist work was done with the underlying idea that tribes were a part of Hindu society, tribal groups were pulled in two directions—Hindu and British (294).

The British made distinctions between the tribes and caste society, perpetuating the notion that the groups represented separate racial categories, distinguishable by physical features. While certain indigenous tribal groups in pre-colonial India had remained relatively untouched by the advancing Brahmanic society, absolute racial distinctions did not represent the result of centuries of intermingling between the so-called Aryans, indigenous tribes and other outside groups.

In keeping with this idea of racial distinction, various characteristics were also associated specifically with each group. Despite the label of martial races given to some caste groups, caste society as a whole was constructed as weak and effeminate by the British. Tribes, in opposition, were portrayed as masculine, noble and loyal. These ideas were fueled by connecting tribes to the romantic post-Enlightenment notions of the noble savage, and wayward children (Skaria, 1997: 732). In the British conception, caste and tribe represented different degrees of wildness. Castes were thought to have reached a slightly higher form of civilization, and were not expected to indulge in violent outbursts whereas with tribes, violence was treated as the mischievousness of children. Indian nationalists, on the other hand, had a stake in representing the unity between tribe and caste. Tribe were claimed to belong within an all-encompassing Hindu realm. The tribes thus became a site of contention between nationalists and colonialists, both fighting to incorporate the tribal communities within their wider projects of nationalism and colonialism respectively.

Rapid and drastic changes in the lifestyle of the tribal populations led many of them to revolt against British and Hindu tyranny. There are three phases of these tribal protests. The first phase, from 1795-1860, coincided with the rise and expansion of the British Empire, and comprised primary resistance movements which tended to be large and spontaneous. The second phase, from 1860 to 1920, coincided with the rise of a much deeper penetration of British capitalism into tribal areas. While both segments of the peasantry and tribal revolted, the latter developed a more political and religious overtone to their movements. The third phase –1920-1947 witnessed movements of a more secular and political nature, and tribes began participating in the nationalist and agrarian movements.

As the nationalist struggle was deeply influenced by Gandhi, his approach to the tribals is also important. Gandhi's contribution to the tribal was two-fold: first, he seemed to carry forward and deepen the process of Sanskritization and then expose them to Hindu spiritualism in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Gandhi's work on tribal welfare was also largely responsible for politicizing the tribals. Through the efforts of Gandhian workers, tribal movements appeared as imitations of Gandhian nationalist Hindu ideology. Gandhi's influential principles of *swaraj*—self rule for Indians—and *satyagraha*—the practicing of truth—became popular with tribal groups.

Nationalist approaches to Indian historiography puts emphasis on tribes as part of larger Indian—implicitly Hindu—family. Aggressive tribal assimilation into Hindu society began with the British, precisely because of their efforts to create artificial distinctions, and this was continued with the nationalists. As a result of colonial distinctions, the tribal were thrown into severely oppressive relations, and some theorists consequently have been critical of the welfare and reconstruction programs aimed at tribal groups (Sachchidananda 303).

Western education, it has argued, has only created divisions within tribal society. For Mark Galandter, the "… absorption of the educated and better equipped tribals into the services… deprived the community of leadership and rendered it more easily manipulated and less assertive and self-reliant" (qtd. in Sachchidananda 303). Schchidananda stresses the fact that welfare tends to benefit those who are already more privileged within the tribal community.

> The role of the tribal elite in bringing about social transformation in their community is a very mixed one. On the one hand, they serve as models for emulation and also inject some dynamism into local communities. On the other, the structural obstacles to upward mobility are too great for the majority of tribals to overcome on their own, and those who have already claimed the benefits of development do not engage in active politics to redistribute them. (309)

Thus, even when social advancement allows particular members of a tribal or other subaltern group to improve their socio-economic status, the group as a whole rarely benefits. Moreover, the members who increase their status, often do so at the cost of maintaining any link with their (tribal) community. Tribal separation from 'mainstream' society, thus, continues, as does the tribal subordination to the Hindu mainstream. In other words, while tribal society still exercises a certain amount of autonomy, it is ultimately working within the "broader pan-Indian" or Hindu society, on whose margins it exists (Saha 287).

It is difficult to conceptualize the relationship between tribal groups and the wider Hindu community, as defining Hinduism is itself a problematic, if not impossible endeavour. "Veer Bharat Talwar," Gyanendra Pandey notes, "has argued recently that the acceptance of *varnashrama dharma* (in effect, caste) and the supremacy of the Brahmin, the worship of the cow, and the burning of the dead, and are three features of commonality in the beliefs and practices of all Hindus" (256). This rather overt reference to the supremacy of the Brahmin points to the fact that Hinduism is, in its essentials, the same as Brahmanism. And it is this Brahmanism that lies at the core of the political agenda of the *Hindutva* proponents. The question,

then, of where the marginal groups fit in, has always been a problematic one for the proponents of *Hindutva*.

Specifically, in terms of tribal groups, Pandey points out that *Panchjanya*, the journal of Rastriya Svayam Sevak Sangh (RSS, a nationalist, voluntary Hindu organization), made an attempt to separate the terms *vanvasi* and *adivasi*. *Adivasi* implies original inhabitant. *Vanvasi* on the other hand, implies an inhabitant of the forest. *Hindutva* proponents believe that the upper castes are descended from Aryans (258). The term *adivasi* is avoided, as it would imply that tribes, rather than the so-called Aryans, are the original inhabitants of India. Using the term *vanvasi* instead of *adivasi* is a deliberate move by the RSS journal to designate the tribals as uncivilized people who still need to be brought into the fold of Hinduism. The term *vanvasi* also has historical implications, connoting uncivilized, even barbaric peoples. This negative association, for people of the forest, is found in pre-colonial and British literature, and although conceptions have been changing over the centuries, the negative connotation associated with tribal (forest) populations has remained rather constant.

Sumit Guha points out that even the term *adivasi* is problematic as it implies some of the genetic continuity, whereas the history of Indian groups is marked with much intermixing. Still, the term *adivasi* represents the reality more closely. The closest English equivalent would be aborigine. However, the term tribe has been used in literature, implying the political organization of a community (Guha 430). But the term tribe also has connections with its anthropological past, which makes it foreign. Despite their foreignness, these terms are part of the political framework today. The politics of representing indigenous peoples is marked by two processes: the first is the

construction of categories by the state, and the second is the usage of these categories by indigenous people themselves in their approaches to the state (Rodrigues and Game 2710). In other words, tribal communities have used the categories enforced on them, originally by the colonial state and later by the postcolonial state, to press for change.

Distinctions between caste and tribe were perpetuated, during colonial rule, in order to create and consolidate distinctions between two supposedly distinct racial groups. These separate categories have been used by nationalists, and later *Hindutva* proponents, to fuel the rise of a Hindu nationalism and to construct a 'Hindu' cultural identity. Colonial officials and writers perpetuated a notion of Hindus as emasculated and weak, and Indian nationalists responded with a return to some notion of a glorious Hindu past, in order to assert the naturalness of their strength and vigour, steeped in a concocted religion. Historiography of the colonial period is consequently submerged in a dialogue between Indian—Hindu—and British elements and categories. Indian nationalism, as it was strongly influenced by Gandhi's version of Hinduism, is difficult to understand without an examination of Hinduism itself.

This dissertation examines two modes of historiography that have sought, in different ways, to examine and analyze the colonial imposition, and to understand the nature and effects of the emergence of the Indian nation. Within these modes of historiography, the subaltern populations have been dealt with in different ways.

In the next chapter this dissertation examines materialist nationalist histories, which have provided an important perspective on the colonial period. These histories have concentrated on the inimical effects of the changing forces of production which

transformed Indian society. However, materialist historians share with nationalist historians a set of positive assumptions about the nationalist movement, which rests on a notion of hegemony. In other words, these historiographies analyze the freedom struggle as a successful counter hegemonic project which ousted colonial rule in India. In these accounts, subaltern groups such as the peasants, lower castes and tribes, are incorporated into the nationalist hegemony under Gandhi's leadership of the Congress Party. Where materialist and nationalist histories diverge is on the point of secularism. Bipin Chandra (the materialist nationalist historian examined in the chapter), contends that while the nationalist movement was guided by certain ostensibly Hindu principles, it was still secular in its approach. Nationalist histories, on the other hand, do not address the question of secularism, and they primarily focus on the work of nationalist—mainly Hindu—freedom fighters. They emphasize the idea that the basis of Gandhian nationalist hegemony, was the notion of tolerance towards the minorities.

The Subaltern Studies Collective has studied the history of the subaltern groups in India in order to show that neither the colonial state nor the elite Indian bourgeoisie which initiated the nationalist movement, was able to achieve hegemony. Their works, especially those of Partha Chatterjee and Ranjit Guha, is the focus of chapter three. Working within the Gramscian framework of hegemony, Chatterjee examines the distinctions between civil and political society and community and capital and concludes that these distinctions are not adequate to understand the nature of nationalism in India. He articulates a further distinction, namely, the unique dichotomy of an inner and an outer domain of nationalism. The importance of the inner domain or community is highlighted, using the Gandhian notion of community,

through which Chatterjee seeks to explain the successful mass mobilization that allowed to gain her freedom from colonial rule.

The fourth chapter examines this possibility through one David Hardiman's ethnographies. This study looks at the tribal groups of Gujarat in India, and their assertions against not only Brahmanical privilege, but also against others who exerted economic pressure on them. This work brings out the potential of a critical, material perspective on Hinduism/Brahmanism and caste during the colonial period. Understanding the potential critiques embedded within this Hindu consciousness is pertinent, especially in the postcolonial political context in India, where they could provide a counter-discourse to the Hindu approach to the history.

Chapter Two

Nationalist History and Hindu Identity: A Critique of Bipin Chandra

This chapter examines the materialist nationalist approach to Indian colonial history in order to show how it is implicated in the construction of a cultural Hindu identity. Nationalist histories have been concerned with highlighting the role of Hindu nationalists during the independence movement. As such, they focus on the cultural aspects of Indian life, emphasizing religion as a method of identity formation. Materialist histories analyze the Indian Independence struggle within the framework of the long-term economic exploitation of India through imperialism. They also study the development of classes as they arose within imperialism, and the rise of communalism in between 1757 and 1947. Where materialist history takes on a nationalist stance is in its analysis of Gandhi's contribution to transforming the national movement into a mass movement.

This history, however, does not account for the reasons why social relations were sustained in specific ways. Class and caste were categories entrenched by colonial rule. While these imposed categories did not adequately represent the reality of Indian life, both the British and Indian nonetheless used them for diverse political ends. Bipin Chandra's materialist history reveals the changing economic circumstances which altered social relations in India. Yet, his materialist approach does not fully deal with the changing mode of production which incorporates an understanding of not only economic, but also social processes that helped entrench the newly emerging social relations. Also Chandra's emphasis on Gandhi's contribution to bringing the masses into the nationalist movement leads him treat the implicit

Hindu factor that guided Gandhi, as unproblematic. Those who do not significantly problematize this take for granted that Hinduism exists as a philosophy or religion and, this results in the emergence of a notion of Hindu secularism.

Hinduism is difficult to define, and, specifically, in terms of its political deployments, during the colonial period, which led to phenomena such as communalism. By not problematizing the varied, diverse and syncretic set of ideas captured in this religion, Chandra ignores the fact that Hinduism was never an absolute and, that despite its mass appeal, Gandhi's nationalism was a Hindu nationalism that did not speak for, or represent, the entire nation.

Chandra explains that colonial rule in India began in the eighteenth country when the English East India Company (EIC) endeavoured to secure a monopoly in trade with India and the East, so that it could buy products as cheaply as possible, and sell them with maximum profit in Britain. The Battle of Plassey, in 1757, marked a significant victory for the East India company. Having defeated the Nawab (ruler) of Bengal (in East India), the EIC attempted to bring the whole of India under its control. In order to achieve this mainly mercantilist function, the Company had to keep out other European competitors who posed a risk to its trade monopoly in Asia. The Company ensured the elimination of competitors from within Britain, but could not use the British government to keep out other European companies. Thus, powerful blocs were set up to maintain trading privileges, and waging battles became part of this procedure. Inevitably, this involved large amounts of money which neither the EIC nor the British government could provide. Thus in order to maintain its position, the company began levying taxes on rulers in India. During this period, few structural

changes were made in India. The main aim behind trade monopoly was the efficient collection of revenue.

The second phase of colonial rule in India coincided with the rapid growth of industrial capital in Britain. With the decline of mercantilist trading corporations the EIC represented the dying social force. The EIC's territorial power over India, thus, produced a struggle in Britain. As Chandra notes, "By 1813 [the EIC] was left with a mere shadow of economic and political power in India; the real power was now wielded by the British Government in the interests of the British capitalist class as a whole" (6).

The British government henceforth represented dominant industrial capitalist interests. The EIC was only a trading corporation, and its monopoly on Indian exports did not have any particular benefit for the British capitalist interest. British industrialists needed a market for the goods, as well as raw materials and cheap labour for the production of these goods. Indian could provide all these factors necessary for capitalist expansion. However, in return for British investment, India had to pay various dividends and fees. For these, she needed to obtain revenue from exporting goods but these goods could not undermine the sale of British products. By then, the cottage and handicraft industries had been all but destroyed by the exploitative policies of the EIC, and India was reduced to exporting certain non-manufactured goods and raw materials.

During this second stage of colonial rule, various changes were made which provoked severe consequences for India's infrastructure. Free trade was introduced to benefit British manufactures, and forcibly open India for their expansion, India's legal structure was changed to accommodate the emerging capitalist relations. And, to

make India accessible and conducive to British administration, an elaborate system of railways was built, roads improved, and a modern postal system introduced. The emergence of this new phase did not signify the end of the old forms of exploitation. Colonialism, to flourish, still needed revenue from India to pay English civil servants. Therefore, perpetuating and altering traditional feudal relations to suit their needs, the British extracted exorbitant taxes from peasant cultivators.

The third stage of colonial rule was that of undisguised imperialism. Beginning in the 1860s, other countries in Europe and North America experienced their own industrial revolution, challenging Britian's manufacturing supremacy. Many European powers were looking for markets in Asia, Africa and Latin America and competition for them was increasing. Colonizing countries in all these continents was beneficial for several reasons. First, the vast surpluses that were accumulating could be invested in these countries. Second, as the labour was cheap, profits were high, and there would be a constant supply of raw materials. Further, the rise of democratic ideals—such as liberty and equality—challenged the rights of the upper classes in Europe. Their hegemony was no longer sustainable without accommodating other working groups in society. European powers needed to find other areas where exploitation could be justified. For a time, therefore, the exploitation was legitimized under the banner of capitalist growth and expansion in the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. In India, this third stage was characterized by intensive capital investment necessary for Britain to compete with other industrializing nations in Europe. In Chandra's words, "the Indian army was the chief instrument for the expansion and consolidation of British power in Africa and Asia" (14). Rather than becoming an independent industrialized economy, India developed in an uneven way;

it became a dependent underdeveloped economy. Even though industrial changes were introduced in India, the benefits of Indian labour were largely siphoned off for the British. In Chandra's words, "… India underwent a commercial transformation and not an industrial revolution" (23).

While colonial rule is commonly associated with the three different stages of mercantilism, industrial capitalism and imperialism, elements of continuity were present throughout. Even though many changes were taking place, some aspects of Indian society were consolidated, with slight transformations, and deployed for different political purposes by the Indians and the British alike. One new element was the rise of classes in India. But while classes emerged, they did so by perpetuating the inequalities already present or nascent between groups.

The introduction of British style education facilitated the conferring of upper caste with elite status. The lower castes, who could not access the educational and industrial progress of colonial rule in India, fell into the disadvantage of the lower classes or masses. When the British first established their rule over India members of the elite nurtured the hope that domination by the British would lead India towards independent industrialization. During the later phases of colonial rule, these classes and castes became painfully aware of colonial exploitation, and began agitating against colonial rule. Once the Indian elite realized that the British were in India solely for their own purposes, and that the British presence was severely damaging to their society, nationalist sentiments of a more militant variety began to take root, according to Bipin Chandra (35-36).

The early freedom fighters, or moderates, as they were known attempted to work towards self-government with the British Raj. Mainly from the upper strata of

society, they were successful in creating a climate of criticism against colonial rule, but were unable to bring about any real transfer of power. This failure helped galvanize a group of more radical leaders known as the extremists These extremists realized that the national movement, if it were to succeed, needed the support of the masses. Thus, as Bipin Chandra mentions, efforts were made at mobilizing students, the lower middle classes and some sections of the peasantry and workers (80-82).

There is historical evidence in India that lends validity to these materialist historical claims of the rise of classes. However, it is the interpretation of the consequences of the rise of these new social relations for different groups that separates the varied histories. Chandra's materialist-nationalist history has not accounted, in a significant way, for the Indian idioms that accompanied the formation of classes. Indeed, new classes of workers and the bourgeoisie arose in colonial India but they emerged with the baggage of old hierarchies. Classes were not only formed by imperial economic factors, but also by the Hindu hierarchy of caste. Meanwhile, caste itself underwent change, as it was juxtaposed with religious identity, namely Hindu and Muslim, to separate Indians through the British strategy of divide and conquer. This political division along religious lines has come to be known as communalism. These factors of religion, caste and class intermingled to form the myriad identities, with which Indians mobilized themselves, in their attempt to overthrow colonial rule.

One of the most potent problems, to arise from the colonial rule, and one that ushered in a bloody Independence for India, was that of communalism—India's version of religious sectarianism. Chandra explains the rise of communalism with reference to various factors. Communalism, he argues, was the result of the British

perpetuation of differences amongst the Hindu and Muslim communities. It emerged because of the scarcity of work, which manifested itself more sharply with Muslims than Hindus. This economic disparity, created largely by the British, led to conflict between Hindus and Muslims as each blamed the other for problems that ensued from colonialism. Nepotism became the safety net for both communities, with alliances based on religious and familial affiliations ensuring a place in the job market (34-54).

Chandra explains the difference between Muslim and Hindu groups in the following way. During the pre –British period, in northern India, a number of upper class Muslims were feudal landowners, while Hindus occupied lower levels of administration. Imperial rule, as it became entrenched, excluded Indians from higher government posts, but allowed them into the lower rungs of civil administration. Lower and middle class Hindus used their education, acquired under colonial rule, to ensure job protection. The hold that Hindus had on middle – level jobs expanded with their entry into banking trade and money – lending. In contrast, the Muslim intelligentsia was weeded out of the higher positions of civil administration. As a result of this, and various British policies disadvantaging the Muslims, divisions along religious lines were perpetuated (18-182).

Communalism was not, as it has been conceptualized in imperial (colonial) histories, an inherent or inevitable aspect of Indian society, but rather the culmination of a complex set of forces. Chandra explains that as a result of the contradiction between imperial and nationalist interest in India, new identities required formation, so as to resist colonial domination. These new identities evolved in the context of the communal representation introduced by the British, as religion was used to perpetuate conflict between groups. Thus Chandra labels the subsequent communal practices as

an instance of 'false consciousness' (19) because communalists played upon differences between Muslim and Hindu interests, and not the differences between antinational and imperial interests, which was the real problem for India. All Indians were exploited at the hands of the British (38-39).

While there is justice in this formulation, to the various Indian and British elements at play, what Chandra does not analyze sufficiently are the different and complex factors that sustained this false consciousness. Further, even though Chandra begins to engage in the analysis of nuances of social groups, he does not pay heed to the very constructedness of these groups in the first place. The British idiom of religious separation collaborated with the Indian factor of Hinduism to form identities based upon caste and class. However, Chandra implicitly accepts the Hindu factor, terming it a mere "weakness" in Indian nationalism, rather than a problematic to be analyzed (33). His approach to the use of Hindu symbols—as simply an unfortunate political deployment in the nationalist struggle—allows for a notion of Hindu secularism. But communalism is not simply an instance of false consciousness, as Indians sustained categories created by the British because of their need to initiate change. Chandra does point out that these categories—Hindu and Muslim did not have the same basis in social reality prior to the British rule. However, it is the reason for their continued use that should become the crucial point for analysis, and this Chandra bypasses.

Thus, while Chandra hints at the complexity of groups in colonial India, his analysis is ultimately steeped in the notions of a successful and unified nationalism which cannot permit any ideas of divergence or dissent arising from a combination of pre-colonial and colonial history. The fact that the identity—Hindu—is, itself, a

varied and concocted mix of idioms remains unexamined. Thus, Chandra's approach to the analysis of different groups in the nationalist struggle is biased by his understanding of Hindu secularism.

Chandra commends the role of the intelligentsia as "having initiated the national movement, and also [having] led it in all its phases till 1947" (14). His emphasis on the invaluable role of the intelligentsia within the freedom movement leads him to lament the lack of credit given to the former. His concern is that the role of the intelligentsia is confused in some histories with that of the Indian middle class.

According to Chandra, this Indian bourgeoisie was initially concerned with simply safeguarding its position in the early phases of the freedom movement, but from the early twentieth century, the "capitalist class entered a period of long-term contradiction with colonialism as the colonial structure and economic policies increasingly hampered its growth" (14). From then the Indian bourgeoisie supported the independence movement led by the congress Party.

The Indian National Congress (Congress Party) was faced with the difficult task of accommodating several different groups and their interests. Chandra believes that the congress met this challenge successfully, and he attributes this to two factors. First, the democratic and dynamic nature of the Congress Party made it flexible enough to allow for dissent. Second, precisely because the Party received its support from the masses, there was a certain cohesion and mutual respect for all. At the turn of the century, the success for the congress was with the upper castes and classes. However, after the 1920s, under Gandhi's leadership, this changed. Gandhi mobilized the masses in India with the methods of appropriating and combining traditions from

all segments of the population. Hindu idioms were employed by Gandhi in such a way that they would appeal to a large number of the masses.

Chandra is aware of the role of these masses or other groups in Indian society, such as the peasantry, tribals, and "other backward classes" (28). Indeed, he argues that some of the most powerful critics of imperial rule came from among the lower classes:

> Women and tribal people […] rose in defence of their rights. In order to mobilize all the people in the struggle against imperialism, the national movement became committed to the goals of abolishing all distinctions and disparities based on caste, sex or religion. Moreover, common participation in demonstrations, public meetings, popular movements, trade unions and kisan sabhas [peasant-farmer unions] weakened notions of caste and male superiority. (28)

It has been presumed by Chandra, amongst others that, through Gandhi's leadership, the lower sections of society were fully incorporated into the national movement. While the commitment to equality was certainly part of the nationalist rhetoric, the reality of the situation was never quite so unproblematic nor the movement so unified. In fact, women and the lower classes did rise in rebellion, but Chandra does not analyze, in detail, the nuanced messages of their protests. Many tribal and peasant assertions were incorporated into the wider nationalist movement, but their fight against repressive Indian landlords was lost in the bigger picture of colonial exploitation. This incorporation was essentially a hegemonic appropriation made possible within Gandhi's version of Hinduism, a version which was expected to

be embraced as much by 'other' groups as by the Hindus. However, this hegemonic appropriation was incomplete.

Chandra partially accounts for this when he states that historical records for peasant (and tribal) resistance are difficult to research, as they are listed in official documents as instances of "lawlessness and dacoity" (47). At one point, he even acknowledges that, "in practice the ignorant and illiterate masses of India showed a better appreciation of the menace of colonialism than the newly educated or upper-class Indians" (50-51). But Chandra does not analyze subaltern resistance in its context of a protest against Hindu practices, that is Brahmanic dominance, because, for him, the real protest is that which was anti-imperial. "At the same time," he argues, "their [subaltern] struggles were foredoomed to failure…they did not possess a new ideology, or a new social, economic, and political programme based on an analysis of the new social forces generated by colonialism" (50-51).

Also, as Chandra is mainly concerned with the more "organized" resistance of the nationalist elite, he understands subaltern resistance only as "scattered, sporadic and disunited uprisings [which], however numerous, could not defeat modern imperialism" (50-51). As he sees it, initially, the peasantry was given to more spontaneous and disorganized rebellion, but with the emergence of *kisan sabhas*—farmer unions—, these revolts were "subsumed within the nationalist struggle, and given a more potent edge" (51). But, one could argue, that it was precisely this hegemonic incorporation into the wider nationalist movement which softened the anti-Brahmanic protest that emanated from peasant and other lower caste and class movements.

Sociologist AR Desai provides an even bleak version of the role of the peasantry. According to him, as the peasant owned land, he was given to conservatism: “Isolated from town culture and dynamic processes of modern life, the kisan meritally nurtured in the culturally poor countryside, is relatively inert, mentally dull and ignorant” (195). The peasants’ work leaves him dependent upon the forces of nature and, therefore, results in the peasant’s extreme superstition. The peasant most often accepts his fate, rather than rise in revolt against injustice. According to Desai, “Due to this organic weaknesses, economic, social and psychological, such as dispersion on a vast area, heterogeneous social composition, conservatism and others, the peasantry does not play an independent political role in the history of social struggles” (195). Further, the peasant was more individualistic in his work, than was the factory worker. As a result, group-based peasant politics emerged much later than the trade unions of factory workers (194-195).

While Chandra accounts for the role of the peasantry in the nationalist movement, if only in terms of the latter’s entry into mainstream Congress nationalism, Desai provides little space for the peasant presence within the nationalist struggle. His approach is based on the idea that the peasantry should be viewed as a heterogeneous mass needing the guidance of political leadership in nurturing the development of a revolutionary potential.

Even though Chandra provides a more inclusive approach to the role of the peasantry, his interpretations are still mired in notions of a unified nationalism. That the resistance of the peasantry and other groups, which did not participate in the bourgeoisie-led nationalism, could have possibly entailed a critique against imperialism, or even internal Hindu culture, is not entertained.

While many social movements are led by elite groups, to be successful, the alliances they seek to create must be representative of a diverse set of interests. However, the attempted Congress hegemony only incorporated the creamy layer of the lower classes and castes, and did not significantly change the material inequality of these groups.

Chandra explains that the development of a strong socialist or Marxist wave within the national movement did not take place because the national movement was dominated by bourgeois interest: while the independent character of the Indian capitalist class strengthened the commitment of the national movement to the goal of political independence, it made the task of weakening or overthrowing the bourgeois ideological hegemony over the movement more complex and therefore difficult (40). This is an important insight in Chandra's work. The hegemony that a bourgeois group exercises is supported by its control over the processes of production. However, the idea of a unified struggle is so central to Chandra's argument that he does not problematize the material control that the bourgeoisie maintained. Other scholars, as we see in the next chapter, have challenged the very notion of an ideological hegemony.

Chandra's nationalist bias becomes more evident when examining the parallels between his work and the work of nationalist historians—Bhagwan Josh and Shashi Joshi. In a two-volume study, they use the communist or left of centre groups as their point of departure, and demonstrate the lack of success that they had in mobilizing Indians against imperialism. They argue that the communist groups did not understand that the struggle against imperialism had to be fought within the domain of nationalism, and not on the basis of class interests. They see Gandhi's role in bringing

the masses within the fold of nationalism, though his class compromise approach, a successful venture. Their nationalist historiography demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the importance of studying histories from above and below, but like Chandra, they do not consider Gandhi's Hindu basis of nationalism problematic.

Gandhi has been acknowledged in many histories as primarily responsible for bringing the masses of Indian into the mainstream of nationalism. For Chandra, Gandhi was successful, as he was able to gauge the "people's mood" (1993: 82). Gandhi saw the need to encourage the masses to fight for freedom, and understood his position as that of mediator. In Chandra's words, "Gandhiji realized that a mass movement had to be based on the active participation of the people—it could not be sustained only by the highly motivated cadre of the movement. It was only with 'the might of the dumb millions' that the British rulers could be challenged" (82). Chandra contends that much of Gandhi's thought and ideology has been unfairly critiqued and seeks to resolve some of the apparent contradictions in Gandhian thought. Further, he argues that Gandhi was an ever-evolving individual, whose views constantly changed and grew and he provides some examples. One contentious debate that emerged during the nationalist struggle was the idea of development along modern industrial lines. Gandhi opposed the use of machinery, as he believed it would replace human labour (Gandhi 86-89). For Gandhi, large-scale industry was unnecessary in villages where essentials could be produced without difficulty' (Chandra, 1993: 78). However, Gandhi was not opposed to large-scale industry in general. This was far – sighted in many ways, as the emphasis on technological advancement was ruining indigenous and cottage industries, and displacing the balance between agriculture and industry. Artisans were pushed onto the land and this placed an unnecessary burden on

agriculture. It was in light of these changes that Gandhi proposed his ideas of state ownership (73-85).

Another example is provided in Gandhi's mixing of religion and politics. Initially, Gandhi believed in the use of religion in politics, as a form of morality. However, when he realized that religion was being used instrumentally to perpetuate communal (sectarian) sentiments, he propounded his idea of the separation of religion from politics (77). To elaborate, Chandra states that Gandhi's original attempts to mix religion and politics were based on an effort to bring morality (*dharma)* into politics. However, when Gandhi realized the destructive effect of this mixture, in terms of emerging communalism he soon renounced this position (18).

Also, with the communal appropriation of religion, Chandra claims that Gandhi came, in later years, to believe in the complete overthrow of the caste system (18). While "he refused to condemn the *varna* system, [in the early 1920s] opposing primarily untouchability and caste oppression," by the 1940s, Chandra argues, he was "for the total abolition of the caste system . . ." (18).

It is not easy to trace the validity of Chandra's claim for he provides no references. More importantly, as discussed earlier, Hinduism is, in many ways a justification of the ideology of the caste system. To renounce caste would also imply the abandonment of Hinduism. Thus the logical extension of this argument would mean that Gandhi came to eschew Hinduism altogether. There seem to be no indications of such an absolute renunciation of religion by Gandhi anywhere.

The notion of a Hindu secularism was not only privileged during colonial times but continues to be asserted today by proponents of *hindutva.* Hinduism has been, in its history, a practice of politically subsuming all diverse elements within its

fold. The fact that Hindu symbols have been used instrumentally, can lead to an understanding of Hinduism as an amalgam of varied elements. But this lack of homogeneity provides potential to understand the artificially constructed homogeneity by elite groups through the Congress Party. These groups appropriated varied traditions into a seemingly homogenous fold to create an aura of hegemony.

Chandra hints at the lack of hegemony as well as the diversity of social groups such as the various castes, classes and religions. However, instead of analyzing the nature of, these classes as they developed or the contradictions between traditional hierarchies of caste and newly imposed hierarchies of class, he resorts to the term masses without explaining who constituted these masses, or their internal differences. This task is accomplished within the context of an understanding of Gandhi's contribution to broadening the base of nationalism. Here there is little critique of Gandhi's class compromise approach or philosophical Hindu underpinnings. Gandhi's ability to bring together people from different groups, within a system of *varna* (underlying his notion of community) is subsumed, in Chandra's account of the development of successful nationalism.

At the same time, Chandra accounts for what he labels the "Hindu tinge" in the nationalist movement (141). This acknowledgement is important, because it could open a site for examining alternative histories. However, Chandra ultimately claims that, "with all its weaknesses Congress secularism was genuine and not Hindu communalism or Hindu 'nationalism' in disguise" (157). Further, he argues that this "genuine secularism", "was amply proved later when, after 1947, under Congress leadership, India adopted a fully secular Constitution and set out to build a society and policy which was on the whole secular, despite serious shortcomings" (157).

To recapitulate, Chandra grounds his analysis of colonialism in a materialist understanding, praising the work of Gandhi for bringing most of India into the nationalist fold. What Chandra leaves aside—albeit in a new fashion—is the debate around Hinduism, what it implies, and its problematic usage in politics by Gandhi.

The ways in which history is interpreted are crucially interconnected to the ways in which the political construction of identities is enabled. The history of the modern period in India is important for its attempt to create a Hindu identity. While secularism and democracy were the stated ideals for Independent India (through the efforts of the congress Party), they were, nevertheless implemented with an implicit acceptance of the Hindu factor, thus a secular Hinduism. Chandra's treatment of the emergence of classes, the growth of communalism, and the participation of the masses, all point towards his general sympathy for the Gandhian project of a Hindu identity.

Chandra's materialist-nationalist history lies close to the work of nationalist historians. Nationalist historians, however, largely ignore the material dimensions of inequality present in the idea of a Hindu secularism. It is important, therefore, to provide a brief account of the nationalist histories from which Chandra departs but to which in crucial ways, he is also indebted.

Chapter Three

Subaltern Studies Collective's Critique of Modern Indian History

This chapter examines contributions to Indian colonial history by the group of theorists known as the Subaltern Studies Collective. Their aim has been to challenge the dominant approaches which treat the nationalist struggle as a unified movement. The Collective seeks to demonstrate that the diversity of groups in Indian society did not allow for the formation of a nationalist hegemony.

The accounts of the colonial period by members of the Collective, specifically Partha Chatterjee and Ranajit Guha, whose works I will discuss here, have provided an alternative conception of Indian history which facilitates the analysis of a more complete picture. Chatterjee has shown that Indian nationalism emerged within the cultural domain of the community, and that this cannot be collapsed within the European notion of civil society. Guha has demonstrated that various idioms combined to form different political domains during Indian nationalism. In their work, both Chatterjee and Guha, invoking the thought of Antonio Gramsci, conclude that Gandhi's contribution to the nationalist struggle in India was largely successful. In their opinion, Gandhi created alliances which allowed many people to mobilize in the fight for independence. This brings their work close to the histories examined in the last chapter. Gandhi's class compromise is not considered problematic, as class is not the basis of their analysis.

The project has also entailed a reconceptualization of Indian historiography to provide a more layered analysis of the role of the subaltern. The term subaltern is deployed as an epistemological and contextual category, where subalternity is a condition which both peasants and the elite alternatively share. Thus the peasantry as

a mass is subaltern to the elite of Indian society, but the indigenous elite was positioned, during colonialism, as subaltern to the imperialists. It is useful first to see how the subalternists have adapted Gramsci's work to the Indian situation.

As we saw in the last chapter, Bipin Chandra views the peasantry as entirely dependent upon the guidance of the elite for creating revolutionary consciousness. The collective draws upon Gramsci's work and specifically his concept of subaltern to provide an alternate conception of the peasantry.

Gramsci counts the peasantry as one group comprising the subaltern elements of a population. This did not mean, however, that the peasant world could be conceptualized as the "idiocy of rural life" as in some Marxist accounts (Arnold 155), including that of Chandra's. Going beyond economically deterministic accounts and laying emphasis on ideology and the philosophy of parxis, Gramsci argued that the peasantry embodied more consciousness than Marx had posited. As David Arnold states, "Gramsci offer[ed] us … not … a stark dichotomy between proletariat and peasant, between revolutionary and reactionary, but differences of degrees of consciousness and solidarity between the two, with the ability of both to become revolutionary classes" (163)

Gramsci opposed the idea that movements were worthy of study only if they were planned and entirely conscious. Peasant religion (and ideology) was not a 'false consciousness', but rather a materially grounded way of explaining their social reality At the same time Gramsci realized that, "[d]isunity and absence of collective consciousness are also the hallmarks of subaltern ideology" (Arnold 159). This is where Gramsci emphasized that intellectuals, should attend to the moments of resistance in peasant life, as well as lead the pleasantry to revolutionary

consciousness. Arnold argues that ultimately, however, Gramsci resorted to an economic determinism, in locating consciousness in material conditions (162). Historical accounts by the Subaltern Studies Collective, "have tended to go beyond Gramsci," according to Arnold, "in identifying a greater degree of autonomy and internal cohesion in the peasant politics of modern Indian than he saw in his native Italy" (175).

The Subalternists' endeavour to show how the peasantry was never fully assimilated into the hegemony of the elite nationalists (169). Critiquing nationalist histories for their lack of attention to this, the aim of the Subaltern project is to analyze the, politics of the people, that is, "the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the laboring population and the intermediate strata in town and country" (Guha, "Some Aspects" 4). The peasantry provides, for the Collective, an example of sublaternity.

This group of people, who were not part of the elite, also contributed to the freedom struggle. Exercising their own methods, the subaltern resisted the hegemonic claims of the indigenous bourgeoisie as well as the colonialists. Guha's aim is to conceptualize and Indian historiography, of India, which captures the history of these subaltern group.

As the Subalternists point out, the project of writing an Indian history must deal with the legacy of colonial historiography—the privileging of the nation-state and the related influence of European modes of historiography. Thus, Europe forms the silent referent in Indian historiography as it is the birth place of the modern state. Colonial constructions of Indian history created a metanarrative of the Indian past, that, according to Ranajit Guha, is inextricably tied to the ideology of the state which,

in India, as defined by post-Enlightenment thought emerged only during colonial occupation.

Indian history predated colonial rule and, unlike its European counterparts, could not be subsumed under one generic civil society, especially when occupied by an alien power. The state should be separated from civil society in the Indian colonial context. This implies that an analysis of civil society can lead to a fuller account of Indian history. By focusing upon civil society, divergences between the elites and subalterns can be studied.

But the history of subaltern groups is associated with chaotic and spontaneous eruptions of violence, and is thus invisible to those looking for more systematic forms of resistance. In the European historiography of Europe and India, the history of the state marked the transformation to a more ordered way of life. The Banaras riots of 1809 demonstrate the method by which particular instances of revolt served, in British accounts, to stand as representative of the Indian past: the discourse of the colonial violence between Hindus and Muslims as chaotic and uncontrolled. Colonial writings seek to promote a picture of the colonial state as a wise and neutral power, ruling almost without a physical presence, by sheer force of its moral authority. The state was the mark of order, whilst religious sectarianism was an indication of the inherently violent and disordered nature of locals in pre-state society.

Indians have incorporated these colonial narratives on Indian society into their nationalist and elitist historiography. While subalternists critique orientalist tropes on Indian colonial society, they partially continue to work within this framework, using such concepts as state and civil society, in an attempt to show its limitations for the

Indian context. Chatterjee's work provides an example of historiography that moves beyond the European models.

Chatterjee's work on nationalism explores the connections between colonialism, capitalism and the modern western state. The modern state is connected to capitalist growth, and thus cannot be understood separately from its colonial career. What is key here, for Chatterjee, is that capitalist growth is in contradiction with notions of community. Indeed, this is the fundamental contradiction of the modern western state: the "narrative of capital seeks to suppress [the] narrative of community and produce in the course of its journey both the normalized individual and the modern regime of disciplinary power" ("Nation" 234). The indigenous notion of community—that Chatterjee implicitly offers as an alternative to that found in the modern western state—is Gandhi's idealized *varna* community (237). This indigenous community is a peasant community, which Gandhi was successfully able to appropriate and mobilize for the wider nationalist movement. While Chatterjee is aware of Gandhi's political appropriation of peasant community and politics, he does not problematize the underlying *brahmanic* ideology. In other words, Gandhi's appropriation created the aura of success, as it perpetuated alliances with rich sections of the peasantry, which were coincident with certain upper and dominant castes. Chatterjee believes that this conceptualization of the community can provide a critique of the capitalist-driven modern western state.

Unlike European statist discourse, subalternists argue that, in India, nationalist resistance emerged within civil society. In *The Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee is concerned with developing a description of Indian nationalism which analyzes Indians as subjects, rather than as objects, of their own history. Chatterjee argues that

the nationalist struggle was not merely a reactive political strategy to gain independence for India but emerged through indigenous, notions of community (3-5).

Benedict Anderson has argued that nationalism was not the sociologically inevitable phenomenon of shared language, race or religion, but something that was imagined into existence, and Chatterjee finds his concept of nationalism as a sense of imagined community useful. But Chatterjee objects to the implication of Anderson's argument that countries in Africa and Asia were left to choose from modes of nationalism already available in the west.

> History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anti-colonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imaginations must remain forever colonized. (5)

Chatterjee, argues instead, that nationalisms in Asia and Africa were marked by the separation of two distinct spheres—the inner or spiritual and the outer or material (16). In this account, the inner domain in India emerged first and consisted of the nation's sovereign cultural identity. The material domain, on the other hand, was associated with modern political institutions of statecraft, and constituted by fields of science and technology (9-10). The cultural facts of the inner domain that gave rise to nationalism were aided by the institution of print capitalism, in Europe, as per Anderson's argument (7-8). Using the example of Bengal, in Eastern India, Chatterjee demonstrates how Bengali novels were printed, and drama and art schools begun, as indications of the activity of the inner domain. The inner domain was sacred to the

extent that whilst social reform could be affected here, it could only be done so by Indians themselves. That is, while reform was along modern lines, it was indigenized to coincide with Indian traditions, and most importantly, remained inaccessible to British intervention (8-9).

This inner domain was not, however, untouched by British involvement. The Bengali Hindu middle class, according to Chatterjee, was a theoretical subaltern which struggled with the tension between Indian tradition and western modernity within the inner domain. In its attempts at social reform, this subaltern elite had to grapple with the contradictions imposed by adopting western principles of liberty and freedom, while, at the same time, paying heed to Indian tradition. As Indian tradition was itself made up of variegated elements, some consensus had to be reached about what constituted this tradition. This tension, according to Chatterjee, was played out in the fields of literature and drama (72-3). Further, the popular or what may be called the folk was appropriated into a largely Hindu idiom by the Bengali middle class. It "becomes the repository of natural truth, naturally self-sustaining and timeless" (73) and, is also sanitized such that any indication of sectarianism is removed from it. This is because the popular, as understood in this context, is Hindu. Chatterjee demonstrates the method by which elite sections of caste and class appropriated folk or subaltern traditions, in order to create a normalized, legitimized cultural Hindu identity.

A classicization of tradition was also necessary for the project of this normalization of the national community. If the English could claim certain roots to ancient Greece, then the Bengalis felt they could trace their ancestry to the Vedic Age (73). Various anti-*brahmanical* movements such as Buddhism and Jainism were now

incorporated into the broader fold of Hinduism. The only factor that proved problematic to the project of classicization was the inclusion of Islam:

> The middle-class culture […] was, and still is, in its overwhelming cultural context, 'Hindu.' Its ability and willingness to extend its hegemonic boundaries to include what was distinctly Islamic became a matter of much contention in nineteenth and twentieth-century Bengal, giving rise to alternative hegemonic efforts at both the classicization of the Islamic tradition and the appropriation of a sanitized popular Islam. (74).

Chatterjee points to the fact that this term Hindu was one given by others to describe a group of people who did not fit into other religious categories (74). This Hindu identity which was constructed as unified, essentially privileging the elite positions of upper castes and classes, formed the indigenous notion of community. And Chatterjee implicitly approves of this Hindu construction of community.

Chatterjee goes on to make the point, that, despite efforts made towards normalizing a national community, internal differences were emerging in the literature and accounts written by Indians themselves, which revealed the geographical particularities of the regions. This undermines the idea of a core Indian history, and opens up the possibility of writing alternative histories. Yet, Chatterjee believes that we do not yet have the ability to fashion these alternative narratives, as well as still steeped in the idea of a linear historiography: "Until such time that we accept that it is the very singularity of the idea of a national history of India which divides Indians from one another, we will not create the conditions for writing these alternative histories" (115). Chatterjee privileges the writing of history as a method of resistance, much as nationalist historians do.

Further, he uses the term alternative, and not dialectical. The dialectical relationship, through which hegemony is constantly negotiated, is an aspect of Gramscian thought to which the Subalternists, such as Chatterjee, pay little attention. Chatterjee's alternative implies an Other which is not western. This is opposed to dialectical, which would allow for internal contradictions within the indigenous community to emerge as points for analysis. As Chatterjee's ultimate critique is against colonialism, the contradictions of the inner community are not pursued in his work, as this would undermine the very notion of the inner community. Consequently, distinctions between inner and outer, indigenous and foreign also allow material and ideological elements to be separated.

Writing history as a method of indigenous resistance, from Chatterjee's reading, emerged within the inner domain. And even though much of this resistance was within a Hindu framework, he does not seem to problematize the methods to any great extent. Instead, he concentrates on the contradictions which developed within the outer domain, which was associated with the modern liberal form of the state. In order to justify their imperial mission, the British emphasized the notions of difference between Indians and themselves. For Indians to assert claims to independence, they had to fight these very notions of difference and, in so doing, had to work within the given discursive field of modern liberalism, including such distinctions as private and public. This distinction implied that there had to be consensus within the public sphere, formed through law and by the state bureaucracy but, within the private sphere, on the other hand, individual liberties and freedoms could exist. The separation between private and public, however, did not coincide with the domains of inner and outer nationalism. In Chatterjee's words, "that

contested field over which nationalism had proclaimed its sovereignty and where it had imagined its true community was neither coextensive with nor coincidental to the field constituted by the public private distinction" (10). For the inner domain of cultural nationalism to thrive, it needed to achieve some sort of consensus and unanimity. As such, the notion of individual liberties could not be permitted in the inner domain of the national community (26). Thus the notion of community that became dominant was that of Hindu. Chatterjee implicitly validates this notion of community as a method of nationalist resistance, without examining the way in which this community identity was developed.

This leads Chatterjee to his argument about the tension between the modern state and community. Chatterjee argues that, in the discursive field of European nationalism, the concepts of community and state must co-exist—the nation is one big community. During colonialism in India, however, the community was separate from the state and, in order to assert itself, had to appropriate, in a sense, the foreign notion of state and indigenize it. This process of indigenization or normalization had to be conducted from a position of subordination (11). In European countries the state was representative of civil society, whereas this was not possible with a colonial state. Chatterjee says, "If the nation is an imagined community and if nations must also take the form of states, then our theoretical language must allow us to talk about community and state at the same time" (11). Chatterjee believes that our present theoretical language does not facilitate this coincidence of community and state. The inner domain of nationalism was a cultural community, according to Chatterjee, which was not represented by the colonial state. Thus, the idea of the inner or cultural domain is not simply another case of oriental exceptionalism but helps mobilize a

critique of the character of the modern western state tied as it is, to the interests of global capital and capital accumulation, and existing, in contradiction with the concept of community (13).

The rhetoric of the community in this inner domain, of which "Gandhi is a particularly good example, is of love, kinship, austerity, sacrifice", notes Chatterjee, and it is also "antimodernist, antiindividualist, even anticapitalist" (237). While Gandhi's version of Hinduism is the subject of scholarly debate, his notion of the idealized *varna* (caste) framework, as the basis of his notion of community, has been reiterated by many scholars. This *varna* framework, based on principles of patriarchal *Brahmanism*, is essentially the same as Hinduism. Chatterjee does not problematize the assumed Hindu factor in the Gandhian idealized community.

Chatterjee accepts Gandhi's ideas of western modernity and its inimical effects on India. For Gandhi, the benefits of western civilization far from bringing a better quality of life, were actually the harbingers of a servitude of man to his own senses and self-indulgences ("Nationalist Thought" 86). In Chatterjee's words, "Gandhi [had] no doubt at all that the source of modern imperialism [lay] specifically in the system of social production which the countries of the western world [had] adopted", a system that encouraged greed, competitiveness and the conquering of countries for economic purposes ("Possible India" 87).

According to Chatterjee, Gandhi was against large scale industrialization, and capitalism in general. Gandhi's alternative vision, that of *Ramrajya*, was "a patriarchy in which the ruler by his moral quality and habitual adherence to the truth, always expresses the collective will" ("Nationalist Thought" 92). Chatterjee goes on to describe this Gandhian notion of *Ramrajya*:

> It is also a utopia in which the economic organization of production, arranged according to a perfect four – fold *varna* scheme of specialization and a perfect system of reciprocity in the exchange of commodities and services, always ensures that there is no spirit of competition and no differences in status between different kinds of labour. The ideal conception of *Ramrajya*, in fact, encapsulates the critique of all that is morally reprehensible in the economic and political organization of civil society. (92)

Chatterjee fails to acknowledge, however, that the idealized *varna* scheme that Gandhi has in mind, as a viable option for Indian society, as opposed to modern liberal democracy, is synonymous with Hinduism. Indeed, he explicitly states that Gandhi's critique is not; "an attempt to establish the superior claims of Hindu religion" (93), but rather a concern with the universality, and not the specific historical adaptations of the *Gita*. Nor did Gandhi believe "that the mere existence of scriptural texts was proof that they must be a constituent or consistent part of true religion" (95).

On the extant caste system, Gandhi was only concerned, in Chatterjee's argument with its harmful nature to spiritual and national growth. While Gandhi was aware of the historical existence of partisan religious politics, he believed that these historical particularities could not be taken to represent a corpus of truths (96). This is what is problematic about Gandhi's thought, especially as it relates to caste, and its position within Hinduism. The fact that the caste system had been deployed for political purposes, perpetuating inequalities, was presumably too minor a point in the bigger scheme of truth which was moral. Chatterjee does not explicitly critique Gandhian thought here. The fact that caste and *Brahmanism* were byproducts of a

much earlier pre-colonial triumph of *Brahmanism,* within the *varna* framework, was missed by Gandhi partly due to his lack of attention to the evolution of social institutions.

Chatterjee notes that Gandhi's position might lend itself to romanticism. But, Gandhi's critique of civil society and the concept of the idealized Indian society "could not have been a romantic longing for the lost harmony of the archaic world, because unlike romanticism, Gandhi's problem [was] not conceived within the thematic bounds of post-Enlightenment thought" (99). Gandhian ideology was not simply the reflections of a peasant intellectual, but the compromise between peasant and elite nationalism (100). Thus Chatterjee implicitly approves of Gandhi's role in "opening up a possibility for subaltern appropriation into the evolving political structures of the Indian state" (100). Despite the fact that Chatterjee locates Gandhian thought outside of post-Enlightenment thought, he does not reveal how the utopia of Gandhian *Ramrajya* might work in a country whose material encounter with industrialization, thought colonialism, changed it forever.

Gandhi's influence on Chatterjee is also evident in the latter's critique of the notion of universality in western modernity. Chatterjee argues that universality, as the term implies, must be applicable to all societies. However, as colonialism was often justified on the grounds that it was for the improvement of the colonized, this necessarily entailed a notion of difference and inequality. Thus it was suggested that universal principles of modernity were not quite applicable to societies outside the west ("Nation" 18). When faced with this contradiction, proponents of universal modernity provided an amendment, namely that, as a result of the cultural and historical particularities of the east there were initial impediments to the realization of

modern universal principles, but that they would ultimately be implemented. And thus the universality of modernity was restored (18).

In this way, Chatterjee critiques the interconnectedness of colonialism and forms of the modern state. For the universality of modernity to assert itself, the whole world had to come under its influence and, in the east, colonialism was the messenger of modernity. Precisely because the resistance to colonialism, in the outer domain of nationalism, had to be fought within the framework of modern discursive forms, the danger of the resistance being subsumed in the larger project of modernity, existed. Therefore, Chatterjee contends that, even though the project of colonialism is inextricably tied to the principles of modernity, specific forms of the colonial state have to be studied, in order to analyze the emergence of forms of indigenous nationalism (19-20).

The postcolonial nationalism that emerges, within this former colonial state, then, is a site of struggle between western modernity and indigenous nationhood. Moreover, the sphere of indigenous nationhood is itself indentified by internal differentiation. This is the separation between the domains of elite and subaltern politics. Chatterjee emphasizes the nuances within each of these domains as well, showing that they are dynamic, constituted by the specific context.

Chatterjee's analysis of subaltern groups provides potential for an alternative history. One group or fragment—as the title of his book indicates—is that of the peasantry in India. While Chatterjee accounts for the fact that the peasantry is internally diverse, he analytically studies the peasantry as a largely homogenous group.

The peasantry, according to Chatterjee, was approached by nationalists and colonialists in similar ways, but for very different purposes. Stereotypically modernist notions of the peasantry entailed its construction as a group possessing neither reason, nor rational ability. Colonialists shared the assumption that the peasantry was a group of ignorant and simple folk to irrational and spontaneous displays of violence who needed to be controlled. For the colonial authorities, this view justified their paternalistic inclinations toward protecting these simple folk from exploitation at the hands of Indian landlords and moneylenders. For the nationalists, the nature of the peasantry was a reason to bring them into the bourgeois frame of politics, and mobilize them against colonial rule (158-159).

The arena of formally organized party politics, occupied by the Indian National Congress, was a bourgeois domain, which did not coincide with the domain of peasant politics. The INC had a specific agenda to act "within the institutional processes of the bourgeois state forms introduced by colonial rule and … use their representative power over the mass of the people to replace the colonial state by a bourgeois nation-state" (159).

Chatterjee contends that, while attempts were made to incorporate peasant struggles into the domain of party politics, they were not entirely successful in subsuming peasant interest. Even though the organized arena of party politics changed its strategies, and peasant politics became exposed to the wider claims of independence, this accommodation—between peasant and elite party—did not mean that their divergent interests were ultimately reconciled. On the contrary peasant awareness and participation in the domain of nationalist polices, was marked by breaks and disjunctures. This points to a "need for a critique of both colonialist and

nationalist historiographies by bringing in the peasantry as a subject of history, endowed with its own distinctive forms of consciousness and making sense of and acting upon the world on its own terms" (160). The result would be that if the dominated are not "granted their own domain of subjectivity, where they were autonomous, undominated," then the dominators "would, in the exercise of their domination, wholly consume and obliterate the dominated," and Chatterjee contends that "dominance would then no longer exist within a social relation of power with its own conditions of reproduction" (161).

But the subalternists do not pay much attention to diversity within the peasantry, which would include an analysis of class differences. The emphasis on autonomy-based on Chatterjee's privileging of a peasant community leads to a cultural analysis, at the cost of a historically situated materialist analysis. Further, it leads to an understanding of subalternity as a rather stable and homogenous category. The reality of Indian social life points to the impossibility of this conception. Guha's work, however, also in the subalternist school, highlights the face that the subaltern occupied their own autonomous domain. Like Chatterjee, Ranjit Guha's analysis concerns itself with the cultural idioms that facilitated resistance.

For Guha, there was never a singular unified political domain. The domain of politics, according to Guha, was "structurally split between an elite and a subaltern part, each of which was autonomous in its own way" ("Dominance" ix). Following Gramsci, Guha argues that civil society must be distinguished from the state, specifically, in the case of the colonial state, which was not representative of Indian society. The assumption in neo-colonialist and nationalist histories that civil society equals nation which equals state is problematic, and does not allow a space to account

for indigenous resistance. These histories also misrepresented the colonial state as hegemonic (19). Imperialism constituted a 'dominance without hegemony', in Guha's words, because the colonizers were never fully able to incorporate the colonized into their culture (ix). Nor did the Indian elite succeed in achieving a hegemony.

The obvious question becomes: why did the elite—or more generally, the bourgeoisie—fail to speak for the nation? Guha makes a distinction between an elite and a subaltern domain of politics, and his answer, to this question, lies in this split. The elite domain of politics consisted of Indian collaboration with the colonial arena of "… laws, legislatures and other institutions of political society, and of the activities and organizations of formal political parties and movements, pre-eminently the Indian National Congress" (Arnold 165). The subaltern domain of politics, on the other hand, included a wide variety of largely autonomous mode of action and thought (164). The bourgeoisie was never able to incorporate vast sections of the subaltern population into its own domain and thereby overcome this structural split (165). According to many subalternists, including Guha, Gandhi came closest to achieving this hegemony, with his ability to forge alliances between the elite and subaltern domains (172).

Guha shows how the two idioms, colonial and Indian, functioned during colonialism, to produce a particular set of social relations. In this schema, domination and subordination together constitute power. Domination is further broken down into coercion and persuasion, and subordination, into collaboration and resistance. Each of these categories is further comprised by a colonial and Indian element. Thus:

POWER (D/S)

DOMINATION		**SUBORDINATION**	
Coercion	**Persuasion**	**Collaboration**	**Resistance**

a) coercion *b) danda*	a) improvement *b) dharma*	a) collaboration *b) bhakti*	a) rightful dissent *b) dharmic protest*

(Adapted from Guha, "Dominance" 20)

Coercion was not simply an instrument of the British, but was brought about by its mix with the Indian concept of *danda*, a combination of ".. ..power, authority and punishment, [emphasizing] … force and fear as the fundamental principle of politics" (29). Persuasion—the other component of dominance—was comprised of the British ideas of improvement, and Indian notions of *dharma*. The former was the underlying bourgeois ideology that permeated colonial attempts to initiate social and technological change. This was a part of the large universalizing mission of capital, which enthused the British and the indigenous elite alike. "Improvement," in Guha's words, "was a political strategy to persuade the indigenous elite to attach themselves to the colonial regime" (32). *Dharma*, "the quintessence of virtue, the moral duty… implied a social duty conforming to one's place in the caste hierarchy as well as the local power structures" (35). Through the notion of *Dharma*, Indian elites justified their involvement with the British, initiating liberal reforms based on their exposure to the valuing of western education. In so doing, the Indian elite took it upon itself to reform the lower sections of the population.

But, according to Guha, various activities of improvement, such as founding village schools, which were liberal for all intents and purposes, were actually validated on the grounds of *Dharma*. The nationalism of the Congress Party, and the subsequent mass mobilization, were steeped in notions of *Dharma*, through Gandhi's

theory of trusteeship. Gandhi attempted to avoid problems of class struggle especially in rural areas. Trusteeship was essentially intended as a plea to the wealthy and the poor to enter into mutually obligatory relations, whereby the owners of wealth would protect those under them, while the 'protected' would willingly submit to this protection. In this way, Gandhi's vision for self rule (*swaraj*), in India, was based on and made synonymous with *Dharmaraj*—literally—the Rule of *Dharma* (37). It was this national notion of *dharma,* according to Guha, which resulted in the "appearance of the political discourse of western nationalism," "dressed up as ancient Hindu wisdom" (35-36).

Gandhi's role in orchestrating subordination is also important, Guha describes subordination as constituted by collaboration and resistance. In the early part of his career in South Africa, Gandhi's conception of loyalty and duty bears witness to the collaborationist aspect of nationalism (42-43). As an example, Guha cites Gandhi's volunteering, on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa, to fight with the British in the Boer War (43).

At first glance, Gandhi's humble and menial request to help in the British war effort, as subjects of the crown, simply represented a position of collaboration and servility. However, Guha argues that this seeming servility needs to be unpacked, in order to reveal yet another Indian idiom. For it was not just the western notion of duty and obedience, that Gandhi had absorbed but, rather, the core of his notions of duty came from the Indian concept of *Bhakti* (47). *Bhakti* is a type of devotion which often involves acts of extreme servility: it "is an ideology of subordination *par excellence"* (49-50).

Resistance is the other aspect which, along with collaboration, makes up the domain of subordination. Resistance is what comes last, according to Guha, and if it is successful in overtaking collaboration, then one type of struggle can be said to be complete (55). Presumably, Guha's point leads to Gandhi's role. During British rule, neither the colonizers, nor the indigenous elite exercised hegemony. However, with Gandhi's entry, the nationalist struggle came to fruition. One can read in this the idea, then, that Gandhi was able to fashion some sort of hegemony.

The English notion of resistance is what Guha labels, "Rightful Dissent." Examples of this were seen in the marches and lobbies that were organized by the representatives elected under democratic procedures (56). However, many inconsistencies in the British principles of liberalism appeared when the law was applied to Indians. What resulted was a critique of British rule in India as being "un-British." Indian liberals, states Guha, took "the 'sacred' English idiom of Rightful Dissent too seriously for the regime's comfort" (57).

The other side of resistance was made up of an Indian idiom and Guha labels it *Dharmic* protest (57), based not on the European concept of right, but on the notion of duty. If a ruler failed to live up to his *Dharmic* duty subjects had a duty to bring back the *Dharmic* aspects of rule by revolting (59). *Dharmic* protest often appeared in volatile forms, and was practiced as a type of peasant insurgency. The volatility of this protest was not conducive to bourgeois forms of resistance and, therefore, neither the colonial authorities, nor the elite nationalists counted this as protest (59-60).

Guha concludes that neither the British imperialists, nor the indigenous elite nationalists, were able to exercise hegemony over the Indian population. For hegemony "is a condition of dominance in which the moment of persuasion

outweighs that of coercion" (103). The Indian nationalists, under the banner of the Congress Party, sought to incorporate the masses under their leadership, and mass interests under their bourgeois hegemony (133). However, subaltern methods of resistance were often incompatible with bourgeois forms of protest. According to Guha, Gandhi was instrumental in effecting a compromise, whereby subaltern resistance gave way to bourgeois methods of resistance (142).

Gandhi's emphasis on the transformation of subaltern resistance into more organized and controlled protest became one of the main elements of Congress organization (146). Further, Gandhi's concern with crowd control and organization was not simply about the transformation of subaltern politics, but also about a principle fundamental to his conception of *swaraj* or self – rule. As Guha explains, the English term "self translates also as 'soul' in many Indian languages, from the Sanskrit—*atman"* (146). Hence, for Gandhi, self-rule was tied in with self-control, and this was a fundamental part of his strategy of civil disobedience and non-cooperation:

> It would appear … that swaraj was to be attained by should control, that is, spiritual self – control, which itself was to be cultivated by swadeshi, which in its turn, was to be based on the two – pronged program of boycott and khadi [the cotton cloth produced from the spinning wheel, which it was Gandhi's aim that every Indian should spin and wear]. There was nothing in either of these that could not be thought or practiced in entirely secular terms. But propelled by self – control they were both assimilated to the idea of self – purification, regarded by Gandhi as central to his project of giving Non – cooperation the semblance of a religious movement. (147)

Guha analyzes Indian and British elements which functioned together to create a set of socio-political relations during colonial rule. However, his analysis ultimately also leads us back to Gandhi. Gandhi's ability to forge alliances only extended to the rich peasantry who represented the powerful caste in particular areas. Thus, his appropriation of peasant community, based on caste dominance, coupled with his notion of trusteeship was a perpetuation of idealized *varna*. The divergences within the peasantry—rich, middle, lower, landless—which resides in class, did not get incorporated into this Gandhian hegemony. Since the Subalternists do not analyze class, they are able to permit, within their work, the notion of a partial Gandhian hegemony.

The subalternists argue that subaltern history, while interconnected with Gandhian and bourgeois politics, also had a domain of autonomy. However, they do not emphasize that it is not so much that peasant or subaltern politics comprised an autonomous domain but, rather, that within this domain, there were moments of autonomy exercised, which lay outside nationalist, Gandhian and liberal democratic frameworks. Attending to these moments permits the writing of other historical narratives that offer a critique of the inner domain of nationalism. In the historical effectiveness of Gandhism as a whole, we find, the conception of a national framework of politics in which the peasants are mobilized but do not more historically situated, material understanding of subalternity including a critical approach to Gandhi's influence.

Chapter Four

Alternative Subaltern Historiography of David Hardiman

This chapter discusses David Hardiman's ethnographic account of the Devi Movement in Gujarat—a state of western India—which offers a more complex method of writing an Indian subaltern history. At the end of the chapter, some analysis will be devoted to the appropriations of history in present day Indian politics to illustrate the contemporary political relevance of this historiographical approach.

The Devi Movement originated out of a propitiation to the smallpox Goddess (a Devi), but became transformed, during the colonial period, into a fight for tribal and, later, nationalist rights. The relationship of these tribal groups to other Indian communities and to the British was complex and tense. These groups did not easily become assimilated into the politics and message of the Mahatma Gandhi, nor did they simply become proselytized puppets of the colonial regime. Hardiman locates the subaltern position within a critical understanding of Gandhian Hindu nationalism, and defines the Devi Movement and, others like it, as tribal assertions.

Gandhi's Hindu nationalism was a significant force which brought a large number of groups in the Indian population together to fight against colonial rule. The precarious consensus and unity of this mass mobilization has received little attention in the literature on colonialism and the national movement. Hardiman's ethnography reveals the possibilities for understanding the national movement as not confined to the perceived Congress hegemony, under Gandhi. Further, this ethnography, among others, allows various critiques to emerge the first against a nationalist all-encompassing Hindu perspective, the second, against a subalternist understanding that

looks more to cultural than material factors, and finally a critique of the contemporary political machinations, that use history to justify the politics of *hindutva*.

In her ethnography on the Bhils of the Narmada Valley, Amita Bavishar argues that this community did not have a simple assimilative relationship with Hinduism or nationalism. During the colonial period, Bhil resistance was not necessarily planned and conscious but, rather, was motivated by their economic destitution. Their attacks were against rich villages, rather than colonial officials. Baviskar here provides a counterpoint to Subaltern Collective's view which has argued that peasant resistance is not entirely unconscious, as there is too much at stake for peasants to simply "stumble into rebellion" (60). Baviskar further says that the Bhil involvement in the national struggle was minimal, as the ideals of the nationalists were not in keeping with theirs. The Bhil relationship to Hinduism was also tense, as individual conversion meant total ostracization from Bhil society. Conversion to Hindu practices, for a Bhil, thus had to offer great rewards and upward mobility, to be attractive (84).

Conversion to Hinduism involved a significant change in lifestyle. However, caste relations were important even in tribal villages. Baviskar argues that each tribal group has to be studied in relation to the caste community with which it had geographical links. Proximity to and interaction with caste society facilitated—and continues to do so today—the subordination of low caste and tribal groups.

The issue of designating and differentiating caste from tribal groups arose during colonial rule when the British wanted to segregate sections of the Indian population, and the process of categorizing tribes emerged. British civil servants emphasized the distinct identity of tribes, whereas nationalists insisted on the

integrated nature of the tribes and pushed for them to be viewed as "backward Hindus" (86). What resulted was an ideal type construction of a social group known as tribe in India. Some sociologists have tried to overcome the problem of definition by labeling them tribes in transition (86). The term transition is problematic, as this implies a linear or evolutionary trajectory. The phenomenon is not simply about a move from tribe to caste society (Beteille 300). As a result of the complexity of tribal assertion, each contributing factor has to be explored, as does Hardiman in his study.

Hardiman's analysis of the Devi Movement raises several critiques of the dominant schools of historiography which indicate the necessity of looking critically at Gandhian Hindu nationalism, to arrive at a fuller picture of subaltern assertion and activity. Hardiman provides this snapshot of the Devi movement:

> On 9 November 1922 about two thousand *adivasis* who lived on the eastern borders of the Surat district of Bombay presidency congregated in a field near a village called Khanpur. Coming from six different villages, they had gathered to listen to the teachings of a new goddess of great power known as Salabai. This *devi* was supposed to have come from the mountains to the east, and she expressed demands though the mouths of spirit mediums. These mediums sate before the crow under a *mandva*—i.e. a shade of leaves placed over a wooden frame. Holding red cloths in their hands they began to shake their heads and were soon in a state of trance. Then, as if reading from their cloths, they pronounced the commands of the Devi ("Devi" 1).

These commands included activities such as prohibitions on consuming alcohol and meat, living a clean, simple life, and having nothing to do with the Parsis, who were the liquor dealers in the region. While teetotalism and vegetarianism were associated

with *brahmanic* rituals, the tribal adoption of these practices was founded in their materiality. Alcohol consumption occupied a central position, in terms of diet and ritual, in tribal life. And the Parsis used their control of the liquor trade to subordinate the tribals. This movement had parallels in other parts of India, with the Oraons of Chhotanagpur where, from 1914 to 1915, similar commands were issued by their divinities. Known as the Tana Bhagat movement, the message was to "… give up superstitious practices and animal sacrifices; to stop eating meat and drinking liquor, to cease ploughing their fields and to withdraw their field labour from non-advasi [non tribal] landowners" (5). While these movements gave the appearance of a spiritual assertion, they were actually firmly founded, as Hardiman demonstrates, in a material dimension.

To understand the dependence on Parsi liquor dealers, Hardiman has explained the tribal relationship to alcohol. Drinking alcohol was a very important aspect of *adivasi* life, associated with all their important occasions. Unlike the *Brahmins,* consumption was not connected to any feelings of guilt or shame, but rather, "great honour [was accorded] to spirituous drinks" (99). Drinking also ensured social solidarity between neighbours, as there was an obligation to share alcohol. Most importantly, the toddy and daru, that they produced and drank, had nutritional qualities. Often the consumption of toddy meant the difference between life and death for an *adivasi*, providing a substitute for both food and water, during times of near famine. Daru was believed to provide protection against malaria, cholera and plague (102-103). Hardiman observes, however, that these *adivasis* of South Gujarat did not drink excessively (104).

Before the late nineteenth century, alcohol was obtained freely by the peasants, and not heavily taxed (99). Tribals were able to obtain alcohol from the peasants, as well as manufacture it themselves. Toddy trees were numerous in South Gujarat, and were generally thought to belong to the peasant who tilled the land on which they grew. Thus peasant families drank most of the toddy themselves, but any surplus that they sold had to be through the licensed liquor dealer, usually a Parsi. Toddy is a highly perishable commodity, and when distances made it difficult to transport, the peasants bartered. Although this was illegal, the British authorities did not significantly attempt to stop it (105), which allowed *adivasis* to procure alcohol through peasants.

Daru was made from the flower of the Mahua tree, which blossomed for a few weeks in April. During this period, the whole *advasi* family was involved in the production of alcohol. The dried mahua flower was also used as food during the monsoon and winter months. The production of daru was quite inexpensive and simple, and was therefore easily made by any *adivasi* (106).

"By law" however, as Hardiman points out, "the manufacture and sale of liquor was permitted only to those who had been given permission by a government liquor farmer", and "this system had been continued from the preceding Maratha period" (106). Even before the colonial period, Parsis controlled the liquor trade. Liquor rights were annually sold by auction to the most successful bidder, invariably a wealthy Parsi. The dealer was then responsible for collecting duty on any liquor produced and sold at the village

level. The duty was usually a lump sum, and did not reflect the actual amount of liquor manufactured or sold. Further, the authorities did not exercise much control and, "much of the duty was evaded" (107). "Before the 1860s the Parsis were unable to turn the indebtedness of their adivasi clients greatly to their advantage", as the Parsis gave alcohol to *adivasis* is return for field labour (109). Once the land tax settlement was introduced, which made land a marketable commodity, however, the Parsis were quite legitimately able to force *adivasis* to sell or mortgage their land for the latter's supposed drinking debts.

While the *adivasis* were exploited by the Parsis, some were still able to minimize their dependence on them by buying alcohol from the peasants. Ultimately, however, the system of liquor manufacture favoured the Parsis, as they were able to exploit the tribals on one side, and evade governmental taxes on the other.

When the British government realized this, it introduced the Bombay Abkari Act of 1978. Through this Act, centralized distilleries were set up to standardize liquor as a commodity (110). As toddy had a relatively short shelf life it do not last the journey to centralized distilleries. Therefore, in order to ensure centralized distillation, the Government encouraged consumption of daru instead. Daru, however, was a stronger alcohol, and less popular with the tribals (105). The Abkari Act made the tapping of toddy trees and the production of toddy extremely expensive and complicated. Heavy taxes were placed on every step of the production process, and this was precisely the intent of the Act. This forced inaccessibility to the production and

consumption of toddy proved difficult and, at times, life-threatening for the *adivasis.*

The Parsis in this area had a great deal of power, bribing colonial officials when they could. Not only did the Parsis take land from the *adivasis,* but they also forced them to labour in their fields. The coercive and exploitative relationship that developed may be understood as a form of feudal exploitation, as the Parsis lived on their estates and exercised direct coercion on the peasantry and adivasis. But when Parsi control over land was formalized by British legal codes, the exploitation became much more severe and harsh (127). Even though the tribal groups in this area were dependent upon moneylenders from caste communities, their dependence on the Parsi liquor dealers was far more crippling (99). Colonial rule, therefore, had the result of exacerbating tribal exploitation.

In response, the tribals migrated to other areas, but this method of resistance was not always possible. The production of illicit liquor was a dangerous act, as it could be detected if not on sight, then by smell. And Parsi dealers would report the tribals to the British authorities, as tribal toddy production also posed a threat to their own distilleries (129). Resistance to this economic exploitation, then, also drew on pre-existing tribal spirituality.

The origin of the Devi has been traced by Hardiman to the Dangs, a tribal group from Nasik district, in the early decades of the 20th century. The Devi-goddess-was supposed to have been bought by spirit mediums and, then, traveled in a northerly direction. The Gujarati language was spoken in this area, and further south, Marathi was spoken, which meant that problems of

translation constrained the spreading of the Devi's message (22). Even further south, tribals who had been converted to Christianity, may not have been as receptive to this message.

Epidemics of smallpox were common at the time, and the Devi movement began as a propitiation ceremony to the goddess of smallpox. Ralph Nicholas points out that, unlike other gods and goddesses associated with disease in India, the smallpox goddess was known by most of the Indo-Aryan speaking regions of India and Nepal. Her name Sitala, was also known by other variations in South India (qtd. in "Peasant Nationalists" 21). Sitala was worshipped on a large scale community level, in every region she was supposed to have inhabited.

Typically, the goddess would reveal herself by entering the body of a person who upon possession by the Devi, would issue various commands. The people of the community would then assuage the Devi by following her commands, which would 'persuade' the goddess to move on to another region ("Devi" 55). The Devi was said to bring good fortune and protection for those who followed her commands, and worshipped her correctly. Hardiman makes reference here to Ranjit Guha's explanation by associating his/her name with well-known deities of the region, or sometimes even with Gandhi. The medium would read from a piece of cloth, on which were said to be written the commands. The sudden ability of the possessed illiterate to read, and his/her powers of clairvoyance, revealed through prophecy, further strengthened the legitimacy of their possession by the Devi (59-60).

The coming of the Devi entailed preparation by the tribal community, including the cleaning of houses, and the selection of a common site, at which various tribal villages would rather. These worshipping ceremonies usually took place at village cross roads or other meeting places (62). This propitiation practice had the function of bringing tribal villages together: it was a custom with a long history. The ceremony was conducive to spreading messages of resistance and nationalism.

During this period, the introduction of British education also served to bring the *adivasis* into the mainstream society although for several reasons, *adivasis* attendance at British Schools was not high. The schools were usually in the Marathi language, whereas the tribal children spoke Gujarati and tribal dialect. Further, the existence of corporal punishment in the schools was alien and unacceptable to the tribals. Finally, the divisive inter – communal results of education between the *brahmins* and lower castes were clear. The egalitarian communities of *adivasis* did not want the same fate for themselves (131-134). Consequently, the *adivasis* developed various superstitions about the negative repercussions of schools.

Under British law, however, *adivasis* were compelled to send their children to school. The tribals thus began constructing their own schools with governmental assistance. Education inculcated a different sense of the world among the *adivasis.* Further, it brought about a belief in the superiority of Hindu practices. Teachers in tribal villages were often high caste Hindus, bent on reform. They felt it their duty to transform superstitious *adivasis* beliefs to "the 'higher' doctrines of Hindu religion" (139). At the same time, this

presumed superiority, it was realized, would grant the tribals some power. if they were to adopt Hindu practices. Ideals such as temperance and teetotalism were gradually understood in the context of providing powerful mechanisms of tribal resistance against Parsi and colonial exploitation (134-139).

The tribals took to abstinence from liquor as a form of protest, and in Surat district between 1905-6, consumption declined by almost a third (144). However, a bad harvest in 1905s meant a choice between abstinence and starvation, or consumption. The tribals, understandably, opted for the latter, bringing alcohol consumption levels back to normal. However, the continuing exploitation by the Parsi landlord provided impetus, for renewed attempts at abstinence, and the Devi's message now took on greater importance as a wider social reform movement. While the message different slightly from region to region, depending upon the requirements of the area, there were five core elements to the message: abstention from alcohol and non-vegetarian food, non-violence cleanliness and a boycott of the Parsis (155). These elements in the movement, appeared for some, to be proof of Sanskritization. MN Srinivas, who coined the term, defines it as,

> … the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology, and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, 'twice-born' caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy than that traditionally conceded to the claimant caste by the local community. The claim is usually made over a period of time, in fact, a generation or two before the 'arrival' is conceded. (qtd. Hardiman, "Devi" 157).

There are various problems with this idea in the case of the *adivasis* of this region. First, the tribals made no claim to high caste status. Second, Srinivas has been criticized for not analyzing the changes that Sanskritization may have brought about in the whole system, rather than in simply inaugurating a positional change for a particular caste or other group. Third, for Sanskritization to be 'successful' the group claiming higher status has to possess a certain amount of clout, in order to make the claim at all (158-160).

Hardiman also points out that Srinivas theory of Sanskritization implies a certain static nature of *brahmanical* ideals. An analysis of different regions in India would easily show this not to be the case. The *adivasis,* argues Hardiman, showed a keen understanding of the relationship between values and power (163). For example, "the ban on daru and toddy occupied a pivotal position because of its dual function of providing the chief weapon against the Parsis as well as serving as an index of purification" (164-165). Exposure to caste society and colonialism brought the *adivasis* out of their previous relative autonomy, but this did not imply helpless assimilation, or mimicry of caste principles. On the contrary, *adivasis* used new and old idioms to assert materials and spiritual autonomy. The commands of the Devi "thus represented a powerful programme for adivasis assertion" (164-165).

Along with the Devi, Gandhian workers in the region began to influence the tribals during the early part of the twentieth century. Added to the commands of temperance and social boycott were those related to the Gandhian national movement, such as wearing *khadi* (cotton cloth), and taking nationalistic vows in Gandhi's name (165). Gandhi's message, perpetuated through the Devi, was received in different ways by the *adivasis.* Some groups had a broader understanding of the nationalist

movement, whereas others simply looked upon Gandhi as a divine and benevolent figure, in much the same way as the Devi herself. Hardiman's point is that the Devi movement was not simply a mouthpiece of the nationalist movement but that her worship gained renewed impetus because of the nationalist movement.

The support that the *adivasis* received from the wider nationalist movement worried British authorities and the Parsis. The boycott of the Parsis by the tribals had been very harmful to them, and the Parsis often forced the tribals to work at gunpoint (179). Gandhian workers were intent on pushing the aspect of self-purification of the tribals which they believed was an end in itself. Thus Gandhian reformers suggested that while *adivasis* boycott the Parsi liquor shops, they should not refuse field labour for the Parsis. This plea by Gandhian workers undermined the core of tribal protest, demonstrating Gandhi's attempts to deflect potential class struggles.

The tribals also became internally divided at this point. Some believed in the ideas of self-purification, while others thought it a temporary strategy to undermine their exploitation. Against the backdrop of the Congress Party's Civil Disobedience movement, and its suppression by the British, Gandhism suffered a setback in the region. The British shut down *ashrams*—relatively austere religious community shelters providing livelihood and support—and arrested Gandhian workers in the area (205 – 206). Ultimately, the Gandhian emphasis on passive forms of resistance, while beneficial initially, did not form an effective strategy of protest for the *adivasis*.

Education and exposure to the nationalist movement had provided *adivasis* with confidence. Subsequent support by the government also served to render Gandhian involvement somewhat redundant. While complete prohibition was not introduced, after the Government of India Act of 1935, many liquor shops were

closed down, thereby, to an extent, freeing *adivasis* of Parsi control (215). Large-scale landlordism did not last either, as the Congress passed a resolution, during the 1950s, to give land to the tillers. The Parsis and other landlords lost their estates to the *adivasis* although this did not take place equitably, creating various divisions within the *adivasis* communities (215).

Despite this, the Devi movement allowed the tribals to understand that gods were not the sole factor in their existence and more importantly, that they could be active agents in bringing about change. While the *adivasis* of the region had links with Gandhian nationalism, their material concerns, which were the foundation of their movement, were not adequately represented through Gandhian strategies.

In another ethnographic study, Hardiman shows that peasant resistance in Gujarat was strongest when class and community coincided ("Peasant Nationalists" 250). Further, he highlights the inadequacy of religious and factional explanations which emphasized the alliances formed between peasants and elite nationalists. Many have argued that these alliances were formed only with the richer segments of the peasantry. But Hardiman argues that this is not always the case and, among the peasant nationalists of Gujarat, alliances can be explained in terms of a certain type of class collaboration (230-231). He adds that such "a collaboration occurs when members of subaltern classes believe that it is in their best interest to collaborate with members of higher classes. This may be because of economic ties, or perhaps because of ties of caste and kinship which require 'brothers' to stick together ("Indian 'Faction'" 231). These ties of caste and kinship do not necessarily translate into Sanskritization, or the omnipotence of a 'Hindu majority'. Kancha Ilaiah's work "Why I am not a Hindu," is an autobiographical account of his relationship with

Hinduism and caste through his life. Ilaiah's background is *Dalitbahujan* which, he defines, as "a concept that has come to be used to designate a united whole of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Classes (166). While caste formed an integral aspect of Ilaiah's life, Hinduism was a peripheral and mostly alien concept, to which education and encounter outside of his community had exposed him. Given this, neither he personally, nor his community, ever thought of themselves as Hindu. In today's political context the importance of labeling a broad cross-section of people as Hindu has become crucial such that *hindutva* can gain strength and proceed. This labeling process has a long history to which the colonial state and Gandhi previously contributed. In Ilaiah's words, "Socially, culturally, and even physically, they [Hindus] want us to remain their other, while acting politically as 'homogeneous Hindus' who can be their tools against Muslims or Christians (in their language 'minorities')" (166).

Hinduism is a construct that attempts to encompass a mix of varied group and practices that have existed for many centuries. It is, therefore, almost impossible to define Hinduism in any absolute sense. This impossibility becomes especially important, given the political manipulations around definitions. In the postcolonial Indian State, the project of *hindutva*—the politically motivated attempt at constructing a monolithic yet tolerant notion of Hinduism and Hindu identity—seeks to oppress all those who do not fit into its realm. As such, selected, constructed versions of history are appropriated to fuel and *hindutva* project.

Political scientist, Ashis Nandy, has also critiqued the present political stand of *hindutva.* Nandy contends that *hindutva* politics results from western notions associated with the modern nation-state which has been used as a cover for religious

intolerance (70). Nandy argues that religion in India has been split into religion as faith and religion as ideology. Nandy defines faith as, "… a way of life a tradition which is definitionally non – monolithic and operationally plural". Ideology, Nandy defines as, "religion as a sub-national, national, or cross national identifier of populations contesting for or protecting non-religious, usually political or socio-economic, interests" (70).

Nandy's contention is that the religion as ideology model has been taken on by the proponents of *hindutva.* They have taken the faith of Hinduism and turned it into an ideology under the influences of western colonialism. Hinduism was made synonymous with western style politics and nationhood, rather than a form of moral or cultural life. But Nandy's notion of religion as faith avoids the fact that this religion—Hinduism—has no other basis in real practice except as a political appropriation of the past. His critique of *hindutva,* therefore, does not get to the heart of the matter. Beyond political appropriation, there is also a dialectical relationship between the so-called little cultures and the notion of moral and cultural life which Nandy does not account for.

Using the examples of the Sangh Parivar, Madhu Kishwar explains the postcolonial appropriation of 'Hinduism' in the form of *hindutva.* The Sangh Parivar, a combination of various rightist Hindu groups, have been labeled communalist (sectarian), but according to Kishwar, this is not actually so (4). Hinduism cannot be categorized as fundamentalist, for it has no fundamental tenets upon which all Hindus would agree (3). Moreover, the Sangh Parivar is not versed in any of the 'Hindu' theological texts. Its main purpose is to propagate a unified all-India identity. Thus, even such institutions as caste are not encouraged, despite the fact that certain upper

caste communities are favoured. Further, the group is against ethnic, linguistic and regional assertions of identity. The idea is that while parochial loyalties may exist. Indians' first loyalty is to the nation. Diversity is the cause of India's weakness, and unification would therefore make India stronger notions of a nation-state are projected back into history, to make various historical figures appear as nationalists, even though there was no unified state in India at the time (5).

The symbol of the Parivar's nationalism is *Bharat Mata*, or Mother India. This is a secular image, symbolizing the nation's relationship to the land, the traditional sustainer. Kishwar argues that the Parivar, successfully preying on the declining status of the congress Party, plays up the idea that they alone are the ones that can unify India (10). The Parivar justifies this unification, by perpetuating Hindu fears of a growing Muslim threat, fuelled in part by the general global Islamic threat exploited in the media.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Constructedness of Hindu Identity

David Hardiman has written as part of the Subaltern Studies Collective but his work, unlike the major works of the school to which he belongs, provides an important example of a critical micro historiography which does justice to the nuances of social reality of the colonial period. Through his ethnography, the complexity and multiplicity that underlies subaltern life can be examined. Further, while his ethnographical work provides potential for nation-wide comparisons, it does not universalize the specifics that mark regional life in India. His ethnographical endeavour shows how a discourse from the margins, as it were, can provide critical insight to dominant discourses of Hinduism.

The different modes of history examined in the first three chapters have considerably varied approaches. These methods lend themselves quite easily to incorporation within the *hindutva* mode of present day politics. In the subalternist literature it is precisely the lack of material dimension which allows inequalities to be occluded in favour of cultural theoretical analyses. The politics of *hindutva* in the recent past has sought to collapse together an amorphous and diverse India under a politically motivated and constructed notion of Hindu identity.

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