



HISTORICAL IMAGINATION AND COLONIAL MODERNITY IN INDIA

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Abstract: *History may tend to repeat itself primarily because the relationship of power and knowledge in class society does not change fundamentally in the short term despite appearances to the contrary. A large part of contemporary Indian historiography is reminiscent of the nineteenth century intellectual fashions simply because the intellectual premises of modernity have not changed much since the arrival of colonial rule in India. The assertion that a decadent medieval 'Muslim' India was ultimately responsible for the rise of British colonialism in India is implicit in such arguments. This view justifies the colonial view of Indian history according to which the British were left with little choice but to rule and reform a people labouring under Oriental Despotism; the Muslims were the despots and the Hindus their hapless victims. In this historiology of the Indian middle class, Islam is a problem and the Muslim community appears in dire need of modern reform. The British and the colonial indigenous elites were equally desirous of improving an India which, to begin with, existed in their respective imaginations. The Indian subaltern classes were, in general, peripheral to the various elite schemes aimed at modernizing a backward country although the Indian elite often deluded itself with the rhetoric of popular representation. Orientalism, as a way of perceiving and theorizing the Orient, had existed in Europe from the medieval period. Its existence pre-dated the late eighteenth century when it arrived in India as an officially patronized school of thought. Since the medieval times an Orientalist in Europe was someone who evinced special interest in the epistemology of the Eastern cultures.*

Key Words: History, Colonial, Muslim, Hindu, India, Britan.

Introduction:

Since history is often made to repeat itself in event and idea by the votaries of the status quo, it is wrong to assume that the march of history is necessarily progressive; a glance at the history of modern

imperialism would confirm this. History may tend to repeat itself primarily because the relationship of power and knowledge in class society does not change fundamentally in the short term despite appearances to the



contrary. The superficial changes in political power and social mentality, if they occur at all in a given historical period and its corresponding knowledge episteme, suggest that intellectual continuities remain strong over generations. Thus, it can be safely assumed that ideologies, like the class societies to which they correspond, have a long shelf life and re-surface in different chronological times in different forms an example of this is the history propounded and nourished by the Indian middle class. A large part of contemporary Indian historiography is reminiscent of the nineteenth century intellectual fashions simply because the intellectual premises of modernity have not changed much since the arrival of colonial rule in India. The bourgeois modernity of our day, inter alia, hinges on certain important aspects of Indian history conceived during British rule Much of this history comprises a living room discourse in which a glorified pre-Islamic scientific past of India squares with a claim to westernized modernity redefined with reference to a post-colonial globalization. In contrast to the secular vision of Indian history, the Indian nation in this view is re-imagined as a primarily Hindu space within which the national

claims to a successful modernity can be fruitfully staked. The future of India, we are informed almost every day by the makers of globalizing India, depends upon this political hallucination. To buttress the point, the historical claims of ancient Hinduism are exaggerated beyond the usual limits imposed by common-sense on fantasy. According to information generated by the new Indology available on the blogs and emails, ancient Hindus had discovered the laws of gravity much before the advent of the Renaissance in Europe. They could perform caesarean sections centuries before modern anaesthesia were invented. Their system of medicine and yoga ensured them long healthy lives - their medical practitioners knew how to cure chronic conditions like arthritis and terminal diseases like cancer.

This savarna vanity yokes history to the politics of communalism with clear implications; ancient India had the potential of modernity but could not achieve it because of the medievalism imported into India by Islam. This "dressing up of the colonial view", Romila Thapar reminds us, masquerades as a new history of India but in reality, closes the Indian mind to reason.



My point here is not to disprove such wild assertions but to understand their ideological role in India where communalism has become respectable in the last thirty years. The assertion that a decadent medieval 'Muslim' India was ultimately responsible for the rise of British colonialism in India is implicit in such arguments. This view justifies the colonial view of Indian history according to which the British were left with little choice but to rule and reform a people labouring under Oriental Despotism; the Muslims were the despots and the Hindus their hapless victims. In this historiography of the Indian middle class, Islam is a problem and the Muslim community appears in dire need of modern reform. The similarities between the intellectual imperialism of bourgeois India and the ideology of the British Raj cannot be overlooked in a sincere interrogation of Indian historiography if we are to believe that human consciousness is the central subject matter of history.

This Article deconstructs Indian middle class historiography with reference to the foundations of modern Indian historiography. It claims that the tropes of ancient glory and modern backwardness are complementary to imagining a past which drives the historical

self-perception of the 'great' Indian middle class. The story of ancient India, and its descent into medieval backwardness with exceptional interludes, was, above all, developed by a modern historicized thinking which spread among educated Indians in colonial and post-colonial India. Valorising bourgeois modernity as universally valid and condemning the medieval world were indispensable components of the dominant historical discourse fashioned by colonialism. Later on, the epistemological basis of colonial modernity, which justified itself with reference to Indian backwardness, was used by the various Indian nationalisms to construct their own discourses. Since the colonial historical episteme re-produced both community and the community-based nation in nineteenth century India, ultimately the difference between religious and secular nationalism was reduced to a question of preferred political practice. This explains the difference between the programmatic communalism of religious nationalism and the pragmatic communalism of secular nationalism in colonial and post-colonial India. Hindu nationalism and secular nationalism often both presume that Hindus are



essentially more accommodating and nonviolent compared with Muslims. The Hindu nationalist deplores the docility of the Hindu while the secular nationalist praises the social flexibility of Hinduism. The prevalence of these views, seventy years after Indian independence, calls for a reconsideration of historical memory in India in relation to the identity politics of our times. Further, the claims of modernity and nationalism should be put to a stern test. These claims, as Marxism and critical theory assert, cannot be accepted at their face value.

Colonial Orientalism and the Indian reaction

Just a few years before the founding of the Indian National Congress Bankimchandra Chatterjee, the author of Anandamath, observed that a "nation with historical reminiscences of its past glory tries to retain its glory, and if this be lost, it tries to regain it." The point is to understand how these modern "reminiscences" emerged in colonial India and how was India regained in a new knowledge episteme. The social diffusion of colonial ideology and the influence of the 'superior' culture of the colonizer in British India affected Indians in myriad ways. In the

nineteenth century the indigenous colonial elites, Hindu, Muslim and others, began a serious modernization of their religions due to the influence of history which they learnt from their colonial rulers. This socio-religious reform, which was radically different from the humanism advocated by the Bhakti tradition of India, was aimed at eliminating the non-modern, and often syncretic, popular religious practices from the everyday domain of the people. According to primacy to history, both as cause and consequence of the communitarian project, was central to this religious modernization. But, while the Bhakti was humane without being modern, religious reform during the colonial period was modern without necessarily being humane - often it needed and manufactured another to justify and sustain its communitarian imagination; the aim of Bhakti was reconciliation in contrast to the development of the modern nation during the colonial period. The epistemological shift from the pre-colonial to the colonial in the source of this reform had profound consequences for the future of India. In colonial India the defining and dividing boundaries between the mainstream and marginal or



majority and minority were drawn with the ink of colonial historiography and ideology". The philosophically constructed binary difference between the modern based on reason and science and the traditional based on unreason and superstition was central to communal reform in colonial India. The historical construction of communities, and later nations, was inherent to the assertion that communities had to modernize in keeping with the historical needs of modernity. The departure from tradition and syncretic popular practices was essential to this modernizing project. At the same time colonial policy, for obvious political and academic reasons, encouraged such community-history based imaginations.

These imaginations had a long-term impact on post-colonial society in south Asia. For example, the theory of the martial races, as part of an overarching colonial anthropology and excessive military recruitment from the Punjab from the 1880s, continues to influence the history of Pakistan and India decades after 1947. Another example would comprise the long term differentiated impact of the Cornwallis System and Munro System in different parts of India. Cornwallis wanted to create a class of improving landlords in

India, whereas Munro claimed a greater familiarity with Indian systemic practices. Nonetheless, both approaches emanated from the impulse to reform India in the interest of British colonialism. A third example was the education system developed in India by the British policy makers like Macaulay with all its long-term implications. Thus, with the arrival of modernity the backwardness India became a source of intellectual examination, ideological obsession and public anxiety. The British and the colonial indigenous elites were equally desirous of improving an India which, to begin with, existed in their respective imaginations. The Indian subaltern classes were, in general, peripheral to the various elite schemes aimed at modernizing a backward country although the Indian elite often deluded itself with the rhetoric of popular representation. The argument that India's poverty was a result of British rule also developed steadily in the Indian nationalist circles during the nineteenth century but ultimately this argument could not displace the community based political nationalism from the historical imagination of most Indians.



This essay looks at colonial ideology as a thought system comprising numerous strands. These strands had different intellectual and social roots but ultimately converged to create the colonial discourse in India. Some strands could, despite their superficial differences, even prove complementary in creating a colonial knowledge of India's past in tune with both colonial administrative convenience and elite Indian attempts to consolidate religious identities and rediscover their own national or local histories with the aid of modern historiography introduced into India by colonialism. Early Orientalism and Liberal-Whiggishness might have examined India's past differently but together they provided the historical paradigm which conditioned the worldview of the British and Indian colonial elites. The British discovered, enumerated and, in the process, reinvented the various Indian communities during the nineteenth century. Thereby the census provided a political future to these communities. At the same time a divided Indian elite was affected by the colonial-modern understanding of India. In response it redefined communities and constructed imaginary nations

by using the ideological material provided by modern knowledge which was colonially derived in India. In this way the self-perceptions of the educated Indian elites were affected by the colonial discovery of India; colonizing the mind of the colonial subject was essential to both to the cultural and economic project of colonialism.

The process of perceiving, understanding, classifying, ordering, administering and exploiting India began with conquests of the English East India Company (hereafter Company) in mid-eighteenth century. The Battles of Plassey (1757) and Buxar (1764) and their well-known economic fallout transformed the Company into a State. By the late eighteenth century, the period of mercantilist loot gave way to systematic governance designed to address the payments problem of the Company and facilitate the transfer of wealth from India to Britain. However, the emergence of the organized exploitation of India raised several questions. What, the English debated was the best way of ensuring a steady flow of revenue into the treasury? Which system of education would be best suited to Indians? What were the best ways of understanding and ruling the natives? What was to be made of India's social diversity,



customs and the numerous languages? What was India's true history and what would define the British attitude towards these? These were difficult questions raised by the English 'who were themselves evolving a new British identity in relation to the colonies and the industrial revolution at the time. America had recently been lost. India was being gained and, in the process, refashioned. France was in the throes of a revolution which was disliked by the British ruling class and the Company was increasingly being attacked by the free traders and Parliament in England. The emerging idea of the British Empire, to which colonialism had become central in the eighteenth century, was related to these historical developments. The relationship of Britain with its Empire would define the identities of the colonizer and colonized simultaneously from the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Although there were numerous ways of perceiving and understanding India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Orientalism and Liberal-Waggishness emerged as the most influential schools of thought as far as the unfolding of British policy in India, and the modern conceptualization of Indian history, was concerned. The

Evangelical view of India was also important to the colonial period beginning with the early nineteenth century but, in general, this view was closely aligned with the dominance of Whig gishness in British thinking of the period. When it came to the colonial subject's paganism or decadence Christianity and Liberalism often spoke in the same voice. However, to assume that the early debates on the future of India excluded Indian opinion would be an unpardonable error. From the years of Warren Hastings native opinion on numerous issues, ranging from interpretations of Indian laws to linguistic matters, was sought by the British to ascertain the difference and similarity between the colonizer and colonized. This opinion was rendered, foremost, by sections of the Indian elite who were collaborating with the British. Thus, the intermediary elite, whom the British preferred to treat as the representative intellectuals of the bewildering Indian masses, became strategically placed between the British and the Indian subaltern classes. This collaboration influenced the process of ruling and codifying Indian society. This native-colonial collaboration has given rise to the view that colonialism in India was ultimately



a hybrid enterprise produced by the interaction of at least two cultures if not more. Though there is merit in this view, it should not be forgotten that this hybrid worked against the Indian subaltern classes whose surplus sustained both colonialism and the Indian elite.

Orientalism, as a way of perceiving and theorizing the Orient, had existed in Europe from the medieval period. Its existence pre-dated the late eighteenth century when it arrived in India as an officially patronized school of thought. Since the medieval times an Orientalist in Europe was someone who evinced special interest in the epistemology of the Eastern cultures. These cultures were supposed to begin on the borders of Europe in Turkey and were seen extending all the way to Japan. In the beginning, an Orientalist was an specialist who generally appreciated his subject. The Germans often led the field and there is reason to believe that many of the early Orientalists were convinced that the Orient had a lot to teach the Europeans. Balzac and Flaubert, in the nineteenth century, did not necessarily condemn the orient but they did certainly associate an air of mystery with it. In modern literature the Orient was often

described in exotic and feminine colours. In Germany the academics of Indology, which glorified an ancient spiritual Vedic Hindu India, probably evolved from an obsessive interest in the orient found among a set of intellectuals who reacted to the spiritually dry industrial materialism of the West. Indology produced the long-lived idea that the similarity between Vedic Hindus and ancient Europeans was dissolved by history. However, the politics of Indology argued, precisely because of this dissimilarity India and the West could learn different things about each other; India could help the West transcend modernity whereas the West could help develop India materially. But the precondition of this lay in India's re- discovery of its ancient glory with the help of tools central to the practice of modern historiography.

The early Orientalists wanted to perceive and understand the historical evolution of similarities and differences between the East and the West and their views can hardly be considered 'objective'. In the first instance, most European Orientalists never visited the orient. Their arguments were based on the numerous travelogues and documents found in Europe. These documents were themselves



not free of discursive elements and hence needed corroboration with other sources before emphatic generalizations based on them could be made. Secondly the views of the Orientalists must be examined in the overall intellectual and social context informing their work. Many Orientalists and Indologists were committed Christians. Hence to assume that early, pre-colonial, Orientalism could indeed easily offer credible perspectives on the orient would be simplistic. Some Indologists, like Max Mueller, enamoured by the achievements of ancient Hindus as they were, did not restrict their vision of India to a narrative of bygone greatness. They were convinced that the Vigor of an Aryan past had equipped the Hindus to approach historical progress and embrace Christianity with confidence. If Europe and India had a common Aryan past it was reasonable to assume then, as it seems now, that they could have a common, morally uplifting, future. Semitic influences were excluded from this Christian-Orientalist vision of India. The Middle East was a geographical and cultural space which could easily be ignored by this projected historical linking of India and the West; the West had overcome Islam

and India had to purge its past of the scourge.

While the tendency to essentialize, and sometimes romanticize, the Orient was present in European Orientalist literature, it is important to remember that Orientalism underwent a major transformation during the early nineteenth century. As an ideology it has a long history. European views of non-Europeans experienced a transformation from the early sixteenth century because of the founding of the Spanish and Portuguese colonial empires and the development of new, early modern, socio-religious perspectives in Europe following the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The age of geographical 'discoveries', and the cultural transformation of Europe during the early modern period leading up to the Enlightenment, deeply affected European perspectives on the Orient. In fact, it can be argued that since the period of the medieval crusades Christian views on Islam acquired definitive, though not always necessarily antagonistic, tones. Moreover, the academic meaning of Orientalism acquired a new colonial connotation in the twentieth century largely due to the scholarship of Antonio



Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Noam Chomsky and Edward.

Orientalism was comprehensively deconstructed by Edward Said in his famous book published in 1978. Using the Gramscian concept of hegemony and Foucault's critique of modernity Said claimed that Orientalism was a pretentious discourse of imperialism and colonialism. It was a knowledge produced by modern western capitalism desirous of exercising total power over the orient. As a dominant Eurocentric discourse, it was inherently biased against the African and Asian cultures and therefore its submissions had to be viewed critically. According to Said, the late eighteenth century was an important chronological, political, cultural and racial point of departure in the history of modern colonialism. Since then, Orientalism developed as a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient" through the mechanisms of knowledge generation, political control, cultural domination and state authority. Since the publication of Said's influential book, Orientalism has become a major problematic central to a post-modern critique of colonial and post-colonial modernity.

On one hand, the reduction of most, if not all, European descriptions of the Oriental institutions and practices to the status of an imperialist Eurocentrism raises a fundamental question difficult to answer. If most European records of the Orient must be deconstructed in the study of Asian histories since at least the early modern period where would facts and truth be located? If historical source comprises a discourse, is the writing of history possible at all? On the other hand some critics of Said point out that numerous European travelers and their records pre-date the development of modern colonialism. They also point out the work of some German Orientalist scholars who were geographically removed from the political sites of colonialism which produced a discourse of colonial-racial domination. These works, it is claimed, emerged from a chronological period and geographical locale unrelated to modern imperialism and thus should not be equated with the colonial project which is central to Said's thesis. These critics warn us against taking Said's analysis of Orientalism too far. Nonetheless these critics may themselves have read too much into Said's submissions. Some critics have



even insisted that Said has inadvertently provided an intellectual basis to an Islamism which conveniently blames the West for modern Islamic problems and backwardness! This is similar to the Indian nationalist position according to which almost all modern social problems in the country can be traced back to British colonialism. Others insist that all dominant cultures produce prejudiced discourses about the cultures they subdue, hence there is nothing exceptional in Said's submissions. It can also be said that writing a history of the pre-colonial or colonial past is possible if 'Orientalist' observations are corroborated, or overruled, by indigenous sources used by a history which subverts the general Eurocentrism of western scholarship.

Verts the general Eurocentrism of western scholarship. While conceding some ground to these criticisms we must not forget that the point of departure in Said's work is important. The transformation of some European countries, especially Britain and France, into modern colonizing powers during the early nineteenth century was certainly the point of civilizational departure as far as the superior positioning of the Occidental over

the Oriental was concerned. However, to extend Said's point further we cannot but allude to the sources generated by the Spaniards, Portuguese and Dutch. These three powers were the early modern colonizers practicing and promoting slavery and similar forms of servitude on a large scale during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Surely it can be claimed, in a fitting response to Said's detractors, that the knowledge of the colonies generated by the travellers, administrators, soldiers, missionaries and scholars of these nations comprises the prehistory of modern colonial Orientalism.

Orientalism and Colonialism in India

In the latter half of the eighteenth century the transition from a prehistory of Orientalism to historicized Orientalism was made in India. In trade, diplomacy and warfare the Company had developed a working relationship with the regionally differentiated, though socially similar, commercial and ruling elite of Indian society since the beginning of the seventeenth century. The relationship underwent a major change during the eighteenth century as consequence of the rapid disintegration of the Mughal Empire and the emergence of



numerous regional polities in India none of whom could check the English advance in India. By the late eighteenth century, the Company emerged as the paramount power in India and set into motion the process establishing a colonial empire in south Asia led by a handful of Europeans. However, right from the beginning it became clear to the British that they could rule India, with its limited rate of literacy and the deep schism between the written and oral knowledge traditions, only in alliance with its tradition intellectual and propertied elites. It has been asserted that these demographic political and educational compulsions made them yield to Brahmanism because, and as D.D. Kosambi pointed out, the Brahmanical ideology became a convenient tool for the intellectual subjugation of the Indian masses.

Abiding by the Indian religious texts, by which its native elites swore promoted the feeling of historical continuity among the British. Their rule could hence claim justification on grounds of being in consonance with textual sanctions enjoyed by India's ruling orders since time immemorial. During the nineteenth century the classification and codification of

Indians into group and their numerous re-discovered texts acquired 'scientific' validity and widespread social acceptance. Finally, "the colonial era's far greater dissemination of printed matter, the increase in literacy, and the development of communications technology, shored up the plausibility of the orthodoxy claims." Thus, the traditional elites within the colonized society used the institutions of colonial modernity to strengthen their grip over their respective communities. In due course this hegemony was challenged by several subaltern movements including the ones begun by Dalit intellectual-activists like Phule and Ambedkar who utilized colonial modernity to challenge the caste-orthodoxy of the upper caste.

Led by Warren Hastings, the early British administrators and scholars established the belief that India was an ancient land which must be ruled in accordance with ancient Hindu scriptures in the case of Hindus and written medieval scriptures with Quranic sanction in the case of Muslims. Since the English were Christians who believed in religious scriptures their search for equivalent texts among the Hindus led them to the Brahmanical texts on law, culture,



history and customs. This set the context within which a new kind of modern knowledge eventually developed in India. Very soon, as a consequence of a new discourse, India was re-discovered. This rediscovery of hoary India was done through the unearthing and codification of its Sanskrit Vedic texts by British scholars with the assistance of scholarly Brahmans. Sanskrit was identified, like Latin in the case of ancient Europe, as India's language of classical learning. Thus, a specific Orientalist understanding of India's past, present and, possible future, developed as an intellectual project dictated by India's new colonial masters with the help of their upper caste Indian collaborators. This gave selected group of Brahmans in the three Presidencies considerable intellectual and administrative space in the growing colonial dispensation from the late eighteenth century. Thus Brahmanism, now backed by the intellectual prestige and discursive institutions of the colonial state, began commanding a new legitimacy in the context of colonial modernity.

However, to claim, on the basis of the above, that collaboration involving, indigenous local and metropolitan elites was

something new to India would be simplistic if not altogether preposterous. Enough evidence suggests that such processes were present during the Sultanate and Mughal periods in which the ruling elites drew their knowledge of Indian religious customs from high caste Hindus and Muslims both. It is also worth remembering here that Dara Shikoh, Shah Jahan's elder son and heir apparent, was busy getting the Upanishads translated into Persian with the help of learned Brahmans before being defeated and killed by Aurangzeb. However, the comparison, despite postmodern temptations to the contrary, must stop here. Dara Shikoh was not William Jones and the mid seventeenth century did not comprise the intellectual departure on which the modern thesis of Orientalism rests. Compared with the seventeenth century, the industrial revolution, colonialism and modernity made an unprecedented difference to India's future in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

With respect to the conceptualization of Indian history Orientalism first discovered the cultural similarity between ancient Europe and ancient India with the help of comparative philology. Second, by reappearing in



nineteenth century Indology, it defined the divergence between the Occident and Orient as a binary opposition between the material and spiritual. The long-term implications of this were clear. In line with a theory of comparative advantage to borrow a phrase from the economists, the West would learn spirituality from India and India would imbibe material-technological lessons from the West. Third, early Orientalism pushed back the historical chronology of India into an ancient glorious period which was perceived as being markedly different from the later periods characterized by historical stagnation and cultural decline. Thus, the chronological tripartition of Indian history, based on the emerging British conception of history in the nineteenth century, along religious lines was created. Fourth, it popularized the idea that the Indian civilization was fundamentally Aryan and Hindu. In this paradigm non-Aryan communities and traditions were portrayed as external influences or domestic infringements on the core Aryan civilization of India. The savarna castes of India lapped this up eagerly in their caste and religious interests. The greatest exponent of such thinking produced in the

nineteenth century was the Arya Samaj which extolled a glorious Vedic period of Indian history and expected the Hindus to fashion a future based on the virtues of the Vedic Age. Thus, in the Indian revivalist movements of the nineteenth century, and even the mass nationalism of the early twentieth century led by social conservatives like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, orientalist ideas became enmeshed with the historicization of the Indian consciousness.

These ideas, cohesively articulated in late eighteenth century for the first time, gathered strength during the nineteenth century and ultimately became the ideological base of nationalism and communalism in India. The abiding popularity of these ideas among the urban English educated Indian middle class can also be attributed to the discourse popularized by the colonial education system. The aim of the education system set up in India by the colonial state under Liberal-Whiggish and Evangelist influence was, in general, twofold. First, and to paraphrase Macaulay, it was designed to create a class of Indians who would be Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, opinions, morals and intellect. This class would be politically subordinate and culturally inferior



to the Englishman in India. The secondary aim was to assign to India a backward place on the worldwide scale of national and moral progress towards a state of enlightenment. Although much of this economic backwardness, in fact, was a product of British colonialism it was convenient for the colonial rulers to define it in terms of the historically inherent backwardness of the Indian civilization. Doing so justified British rule in India as historically progressive and even providential - an important assumption of Whiggish history shared by the moderates within the Indian National Congress. The intention here was to inculcate a sense of racial, cultural, religious and historical inferiority among the English educated Indian elite by making them recreate their own past in degrading terms laid down by the foreign rulers. Thus, the corruption of the memory of the colonized was made to benefit the colonizer in every possible way. In the long run, and largely due to this institutionally manufactured inferiority, the native elite would remain in awe of the British and at the same time look up to them for guidance from a position of dependence and subordination. Since this inferiority had to be rationalized in order to

hegemonize the Indian middle class, the study of Indian history was yoked to the project of colonialism. Towards this end the tri-partition of Indian history along the fashionable lines of studying European history, the notion of a dark age under Muslim rule and the hope that India would ultimately make progress under enlightened modern British rule, and possible Christian instruction, became the guiding signposts of Indian historiography. The idea that British rule would, wittingly or unwittingly, revolutionize and modernize an ancient changeless civilization in India was believed by almost all the leading intellectuals in Europe, Karl Marx included, during the nineteenth century. From the nineteenth century onwards the West, therefore, became a critical comparative reference point in the story of India's future.

The immense discursive power of colonial education and historiography can be gauged by the following. First, the central Orientalist and Whiggish notions of history continued to influence the historical views of even those middle-class Indians who began to oppose British rule in India from the late nineteenth century. Even as the moderate faith in British rule yielded space to opposition and



conflict in the first two decades of the twentieth century, some of the core tenets of colonial historiography were reproduced in the growing nationalist and communal historiography of India; an ancient imperial India along with the Mughal Empire was glorified and, simultaneously, medieval conflicts were painted in communal colours while the eighteenth century became a pitiable episode of Indian history characterized by the culture of a decadent Mughal nobility. Second, even the revivalist movements of the nineteenth century like the Arya Samaj could not escape the influence of colonial modernity. While the ideas of Satyarthprakash glorified the Vedic age and debunked Islam and Christianity, the schools and colleges set up by the moderate section of the Arya Samaj came to be called the Dayananda Anglo-Vedic (DAV) institutions. Reformers, beginning with Rammohan Roy in the early nineteenth century, had in any case grasped the importance of combining western learning and Indian culture to develop a modernity suited to Indian conditions. Following the Revolt of 1857, and the subsequent punishment meted out to the Muslims of north India by the

British, Muslim reformers also began to highlight the importance of imbibing Western learning. Consequently, British influence remained strong in institutions like the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) set up by Muslim reformers desirous of combining Islamic and Western-modernist elements in a futuristic education system tailor made for Muslims. By the end of the nineteenth century ideas emanating from Orientalism, Indology and British liberalism had converged to form a variegated episteme which conditioned the minds of colonial subjects trying their best to shake off the cultural inferiority induced in their everyday life by racial and colonial subjugation.

Conclusion:

During the colonial period the opposition to colonialism was seen to distinguish secular nationalism from religious communalism. In the postcolonial period the accent on British colonialism as the focus of opposition declined steadily as time passed. In contemporary India the difference between nationalism and communalism - as ideologies of the ruling elite - appears much reduced not only because of elite political pragmatism but also because of their shared historical premises. There is enough reason



to believe that since secular and religious nationalisms in India are essentially the products of colonial modernity, they have much in common. Nationalism's belief in its own future is based on a re-discovery of the pre-colonial past as an inspiration necessary to modernize a nation which is desperate to have its own place under the sun. But this historical journey is fraught with dangers which have been highlighted in this paper. The lasting importance of Orientalism and Whiggishness in the largely Brahmanical 'mainstream' historical viewpoint of the urbane, culturally dominant, articulate and politically influential corporate sections of the great Indian middle class can only be explained with reference to colonial ideology. On the other hand, a variegated political Islam created by the histories of modern imperialism and colonialism, and the Muslim reaction to colonial and post-colonial modernity, has created the perfect counterfoil to post-colonial Orientalism and Whiggishness.

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