South Asian Liberalism under strain c. 1900-140

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In these lectures I have been interpreting liberalism as a broad set of concepts designed to release the individual from political, economic and religious coercion in order to promote human flourishing. A particular Indian version of this sensibility remained dominant in Southern Asia through to 1914, and in some respects beyond. The political significance of the constitutional 'moderates' in the Congress after 1906 attested to this. So did the public status of leaders such as G D Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta. Yet, by 1890, new, organic understandings of state and society and calls to violent political action challenged liberalism from outside. At the same, the liberal project was transformed from within. Doctrines that emphasized faith, 'the heart' and the divine land of India (Aryavarta) became more influential. Intellectual historians of the United States and Europe have traced analogous shifts. Liberalism came under attack from socialism in Britain, the resurgent right and Roman Catholic piety in Italy, anti-big-business progressivism in the United States, and Marxism across the world.

The successful displacement of classic liberal arguments obviously reflected massive social change: the effects of industrialization- or, in the extra-European world, de-industrialization- imperialism, militarism and war in Europe; the reaction to immigration and racial tension; the economic decline of the old upper middle class elite. The decline of liberal ideology also attested to the persuasiveness of new concepts of power, justice and right social ordering. Yet we should avoid simply reducing intellectual history to an epiphenomenon of economic, social or political history. Unconditional religious faith and faith in the state began to

be seen once as harbingers of the good as the result of a generational shift in ideology. Ideas in their own right had the capacity to persuade and to help people make sense of their lives.

Equally, while acknowledging the trans-national social life of ideas, it is important not to fall back upon the image of a simple diffusion of ideas from West to East. The picture is more complex. Albert Hourani's *Arabic thought in the liberal age* remains one of the finest intellectual histories of the extra-European world. Yet Hourani used a model of diffusion. He wanted to discover when 'echoes' of European thinkers first appeared in Arab journals and periodicals.[1] It would be interesting, of course, to locate the precise point at which references to Bentham, the Mills or Marx first appeared in Indian newspapers and public debate. Yet the naming of these philosophers was often merely symbolic. They acted as markers for intellectual shifts which had already happened. Western works and 'influence' did not necessarily initiate change. On the contrary, Indian public discourse sometimes anticipated changes that took place later in Europe or the Americas. As early as 1828, Rammohan Roy, India's first modern political theorist, challenged the crude application of Bentham's principle of utility. He argued that freedom in the positive sense involved- to use the words of T. H Green fifty years later- 'the liberation of the powers of all men equally for contributing to a common good.' As I noted yesterday, Indians had already anticipated many of the reformulations of liberalism proposed by Isaiah Berlin or John Gray after 1960 when Britain became a multi-cultural society; India always had been a multi-cultural society. Again, Indian liberals already demanded state intervention in the economy well before British political argument moved towards so-called 'welfare-ism' after about 1890. Everyday debates about scarcity and recurrent famines in the subcontinent demanded this.

I am not claiming that Indian thought anticipated every development in the West, as modern devotees of political Hinduism sometimes do. But I do suggest that the 'order of knowledge' in India, combined with the subcontinent's often-dire economic conditions and its cultural pluralism, gave Indians a unique capacity themselves to transform and legitimize important intellectual changes. Not all of these were straightforwardly positive, of course. Mystical devotion to nation, whether in Benedetto Croce's Italy or in twentieth century India, may well have contributes to socially negative outcomes in violence or ethnic conflict.

The internal shift was already apparent in India in the 1880s when, for instance, Keshub Chandra Sen, the Hindu Unitarian preacher, abandoned his benign, though still objective moral sociology and began to emphasize the sense of mystical-romantic union with India's mountain's and rivers. For him, as much as for the world-famed seers Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, India became the Universal Mother. About the same time, the second generation of radical leaders of the Arya Samaj developed a doctrine that might be called 'bio-nationalism.'[2] This also constructed India's very soil as a sacred terrain of virtuous sacrifice. The Aryas melded the classic liberal prescriptions of independence and local self-government with an Indian version of eugenics and an intrusive creed of disciplining the body and society.

The rising tide of anti-colonialism, signaled particularly by the home industry (*swadeshi*) movement after 1905, has overshadowed the deeper changes taking place in the intellectual culture of the Indian intelligentsia. These changes informed the content of nationalist discourse, but they also reflected on India's wider engagement with global modernity. Two trends emerge

clearly from political and social comment at the time when the Congress was split between so-called political 'moderates' and 'extremists.' The first was the growing emphasis in elite debate on the group aggregates that were thought to stand between the individual, the nation and humanity. The supposed divide between Hindu and Muslim representations of the nation, was only one aspect of a tendency among India's public men to envision society as a complex of separate entities that needed to melded together. I call this 'communitarianism', expanding a term used by Ayesha Jalal. This shift in sensibility also influenced attitudes to caste, 'tribe' and sects within Hinduism. It found a useful language in the prevailing social theory appropriated from Spencer and the later Darwinists. As one Indian commentator said in 1910 'the organic view of life is the accepted view today.'[3] Communitarianism also found a hospitable space in the evolving indigenous Hindu vedantist tradition, which had been further popularized by Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Vedanta envisioned spirit moving through a unified creation and history without benefit of divine revelation.

Historians have tended to see Indians' new emphasis on caste and community after 1870 as a reflection of the categorizing tendencies of the colonial state. The census and official constructions of cultural difference, however, were themselves located in a much wider field of ideas. Here Indian self-representation in the public sphere interacted with the dominant political ideas of the day, European and indigenous. Leaders of caste and religious movements inverted Herbert Spencer's 'laws of development' to account for a contemporary Indian sociology. The social organism, they argued, had degenerated over time into mutually hostile fragments, castes and small communities. It could be reunified by enlightened conduct so that caste sub-groups

(*jati*s) would fuse into wider groupings and ultimately into an organic nation and a new type of humanity.

This historicizing sociology was paralleled by another tendency that also downplayed the role of the classic liberal ideal of active individual and emphasized instead the organic solidarity of the group. This was the moralizing, Anglo-American version of ethical socialism as it merged with Indian ideas of the practical virtues of the caste order. Again, this was no mere diffusion of Western ideas: romantic socialism in India was empowered by a much more urgent discourse about the subcontinent's huge artisan sector, now in terminal crisis. After 1890, many of the British founders and co-workers with Indian nationalism and social reform moved from a liberal to a 'soft' socialist stance. A O Hume's speech of farewell to India in 1894 had concluded that nothing would be done for India 'until our [British] working men put forth in earnest the power vested in them and put into power a true democratic ministry.'[4] Another British Congressman, Sir Henry Cotton, foresaw a 'United States of India' in which labour was protected from the sort of abuse that was daily evident in the Assam tea plantations. American Progressivist ideology offered distant support. W J Bryan, democratic contender for the US presidency, denounced the exploitation of the workers in British India and was widely quoted in the Indian press.[5]

Edward Carpenter and Ananda Coomoraswamy, the Eurasian art critic, were romantic socialists. Both denounced the destruction of Indian industries by the evils of British capitalism. Carpenter wrote of ancient India as 'wisdom land', comparing it favorably with the 'cheap and nasty puffing, profit mongering, enterprising, energetic business' which was to be seen in the 'queer broil' of places such as Bombay and Calcutta. Here the 'highest concept of life and

religion' was the General Post Office, he complained.[6] Coomaraswamy, for his part, told an audience in Madras 'people who lived up to their own ideals, had their own arts and industries, and who like the Japanese had their own industries would be respected and not succumb to imperialism.'[7] This was not a doctrine of class struggle, but of small-scale enterprise. India, he said would not benefit from large industries such as those that had created the slums of Bombay and Calcutta. Beauty and employment had to come before profit. 'Great art or science is the flower of a free national life pouring its abundant energy into ever new channels, giving some new intuition to the world of truth and beauty before unknown.'[8]

This romantic and socialism created a new representation of caste. Here the caste system was neither denounced as a denial of rights nor praised as moral ordering, so much as approved for its cooperative and guild-like features. Amongst working people, it was said, caste had once been a virtuous and democratic system for the allocation of work, land and resources in conditions of scarcity. Further, benign caste, as one Indian commentator noted, 'might possibly develop into a cooperative or socialist organization of industry.'[9] He observed, for instance, that artisan caste associations in the city of Ahmedabad had recently banned overtime in an attempt to apportion work equitably across the city. This 'true' form of caste had flourished in ancient India with its great hospitals, irrigation works, village grain stores and protection for the worker. This utopia had been destroyed by greedy western capitalism that had subjected India to poverty and misery. The theme of 'the return of the guild', as much as Tolstoy's idea of a pure community, formed the background to Gandhi's ideological investment in the weaver and the village community. Thus British soft, romantic socialism had been merged with Indian historicizing sensibilities about the artisan well before Marx's own ideas had any purchase in the

subcontinent. Capitalism to these thinkers was not a stage of development in the dialectic of modes of production. It was a malign force working against the evolution of spirit in the world.

Thus Indian romantic socialism was quite compatible with organic nationalism. Indian socialism, borrowing from the Anglo-Saxon, if not in the German mode, remained particularist. Early Indian socialists followed the tradition of J. S. Mill's last writings with their stress on social cohesion. Into this sensibility they injected a strong admixture of Spencer's organicism and Hindu rumination on the unity of being. For instance, Har Dayal, the humanist and later revolutionary, writing in the journal *Modern Review* in 1908, even managed to assimilate Marx into this ideological mixture. He argued that it was Marx's compassion for the downtrodden, his status as a great teacher or *rishi*, rather than the doctrine of class struggle that was relevant to Asia.[10] This was not simply a superficial preamble to a more rigorous Indian Marxism. Even supposedly 'scientific' socialists, such as M N Roy, or for that matter Jawaharlal Nehru, later left room in their analyses for the past glories of Indian civilization and were uneasy with Marx's concept of oriental despotism.

One feature, then, that empowered the transition in India from classic liberalism and enlightened individualism of the early- and mid-nineteenth century to a collectivist mode of thought was the reception and transformation of various forms of evolutionism in India. Because their works were accessible in English, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer were the most often cited authorities. But 'Darwin' and 'Spencer' were not fixed bodies of doctrine. For instance, Raja Rama Varma, arguing for government support of higher education in 1882, quoted Spencer, but seemed to invert his opposition to state provision by recourse to historical relativism, similar

to Telang's.[11] In Britain, Varma said, society was already wealthy enough to leave the individual to pay for advanced training. In India, which had suffered from generations of invasion and poverty, the state's protective function had to be extended to higher education. Indian writers were also alert to the theoretical problems in Spencer's picture of human society as an evolving organism. Human society was a conscious society.

Conscious life implied a division of preference as well as a division of mindless organic labour. Self-determination could not wait for a gradual evolution of all the interdependent parts of the Indian social organism. What was needed was a comprehensive 'reconstitution' of the body politic.[12] In this way, the Indian version of organicism was made congruent with the need for vigorous political action. Commentators were able to approve the activism of political radicals, such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak or Lajpat Rai, even though these two leaders remained conservative on matters of social reform.

The ambiguity in Spencer's own writings between the primacy of individual action and the self-regulation of the complex social organism aided an ideological drift towards idealism in Europe as well as in the Subcontinent. For instance, the British writer, Benjamin Kidd (1858-1916) set himself to emphasize the inter-relationship between human sociability and the development of society in his works, particularly *Individualism and After*. This was a published version of his Herbert Spencer Lecture at Oxford in 1902.[13] Shruti Kapila has shown that this lecture series had a strong Indian connection. Shyamji Krishnavarma, Arya Samajist and anti-colonial revolutionary, had inaugurated it a few years earlier.[14]

Kidd was one authority cited by Mohini Madan Chatterjee who lectured on 'History as a science' and the 'Importance of Historical Studies' in Calcutta 1907. Chatterjee argued that history was an encompassing master-science, like biology or mathematics, to which the principles of evolution and natural selection could be applied. Man and his works were not distinct from nature but 'part of the general evolutionary process.' At this point, Chatterjee inserted an indigenist element into his argument, but a much more sophisticated and historically informed one than earlier appeals to the Vedic past. The sacred teachings of the Hindus were 'entirely in accordance with the idea of social evolution,' he maintained. The Sanskrit texts were not simply divine stories, but records of historical change. Divinity incarnated in the world had always adapted institutions to the needs of the changing ages. The ancient Hindu lawmakers constantly modified the primal dicta. For instance, the medieval seers' rule that girls should marry at the age of ten was itself an evolution from the classical sage, Manu's prescription of a yet earlier age for marriage. Modern reformers had then reinterpreted the scriptures in light of changed economic conditions. Thus we see natural selection 'working before our eyes as both a divine and an historical progress.' Hinduism had anticipated the idea of natural selection and was, in fact, more scientific than Islam and Christianity, because it had no concept of the 'special creation' of humankind.

Chatterjee's second goal, then, was to 're-moralize' Darwin, Spencer and modern science, but again in a distinctly Indian mode. The individual organism, Chatterjee argued, was the embodiment of the experience of its ancestors. Racial experience and individual experience moulded each other. The unity of knowledge proclaimed by the ancient Vedas was now being rediscovered by western science. History showed that progress was a physical, economic, but

preeminently a moral process. He rejected 'the narrow view of the cosmic process on its ethical side taken by Spencer and Huxley.'[15] 'Ethical coherence' was superior to force, he wrote, citing Prince Kropotkin. The social organism was held together by an ethical, and not merely a functional 'cement.' Here Chatterjee even seemed to provide an Indian parallel to the thought of Emile Durkheim, one of the great critics of positivism. Natural selection in human societies involved an adaptation that resulted in the increase of an 'interested consciousness,' that is an expansion of human morality which reflected both desire and duty. Chatterjee was keen to avoid what he saw as the opposition in Christian and Islamic theology between self-cultivation and social duty. He claimed to find a unified concept of 'good-with-self-interest' in the Hindu 'god of all virtues,' Subrahmanya Deva.

Moving back to history, and by implication, his own national history, but still using the biological analogy, Chatterjee argued that the ethically more coherent human organism would always survive one based on temporary physical advantage. Thus the Manchu conquerors were ultimately assimilated by the superior Chinese society. Though this was only hinted at, India's moral unity was adapted to survive colonial conquest. Intriguingly, Chatterji's arguments foreshadow the ones that Joseph Needham later used to blend biology and historical materialism with a post-Christian notion of the good. There were distant echoes here, too, of some of the themes that pervade Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* ('Free India), a tract that was published in the same year as Chatterjee's lecture.

These debates about consciousness and religion were all implicitly and even explicitly political in India. They reflected not only an idealist assault from outside classic liberalism, but

also its gradual transformation from within. In this transformation, the idea of degeneration became a potent negative trope to the idea of evolution. So, an unnamed correspondent of the *Bengalee* wrote in 1908 of 'political degeneration.'[16] This was more than a mere metaphor and comprised a complicated application of the ideas of the second generation of 'social Darwinists' to Indian politics. The author referred to the work of E. Roy Lankester, whose *Treatise on Zoology* along with Archdale Reid's theory of *Retrogression* (published in1906) posited that species degenerated if they did not evolve. These ideas were attractive to Indians because they were thought to prove that species or races did not merely inherit mental traits directly, but inherited the capacity to acquire them. If, therefore, the Indian 'race' had once been intellectually dominant, then it had the capacity to become so again. The *Bengalee*'s correspondent took this to mean that if Indians did not move forward to greater 'righteousness' on the political plane, they would inevitably fall back into weakness, degeneration and parasitism. As the vital organs of parasites decay, so, he said, 'effeminacy and ease' digs the graves of nations. Indians had therefore to resort to rapid and united political action. What we see here is the merging of quite specifically Indian conceptions of dystopia with the western notions of degeneration, ably analysed in the French case by Daniel Pick.[17] But this was more than simply a 'European disorder.' It was a broader concept and a broader fear emerging against the background of a global anxiety about the speed of urbanization and industrialization.

Girindra Kumar Sen developed a more immediate application of the current discourse of evolution and degeneration to the situation of the Bengali Hindus.[18] Iftekhar Iqbal has recently demonstrated that the silting up of the eastern Delta, the spread of waterborne disease and weed and the decline of economic vibrancy afflicted Bengali society after about 1880.[19] Sen argued,

however, that it was specifically the Bengali Hindu who was in decline. He pointed to empty villages and declining farmsteads, the migration of Hindus to the towns to become paupers. The low birth rate, Sen contended, was not an artificial outcome as it was in France (the home of theories of degeneration), but the result of bad customs and poverty. A generation of 'weak and brainless children' was emerging not least because the cattle stock was degenerating. Cattle were being consumed and eaten by voracious Europeans; but decadent Bengali landlords were failing to breed strong Brahmini bulls, with the result that the quality of milk was deteriorating. Theories of decline during the Kali Yuga (the age of iron) were of ancient coinage in India. Later, Rammohan and his generation of the 1820s wrote of the decline of the ancient Indian constitution and civilization. But this organicist and eugenicist version of what my Indian friends call 'Bengali despair' became increasingly fashionable after 1890.

Sen forged a link between contemporary biological and economic 'declinism' and Hinduism through the image of the cow. The cow had emerged as a symbol of Hindu race and civilization in through the activities of the cow protection societies some twenty years before. Another pessimistic intellectual, P. C. Banerjee, developed a similar theme about degeneration due to child marriage and caste.[20] He implied, however, that it was the lack of self-government that had brought this about. When Hindu kingdoms had possessed their own sages and lawgivers, these evils had not existed. Another common theme linked, India's de-industrialisation (by now amply documented by Dutt and Naoroji) to the physical decline of its population. K. L. Sircar, for instance, argued that the decline of local industries and the 'beloved charka' (spinning wheel) gave a 'morbid stimulus to agriculture.'[21] The need for yet more hands to set to husbandry caused over-population and this, in turn, led to malnutrition.

This whole genre of declinism reached its apogee in a series of no less than twenty articles, entitled 'A dying race', specially written by Lieut Col. U N Mukerjee MD for the liberal newspaper the *Bengalee* in 1909, presumably at its editor, the liberal politician, Surendranath Banerjea's behest. The 'race' in question was, of course, the Bengali Hindus. Mukerjee's contribution was notable more for prolixity than novelty. But he was particularly insistent on the superior racial efficiency of Bengal's Muslims and held before his co-religionists the fate of the Amerindians of Hispaniola, the Australian Aborigines and Maoris, as had the writer in the *India Gazette* as early as 1830.[22] Mukerjee's approach, however, reflected nearly a century of Indian sociological imaginings, the rise of eugenic ideas and the spectre of communal conflict. Muslims, he noted, had moved into business, flooded into Calcutta to take technical jobs. They were socially cohesive, proselytized vigorously and had not splintered into castes like Hindus. Systematic moral and religious teaching characterized the Muslims; Islam operated as a 'militant church' whereas 'Hindus as a race have sinned against God and nature.'[23] The argument for 'degeneration' here worked on a biological, economic and spiritual level. It reversed the polarities of the argument for the revelation of God in India's history, which was propagated by more optimistic liberals.

Race was, indeed, a key theme not only for conservatives, but also for liberals worldwide immediately before the First World War. In India the debate focused on issues such as immigration to North America and the fate of Indian labour in Transvaal, but it also inflected the internal Indian debate about caste and community. More radical social reformers associated with the National Social Conference argued for marriage alliances at least between the fragmented

sub-castes of the higher castes, the 'twice-borne', on the grounds of racial efficiency. Here they found themselves challenged by neo-conservatives using organicist theory to assert that intermarriage among different 'races'- even among sub-castes- would lead to degeneration. Here 'Spencer' was used as a weapon by both sides. D. N. Chowdhuri took up the issue in the journal *Modern Review*. The attempt to bring Spencer's authority behind a new form of apartheid had gained force after his death when a letter he had written to the Japanese statesman Kentero Kaneko was published. Spencer warned Kaneko to keep other races 'at arms length.'[24] David Duncan's biography of Spencer also had the philosopher saying that racial mixing 'beyond a slight degree' was a bad thing.[25] Even for Spencer, this was more than a purely biological matter. Since racial characteristics embodied the institutional and civilization values of parents, the mixing of widely different races created a kind of institutional incompatibility, he held. The implications of this were particularly challenging for Indians who widely adhered to a civilizational rather than a biological understanding of race.

Chowdhuri and other liberal reformers who were attempting to appropriate Spencer as an authority for the mixing of sub-sections of the Indian population, therefore scoured his writings to find evidence of what he had meant by 'a slight degree.' They marshaled many examples: the Romans were sprung from an amalgamation of the Sabines, the Sabelli and the Samnites. The vigorous north European races had arisen from the mixture of Scandinavians, Saxons, Jutes, Angles and Normans. In ancient India, Dravidians and 'Kolarians' had mingled together to give rise to the glories of classical Sanskrit civilization. Even in modern times, the Eurasian, Henry Derozio had become one of India's greatest poets, while Mr Booker T. Washington, the great Pan-African American leader, also seemed to subvert Spencer's categories from within. Faced

with many pressures to ethnicise or even racialise the language Indian politics, Indian reformers resorted to the metaphor of the 'melting-pot' common among American liberals of the time. India could never be racially exclusive like the Jews. It had to remain a 'cosmopolitan variant' on Arya Varta.[26] Yet this 'melting' could only go so far. Even if fragmented sub-caste groups should merge again, the great castes (the *varna*s) should remain pure. Hindus should not merge with other races to produce mongrels, as it was alleged, the Burmese had done.

I want to turn now to a critical issue: how these themes and tropes of history, evolution and degeneration were used in contemporary political argument. Public men of all political persuasions alluded to all these themes, but there were sharp differences of interpretation between latter-day liberals and the new generation of integral nationalists, such as Aurobindo Ghose and Bipan Chandra Pal. This intellectual contest was important, not least because it provided ideological legitimation for and against the acts of terrorism or political violence that became a routine aspect of Indian politics after 1895, especially in Bengal and Western India. Versions of these ideas were also to inflect the political language of Gandhi and many later activists.

Historians have generally told the story of the clash between so-called moderates (liberals) and extremists (advanced nationalists) between 1905 and 1910 in terms of political faction or, less cynically, constitutional conflict: the demand for immediate independence as opposed to dominion status within the Empire. Alternatively, it has been depicted as a battle between neo-Hindus, such as Tilak and Lajpat Rai, and liberal universalists, such as Surendranath Banerjea and G D Gokhale. Yet, in contemporary political thought, particularly in

Bengal, the split was represented as a debate between proponents of political evolutionism and those who advocated immediate action and individual sacrifice. In other words, philosophical arguments were invoked to validate political positions and this meant that the ideas themselves had political force.

At a theoretical level, the argument turned on the notion of a rupture within the evolutionary schema. For instance, the radical nationalist newspaper, *Karamyogin*, speaking for Aurobindo Ghose, argued in 1909: '[t]he 'religion which embraces science and faith, theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism, and yet is none of these is that to which the world spirit moves.'[27] This was Hinduism, of course. Hinduism would be the basis of the future of the world religion and Hinduism would be apprehended by 'the heart' and not by reason. What was needed was faith and, in particular, faith in 'the people' as embodying God's evolving presence. The *swadeshi* (home industry) movement should inspire faith because, as 'a big, irresistible movement,' full of 'vehemence and velocity' it represented the 'unconscious or semi-conscious preparations of the human mind.' The *Karamyogin* wrote, in the spirit of Aurobindo's recent dictum, that suffering and sacrifice was a sign of spiritual progress and that British repression was 'the hammer of God moulding us into a mighty nation to do his work in the world.' The article proclaimed: '[r]ationalism leads only to despair.'

The *Bengalee*, a classical liberal newspaper, edited by Surendranath Banerjea, criticized this position on several grounds. Firstly, the editor condemned its 'nativism.' While the radicals accepted the Vedas and paid some lip service to the Bible and the Koran, they seemed to argue that 'the heart' would choose between these faiths, and would chose 'Hinduism.' True to his

Brahmo and liberal universalist background, the *Bengalee* editor argued that 'it is in the progressive development of humanity that God reveals himself in his fullest form and that no scripture, belonging to any age or generation, can do for all generations, ages and countries. And for the same reason God has to be looked for not merely in the heart, but in history- the one supplementing the other in essential particulars.'[28]

Secondly, the *Bengalee*'s article criticized what seemed an essential dualism in the argument; God revealed himself in the unconscious, not the conscious mind. Yet 'those who profess to see the finger of God in particular movements and not in all, are shirking their responsibility to think for themselves.' Rationality - though not rationalism- must supplement and direct faith, not be submerged by it. Thirdly, the writer defended himself against the *Karamyogin*'s charge that he was a selfish individualist. The individual's life should indeed flourish though only in so far as it helps the greater organism, the nation or humanity. 'How is the race, how is humanity to fulfill itself, except through the individual?' 'The true faith does not deny reason' and an act of sacrifice must await an answer to the question of whether the sacrifice was really needed. In effect, the *Bengalee* was arguing for the neo-vedantic idea of the omnipresence of a progressive divinity that could be apprehended through human reason. Rapid and violent change in human history usually had the effect of entrenching repressive structures. A later writer in the *Bengalee* predictably used Herbert Spencer to argue for such steady, but reasoned change. France over three generations, he said, was a good example of how too much liberty led to a reaction and the resurgence of despotism.[29]

So, to summarize the argument thus far: the classical Indian liberal programme was invaded by the following concepts: the validation of community over the individual, romantic socialism, spiritualised an organic view of the divine nation, degeneration theory and the new emphasis on race. But there was something more. The Indian liberal *modus vivendi* between universal aspiration and ideological difference, which showed some signs of emerging in the thought of leaders such as Gokhale or Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's father, seemed constantly to be rocked by explosions from within. In particular, the unity of Hindu and Muslim India seemed increasingly at risk from what is commonly called communalism. Yet the widespread decline of the ideological *modus vivendi* after 1920 was not simply the result of practical political impediments, or colonial divide and rule, it also turned on issues in political philosophy. Here it may be necessary to turn for an explanation from John Gray to the yet more radical critique of liberalism- and of Cartesian thought generally- mounted by a lineage of continental European philosophers from Nietzsche through Heidegger to Heinz-Georg Gadamer.[30] According to Gadamer, thought-actions are never really objective, but represent instead the working of formative 'prejudices'- 'pre-judgments'- born out of the indissoluble fusion of language with historic life experience, which some call tradition. Whatever the merits of this position in high philosophy, it is certainly true that Indian liberals found it difficult to subdue lived experience, the foundational formations of language and tradition when seeking the *modus vivendi*. Thus apparently rational political argument was invaded by 'prejudice.' Despite his desire for Hindu-Muslim accord, even the arch liberal Gokhale fell into polemic, referring in private letters to Muslim 'rowdyism,' 'fanaticism' and anti-Hindu 'jihad.'[31]

A figure such as the U.P. political leader, Madan Mohan Malaviya, is an even stronger case in point. He was once described to me by Jawaharlal Nehru's biographer, Dr S. Gopal, as a 'Hindu communalist',[32] and was viewed as such by many Muslims especially after 1926. Malaviya seemed nevertheless a classic liberal in many respects. Like Gokhale, he argued for radical de-centralisation of government, an Indian federation, full male franchise and Indian ministries within a British dominion.[33] When faced with the British counter-argument that irremediable religious differences split the sub-continent and required the continuation of direct British administration, Malaviya parried it with a clever discussion of British history. He recalled that the 'irremediable split' between Protestants and Catholics had led to a series of wars and rebellions, which continued at least to the Gordon Riots of the 1780s.[34] This, however, had cast no doubt on the right of the British to self-rule. Similar religious divisions in India would eventually be healed by a sense of nationhood.

Yet Malaviya's 'life world' and semi-conscious thought was overwhelmingly Hindu. In his speeches, writings and letters, Muslims are associated overwhelmingly with conquest and oppression. He never discussed Muslim life or belief, and seems barely capable of imagining them. Their being was different. For Malaviya, progress was always summoned up in terms of Hindu traditions and ideas or Sanskrit words. Speaking of the establishment of the Benares Hindu University in 1911, for instance, he remarked that 'the Hindus' were once the greatest race on earth, but because of their sins, they had become the most degraded and had lost their *dharma*. The foundation of BHU would, he said, 'reset the karmic clock.' He went on to 'pray that he would be allowed by the Almighty Father as many lives in which to serve his brethren as petals had been showered on him' by the crowds on his lecture tours. Just as Japan had risen

again to greatness, so a combination of Hindu spirituality and technical prowess would revive India, but this was Bharat Varsh or Aryavarta, the Hindu India.[35] While demanded for Indian self-rule he also denounced the role of 'idle talk' in political and religious debate.[36] His liberalism increasingly took on a religious hue. Classic liberals rejected the coercion of labour on the grounds that it was a violation of individual autonomy. The examples of the evils of indentured labour selected by Malaviya emphasized instead the violation of caste and religion (*dharma*) it entailed. He referred to Hindu indentured labourers to Mauritius or the West Indies forced to cut up meat in a butcheries or face jail.[37] By the later 1920s, Malaviya's words and actions in the campaigns of the All-India Hindu associations had become openly hostile to Muslim aspirations in India. To my mind, this represented not only a response to the political conflicts that followed the British constitutional reforms of 1918, but also the continuous eruption into his discourse of language, tradition and 'prejudice', in Gadamer's sense.

While Malaviya progressively re-Hinduised Indian liberalism in conformity with the karmic order, Gokhale, another great pre-1924 liberal, bifurcated and socialized it. Gokhale also stressed the participatory aspect of traditional liberalism: decentralization, the division of powers, the construction of a wide male franchise, dominion status and the right of property.[38] He deplored coercion in matters such as the control of the press, or control of labour through indenture or intervention in the peasant's right to sell his land.[39] Above all, he revered the action of the individual's charity and social commitment in the process of human flourishing. Yet, at the same time, his liberalism emphasized the constant need for state intervention in a manner very unlike classic liberalism. He used and extended the ideas of Friedrich List on the need for national political economy.[40] The state, he argued, ought to provide universal education; it

should intervene to relieve poverty and it must act to adjust relations between the social classes by legislation, even while preserving private property. To this extent he argued for the permanent settlement of rents between landlord and tenant. The drift of Indian liberalism towards state intervention was part of a very general move towards 'welfare-ism' across the world.[41] In Britain, collectivist liberals such as L T Hobhouse made similar ideological moves: the change reflected not simply a desire to change relations between the classes, but a notion of 'society' as a moral and epistemological unity, which could only flourish collectively. Political factors, such as Bismarck's welfare state, the demands of modern warfare and social efficiency, were critical in this change. Yet the liberal programme had always been ideologically ambivalent on the matter of the individual's relationship with the group and its contradictions were now fully exposed.

In India, the resurgence of lethal famines after 1898 and the pressure of idealist *swadeshi* ideology provided the external pressures on liberalism. Indian liberals had for many years been notably more interventionist and 'welfareist' than many of their British contemporaries. Gokhale, for instance, understood the British government as having a sacred duty for the welfare of the people since Providence had ordained their rule. But, observing a world already divided into armed camps, he also noted that national efficiency demanded mass education and welfare. Inwardly, too, Indian liberalism could never have taken an entirely individualist direction, given the ideological inheritance of investment in the family, clan, kinship group and *dharma*-righteous conduct. So Gokhale also moved to spiritualize (though not to Hinduize) Indian liberal thought. He claimed that he was 'agnostic'; he seems to have gone out of his way to smoke cigars and violate brahmanical dietary norms. Yet, as Carey Watt has suggested, his major social

intervention was to transform the idea of *sewa*, service to deity, Brahmin or husband into a notion of secular service to society, not so much demystifying it as turning it outward.[42] Indeed, he compared his foundation, the Servants of India Society, to the Jesuit order and at other times the Ramakrishna Mission, while the Society's membership oath had a distinct feel of practical spirituality.[43] Indian liberalism had here come full circle, back to Rammohan's original idea of spiritual liberation (or *mukti*) working within society.

Finally, how, if at all, did the transformed liberalism of the *swadeshi* era connect with the moderate socialism combined with devotion to centralized planning regimes that characterized the mind-set of India's political elite after the 1930s? What indeed were the ideological origins of Jawaharlal Nehru's India? Some features of the Indian socialism of the 1900s discussed at the beginning of this lecture certainly acted as its precursor. Socialism in India was never seen as a de-nationalising force, as it was by some contemporary Arab nationalist ideologues, according to Albert Hourani.[44] Socialism was always immanent 'in one country' for both the British and these earlier Indian models. Again, the concern of sentimental socialist writers such as Coomaraswamy, Har Dayal or Carpenter with the artisans of 'wisdom land' arguably made it easier for modernist such as Nehru to find common ground with Gandhi's idiosyncratic thought, on some issues at least. Being in one country did not, of course, debar the emerging Indian socialist tradition from a global humanist posture. Nehru declared himself an agnostic, but in youth he had briefly flirted with the universalizing, as opposed to the Hindu tendency within the Theosophical society. For him, science and progress and political empowerment of the people became, in effect, a 'religion of humanity' similar to the spiritual evolutionism common amongst the moderates of the pre-War era. Again, the Nehruvian emphasis on the state's responsibility for

planning society and economy had been foreshadowed in the attempts of classic liberals, such as Naoroji and Dutt, to find an ethical balance between liberty and the need for vigorous political action to save lives during famine. Yet liberalism was never a coherent body of political philosophy in India or anywhere else. It had become disordered not only by the impact of events and competing philosophies, but also by the internal deformations resulting from the contradictions between the imperatives of liberty and the search for a virtuous polity. We see the same changes in the European and American contexts over the same span of years. In India, however, the ideological urgency of cultural difference, the malformations of a racially divided state and the ravages of War and Depression gave rise to a particular type of ideological urgency.

This final lecture, then, has been concerned with the decline and transformation of the liberal ideology after about 1890. If I had time, I would carry the story on to 1947 and beyond. Liberalism, or at least its iconic themes, persisted into the twentieth century in radically different contexts and in competition with further new ideological formulations: revolutionary socialism, Gandhian experiments with the self and militarized nationalism. For instance, B R Ambedkar, the maker of the independent Indian constitution, engaged with the question of the balance between centre and region first raised by Rammohan. Ambedkar wrestled with the notion of civil rights and women's rights, as in a very different context, had Rammohan. Ambedkar used Ernst Renan's ideas to try to imagine the nature of a potential 'Muslim nation' in India, as S. N. Bannerjea had used Mazzini eighty years before. Subhas Chandra Bose, as much as his rival Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote extensively on the *panchayat* (the local deliberative body), first highlighted by the constitutional liberals of the 1820s. Bose believed that the British had snuffed out this embodiment of Indian self-government. None of these twentieth-century activists was

straightforwardly a liberal thinker, of course. But liberal themes were constantly re-calibrated to contemporary politics and re-historicized as Indians' sociological imagination deepened. While we must avoid being sentimental about liberalism, it remains true that India's 'liberal age' did broaden out to postcolonial democratic republicanism. By contrast, Albert Hourani's Arabic 'liberal age' petered out in the face of Islamism and neo-colonialism. In China and Southeast Asia, the integral nationalism of the New Life Movement of the 1930s and militant communism after 1945 killed off the shoots of liberal democracy fostered by Lim Boon Keng or Sun Yatsen. India's different, and more positive direction reflected the vibrancy of political theory and political debate in India more even than it did the practical the policies of nationalist and colonial leadership.

As I come to the end of my Wiles lectures, I would like to renew my special thanks to the Wiles Trust and Queens University Belfast for the honour they have done me. I also thank this attentive and responsive audience. I hope I have enhanced interest in Asian thought rather than spreading complexity. Understandably, the historiography of former colonial territories across the globe has been dominated by studies of nationalist politics, the genesis of poverty and, more recently, the status of 'culture' as a redoubt against colonial racism. By moving the focus back to Asians' intellectual history, I have tried to show that the study of the ideology and aspirations even of elites connects with, and can enrich these other fields of study, too. I have focused on a set of ideas and sentiments broadly classed as liberalism, partly because they were hegemonic for Indian and other Asian intelligentsias during the nineteenth century, but partly because they have been formative of Asian and global modernity. They still resurface in modified form in debates about democracy, inequality and the role of the state in today's 'Indian Shining' or information-

rich Singapore. The Asian version of liberalism was more than a 'derivative discourse' or even a passively 'hybrid' one. It emerged from violent contestation between Indians, other Asians and distant Western critics and theorists over several generations of ideological conflict and distant polemic. The emergence of liberal ideologies and practices did not represent the overturning of an 'authentic' Asian culture by an alien Western episteme. There is no such thing as an unmediated culture. From the elite to the poor, colonized people argued and debated, trying to understand their world and to improve it. I hope my lectures have also shown that this intellectual world was already trans-national in significant ways. These debates, refutations and misprisions were of their own time. They should not be annexed in a facile manner to today's polemics. Yet to consider them may yet help us understand our own condition.

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[1] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798-1939* (new edn., Cambridge 1983), p. v.

[2] e.g., B. R. Nanda (ed) *The collected works of Lala Lajpat Rai*, I (Delhi, 2003), p. 61. Lajpat Rai denounced the export of bones from India which he claimed was denuding the soil of goodness. Similar themes infuse Dayananda's own denunciation of cow-killing in *Satyarth Prakash* as both a moral and a physical assault on India.

[3] 'Social reform', *Bengalee*, 4 January 1907.

[4] Frederick C Charles, 'English Socialists and India', *Bengalee,* 2 January 1907

[5] ibid.

[6] ibid; for Carpenter see Anthony Copley, *A spiritual Bloomsbury. Hinduism and homosexuality in the lives and writings of Edward Carpenter, E.M Forster and Christopher Isherwood* (London, 2006).; Edward Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak to Elephanta. Sketches in Ceylon and India* (London, 1910).

[7] *Bengalee*, 29 January 1907.

[8] 'The present state of Indian art', *Modern Review*, 2, 1907, no. 5, p. 413.

[9] 'English socialists and India', *Bengalee* 2 January 1907.

[10] Har Dayal, 'Marx as a rishi', *Modern Review*, 3, 1908 pp. 25-36

[11] Rama Varma, Maharaja of Travancore, *Observations on the Higher education and the education of the masses in India* (Madras, 1882), p.2.

[12] *Bengalee*, 4 January 1907.

[13] See also Kidd, *Social Evolution* (London, 1898), *Principles of Western Civilisation* (London, 1902).

[14] Kapila, 'Self, Spencer and swaraj',

[15] Mohini Madan Chatterjee 'The importance of historical studies', *Bengalee*, February 27th 1907.

[16] *Bengalee*, 1 September 1908.

[17] Daniel Pick, *Faces of degeneration. A European disorder c. 1848-c.1918* (Cambridge, 1993).

[18] 'Economic condition of the Hindus of Bengal', *Bengalee*, 10/11 April 1909.

[19] Iftekhar Iqbal, 'The Bengal Delta c. 1840-1943', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2005.

[20] 'The present state of society in Bengal' Dacca Literary Society, *Bengalee* 2 Sept 1908.

[21] Faridpur District Conference, *Bengalee* 17 July 1907.

[22] H Mukerjee, 'A dying race. 1', *Bengalee*, 1 June 1909; cf. 'On the colonization of India', *India Gazette*, 12 February 1830.

[23] Mukerjee 'A dying race 3' Bengalee, 4 June 1909; 7, 8 June, 9, 19 June, 1909.

[24] D N Chowdhuri, *Leader* 10 May 1911.

[25] David Duncan, *Life and Letters of Herbert Spencer* (London, 1908).

[26] 'The Indian renaissance', *Leade*r, 4 November 1909.

[27] *Karamyogin*, 20 June 1909.

[28] 'Faith and fatalism', *Bengalee*, 7 July 1909.

[29] 'Organisation' no. III, *Bengalee*, 10 June 1909.

[30] See, e.g, for an introduction, Jean Grondin, *The philosophy of Gadamer, trans. Kathryn Plant* (Chesham, 2003).

[31] e.g. Gokhale to Wedderburn, 20 May 1907, B R Nanda, *Gokhale, the Indian moderates and the British Raj* (Princeton, 1977), p. 333

[32] Personal communication 1973.

[33] See eg., *Speeches and writings of Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya* (Madras: Natesan and Co., 1919); pp. 10-19, 112-19, 133-40.

[34] 'religious difference', a critique of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, 1918 Ibid. pp. 181-2

[35] *Leader*, 10 October 1911.

[36] I thank Dr Francesca Orsini for this point.

[37] Malaviya, *Speeches and writings*, p. 331.

[38] D B Mathur, *Gokhale, a political biography. A study of his services and political ideas* (Bombay, Manaktalas, 1966).

[39] John S Hoyland, *Gopal Krishna Gokhale. His life and speeches* (Calcutta, 1947), p.66

[40] Mathur, *Gokhale*, p. 407.

[41] See Michael Freeden, 'The coming of the welfare state, in Terence Ball and Richard Bellamy (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Twentieth Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 7-45.

[42] Carey Watt, *Serving the nation. Cultures of service, association and citizenship in colonial India* (Delhi, 2005).

[43] ibid. 103-6.

[44] Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age 1798-1939* (repr Cambridge, 1983), p. 181. On some of Abduh's disciples.