Imagined Economies

Styles of Nation-Building in Twentieth Century India

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The fiftieth anniversary of the Quit India movement seemed to provide a natural vantage point from where to take stock of the history of our present. As the cartoonists pointedly reminded us, 1992 appeared in so many ways to be 1942 in reverse: far from calling upon foreigners to quit India, our leaders are desperately seeking foreign and multilateral capital; the enormous hope, energy and idealism of the 1940s are the inverted image of the dispirited and cynical 1990s where the buzzword is 'realism'; finally, and not least, the commitment to a vision of socialism (however ill-defined) is now parodied by the boundless faith being invested in the capitalist market.

But then came December 1992, only to be followed by January 1993. Ironically enough, the cup of contrasts that was threatening to spill over seemed to steady itself. *This*, after all, was common to both decades, both crucial turning points in the social history of the modern Indian nation. In a sudden surreal twist, the nineties seemed to be the forties in fast forward as well as reverse, and familiar everyday things—relationships, faces, voices, images and institutions—grew distorted and grotesque and shrill before our very eyes.

The idea that has perhaps suffered the most is that of the Indian nation. It is as though an elderly celebrity has taken ill and all the society columnists are hunting for their pre-written obituary notices, eager to do some editing, polishing, updating. But the reports of its imminent demise are no doubt somewhat exaggerated: indeed, this is perhaps the best time to enquire into the social arrangements and the ideological idioms that have made it possible for us to think the Indian nation.

Intended as an invitation to a research project, this exploratory essay looks at some of the transmutations that have occurred during this century in the way that the Indian social imagination articulates the discursively constructed concepts of 'economy' and 'nation'. If nations are indeed 'imagined communities' as Benedict Anderson has so persuasively suggested, then I would argue that one of the dominant modes in which the Indian nation has been imagined is as a community of producers, as an *economy*. Attempting to read some of the contemporary literature on the nation against its culturalist grain, I will try to provide a preliminary sketch of the idea of 'nation-ness' and its changing relationship to the idea of the economy in the Indian context. Finally, I will suggest that the current conjuncture constitutes a critical watershed in that the nation is being disarticulated from the economy; or, what is the same thing, the notion of the economy is being denuded of its content such that it can no longer participate in the idea of the nation.

THE NATION IN RECENT WESTERN SOCIAL THEORY: A BIASED CULTURALISM?

> Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (Anderson 1983: 15)

Evaluating the early literature on nationalism in an essay published in 1980, Sarvapalli Gopal concludes that its failures were due to a combination of ethnocentric biases and political vested interests. The emergence of modern nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a phenomenon 'which lay primarily outside Europe and was a consequence of the encounter between western imperialism and non-western peoples. But the horizons of western thinkers were limited to Europe; and from that they jumped, at one move, to internationalist principles.' Since both Marxists and free market liberals in the west were affected by this ethnocentrism, the field was left open to those whose analyses were 'vitiated by self-interest': the apologists for western imperialism who were dismissive of, and the protagonists of anti-imperialist struggles who celebrated, the third world nationalisms of the time. The latter, in their search for ideological ammunition, relied not only on 'what was often a mythical past', but also on the writings of European philosophers which were actually about 'nationalism of a different type' (Gopal 1980: 90–91).

Much has changed in the dozen years since Gopal's review, but not enough. One of the problems he mentions, namely, the tendency to make extravagant historical and philosophical claims, is an old one common to both first as well as third world nationalisms. Indeed, it forms the core of the riddle that nationalism presents to social theory: its undeniable political efficacy despite its obvious historical errors and logical excesses. Recent western theory has developed a much more complex and sophisticated approach to this paradox than was possible or attempted in the earlier literature. Much of this theoretical sophistication is directly or indirectly attributable to the developments since the sixties in neo-marxism and in post-structuralist theory. Perhaps the most decisive change is that the newer writers do not experience any theoretical embarrassment or discomfort at the invocation of a 'mythical' (rather than a historically authenticated) past. The phenomenon of nationalism is now investigated more in terms of its modality than its defensibility: as a 'how?' rather than a 'why?' question.

However, Gopal's second problem, namely, a more or less Eurocentric approach to the problem of nationalism, is still with us. This is in spite of the fact that recent western theorists have made self-conscious attempts to break out of the constraints of ethnocentric perspectives.[1] While these efforts have undoubtedly succeeded in broadening theoretical horizons to include socio-cultural contexts beyond western Europe, there is as yet an insufficient appreciation of the *specificity* of third world nationalisms. Partha Chatterjee's indispensable work (Chatterjee 1986) maps the broad theoretical terrain that any attempt to come to grips with the particularity of nationalist thought in the colonial world and especially in India, must necessarily traverse. While Chatterjee's path-breaking genealogy is concerned with the philosophical presuppositions that render Indian nationalist discourse inescapably 'derivative', I wish to explore the area occupied by the nation-as-economy on this larger map.

Although this is an argument that is still to be developed and tested, I would like to suggest that an important aspect of the specificity of Indian nationalism (and probably also that of other third world societies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) is the crucial role played by discursively constructed notions of a national economy. This assertion—by itself, and in such an undeveloped form—is hardly novel. Indeed, the economic aspects of nationalism are arguably the most intensively studied in the Indian literature; but the modalities through which a nation may be 'imagined' are not among its primary concerns. While some recent western works on nationalism also treat the economic sphere (albeit more or less explicitly) as their point of departure, they display a certain 'biased culturalism'—a lopsided enthusiasm for the cultural as opposed to the economic materials involved in imagining modern nations.

This asymmetry of orientation does not represent a 'bias' in any simple or straightforward sense. It is not that these authors 'ignore economic factors', or that their emphasis on the cultural modalities through which the nation emerges is misplaced. What I am arguing is that, in keeping with the broader contemporary trend of a certain preoccupation with the cultural, these authors *insulate* economic processes from the cultural modalities they analyse so well. In other words, while they correctly insist that the nation is primarily a cultural construct, they needlessly limit the *materials* that are involved in this construction—the substantive content which the modality of the cultural moulds into 'nation-ness'—to 'extra-economic' conditions and processes. Given that the economy is an important, perhaps even the primary, source of raw material for the nationalist imagination in India (and probably other third world contexts as well), this one-sided culturalism tends to understate the particuliarities of these contexts.

Perhaps the most decisive mark of a paradigm shift in the western literature on nationalism is the confident insistence on treating the nation as an imagined *construction*. It is assumed to be an ideologically produced concept that cannot simply be traced, through a direct cause-effect relationship, to 'objective' characteristics (like race, ethnicity, language, religion, state, geographical region, or history) that members have in common. Benedict Anderson is perhaps the best known among those who have helped to bring about this transformation.

The lack of intellectual rigour and the 'emptiness' of nationalism, Anderson suggests, 'easily gives rise, among cosmopolitan and polylingual intellectuals, to a certain condescension. Like Gertrude Stein in the face of Oakland, one can rather quickly conclude that there is "no there there".' (Anderson 1983: 14) Wary of such premature condescension, Anderson wishes to take nationalism seriously despite its vacuousness. This leads him to argue that there *is* a 'there' to nationalism, except that (unlike M.C. Hammer's home town) it is not a real place one may visit—it exists in the *imagination*. Thus is born—'in an anthropological spirit'—Anderson's celebrated definition of the nation as an imagined political community that is sovereign and exclusive (1983: 15–16).

Anderson's innovativeness is in approaching the inventions and fabrications resorted to by nationalism not as lies or errors to be juxtaposed against some factual or true account, but as creative acts of a communitarian imagination. However, the immediate reason why the nation *must* be imagined is the obvious one that, because of its size, it is a community where direct, personal contact among members is not possible. In this sense, therefore, the nation as an imagined community turns out to be a somewhat trivial proposition, as Anderson himself is well aware.[2] Etienne Balibar has put the matter well:

> *Every social community reproduced by the functioning of institutions is imaginary,* that is to say, it is based on the projection of individual existence into the weft of a collective narrative, on the recognition of a common name and on traditions lived as the trace of an immemorial past (even when they have been fabricated and inculcated in the recent past). But this comes down to accepting that, under certain conditions, *only* imaginary communities are real. (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991: 93, emphasis original)

Thus, the notion of an imagined community is useful not in itself but because of its heuristic value in highlighting the methods—the specific social mechanisms—through which patriots interweave their individual life histories into the weft of a national narrative. In short, it is only because it promises to show us *how* communities may be (and are) collectively imagined that Anderson's definition is a helpful one.

What are the specific modes of imagining the nation that Anderson identifies? He initially offers two basic processes which enable a sense of nation-ness to grow from the cultural roots provided by religious communities and dynastic realms. The first of these is the emergence of print-capitalism, especially in the form of popular novels and daily newspapers, which, by creating a widely disseminable print-language, made available historically unprecedented technical means for 'thinking' the nation. The peculiar narrative structure of these forms of print-capitalism helps supplant the medieval conflation of cosmology and history (expressed as the 'simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present') with 'an idea of "homogenous, empty time", in which simultaneity is, as it were, transverse, cross-time, marked not by prefiguring and fulfilment, but by temporal coincidence, and measured by clock and calendar.' (Anderson 1983: 30) Equipped with this new temporal consciousness, the citizens of a modern nation, though personally acquainted with only a microscopic minority of their fellow citizens are nevertheless able to imagine the rest, to have 'complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity' (Anderson 1983:31).

The second major precipitant Anderson identifies is the double exclusion experienced by the emergent stratum of the educated middle class in colonised societies. Alienated from their local contexts by their western education and outlook, these groups identified themselves with the culture of the colonising country but were excluded from full membership in it. Thus, native and creole bureaucrats, though they may have acquired the same or even better objective qualifications than their European colleagues, were permanently barred from the top administrative or judicial posts. These 'lonely, bilingual intelligentsias' (Anderson 1983: 127), uprooted from their local habitat and denied an equal share in imperial society, were forced to imagine the *nation* as their legitimate domain. Because their western education gave them access to models of nationalism developed in Europe and the Americas, they helped invent nations as composite communities subsuming the parochial considerations of region or locality, and as sovereign states refusing the suzerainity of alien empires.

Although Anderson's account is clearly a step forward in its sophisticated analysis of the conditions of possibility for nationalism, it is also somewhat limited in the modalities that it identifies, particularly when viewed from a third world perspective. Anderson is least vulnerable in the second part of his argument where he examines the catalytic role played by disgruntled intellectuals alienated by the arbitrary constraints placed on their ambitions by colonial governments. However, this is also where he is least original, the particular phenomenon he describes being well known in the third world and especially in India.[3] More important for my purposes here are the limitations of his first, and more innovative, suggestion regarding the role of print-capitalism.

To begin with, it is interesting to note that Anderson's analysis of the socio-economic conditions surrounding the coming of print-as-commodity (based largely on Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's work, *The Coming of the Book*—Febvre and Martin 1976) is restricted to the European context. On the other hand, when he moves to non-western contexts, the commodity aspect of 'print-as-commodity' seems to drop out, and the analysis takes the form of a *reading of literary texts* conducted more in the manner of a literary critic than a social scientist. The point is not that a socially sensitive literary criticism is out of place or unnecessary, but that it is surely insufficient. There can be no doubt that Anderson's suggestive readings of, say, Jose Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* or Mas Marco Kartodikromo's *Semarang Hitam* help him to transcend narrowly European horizons, and to identify important narrative strategies for eliciting a communitarian feeling amongst readers. But these readings also need to speak to the concrete social context of the Philippines as a Spanish, or Indonesia as a Dutch, *colony*.

From a third world perspective, Anderson's broad argument concerning print-capitalism is subject to this serious qualification. Though they may supply the technical means for visualizing the nation, newspapers, novels and other 'print-commodities' in a colonial context do not translate into nationalist imaginings in any simple or automatic manner. These commodities (and all others, for that matter) are enmeshed in the specificities of the colonial context including, for example, questions of content, the size and social character of the 'reading classes', censorship, availability of printing technology, the economics of publishing, the intricate relation between colonial and native languages, and so on. As an illustration of the problems that need to be taken account of, consider the fact that the percentage of those literate in *any* language in British India rose from 5.35 in 1901 to 9.50 in 1931, the corresponding increase for males only being from 9.83 to 15.59 per cent.[4] Or consider Jawaharlal Nehru's reflections on British–Indian newspapers:

> I remember that when I was a boy the British-owned newspapers in India were full of official news and utterances; of service news, transfers and promotions; of the doings of English society, of polo, races, dances, and amateur theatricals. There was hardly a word about the people of India, about their political, cultural, social or economic life. Reading them one would hardly suspect that they existed. (Nehru 1981: 294)

Under certain social conditions, therefore, newspapers may actually be a hindrance rather than an aid to the nationalist imagination.

Thus far my comments have been confined within the framework of Anderson's argument; but the main point that I would like to make concerns the needlessly restrictive ambit of this framework itself. Anderson is surely right to insist that nations must be distinguished not by the truth or falsity of the claims they make, but by the style in which they are imagined. However, he considers only a very limited number of such styles; more precisely, he excludes from his analysis a major source of materials for the nationalist imagination in the third world, namely, the economy. To anticipate the following argument, it is not only print-commodities but other commodities too which provide the means to imagine the nation, such as hand-woven cloth or common salt, to take only the most obvious examples from the Indian context.

Although Anderson does not explicitly invoke post-structuralist theory, I think it would be fair to say that his privileging of a limited version of the imagination owes much to its homology with the discursive. The confidence with which he sets aside questions of truth/falsity and the seriousness with which he approaches the workings of the imagination are certainly the product of the post-structuralist moment in western theory. If 'the linguistic turn' led to the realization that there is no direct, extra-discursive access to the real, it also created the impression that reality was somehow irrelevant, or that the non-discursive produces no effects. With the passing of this moment, it is perhaps easier to recognize that the imagination—or the discursive—does not exhaust the sphere of all that is real or relevant, but must constantly *negotiate* with the non-discursive. Hence, though it comes from the rather different context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Slavoj Zizek's warning may be timely:

> To emphasize, in a 'deconstructivist' mode, that the Nation is not a biological or transhistorical fact but a contingent discursive construction, an overdetermined result of textual practices, is thus misleading; it overlooks the role of a remainder of some real, non-discursive kernel of enjoyment which must be present for the Nation *qua* discursive-entity-effect to achieve its ontological consistency. (Zizek 1992: 195–96)

In a brief essay published recently, Zizek himself offers what might be termed the Lacanian analogue of Anderson's imagined community. From his perspective, the apparent vacuousness of nationalism can be explained by thinking of it in terms of a shared relationship towards the Nation-Thing, a relationship 'structured by means of fantasies'. A paradoxical entity, the Nation-Thing appears as

> something accessible only to us, as something 'they', the others, cannot grasp, but which is nonetheless constantly menaced by 'them'. It appears as what gives plenitude and vivacity to our life, and yet the only way we can determine it is by resorting to different versions of an empty tautology: all we can say about it is, ultimately, that the Thing is 'itself', 'the real Thing', 'what it is really about', and so on. If we are asked how we can recognize the presence of this Thing, the only consistent answer is that the Thing is present in that elusive entity called 'our way of life'. All we can do is enumerate the disconnected fragments of the way our community organizes its feasts, its rituals of mating, its initiation ceremonies—in short, all the details by which is made visible the unique way a community *organizes its enjoyment*. (Zizek 1992: 195, emphasis original)

The Lacanian Nation-Thing is thus very close to an 'imagined community' particularly since it is based on a shared relationship structured in fantasy, a relationship that exists 'in reality' only in so far as each member of the nation believes in *the other members' belief* in it. However, this conception of the nation is not the product of a 'discursive idealism'. It requires something more substantial to exercise its attraction, the 'non-discursive kernel' of enjoyment, or *jouissance*.[5] Thus, for Zizek, 'A nation exists only as long as its specific enjoyment continues to be materialized in certain social practices, and transmitted in national myths that structure these practices.' (Zizek 1992: 195)

So far so Lacan, one might say. Nevertheless, one may have been tempted to follow Zizek further into these thickets but for the weakness of the societal dimension in his essay. Building on his argument that nationalism is 'a privileged domain of the eruption of enjoyment into the social field' (1992: 196), Zizek proposes 'to grasp the re-emergence of national chauvinism in Eastern Europe as a kind of "shock absorber" against the sudden exposure to capitalist openness and imbalance' (1992: 204). The crucial mediating link in this thesis is a rather thin analogy between Freud and Marx:

> There exists effectively a kind of structural homology between capitalism and the Freudian notion of superego. The basic paradox of a superego also con-

> cerns a certain structural imbalance: the more we obey its command, the more we feel guilty; so that renunciation entails only a demand for more renunciation, repentance more guilt—as in capitalism, where a growth of production to fill out the lack, only increases the lack. (Zizek 1992: 203)

Whatever its suggestiveness and intuitive appeal, this argument is clearly inadequate. The societal stratum (brought in through a rather cliched version of classical Marxist theory) is very much an afterthought and is simply tacked on. The central plank of the argument—an alleged 'structural homology' between the Freudian superego and the Marxian notion of ceaseless accumulation as the essence of capitalism—cannot bear the theoretical weight that is placed on it. (To take only the most glaring problem: if press reports are to be believed, the Eastern European economies are in no immediate danger of being swamped by the problems of overproduction or a surfeit of capitalist prosperity. Therefore, though it is not Zizek 's project, how much more remote would his thesis be from the contexts of third world nationalisms?)

If Anderson and Zizek emphasize the discursive or imaginative aspects of nationalism, Tom Nairn and Ernest Gellner place the economy at the core of their arguments. Nairn's basic thesis is that the emergence of nationalism in modern world history is the consequence of the uneven development engendered by imperialistic capitalism. Resisting western imperialism but nevertheless succumbing to the temptations of the metropolitan fantasy of even development, the colonised countries had to try and catch up with the west. This they tried to do by mobilizing the available resources of their societies for a 'historical short cut'.

> Mobilization had to be in terms of what was there; and the whole point of the dilemma was that there was nothing there—none of the economic and political institutions of modernity now so needed.
>
> What there *was* was the people and the peculiarities of the region: its inherited *ethnos*, speech, folklore, skin-colour, and so on. Nationalism works through differentiae like this because it has to. (Nairn 1977: 340)

While it has the merits of emphasizing the importance of the economic and of adopting a 'third worldist' perspective, Nairn's argument is much too general and fails to specify the social mechanisms through which nationalism works.

The same is true for Gellner, only more so. Gellner's thesis is that nationalism is a response to the advent of industrial society: it develops the 'homogenous high culture' required for the 'musical chairs' economy characteristic of modern societies where extreme mobility across diverse occupations becomes the rule (Gellner 1987: 23). Nationalism thus performs the function of educating—imparting a generic cultural training to—the individuals who have to be able to 'communicate contextlessly'[6] with each other in this constantly changing social environment (Gellner 1986, especially Ch. 3; 1987: Ch. 2). Gellner makes no extended attempt to address the question of the third world, where even today the majority is illiterate and an overwhelming majority uneducated; and where accelerated mobility across occupations is not quite the norm. Pitched at an even higher level of generality than that of Nairn, his argument offers little help in attempting to understand the specific processes through which nations may be imagined.

We thus seem to have two broad kinds of theory: one offering insights into the mechanics of the nationalist imagination but without relating this to the economy; and another emphasizing the economy but without offering many details about the specific processes through which nations are conceived. I am well aware that to say only this is to overstate and to oversimplify; but I hope that the reader will persevere into the next section, where matters may improve somewhat, given the more concrete context of my tentative efforts to demonstrate what an argument uniting both kinds of theory might look like in the case of modern India.[7]

THE IMAGINED ECONOMIES OF THE INDIAN NATION

In the Indian context, three main variants of the 'imagined economy' have contributed to the making of the nation. During the colonial period the major impetus behind the nationalist struggle—giving it an all-India character—is the notion of an enslaved economy. The goals of attaining a fully sovereign state and of liberating the economy are seamlessly interwoven with the yearning for nationhood. With independence, and especially with the advent of socialist planning, the newly liberated economy comes to be enshrined as the very essence of the emergent nation. This is the Nehruvian era of socialism, secularism and non-alignment, a period when 'the task of nation building' is quite literally taken to be the objective of state policy. During the eighties and more so the nineties, with the erosion and finally the sweeping away of all three pillars of the Nehruvian utopia, we are at a juncture when the economy is being evacuated from the collective conception of the Indian nation.

This is, of course, a rather broad and oversimple characterization. At no point was the Indian nation synonymous with an imagined national economy: the figure of Mother India, despite the ubiquitous references to her poverty, is surely much more than an economic metaphor. Nor are the stages identified above anything other than very general and partial labels for an obviously more complex and multivocal history. Despite these and other equally evident shortcomings, however, this description does serve a limited heuristic purpose. It helps us to begin tracking one strand—arguably a crucial one—among the several which make up the fullness of the imagined community that is the Indian nation.

The Economy Enslaved: Nationalism, Swadeshi and the Discourse of Poverty

Perhaps one of the most striking signs marking the advent of modernity in the non-western world is the emergence of the poverty of nations as a social scandal. Certainly the experience of poverty—its empirical presence in most parts of the globe and for large numbers—is as old as recorded history. What is new in the era of capitalist colonialism is the recognition that this is a preventable economic disorder rather than an ordained affliction. It should go without saying that this is in large part a mirror image of the discourses surrounding the wealth of western imperial nations. As invocations of 'manifest destiny' or 'white man's burden' begin to give way to (or at least coexist with) the realization that the Empire is 'a bread and butter question' (Cecil Rhodes) or that 'the East is a career' (Benjamin Disraeli), it is not long before western educated ideologues in the colonies begin to assert that the wealth of the Mother country is causally related to the poverty of the Possessions.

In the Indian case, the discourse of poverty is provided additional rhetorical leverage by the fact that available historical accounts (many of them from western sources or put into circulation by the west) had been emphasizing the *wealth* of 'India'. In these accounts, the nation and its wealth are both equally and inseparably fabulous. For pre-modern Europe, 'India' is the legend that launched major economic pilgrimages, like those of Vasco da Gama or Christopher Columbus. With modernity, the tables are turned: the wealth of the west and the poverty of India now come to be paired in a new mythology.

With some ideological work, this reversal of fortunes could be causally related to British rule. Particularly for the early Indian nationalists, many of whom served an apprenticeship in British liberal politics, this connection, once made, could clearly be seen as violating the political ethics of the British themselves. It is this moral contradiction that led people like Dadabhai Naoroji to rail against 'un-British rule' as the cause of 'the poverty of India'. The elaboration of the arguments implied by this perspective resulted in the production of the immensely powerful theory of the economic drain. Dadabhai Naoroji's ceaseless pamphleteering and R.C. Dutt's widely influential two-volume work are emblematic products of this strain of Indian nationalism.

The less obvious but equally important aspect of the discourse of poverty is the direct help it provided in assembling the technical means for imagining the Indian nation. It has often been remarked that the British created 'India' as a meaningful administrative, political and economic entity. From the nationalist point of view, however, what is even more important is the fact that British *exploitation* helped to identify as Indian not only the national economy but also the millions of producers—peasants, artisans and workers—who were otherwise a hopelessly disparate and fragmented constituency. By nurturing the collective recognition of a shared status as exploited producers, the nationalist movement extracted from the very apparatus of British imperialism, the concrete and practical means with which the nation could be imagined.[8]

Jawaharlal Nehru's writings provide some insights into this process and demonstrate that the nationalist leadership, at least by the twenties and thirties, was self-consciously aware of it. Reminiscing about his travels during the election campaign of 1936–37, Nehru writes:

> Often, as I wandered from meeting to meeting, I spoke to my audience of this India of ours, of Hindustan and of *Bharata*, the old Sanskrit name derived from the mythical founder of the race. I seldom did so in the cities,

> for there the audiences were more sophisticated and wanted stronger fare. But to the peasant, with his limited outlook, I spoke of this great country for whose freedom we were struggling, of how each part differed from the other and yet was India, of common problems of the peasants from north to south and east to west, of the *Swaraj* that could only be for all and every part and not for some. I told them of my journeys from the Khyber Pass in the far north-west to *Kanya Kumari* or Cape Comorin in the distant south, and how everywhere the peasants put me identical questions, for their troubles were the same—poverty, debt, vested interests, landlords, moneylenders, heavy rents and taxes, police harassment, and all these wrapped up in the structure that the foreign government had imposed upon us—and relief must also come for all. (Nehru 1982: 59–60)

In this passage from *The Discovery of India*, Nehru is quite explicitly aware of the political necessity of emphasizing—particularly for the benefit of 'the peasant with his limited outlook' rather than city audiences that were 'more sophisticated and wanted stronger fare'—that the same economic problems are shared by the peasantry across the length and breadth of India. This is clearly recognized as an important sense in which 'this great country' can be seen as a coherent community, where 'each part differed from the other and yet was India'. The passage quoted above is taken from a section entitled 'Bharat Mata'; immediately following this is a section on 'The Variety and Unity of India' (Nehru 1982: 61) where Nehru discusses the immense cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic and geographical diversity of India. In the face of these diversities, Nehru asserts that the Indian people are nevertheless one nation:

> It is fascinating to find how the Bengalis, the Marathas, the Gujratis, the Tamils, the Andhras, the Oriyas, the Assamese, the Canarese [*sic*], the Malayalis, the Sindhis, the Punjabis, the Pathans, the Kashmiris, the Rajputs, and the great central block comprising the Hindustani speaking people, have retained their peculiar characteristics for hundreds of years, have still more or less the same virtues and failings of which old tradition or record tells us, and yet have been throughout these ages distinctively Indian, with the same national heritage and the same set of moral and mental qualities.

Such rhetoric is immediately recognizable as typically 'nationalist', in the sense spoken of by Gopal or Anderson or Zizek. Indeed, Nehru declares a little further on that 'Some kind of a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization'![19] However, at the same time, Nehru is also aware that this is not enough. Speaking of the economic centralization and political consolidation effected by the British, he wryly remarks (in his *Autobiography*): 'Unity is a good thing, but unity in subjection is hardly a thing to be proud of.' (Nehru 1989: 435)

To produce a notion of unity that Indians could be proud of is thus the other half of the political task. This is what Nehru (and other nationalist leaders) attempt to do by invoking the shared glories of an ancient civilization, in language that is common to nationalism the world over. Thus, the long passage from *The Discovery of India* quoted above from the section 'Bharat Mata', is followed a little further on by the well-known passage (quoted and commented upon by Partha Chatterjee among others) where Nehru tells his peasant audiences that they themselves—the millions of people spread out all over the land—are Bharat Mata. However, the point to be noted here is that while the latter aspect of Indian nationalism (i.e. its invocation of an ageless, always unified, harmonious and irreducible culture that guarantees the one-ness and coherence of the concept of India) can be addressed in terms suggested by western literature, this aspect must be seen as only one part of a composite discourse. Another, clearly indispensable, part of nationalist discourse in India involves specifically economic questions. The effectivity of these questions in forging a sense of nation-ness must be understood not only in terms of actually existing economic relations, but also in the register of the imagination. To put it differently, an imagined economy is at least as powerful a technical means as print-capitalism for producing an individually assimilable sense of a collective national community.

One of the concrete ways in which the economy entered the nationalist imagination, and in fact helped shape it, was through the medium of commodities. The Swadeshi movement of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century marks the moment when the consciousness of economic exploitation on an 'all-India' level proves catalytic for the emerging nationalist movement. As Sumit Sarkar's classic work on the politically advanced province of Bengal has shown (Sarkar 1973), the Swadeshi movement invested commodities—mundane articles of everyday use—with a new ideological charge. The idea that a credible claim to national identity necessarily involved explicit and visible loyalty to the national economy, even at the cost of considerable expense or inconvenience to oneself, took hold of the middle classes.[10] These educated classes thus began to be active on both fronts of the Swadeshi movement, that of initiating indigenous *production* of hitherto imported goods, and that of boycotting the *consumption* or purchase of foreign goods. While by all accounts the economic impact of the Swadeshi movement appears to have been less than decisive and somewhat shortlived, its ideological impact may have been significant. In the discussion that follows, I will try to indicate, very tentatively and briefly, the part played in the making of the Indian nation by commodities and the synechdochic representations that they make available.[11]

The Swadeshi movement strikingly illustrates how an invisible social process that produces its effects 'behind the backs' of social actors can be transformed into a visible one. This movement's recognition of commodities as 'social hieroglyphics' that enable the conscious invocation of the nation as (also) an economic community to which loyalty is owed, thus explicitly harnesses to the nationalist cause what is usually an unexamined part of everyday life. Right up to the days of 'traditional' capitalism, certain kinds of commodities were recognized as 'coming from' certain kinds of places. In contemporary India, although this is fast diminishing, a fairly large set of associations between particular commodities and their supposed places of origin is part of our everyday knowledge: scissors from Meerut, brass from Moradabad, silks from Benares or Kanchipuram, chappals from Kolhapur, mangoes from Ratnagiri or Banginapalli, padlocks from Aligarh . . . and so on.

While late capitalism and its regime of 'flexible' accumulation have no doubt considerably weakened these traditional associations, they do seem to have played a significant part in the fashioning of a spatialized conception of the Indian nation. Commodities appear to have functioned as mnemonic devices, aids for imagining the nation in its geographical spread and specificity. Considerable work needs to be done to investigate the role played by commodities in enabling Indians to invest the idea of the nation with a concrete and specifiable geography. Here, as a preliminary illustration, are some passing remarks on the local grain *mandi* at Sargodha (in the Punjab) during the inter-war years taken from Prakash Tandon's autobiographical social history:

> The mandi was a big square with ground floor shops on all sides. Here the produce of the surrounding country, wheat, cotton, millets and oilseeds came in. The farmers brought the commodities in large carts drawn by pairs of bullocks. . . . The farmers and buyers and commission agents, among them the representatives of the large European produce firms of Ralli Brothers, Louis Drayfus, Volkart Brothers, and their Japanese counterparts, Toyo Menka Kaisha, Mitsu Bishi and others, and the professional auctioneers would move from one pile to another. . . . From the railway station next door, the produce packed in gunny bags would be sent to destinations all over the Punjab, India, and it was said, even across the seas. (Tandon 1961: 158–59)

What is noteworthy in this account is the way in which known and familiar local products, in their projected journeys away from the point of production, seem to provide the means for entering and learning to inhabit confidently what is (at least initially) an unknown and unfamiliar mental geography—'the Punjab', 'India', and even the world beyond. That representatives from European and Japanese produce firms were present in the Sargodha mandi would surely have assisted in the formation of initial notions of national boundaries. Such contacts through the world of commodities are particularly notable because, for the average Indian resident of even a medium-sized town leave alone the villages, actual encounters with the British (or other Europeans) were rare. As Tandon points out, this time about his ancestral home-town of Gujrat in northwest Punjab, Englishmen were seldom seen by Indians:

> After sixty years we in Gujrat had almost forgotten that we were ruled by the British. In the city you never saw an Englishman except some rare salesman throwing free cigarettes out of a tonga to promote the habit of smoking. You had to go out of the city gates into the Civil Station to see one of the three or four Englishmen posted in Gujrat, the Deputy Commissioner, the Superintendent of Police, sometimes the Executive Engineer, possibly the Sessions Judge, and perhaps the Padre Sahib. (Tandon 1961: 122–23)

Thus, contact through the medium of commodities appears to have been much more important for the majority of the population who did not actually meet foreigners except on ceremonial or other unusual occasions. While the image of an Englishman 'throwing free cigarettes out of a tonga' is a particularly striking one, more typical instances of encounters with the 'outside world' were probably those involving commodities in the marketplace. Of course, commodities functioned as two-way linkages: Indians encountered the larger world (both intra- as well as inter-national) through commodities not only as sellers but also as buyers. Here is Tandon again on his first experience of the attractions of foreign-made goods found in the market on the main street of Gujrat:

> The goods were usually British or German, and many of the brands had become household names. Japan had not quite entered the market. One could buy knives, scissors, buttons, cotton and silk thread, mirrors, soaps, bottled hair oils, razors, socks, woollen and cotton knitwear, etc. These imported things always held more glamour for us than the local ones. We preferred the imported combs to the hand-made wooden ones, the electroplated Sheffield and Solingen knives and scissors to the solid steel ones made by our local smiths, Pears and Vinolia soap to the home-boiled desi soap, and the shining coloured buttons to the simple cloth ones. (Tandon 1961: 110–11)

The glamour of 'imported' things, not quite a thing of the past even in contemporary India, took on an added dimension when the product in question visibly incorporated the legendary technology of the west. Tandon recalls the first encounter with one such commodity, also famous for having won the admiration of as staunch an opponent of modern technology as Mahatma Gandhi:

> Perhaps in celebration of father's recovery [from a near fatal attack of influenza during an epidemic], or because the time was ripe for it otherwise, the first mechanical contraption arrived in our house. It was the Singer sewing machine, shining black and chromium-plated, with a highly polished case in wood. Few homes as yet possessed one. With it came a colourful calendar showing Singer's popularity in different countries of the world. This was my first introduction to people of other races, if only in pictures. (Tandon 1961: 162)[12]

It was the glamour of the imported commodity and the mystique of western technology that the Swadeshi movement had to confront in its attempt to bring a nationalist consciousness into the marketplace. Of course, the two commodities with which the movement had its greatest political successes, namely salt and cloth, were neither particularly glamorous nor associated with a technology that seemed decisively beyond reach. They were no doubt chosen for political reasons—because they touched the life of every Indian, and because their production was very well distributed across the length and breadth of the country, especially in the case of indigenous textiles. But the ideological paradigm out of which Swadeshi emerged included as its core element the imperative to catch up with western technology and science so that this superior material culture could be assimilated and married to the already superior spiritual side of Indian culture, thereby laying the foundation for the re-emergence of India as a great nation on the world stage.

Partha Chatterjee's pioneering study associates this basic ideological paradigm with the work of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, and terms it the 'moment of departure' of Indian nationalist discourse. Writing in 1888, Bankim proposes the concept of *Anusilan*, or practice, which he understood to be: 'a "system of culture," more complete and more perfect that the western concept of culture as propounded by Comte or, more recently by Matthew Arnold. The western concept was fundamentally agnostic, and hence incomplete.' (Chatterjee 1986: 66) *Anusilan* was therefore to be fashioned by borrowing from the west those knowledges (of the world and of the self) in which they were superior, and joining these to the kind of knowledge (that of God) in which the east was undoubtedly superior.[13] *Anusilan* was based on the concept of *bhakti*, which implied the unity of knowledge and duty; duty in turn invoked the concept of *dharma*, or a non-possessive, non-utilitarian devotion to one's moral responsibilities, also the core of Hindu religion. This was the philosophical basis for Bankim's declaration:

> The day European industries and sciences are united with Indian *dharma*, man will be God. . . .
>
> Soon you will see that with the spread of the doctrine of pure *bhakti*, the Hindus will gain a new life and become powerful like the English under Cromwell or the Arabs under Muhammed. (Quoted in Chatterjee 1986: 66)[14]

The ideology of Swadeshi was clearly influenced by the philosophical underpinnings of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's notion of *Anusilan* and his general prescription for national revival. This can be seen in the movement's own more or less stable self-understanding as primarily a nationalist movement, rather than one motivated by other relevant considerations. Thus, as Sumit Sarkar has shown, the ideology of Swadeshi managed to retain its distinct identity as 'a term of narrower scope than indigenous enterprise, much of which could, and often did, follow the more profitable frankly compradore lines'. (Sarkar 1973: 92) Moreover, neither the growing awareness of the problems that large-scale industrialization had created for the west, nor arguments about the social inequities and exploitation sponsored by this system could supplant the essentially patriotic flavour of the movement, although both types of reasons were undoubtedly influential. As Sarkar sums up: 'Rejection of the west out of nationalist motives, rather than a genuine awareness of the evils of emergent industrial society or any passionate concern for that matter about the sufferings of the downtrodden in general—such seems to have been a dominant feature of swadeshi economic thought. (Sarkar 1973: 108)

The point to note about the Swadeshi movement is the way in which commodities acquired the potential of becoming crucial mnemonic devices, serving to invoke in a convenient shorthand an entire nationalist philosophy. The movement touched such products as brass utensils, nibs for pens,[15] cutlery, china,[16] soap, perfumes, shoes, boots and leather products, matches, buttons, cigarettes, ink, paper, candles, sugar and edible oils, not counting the staple of textiles both silk and cotton (Sarkar 1973: 108–36). This, too, is to concentrate on the identifiable products and to ignore significant (though often shortlived) efforts in banking, insurance, shipping and technical education. Thus, though Sarkar tells us that 'A sense of anti-

climax is difficult to avoid in any survey of swadeshi business achievements' (1973: 134), in the context of the argument of this paper, it should be clear that commodities played a central role in this movement, which in turn was crucial in the development of a nationalist consciousness.

The Swadeshi movement, by anticipating much of Gandhian economics (see Sarkar 1973: 101ff.), made it possible to think of the nation as also *a locus of production*, and to look at commodity relations as also implying certain mutual social and moral responsibilities. Indeed, it was precisely the imperial regime's refusal of these responsibilities—the classic, even cliched case is that of the ruin of Indian handlooms by the textile industry of Lancashire—that had precipitated the self-consciousness of subject status. In the nationalist imagination, swaraj, no matter how or when it came, necessarily had to be different from the imperial regime. Hence the appeal of the Gandhian model, with its emphasis on social relations and mutual responsibility in defiance of the impersonal laws of the market. Hence also the ideological paradigm of Nehruvian socialism which enshrines the economy as the embodiment of the nation, and instals the figure of the producer-patriot as its chief deity.

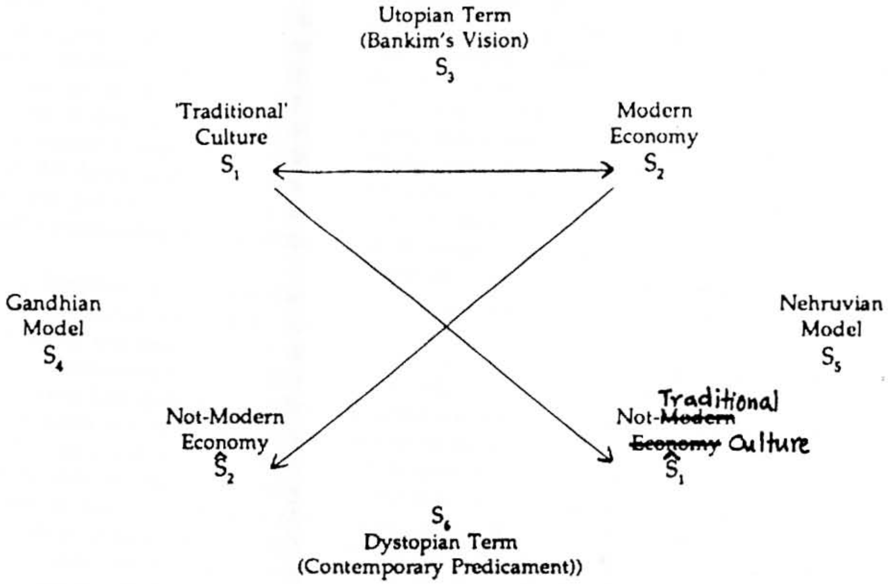
The Economy Enshrined: Nehruvian Socialism and Development Planning

Much has already been said about the relative merits and the points of comparison and contrast between the Gandhian and the Nehruvian models of national development. What is relevant from the perspective of this paper is to consider these models as prescriptions for the imagination, as alternative ways of visualizing the future of the nation. Both models emerge from the same discursive context, that of the early years of the nationalist movement, before, that is, it could rightly be termed a movement.

Partha Chatterjee has identified this initial context with the work of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and called it the 'moment of departure' of Indian nationalist discourse. The basic features of this moment have already been described above, and here I will only reiterate that the fundamental axis for Bankim is that formed by the twin poles of Indian spiritual traditions, philosophy and religion—in short, *culture;* and western material, military, technological and industrial prowess—in short, *economy*. The creative tension between traditional (Indian) culture and a modern (western) economy thus provides the impetus for Bankim's programme for national resurgence and shapes the early nationalist paradigm out of which the Gandhian and Nehruvian models emerged. The process of this emergence may be usefully summarized with the help of a semiotic square.[17]

FIGURE 2

Economy and Culture in Alternative Constructions of the Nation 1890–1990



The square sketched in Figure 2 maps the ideological framework within which the idea of the Indian nation has been (and to a significant extent continues to be) shaped. The moment of departure for Indian nationalism is the utopian impulse towards combining a 'great-and-ancient' Indian culture with a strong 'western-type' economy. Shaped by the creative tension between 'traditional' culture and modern economy, the two terms which occupy the S_1 and S_2 positions on the square, this impulse is expressed in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's longing for 'the day [when] European industries and sciences are united with Indian *dharma*'.[18]

The two original terms yield their contradictories, somewhat awkwardly termed 'not-"traditional" culture' and 'not-modern economy', in the $\hat{S}_1$ and $\hat{S}_2$ positions of the square. As the antithesis of 'traditional' culture, the term 'non-"traditional"' culture can be seen as pointing to all that the former term is not: hybrid, inauthentic, without the sanction of an ancient past, corrupted by western influence, atheistic and secular rather than theistic and religious, and so on. Similarly, a 'not-modern economy' can be understood as one that, in contrast to a modern economy, is poor and underdeveloped, agrarian rather than industrial, technologically backward and small-scale, not fully saturated by market relations, and so on.

However, it is important to note that the contradictory terms may also be seen in a more positive light. Thus, a not-'traditional' culture may also be described as modern and forward-looking, liberal, tolerant, more attuned to contemporary realities, free from the overly constraining influence of religious orthodoxy and conservative traditions, willing and able to learn from other cultures, and so on. In the same vein, a not-modern economy may be thought of as presenting a favourable contrast to the modern: able to maintain a more just and equitable distribution of national wealth, more responsive to the social and cultural needs of the population, with a more humane and people-oriented technology, and so on. While both the positive and negative interpretations of these terms have a certain *a priori* plausibility, they may be invoked only through conscious ideological efforts. But even when such efforts are made, the ideological project of invoking one aspect and suppressing the other can never be fully successful: the subversive effects of the suppressed aspect continue to be felt.

The Nehruvian and Gandhian models of nationhood and national development are the hybrids formed by the combination of the two terms on the right and left sides of the square. Being hybrids, both models share the same general relationship to the fundamental ideological axis of Indian nationalism. This is a relationship marked by, on the one hand, the ability to develop and maximize the ideological effect of one of the poles of the basic axis, and, on the other hand, an unavoidable vulnerability with respect to the other pole of the axis. Thus, the Nehruvian model is able to optimise the ideological impact of the idea of a modern industrialized economy by developing it into a powerful vision of the future of the Indian nation. However, despite its best efforts, this vision is not able to allay doubts regarding the cultural content of the kind of national identity it offers. In an analogous manner, the Gandhian alternative succeeds brilliantly in giving voice to the idea of the Indian nation in an idiom that strikes deep cultural chords: Gandhi is credited with almost singlehandedly 'inviting the masses into history' (to paraphrase Nairn). But the economic programme espoused by this model proves to be too radical for the times, and is unable to shake off the label of an irrational and anachronistic attitude to modern technology and the charge of wanting to distribute poverty rather than aiming for mass prosperity.

It is important to remember that the Nehruvian model did not have to invent wholesale the ideological construct of an industrialized nation; rather, the model built upon and gave a distinctive shape to an already existing consensus that informed the early nationalist movement.[19] This widespread sentiment about the need for developing modern industries in India was a strong and deeply felt one; it was not dissuaded by the awareness of the evils of western industrialism, or by sympathy for the village crafts of the country. Indeed, Justice Ranade, one of the most outspoken and influential advocates of industrialization, went so far as to declare that only modern industry could unite the diverse peoples of India into a cohesive nation:

> The agitation for political rights may bind the various nationalities of India together for a time. The community of interests may cease when these rights

> are achieved. But the commercial union of the various nationalities, once established, will never cease to exist. Commercial and industrial activity is, therefore, a bond of very strong union and is, therefore, a mighty factor in the formation of a great Indian nation. (Quoted in Chandra 1966: 69)

Gandhi's attempt to infuse the idea of a non-modern economy with positive and morally charged content represents the 'new' term in the lower left corner of the semiotic square. This is the term that is unexpected, that seems to have the potential to break out of the ideological confines mapped by the square. Thus, the notion of a just and humane economy, where commodity relations are minimized if not eliminated altogether, directly confronts Bankim's desire for a strong and powerful economy along western lines. However, it should be emphasized that Gandhi's objection to modern industry and technology is based on a very radical and deeply principled stand. In the final analysis, Gandhi objects to industry and modern technology because they are based on exchange relations, which to him is the root of most social evils, beginning with economic exploitation. Ideally, he would like to abolish exchange value altogether, and live by the principles of use value—i.e. fulfilling one's personal needs through one's own labour (Chatterjee 1986: 85–93). Here Gandhi, though he offers a different solution, is quite close to the spirit of Marx in opposing the reification and exploitation that generalized commodity production brings with it.

How, then, did the Nehruvian model of the economy 'win' this ideological contest for shaping the idea of the Indian nation, even if it was a one-sided contest? The answer must be sought in factors like development economics and socialist planning.

Between them, socialist planning and its liberal-western analogue, development economics, offered a remarkable array of resources for representing the basic economic issues facing the countries of Asia and Africa which gained independence in the mid-twentieth century. Interestingly, both paradigms were particularly amenable to translation into a specifically *nationalist* idiom; moreover, and this probably accounts for the predominantly economic rhetoric of third world nationalism in mid-century, they were both unambiguous in identifying the *economy* as the single most important (and often the only) arena for social action. These discursive formations were especially helpful for the populist side (since they promised the end of exploitation and poverty, an egalitarian society, etc.), and the modernist side (because of their invocation of modern science and technology, including the apparatus of scientific economic planning) of nationalist rhetoric. Needless to say both played up to the 'catching-up-with-the-west' syndrome afflicting all non-western and especially third world nations.

The circumstances under which the Nehruvian model was installed in India beginning with the Second Five Year Plan following the adoption of the famous 'socialistic pattern of society' resolution at the Avadi session of the All India Congress Committee in 1955 are well known. What is important for the purposes of this essay are the specific modes in which this model made it possible—indeed, even necessary—to imagine the nation.

If commodities can be used, sometimes unconsciously, as mnemonic aids in imagining the nation, the apparatus of economic planning is explicitly predicated upon a mental construct of the national economy. This construction of the economy very soon becomes synonymous with the nation itself. This enshrining of the economy as the synechdochic representation of the nation was perhaps one of Nehru's distinctive personal contributions to the nationalist cause. The Indian variant of development planning initiated by the Feldman-Mahalanobis model for the Second Plan was particularly suitable for such discursive purposes because of its emphasis on 'physical planning'. This made it very easy to anthropomorphize the economy and to treat it as a sort of person writ large, in much the same way as Hindu gods and goddesses are thought of: as super-human personalities, nevertheless endowed with distinctly human-like traits and peculiarities of character.

The explicit mapping of national resources and coordination of projected targets that a plan requires is clearly much more 'efficient' than occasional encounters with commodities in evoking the extra-sensory entity that the nation represents. Moreover, harking back to Anderson, the centrality of the temporal element in all development planning also provides a direct and powerful means of evoking a 'homogenous time', a time which is not 'empty' but is punctuated by a coherent national narrative. A 'five-year plan' is thus a newspaper multiplied many times over in terms of its impact on the individual's ability to imagine a collective project that is the nation. In short, planning may perhaps be thought of as helping to produce a scientific-technical analogue to the figure of 'Bharat Mata'.

How is such a figure to be imagined—in what form will 'she' become visible to us? Once again Nehru seems to provide the answer: the nation becomes visible to us in all the various tasks of nation building that are being undertaken by the Indian people and state during this phase. For obvious reasons, giant steel plants or gigantic dams and power stations are the most privileged sites where the nation emerges onto our consciousness. Here is Nehru on the Bhakra-Nangal dam:

> Our engineers tell us that probably nowhere else in the world is there a dam as high as this. The work bristles with difficulties and complications. As I walked around the site I thought that these days the biggest temple and mosque and gurdwara is the place where man works for the good of mankind. Which place can be greater than this, this Bhakra Nangal, where thousands and lakhs of men have worked, have shed their blood and sweat and laid down their lives as well? Where can be a greater and holier place than this, which we can regard as higher?. . .
>
> I look far, not only towards Bhakra Nangal, but towards this our country, India, whose children we are. Where is she going? Where have we to lead her, which way have we to walk and what mighty tasks have we to undertake? Some of these will be completed in our lifetime. Others will be taken

up and completed by those who come after us. The work of a nation or a country is never completed. It goes on and no one can arrest its progress—the progress of a living nation. (Nehru 1980: 214)

There are two things which are striking about the above passage. One is the conspicuous interweaving of religion and the economy—the dam is explicitly claimed to be a holy place, and the task of nation building a religious responsibility. This move captures a characteristic feature of the Nehruvian model, namely its attempt to bring together the commitment to building a modern and industrialized nation with the impulse towards modernizing—dare one say secularizing?—the national culture. The invocation of religious feeling at such a 'non-traditional' site as a hydroelectric project serves to shift the terrain on which this feeling has hitherto been situated, while simultaneously signalling that national construction projects are to be invested with the faith, piety and fervour previously reserved for religious works.

The second noteworthy feature is the strong link that is constantly being established between patriotism and work. The theme of work is continually emphasized (especially its difficulties, its scale, its limitlessness. . .) even as the object of this work is asserted to be the nation itself. The nation is not only the locus for all this work, but it is also the end towards which this work is moving: patriotism is quite literally the act of building a nation. This is another typical feature of the Nehruvian model, the nexus between patriotism and production. In fact, it may be argued that the protagonist of this model of national development is the producer-patriot. However, this particular aspect of the Nehruvian model can perhaps be better appreciated when contrasted with features of the contemporary situation, which forms the subject of the next section.

The Economy Evacuated: Globalization and Contemporary Crises

While the subsequent argument doubtless needs to be developed and substantiated, I will risk providing a preliminary sketch here. I would like to suggest that the contemporary predicament of the nation is being seen today as something like the dystopian term (S_6 in the semiotic square shown in Figure 2) in which 'all of the privations and negations are assembled' (Jameson 1987: xiv). With the disappearance of the national confidence and hope born out of the freedom struggle, the nation appears to have ended up with the worst of both worlds: neither have we managed to build a strong and prosperous economy, nor have we succeeded in nurturing our cultural identity. Thus our economy continues to be underdeveloped and poverty-stricken, the grand scheme of attaining a socialistic pattern of society through planned industrialisation having failed. Meanwhile, western influence and the debilitating effects of state-sponsored secularism (it is claimed) have undermined the cultural identity of the nation.

These are the two poles of the present crisis that the major political forces in the country today—the Congress and the BJP-VHP-RSS combine—are attempting to tackle. Although neither side disagrees fundamentally with what the other is doing, the terrain and the specific strategies chosen by the Congress are in the realm of the economy, while the BJP group is concentrating on (Hindu) cultural identity.

In a rather uncanny manner, both strategies seem to be inverting the solutions offered by the Gandhian and Nehruvian models. The Congress government's programme for globalization (which in effect evacuates the economy as a resource for imagining the nation) is aimed at standing the Nehruvian strategy on its head: liberalisation of controls and integration with the world market in place of protection and import substitution; reliance on the private sector and consumer goods industries rather than the public sector and producer goods industries; inviting foreign capital rather than keeping it out; financial and forex-based planning rather than physical or needs-based planning—the list could be extended. Similarly, the Sangh Parivar is intent on turning Gandhi inside out, with their exclusionist rather than inclusive and catholic approach to religion, tacit support for caste hierarchies in place of outspoken opposition, and aggressive and violent methods instead of peaceful and non-violent ones.

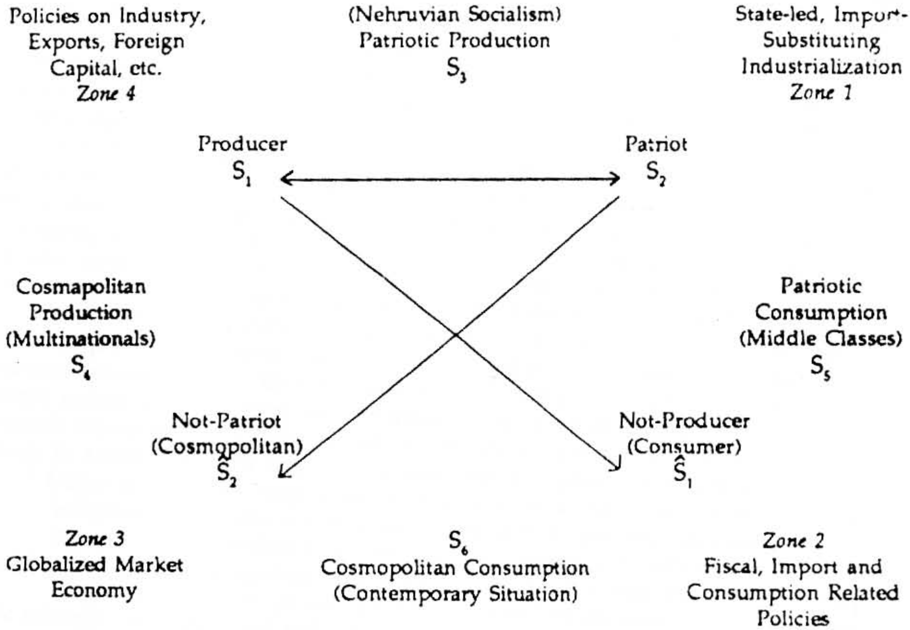
In order to explain clearly the transformations that have accompanied the transition from Nehruvian socialism to the contemporary situation, it is necessary to take the help of the semiotic square presented in Figure 3. This square is different from the previous one in several respects: firstly, it is concerned with the post-independence period while the previous square began with Bankim's formulations around the 1890s; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, this square considers only one half of the story that Figure 2 attempts to tell, namely that dealing with the economic aspects of the nationalist imagination (the cultural aspects are excluded); finally, this square features the *central figures* that have preoccupied the national imagination since independence as well as the major aspects of *state policy*. Thus the semiotic square in Figure 3 may be seen as a sort of enlargement of the upper right-hand region of the square in Figure 2, or as a more detailed consideration of the ideological framework of Nehruvian socialism.

Figure 3 uses the binary opposition between the figure of the producer and that of the patriot to begin its demarcation of the ideological space. These two terms are contraries in the sense that the specific logic of either the patriot or the worker role does not necessitate any interaction with the other. In fact, the figure of the worker in the socialist imagination is seen as transcending the confines of the nation-state: it is a category that is more general, pitched at the level of epochs or modes of production. Similarly, the quintessential figure of the patriot is that of the soldier, one who is ready to die for his country—hardly compatible with the image of productive worker. Both figures are being seriously contested today, in ways that will become clearer further into the argument.

Nehruvian socialism tries to unite these two figures on a transcendent ideological plane, attempting meanwhile to infuse each of them with something of the temper of the other. Thus, as was seen in his remarks made at Bhakra Nangal, Nehru exhorts and extols workers in the language usually reserved for soldiers and their dedication to the motherland, while patriotic Indians are urged to become productive workers and dedicate themselves to the sacred task of nation building.

FIGURE 3

Post-Independence Protagonists of the National Imagination: Economic Ideologies in India from the Fifties to the Nineties



Nehruvian socialism, the utopian term in this square, thus inhabits the sphere of patriotic production and has the figure of the producer-patriot as its protagonist.

The original contraries yield their respective contradictories in the terms 'not-producer' or consumer, and 'not-patriot' or cosmopolitan. While the figure of the consumer initially (during the days of Gandhian *antyodaya* and concern for poverty alleviation) included the poor, it has increasingly come to refer to the middle class consumer. The consumer may of course also be a producer, but the role in which he appears to be most significant in this ideological paradigm is that of the consumer. The right hand side of the square thus produces the composite term of patriotic consumption, and this is represented (more or less) by the Indian middle class. The bottom term is again the dystopian term (though this understanding of it is being challenged today), and represents the present situation where cosmopolitan consumption (rather than the patriotic production of Nehruvian socialism) appears to be the preferred terrain for the national imagination associated with a globalized capitalist economy.

The figure of the cosmopolitan is the unexpected or the 'new' term, one that is relatively unprecedented in Indian ideological history. Its clearest representative is perhaps the ubiquitous figure of the Non Resident Indian, the closest approximation to a modern mythological hero that the Indian middle classes possess. The cosmopolitan is a more inclusive term, however, and refers to all those Indians (whether resident or not) who can and do consider themselves to be citizens of the world. For obvious reasons, this tribe is restricted to the 'creamy layers' of the urban middle and upper middle classes, and is thoroughly 'modernized' (perhaps 'globalized' would be more accurate) in its outlook. For this group, economic calculations are not confined to the Indian economy, whether these involve decisions on the income/production or the expenditure/consumption side. This group, which consists of the Indian middle class elite, may be said to have joined the global middle class.[20]

The composite term on the left side of the square, that of cosmopolitan production, can be thought of as representing both Indian and foreign multinational capital. These are producers for whom the relevant sphere of decision-making is the world market, and whose presence and behaviour in India is a complex outcome of global considerations and the policies of the Indian state.

The outermost levels of the square, comprising the second order composite terms formed by the union of pairs of terms from the first level, are used to locate elements of state policy. Thus, the Nehruvian strategy of import-substituting industrialization, for so long the staple of state policy in independent India, occupies Zone 1 or the top righthand region between patriotic production and patriotic consumption. This regime of state policy requires a supporting set of policies in order to maintain itself, those represented in the adjoining Zones 2 and 4. Zone 4, shaped by the tension between patriotic and cosmopolitan production (or the state sector and the foreign capital plus private indigenous capital sector), includes those aspects of policy which impinge on industry, exports, and the control and supervision of foreign capital in general. Similarly, Zone 2, given its position between cosmopolitan and patriotic consumption, is the locus of those state policies concerned with the consumption side of the economy, such as (consumer) imports, direct and indirect taxes (fiscal policy) and other measures designed to affect the consumption patterns of the middle and upper middle classes.

Zone 3 constitutes the antithesis of Zone 1: a globalized market economy regime as against a centralized state-led mixed economy. It is my argument that the history of post-independent India has witnessed a gradual shift, which has gathered sudden momentum during the last two or three years, from the top of the square towards the bottom, and from the north-east corner to the south-west corner. The contrasts are obvious: today the darling of the national imagination is no longer the patriotic producer but the cosmopolitan consumer who has made the world his oyster; import-substituting industrialization has been decisively abandoned for a liberalized open economy with a fully convertible currency; the leadership of the public sector has given way to private and especially foreign capital, the apparatus of planning to the logic of market forces.

My main argument in this concluding section is that these changes are leading to a situation where, for the first time in the history of modern India, the economy can no longer be a centrally important resource for imagining the nation. Why this is likely to be so can be seen in two main ways, the first having to do with the contestations that are currently being engaged in regarding the proper identities of the producer and the patriot, and the second with the more general consequences of globalization in the contemporary context of the capitalist world system.

The political brinksmanship that the Sangh Parivar has been engaging in during the past couple of years has repeatedly raised questions regarding the 'proper' definition of a patriot. In the Nehruvian model, this term was available to anyone able and willing to participate in the task of nation building; the only possible grounds for exclusion were the shirking of one's national duty. Today, the criterion is sought to be shifted to religion: one's patriotism, it is being suggested, is more a matter of blood than of actions, of certain special marks of ascription rather than involvement in and commitment to the life of the nation. In trying to render the phrase 'Hindu patriot' into a pleonasm, and as a corollary, to render the phrase 'Muslim patriot' into an oxymoron, the Sangh Parivar is introducing basic and potentially unbridgeable chasms into the sense of belonging that every Indian was invited to feel towards the imagined community. However, it may be argued, perhaps with a degree of strained plausibility, that this reaction on the part of certain political groups is just that—a response to an ongoing process rather than an initiative. It may be that the national identity, especially that of the producer, had already been weakened or rendered less attractive, so that the attempt to communalise this question is only an attempt to fill the vacuum. If this is even partly true, then it makes much more serious the problems already being faced by the identity of the producer.

Though they are much less visible or obvious, the Congress government's dramatic reversals of long-standing state policy have also created similar doubts about who is to be valued as a producer. In the current dispensation, only those who produce for the global market and bring in foreign exchange—exporters—are seen as being valuable producers. Here what becomes the all-important point of reference is the contribution that a producer makes towards the satisfaction of needs that are not located within the community but belong rather to an ill-defined category such as the global consumer. Thus, the more local (and visible) effects of indigenous production are devalued, while a much more mediated effect (which is vulnerable to the corrosive effects of alienation) is emphasized. The simple point being made here is that once contributing to the global economy becomes the relevant criterion, it is probable that the *national* origin of this contribution will soon become a matter of indifference. In other words, the solidarity-enhancing effect of the identity of a producer may be diverted away from the nation as such producers attempt to join—in reality as well as in their imaginations—the global middle class.

A closely related point concerns the overall impact of the globalization policies being followed so enthusiastically by the Congress government. In the capitalist world system today, single nation-states are no longer the relevant units for the organization of production. The regime of flexible accumulation encourages a sort of international assembly line, with many (if not most) products crossing and recrossing several national borders during the course of manufacture or assembly before finally reaching the consumer. In this kind of a 'musical chairs' economy, only the very big players can hope to be safe, and more important, to remain immune from the debilitating effects of the loss of national identity.

The dispersal of production and the volatility of the international market promotes anonymous and therefore mutually irresponsible social relations between producers and consumers. In the old regime, the nation-state, even if it was thoroughly integrated into the world market, was nevertheless a meaningful entity at least in the sense that it defined a locus of political and social responsibility. Regardless of whether various groups of producers or consumers were actually able to get the state to redress the real or imagined wrongs done to them, this possibility was always present. Today, the state can (and usually does) abdicate this responsibility under the pretext of a reified set of social relations: it is the market which appears to decide, and things seem to rule over humans. A globalized economy will, over time, cease to function as a mechanism for imagining the nation because the nation will no longer be a meaningful unit in the globalized regime of production.

As a small illustration of the above arguments, let me take the ITC Chairman's speech at the annual general meeting of this highly successful agro-business conglomerate.[21] In a section entitled 'Globalization and what it means', the Chairman informs us, *inter alia*, that:

> Globalization puts an emphasis on consumer concern, delivering to the consumer the very best quality, in the most cost-efficient manner possible. . . .
>
> Globalization, therefore, means a borderless world, where there is a free exchange of money, ideas and expertise, fostering partnerships and alliances to serve the consumer best. . . .

No more striking proof of the new 'consumer sovereignty' could be had. Moreover, the 'consumer' continually referred to is clearly a 'global' or cosmopolitan consumer and is not encumbered by any nationality. If this is the sovereign that nations are to serve, then problems of identity are bound to arise. Unlike the need-based approach of 'physical' planning (where the questions asked have to do with the nation's own needs and requirements of goods and services) that guides production along lines that are also helpful in forming and supporting a collective identity, the world market approach is much more vulnerable to risks. For one thing, this promotes a 'musical chairs' world economy where each country grabs whatever economic opportunity is available whenever it becomes available. After each 'stop' or 'go' issued by the global market, a nation might find itself forced to scramble from, say, denim to tobacco, or iron ore to software. Such volatility is bound to be bad for the older, more stable forms of national identity. Only the economically powerful nations can manage this system, since they *are* managing and manipulating it anyway. Thus, quite apart from the purely economic wisdom of going global, there are questions of identity that must also be faced.

Of course, this is in some respects a misleading contrast: dire consequences need not necessarily follow globalization, just as big dams may not be the ideal expressions of nationalist sentiment. Indeed, this very sentiment itself may often be an unhealthy thing. However, the point is that the relatively stable ideological arrangements of the past which helped fashion a coherent national identity and made it accessible to people, are giving way to new and unknown systems. New sources of identity may be found to replace those now defunct—indeed some would argue that the Hindutva phenomenon represents just such an alternative.

But the limited argument of this paper has been that the economy, which has always played a crucial role in modern India as one of the major sources for the fashioning of a recognizable national identity, is no longer going to be able to fulfil this role. The impending consequences of this profound transformation can, as yet, only be the subject of speculation.

NOTES

1. Thus, for example, Tom Nairn adopts an explicitly (and sometimes excessively) third worldist perspective; Benedict Anderson's illustrative material is drawn mainly from South-East Asia and South and Central America; Immanuel Wallerstein's argument is embedded in the world systems approach; and even Slavoj Zizek's suggestive psychoanalytic reading of the resurgence of nationalism is located, eccentrically enough, in post-socialist EasternEurope (Nairn 1981; Anderson 1983; Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Zizek 1992). .Alone among the recent authors, Ernest Gellner appears to refuse any explicit location, choosing to continue writing in a universalist (western) mode (Gellner 1983).
2. 'In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined.' (Anderson 1983: 15).
3. One of the 'lonely bilinguals' Anderson quotes is Bipin Chandra Pal (1983: 88). Significant portions of Dadabhai Naoroji's memorializing and pamphleteering were concerned with the 'Non-Fulfilment of Solemn Promises' made by the British Crown regarding the employment of natives in government service. See, for example, the section with that title in *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India* (Naoroji [1901] 1962: 85–116).
4. Census of India figures, quoted in Dasgupta (1987). The point here is not that the small numbers of literate persons makes Anderson's argument invalid, but that the *effectivity* of print-capitalism as the progenitor of nationalist sentiment depends on its ability to, and the manner in which, it negotiates these ground realities. Since nationalism is above all a *mass* phenomenon, much of the theoretical importance attached to the print medium must, in such a situation, be transferred to the social mechanisms through which nationalist feeling is *disseminated* from the literate elite to the illiterate masses.
5. Earlier in his essay, Zizek provides a gloss on this term that is not particularly illuminating for those unfamiliar with the niceties of Lacanian psycho-theory: 'Note here that enjoyment (*jouissance*) is not to be equated with pleasure: enjoyment is precisely "pleasure in unpleasure"; it designates the paradoxical satisfaction procured by a painful encounter with a Thing that perturbs the equilibrium of the 'pleasure principle'. In other words, enjoyment is located 'beyond the pleasure principle"' (1992: 206, n.2).
6. This is because members of industrial society 'must constantly communicate with a large num-

ber of other men, with whom they freqently have no previous association, and with whom communication must consequently be explicit, rather than relying on context' (Gellner 1986: 35).

7. An additional word of apology is due to the reader for the rather abrupt transition from this into the next section. Constraints of time and space forced me to leave out an intermediate section entitled 'Capitalism and Community: The Nation as a Locus of Production', which may have helped to locate more precisely the nature of the schism between the two kinds of theory described here, and the reasons why a unified theory is so difficult to fashion.
8. 'Apart from the development of a common economy, etc., [. . .] it was the existence of a common oppression by a common enemy and *the struggle against it* which provided important bonds uniting the Indian people. Perhaps no nation could have been formed without such a struggle, though the struggle itself was inherent in the nature of colonial domination. Looked at from this point of view, the nation was not a datum prior to the nationalist movement.' (Chandra 1986: 210)
9. For examples of similar assertions by other nationalists that India had 'always' been a nation, see Chandra 1986: 214–16.
10. 'In its specifically economic aspect, swadeshi may be defined as the sentiment—closely associated with many phases of Indian nationalism—that indigenous goods should be preferred by consumers even if they were more expensive than and inferior in quality to their imported substitutes, and that it was the patriotic duty of men with capital to pioneer such industries even though profits might initially be minimal or nonexistent.' (Sarkar 1973: 92)
11. In this rather sketchy exploration of the avenues to be pursued in further research on the question of the synechdochic properties of the commodity, I am basically using two texts as illustrations: Prakash Tandon's semi-autobiographical account, *Punjabi Century, 1857–1947* (1961), chronicling social life in Punjab leading up to independence; and Sumit Sarkar's study, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903–1908* (1973).
12. Tandon adds an amusing sequel: 'Father now regaining strength and interest in life, at once converted to advantage the slogan on this calendar, "Singer preferred in every country." He exhorted us to learn singing in addition to studies. Even if we had no special talent for it, we must work hard because singing was a great accomplishment. He was convinced in his humourless way that the Singer people were using to good advantage the international love of singing.' (Tandon 1961: 162).
13. 'There were three kinds of knowledge: knowledge of the world, of self and of God. Knowledge of the world consisted of mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry, and these would have to be learnt from the west. Knowledge of the self meant biology and sociology, and these too one would have to learn from the west. Finally, knowledge of God, and in this field the Hindu *sastras* contained the greatest human achievements—the *Upanisads*, the *darsanas*, the *Purana*, the *itihasa*, but principally the *Gita*.' (Chatterjee 1986: 66)
14. It is interesting to compare Bankim on this question with Matthew Arnold, whose work Bankim was well acquainted with. As discussed in the previous section of this paper, Arnold's main task is to establish the supremacy of culture as the touchstone of national greatness—in opposition to the commonly held views of his time emphasizing industrial power, military might or economic prosperity. See his railings (in *Culture and Anarchy*) against those who would regard coal, railways or machinery as the basis of England's greatness, rather than the forces of 'sweetness and light' (Arnold 1932: 49–51). However, both Arnold and Bankim are also very close to each other in according primacy to the non-material aspects of culture, though the latter may be more explicitly and strongly oriented towards a religion-based notion of culture. (But compare Arnold on religion—1932: 47ff.)
15. Sarkar reports: 'Use of swadeshi nibs became a point of honour, and not unoften a real test of patriotism, too, due to their atrocious quality.' (1973: 123)
16. The Calcutta Pottery Works 'was advertising "swadeshi teacups, saucers, teapots, a real novelty"—as well as inkpots, insulators and dolls and even entering the foreign market.' (Sarkar 1973: 125)
17. The semiotic square is a heuristic device associated with the French semiotician and structuralist linguist, A.J. Greimas. In its original form (for example, Greimas 1987: Ch. 3) it is a precise

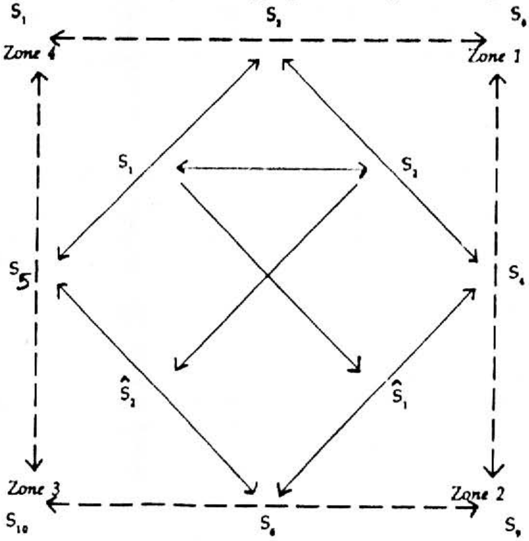
and rather technical device; but it has been used in a much looser and modified form by literary and cultural critics—the best known being Jameson (1981) and Clifford (1987)—to outline the conceptual possibilities of a given semiotic or ideological phenomenon. It is in this latter sense—as a 'visual device to map out and to articulate a set of relationships that it is much more confusing, and much less economical, to convey in expository prose' (Jameson 1987: xv)—that I am using it here. I have found Clifford's fine essay (1988) particularly helpful, especially in giving me the confidence to make use of the Greimas square without worrying too much about remaining faithful to the letter of its original version.

The point of departure for the semiotic square is a binary opposition between two terms, S_1 and S_2 (please see Figure 1). These terms are contraries, that is, they are strongly opposed to each other without being logically contradictory, for example white and black, or male and female. Contraries are defined logically as opposing terms that can however *both be false simultaneously*, that is, there obviously exist objects that are neither male nor female, neither black nor white; it is also possible to conceive of a union of the two terms in some transcendent synthesis. This initial binary opposition yields two further terms $\hat{S}_1$ and $\hat{S}_2$, which are the *contradictory* terms corresponding to the first two terms. The contradictory terms imply strict mutual exclusivity—$\hat{S}_1$ and $\hat{S}_2$ are defined as 'not S_1' and 'not S_2' respectively (i.e. 'not-white' and 'not-black' or 'not-male' and 'not-female') and it is logically impossible for an object or a phenomenon to belong to both S_1 and $\hat{S}_1$ simultaneously. The contradictory terms are located diagonally across and below the initial terms and complete the basic square.

Further terms may be identified by considering the conceptual possibilities of uniting (or holding in creative tension) the two terms on each side of the square. Thus, S_3 is the 'utopian term' envisaging the possibility of a transcendent union of *both* the contrary terms S_1 and S_2. On the two vertical sides of the square are the terms S_4 and S_5, which represent the possibilities of uniting S_1 and $\hat{S}_2$ or S_2 and $\hat{S}_1$ respectively. S_6 is the inverse of the utopian term S_3 since it is formed by the union of the contradictories: it represents the *absence* of both the original contrary terms. In exactly the same way, four more hybrid terms S_7–S_{10} may be identified, formed by the possibility of linking the first four composite terms, S_3–S_6.

FIGURE 1

The Semiotic Square: Mapping an Ideological Paradign



In this way, the semiotic square allows us to identify many new conceptual possibilities from the initial binary opposition. Of course, logically the number of terms can be infinite, but the empirical application of the square does not usually admit of meaningful possibilities beyond the second stage, and may often be restricted to the first (i.e. with S_1–S_4).The square offers a powerful and heuristically rich method for identifying the conceptual framework constituting a given ideological phenomenon. As Jameson has suggested, we may find the square helpful if we think of it as 'a virtual map of conceptual closure, or better still, of the closure of ideology itself, that is, as a mechanism, which, while seeming to generate a rich variety of possible concepts and positions, remains in fact locked into some initial aporia or double bind that it cannot transform from the inside by its own means' (Jameson 1987: xv).

18. 'Traditional' is placed in quotes to draw attention to the naturalizing effect of the word. Unlike the word 'modern', which refers to explicitly contemporary or relatively recent happenings that can (usually) readily be understood as 'constructed', the word 'traditional' invokes an ageless, authentic and essence-like past that often stands outside history. This particular use of the concept is actually a characteristically modern invention, but it has the paradoxical effect of accepting as natural or essential something that is quite clearly constructed. In short, while both 'modern' and 'traditional' are constructed categories, the latter is one of the effects produced by the former: a certain notion of tradition is formed and deployed during (and *only* during) the modern period. Such a notion of 'tradition' is in fact one of the signs by which modernity itself may be recognized.

19. On this consensus, see Bipan Chandra's copiously documented classic (Chandra 1966: especially 65–73).

20. It may also be the group most involved with the emergent phenomenon of 'long distance nationalism'. See Anderson 1992 for a brief and preliminary discussion.

21. A summary of the Chairman's speech appears as a paid advertisement in the *Economic and Political Weekly* of September 12, 1992, on pages 1956–57.The ITC is by far the largest net foreign exchange earner in the corporate sector: a report in the *Hindu* of March 4, 1993 places these earnings (for the financial year ending in March 1992) at Rs. 406 crores; the next highest figure is that of Rs. 242 crores for Tata Exports. At the beginning of his speech, the Chairman informs shareholders that ITC 'contributes over 2% of all Central Government revenues; 1% of India's foreign exchange earnings; and provides livelihood, both directly and indirectly, to over 1% of India's population, including one million farmer families.' The advertisement from which these quotations are taken is entitled 'The Role of a Corporation in the New India'.

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