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### BOOK REVIEW

Thomas Pantham and Kenneth Deutch, (eds)  
*Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi / London,  
Sage Publications, 1986, Rs. 175-00.

Indian nationalism that asserted itself as reaction to colonialism was a highly complex phenomenon. This complexity found its manifestation in diverse movements and intellectual tendencies. Several thinkers and leaders of modern India attempted to isolate certain elements of it as primary and tried to establish a consensus around them as the basis of Indian nationalism. These attempts towards a consensus called for an active opposition to colonialism and reconstituting Indian nationalism on a new basis. But quite often what was conceived as opposition to colonialism turned out to be another attempt to shroud it in a new garb. It was like the proverbial demon whose head when chopped off another reappeared on the very same foundations. Further, what was nationalism to some appeared to others as an intricate tool to perpetuate age-old or contemporary forms of domination and subjugation. Post-independent India was to inherit this ideological legacy without resolving its conflicting and contradictory dimensions in one way or another decisively. The rhetoric of nation-building and development did not succeed in carpeting over such basic disagreements for long. In fact, they have reasserted themselves, again and again, with great force and fury, albeit, in different forms.

While there have been certain brilliant attempts to probe into certain dimensions of this complex array of thought, most of

them have concentrated on elaborating certain facets of it or have confined themselves to individual thinkers or specific trends. On the other hand the majority of the general attempts to treat this subject matter as a whole, can be accused of methodological laxity, lack of rigour and focus. inability to situate ideological development in India in a global focus or simply, as wishing away the complexity of the ideological make of modern India. Political Thought of modern India, therefore, still remains, one of the sadly neglected area of study.

The book under review, edited by two noted political scientists, one Indian and the other American, is an attempt to cover the whole canvass of political thought in modern India by attempting to avoid the above pitfalls. While it brings together the major dimensions of this body of thought in twenty essays, contributed by Indian and foreign scholars, some of these essays, by focussing on methodological issues open up the possibility for more creative works in this field in the future.

In the introduction Dr. Pantham refers to the very modest as well as to the very ambitious objectives of this work. It aims to offer 'a consistently high level treatment of its subject matter' with a view on the university curricula; it attempts to locate the interface of political thought with its socio-historical context; it wants to bring out the 'global dimensions' to which political thought in India is addressed and its capacity to provide alternatives to 'Westcentred paradigms'.

All the contributions in this book, however, cannot be said to be infused with these objectives. Some contributions are plainly meant as critical summaries of the activity and thought of certain prominent thinkers of modern India, which have clearly the the university students as their audience. A few essays primarily deal with methodological issues with little attention paid to

cover exhaustively the various dimensions of a thinker. In fact the latter assume significant acquaintance of the reader with such thought. Among the alternatives that are proposed, the one around the Gandhian paradigm has stood out for special consideration. Gandhi is seen as proposing not merely an alternative to industrial, liberal democracy but also the mainstream of marxist thought. He is not merely a dead hero eulogised but seen as representing mankind's future hope.

If we take together the book as a whole it makes clear certain distinct trends in which a critique of colonialism and the alternatives to it, in terms of specific conceptions of nationalism, were posed in India. A major trend saw the socio-political state of India as the primary reason for the success of colonialism in India and thereby saw the coloniser in an exalted position. According to this trend, the regimentation of Indian society in terms of castes and traditions, the consequent lack of freedom and mobility, the widespread prevalence of superstitions and the lack of scientific spirit, reason and rationality, *Karma* and fatalism of the dominant belief-systems, political division and rivalry in Indian society and the severance of the relation between the masses and the native regimes were seen as the basic reasons for the success of the British in India. On the other hand the coloniser was seen as not to have been affected by these defects or as to have extricated himself from such undesirables in the distant past. This trend, while it sought self-rule, thought it foolhardly to press for it immediately. The protagonists of this trend waited for certificates to be awarded by their colonial masters with respect to political maturity and often used colonial criteria to adjudge relations and institutions in India. While this trend was critical of the new forms of exploitation that colonialism engendered and denounced its infidelity to its own ideals, it welcomed whole-heartedly western education

modern science, reason and rationality and the political innovations brought into being by the colonial power. It understood nationalism as self-rule plus all the positive features mentioned above. But as the state of political society is indissolubly bound with that of civil society this trend called for the transformation of the latter as a necessary condition for the former.

While the first trend pointed out at the social inadequacies of India for political self-rule, a second trend saw in India a distinctive cultural identity which was threatened by colonialism or was not allowed to express itself and come on its own. *Swarāj*, therefore, became the indispensable precondition for the cultural expression and effervescence. In this struggle between two distinctive cultures, one western and the other eastern, all the elements of Indian society were seen as allies opposed to that of colonialism. The question of reforms, if any, of Indian society should be a task of the post-colonial society. In the process of defining culture, this trend was not necessarily against western science, technology and industry but the latter were seen in the service of culture.

When nationalism was defined as the second trend did, it opened veritable floodgates. The problem was to define what was culturally characteristic of India that can rally the Indian masses together against colonialism. A majority stream identified this culture with the predominant Hindu tradition and proposed up symbols, myths and histories to depict it. However, powerful minority streams did not find such interpretation as inclusive of themselves and often saw themselves in opposition. Some saw in the attempt to define a cultural identity nothing but an attempt to superimpose the domination of a segment of Indian society on others. The dominant strands of Muslim, Dalit and Tribal thinking, thereby, parted ways with the majority stream. In the South the non-Brahmin and the Dravidian movement

was to see in the defence of this cultural identity a powerful reassertion of Brahmin and Aryan supremacy. In pushing these currents, although they distorted social perception, were rooted in the Indian social context.

Given the problem of wielding a cultural identity encompassing the whole nation, the protagonists of this trend had to often resort to expressions and symbols which were vague, vacuous or simply religious. Thereby they failed to reflect in anyway the real relations in which people lived and reproduced their social existence. In fact, the cultural identity that this trend asserted was a contemporary creation fused by drawing certain elements from a complex historical tradition.

The communists attempted to bypass this entire debate by attempting to pose questions around the economic relations in India, the world-wide development of capitalism and its super-session and the class character of nationalist leadership. While they attempted to pose the question of Indian nationalism from the perspective of workers, peasantry and the broad masses they failed to establish the necessary interconnections between agrarian revolution and nationalist struggle on the one hand and culture, social reforms and social classes on the other. Methodologically they often transferred readymade schemas to perceive social reality and evolve a strategy for India.

Gandhi's great merit consists in the fact that in this fragmented and often counterposed notions of nationalism he attempted to negotiate a unified notion of nationalism by showing elements from mass culture and folk traditions and in the process radically altering the hitherto dominant notions of nationalism. Upholding a non-violent, democratic and humanist perspective Gandhi became not merely a trenchant critic

of colonialism, dominant west-centred paradigms but also of those terms in which nationalist debates in India were carried out. Several essays in this book argue that drawing from authentic Indian tradition, but not exclusively, Gandhi posed an alternative which was not merely nationalistic but civilizational. A defence of the Gandhian paradigm remains the central thrust of a couple of major essays of this book.

Coming to the individual contributions. While certain essays concentrate on the critical appraisal of the whole or part of the thought of a mainstream thinker, others deal with certain ideological strands in modern India. The first essay by Bhikhu Parekh on 'Some reflection on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought' is supposed to be a connecting link between modern political thought with earlier thought. Thomas Pantham claims in the introduction that there is an essential continuity between the ancient and modern thought in India (p. 16). This essay is probably meant to justify it. Bhikhu Parekh's analysis however, is far from substantiating this claim. On the contrary, the latter finds the Hindu Tradition basically 'inegalitarian', 'pluralist in orientation', 'uncritical and apologetic of the established order, which justified the caste system and other inegalitarian features. He finds that it did not take into account 'social conflict', remained 'didactic and practical and not theoretical'. He concludes: "it would not be inaccurate to say that the Hindus did not develop a tradition of political philosophy" (p. 30). Pantham is far from locating the 'essential continuity' in what Parekh identifies as the basic characteristics of Hindu political tradition and what the subsequent essays argue for modern Indian political thought. But Parekh can be easily accused of adopting a narrow delimitation of the 'political' and for his reliance on commentaries whose methodology is faulty and the material they draw from is highly selective.

In fact, there are other essays which make more serious attempts to establish a continuity between the early and modern thought. Noteworthy among them is Indira Rothermund's 'Gandhi's Satyagraha and Hindu Thought' and to some extent Ashis Nandy's 'Oppression and Human Liberation: Towards a post-Gandhian Utopia'. The problem with Rothermund, however, is the way she attempts to link up Gandhi's conceptual framework with the early Hindu Tradition. Probing into categories like *Rta*, *Sat*, *Dharma* etc she finds that they formed the basic core of Gandhi's philosophical and moral universe and these categories in their 'essential meaning' were available to Gandhi through the living folk tradition of Hinduism. Due to this, Gandhi 'intuitively grasped the existential content of the *Vedase* as well as later achievements of Hindu Thought' (p.298). But a question can be asked: should Gandhi be approached reductively or as a thinker and leader who framed concepts and categories to meet the contemporaneous moral and political demands by drawing in elements from popular Hinduism but not exclusively from it? Further, was there a comprehensive and continuous religious folk tradition in India or a highly fragmented, diverse, discontinuous tradition?

The essay by Thomas Pantham on 'The socio-religious and political thought of Rammohan Roy' attempts to project Roy as avoiding the twin pitfalls of being an Anglophile on the one hand and the defender of Hindu Orthodoxy on the other. While he admits that Roy was not sufficiently sensitive to the contradiction between nationalism and colonialism he sees in him the merit of entertaining a vision, however faint it was, of a post-imperialist order and making an important contribution 'to the formation of a transnational culture' on a 'humanistic basis'. Apparently, Pantham takes this synthesis at the face value. Could a serious synthesis of cultures be contemplated at all.

without placing primacy on decolonisation which the author admits Roy did not do ?

The essay by B. R. Purohit on 'The social and political ideas of Swami Dayanand Saraswati' brings out clearly the basis of Indian nationalism that Swami Dayananda Saraswati attempted to lay down through a reformed Hinduism. Such an attempt introduced racial overtones - 'the superiority of Aryans - and emergence of Hindu revivalism and an exclusive conception of nationalism'. While Purohit admits it, at the same time he argues that 'Dayanand raised a banner of revolt and protest against the divisive forces and cumbersome customs of Hindu Society' (p. 65). But can we not say that the way Dayanand attempted to forge a basis for Hinduism and thereby for Indian nationalism he came to exclude all those traditions which departed from his 'pure Hinduism' leading to greater disunity. Exclusivism at one end bred exclusivism at the other. Can we exonerate Dayanand fully from the responsibility for the emergence of sikh fundamentalism later and the doctrinaire stand of muslim and non-brahmin movements earlier in India.

The contributions of Prabha Dixit on 'The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism' and Moin Shakir on 'Dynamics of Muslim Political Thought' throw some light on these queries. According to Prabha Dixit, the ideology of Hindu nationalism was constituted by the middle class at the end of the nineteenth century as a political tool in defence of its material interests. As these interests differed from time to time and from place to place depending upon the preception of the enemy, different elements of this ideology were emphasised at different times even at the risk of proposing 'diametrically oppsed solutions'. Hindu nationalism was attempted to be countered by a section of muslims by proposing an ideology of Muslim nationalism. Colonialism found such a development handy to pit one section of the population againts

the other. It is able to thrive even today on account of the confidence of numbers and the phobia it can generate about the minorities. Moin Shakir shows clearly the vast diversity and divergences of political thought among muslims prior to independence. There is nothing like a mainstream of muslims thought. Different strata of Muslims, depending upon their interests, responded to colonialism and nationalism differently although the forms of these responses may often be shrouded in ideologies which may be misconstrued. The upper classes claimed Islam to serve their interests while the lower classes in the absence of an alternative explanation, explained their current misery as due to the departure from Islam and thereby sought a purified Islam. But the form of these responses itself was to prove advantageous at a particular point of time to those who argued for Muslim nationalism. Both the upper classes and lower classes used a language and an idiom of politics which became more and more Islamised (p. 152) although they understood different things by it. Both the above essays show how the ideologies of religious revival in India were highly fragmentary weaving different ideological elements within an overarching semblance of unity. A critique of Hindu and Muslim nationalism remains, therefore, a critique of the mainstream nationalism in India demonstrating the inability of the latter to negotiate itself among the masses with sufficient appeal whereby the former remained isolated.

Rajendra Vora and N. R. Inamdar throw light on the differing stands that Ranade, Phule and Tilak adopted with regard to nationalism. Their perception of Indian society and British colonialism was sufficiently distinct as to introduce differing strands of nationalism in India. Vora's treatment of Mahatma Phule, however, is too brief compared to that of Ranade. It was Phule who pioneered a stream of radicalism both in ideology and socio-political practice which while did not merge in the

communist movement, still represented a broad spectrum of mass politics in India. Kenneth Deutch in 'Sri Aurobindo and the search for political and spiritual freedom' shows how for Aurobindo *Swarāj* was both a condition and the goal for achieving full spiritual perfection and the fulfilment of the ancient life of India under modern conditions. Deutch finds parallel between Aurobindo and the French mystic and paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin. Both of them draw attention to the phenomenon of man as the highest and qualitatively different stage of evolutionary progress placing man on the threshold of the spiritual. For Aurobindo, *Swarāj* must concretely aim at this objective. Deutch, however, rightly points out that 'Aurobindo's yogic surrender shows the proclivity to underplay specific socio-political obligations in the face of specific human needs and specific historical circumstances' (p. 207).

Eleanor Zelliot, Radharaman Chakrabarti and R. C. Pillai discuss the basic positions of B. R. Ambedkar, Tagore and Nehru respectively and point out at their specific emphases. While Ambedkar struggled against mainstream Indian nationalism from becoming the expression of upper castes and upper classes of Indian society, Tagore tried to steer Indian nationalism from being exclusive and inward looking and closed to the reception of other cultures. For Nehru nationalism basically connoted a secular, rational and scientific spirit with an international outlook.

Manoranjan Mohanty goes into the dynamics of communist ideology and movement in India as it interacted with its own ideological presuppositions, the environment in which it functioned and the international developments. He finds that the communists in India failed to combine the agrarian revolution with anti-colonial struggle. In post-independence India they

have not been able to develop an effective response to the Indian state and appreciate the import of the national question. The communist movement has witnessed split after split and every split has justified itself by establishing ideological defences.

Dennis Dalton finds a consistent ideological tradition in Modern India running through Vivekanand, Aurobindo, Tagore, Gandhi, Vinoba, and Jayaprakash Narayan which sees the state basically as an evil. For this tradition politics and power are everywhere suspect and takes centralization and bureaucratization to task. The alternative this tradition seeks is in mass participation and a sound body of individual ethics. Ronald J. Terchek locates Gandhi in the theoretical tradition of democracy and shows how Gandhi not merely called for full and free participation in public affairs and the removal of all dependancy relations but also tried to establish the necessary human and social foundation for the same.

In his seminal essay on 'Culture and power in the thought of Bankimchandra' Partha Chatterjee goes into the investigation of two crucial elements of Bankim's thought : power and culture. For Bankim the lack of power in India is not a physical shortage but due to cultural one. His project is to initiate 'progress' by transforming the backward culture of his nation. But while attempting to initiate such a project Bankim was increasingly confronted with the possibility of throwing out the baby along with the water in the bath-tub. In the process of inculcating values conducive to power one might lose the very culture itself. The author feels that although Bankim did not confront this possibility comprehensively he increasingly sought a solution in Hinduism in which he saw dimensions superior to Christianity or western culture. Due to this tension between power and culture, the 'modern' and the 'National' remained ...8

distinct and opposed in Bankim. The author's principal investigation is the logic of Bankim's thought. In this logic Bankim is not able to extricate himself from a mode of reasoning whose essential categories are positivistic and culture-bound in a colonial sense. The key to the contradiction in Bankim's thought, therefore, lies in his methodological and conceptual presuppositions.

Sudipta Kaviraj's essay on 'The Heteronomous Radicalism of M. N. Roy', like that of Partha Chatterjee, is an attempt to probe into the methodological and conceptual weaknesses of M. N. Roy's thought. These weaknesses led M. N. Roy to perceive the development of capitalism, nationalism and social revolution in India in the model of countries of late capitalism such as Russia and Eastern Europe. The distinctions that Lenin made between the various stages and phases of the development of capitalism and the specific class relations they gave rise to simply escaped Roy. This was because Roy's framework of reasoning and historical vision was stamped with a 'subtle Eurocentricity' that too of a particular type of eighteenth century rationalism (p. 234). Marxism in the hands of M. N. Roy remained a completed system to be applied rather than a method to investigate. M. N. Roy's radicalism, therefore, remained one more variant of the colonial mode of thinking. This is a remarkable essay suggesting a number of new directions of enquiry including the methodological bases of Indian Communist movement.

While the above two contributions demonstrate the limitations and failures of certain alternatives as they were woven in their very fabric with a heteronomous mode of thinking, Ashis Nandy in 'Oppression and Human Liberation : Towards a post-Gandhian utopia' and Thomas Pantham in 'Beyond Liberal Democracy : Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi' discuss the

strengths of the alternative that Gandhi proposed to Indian nationalism, Ashis Nandy argues that the oppressor and the oppressed cannot be perceived in simple dichotomous terms as the Cartesian rationality proposes. Such conceptualisation leads to the belief that if the oppressor is vanquished then oppression necessarily results in liberation. Oppression not merely dehumanises the oppressed but also the oppressor. Often the oppressed conceive their liberation as simply exchanging places with the oppressor. Gandhi recognised it well. Therefore, the alternative that he proposed was not in the terms of the oppressor but the transformation of an entire situation of oppression wherein not merely the oppressed transform themselves but in the process transform the oppressor too by posing new terms for social and human existence. The way Gandhi proposed the terms of his alternative recaptured an essential dimension of Indian civilizations because unlike the west 'Many of the Eastern civilizations' have not drawn a clear line between the victor and the defeated, the oppressor and the oppressed and the rulers and the ruled' (p. 352). Ashis Nandy's call is very clear: If there can be an authentic civilizational response from India and the Third World against oppression and towards human liberation the point of departure can only be the premises that Gandhi proposed.

Like Ashis Nandy, Thomas Pantham explores the Gandhian alternative from another direction. Pantham argues that the Gandhian project was aimed at resolving fundamental contradiction in the theory and practice of liberal democracy i. e., the contradiction between the affirmation of the freedom of the individual in the so called private sphere and its curtailment in the public political sphere (p.326). Further, Gandhi was far from a romantic or idealistic visionary. He realistically grasped the contradictions of capitalism and the exploitation it engendered. The result of these contradictions is that the public/politi-

cal sphere continuously suffers a legitimation crisis. While Habermas outlines the causes and consequences of this crisis in terms of advanced capitalism Gandhi was to perceive it in his analysis of liberal or socialist democracy as alternatives to colonialism. The alternative that Gandhi proposes is in terms of his concept of *Swarāj*. While it undermines the need for a centralised, coercive state, it accords with individual freedom and full, participatory democracy. Social relations in the realm of *Swarāj* are not going to be regulated by force but on the basis of the 'reign' of self-imposed law of moral restraint. Only on such a foundation can an uncoerced, consensual and communitarian organisation of society be founded.

As already said in the beginning, this book is a major attempt to come to terms with the various stands of political thought in modern India with their strengths and shortcomings and the alternatives that they propose not merely to Indian Nationalism but to certain global issues that political theory has addressed itself to. It proposes new dimensions of enquiry in the search for an authentic political identity which takes freedom and justice seriously without being parochial and sectarian.

However, while there is a strong emphasis on the Gandhian perspective, its strengths and weaknesses with respect to the other nationalist traditions, especially the Nehruian one, is scarcely explored. In fact the Nehruian alternative is not seriously probed at all considering its importance in independent India. It was around this alternative that major strands of nationalist thought were pitted in post-independence India. Further there is little in the book about those traditions which reflect regional and subnational issues, in terms of national-cultural dimensions. The ideologies of the non-Brahmin movement and the tribal movement are not explored at all. The strength of the alternatives that Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar

proposed remains unasculated in this book. There is no single political thinker from the south that finds a mention. These limitations, however, do not lessen the importance of the book as bringing to the fore the complex and creative dimensions of political thought in India and in the process raising plenty of questions.

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