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Introduction

Crispin Bates

South Asians have long grown accustomed to being represented by others: in the colonial period by officials eager to dissect and define their societies for purely practical administrative purposes, and in the post colonial period by academics – historians, anthropologists and others – telling us what Indian society 'really' is.[i] Explanations have divided between those who see South Asian society as proceeding according to its own unique logic, with classical 'traditions' surviving in the longue durée; whilst others see the subcontinent as much prone to international phenomena as anywhere else, and regard identities and social units as malleable, constantly changing, and largely constructed in the short-term. Importantly, amongst the latter school (which includes both Marxists and contemporary historical anthropologists) it is often argued that colonial representations had a powerful effect on the ways in which colonial subjects fashioned and conceived their own identities. We are thus left with two competing explanations: one in which Indian traditions seem to have changed hardly at all in the past three hundred years (a perspective described by some as both orientalist and a form of colonial apologetics[ii]), and another in which Indians are seen as little more than victims, tossed and turned by the waves of colonial definition, administrative dictat, and the forces of international capitalism and globalisation.[iii] Between these polar positions is a growing literature that focuses on the question of Indian agency: some arguing for an understanding of Indian agency within the colonial-orientalist dynamic,[iv] whilst others show how Indians contributions somehow made them complicit but do not ask how far they had the means to process the knowledge they provided.[v] Then there is the approach which argues that caste and other Indian social institutions are largely stripped of their connections with live politics as a result of British interventions, and that if Indians do exercise agency, it is a constrained agency, due to the resources with which they exercise it being provided by the coloniser.[vi] Despite their subtly, these differing interpretations are not yet so far removed from the old continuity versus change dynamic and a great many complexities are still left to be explored. Some of these complexities, with an emphasis on the agency of Indians themselves, are addressed in this volume.

'Beyond Representation' aims to explore from novel perspectives how colonial rule and constructions of identity affected Indians. It concerns the impact of colonialism on Indian identity in a manner which emphasis disjunctures as much as continuities. Crucially, the intention is to step beyond conventional dichotomous paradigms by airing a cross section of new and original research which examines the agency of Indians in processes of identity formation in the colonial and immediately post-colonial periods. The intention is to focus broadly on dialogics in the creation of colonial cultures, rather than the overdetermination of one aspect by another, the reduction of collective and individual cultures to the teleologies of nationalist political discourse, or the relativist dissolution of any possibility of shared social and political interests.[vii]

With modernism and the certainties of class, nation, and secularism under threat, social scientists have increasingly turned to History in an attempt to understand the transformation of Indian identities and the origins of contemporary ideas and social groups. Humanism, individualism, and westernisation have profoundly influenced the subcontinent, spawning movements of imitation as well as new ideas of community and association, including feminism, nationalism, socialism and class. In some cases re-defined identities, revolving around caste and feudal loyalties, were backward looking. In other instances, such as the aristocracy of the Princely States, the orient was orientalised in an image made for it by western scholars that had truly never previously existed. Other identities had their roots in Indian tradition, were reactive, yet looked forward to wholly new and syncretic notions of the self. Religious identities were among those most radically affected, together with notions of caste, race and regional forms of nationalism. At a local level however civil society was often transformed in the colonial period, charitable associations, the co-operative movement, and local politics giving rise to novel forms of association and means of assertion. In sum, the absence of democracy, combined with often rapid economic change, generated new forms of identity and social agency - sometimes radically different from those seen before, others a reification of existing traditions, others again (such as the adivasi or dalit) paradoxical in nature and a site for resistance. The essays in this volume suggest new ways in which we might assess the degree of continuity seen in movements of people and ideas and endeavour to determine the extent to which the impact of colonialism, and modernising trends of the nineteenth and early twentieth century have, or have not, been exaggerated. Above all the essays highlight the dialectical nature of the encounter and the ways in which modernity and tradition might mutually transform each other, through both compromise and conflict, and give rise to wholly new forms of cultural, political, and individual expression: forms of expression which can be dissonant as well as effective syncretisms and cross-cultural rationalisations.

Colonial ethnography and 'tribal' identity

Anthropology and colonialism have always been intricately entwined, as is seen in various essays in this volume, and the very first essay, 'Human Sacrifice in Colonial Central India: Mythology, Representation and Resistance' addresses an early stage in the colonial encounter when the dialogic encounter between anthropology, colonialism and Indian society was all too apparent.[viii] It arose when British soldiers and administrators first come into contact with the strange and unknown tribal peoples of central India. Human sacrifice was believed to be widely practised amongst the Konds of Orissa and the Gonds of Central India (Madhya Pradesh) in the early nineteenth century, and figured particularly in missionary pamphlets railing against the alleged barbarities of Hindu religion. Recent academic studies have accepted or represented the phenomenon as an authentic religious tradition[ix]. This chapter argues that in many instances the British were chasing red herrings. Rumours of human sacrifice abounded, particularly after the British began to react to them and to launch investigations. But the rumours were usually purveyed by those who wished to discredit political rivals. Thus zamindars or adivasi chiefs were often to be found alleging that their neighbours practised it. Upon visiting the shrines where these sacrifices supposedly took place, human bones or any other evidence of such activities were never found. It nonetheless remained a powerful cause as the allegation of human sacrifice could be used to legitimate sending an expeditionary force. Company officials were invariably inclined therefore to believe such stories whenever it was to their political advantage. This chapter argues that adivasi leaders themselves

learned to appropriate the anxieties of missionaries and colonial officials and to use these anxieties against them. Mythologies of human sacrifice thus had an elite, colonial and subaltern face. The disappearance of the practice did not therefore mark the ascendance of a colonial legal and cultural hegemony, so much as territorial conquest of the adivasi districts and the movement of resistance into other planes and spheres.

The 'backward' Muslim and middle-class 'respectability'

Much like the depiction of adivasis, religious representations influenced by colonial policies of 'divide and rule' have been generally negative in their influence on identity formation, and yet still find their advocates. Thus the communal divide in India has sometimes been explained as a simple consequence of the educational disparity between Hindus and Muslims in the late nineteenth century. The introduction of western education, some argue, led to its embrace by upper caste Hindus but not by Muslims. The resultant disparity in access to government jobs and the like resulted in Muslims falling behind in the 'race for life' and mobilising to redress that imbalance in ways which accentuated the divisions between the two communities. In chapter three, rather than join the debate on whether Muslims were 'in fact' backward or not, and what effects this had, the author seeks to stand back and defamiliarise the naturalness of 'Muslim' and 'education', which allowed the colonial administrator and more recently the sociologist to so easily cross-tabulate the two. Sanjay Seth traces the emergence of the 'backward Muslim', whose fortunes came to be statistically tracked and who was the object of concern of various well-wishers, including the colonial government. It is argued that the debate around education was a key site for the discursive construction of 'Muslim' as a social and political category, in the specific form of the 'backward Muslim'. It is then further argued that education was an important site for the construction of such a Muslim identity because of the relations between modern education and a new regime of power which it reflects and encodes, a regime closely associated with the mode of operation of the modern, territorial administrative state, which Michel Foucault has termed 'governmentality'. Sanjay Seth finally suggests that the production of the category of the backward Muslim created a new identity as an object of desire: its counterpart, the 'forward' or modern Muslim. It was this which ensured that the figure of the 'backward Muslim', whether he 'in fact' existed or not, proved to have real and lasting historical consequences.

Along with religion, recent scholarship on South Asia has brought to the fore the importance of the family and the domestic domain as a site for articulating middle-class cultural identity and for establishing its hegemony over subordinate groups.[x] Located at the heart of the domestic domain, the interaction between upwardly mobile employers and lower class domestic workers offers an excellent opportunity for examining the middle class's multi-dimensional bid for hegemony in colonial Bengal. By analysing the 'narratives of transgression', Swapna Bannerjee demonstrates in chapter four how the articulation of a Bengali middle-class self identity was based on the definition of its women who in turn were carefully distinguished from members of lower socio-economic groups. Examining selective literary sources such as housekeeping manuals and short stories, it is suggested that the process of self-definition of the Bengali middle-class was fraught with tension emanating from the possibility of subversion and transgression of their ideals by the subaltern 'other' whom they tried to keep at bay and effectively under control. An attempt is then made to show how the discourse, that articulated the distance between the domestics and the Bengali middle class was closely tied up with the ideal

model of the "respectable" lady and the ideal housewife. It is thereby revealed that the aspects of fear, conflict and tension that underlay employer-servant relationships were often predicated on the notion and status of the 'respectable' Bengali lady, the *bhadramahila*.

Gender, language and nation

Conceptions of the self and collective identities have been profoundly influenced by the advent of modernity, the spread of communications and contemporary systems of capitalist exchange. As a consequence no community remains isolated from contact with the wider world. There is nothing uniform in this phenomenon, and. identities have not -merged into a single, universal westernised ideal type. Benedict Anderson in particular has been convincingly criticised for suggesting that nationalism has generally evolved in imitation of a European prototype.[xi] Although the processes of globalisation may be universal, the responses are not, and the evolution and fashioning of identities is equally, if not more often in reaction rather than imitation, or a complex mix of the two. Community identities in India have often evolved in response to a nationalist rather than imperialist agenda, and have often assumed a sub-nationalist or regional form. Related identity issues, such as that of language, religion, and gender, are equally involved, each of these in turn reacting to or imbibing motivation from global agendas and producing not a backward movement towards 'tradition' (although often represented as such) but a unique and dynamic melange.

In the construction of nationalism, the modern nation has often been explicitly imagined through gendered metaphors. The fourth chapter in this volume, by Charu Gupta, studies the working of the icon of mother into a multiplicity of narratives of nation, language and cow, which were used as a source of nostalgia and of political mobilisation in Hindu nationalist rhetoric of late colonial north India, with a special focus on Uttar Pradesh. These metaphors were symptomatic of the simplistic ideologies that nationalism often relied upon. The gendering of national and linguistic identities sharpened the definition of the Hindu community. The symbol of mother was especially effective because it was imprecise and malleable and could take on different meanings in different contexts. There was a search for an undisputed identity in the motherland, mother tongue, mother cow and such tropes that pervaded the Hindu nationalist discourse, but in the process there were also tensions of mutuality, revealing implicit paradoxes. Motherhood and maternity are female phenomena, but here the symbol of mother was used largely to aid masculine formations, and sons, in the service of the nation. In practice, although female icons were constantly evoked in UP, in their physical representations and at crucial junctures, they often tended either to disappear or to acquire contradictory meanings. This chapter further attempts to problematise concepts of gender, nation and Hindu identity. In examining the multiple relationships between different icons of mother and Hindu identity through localised evidence, it implicitly questions some formulations made regarding Bengal, which have tended to provide much of the current theoretical framework for discussions on gender, social reforms and nationalism in colonial India.

In examining the gendered rhetoric of the anti-Hindi movement that punctuated Tamil politics in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the sixth essay in this volume, by Sumathi Ramaswamy, considers the gendered aspects of linguistic nationalism in colonial and post-colonial southern India. The anti-Hindi protests launched in Tamil India are striking in their mobilisation of the female figure to personify the rival languages - Tamil

and Hindi -and to construct contrary sentiments about them. On the one hand, Tamil was imagined as a goddess, queen, and mother of the Tamil community as embodied in the figure of Tamilttaay, 'Mother Tamil'. On the other hand, Hindi was cast as demoness, maid, whore, and false mother. Sumathi Ramaswamy demonstrates how the image of Tamilttaay as a noble but endangered mother was deployed to produce sentiments of love, filial anxiety, and devotion for Tamil amongst its speakers, whereas the antithetical figure of Hindi as a blood-sucking demoness and evil temptress was circulated to create fear and aversion for the designated 'national' language of India. In analysing the competing structures of sentiment in which these languages come to be embedded, she considers how Tamil identity was produced in opposition to an Indian national identity in the decades immediately preceding and following formal independence from British rule. At the same time, the anti-Hindi movement illustrates that on the putative margins of the emergent nation, the formal end of colonial rule in 1947 did not put an end to a pervasive and profound sense of alienation and anxiety. These sentiments, rather than those of belonging to 'India', were crucial to the formation of a post-colonial Tamil identity in the middle years of the last century.

Literature, class, and region

Apart from tribe, gender, language, or religion, a region or territory can form an equally successful basis for identity formation, as has been argued by Ranajit Guha.[xii] This can take a variety of both popular and elite forms. Chapter seven illustrates this phenomenon by looking at how the Gujarati literati in the late nineteenth century defined their identity and, in that process, created a specific idea of Gujarat. This study, by Riho Isaka, focuses in particular on Ahmedabad, the leading city of Gujarat, which was known for its mercantile tradition. Ahmedabadi elites under British rule shared a common experience of education, both literary and 'useful' (rather different from that of many Muslims in north India) and became involved in the vernacular press and voluntary associations, such as the social reform organisations and the Gujarat Vernacular Society. These educated elites, through such institutions, began in the late nineteenth century to claim to represent Gujaratis as a whole, and in their attempt to identify Gujarat, became particularly interested in its language, literature and history. There were active debates over the 'pure' and 'standard' forms of Gujarati, the 'new' literature, the 'classical poets', and the 'ancient glory' of this region. The influential members of the literary circles were Nagar Brahmans and Vaniyas (including Jains). The latter's economic and social prominence was an important factor in the formation of Gujarati identity. Even Nagar Brahman literati came to incorporate the image of the 'country of merchants' and the Vaishnava and Jain religious traditions into their articulation of regional identity. The Gujarati literati sometimes described themselves as the middle class, a term they adopted from the British. This chapter argues that this development of middle-class consciousness closely coincided with that of regional identity. The late-nineteenth-century construction of Gujarati identity, was to have important implications for the rise of Indian nationalism in Gujarat, especially after Gandhi's rise to power.

Although clearly important, the elite class nature of the Gujarati literati was (perhaps cunningly) never too greatly reified or celebrated. This was not the case in Bengal, where the bhadralok elite played an important role in shaping Bengali nationalism in the late nineteenth century, whilst simultaneously and self-consciously endeavouring to enhance the status and influence of the bhadralok class itself. In consequence, culture, education and a discourse of learning have always been associated with the bhadralok in Bengal

both in their own history and in the historiography of the nineteenth century. The bhadralok situated themselves as a ‘middle class’ (*madhyasreni, madhyabitta*), below the aristocracy (*dhanllok or abhijat*), above the ‘lesser folk’ engaged in manual labour and generally separate from the lower castes or Muslims. What distinguished them from both was education of a particular kind, so much so that pronouncements about education ultimately became the sole criterion for defining the bhadralok. From the second half of the nineteenth century, moreover, the colonial authorities reformulated the Bengali's educational achievements as a sign of their physical weakness. Chapter eight in this volume, by Tithi Bhattacharya, is concerned with interrogating this relationship between the actual social composition of the bhadralok and its perceived identity.

The term bhadralok, so far, has had a somewhat ambivalent legacy of definition. It has been denoted variously as a class in the Marxist sense, a status group in the Weberian sense and even as a ‘mere category’. In most scholarship about this period the term bhadralok is used freely to give the impression that the bhadralok was or is a cogent group of individuals who shared a similar, if not equal, social position, culturally and economically. The obvious question that springs to mind is why the acquisition of education became the primary determinant of bhadralok membership. Tithi Bhattacharya argues that from the mid-nineteenth century onwards colonial political economy limited all other channels of social mobility except the service sector for which western education was a necessity. The social and cultural attributes of the bhadralok, in this period, were thus significantly different from those considered ‘bhadra’ in first half of the nineteenth century. The need for Western education to earn a livelihood, it is argued, promoted certain ideological forms in society around education in general and literature and culture in particular. These ideologies, best expressed through the new social medium of the printing press, worked towards the social consolidation of the bhadralok identity. This chapter analyses these ideological forms in an effort to address, firstly, the identity and the social composition of the change between the first and second half of the nineteenth century in the composition and concerns of the bhadralok; and secondly the problems that identity poses as a historical construct under colonialism.

Following on from Tithi Battacharya’s analysis of the bhadralok as a class, chapter nine questions the very essence of the literary culture it used to create its self-image by examining the social history of print languages and literature in colonial Bengal and the formation of a standardised vernacular print-culture. If a modern 'high' and sanitised Bengali was created and wielded as a tool by the educated middle classes during this period, to establish their power over other social groups, Anindita Ghosh demonstrates that the process was keenly contested. Other non-elite but significant literate groups participated in nineteenth century Bengali print-cultures. Commercial 'low-life' print-cultures disseminated literary preferences that ran counter to efforts defining the boundaries of 'polite' and 'vulgar'. Besides, the continuing importance of non-standard linguistic variants, oral cultures and specific reading practices of audiences, created a space within which the impact of standardised print could be remarkably resisted and re-interpreted.

Anindita Ghosh highlights three contestary arenas of literary production which, both in terms of content and in a strictly linguistic sense, were the defining 'others' of a standardised modern Bengali language and literature - 'vulgar' colloquial speech of the lower orders (*itarjan*), 'women's' (*meyeli bhasha*) and 'Islamic-bengali' (a syncretistic folk Bengali) language and literature. Contestation occurred along three axes - class, gender

and religion. As patrons of a risqué and rude literature, literate lower urban service groups resisted moves by the upper classes to sanitise their cultural domain. The standardising discourse had a male and Hindu dimension to it: contesting print-cultures of women, and Muslim readers of syncretic folk literature, therefore, likewise defined distinctive gender and communal identities that challenged these aspects of the discourse. Anindita Ghosh seeks to recover the mentalities and world views of groups that have been till now seen as only passive bearers of hegemonic discourses. Highlighting survival, rather than 'silencing', it is argued, throws light in important ways on the complex problems of nationalism, communalism and women's issues in the twentieth century.

'Metropolitan' ideologies and modernity

The impact of metropolitan ideologies was at least as important as that of colonial representations of India, and the fear of 'degeneration' and 'racial degradation' was one of the most pervasive themes in the intellectual and political life of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Among the strategies developed against this nineteenth century disease, the encouragement of physical culture and city planning measures as suggested by the environmentalists and 'conscious race culture' as recommended by the eugenicists were the most popular. In chapter ten, Harald Fischer Tine discusses how both the notion of the disease and its remedies, were adapted to the Hindu nationalist discourse by the so called 'radical' wing of the Arya Samaj, then the most influential socio-religious reform movement in North India.

The 'radical' or Gurukul-wing of the movement has mostly been depicted as conservative, devotional and anti-modernist. Fischer-Tiné shows conversely that the allegedly 'devotional' Arya leaders incorporated modern concepts of eugenics and environmentalism in the ideology underlying their alternative educational project - the *gurukula shiksha pranali* - and that their discourse was informed as much by the theories of Herbert Spencer as by the teachings of the Arya Samaj founder Swami Dayanand. The phenomenon, however, cannot be explained by simplistic 'diffusionist' models since the concepts of 'racial hygiene' and public health were not only modified by the Arya Samajists but also moored to elements of living Hindu tradition namely to the powerful concept of *brahmacharya*.

Chapter eleven follows on from the impact of modernism on the public and social ideology of the Arya Samaj by examining the development of fundamental concepts such as 'politics', 'political space', 'time', 'agency', 'collectivity', 'self' and 'individuality' in colonial north India during the crucial time period between 1935 and 1947. Markus Daeschel 's observations relate mainly to the Muslims of Lahore, revealing that the reformulation of political culture in the 1930s to 1950s had little to do with the cultural peculiarities of Muslim Punjab but was instead the product of global developments which were to some extent autonomous from the impact of colonialism in the Indian Subcontinent.
The main feature of political culture in the Punjab from the 1930s to the 1950s was the tension between an increasingly felt individuality (in the shape of the nuclear family for instance) and the need to act collectively in politics. On the one hand, the natural and social sciences, and new notions of history and religion, turned the world into a giant machine governed by inescapable semi-natural laws which completely subjugated human beings as individuals. On the other hand, political mobilisation, and the promise of all sorts of liberation ideologies, posited the ability or even the duty to overcome this giant

suppressive machine. The resulting tension and insecurity is reflected in political culture by historical romanticism, disciplinarian attitudes, martiality, a heightened sense of masculinity, technology and medical fetishisms and a valorisation of large imagined communities, in short what M.A. Jinnah called 'Faith Unity and Discipline'. Although all these features may be traced as far back as the end of the nineteenth century, it was only in the period between the 1930s and the 1950s that they acquired a dominant force. Markus Daeschel suggests that it was the intersection of two developments which underpinned this dominance: firstly, the rise of the middle class, or better middle class-ness, i.e. class less in a physical sense than in a cultural and discursive sense and secondly, the emergence of ideological politics, conducted almost entirely in the public sphere, which tended to stress future goals over short term bread-and butter issues. In other words, the evolution of north Indian political culture in this important period was characterised by the separation, one could say alienation, of the political from the immediate concerns of daily life. One might comment that this movement was characteristic of the modernisation of political life in many societies in the early twentieth century. Markus Daeschel highlights the importance and widespread nature of the phenomenon in north India: challenging thereby the representation of political life in this period as one that is easily divisible into elite/modern and subaltern/traditional forms, or characterisations of nationalist political culture as revivalist or backward-looking. The phenomenon of communalism seen in this period therefore had little in common with that of earlier epochs.

Technology, individual and virtual identities

A related but different approach to the study of modernity and its impacts is seen in chapter 12 in the discussion of representation and sedition in the North Indian telegraph, c.1905-1912, by Deep Kanta Lahiri Choudhury The focus here is on the effects of a particular technology and the evolution of solidarity and a 'virtual' community amongst workers in the telegraph industry. The historical period addressed, 1905 to1910, has been so far conventionally been accepted as that of Swadeshi and Boycott and the first phase of revolutionary terrorism. It sometimes also figures as a period constituting a prehistory of labour movements, popular politics, and communalism. Within it, Deep Kanta investigates the hitherto little studied telegraph strike of 1908. This strike involved both telegraph signallers as well as subordinate staff and occurred simultaneously in Rangoon, Moulmein, Calcutta, Allahabad, Agra, Bombay and Karachi. The strike was still on when the first revolutionary terrorists were arrested in Calcutta. It was regarded therefore by the Government and the India Office in London as part of a widespread anarchist threat. Through a close study of the 'information panic' that ensued, the chapter argues that there were particular, though not necessarily co-ordinated, investments by different sections in the State and media in the construction of a narrative of events. In particular, it focuses on the romanticism inherent in the exaggerated importance accorded to the political General Strike, such as the Tilak strike of 1908 in Bombay, in the work of authors such as Chandavarkar, and on a more general plane, in the work of Elizabeth J. Perry. By returning to the work of G. D. H. Cole, a contemporary of the period, the chapter argues for the importance of the transregional and transhierarchical industrial general strike in the history of labour movements. Analysis of the relationship between technological change and workers, beyond questions of continuity and representation, reveals how twentieth century workers were capable of charting general agendas, using technology to combine and combat technological rationalisation. The chapter hints that telegraph workers might have combined across national boundaries, in the process creating a sense

of identity that was supra-local and supra-national: not an 'imagined' identity founded on internationalist socialist rhetoric, but a virtual community, effected through the mechanism and shared working environment of the telegraph system.

Chapter thirteen by contrast, addresses the impact of wider societal change within the life of a single individual, Sir Prafulla Chandra Ray, and his attempts to intellectualise the cultural and political changes of his time. Sir Prafulla Chandra Ray was a prominent scientist, entrepreneur and public figure in Bengal and India, whose career spanned the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Ray's importance as a public figure over several decades, and as one whose pronouncements on various social, political and cultural matters were taken very seriously by a wide audience of middle-class Indians, provides an interesting insight into the intellectual history of Bengali and Indian nationalism over a wide time-frame.

Ray's peculiar ability to voice the concerns and anxieties of the Bengali intelligentsia, his frank projection of these anxieties onto the rest of the Indian middle-class, not to mention the 'nation' at large, and the engagement of his contemporaries with his ideas makes him more than a random example of peculiar views. Zachariah argues that Ray was far from being a communal ideologue, as some have described him. Instead, his political views moved from high liberalism in his years as a student at Edinburgh University, through Gandhism in the 1920s, to a position close to the socialism of his prominent students and fellow public figures such as the physicist Meghnad Saha in the 1930s. An inspirational figure for the *swadeshi* movement for economic and intellectual self-reliance early in the twentieth century, he continued to be, and to regard himself as, a role model for publicly desirable behaviour, even as he struggled to accommodate the lessons from role models ranging from Gandhi to Mussolini. Ben Zachariah analyses how Ray attempted to reconcile these ideologies, insisting, for example, on the need to industrialise whilst supporting some of Gandhi's anti-machinery ideas. Through a close study of Ray's ideological shifts, incoherences, inconsistencies, associations and dissociations, and within a comparative framework that keeps in perspective the ideas of his contemporaries, crucial aspects of 'identity' formation under colonialism are addressed, including the relationship between the personal and the general, and the often complex interaction between allegedly 'Western' and 'indigenous' ideas, or between metropolitan and colonial perspectives.

The final chapter in this volume, by James Mills, neatly combines the impact of modernity, religion, technology and colonial discourse (in this case the discourse of colonial medicine) whilst addressing the question of volition and the space within which individual, post-colonial, even radical perspectives might flourish. The chapter considers two sets of issues in exploring the history of Indian identities. Firstly the way in which aspects of medicine and religion came to be manipulated in the formation of Indian identities in the post-colonial period. and secondly the way in which historical sources confirm that individuals are not mere victims of hegemonic discourse but actively engage with identities, arguing that they do this in order to pursue a number of agendas. These include altering views that they have of themselves, manipulating the ways in which others see them and negotiating the social positions that are available to them. The case of Param Brahma, a schizophrenic swami who was incarcerated for an assault on a railway official and held at the Regional Psychiatric Hospital at Thane, Maharashtra between 1956 and 1977, provides the focus for this analysis.

The Indian psychiatrists of the Thane asylum maintained their diagnosis despite the fact that a group of influential disciples, which included government doctors, successful businessmen and municipal councillors, argued that Param Brahma could not 'be easily conceived in the material plane' and that 'mere medical men who base their treatment on western ideas cannot be expected to consider this peculiar condition'. He was believed by them to be an Avadhuta yogi and they were convinced that there was nothing wrong with him. By observing a broad cross-section of 'modern' Indians - psychiatrists, doctors, government officials and entrepreneurs in the three decades after Independence - the chapter traces how religion and medicine were issues on which very different identities were forged in post-colonial India.

The case of Param Brahma further raises the issue of individual changes of identity. Police chapters relating to his case suggest that he was a Punjabi Hindu whose family had lost land at Partition, and that he had subsequently been an RSS operative who had been expelled from Kashmir in 1947. In 1952 he experienced an urge to renounce all of this and declared himself to be 'the head of the universe government' who told doctors (in English) that he was on his way to his capital in New Delhi when arrested. There are parallels here with the character of Bishan Singh in the short story *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hasan Manto.[xiii] One is tempted to speculate that in the context of the time and his personal experiences 'madness' might have been the sanest perspective he could adopt. Param Brahma believed that he was both 'Guru and Bhagavan' and insisted upon this for almost twenty years. Freed in 1977 he abandoned this identity and with it the disciples who had so doggedly stuck with him: '[H]e had a hair cut and got made some sets of paigama and some underwears shirts and also took a shawl ... he said he was a teacher and would take that profession and he likes children'. With this he left for Delhi to start his new life.

Conclusion: the 'Postcolonial' history of identity

Collectively the papers in this volume reveal the complexities and ambiguities that lay behind the creation of identities in the colonial and immediately post-colonial periods. The process of construction and reconstruction is ongoing and intimately related to present day dilemmas of identity . Individuals invariably feel the need to be part of a larger whole for purposes of political and economic self-assertion, to more effectively share a common language and culture, or merely for defensive reasons: to generate a solidarity in numbers to resist a perceived external threat. One of the problems of at least the first and last of these forms of association is that identities come to be perceived in the form of an opposition; and oppositions and contrasts are often over-emphasised in the definition of social units. From the examples in this volume it is apparent that social identities are not always quite what they seem or claim to be. Elite culture in Bengal, for example, may find some of its origins in low caste literature; education reform amongst Muslims in north India created stereotypes of failure just as effectively as models of progress; reactionary fundamentalists may in fact be striving towards what they conceive to be a progressive agenda of European origin; and middle class 'respectability' rather than being based upon universal moral values may actually hinge largely upon the emergence of service classes in urban India. Other examples in this volume demonstrate that so-called 'high' culture often has recent and rather earthy roots; that all identities are virtual but that some are more imaginary than others; that advasi chiefs can use the tropes of savagery as weapons against their oppressors; and that freedom from colonial rule may not mean freedom at all for sections of the nation but be seen as merely a new form of

tyranny. The latter view has at times been widespread in the south of India, where the assertion of dravidian identity and the idea that everything that is bad comes from the north, sits side-by-side with a nagging sense of marginality and cultural or even racial inferiority.

Some of the most interesting examples cited, such as the life and career of P.C. Ray, demonstrate how several different and contradictory identities can co-exist; and that individuals may spend a life-time trying to reconcile them. Others on the other hand, who find themselves in a similar position, such as Param Brahma, may decide opportunely to reject one persona completely in favour of another. Although this latter case is derived from the records of an asylum, there are many in every day life, even in positions of political leadership, who have done the same thing.

Many movements of cultural and religious revivalism and social advancement can generate bizarre para-identities that are several times more devout or 'pure' than the model they seek to emulate. Such dissonance may of course not be a flaw but the very essence of many identities. It is a purely monist western European delusion that identities should be exclusive: one and the same thing, every time and in every place. In many cultures, including those of Europe, people often experience little difficulty in maintaining simultaneously a number of different senses of 'self'. Gender in particular is often deployed to serve a variety of quite contradictory purposes: the evocation of motherhood in the symbolism of the Indian nation, for example, has been commonly used to empower men rather than women, and even as a pretext to keep women in their place. Clearly when 'Mother India' is represented not as a powerful shakti, abundant mother or frail widow, but as an anthropomorphic map, with her arms stretched out to Nagaland and Baluchistan, we are dealing with a very modern geo-political idea rather than something rooted purely in Hindu tradition. Yet 'tradition' is the motif deployed to legitimate nearly every innovation in political, social and cultural identity. Histories thus become the dearest ally as well as greatest potential threat to those seeking to re-fashion popular and community perceptions to political or economic ends. It is no great surprise therefore that in most countries governments take a hand in senior academic appointments in the discipline of History.[xiv] It is hoped that the contributions to this volume might, in the spirit of post-colonialism, help liberate the study of History from this dead hand of orthodoxy. By illustrating and considering the diverse origins of many contemporary identities, we may be encouraged to think of other possibilities of existence and, above all, imbued with both a tolerance and irreverence for the markers of difference.

NOTES

[i] I use the terms South Asia and 'India' interchangeably here, since most of the papers in this volume concern the 'undivided' India pre-1947, or rather the 'India' that was in the nineteenth century divided between British territories and some 650 Indian princes, rather than the three sovereign states of the present day.

[ii] Irfan Habib, 'Studying a colonial economy without perceiving colonialism?', in Modern Asian Studies, 19 (3) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 355-381.

[iii] Crudely one might situate the work of Bernard Cohn, for example Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Princeton University Press, 1996), within the latter camp. See also P. Marshall (ed.), The Eighteenth Century in Indian History: evolution or revolution? (Delhi: Oxford University Press 2003).

[iv] For example, Peter van der Veer, Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India (Berkely: University of California Press, 1994); and 'The Foreign Hand: Orientalist Discourse in Sociology and Communalism' in the Breckenbridge and Van der Veer (eds.), Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

[v] C.A. Bayly, Empire and Information: intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[vi] Nicholas B. Dirks, The Hollow Crown: ethnohistory of an Indian kingdom (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1993) and Castes of Mind: colonialism and the making of modern India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[vii] Citing the work of the Marxist literary critic M.M. Bakhtin, David Washbrook has cogently argued the case for dialogics rather than discourse as a fruitful direction for future investigations of identity formation. See Bakhtin, M.M., The Dialogic Imagination: four essays (Austin: University of Texas, 1981) and D.A. Washbrook 'Orients and Occidents: colonial discourse theory and the historiography of the British Empire' in The Oxford History of the British Empire, vol V: Historiography, edited by Robin W. Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[viii] For the classical critical exposition of the role of anthropology in the colonial project see Talal Asad (ed.), Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter (London: Prometheus, 1974).

[ix] For example Felix Padel, The Sacrifice of Human Being: British Rule and the Khonds of Orissa (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[x] G. Forbes, Women in Modern India (New Cambridge History of India: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Partha Chatterjee The Nation and Its Fragments (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Dipesh Chakrabarty 'The Difference-Deferral of a Colonial Modernity: Public Debates on Domesticity in British India, in Subaltern Studies, vol 8 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 50-88.

[xi] See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (2nd ed.: London; Verso, 1991) and the critique by Partha Chatterjee in the introduction to The Nation and its Fragments (1993).

[xii] Ranajit Guha, Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[xiii] Saadat Hasan Manto, Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1997)

[xiv] In most countries, since ancient times, the historian has been regarded as an important legitimator of national ideology and in the UK, senior Professorships in History in Oxford and Cambridge Universities are subject to government approval, along with the appointment of Bishops and Archbishops (there being strictly no separation between Church and State).