Chapter 2

THE MAKING OF THE NATIONAL ELITE

Section I

Representing education: history, politics and nation

Histories of Indian education, particularly of the British period, have described the western mode of education as the chief agent of change in India in the domains of history, politics, culture, religion, economics, etc. Some of the major themes that are usually associated with the accounts of such a mode of education in India are the themes of modernity, democracy, secularism, nationalism and self-government. It is generally argued that the English educated Indian initiated a political discourse which inaugurated the process of decolonization leading to a vigorous nationalist movement and eventually to India's independence. One of the powerful articulations of such an argument in academic historiography could be found in David Kopf's *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance* (1969). The book resolves the issue of cultural contact within a cause-effect framework, stressing the contribution of the orientalists who "both historicised the Indian past and stimulated a consciousness of history in the Indian intellectual" (275). According to Kopf, it was the orientalists who transmitted a new sense of identity to Bengalis and enlarged their "capacity for rational goal-setting," an instrumental process in the development of a modern outlook (Kopf 275). It is evident from Kopf's observation that the formation of the Bengali-Indian identity, of rationality and

of historical consciousness was the effect of India's encounter with the British orientalists.

An early articulation of such an argument could also be found in Bruce McCully's *English Education and the Origins of Indian Nationalism* (1942), a book that reveals in the title itself its author's orientalist orientation. The book explores the instrumental aspect of English education both in terms of consolidation and subversion of colonialism. McCully significantly raises the issue of subversion but resolves it in favour of English education as a crucial factor for the rise of nationalism in India. By taking English education away from colonialism and aligning it with Indian nationalism, McCully, like Kopf, valorizes the British educational policies on the one hand and the liberal democratic value system acquired by the Indian elite on the other.

Such a valorization of English education has come under severe criticism in recent times. Gauri Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest*, exposes how "by perceiving the effect of [an English education] as an incidental rather than willed outcome, McCully frees himself from the obligation of having to determine the motive force of English education, as does Kopf from that of British Orientalism" (16). Such methodologies, Viswanathan argues, causes "the phenomenon of Indian nationalism to be interpreted as the product of an unmediated form of English thought, with the ideas of the Western liberal tradition seeming to seep into the Indian mind in a benignly osmotic fashion" (16).

Such histories associate, at least implicitly, the west with modernity and India with tradition. They usually conjure up the image of the colonizer as superior in civilization and culture and as an agent of change in the colonial society. One of the major assumptions of these historians is that the Indians who were educated in English and were trained in western values abandoned traditional beliefs and pursued liberal democratic values to the extent that they allowed for the subversion of colonial authority.

These success stories of English education stress the importance of our political education under colonialism. Although one cannot deny the significant role that the schools, colleges and universities had played in shaping the colonial mind, the problem with such accounts is that they partially explain the process of change while concentrating entirely on the action and behaviour of the native elite.

In the context of the relationship between English education and Indian nationalism, the work of Cambridge historians remains significant. Writing in the early twentieth century but active even in the 1970s and 1980s, these historians were concerned with writing 'new histories' which mapped the processes of change under colonialism. Their work on India focussed primarily on how public and national politics emerged out of the action of the elites at both the regional and national levels and on the way the elite negotiated with the institutions of self-government established by the colonial rulers. Cambridge histories are

significant in their attempt rethink the existing frameworks of colonial historiography. For example, while writing *The New Cambridge History of India* (1988) A.C. Bayly took note of the fact that "much of the historical writing on India since 1960 has been a persuasive attempt to argue the importance of regionalism: political, economic and cultural"(ix). His attempt was, therefore, to explore how the rich peasants at the local and regional level played "creative roles in the formation of regional cultures and economies" (206). The emergence of these peasants and their contribution to the national scene, Bayly contends, "should not be seen as an Indianized form of a native doctrine of national progress. This would be a mere substitute for the historiography of modernization and of triumphal westernization propogated by the old writers" (205). Instead, he shows how these rich peasants, organized around traditional factions and religious groups, broke down "the resistance of tribal and nomadic societies, annexed the labour of backward regions and often subordinated more completely their low-caste underlings" (205-6). Bayly, further argues that the "Resistance movements throughout the nineteenth century were directed against more privileged groups of Indians as often as the British" (206). What determined, according to Bayly, the political behaviour of both the rural and the urban elite was mostly their race for influence, status and resources.

A similar argument is offered by Anil Seal, another Cambridge historian, in his exploration of the issue of

competition and collaboration in late nineteenth century India. Seal observes that "the imposition of colonial rule had meant a shuffling of the elites in British India; its continuance meant that they had to be continually reshuffled. Collaboration came and went; new allies and new enemies envenomed the rivalries inside the country" (343). The historiographical dispute, Seal says, about whether the spirit of the nationalist movement came from the western educated or from an indigenous tradition of revolt seems to miss the point. According to Seal "an educated man continued to belong to a caste and a community, and hence he tended to belong to organisation of both kinds, one based on common kinship and religious persuasion and one based on common education and political persuasion" (15). In tracing the genealogy of the educated Indian, he points out that a "mutation" occurred in Indian politics around the 1870s and 1880s when the western educated Indians turned from being collaborators into critics of the colonial regime. The educated Indians, he argues, displayed a "certain detachment from British purposes" (23) and started experimenting with "new methods of public expression which soon incurred the candid dislike of government" (23). Seal, however, complicates the division of interest between imperialists and nationalists by arguing that "if imperialism and nationalism have striven so typically against each other, part of the reason is that the aims for which they have worked had much in common" (351). In fact, in the context of a colonial society, the complicity of nationalism with imperialism was discernible in the manner in which nationalism "sought to conserve the standing

of some of those elites which imperialism had earlier raised up or confirmed; at various times both have worked to win the support of the same allies" (351).

The educated elites began to develop connections wider than the ties of family, caste, religion or locality and these connections increased their chances of starting a movement with an all-India base. But Seal perceives an ambiguity in the native elite's impulse towards political unity (202). In spite of their membership in national and secular organizations, the native elite's loyalty to caste or community was conspicuous. Their larger political strivings were in fact expressions of their narrow local interests. If there was any clash of interest between one elite group and another, it was mostly with regard to their caste or community affiliations. The educated Indian elite, according to Seal, was an elite of a special kind in the sense that the groups and associations that it mobilized were usually based on "castes" (342). This according to Seal, is one of the reasons why the nationalist movement in India can hardly be explained in terms of "the genuine nationalisms of nineteenth century Europe" (342). The nationalist movement in India had features peculiar to itself. For example, the emergence of a caste-elite and its role in leading an organization of national dimension can be understood better by developing "a conceptual system based on elites rather than on classes" (341). Such a view is quite consistent with Seal's perception that the nationalist movement was "not formed through the prompting of any

class demand or as the consequence of any sharp changes in the social and economic structure of the country" (341).

The Cambridge historians, in spite of their disagreement on several issues, did have some common understanding of the development of the nationalist movement and the elite politics of the (English) educated Indians. They usually saw the emergence of public and national politics in India as an "uneven" growth. They attributed this uneven growth to two things: one, the uneven development of the social and economic structures under colonial rule and two, the equally uneven penetration of education in colonial India. They tried to break away from the models of westernization and modernization by stressing that they are inadequate in understanding the complexity of developments in a colonial society. For example, P.J. Marshall declared that "whatever the ultimate significance of their rule, the British were by no means the only bringers of change" (2).

It is on the basis of such an argument that Marshall, in his history of Bengal between 1740 and 1828, can contend that the early British rule in Bengal cannot be understood in terms of "a chronology which is determined by the rise and firm establishment of a colonial regime" (2). Although the work of the Cambridge historians offer a vigorous reading of Indian history where change is figured as a process not attributable to the west alone, these historians continue to concentrate only on the western-educated Indians who gave some direction to an all-India movement. The questions that interested them were: who were

these modernizing men? Which parts of India did they come from? What were their relations with other groups in their society? What did impell them to form their associations, and from there to work towards a unified political demand? (Seal 23). From these questions it is apparent that these historians were methodologically constrained to the extent that their analyses could only take into account the identity-formation process of only the educated Indian elite and their alliances and associations. They could only argue that the elite and their alliances were "fragile," that there were internal rivalries between caste and caste, community and community and what conferred unity on this otherwise uneven and disparate elite mobilizations was their western education (Seal 23).

In his *Rhetoric and Ritual in Colonial India* (1991) Douglas E. Haynes has taken issue with the Cambridge historians on the question of western education and its role in public culture. He acknowledges the formative influences of western education on the Indian elite. He admits that the exposure to European political traditions was instrumental in infusing liberal democratic ideals among the western educated Indian elite. But he contends that their education "must be considered a political process shared by the character of domination" (8). Educational institutions were certainly major sites of production of elite identity, but they were not the only sites. Further, the identity-formation *process* of the elite was not singular but multiple. The western political discourse was a reference point, but "different elites selected

different words and different colonial models from a larger potential repertoire" (15). Haynes shows that the hindu elite's claim to be representatives of an undifferentiated local public and the muslim elite's claim to be leaders of religious minorities were both "negotiatied versions of colonial political notions" (15).

In his study of the culture of politics in Surat city Haynes shows how the liberal democratic values of western origin "acquired very particular characteristics as a result of having been produced under colonial circumstances" (292). In tracking the politics of communalism and factionalism in the city Haynes argues that they are not "remnants of traditional social patterns that will eventually be overcome by liberal values. Rather they are the products of the rhetorical and practical adaptations of indigenous leaderships to the needs of representative systems they have been `granted' by their colonizer" (295). The suggestion he makes is that liberal-democratic ideals are contingent upon particular forms of domination and are not the natural outcome of universal human drives. The language of liberal democracy according to Haynes, has become the monopoly of those who have many years of formal education in the European style. Since political discourse in India operated within the limits of an alien political idiom - an idiom unknown to many underprivileged people -it would be quite a test of democracy if these underprivileged groups are given access to the liberal order.

While the Cambridge historians argued that democratic discourse merely masked the true concerns of the dominant groups in India, Haynes shows how the liberal democratic ideals in fact produced forms of domination. Unlike the Cambridge historians who had treated liberal-democratic ideals as basically "western" and continued to use western concepts such as "class," "bureaucracy," "capitalists," "aristocracy" etc. for their understanding of the Indian cultural and social forms.[1] Haynes argued that these liberal democratic ideals could be as oppressive in the west as anywhere. In fact, Haynes' idea is to "unravel the dominant western assumption that liberal democracy flows inevitably out of human nature, that it represents the culmination of the processes by which the world's peoples have sought to capture a voice in making their political environment" (296).

In their study of the movement of liberal democratic ideals in colonial India the Cambridge historians have persistently shown how their western educated followers used them to 'hide' their caste and community aspirations. Therefore, what they read in the nationalist movement in India was "a vast swell of aspirations and rivalry" (Seal 351) against which the ideals of liberal democracy proved weak and fragile. Haynes, instead, acknowledges not only the strength of the liberal democratic ideals and the various oppresive forms it has taken in India but also sees "the possibility that cultural order may yet develop that [will] provide greater scope for social justice and for a genuinely democratic participation in the shaping of the

political world" (296). Haynes' optimism, however, issues out of his recognition that "it is men and women who give shape to their culture, not the larger structures in which they live" (296). But one can see that Haynes' hope for democracy in India is articulated within the limits of a liberal democratic framework which he finds insufficient in its existing form. Such an articulation is made possible on account of a theoretical assumption that Indian democracy has "grown out of a colonial context rather than out of demands from deeper within society" (Haynes 295). What, in fact, accounts for the insufficiency of Haynes' theoretical framework is his disengagement with "the demands from deeper within society." Since Haynes tries to understand the movement of democracy in India within a framework of "colonial domination" he takes little notice of the resistances that were made both against the British and the native elites. Haynes describes the role of the western educated elite in the anti-colonial movement as only an "all-too-creative adaptation by local politicians to their participation in a representative policy established from above" (294). What comes across in such an account is not only a larger-than-life picture of the educated elite but also a too-insistent, portrayal of elite creativity, elite adaptability.

Such elite-based colonialist historiography, as we saw in Kopf, McCully, the Cambridge historians and Haynes, has obvious limitations. Here there seems to be an over-emphasis on the historical significance of the western educated individual and on

the western ideas of democracy, secularism, liberty, representative polity and the nation-state. In such a historiography it is the western educated individual who finally emerges as the only agent of action, and consequently history gets reduced to a biography highlighting his achievements and interventions.

Nationalist historiography has taken note of these idealistic and reductionist versions of colonial history and has recognized the implications of such histories for the native traditions of intellectual discourse. K.N. Panikkar, in his study of the various aspects of intellectual history of colonial India, has pleaded for a re-evaluation of "the generally accepted notion of a direct relationship between the western influence and intellectual commitment" (56). He takes note of a whole body of writing on nineteenth century India which includes among others the works of J.N. Farquhar, R.C. Majumdar, Charles Heimsath and David Kopf. Most of their historical writing, according to Panikkar, dealt with social reform movements and the rise of nationalism and traced changes in colonial society "directly to western influence on the Indian mind" (57). Panikkar also takes issue with the marxist historiography of Asok Sen and Sumit Sarkar on the ground that their works only demonstrated "how politico-economic structures warped the intellectual developments" (62) but could not "delineate how intellectual perceptions and positions were arrived at" (62). The questions that Panikkar chooses to ask are: who constituted intellectuals

in colonial India? How did they come into being socially and intellectually? What functions did they perform in the given social and political situation?

Panikar's use of the word "intellectual" is quite expansive. It is "not limited to a handful of activists but comprised a large number of lesser known people engaged in the elaboration and dissemination of ideas" (63). The advantages of such a notion of the "intellectual" are obviously enormous. In conventional descriptions, educational influences are usually taken as decisive for intellectual activity. But such descriptions, according to Panikkar, exclude "The role of social experience: how social factors mediate in the formation of intellectuals and the growth of consciousness" (64). By including "a large number of lesser known people" with social experience but without any educational influence in his description of the intellectual Panikkar hopes to displace education as a privileged site of production of cognitive ability. Further, he distinguishes two broad categories of educated intellectuals: one nurtured only on traditional knowledge, and the other on a combination of the western and the traditional. In the first group he includes Radhakanta Deb, Dayanand Saraswati and Narayan Guru, whereas the second group consisted of Rammohan Roy, Vivekanand, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Jawaharlal Nehru. After a careful perusal of the biographical information on these intellectuals, Panikkar concludes that "differences in the nature of formative educational influences did not prevent an identical mediation in

the social process" (69). He also shows how "similarity in intellectual influences did not lead to identical cognitive ability or social mediation" (69). What integrated this group of intellectuals reared on varied intellectual traditions, according to Panikkar, was their "commonly shared socio-political endeavours" (87) and their "common objective of social regeneration" (87). What these intellectuals created in the process was "the ideological base of a modern society, distinct from the traditional and colonial" (56). The problem with accepting such a framework for an understanding of intellectual discourse in colonial India is that its application to the analysis of issues such as sati, Anti-conversion Petition, or widow-remarriage is predictable and formulaic. It only remains to show, for example, how these various problems which were organized on regional and caste lines were "perceived as common to all Hindus and [how] the intellectuals in three presidencies borrowed arguments and counter-arguments from one another" (93).

By making "social experience" and not just English education a crucial factor in intellectual growth, Panikkar questions the commonly held assumption that the cultural-intellectual struggles in colonial India were engendered through western education. However, his valorization of the intellectual remains somewhat problematic.

The focus on the intellectual and on his exaggerated role in both early and late nationalist activity has been a point of discussion in the works of Sumit Sarkar. Sarkar's work *A Critique*

of Colonial India (1985) provides a framework in which the role of the nineteenth century intellectuals and reformers can be understood. Sarkar argues against any "overenthusiastic search for father-figures or precursors" (1985 70). Instead, he chooses to focus on the inadequacy of the historiographical models based on a tradition/modernity dichotomy in either describing the intellectuals or understanding "the specific logic of the colonial situation" (1985 vi). In constructing the logic of colonialism Sarkar shows how the colonial situation allowed voluntary consent, created faith in the good intentions of the British, gave birth to deep-seated liberal illusions and, above all, created a belief in English education as the sovereign panacea (1985 68). He proposes that it is only in such a context that the role of the intellectuals can be usefully understood. Their actions and their ideas, he maintains, need not be evaluated in terms of either their cognitive ability or cognitive failure. Rather, he says "the limitations of our intellectuals, radical or conservative alike, were connected with the socio-economic structure moulded by colonialism" (1985 68). Indicating the various specific ways in which the colonial situation warped, hindered or frustrated the aspiration of intellectuals in the Bengal Renaissance, he demonstrates the way the "translation of Western ideals of nationalism, political democracy and social equality into *real movements* was far more difficult for the colonial intelligentia drawn overwhelmingly from upper castes, dependent for their jobs and often landed interests on the

colonial structure and extremely distant from the masses" (1985 74).

Analysing the pro-peasant sympathies of the Bengali intellectuals, particularly of Rammohan Roy and the Derozians, Sarkar shows how the pro-raiyat changes in the Rent Bill and the Tenancy Act of 1885 which removed all restrictions on sub-letting of land were achieved through the organization of peasant meetings and Rent Unions. But he also shows how the breakthrough made in the Rent Bill and Tenancy Act was "of great help to 'ryots' settled in Calcutta or other urban centers and enjoying occupancy rights over agricultural lands" (1985 65). These Acts were helpful only to those who had left the country side and had come to settle in urban places with jobs they had got by virtue of their English education. Sarkar, however, does not reduce the occasional humanitarian sympathies of the intellectuals towards the peasants to some sort of failure on their part. He rather attributes it to the absence of any "agonized sense of alienation from the masses" (1985 67) - a sense of alienation which, according to Sarkar, would have "culminated in the going-to-the-people movement" (1985 67) but which was disallowed by the logic of colonialism. It was precisely this alienation from the masses that shaped the demands of progressive intellectuals - primarily indianization of services and a measure of representative government - at least till 1905.

Sarkar's work on the national movement is set against the challenge posed by the Cambridge school historians. Sarkar argues

that the focus of the Cambridge historians elite aspirations and/or factional squabbles is "a kind of neo-imperialist onslaught" (1985 vi). Further, he says that the work of the Cambridge school maintains "a basically elitist stance with its incessant search for relatively privileged groups whose `ambitions' are assumed to have 'created' political movements" (1985 77). Against this stance, Sarkar reads the national movement as a (failed?) moment which held a real possibility of mass movements inflecting/ directing a leadership drawn essentially from the bourgeoise.

The national leadership, according to Sarkar, was as much under pressure from the bourgeoisie as "from below" (1985 vi). Through a careful analysis of a few popular movements such as "Tebhaga" in Bengal and "Telengana" peasant movement in Hyderabad, he shows how in contrast these communist-led movements ended up in "self-defeating isolation in which guerilla war degenerated into sporadic individual terrorism" (1985 143). He further locates the limits and contradictions of communist leadership in its "policy of waiting on bourgeoise leaders and putting undeserved trust in their 'progressive' intentions" (1985 142). The significance of Indian independence, according to Sarkar, needs to be understood precisely within the limits and contradictions set up by the "inter-related labels of consciousness, both `elite' and `popular'" (1985 vii).

In exploring the relationship between popular movements and national leadership Sarkar seeks guidance from Antonio Gramsci's

concept of "`passive revolution': passive not in the sense of popular forces being inactive but, because the privileged groups in town and country were able to successfully detach attainment of political independence and unity from radical social change" (1985 143).

Sarkar's "history from below" provides only accounts of "Poor Peasants, sharecroppers, and agricultural labourers, labourers, often of low caste or tribal origin, [who] provided combustible material" (1985 143). This is consistent with his enterprise of seeking to explore "popular consciousness" and not of discovering "popular autonomy." Sarkar's argument seems to be that popular peasant consciousness can only be captured in its relation to elite consciousness and that "popular" and "elite" are not two distinct domains and that the meaning of "autonomy" has to be located in their "interpenetration, mutual (though obviously unequal) conditioning, and, implicitly, common roots in a specific social formation. Otherwise the subaltern would logically always remain subaltern, except in the unlikely event of a literal inversion" (Sarkar 1997 90). His historiographical method is quite useful in sofar as it explores, as it claims, the inter-related labels of popular and elite consciousness. But one could certainly ask: aren't we collapsing the questions of autonomy and dominance by choosing to describe the relationship between the elite and the subaltern as "obviously" unequal? Isn't the domain of the obvious precisely the domain of knowledge and power?

The question of autonomy and dominance and the study of their relationship have been major preoccupations with the group of historians whose practices form the core of a large body of writing known as *Subaltern Studies*.[2] The subaltern historians begin with the recognition that "The elitism of modern Indian historiography is an oppressive fact resented by many others, students, teachers and writers like ourselves" (Guha 1982 7). Their project is directly related to the way history is taught, written, and consumed under colonial and post-colonial situations. According to Ranajit Guha, historiography, like literature, was one of the principal instruments of a "curricular effort to educate Indians in liberal values" (1989 309). Guha shows how colonialist historiography which began as mercantilist writing and a means to educate the servants of the East India Company soon developed into a "genre" of writing. In fact, the influence of colonialist historiography, Guha contends, had "so thoroughly permeated the indigenous historical imagination by the second half of the century that the British and Indian narratives of the history of the raj were soon to acquire a family resemblance" (1989 308). Nationalist historiography which developed in "opposition" to colonialist practice showed a lot of "resemblance" to it.[3]

What is common to the colonialist and the nationalist historiography, the subaltern historians contend, is their elitist bias. Both share "the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of the consciousness -

nationalism - which informed this process, were exclusively or predominantly elite achievements" (Guha 1982 1). Guha, however, recognizes the value and the "use" of such historiography for those who seek "to understand the ideological character of historiography itself" (Guha 1982 3). Colonialist historiogrpahy whose beginning Guha traces to the publication of James Mill's *History of British India* (1818) was hardly concerned with India. Mill only "pretended to write the history of India while writing, in fact, the history of Britain in its South Asian career" (1989 291). Guha makes a similar observation with regard to nationalist historiography which "cannot explain Indian nationalism for us" (1982, 3) since it hardly spoke for the nation. The poverty of such historiography which spoke only for the elite lies, according to Guha, in its failure "to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of this nationalism" (1982 3; emphasis in the original).

Guha calls the practice of such historiography "one-sided," "blinkered" and "unhistorical." What clearly is left out of this historiography is the *politics of the people* - a domain of politics which is "autonomous," for it "neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter" (1982 4). However, Guha's description of subaltern politics in terms of "autonomy," "spontaneity," "consciousness" and "depth" should not be taken at their face value. His statement on the "autonomy" of subaltern politics as well as his location of "a structural

dichotomy" (1982 6) is not to emphasize that these two domains of subaltern and elite politics were "hermetically sealed off from each other and there was no contact between them" (1982 6). Instead, it is meant to show that a divergence of interest existed between subaltern politics and the strategic and tactical politics of the various segments of the nationalist leadership.

It is not a part of Subaltern Studies agenda to break up the world into two opposing identities - the elite and the subaltern. The subaltern historians do not seek a simple inversion of the importance given to the elites and their politics. Neither do they intend to valorize the political actions taken by the subaltern classes.[4] Instead, their work seeks to expose the tendency both in colonialist and nationalist historiography "to contain all of politics within a single elitist domain" (Guha 1989 305). The inadequacy of the elitist historiography, Guha contends, follows "directly from the narrow and partial view of politics to which it is committed by virtue of its class outlook" (1982 3). The consequences of such a class outlook in historiography, according to Guha, is enormous. On the one hand, such an outlook reduces political action to an "effect" of collaboration and competition between the ruling and indigenous elite. On the other hand, it excludes all popular action from the domain of politics and history "[when] nothing is left to politics but collaboration, resistance stands expurgated as an irrelevance and an elaboration without requiring further argument" (Guha 1989 300).

The subaltern intervention, therefore, needs to be understood precisely in the context of "the narrow and partial view of politics" that underwrites much of colonialist and nationalist historiography. The parameters that traditional historiography uses to understand politics are those that "equate politics with the aggregation of activities and ideas of those who were directly involved" (Guha 1982 4). Instead, the subaltern historian discerns two kinds of political "languages": the language characterizing the project of nation-building involving the rituals of the state, political representation, citizenship, citizen's rights etc; the language derived from power-relationships and ideological formations that pre-date colonialism. One is the privileged vocabulary of the Indian elite classes and constitutes a part of our colonial heritage, the other is the language which has very little to do with the language of citizen-politics: "that other language of politics, which is the politics of a nation without `citizens'" (Chakrabarty 1985 376).

The two political langauges and the two "contradictory" political cultures that they represented came to a sharp visibility with the coming of mass politics in modern India. Elite politics derived its language through the media and institutions of an English-style education. The educated elites who read in their English textbook about the virtues of political culture in the west used the English idiom of rights and liberties in their anti-colonial struggle. Their politics,

therefore, acquired a peaceful aspect as they pressed the colonial rulers "to match their administration to their own ideals" (Guha 1989 266). According to Guha, the educated middle class leadership had "taken the `sacred' English idiom of rightful Dissent too seriously for the (colonial) regime's comfort" (1989 267). The politics of elite was thus bound within the legal and constitutional limits set by the colonial authorities. More important, these limits were not imposed on the elites, they were acquired by them systematically through English education. But the influence of their politics went only as far as the influence of English language and therefore had no mass appeal.

Partha Chatterjee has explored in great detail the difficulty which the liberal elite had to face in reconciling the rationalist forms of an `enlightened' nationalist politics with the modes of thought characteristic of peasant consciousness. While concluding his masterly reading of Gandhism and its mass appeal, he says: "We get, in the historical effectivity of Gandhism as a whole, the conception of a national framework of politics in which the peasants are mobilized but do not participate, of a nation of which they are a part, but a nation-state from which they are for ever distanced" (1986 125). It is precisely in this context that Chatterjee wants us to understand Nehru's observation that Gandhian politics bridged the gap between "the English educated class" and "the mass of the population."

Gandhi's intervention in the elite nationalist politics, no doubt, made it clear that an authentic national movement could only be built upon the support of the mass. It is possible to argue that this was the context in which the English educated elite came to recognize the value of the vernacular languages for purposes of mass mobilization. Guha has shown how Gandhi invented a political idiom of mass appeal through a careful grafting of the western liberal notions of liberty and citizenship onto the Hindu ideology of *Dharma*, identified as "*Satya*" (1989 269). The use of a dharmic idiom in the vernacular, no doubt, was useful in mobilizing the masses but, as Guha argues, it hardly proved the authority of Satyagraha theory itself. Recent research has also shown that popular mobilization during the nationalist struggle very often took violent forms which undermined the authority of satyagraha.[5] Further, the expectations of the peasantry were in violent contradiction to the stated goals and methods of the nationalist leadership. The elite's recourse to the idiom of *dharma* was "to justify and explain the initiatives by which they hoped to make their subordinates relate to them as non-antagonistically as possible" (Guha 1989 244). The dharmic idiom was expected, on the one hand, "to stop popular militancy from 'going too far'" and on the other, "to stop class struggle from boiling over into armed conflict" (Guha 1989 265).But, in the process, the elite in its attempt to speak for the nation had come to "rely heavily on the traditional idiom of *Dharma*, with the curious result that something as contemporary as nineteenth-and-twentieth-century nationalism often made its appearance in

political discourse dressed up as ancient Hindu wisdom" (Guha 1989 245). Further, an exclusive emphasis on hindu *dharma*, Guha argues, "divided the nation, ranging peasantry against rural gentry, the Namsudras against upper castes, and above all, Muslims and Hindus against each other" (1989 246). The significance of such an argument is that it stops blaming colonialism for "all the uncomfortable aspects of popular mentality, such as `casteism,' `regionalism,' `communalism' etc." Instead, it questions the category of the "nation" and poses the failure of the "nation" to come to its own as "a fundamental problem of modern Indian history" (Chakrabarty 1995 373).

It is clear from the above account of the recent historiography in/on India that accounts of Indian nationalism are powerfully engaging with the relation between the popular and the elite. It is equally clear that an elite class which grew into the `national' leadership in the early decades of the twentieth century was significantly constituted by a modern English education which enabled it to push for enhanced political power. This bid for political power was locked in with the question of mass mobilization, a question which is complicit with the use of the vernacular. However, education in a vernacular envisaged as `national' was hardly different from `English' education. (I will argue this point in the following chapter.) The subaltern perspective offers to the above understanding the insight that alongside mainstream debates on education, arguably a major site of nationalist consolidation, powerful critiques of

education are available in terms set outside the colonial-national paradigm. These critiques might refigure our understanding of the relationship between the 'popular' and the 'elite' and might thereby allow us to rethink the question of English and the vernacular. In the following section, I will take up one such critique for analysis.

Section II

Ambedkar and a possible critique of education in India

Education has been at the heart of the nation-building project in India since 1947. The various Reports, formulas, Bills, Acts and policies adopted by the Indian government have always emphasized the centrality of the question of the "nation" to our education system. A recent example of one such document would be the University Grants Commission (UGC) guidelines to the universities asking for Seventh Plan Proposals.[6] The UGC document suggests that "development" should take place in the spirit of the National Education Policy of 1986. The most important aspect of the Policy, the universities are told, is the realization that "education is a means of national development at all levels - economic, political and social and that the development plans of the universities should try to translate this realization into reality" (1). The immensity of the educational task for "national development" is further deepened with declarations such as:

a) India's political and social life has got totally eroded and we are at the threshold of collapse of traditional values.

It is the education system alone which can retrieve the situation in this regard (4).

b) In our culturally pluralistic society, education should foster universal and eternal values which are oriented towards the unity and integration of our people and should help eliminate obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition and fatalism etc. (4).

c) All educational programmes will be carried on in strict conformity with secular values (5).

d) There should be adequate educational opportunities for weaker sections, minorities etc. and, in fact, there should be education for all (2).

The UGC document lists all that is desirable in the production of an enlightened and humane society. But one thing that has become clear in the last fifty years of policy-making is that there is a fragility at the very heart of the nation-building project. The visibility of such a fragile core is simultaneous with a crisis in civil society. Although it is easy to envisage, as the UGC document does, the movement of education in terms of "progress" and "development" it could perhaps be useful to read this movement as singularly undemocratic, especially in the wake of various contestations in the name of `language', `caste', `class', `community', `region', `religion', `gender' etc. In fact, the very idea of progress, as Antonio Gramsci has tellingly delineated, depends on `a specific mentality'; it implies "the

possibility of quantitative and qualitative measuring, of `more' and `better'; it supposes a "fixed" or fixable yardstick - a yardstick which is "given by the past, by a certain phase of the past" (Gramsci 357). Thus, the question of defining the "nation," as indeed of "progress," in the present circumstances no longer remains as unproblematic as the UGC document assumes.

It is evident that the UGC document valorizes only a particular notion of the "nation" and offers it not only as being desirable but as being "natural" and "normal." The consequences of maintaining such a monolithic and unitary idea of the nation are enormous. Such an identity, by necessity, excludes diverse and contestatory elements and dismisses them as divisive and dangerous. For example, the diverse and pluralistic nature of the Indian society is emphasized in the UGC document, but it is quickly subverted. This subversion is naturalized in the name of "unity and integration of our people" (4). This has been consistent with the language of the nation since independence. Some of the questions which need to be raised here are the following: what is the nature of this language which makes a subversion look so natural and normal? How is such a language constituted? What is it in the language of the nation that ensures the consistent and repetitive production of a flat and singular national identity?

There have been several moves in the recent past to dismantle the image of a unified nation. These moves have taken several shapes and have occurred across several practices. Within

the academia the effort has been on critiquing the underlying logic of representations of unity.[7] There is a growing realization that our understanding of the nation has been consistently singular and that it has failed us historically, politically and, what is more important, conceptually. A singular concept of the "nation" has neglected and is still neglecting a powerful history which has grown and is still growing outside history as nation. Such an exclusionary representation of the nation has further led us into various impasses and aporias on account of its refusal to acknowledge, understand or engage with various other identities, claims, protests and contestations made beside the 'national' identity. What seems to have emerged today is the recognition that our national identity is predicated on an elite and pervasive agenda of nation-building. However, this elitism in the nation-building activity is now challenged by a set of rival definitions of the nation that are being made outside and against the avowed intentions of state policy.

The current visibility of a parallel history of rival definitions marks a highly self-conscious phase of our historical engagement with the question of the "nation." It is argued that the idea of the "nation" and "nationalism" can no longer be taken for granted. It is, no doubt, praiseworthy to bring patriotic sentiments to bear on the history of Indian nationalism, but such sentiments scarcely advance knowledge about our immediate past - a past which is increasingly becoming distant on account of our uncritical acceptance of the Indian nationhood.

It has been argued recently that "while the historical conjuncture in the west favoured a convergence between the nation and nationalism, it did not do so in the subcontinent. Nationalism here largely diverged from the nation and advanced towards the formation of a state-system (Aloysius 226). What underlies such an argument is the idea that the Indian nationalism is historically comparable to the nationalisms of the west. In fact, there is a large body of work on the Indian nationalism which operates precisely within such comparative frameworks, invariably producing eurocentric readings of nationalism. The various nationalisms of the west emerge, in these readings, as "progressive," "genuine," "ideal" and, above all, "political," as against the subcontinental nationalism which is seen as "derivative," "reactionary" and at best, "cultural."

Partha Chatterjee, in his *Nationalist Thought and The Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*(1986), has shown the inadequacy of such comparative models for the study of nationalism in India. He argues that it would be dogmatic to assert that Indian nationalism and "its logical principles and theoretical concepts are wholly derived from another framework of knowledge - that of modern Western rational thought" (1986 41). But he does not suggest that there was no borrowing and that nationalist thought is exclusively culture specific. Instead, he argues that "nationalist thought is selective about what it takes from Western rational thought. Indeed, it is deliberately and necessarily selective. Its political burden, as we have said, is

to oppose colonial rule" (1986 41). Chatterjee argues that there is a "historical" process through which nationalist discourse has constituted itself; it did not "simply `emerge' out of a social structure or out of the supposedly objective workings of a world historical process" (1986 40) but was thought out, formulated, propagated and defended in the battlefield of politics.

What, therefore, needs to be explored, according to Chatterjee, is the process through which "a unity was established between nationalist thought and nationalist politics" (1986 40). Chatterjee, of course, is aware that nationalist thought, even though it claimed for itself a certain unity and autonomy, was far from being monolithic. However, his project is not merely to contest the unity of the nationalist ideology, but to identify the `positive' aspect of this unity which seeks "to assert the feasibility of entirely new political possibilities" (1986 40). His attempt to study the nationalist ideology in terms of `unity' and `content' seems to be the outcome of such a project. He suggests that there is a relation between the content of nationalist discourse and the kind of politics which nationalism conducts. It is the content of the nationalist ideology, its claims about what is possible and what is legitimate which, according to Chatterjee, give "specific shape to its politics" (1986 40). A study of the politics and ideology of nationalism would, therefore, involve not only an exploration of the unity of nationalist thought and "the possibilities it seeks to actualize in the unified life of the state" (1986 51) but a process of

showing "how some possibilities are emphasized, others erased, how the marks of disjuncture are suppressed and the rational continuity of a progressive historical development established" (1986 52).

What is particularly significant here is Chatterjee's suggestion that "the critical analysis of nationalist thought is also necessarily an intervention in the political discourse of our own time" (1986, 52). In his engagement with the question of the nation and nationalism Chatterjee poses the problematic of the ideological creation of the nation as a central problem in the political discourse of our time. The implication of this is that the question of the nation has to be posed in the context of the intellectual history of nineteenth century India, and not the history of modern Europe. Aijaz Ahmad makes a similar argument that "The *historically* adequate referent for Indian nationhood exists in India in the shape of the history of the national movement itself" (1997 278). Ahmad argues that the political concepts and practices of western origin such as 'nationhood', 'constitutionality', 'citizenship', 'democracy' and 'socialism' they can no longer be treated as a mere legacy of imperialism; "*Words* may have originated in Europe, but the historical adequacy of the *referent* can only be established through reference to practices undertaken within India by Indian political subjects" (1997 279; emphasis in the original).

One of the major political achievements of the modern Indian state, according to Ahmad, is that it became a secular,

democratic republic immediately after independence. But there is an urgency to re-evaluate the political "achievements" of postcolonial India at this time when there is a tendency to take its secular-democratic character for granted. Some of the achievements of this state were the offer of adult franchise to all men and women at the very founding moment of electoral democracy. One can consider these events as the logical consequence of the success of the freedom struggle. But it would only establish an unproblematic continuity between the years that preceded independence and the years that followed. It is worth noting here that until 1946 franchise was extended to only a small minority of the population and that the nationalists had accepted the prescription of wealth and education as conditions for the exercise of public authority. The extension of franchise irrespective of wealth and education is certainly an achievement of the modern Indian state, but it is precisely the one which effectively erased a powerful history of struggle over education. The politically charged and highly heterogenous articulations of the period preceding independence were at once rewritten into the quietist languages of social policy and legislative reform. However, the burden of that unresolved struggle continues to inform the various agendas of the Indian state and its education policy now as evidenced in the resolutions made in the UGC document. It is, in fact, possible to argue that the government resolutions are strategic and always haunted by that which they write out of their schemes, plans and proposals. It is important, therefore to understand the concepts of 'nation' and

'nationhood' as historically constituted in which education figures as a major site of contestation.

The colonial education system had produced effects that became increasingly contentious during the time of independence. It was mostly on account of its entanglement with questions of the nation, subject and citizenship that the issue of education came to acquire a new dimension. It is true that education was an offer of the colonial state but this offer, as I have argued in Chapter 1, was only to enlist a class of people who would assist the colonial state in its goverance. It was not the agenda of the colonial state to institute citizenship through education. This is, of course, not to forget that the colonial state had its own reportoire of address whereby a native population could be called "the natural-born subjects of Her Majesty." The struggle over education during the national movement was as much against the colonial state as it was within the native society. The narratives of the anti-colonial struggle over education were mostly spun around the English/vernacular debate, whereas the struggle within the native society was structured by resistance towards the monopoly of a certain caste/class/community. It is precisely in this context that a reading of B.R. Ambedkar is in order. The significance of Ambedkar lies in his forceful articulation of the relationship between caste and education. He has written such a great deal on this particular issue that it makes no sense to try to present here anything like a fair assessment of the richness and complexity of his thought. All I

propose to do here is to concentrate on some of his essays in order to show how certain crucial issues relating to access to education are neglected on account of too much emphasis on the English/vernacular debate in mainstream nationalism.[8]

In 1928 Ambedkar submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission a statement concerning the state of education of the Depressed classes in Bombay Presidency. On the surface, the statement constitutes a sweeping overview of the history of the education policy of the Government from 1813 to 1923. But the significance of the statement lies in its analysis of the history of delegitimization of a certain community through a selective appraisal of events, years and documents. It is also important to note here that this community of people did not have any fixed designation. Earlier, such designations as "Low castes," "Backward Hindus," "Backward classes," "Depressed classes," "Untouchables" were used interchangeably; Ambedkar accepts the interchangeability of these descriptions. In fact, it was only with the Government of India Act of 1935 that a semantic stability was forced on what was earlier a community of fluid boundaries. All these designations took the generic title of "Scheduled Castes" as late as 1935. Ambedkar's "State of Education" report, I argue, charts quite effective the process through which caste reemerged as a category of political contestation under the British rule.

Ambedkar's reference to the state of education under the Peshwas is particularly significant. He argues that under the

Peshwa government the depressed classes were entirely out of the pale of education. What was the reason for such a deprivation? Ambedkar's answer is: "for the simple reason that the Peshwa's Government was a theocracy based upon the canons of Manu, according to which the Shudras and Atishudras [classes corresponding to the Backward Classes of the Education department], if they had any right to life, liberty and property had certainly no right to education" (1928 409). The advent of the British rule, according to Ambedkar, raised hopes among the Depressed classes as they thought that the British administration promised a democracy "which believed in the principle of one man, one value, be that man high or low" (1928 409). The point of comparison however ends there as Ambedkar goes on to show how "the British Government deliberately ruled that education was to be a preserve for the higher classes" (1928 409). He showed how it was argued in the Report of the Board of Education of the Bombay Presidency for the Year 1850-51 that "Educational Boards ought not to allow themselves to be distracted from a more limited practical field of action by the visionary speculations of uniformed benevolence" (in Ambedkar 1928 412). The question, therefore, was not merely of whether to give education through English or the vernaculars, but, more importantly, of how to ascertain "the field of action," which would be "practical" and not "visionary." To put it differently, the difficulty with the Government was how to ascertain the precise extent of the native population to which education should penetrate.

Ambedkar refers to the particular difficulty which the colonial state had to face in deciding what "upper classes" exactly meant in the context of India. He refers to the kind of injunctions that were often made to the European inquirer "to divert his mind of European analogies which so often insinuated themselves almost involuntarily into Anglo-Indian speculations" (in Ambedkar 1928, 413). Ambedkar points out that the colonial government believed that in England there was a clear line which separated the upper classes from the lower classes in terms of manners, wealth, political and social influence, but no such line of separation obtained in the colonial society. Hence the government had to put together such a class. What, therefore, came to be designated as "upper classes" consisted of the following people in the native society:

> 1st. The land owners and jaghirdars, representatives of the former feudatories and persons in authorities under Native Powers, and who may be termed the Soldier class.
> 2nd. Those who have acquired wealth in trade or commerce or the commercial class.
> 3rd. The higher *employees* of Government.
>
> 4th. Brahmins with whom may be associated though at long interval those of higher castes of writers who live by the pen such as Prabhus and Shenvis in Bombay, Kayasthas in Bengal, provided they acquire a position either in learning or station. (in Ambedkar 1928 413; emphasis in the original).

Ambedkar, however, goes on to show how the British official opinion before 1855 was decidedly in favour of the brahmins. The official analysis demonstrated that "the influential class whom the Government are able to avail themselves of in diffusing the seeds of education are the Brahmins and other high castes *Brahmannis proximi*" (in Ambedkar 1928, 412). Ambedkar notes that in the Despatch of 1854 the Court of Directors recognized the neglect on the part of the government to educate "the great mass of the people who are utterly incapable of obtaining any education worthy of the name by their own efforts" (415). However, he refers to the Hunter Commission of 1882 to show that "although mass education was the policy of the government, the masses were as outside the pale of education as they were before the year 1854 and that the lowest and aboriginal classes of the Hindus still remained lowest in order of education; so much so that in 1881-82 there was no student from that community either in the High Schools or in the colleges of the presidency" (1928 417). The lifting of the ban on the education of the Depressed classes, Ambedkar argued, was a nominal affair as "the ban continued in practice as before" (1928 419). In order to show how the principle of non-exclusion was in fact compromised in practical operation, Ambedkar gives the example of a petition submitted to the government in June 1856 by a Mahar boy who had complained that "though willing to pay the usual schooling fee, he had been denied admission to the Dharwar Government School." (in Ambedkar 1928 418) The Government Resolution of July 1856 admitted that "the Mahar petitioner has abstract justice on his

side" and that "the disadvantage under which the petitioner labours is not one which has originated with this government." But the resolution held that the "Government is obliged to keep in mind that to interfere with the prejudices of ages in a summary manner, for the sake of one or a few individuals, would probably do a great damage to the cause of education" (in Ambedkar 1928 418). The government in its effort to find a way out of the "impasse" created by the "prejudices of ages," says Ambedkar, adopted two measures: (1) the institution of separate government schools for low caste boys; and,(2) the extension of special encouragement to missionary bodies to undertake their education by relaxing the rules in grant-in-aid. However, the opening of separate schools was given up in practice as it involved expenses unacceptable "to a Government to which primary education was a task" (1928 424). Besides, the provision that such schools should be opened where backward classes were in large number, according to Ambedkar, worked against the Backward classes as they could "seldom be found to be living in one locality in large numbers" (1928 424). The stocktaking by the Hunter Commission in 1882 showed only a very meagre presence of backward classes in primary education and no presence at all in the secondary and college education. Ambedkar further cites the Report of the Director of Public Instruction, Bombay Presidency for the year 1923-24 which showed "no improvement over the situation as it stood in 1882 relatively speaking" (1928 421). In the matter of population, the Backward classes were greater in number but in the matter of education they occupied a place which

was not only last but was the least. The "Advanced Hindus," on the other hand, occupied the fourth place in order of population but they were first in order of college education, first in order of secondary education and first in order of primary education. This according to Ambedkar, reveals "the disparity that exists in the educational advancement of the different communities" (1928 421).

Ambedkar's "State of Education" report of 1928 can be better understood in relation to the historical development of elite-nationalist politics in India. To the mainstream nationalists of the pre-independence period, the "main enemy" in India was imperialism. Ambedkar, no doubt, agreed that the Backward classes needed national independence to have a stake in political power. But for him the internal caste/class exploiter was no less an enemy. He, in fact, declared that it hardly mattered whether the exploiter was a Hindu or a European : "The Hindu is as alien to him [the untouchable] as a European is" (1945 425) For him both imperialism and feudalism/casteism are indissolubly connected. In his speech at the Round Table Conference in 1930 he declared:

> That the British, who have held so large a sway over us for such a long time, have done some good we cheerfully acknowledge. But, there is certainly no fundamental change in our position. Indeed, so far as we were concerned, the British Government has accepted the social arrangements as it found them, and has preserved them faithfully in the manner of the Chinese tailor

> who, when given an old coat as a pattern, produced with pride an exact replica, rents, patches and all. Our wrongs have remained as open sores and they have not been righted, although 150 years of British rule have rolled away (1930 504).

The British Government, according to Ambedkar, neither intended nor was equipped to bring about any revolutionary change in the social politics of India. It suffered from two serious limitations: "There is first an internal limitation which arises from the character, motives and interests of those who are in power...The second consideration that limits its authority is the mortal fear it has of external resistance" (1930 505). Within these limits, however, the British Government affected certain changes serious enough to transform the traditional forms of dominance and resistance into modern forms. By transforming the dominant castes into a unified bureaucracy the British Government established a link between social dominance and state power. Ambedkar's argument that the hundred and fifty years of British rule produced only "an exact replica" of traditional social arrangements was not meant to emphasize the changelessness in the native society. Rather, it was intended to show how the British rule only strengthened the traditional social structure and empowered the already powerful.

Ambedkar argued that the changes brought about by the British hardly had any effect on the native social structure in spite of the "modern" conditions created by the colonial state

where "men of all castes and races work side by side in the mill without any misgivings regarding the caste of their neighbours" (1932 493). Ambedkar's observation had reference to the popular perception that this co-mingling of caste under modern conditions was evidence of the disappearance of the caste-system. But Ambedkar argued that the everyday life in the colonial society had made it impossible for the upper-castes to follow the same rules they had followed a hundred years ago. The educated upper-castes who were aspiring for ranks in the colonial society had effectively adjusted to the demands of modernity. They had come to deny caste in public spaces while practicing it privately. This, according to Ambedkar, was a "modern" phenomenon of caste peculiar to a society under the colonial rule. He cites the statement made by the Census Superintendent of Bihar and Orissa in 1921 that the non-observance of caste in native society need not be regarded as a "sign portending the collapse of the caste system, but of its adjustment to modern conditions" (1932 493).

It was precisely in the context of such "modern" practices of the caste system that Ambedkar was critical of the "reforms" introduced by the upper-caste/upper-class intelligentsia. Ambedkar argued that "while the intelligentsia is a very important part of Indian society, it is drawn from its upper-strata and although it speaks in the name of the country and leads the political movement, it has not shed the narrow particularism of the class from which it is drawn" (1930 506). It was often argued by the

nationalist intelligentsia that "the problem of the Depressed Classes is a social problem and that its solution lies elsewhere than in politics" (1930 506). The Congress-led political movement, according to Ambedkar, consistently avoided the issue of social reform on the pretext that "we stand upon a common platform - here we have all agreed to bury our social, religious differences and recognize one common fact that being subjects of the same Soverign and living under the same Government and the same political institutions, we have common rights and common grievances" (in Ambedkar 1945 10). This statment by Surendranath Bannerjee, the Congress President in 1895, only echoed the words of W.C. Bannerjee who in his presidential address in 1892 had declared: "I am one of those who have very little faith in the public discussion of social matters; those are things which I think, ought to be left to the individuals of a community who belong to the same social organization to do what they can do for its improvement... the Congress commenced and has since remained, and will, I sincerely trust, always remain as a purely political organization devoting its energies to political matters and political matters only" (in Ambedkar 1945 9). In his reading of the history of Congress party, Ambedkar showed how efforts were made by the Congress intelligentsia to keep the social issue separate from the political and how the representatives of the Depressed classes were against such a separation. In 1917 a resolution was made in a public meeting of the Depressed classes which maintained that the disabilities imposed by religion and custom worked against their admission into public schools,

hospitals, courts of justice and public offices. It also resolved that "these disabilities, social in origin, amount in law and practice to political disabilities and as such fall legitimately within the political mission and propaganda of the Indian National Congress" (in Ambedkar 1945 15).

The struggle over the social and the political was at the heart of the debate during India's struggle over freedom. The Congress, according to Ambedkar, regarded the freedom of India from the British imperialism to be the be-all and end-all of the Indian nationalism. Against this view Ambedkar held that there were two different aspects to the politics of India which he called "foreign politics" and "constitutional politics." India's foreign politics "relate to India's freedom from British Imperialism, while the constitutional politics of India centre round the nature of a constitution for a free India" (1945 440). However, the constitutional demands made by the Depressed classes for safeguards and guarantees for minimum representation in the legislature, executive and public services were held by the Congress as expressions not only of "communalism" but also of "pro-British" attitudes and the leaders of the Depressed classes were also called "job-hunters" (Ambedkar 1945 170). The Congress leadership maintained that

> what the Indians must aim at is to maintain in India an efficient body politic and that this can be done only by insisting that every place of power and

authority should be filled by none but the best men available (in Ambedkar 1945 474).

The Congress attitude to the Depressed class demand for reservation in public services only consolidated the attitude of the brahmins and the allied castes who had argued that "efficiency" should be "the only consideration in the matters of appointment to public services and that caste and creed should count for nothing" (1929 394). The brahminical notion of efficiency was based on educational merit and was in favour of appointment by open competition as against by reservation. The argument for open competition has no doubt an "appearance of fairness" but, according to Ambedkar, it "completely fails to carry conviction when in practice one finds that having regard to the historical circumstances of India every time the 'best man' is choosen, he turns out to be a man from the governing class" (1945 475) - the class which still consists principally of brahmins and the allied castes.

Through a careful examination of the role of caste in the promotion of education in the colonial society Ambedkar showed how the supremacy of the brahmin was neither a matter of historical accident nor of superior intellect -- "for intellect is nobody's monopoly" (1945 477) - but was enmeshed with the question of domination, exploitation and oppression. Ambedkar's intervention provides a rethinking of the question of merit and efficiency. The uncritical acceptance of the educational merit of a particular caste/class/community had and

continues to have enormous effect on the conduct of Indian politics. Ambedkar's "State of Education" report shows that education, which was a major site of contestation in the colonial society, eventually promoted the advancement of "the upper classes." The question of caste was crucial to the question of self-government which involved issues of franchise, representation and electoral power. In the Round Table Conference Speech in 1930, Ambedkar had specifically criticized the proposal for a franchise based on literacy by saying that "literacy in India is so unevenly distributed, that some communities would have all the increase of the franchise added to their stock, while other communities would remain where they are" (1930a 562).

The introduction of adult franchise at the dawn of the Indian independence, however, seems to have severed the link between caste and education. But a reading of Ambedkar in independent India, I believe, is useful for understanding the return of the caste question. The Mandal Commission Report only reiterated the complicity of caste and education. By raising the issue of "reservations" in the services, it brought in the question of merit and efficiency back into the political discourse of our time. This reading of Ambedkar suggests that the idea of education as a site where `merit' and `efficiency' are produced is problematic. In fact, his understanding of education in terms of the political and the social opens up the question of merit itself.

What is equally significant in Ambedkar's writings is that they are hardly concerned with the English-vernacular question. The issue in these writings relates to the question of differential access to education and the modernization of caste. The question of the democratization of education under colonialism is problematic in the face of evidence showing the systematic denial of education to the 'Depressed classes.' Caste critiques of education focus on the production of privilege in the social and political domain, often through incisive analysis of the notions of merit and efficiency produced through education. On the other hand, mainstream debates on education have centred around the assumed opposition between the colonial and the indigenous. This opposition often manifested as the Engish-vernacular debates. In the following chapter, I will examine the national elite's manner of engagement with the vernacular question focussing on its implications for national education.

Notes

1. See, for example, Bayly (x).

2. *Subaltern Studies*, in many ways, represents a significant movement in Indian historiography. The work of *Subaltern* writers is substantial and often related to each other only loosely. Hence, instead of a futile attempt at a summary, I have focussed on those essays which theorize the Subaltern project; primarily Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the

Historiography of Colonial India," *Subaltern Studies I* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1982) 1-7, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "An Invitation to a Dialogue," *Subaltern Studies IV* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1985) 364-376 and Guha, "Dominance Without Hegemony and Its Historiography," *Subaltern Studies VI* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1989) 210-309.

3. Partha Chatterjee has also made this point in *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1986). See 36-53.

4. For a detailed exposition of the *Subaltern* project, see Chakrabarty, 1985, 364-376.

5. See, for example, David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District, 1917-1934* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1981) and Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995).

6. *Guidelines to the Universities for Preparation of Development Proposals for the Seventh Plan*, University Grants Commission, New Delhi, 1986.

7. See, for example, Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for `Indian' Pasts?" in *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995*, ed., Ranajit Guha (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1998) 263-293; Vivek Dhareshwar, "`Our Time': History, Sovereignty and Politics" *Economic and Political Weekly* 30.6 (1995): 317-324; Sudipta Kaviraj, "The

Imaginary Institution of India," . . *Subaltern Studies VII*, eds. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1992) 1-39. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994).

8. The two texts that I have referred to extensively are "Statement Concerning the State of Education of the Depressed Classes in the Bombay Presidency," (1928) *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 2. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1982) 407-428 and *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*, 1945, vol. 9 of *Writings and Speeches* (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1991). For all other citations, refer *Works Consulted*.