CHAPTER 1

The Pioneers

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a nation as an ‘extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory’. It adds that in earlier usage, the racial idea is usually stronger than the notion of political unity and independence. This definition, though accurate and comprehensive, requires a little elaboration before its meaning can be fully grasped. While many Jews wandered from place to place, a minority stayed on in Palestine under alien rulers. But in spite of persecution and wanderings, they retained their national unity, though they had no political independence at home or abroad; the secret of their strength lay in their strict adherence to their religion, and more than that, in their intense consciousness of racial integrity.

The important point, however, is that though there might be other factors such as common language or religion, the essence of nationality lies in territorial integrity with political sovereignty. The other factors aid in the growth of nationalism but may also embarrass it. Palestine, with Jerusalem, was occupied by the Arabs in 615 A.D., and then it passed on to the Seljuk Turks, who were superseded by the Ottomans in 1517. For centuries the Jews nursed their dream of recovering their homeland in Palestine and succeeded in realizing it only in 1948. The neighbouring Arab countries, all Muslim, refused to recognize it, but the new Jewish state of Israel, where religious fervour is matched by military strength, has not only held its own against Arab hostility, but also considerably extended its territories. One may object to Israel’s aggressiveness or question the propriety of the diplomatic moves which preceded the creation of this national homeland for the Jews. Here we are concerned with the concept of nationalism, and the example of Israel only shows that the common consciousness
should be symbolized by a sovereign national state.

How other factors sustain and also bedevil the sentiment of nationalism may be realized if we look at the growth of Islam and Islamic states. Religion is a unifying factor that binds one man to another; and Islam, which believes in the unity of God and the equality of man, was from its early beginnings destined to become a world religion, spreading over different countries inhabited by people of different races speaking different languages. A new cementing force was the Caliph (the Viceroy of Mohammed), whose name was to be uttered by every Muslim in his daily prayers. When the Caliphate was assumed by the Turkish Sultan in 1517, Islam seemed to be on the way to becoming the unifying principle of a world state. But the experience of the Islamic Caliphate combined with the Turkish Sultanate has only proved the truth of what Swami Vivekananda said in another context, that it is not possible to establish either a universal religion or a universal empire. It is possibly the vastness of the Turkish Sultan’s empire which contributed to its decay. Within a few centuries Turkey came to be known as ‘the sick man of Europe’; and the Sultan’s authority in distant provinces was then only nominal. By the time the First World War broke out, there were murmurings of revolt both in Turkey and in the outlying provinces. Some had already broken away and others were preparing to do so. Curiously enough, this assault from opposite directions was based on the territorial principle of nationalism. The Arab world, although divided into various factions, was united in its efforts to throw off the yoke of foreign Turkish domination; and the new generation in Turkey, while professing unflinching loyalty to Islam, wanted to go back to their Turanian roots, and even to get rid of the Arabic accretions in the Turkish language. The result was that at the end of the First World War the only champions of the Caliphate, which was equally unacceptable to Arab and Turkish nationalists, were Indian Muslim leaders like the Ali brothers, Ameer Ali and the Aga Khan and the great Hindu sponsor of the Khilafat, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who was ‘sure’ but not ‘absolutely sure’ of the rights of the Sultan-Caliph. No wonder that first the Sultanate and then the Caliphate was unceremoniously abolished by Mustapha Kamal Pasha.
Another notable attempt was made by Karl Marx (1818–83) to found a new order (or a new religion?) by uniting the workers of the world in a classless society, and it is partly with this end in view that the Comintern (1919–43) or the Third Communist International was established in Russia. But as Stalin himself opted for Socialism in One Country, it is the Comintern that withered away. This may sound as an oversimplification of history, but the fact remains that in the foreseeable future there is little prospect of the supersession of nationalism. The constituent elements of nationalism are many—homogeneity in language, culture, racial descent, religion and so forth and so on, but its essence is love for a homeland that is compact and integrated. The love for the motherland is like the love for one's mother. It is for such a land that the Jews yearned for centuries, and it is after being deprived of such a homeland that the Palestinian Arabs are moaning today, ready to fight to their last breath. This very common sentiment finds its simplest and best expression in Scott’s well-known lines:

Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!

II

The concept of nationalism is, indeed, very ancient. The prehistoric legends which were transformed by the poetic genius of Homer show the rulers of very small principalities banding themselves together to defend Greek national honour. Compared with Greece, India is a vast country protected on all sides by natural frontiers—the mountain ranges on the north and the sea on the other sides, not to speak of the dense forests which gave additional protection in the east. Its name Bhārat-varsha takes us back to a legendary semi-divine king Bharat who must have wielded suzerain power over scattered kingdoms, of which we get glimpses in the old epics; and some indologists think that ‘Varsha’ has reference to the plentiful rains which made this vast tract fertile. Ancient sages who have handed down a large legacy of cultural tradition called themselves Aryans, and we are inclined to equate Indian
civilization with Aryan civilization which was overlaid with contributions made by waves of later immigrants. Whether or not the Aryans themselves migrated to India from Central Asia, the fact remains that from the earliest times India has been one country and that the process of fusion of different races and cultures has continued unabated. Vivekananda believed that there were contacts between the primitive inhabitants of India and Egypt, and many ideas, such as those of the unity of God and the transmigration of souls, travelled from India to the West via Alexandria. Yet in spite of these incursions and fusions, India has always maintained its own identity, and it is this sense of identity that has tended towards unified political sovereignty, and we find evidence of this integration in the days of the Mauryas or of the Moguls, of whom Akbar was the central figure.

The process of assimilation and fusion was not as simple as might appear from the preceding paragraph. Muslim invaders from the north-west were not just warlike marauders but men with a militant zeal for their faith; and towards the end of the twelfth century they decided to settle in the fertile regions of India rather than go back to the inhospitable climate of their home in Afghanistan. Mohammed Ghor left as his Viceroy Qutubuddin, who, on his master’s death, established what is called the Slave Dynasty, thus beginning a new period in Indian history. That a slave could attain to generalship, then to Viceroyalty and last of all to kingship should have been an eye-opener to the caste-ridden Hindus of India. Why the Hindus did not join their forces and block the narrow mountain passes through which the Afghans made their frequent and devastating incursions is a puzzle that historians have not been able to solve. Subsequently, even that possibility vanished, for the Muslims stationed themselves at Lahore, and more importantly, at Delhi, which is said to have been the site of the capital of the Kurus and Pandavas, whose glorious deeds are enshrined in the Mahabharata.

The Hindus noted with dismay that the new conquerors professed a religion not in any way akin to their own faith. As Bernard Shaw would put it several centuries after Mahmud of Ghazni and Mohammed of Ghor, ‘Islam is very different . . . there was to be no toleration. You accepted Allah or you
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had your throat cut by somebody who did.’ The Muslim rulers who now settled in India did not proceed to cut the throats of the vast population with whom they must live peaceably if they were to live in India and rule it. The Hindus, who were normally a peace-loving people, now devised a wall of defence which was as foolish as their failure to build a wall to prevent the periodical invasions of the Turks or the Afghans. Here was an outsider (mleccha) who not only ate beef, the flesh of the cow, a sacred animal, but also pulled down the images of gods. So he must be regarded as an untouchable; any contact with him would be a contamination. Already the caste system in Hindu society had been stratified; and now the Brahmin priest or pandit, who was the law-giver, devised new and ever new ordinances for ostracizing the lower castes who performed ignoble duties or had any contact with aliens—the Muslim ruler and his co-religionists, who stood outside the pale of Hindu society. By thus confining themselves in a segment fenced off from the outside world by prejudices and taboos, the Hindus lost interest in nature and added little to their ancient cultural heritage except verbal subtleties. At one time the Hindus had gone to different lands for trade, for the study of philosophy and science, and they had made signal contributions to medicine, mathematics and chemistry. But these soon became sealed books to them; and even now when there is talk of exploring the mysteries of the ancient Indian system of medicine, we are bewildered, because we do not know the steps by which our forefathers reached their conclusions.

The worst sufferers were the womenfolk. The Muslims kept their women confined in harems, though there is reason to believe that women were relatively free in their movements in ancient India. When marauding soldiers sack a city, they kill the men and rape the women, and it is not unnatural that some women should prefer to preserve their honour by jumping into a blazing fire. Such heroic self-immolation of Rajput women in the early days of the Delhi Sultanate has been embalmed in legend and sung by bards. But as priestcraft did not disapprove of self-immolation of widows, it came to be looked upon as wifely duty, and thus from the noble jahar ritual of Rajput women, we come to the horrible custom of the suttee. Women were now confined to the house and denied
all opportunities of education. As the Hindus lived in a closed society, various barbarous and superstitious practices became rampant—child marriages, particularly among girls, and polygamy, especially amongst the higher strata of Brahmins. Foreign contacts were rendered impossible because a sea voyage came to be looked upon as a sin. Hinduism preserved itself from contamination by blocking all avenues to progress.

If the Hindus were sunk in ignorance and superstition, the Muslims were enervated by luxury, fratricidal strife and the fissiparous tendencies which had grown out of the new mode of administration introduced by the last great Mogul emperor, Aurangzeb. The Mahratta power in the Deccan became so formidable that in trying to cope with it Aurangzeb was compelled to spend the last twenty-seven years of his life away from Delhi; the Sikhs rose in revolt in the north, and Rajsimha showed that the Rajputs, who were always a thorn in the side of the Muslim emperor, had not lost their old vigour. After Aurangzeb's death, the Mahrattas and the Sikhs became more and more formidable, and with turmoil at home and raids from across the borders, the Mogul emperor gradually became a shadowy figure with little power or influence. In the Bengal 
Subah, Murshid Quli Khan was an able administrator, but he too could not win over the majority community, and his successors lived in constant dread of roving Mahratta marauders. The European traders, who had been entrenched for some time in their factories, which were also their arsenals, were quick to seize their opportunity, and Robert Clive dealt a crushing blow to Muslim sovereignty in Bengal—and in India—by winning the battle of Plassey in 1757.

III

Twenty-six years after Plassey a son was born in a high-caste Brahmin family, who, in the centenary of his death in 1933, was described by Rabindranath Tagore as the 'path-maker', that is to say, as the man who inaugurated the 'Modern Age in India'. His name was Rammohun Roy. He rescued India from the morass into which it had been plunged by priests and pandits who had deceived themselves and the people by
relying on garbled versions of old Hindu scriptures. By giving a new interpretation of the Upanishads he brought Hinduism nearer to Islam, for he showed that image-worship, which was one of the factors that divided the two communities, was not an integral part of Hinduism. He saw, too, that the Europeans who were firmly establishing themselves in India were not merely traders and administrators but also exponents of a new culture which would rejuvenate our ancient heritage. His forefathers, who held high offices under Muslim rulers, were well-versed in Islamic literature and theology, and this interest they passed on to Rammohun, who early in life acquired mastery of Arabic and Persian. From his forebears on the mother’s side, who were priests and pandits, he derived his grounding in Sanskrit literature and his familiarity with Hindu scriptures. When he was old enough to build a career for himself, he found that Lord Cornwallis had not only permanently settled the land revenue system in Bengal but also established the British Indian Civil Service. So he had to acquire an effective command of English, and by learning English, he could also grasp the significance of modern European philosophy, science and literature.

More important than his linguistic and literary attainments was his mental acumen, which grasped the realities of practical life as much as it yearned for what lay beyond the senses and the intellect. He was conscious of the rich heritage of the past, but he was equally alive to the necessity for mopping up the abuses that had made this heritage more a liability than an asset. He was repelled by the gross idolatries of Hinduism and raised a storm of protest against them even in his teens. He valued Western education, which was a benefit conferred by the British, but he was not blind to the ruthless exploitation of India’s resources by foreign merchants; and when Cornwallis established law and order through the British Indian Civil Service, he saw, too, that the Governor-General had blocked the path of advancement for natives. But although there were pulls from different directions, he never lost sight of priorities, and that made him a reformer before a revolutionary. Even as a boy, he became aware of the evils of superstition, and when his protests estranged him from his father, he left home in disgust and wandered from place to place, from province to
province, even as far as Tibet. Long and arduous journeys at a time when the means of transport were inadequate and often non-existent made him see India in the raw, and he returned a chastened man. He felt that although British rule might mean political bondage and economic drain, we must set our house in order before we try to drive out the foreigner who had saved the country from chaos. Subhaschandra Bose would think otherwise. But Bose was born one hundred and twenty-four years after Rammohun.

It would be irrelevant in the present context to examine the details of the reforms initiated by Rammohun; many of them are now a part of history. What is more important is that Rammohun shook Indian society out of its inertia and gave it a new dynamism; and though the new India might make mistakes, there was little possibility of its sinking into stupor again. The same thing may be said of what once aroused fervid enthusiasm and also implacable hostility—his founding of a new religion, Brahmoism, though he refused the role of a man-God or a God-man, which he disliked. With the gradual relaxation of caste rigidities, the stepping-up of the age of marriage, the increasing freedom given to women, and similar other changes, the distinction between Brahmos and Hindus has become rather nebulous now. Only Rammohun and his followers would not agree with the Hindus that God could be worshipped in many forms and under many names. It seems that he had greater attraction for Unitarian Christianity than for Islam, which makes a distinction between Allah and his Prophet Mohammed. Rammohun thus made a noble and daring attempt at bringing together the various peoples of India by showing the spiritual affinity between the Upanishads, the Bible and the Quoran and also the Grantha-Sahib of the Sikhs. What exists is One; the sages call It by different names. This Upanishadic message was the kernel of his religion.

Rammohun did many memorable things, not the least important being his contribution to the growth of Bengali prose, of which he may be said to be the founder. But to my mind, by far the greatest achievement of his life was his relentless championship of Western or English education in India. Robert Clive, it has been aptly said, conquered India in the manner and spirit of a robber baron, and it was left to his
successors to consolidate the conquest by devising a suitable administrative machinery and to choose the language in which the administration was to be conducted. Persian, the court language of the Moguls, was on its way out, and the question was whether the official language was to be Sanskrit in a simplified form (with Persian as an alternative for Muslims) or English, the language of the new ruling class, which the majority of Indians, Hindus and Muslims, did not know.

Warren Hastings, who succeeded Clive, was promoted Governor-General so that he might have authority also over the two other Presidencies of Bombay and Madras. He was to be assisted by a Council of four, of whom one was Sir Philip Francis, an implacable enemy of the Governor-General with whom he once even fought a duel. Francis stood for English, which meant that Hastings would oppose it. Besides this personal animosity, Hastings, himself an Orientalist, was the friend and patron of Sir William Jones, founder of the Asiatic Society and one of the greatest linguists by any standard. If the Anglicists, as the champions of English were called, won the battle against the Orientalists, not a little of the credit must be given to Rammohun Roy. In spite of his mastery of Oriental languages, he fought on behalf of English with unflinching tenacity, because he knew that at that point of time the future of India lay with English education, which would bring to the people the 'enlightenment' of modern Europe, and not with Sanskrit or any other Oriental language, which would shut them out from the rational thinking and liberal knowledge of the West.

IV

Rammohun Roy, who entertained revolutionary ideas in politics, espoused the cause of the Neapolitans against Austrian aggression, and of the South Americans reeling under oppressive Spanish masters; and he also enthusiastically supported the rising in France in 1830. But although in his youth he was disturbed by the rapacity of British traders who had become rulers of India after the Battle of Plassey, his early revolutionary zeal cooled off as he grew in years; he realized the benefits of British rule after the virtual dissolution of the Mogul
Empire in the second half of the eighteenth century, and he died a loyal subject of the East India Company in 1833. The embers of political revolution, however, were not extinct, and they blazed into a fire within twenty-five years of Rammohun’s death.

The spark that kindled the fire was a minor grievance, and what is known as the Sepoy Mutiny has been dismissed as a string of sporadic skirmishes which lacked central direction and which British generalship put down without much difficulty. But there are certain features of the rising which cannot be so lightly passed over. First, it was a people’s movement against foreign rulers who were proud of being aliens and looked down upon Indians as inferior specimens of humanity. This hurt the feelings not only of the humble sepoys after whom the Mutiny is named but also of the peasantry who helped the upheaval as far as they could. And a second feature, equally significant, was Hindu–Muslim unity. There were occasional communal clashes, but on the whole the Hindu sepoys and the Muslim sepoys fought side by side, and it is a remarkable tribute to their joint struggle that the Hindu majority flocked to the banner of the last Mogul emperor Bahadur Shah, who, although old and decrepit, attracted the loyalty of all his subjects, because he was an Indian.

The Sepoy uprising was marked by acts of heroism, but it lacked effective leadership and a coherent philosophy; and although the first rumblings were heard at Vellore, it was in the north—from Meerut to Bengal—that the rebellion spread like wildfire. Even if it was put down, the spirit remained intact and only the form of expression changed. The new leader was a religious teacher, Dayananda Saraswati (1824–83), who was born in Gujarat but chose the militant provinces of Punjab and U.P. as the field of his missionary activity, which started in 1866. Dayananda was a religious teacher, but quite early his teaching acquired political overtones, as will be evident from the message which his disciple places as the Foreword to a worshipful biography: ‘The world is fettered by the chain forged by superstition and ignorance. I have come to snap asunder that chain and to set slaves at liberty. It is contrary to my mission to have people deprived of their freedom.’

Dayananda was austere in his morals, firm as a rock in his
religious convictions and equally aggressive in his denunciation of other faiths, Indian and foreign. His religion was so intimately fused with his patriotism that it is difficult to say which of these impulses was primal and which derivative. An erudite scholar in Sanskrit, he held that many of our evil practices sprang from the failure of our commentators to distinguish Vedic language from later interpolations, which had no plenary authority of their own. He engaged himself in frequent debates with scholars of other schools and always held his own against opponents by means of his ratiocinative skill and his impeccable command of Vedic Sanskrit. But it is neither in his learning nor in his logical power that we shall find the secret of his influence. Rather it was his fervour, his militancy, his unswerving faith in his religion that made this sectarian teacher a national leader.

His attitude was clear and forthright. Our homeland was under a cloud, because the people had been enervated by ignorance, superstition and corruption and deceived by the ‘Popes’, which was the epithet he applied to the dishonest priests of all religions. A foreign ruler, even if he is just and benevolent, cannot promote the welfare of a subject nation, because on account of differences in culture, language and customs, there would be disagreements and clashes which it would be impossible to resolve until the country is free. He was unequivocal and emphatic in the exposition of his own philosophy, which was interwoven with his love for his own land and people and his indifference to other races and faiths. An enemy of Hindu idolatry, he derided the degenerate Hindus, who, in order to save Lord Venimadhab from Muslim iconoclasts, threw the image into a well, and now their equally pusillanimous descendants show off this scene of dishonour as a place of pilgrimage. On the other hand, his complaint against Brahmos was that although not idolatrous, these ‘enlightened’ men were proud of their English education and foreign ways and manners and their ignorance of the native heritage.

The country which Dayananda refers to as his own he calls Aryavarta, the land of the Aryans, which is bounded on the west by the river Attock and on the east by the Brahmaputra; on the north are the Himalayas and on the south the Vindhya ranges. This place he calls a ‘touchstone’, the home of true
religion; it is from here that all learning emanated and flowed first to Egypt, then from Egypt to Greece, from Greece to Rome and from Rome to other lands. The first inhabitants of Aryavarta were the Aryans, who came not from Iran, as some people say, but from Tibet, and before their arrival this land was uninhabited. These Aryans were God’s chosen people to whom He gave His message as contained in the Vedas, which alone can claim primal authority. To these four Vedas sages later added the Upanishads, the Brahmanas and the Puranas, which have no authority of their own and should be obeyed only in so far as they are compatible with Vedic teaching. According to Dayananda, the Vedas posit only one God who is formless, and if anywhere there are references in the Vedas to more than one God, these should be rejected as later accretions. Dayananda looks upon every other religion as man-made, and he is as hard on corrupt Aryan priests as on Jains, who, he says, introduced idolatry in India. He would not recognize later religions, which, he thought, had no divine authority; thus he is as indifferent to monotheistic Christianity and Islam as to Buddhism, which is inclined towards atheism. He could not altogether leave out castes, which are mentioned in the Vedas, but says that castes were intended to be based on occupations, and it is priestcraft which has made them static. This argument has been advanced by other apologists too, but not one of them has been able to advance any convincing explanation either about its utility or of the stages of its degradation. Dayananda, however, asserts that there should be no difficulty in our accepting the authority of the Vedas because they are the most ancient scriptures and also because they satisfy all the tests of logical proof: (a) sensuous perception, (b) inference, (c) upamāna, which may roughly be translated as ‘analogy’, (d) authority, (e) implication, (f) tradition or legend, (g) inclusiveness, and (h) probability.

Dayananda’s philosophy is open to various objections, including illogicality. He admits that God is not capable of proof, but also advances the specious argument that since all existing things have a creator, the world cannot be uncreated. In that case, the creator must have been created, too, and thus there will be infinite regress. And if there is a God, why should He speak to the people of Aryavarta alone? He makes other
curious assumptions, and his philosophy is vitiated by inconsistencies, too. At one stage, he asserts that there are three eternal things, viz. God, Nature and Life, but then God ceases to be the source of all creation. He rejects Hebraism and Islam on the ground that they are much younger than the religion of the Aryans, but recent excavations have revealed a pre-Aryan civilization at Harappa; and why should we assume that they did not have a religion also? His further argument against Hebraism and Christianity that the all-powerful Jehovah and Allah could not prevent the emergence of Satan applies to the Vedic God also, who had to find a place for evil that had to be warded off and who could not keep out non-Vedic religions from Aryavarta.

From the point of view of nationalism, the most serious objection to Dayananda’s philosophy is its narrowness, for, as far as I have understood his views, it excludes the region south of the Vindhyas and also people professing other faiths whether in the south or the north. It is at the same time pathetic and ironical that Dayananda’s most famous follower Lala Lajpat Rai, a noted freedom-fighter, came round to the view that the Hindus and Muslims were separate peoples, and Jinnah cited this view when the campaign for the partition of India was at its height.

All these criticisms notwithstanding, we must admit that Dayananda’s Arya Samaj made a signal contribution to nationalism, and that the Swami gave it a local habitation and a content. Dayananda and his organization carried on a ceaseless war against corruption and laid emphasis on probity both in personal and public life. He made Hindus conscious of their national heritage, and did his best to rid it of superstitious practices and sectarian heresies. Even now, when he is regarded as no more than a founder of a sect, there can be no two opinions about his burning patriotism and his fervid admiration for the heroes who tried to rid India of foreign domination. The great Mahratta leader Shivaji was partly inspired by a religious motive, but as he was illiterate, he did not care for the niceties of doctrine. The more important thing for him was Shivaji’s love for his homeland, the Deccan, where the Mogul emperor was an outsider. That the Muslim invader was a beef-eater was an additional consideration for the Hindu
warrior for whom the cow was a sacred object. As Dayananda did not approve of sectarianism, and the Sikhs appeared to be a new sect with a new divinity, the Grantha-Sahib, Sikhism was not expected to have any appeal for him. But Dayananda held out both Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh, neither of whom had anything to do with the Vedas, as noble examples for modern Indians, because both of them had stood up against foreign domination; and we hear his voice echoed and re-echoed in Lala Lajpat Rai and the young man who avenged Lala Lajpat Rai’s death—I mean Sardar Bhagat Singh, a great patriot and a Sikh.

V

Dayananda Saraswati lamented that the Brahmos were too westernized to care for the beauties and mysteries of their ancient heritage. But quite some time before his birth, Ram-mohun Roy, the founder of Brahmoism, and David Hare, a Christian humanist, had launched a campaign for the dissemination of Western education. It reached a significant stage with the establishment of the Hindu College, which became a rallying-point for the Anglicists right from 1817, the year of its birth. When eighteen years later, in 1835, Macaulay drafted his famous minute, declaring that Government’s objective was the promotion of European science and literature through the medium of English literature, there was no longer any hope for the revival of Vedic culture in the way Dayananda desired; indeed, on this issue even Dayananda’s own sect was to be later divided into two factions, but with that history the present account has no concern.

What is relevant to the present context is that the introduction of English education helped the cause of nationalism in a way which the upholders of the ancient lore could never dream of, but some of the champions of the new learning foresaw this and were a little alarmed. Some among the alien rulers felt that if the natives were acquainted with English and all else that could be acquired through English literature, native scholars and administrators might be fired with a passion for political liberty, which is the keynote of English literature and the message of European culture.

And that is what actually happened—first in Bengal, because
it was at Plassey that British rule was established, and Calcutta
remained the first city of British India for more than one hun-
dred and fifty years. The beginnings of English education in Ben-
gal, particularly in the Hindu College at Calcutta, saw the emer-
gence of a group of intellectuals who were proud of the new
learning which sharpened their intellect and broadened their
outlook, but which also instilled into them a galling sense of
slavery and made them dream of national freedom, for the
attainment of which, however, they could prescribe no plan
or programme.

For the present we may confine our attention to the young
men who came out of the Hindu—later called Presidency—
College, and for this purpose we may mention three remarkable
young men—Michael Madhusudan Datta (1824–73), Raj-
narayan Bose (1826–99) and Bhudev Mukherji (1827–94), who
were contemporaries at the Hindu College and whose friendship
survived differences in outlook and divergence in ways of life.
Of these three, Madhusudan was a man of genius, who drank
deep of the Pierian Spring; he became a Christian not out of
love for Christianity but from a desire to adopt European ways
of life and European modes of thought. It was somewhat late
in life that he turned to Bengali verse and found there the
appropriate vehicle for the expression of his thoughts and
feelings. His poetry is imbued with love for his motherland—
tender, wistful, but ever assertive of independence. Reacting
against the traditional view of the \textit{Ramayana} story, he portrays
Ravana as a grand character and the pious Vibhishana as a
traitor to his country; the hero of Madhusudan’s epic is
Meghanad, who dies fighting a patriotic battle against a foreign
invader. The impact of this epic has been so powerful that
although Rama and Sita have retained their place intact in
the minds of modern readers, Vibhishana has become a name
for a traitor, a fifth columnist. It is in this way that nationalism
finds passionate expression in the work of a poet who was an
apostate to the religion of his forefathers and expressed con-
tempt for traditional values. It is also significant that when in
his last unfinished work, Madhusudan attempted a prose
recension of Homer’s \textit{Iliad}, he calls it the \textit{Death of Hector},
because his protagonist is not the irate Achilles but his antag-
onist who dies fighting for his country.

Madhusudan’s two friends, Rajnarayan and Bhudev, were
not men of genius and their influence on Indian nationalism was somewhat ephemeral, but each in his own way contributed to nationalist thought and action. Rajnarayan adopted Brahmooism, which was a kind of protest against accepted modes of thought and life. An educationist and a sage, he quietly laid the foundations for political revolution and economic reform. As far back as 1861, he set up a society for the promotion of national glory and issued a prospectus for stimulating national sentiment. The significance of the word ‘National’, which is reiterated in every organization he established with his friend and associate, popularly known as ‘National’ Nabagopal Mitra, should not be missed. Although a man of a retiring disposition who spent a large part of his time in religious meditation, Rajnarayan felt that no real progress would be possible until the country was politically free, and for a subject nation real political activity could not make any headway unless it was secret. To Rajnarayan Bose and Rabindranath’s elder brother Jyotirindranath Tagore belongs the credit of founding the first secret society—Sanjivani Sabha—of which the great poet, yet in his teens, was a member. Nothing of note was accomplished by this society, but it was the forerunner of the many secret societies which were to pose a real threat to the foreign government decades later.

Bhudev, to whom Madhusudan dedicated his Hector-Badh, was very different in his outlook. Western education only deepened his innate conservatism, and through a formidable array of arguments and statistics he shows that the Indian way of life, based on the joint-family, is superior to the western mode with its slogan of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, which, he felt, should be replaced by one of Devotion, Love and Benevolence. He objected to the alien ruler’s hauteur which made him look upon India as a colony rather than as his own country. Bhudev was alive also to the economic exploitation of India in the interests of Britishers. Himself a high official, he keenly felt the discrimination made against Indians in their service life. In spite of all this, he was not a revolutionary; he thought that the British, who were efficient and had given India orderly administration, should stay on at least for some time, especially because, in his opinion, the British were becoming increasingly alive to the interests of Indians! In this way his
elaborate reasoning seems to lead to a somewhat tame conclusion; by long-drawn-out, sometimes tortuous, reasoning he arrived at the conclusion that Indians should remain where they were. Only they should not adopt western ways, and they must cling to their castes and their scriptures. A Principal of Presidency College reportedly remarked, ‘Bhidev with his C.I.E. and Rs 1,500 a month is still anti-British.’ It might be said, on the other hand, that the C.I.E. and a monthly salary of Rs 1,500 dampened Bhidev’s anti-British proclivities and made him a loyal subject of ‘Company Bahadur’!

Rangalal Banerji (1827–87), who stands outside the Hindu College group, was a considerable poet who sang directly and passionately of political freedom. He, too, was a pioneer in the sense that he was one of the earliest modern writers to derive both inspiration and material from Todd’s Annals of Rajasthan, which is so redolent of Rajput valour trying to wrest freedom from alien invaders. Rangalal’s best-known work is the Story of Padmini, a verse-narrative containing the famous lyric, ‘Who would want to live bereft of freedom/Tell me who ever chose to put on the manacles of slavery’, which is moving by itself and also derives added significance from its context. This passionate lyric was on the lips of Bengalis when in the Swadeshi days of 1905–8 they started an all-India movement for the attainment of Swaraj.
CHAPTER 2

Bankimchandra and *Ananda Math*

After the pioneers had done their work, there arose a group of Bengali writers of whom only four I regard as significant—the dramatist Dinabandhu Mitra (1830–73), the two poets Hemchandra (1838–1903) and Navinchandra (1847–1907), and last and first, the great Bankimchandra.

Dinabandhu created a sensation by delivering a frontal attack on British traders by drawing in *Nil-darpan* a gruesome picture of the ruthless and lecherous indigo planters, whose oppression did not spare womenfolk and who made huge profits by selling the indigo dye, but ruined the village agriculturists who got little in return for their land and labour. The book was published anonymously in 1860, though the name of the author was known to many. But when an English translation, made by the great poet Madhusudan Datta, was published by the Reverend James Long, there was a great flutter in European society; and as the anonymous translator could not be got hold of, the English priest who published it was prosecuted and punished. *Nil-darpan* did much to stir nationalist sentiments by exposing the horrors of British rule, and although the subject-matter is no longer pertinent, the drama is very much alive even today.

Hemchandra Bandyopadhyay was a prolific poet; he wrote loyalist poetry along with poems like ‘Bharat-bilap’ (‘Lament of India’) and ‘Bharater Jagaran’ (‘The Awakening of India’), in which he gives poignant expression to the feeling of patriotism. He also recast an ancient Mahratta song of Shivaji’s time intended to stir Hindus to rise for the motherland. A commendable feature of Hemchandra’s patriotic poems is that even when he writes of Hindus, he means Indians of all classes and creeds.

From the nationalist point of view, more important than any poem of Hemchandra or other poets of the period was Navin Sen’s *Palashir Yuddha* (*The Battle of Plassey*), of which the
main character is Sirajud-doula. The poet does not idolize the defeated Nawab, but he succeeds in making a tragic hero of this last independent ruler of Bengal. This he does mainly through the lips of the celebrated Rani Bhabani of Natore, who in all probability did not play any part in the anti-Siraj conspiracy. But in this poem she launches a forceful attack on the secret motives of the British merchants, who, after helping the conspirators to dislodge the native ruler, would in no time proceed to seize the role of empire-builders. The passionate plea she puts forward is not for Siraj as a person but as an Indian ruler whose dethronement must be the first step to the loss of national freedom. This new note is the original contribution of the poet, who had no authority for it in his source-book, Marshman’s History of Bengal. No wonder that this strident note of nationalism aroused the displeasure of the Government, of which he was an official.

II

The writers discussed above had nationalist fervour, but none of them could produce a work that would not only inspire but also provide a plan or programme for direct action. Such a gospel of revolution nationalist India found in Bankimchandra’s writings, and to Bankim the present chapter will be devoted almost in its entirety.

Bankimchandra’s unique asset amongst creative and critical writers was his lofty imagination, acute intellect, wide-ranging scholarship, and all these were enlivened by a sensitive heart that felt the woes of his downtrodden countrymen. In personal life as a Government servant, he knew, too, ‘The insolence of office, and the spurns/That patient merit of the unworthy takes.’ Incidentally, I may mention that during his thirty-three years’ service as a Deputy Magistrate, he was the subject of thirty-odd confidential reports by different District Magistrates, all Europeans. These have now been published, and I read them with amusement because I found that not one of the Magistrates had the slightest notion that he was assessing the abilities of a man of genius.

The problems of national subjection disturbed Bankimchandra’s mind even in his thirties, when he was writing his
third novel *Mrinalini*, which was published in 1869. He was a Hindu, and unlike many modern nationalists he was not ashamed of calling himself a Hindu. As a Bengali, his national pride was outraged by the unfounded claim made by the Muslim chronicler Minhajuddin that Bengal (or Gaur) was conquered by Bakhtiyar Khilji with the help of only sixteen cavalry men. Later on, Bankim would dismiss the story as an arrant lie, but in *Mrinalini* the creative artist in him drew a plausible picture of the situation and circumstances in which such a cake-walk victory could be possible, thus writing what might appropriately be called True History That Never Happened. It must have been a priest-ridden society with a treacherous minister who, acting in league with a double-dealing foreigner, betrayed his decrepit king, who fled on hearing of the approach of an invading army. In his later essays Bankimchandra works out the thesis suggested in the novel and points out that though Bakhtiyar Khilji might have occupied the capital of Gaur from which the old king fled, the people of the country fought on and Bakhtiyar and his successors could not occupy more than a third of what we call Bengal. The Pala and Sena kings continued to reign undisturbed, owing nominal allegiance to the Pathan ruler of Delhi or his representative nearer home.

In these essays Bankimchandra, with the limited materials at his disposal, works his way to his own conception of national freedom. Freedom means the right of the people to live and think in their own way. Such freedom the people of Bengal enjoyed during Pathan rule, for this period witnessed the efflorescence of Bengali culture, by which he meant the poetry of Vidyapati and Chandidas, the New Logic propounded by Raghunath Shiromoni, the Hindu jurisprudence enunciated by Raghunandan—and, above all, the religious revival effected by Sri Chaitanya, whose influence extended beyond the borders of Bengal.

Who took away this freedom? Not the Pathans, but the Moguls who were empire-builders, who combined the small kingdoms of this area into a single unit and then exploited its resources, drained its wealth to exalt imperial grandeur—to erect the Peacock Throne and the Tajmahal. Although foreign domination is always a curse, the well-being of a nation is to
be judged by the quality of the life led by the people in general and not by the strength or glory of the sovereign at the top. Looking forward from the Pathans to the Moguls, we find that the empire was larger in Aurangzeb’s time than in Akbar’s, but Akbar built and consolidated whereas Aurangzeb paved the path to disintegration and dissolution because his sole concern was his own faith and authority. ‘Ill fares the land’, we may say, adapting Goldsmith, ‘to hastening ills a prey/Where [rulers prosper] and men decay’.

III

All that has been said above refers to Bengal, but Bankimchandra, who had a larger vision, enunciated principles that would apply to India as a whole; and what he said of the past was true also of the present. In the Bande Mataram song, for example, the immediate context is Bengal, but with its evocative power it became the national anthem of India and has survived all criticism, old and new. Bankim admits that possibly Indians, living on a fertile soil, are less virile than those who have to struggle hard to wring sustenance from an inhospitable terrain. But that does not argue lack of physical prowess, as will be seen from a consideration of the results of the expeditions of Turks, Arabs and Afghans, who, inspired by Islam, went out in different directions. The Arabs first attacked India in 712 A.D. but did not stay on to consolidate their early victories. Rather, although they made rapid conquests in other directions, they must have met with stiff resistance in India during their sporadic raids, and it was not till towards the end of the twelfth century that Mohammed Ghori established a kingdom on Indian soil.

How are we then to explain India’s long subjection to foreign rule? First, it was due, according to Bankimchandra, to Indian philosophy—Sankhya, Buddhism, Vedanta, etc.—which made Indians relatively indifferent to worldly affairs, and particularly averse to aggressive warfare and annexation of foreign territory. They fought and fought heroically but only in self-defence, which is not conducive to success in warfare. I shall explain Bankimchandra’s argument with the help of a statement attributed to Temujin, later on famous as the great
conqueror Chenghiz Khan. He is reported to have said that the man who fights in self-defence is constantly unnerved by fear of losing his hearth and home, but an aggressor has nothing but his own life at stake. Western people sought knowledge as a means to power, but for Indian philosophy it is the gateway to salvation. It is this attitude which also impeded the growth of nationalist ideas amongst Indians, who have no word corresponding to nationality in their language, and, strangely enough, use the same word for both nation and caste. The Muslims who came from outside and settled here imbibed this outlook and never wanted to annex territories outside India.

The greatest drawback to the development of national sentiment in India was lack of unity. There was a feeling of social and cultural unity but not of political cohesiveness. Wherever the Hindu poured libations to his ancestors, he invoked the names of sacred rivers of the north and the south—the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Godavari, the Saraswati, the Narmada, the Sindhu (Indus) and the Cauvery. In spite of occasional feuds, Hindus and Muslims had been tilling the soil side by side for centuries. Mir Madan and Mohanlal fought against Robert Clive as readily as Mir Jafar and Rai Durlabh conspired against the native ruler. The first stirrings of national sentiment, that is to say, of political unity, were felt during the uprising of 1857–58 when the whole of the rebellious north stood against the British, from whom Indians had imbibed modern nationalist ideas, but even then the Deccan and the southern provinces stood aloof. The rising in northern India also was more a string of isolated clashes than an organized and concerted venture. The moment had come for the inculcation of nationalism as a philosophy with a creed of its own; but not the man—the prophet and poet of militant patriotism. His advent, however, was not long delayed, and in less than a quarter of a century from the Sepoy upheaval, he gave the nation its anthem and its Bible. This apostle was Bankimchandra, and the book which took its place alongside the Gita was Ananda Math.

IV

Bankimchandra’s nationalism, which is reflected in many of his novels, is also cogently and elaborately argued in many
sparkling essays. He makes a subtle distinction between liberty and independence. A country has independence if its rulers are natives, but it lacks liberty if the subjects do not have the right to think and act freely and its resources are not used for the benefit of the people. When Qutubuddin established himself on the throne of Delhi, the people of the greater part of India, who had kept aloof from the conflict between Mohammed Ghori and Prithviraj, did not know—and would not care if they did—that they had lost independence, because although the throne of Delhi was the symbol of the sovereignty of India, small kingdoms, especially in remote areas, retained their separate identity and autonomy for some time. The early Sultans, Qutubuddin and his successors, tried at first to maintain and recruit a standing army of Turks and Afghans and also appoint counsellors from abroad. It was in the area under the direct control of the Sultanate that there was neither independence nor any liberty for the subjects, who had little say in the administration of the territory.

When Aurangzeb succeeded to the throne of Delhi, India might be said to have been politically independent, for Aurangzeb, his soldiers and generals, officials and ministers were all Indians, but at the same time, as the majority of his subjects lived in constant fear of oppression and were often actually harassed, they had little liberty. The celebrated historian Jadunath Sarkar says, 'To the historian whose eyes are not dazzled by the Peacock Throne, the Taj Mahal and other examples of outward glitter, . . . the Mughal empire was a thinly veiled system of brigandage. It explains why the Indian princes, no less than the Indian people, so readily accepted England's suzerainty.' Bankimchandra did not fully share this view of Mogul 'brigandage'; nor would he agree, as would appear from his quotation from Warren Hastings' letters in the Preface to Ananda Math, that the people gladly accepted the change from Mogul to British rule. What Bankimchandra freely admits is that nationalism is a modern concept and one of the gifts of Western education. If a country is to be independent, it must have a national government united under a sovereign who is a native of the country and who rules it in the interests of its people. Native rulers also could be oppressive as was Aurangzeb, and it is not always the ruler's oppression
that alone is galling. The restrictions imposed by Brahmins on the lower castes might be as terrible as the discriminatory taxes imposed by an Aurangzeb or the exactions made by the foreign trader. Bankimchandra was full of sympathy for the ruler who feels for his subjects and refuses to oppress them. There are few portraits in literature so touching as Bankimchandra’s brief sketch of Mir Quasim, who knew that in his encounter with the British he would certainly be defeated and deposed; yet he would not agree to oppress his people and give the English a free hand to fleece them. Bankimchandra depicted Qutubuddin’s reign as a period in which India had neither independence nor liberty and Akbar’s India as a country which had both. Those who glibly accuse Bankimchandra of an anti-Muslim bias should ponder these points.

V

Bankimchandra’s imagination was stirred by thoughts of nationalism all through his literary career; his mind was especially occupied with the problem of national independence, national unity and the happiness of the nation as a whole. Although a high-caste Brahmin, he admitted that during the predominance of the Aryans in what is called the Hindu period, the men at the top—Brahmins and Kshatriyas—were probably better off than their counterparts in the British period, when there was discrimination against Indians in the interests of Britishers who monopolized the highest offices in the administration, but the lower castes, the peasants and the artisans, were not worse off; their condition might even have been slightly better, because the tyranny of the higher castes had been mitigated under the rule of people who were themselves mlecchas or untouchables.

Some of the episodes in Durgeshnandini, Bankim’s first novel, are taken from Indian history of Akbar’s time, but they have been so transformed that it would be idle to stress their historicity. There is, however, one point to which attention should be drawn. The hero of the novel is the son of Raja Man Singh, Akbar’s general, who was helping the emperor to bring the outlying provinces into submission and thus give unity to the empire. The second novel, Kapalkundala, is a pure romance
with very occasional references to the historical background. But even these references emphasize Akbar’s great virtues—his unquestioned authority and his absolute impartiality.

It will appear from his essays that Bankim’s mind became increasingly attracted towards the condition of India’s lower classes who were daily becoming poorer because the economy was stagnant owing to the apathy of the foreign ruler. Anyone who feels for the downtrodden masses must also be led to examine the problem of how to ameliorate their condition. Every novel has a story and some characters, and every work of art must have an idea, which in some works is the principal ingredient. It is generally believed that Bankimchandra’s last three novels—Ananda Math, Debi Chowdhurani and Sitaram—are novels of ideas, in which, in Sri Aurobindo’s view, Bankim is more a poet and a prophet than a novelist, and it is held that the ideas which inspired these novels were both political and spiritual. It is necessary to point out that there is a basic difference between Ananda Math on the one hand and Debi Chowdhurani and Sitaram on the other. Ananda Math is a novel of political revolution whereas the other two are novels of spiritual and moral ideas in which the theme is ‘Anushilan’ or Culture, meaning the all-round cultivation of physical, intellectual and spiritual faculties. In the chronicles, both Bhabani Pathak and Debi Chowdhurani were bandits, but there is no reference to banditry in Bankimchandra’s novel. In Sitaram, Bankimchandra portrays a valorous young ruler who is ruined by sex hunger—the other side of the shield. The first Anushilan Samiti founded by Pramathanath Mitra and others in 1902 was modelled on Bankimchandra’s essays collected in Anushilan or Dharmaatwa, in which there is not a whiff of politics. But when a few years later, possibly under Aurobindo’s direction, young men inspired by patriotic zeal began to give Anushilan and other samitis a revolutionary turn, and Barindrakumar Ghose established a factory for manufacturing bombs, the elders shied away; then the youngsters probably modelled their organization on Satyananda’s Ananda Math and took their idea of manufacturing guns from the novel. Aurobindo, who should have known better, lumped the three novels together, and this mixing up has partly contributed to a mistaken interpretation of Ananda Math, which alone was a novel of revolutionary
idealism, whereas the theme of the other two was a new definition of religion as a co-ordination of physical, mental and spiritual faculties.

For the source of *Ananda Math* Bankimchandra went to the annals of Hindu Sannyasins and Muslim Faqirs, who, in the early seventies of the eighteenth century when Muslim power was tottering and the British were yet to establish themselves, embarked on roving expeditions, plundering and ravaging towns and villages. They went out on the pretext of visiting places of pilgrimage, which gave them some sort of protection; and when they had gathered a large number of followers and also enough weaponry, they would throw off their pilgrim’s mask and engage openly in pillage. Like the raids of Mahmud of Ghazni, the plundering expeditions of the Sannyasins and Faqirs became a regular affair, and for some time the Government, such as it was, looked helplessly on. It is said that some of these wandering mendicants even built a fort in North Bengal, with the Teesta, then a vast sheet of water, acting as a barrier against the sepoys of the Nawab or the Company.

The ravages of the mendicants went on for about a decade, the worst years being 1770–72, until Warren Hastings took up the challenge in 1773 when he was firmly in the saddle. The most formidable leader of these gangs was one Shah Maznool, though one cannot definitely say which of these gangs built the fort protected by the river Teesta. It was not because of the fort, however, that the roving rebels could not be suitably dealt with. They relied primarily on their speed, because they were mere plunderers, and after a raid they would return to their lands and resume their customary occupation of tilling the soil. Bankimchandra’s literary instinct must have told him that these peasants, who had suffered most, should form the stuff of a revolutionary army; their large numbers and their mobility would give them a definite advantage in pitched battles as well as in guerrilla excursions. There was no doubt that it was the unscrupulous British exploiter rather than the tottering Muslim Governor who was Bankimchandra’s target. Indeed, although the novelist said many hard things about the Britishers, as a Government servant he would not expose all his cards, for with a little caution he might save himself and the book without obscuring his meaning.
Here is a free translation of one of the key passages in *Ananda Math*, in which Bankimchandra describes the closing stages of the Great Famine of 1770. 'The English were in charge of the Diwani. They exact taxes but have not till then taken up the responsibility of protecting the life and property of the people of Bengal. At that time the English were in charge of collecting revenues, and the duty of protecting the lives and property of the tax-payers lay with that scoundrel of a Nawab, Mir Jafar, that treacherous miscreant, who represented the scum of humanity. How could Mir Jafar, who could not defend himself, protect Bengal? Mir Jafar, a drug addict, used to sleep away his days. The Britishers extorted money and sent home despatches.' The onslaught on Mir Jafar was a thin cover through which the reader can easily see the real villain of the sordid drama, the British trader and revenue collector, because at the time of the Great Famine Mir Jafar had been dead for five years, Muslim power was tottering, and the responsibility for ruining a famished country rested squarely on the Britishers who had benefited by Mir Jafar's treachery and who were as keen on draining India's wealth and as negligent of the people's interests in 1770 as in 1881–82 when *Ananda Math* was written and published.

*Ananda Math* is not an historical novel but a novel of ideas. Yet it draws materials from the recent past and might even have derived its immediate impetus from the contemporary adventurism of Wasudeo Phadke, as some people think. If the novelist had not given his idea such a local habitation, he would have beaten his luminous wings in the void in vain. The novelist takes large liberties with his sources so that his story may be both meaningful and credible. The Sannyasins here are a cultured and dedicated set, and not illiterate vagrants from Allahabad, Benares and Bhojpur, as is pointed out by Jadunath Sarkar, who, however, argues that in spite of this admixture of fiction, *Ananda Math* is an historical novel, because the main action is taken from history and Bankimchandra vividly portrays the spirit of the age, the interregnum of about eighteen years from Plassey to the establishment of orderly government by Warren Hastings. Bankim admits, too, that the battles described in the novel did not take place on the banks of the Ajoy in Birbhum but in the Teesta valley in North
Bengal. He must have made this change, because at that time this was a no-man's-land where a semi-independent Raja had become functus officio, and the tottering Anglo-Indian alliance had yet to establish itself. The exploits of the Sannyasins and the discomfiture of the British would be plausible against such a background, and there was the grim reality of the Great Famine which the novelist describes so vividly. Indeed, there was nowhere a shadow of doubt about the prevailing anarchy, rapacity and moral degradation.

It is difficult to put in a good word for the dual control of the Muslim Nawab and his British Diwan. The Nawab gradually became a shadowy figure and then, by the time of the Famine, was heard of no more. There might have been a handful of British soldiers who fought bravely and sustained the growing authority of the Diwani, but by and large they were venal and lecherous. The native soldiers of the Government, mostly Muslim sepoys, served on very poor pay, which too would always fall into arrears. The only man who counted was the Deputy Governor Reza Khan, who was notorious for his exactions, but he had to fill his own pockets and also meet the demands of the British masters whose greed was insatiable. If an artist were to choose a theme for a revolutionary novel, here he had the most suitable material. One authority was tottering to its fall and the other, youthful and vigorous, was yet to awaken to its responsibilities, and both were equally unscrupulous. Between these two masters, the people lived in insecurity, uncertainty and utter poverty.

Bankimchandra castigated both Muslims and Britishers in Ananda Math when it was serialized in Bangadarshan and also in the first edition of the novel which appeared in 1882. Here, through the lips of the Physician, who remains outside the story, he says to Satyananda, the protagonist, that British rule was necessary to fill the interregnum, which would be followed by the advent of Aryanism, by which perhaps he means genuine Hinduism free from idolatry and superstition. Later on, Vivekananda was to point out that this Aryadharma was very near to both Islam and Christianity, and Aurobindo also would for a time champion the Aryanization of India. All this, however, is subsidiary in the present context. What is relevant is that Bankimchandra was equally hard on the immorality
and cupidity of the British, the decrepitude of the decadent Islamic imperialism and the idolatrous practices of the Hindus, and he dreamt of the revival of a religion based on spiritual knowledge. More importantly, he wrote a novel of revolution that would inspire people to rise against the authority of the British who in his day were firmly established; his criticism of Muslims was only incidental. He had to suffer in his service career for his criticisms of the Britishers in the novel and had to step down from the post of Assistant secretary, a small promotion he had earned after about twenty-four years of devoted work. He removed some derogatory phrases about the British people in subsequent editions, and this was very adroitly managed, because these excisions did not alter the significance of the work.

No reader should fail to capture this total significance or to notice that the criticisms of the Muslim rulers and sepoys were immaterial, because they did not deserve anything better; and in 1882, when there was no chance of the revival of the Muslim Empire in India, these criticisms were of only historical interest. But the Muslim League was founded in 1906 at the initiative of the Nawab of Dacca and separate electorates were given to Muslims in 1909. The inspiration for both came from British politicians and the Anglo-Indian bureaucracy, and their target was Indian nationalism, of which the sponsors were Hindu intellectuals and patriotic Hindu young men. In a country where the vast majority of the population are Hindus, they would naturally play a leading role in every sphere, but the large percentage of Muslim population in India at a time when we see an array of Islamic states in Afro-Asia should demonstrate that the Aryadharma preached by Bankim, which directly or indirectly has inspired succeeding generations, is not religious chauvinism. And there the controversy, artificially sustained by designing politicians, should rest.

VI

Bankimchandra chose this story and this period for yet another reason. He wanted to inculcate patriotism as a religion and present the motherland as a divinity. For this purpose he would be able to make suitable characters out of the roving
pilgrims who were supposed to be out on a visit to some holy place. But a patriot dedicated to the national cause can have only one God—and that is the motherland, which, according to the well-known Sanskrit saying, is as sacred as the mother and both are to him more sacred than Heaven itself. If the motherland is a deity to be worshipped, she must have a distinctive image and a personality. Such a conception is possible only in a religion that has pagan associations—in modern times in Roman Catholic Italy rather than in Protestant Britain. I should cite only one example which reminds me of Bankimchandra’s concept. It was a song of a revolutionary organization, the Delphic Society in the nineteenth century, in which the Delphic priest thus addresses Mother Italia: ‘My mother has the sea for her mantle, . . . The lady with the dark tresses, whose gifts are beauty, wisdom, and formerly strength; whose dowry is a flourishing garden, full of fragrant flowers, where bloom the olive and the vine, and who now groans, stabbed to the heart.’

That is the way in which Bankimchandra, at the height of his patriotic fervour, looks upon the motherland, whose children (Santans), the patriotic soldiers, derive strength, beauty, love and faith and even the breath of life from her; and although we may have other gods, it is the motherland whom we worship in temples or other houses of prayer. This is a modern sentiment to which Bankimchandra gives imperishable expression by drawing on pagan imagery, but the images lose their sectarian associations and become symbols of a patriot’s one and only deity—the motherland. No one will say that as a creative artist Bankimchandra was anywhere near Shakespeare. But when Shakespeare expresses this modern sentiment of patriotism through moving verse, he cannot draw on such a rich store-house of legend and, mixing it with the beauty of nature, produce a hymn like Bankimchandra’s Bande Mataram. One has only to place beside this anthem Shakespeare’s invocation of England in King John and King Richard II:

This England never did, nor never shall
Lie at the proud feet of a conqueror,

. . . nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.
Or,

This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal Kings,
Fear’d by their breed, and famous by their birth,

This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear Land,

to realize the moving appeal of the song and the slogan.

It may be questioned how a country inhabited by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Parsees can adopt a national song that is redolent of the legend of one particular sect. But that would be arguing in a circle, for the very definition of patriotism presupposes worshipping the motherland as a deity in whom all other deities have merged themselves after shedding their separate identity. Such imaginative expansiveness is the essence of culture and all humane feelings. Do we reject Hyperion because the poem speaks of gods of different lands and different times? Who has not felt at one with Wordsworth when he exclaims in a mood of forlornness—

Great God! I’d rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn,—
So might I . . .
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

If a person, say, one man in four, cannot appreciate this sentiment, he should not stand in the way of those who, inspired by this song and this slogan, would leap to their death.

Those who should have known better were persuaded by critics to adopt Tagore’s ‘Jana-gana-mana’ as the national anthem, but it lacks the intensity and vigour of the appeal an Indian patriot finds in the Bande Mataram hymn. I need not refer to the silly criticism that Tagore composed this poem to sing the glory of King-Emperor George V, but this comment, silly as it is, points to the difference between the two poems. Tagore posits a divinity who decides the destiny of India, but in Bande Mataram, the Absolute is Mother India herself, and there is no deity beyond and above her. That makes the difference between a beautiful poem and a hymn that enlivens and inspires.
In *Ananda Math*, Bankimchandra incorporates the Bande Mataram anthem and gives it an appropriate body, by which I mean a realistic description of a famished country, ripe for revolution, a moving story, and certain characters who try to live the message embalmed in the song and the slogan. Coming to more prosaic details, Bankimchandra also gives a wonderful outline of the plan and programme which may bind together dedicated patriots and prepare them for guerrilla warfare as well as for pitched battles. It will always remain the Sacred Book of patriotism. Critics will arise now and then who will carp at it, but Bande Mataram and *Ananda Math* will endure.
CHAPTER 3

Vivekananda and His Religion
and Philosophy

It is unfortunate that an essay on Vivekananda’s impact on Indian nationalism has to open with a rejoinder to Sri Aurobindo, whom Deshbandhu Chittaranjan aptly described as a prophet of nationalism. In course of an eulogium on Swami Dayananda, Aurobindo contrasts the founder of the Arya Samaj with Mahadev Govind Ranade and Vivekananda, who were ‘great souls and great influences. . . . Vivekananda was a soul of puissance. . . , a very lion among men, but the definite work he has left behind is incommensurate with our impression of his might and energy.’ This obiter dictum is doubly misleading. There is nothing vague, imprecise or indefinite about Vivekananda’s message; and friends and foes, the disciples of Ramakrishna as well as the police sleuth-hound Charles Tegart, knew how it entered the soul of India.

Vivekananda had not only a ‘leonine soul’, but an acute, agile and comprehensive mind which took as its province history, geography, anthropology and eastern as well as western philosophy. The story of Narendranath Datta, son of Vishvanath Datta, who first met Sri Ramakrishna in January 1881, received ochre robes from the Master in 1886, and becoming a Sannyasin, adopted the name of Vivekananda, is too well known to need recounting. Equally well known is the oft-repeated saga of his wanderings, covering, with short intervals, a period of seven years from 1886 to 1893, and then his sudden dash to Chicago to attend the Parliament of Religions, where he carried everything before him. We should not forget this arduous and often hazardous odyssey of a vagrant monk, for it is in course of these wanderings that he saw India in its totality—India sunk in poverty and ignorance, oppressed as much by the foreign ruler as by the Brahmin priest, but rich in its spirituality. It must have been during these wanderings
that in spite of his faith in intuition, he arrived at the important truth that all knowledge is derived from experience, and that inspiration must not override logic.

It is against this background that we have to understand the significance of Vivekananda’s triumph at the Parliament of Religions, where he preached a religion, or, better still, expounded a philosophy which everybody could accept. Romain Rolland says that ‘his speech was like a tongue of flame. Among the gray wastes of cold dissertation it fired the souls of the listening throng. Hardly had he pronounced the very simple opening words, “Sisters and brothers of America!” than hundreds arose in their seats and applauded.’ It is not necessary to repeat that what the audience of 1893 felt was not a passing thrill but something which went into their soul and which it is difficult to forget. Today, ninety years after the Parliament, the orator is no more, nor anyone among the first audience. But what he said then and afterwards, in the brief span of nine years—he died in 1902—is available in his works running to eight volumes, and a reader in the closet will be equally thrilled and equally illuminated. Sri Aurobindo felt the impact but was not possibly acquainted with Vivekananda’s writings, which were the fountain of his pervasive influence.

Vivekananda was neither a social reformer like Ranade nor a Theosophist like Annie Besant. However, it was the Theosophist Mrs Besant who came nearer than Aurobindo to the secret of Vivekananda’s influence. Her account is of necessity brief because she spoke of Vivekananda’s part in the awakening of India, in the limited space available in her Presidential address at the Calcutta Congress of 1917. Here she analysed the forces which led to the Indian Renaissance, and if I remember aright, gave pride of place to Vivekananda’s influence. The emergent nationalism in India was, according to Annie Besant, traceable to six causes: (a) the awakening of Asia, (b) discussion abroad on alien rule, (c) loss of belief in the superiority of the white races, (d) the awakening of merchants, (e) the awakening of women, and (f) the awakening of the masses. Vivekananda played an important part in demolishing our faith in the superiority of the white races and in sharpening our consciousness of the poverty and illiteracy of the masses. Annie Besant, who herself was a great lover of
India and India’s past heritage, lays emphasis on Vivekananda’s love and admiration for India and his exposure of the evils resulting from the materialism of the West. Yet even this estimate, laudatory as it is, falls far short of the truth. Other men, Europeans like Max Müller and Indians like Bhudev Mukherji, have dwelt on the superiority of Indian ways of life. But Europeans in general have looked upon these Brahminical ideas with amused tolerance, and scholars like Max Müller appeared to them as men of curious but useless learning, to whom we should respectfully bow from a distance. Such obeisance was merely formal and the Westerner looked and still looks upon our moral disquisitions with cynical disregard. I may illustrate the point by referring to a recent book by Henry Kissinger, Professor of Harvard University and Special Presidential Adviser and Secretary of State, U.S.A. during Nixon’s tenure. In *White House Years*, he refers, with the tongue in his cheek, to Jawaharlal Nehru’s claim to be the neutral moral arbiter of world affairs, adding the icy comment that this was precisely the policy by which a weak nation seeks influence out of proportion to its strength. No Western critic, howsoever caustic, would dare adopt such a condescending attitude towards Vivekananda. That is because Vivekananda gave such a lucid exposition of what he called India’s spiritual mission, explaining with extraordinary clarity the deeper truths of life and supporting his arguments with telling illustrations that even those who came to scoff would stop to ponder. His open admission of the weaknesses of dualism, of the limitations of Hinduism—crudities of idolatry, evils of casteism and ‘don’t-touchism’—gives a new dimension to his arguments which are difficult to controvert or to ignore.

It must also be said that the sixth force, the awakening of the masses, referred to by Annie Besant, was largely Vivekananda’s work. Here I may be excused for referring to a personal experience. It was in 1915 that Aurobindo referred to the inadequacy of Vivekananda’s work as compared with his enormous influence. It was in 1915 that I migrated from a sleepy hamlet to a large village, a river port, humming with commercial activity, containing libraries all over the place and the entire area dotted with schools of some sort or other. Not that the rate of literacy was high statistically, nor that
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I met many learned men there. But I found that the only books which young men used to read, besides text-books, were the works of Vivekananda—particularly Prachya O Paschatya (‘The East and the West’) or Vartaman Bharat (‘Modern India’). Some people would read the Bengali recensions of his letters and lectures in English. It was the impact on these young men, who had drawn inspiration from the works of Vivekananda, which passed on to men and women who were illiterate or had no time to read books. It was in this way that Vivekananda’s influence was responsible for the awakening of the masses referred to by Mrs Besant.

II

The spirituality which, according to Vivekananda, is the ‘theme’ or principal characteristic of Indian culture and civilization was not a revealed message or a product of a sudden inspiration but the result of centuries of striving, experiment and assimilation. The question who were the original inhabitants of India would possibly never be answered correctly, but there is no doubt that various race-waves have swept over the country—Negrites, Kolarians, Dravidians and Aryans, Greeks, Mongoloids, Mongols, Tartars, Scythians, Parsees, Arabs, even descendants of the Vikings, and the lords of the German forests. No wonder such commingling of races and the twin processes of emigration and immigration have led to the emergence of a multiplicity of religions, because religion is a part of the constitution of humanity. Out of these innumerable religions Vivekananda has tried to evolve One Religion which is as broad-based as atheism, as intense as Islam, and of which the most distinguishing feature is that it tolerates everything except intolerance.

The theory held by most theologians is that there is a God in heaven who created the universe of men, animals, and stars, in fact everything that exists. This notion is derived from our ordinary experience of a maker making something out of materials ready to his hand. Since nothing can be created out of nothing, God must have made the universe out of materials already in existence. Who created these materials, and, assuming that God created the universe, who created the Creator?
Hindu scriptures say that God is self-created, and the religions originating in the Semitic lands posit a God whose origin is unknown; but the difficulty is that there are two 'Gentlemen'—God and Satan—warring against each other. But can we rationally accept such hypotheses, of an uncreated God or of two immortal Beings filling the same universe?

Mystics have direct experience of God. They can see what is invisible to the eye, but such experiences are not capable of rational demonstration. There are some people who think that God is mysterious and supernatural, and we must admit that there are more things than are dreamt of in our philosophy. Vivekananda is, however, equally impatient of mysticism and occultism. There is a power which we must recognize as inspiration or intuition, but its products and findings must be consistent with reason. Vivekananda deprecates blind faith in scriptures, which are, after all, books, and our faith in them should be tempered by circumspection. Although Vivekananda looks upon religion as part of the human constitution, he realizes, too, that there is also an economic necessity; that is to say, in his opinion the growth of religion is partly determined by economic and other temporal forces. If we remember the mundane circumstances in which religions develop, we shall have little ground for religious wars and communal clashes.

No reader need be surprised if he is told that Vivekananda banishes Heaven from his religion and gives a secondary place to the person whom we call God. There is no God who created the universe, neither does he rule the world, awarding prizes and punishments. Although a Vedantist who quotes from the Upanishads, he quotes from other scriptures too, without professing blind faith in any books. His goal is Freedom; the instrument for attaining that goal is knowledge, and knowledge must begin at the grassroots, that is to say, with sensuous perception. It is on the basis of sense perceptions that we proceed to a higher stage of knowledge which we may call intellectual inference, which takes us from particulars to a general truth and from the less general to the more general. Although this intellectual faculty works on sensuous perception, it has its seat in the mind. There are empiricists who think that the mind is only a function of the body, which is a material entity;
what we call mental activity means only the functioning of nerves, especially of the brain, which is a part of the body. On the other hand, idealists hold that the external world has no existence beyond what is projected by the mind. Vivekananda’s solution of this ancient controversy is worth quoting: ‘Now to prove matter from mind, and mind from matter, is to deduce from each the very qualities which we have taken from each; and, therefore, all the fight about the causality of mind or matter is merely a word puzzle and nothing more.’

Mind is a general name for all activity that is not external. But the mind has various levels; for example, there is a storehouse which retains our impressions, but some of them seem to be totally effaced and might reappear when it suits them. This part of the mind might be called the conscious self. But beneath consciousness there is a level which may be called the region of the unconscious. According to Freud, the greatest exponent of the subject, ‘every mental process . . . first exists in an unconscious state or phase, and only develops out of this into a conscious phase, much as a photograph first exists as a negative and then becomes a picture through the printing of the positive.’ Some modern experiments are leading to the formulation of another science—it is called para-psychology now—which suggests that certain people can recall their experiences in a previous birth. Careful verification in different ways shows that these experiences are stored up in the unconscious and come back erratically with details which can pass the most searching scrutiny. If Vivekananda had been alive today, he would have been mightily interested in this embryonic science, but it does not touch our present argument.

There is a layer of consciousness which is possibly the highest of all, which Vivekananda calls the super-conscious; he says that its peculiarity is that although it does not follow the discursive, analytical process of logic, it does not also contradict reason. It is a spiritual urge, and it is located in the soul, if we restrict the mind to activity that is entirely material or intellectual. This spirituality looks beyond calculations of profit and loss and urges us to do what ought to be done. The hired murderer is fortified by hashish, from which the word ‘assassin’ has been derived, but the martyr is urged by the sense of Duty, the Stern Daughter of the voice of
God, which Kant calls the Categorical Imperative. It is true that this voice is overlaid with various accretions and impositions which obscure the pure intuitions of the imperative. It is the business of education to scrape off these extraneous accretions which cloud the mind and impede clear vision and right action. I have referred to Kant's Categorical Imperative because more than once Vivekananda mentions Kant as a philosopher with whom he has affinities. But the starting-point of Vivekananda's own philosophy is the Absolute which is unknowable. The Absolute occupies a central position in Hegel's philosophy too, but Vivekananda's approach to the Absolute is different from that of Hegel, of whom he does not seem to have entertained a high opinion.

III

Vivekananda explains his conception of Reality with the help of a diagram which I have found helpful for understanding such a recondite problem. The Absolute is the only Reality. It alone is, or in other words, It is pure Existence, but It cannot be known, because being infinite It cannot be objectified. The diagram reproduced below may give us some idea of what defies comprehension.

![Diagram]

(a) The Absolute

(c) Time

Space

Causation

(b) The Universe
The Absolute is Existence \textit{per se}. It is incomprehensible because there is none outside It to know or measure It. Time and Space are concepts by which man knows what he sees; these are also necessary to explain to him the changes which he thinks he sees. For an analogy, we might refer to the movement of the sun which we seem to see, and it is with the help of this movement that we count our time, but the sun's movement, if there is any, cannot be visible to man on earth. Movement is change and change can occur in space. Once we see movement and change in space, we have also to posit the law of causation. As this is the medium through which the unseen, the incomprehensible is seen and comprehended, we may compare it to glass—spectacles, binoculars, telescopes, microscopes—through which the Absolute, the Eternal subject is objectified, the medium imposing on It its own limitations. This world of objects we call the universe, and science can now even posit the concept of the expanding universe, which is a self-contradictory expression, because if it is the universe, it is not capable of expansion. But the contradiction will disappear if we remember that Time, Space and Causality are human media, and it is through them that the Absolute has become the universe.

Vivekananda calls himself a Vedantist, and the Vedanta says that Brahma is \textit{Sat}, Existence or truth, and the universe is Illusion or Falsehood, and critics complain that this is the reason why Indians, who are unworldly, have been beaten and surpassed in the struggle for existence. That is not how Vivekananda looks at the matter. The universe certainly is not Existence in the same sense in which Brahma or the Absolute is, but neither is it an illusion like a mirage. It is a manifestation of the Absolute and is thus a reality in the empirical world of Time, Space and Causality. The sun's movement from east to west is an apparent movement but it is not an illusion, for when the sun is not there in the sky, the earth is enveloped in darkness. This is a truth of the phenomenal world, but we shall be equally in the wrong if we mistake it for the ultimate truth. Time, Space, Causation, our senses—all these belong to the world of phenomena. They cannot be wished away, but neither are they Real in the sense in which the Absolute is Real. This is the key to Vivekananda's life and philosophy. Although a
Sannyasin, he was very much a man of the world, preaching a tireless crusade against the poverty, ignorance and priest-ridden religion he saw around him; he saw, too, the emptiness of the glamour of Western civilization, and although he never dabbled in 'political nonsense', he could not be unaware of the impact of his philosophy and of his diatribes against his fellow-countrymen and his western hosts. There are some who thought that he was too worldly-minded to be a Sannyasin or monk, while others hated him as a seditious sadhu. But he was neither, because he knew that the problems he discussed and tried to solve were pressing problems but had no fundamental reality. He could see clearly and express himself with lucidity and force, because even while he was absorbed, he was non-attached.

We are so accustomed to watching the constant succession of cause and effect and the testimony of our sense organs that we have no doubt about the inviolability of the causal relation and the unfailing connexion between a particular sense and the work assigned to it, but artists with their sixth sense know the tentativeness of such arrangements and express their doubts in their own peculiar, sometimes fanciful, way. When he was in his eighties, Bernard Shaw was asked to what cause he attributed his exceptional mental and physical efficiency in old age, and he answered very characteristically, 'I do not attribute it at all!' Shakespeare is more amusing but equally far-seeing when he makes Bottom hold forth thus after waking from his dream: 'The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.'

IV

This is Sat, which means Existence. If Time, Space and Causality were not there, there would be no universe, the Absolute would remain, but It would be unknowable, and it would not be possible for us to say what It is. As we cannot posit any creator who himself has not been created, we need not go beyond the Absolute. Our notions of good and evil derive from our super-conscious moral sense, which is our justification for positing the Absolute, but the Absolute does
not 'abide our question'. We must accept It with all that is good and all that is evil. It seems to answer with the demi-devil Iago: 'Demand me nothing! What you know, you know.' We have to accept the world as it is: the street-walker along with the chaste woman. Probably the one would not be there if the other were not. We must try to do good, not because the religious scriptures say that we should do good, but because we feel that it is good to do good. This is non-attachment, the fruit of knowledge which is Chit, and if we can accept with equanimity a universe that is a mixture of good and evil, we shall have Freedom or Bliss (Ananda), and Vivekananda sometimes called himself Satchidananda. It is this rational acceptance of the world along with a recognition of the inherent impulse to do good, which is the hallmark of Vivekananda's philosophy. Its God is an impersonal God, who can never be known, and cannot, therefore, be an object of controversy and dispute and cannot cause any clash or warfare. This philosophy based on an Impersonal Absolute which has no connexion with any personal God is the source of all religions, but it is not itself a religion, for it has no God, no heaven or hell. The human mind wants to love and deify the vast unknown, and that is why man is always creating a God or many gods who are Persons. This happens only at a lower level and such deification or worship is a good thing if only we remember that the deity is only a symbol. Beyond this is the unknown Impersonal which is identical with our own Self or Spirit. From where else could we derive our super-conscious moral sense? This realization is valuable, because in such a realization there is no room for strife, and all is peace. It is immaterial whether we follow the Vedas or the Quoran or the Bible. Every creed is only a human and, therefore, a limited attempt to objectify the Eternal Subject.

Vivekananda claims that this philosophy of the Impersonal Absolute with which the Soul is at one (Soham) had its origin in India and from here it travelled to other lands. When Jesus said, 'I and my Father are one, or I am the Word', he preached a message that had already been enshrined in the Upanishads. Although these sages recognized the basic equality of all souls, this noble doctrine was, quite early in its history, distorted and corrupted by the abuse and misuse of the caste-system. Es-
sentially, castes were hereditary trade-guilds without any implications of social or spiritual superiority. The great merit of the system was that it guaranteed hereditary employment. It would be useless in the present context to go into the history of the caste system in India. One thing is certain that it was degraded beyond redemption, and one of the benefits of British rule, according to Vivekananda, is that it has released us from the tyranny of priestcraft, which reduced Hinduism into a religion of ‘don’t-touchism’.

It is to the credit of Lord Buddha that he waged a successful war on casteism and priestcraft, but Hindu tradition was so deeply entrenched in Indian society that there was a countermovement against Buddhism, which, in its turn, had degenerated on account of the infiltration of Vamachara or rites involving sexual orgies. This reaction against Buddhism culminated in the advent of a man of exceptional intellect and organizing power, the great sage Shankaracharya, who, by reconverting Buddhists to Hinduism, almost succeeded in driving away Buddhism from the land of its birth. The old caste distinctions were revived and their rigours multiplied. Although Vivekananda was a Vedantist professing monism, his philosophic interpretation is different from Shankara’s. I am not competent to go into the subtleties of Vedantism or Shankara’s exposition of Mayavada, the Doctrine of Maya. What is important for the purpose of the present argument is that Vivekananda looks upon maya more as a manifestation than as an illusion, and according to him, even if we call the world an appearance (which is more to the point than illusion), that is the only reality we know in the world of Time, Space and Causality. We shall be able to rid us of intolerance, rigidity and fanaticism, only if we know the limitations of empiricism and sectarianism.

Although Vivekananda denounced the ‘don’t-touchism’ to which Hinduism had reduced itself, he did not lead any movement for the abolition of castes, for he had greater faith in education and was a teacher rather than a social reformer. Apart from his faith in Western education, he knew that his interpretation of Soham (I am He), if rightly elaborated and understood, would be a more powerful solvent of social evils than reform movements ending with legislation. From this point of view, he had high praise for Islam, of which the two
cardinal principles are the unity of God and the equality of men. In the Islamic account of the creation of man, Vivekananda points out, Allah created Adam and called upon the angels to salute him; all the angels complied, except Iblis whom Allah at once turned into Satan. It is only amongst Mohammedans that a slave could without much difficulty make his way up and even become a king. Is it not significant that in Indian history we had a regular Slave Dynasty founded by Qutubuddin, who was originally a slave of Mohammed Ghor? From a log-cabin Abraham Lincoln made his way to the White House, impelled in this quest more by his resolve to put an end to slavery than by personal ambition. He fought one of the most righteous wars in history and after winning the Civil War passed a law emancipating slaves. That was in 1863, more than a century ago, but Harlem remains Harlem, and no Negro has yet been able to get within measurable distance of reaching the Presidency of the U.S.A.

V

Although Vivekananda had great respect for the religions preached by Jesus and Mohammed, he was at times severely critical of both Christianity and Islam. According to him, they were religions of the sword and both preached and practised jihads and crusades. When Columbus discovered America, there was a sizeable population of natives both in North America and in the twenty-three countries in the South, now called Latin America. But where are they now? Where are the Muslims who for centuries ruled in Spain? Where are the Etruscans who once were masters of Italy? The charge that Mohammedan conquerors put non-believers to the sword may be exaggerated, and Vivekananda himself admits that more low caste Hindus were converted to Islam because of Brahminical persecution than by the alien conqueror’s sword, because the pariahs knew that they would get more considerate treatment from high caste Hindus if they embraced Islam than they were accustomed to receive in their lowly station in Hindu society. But equally is it true that wherever the Muslim Sultans and Caliphs have conquered territories, they have—to put it mildly—discriminated against non-Muslims, who have been reduced
to ever-thinning minorities. I need only refer to the minorities we have created in our time and in our country. How many Muslims were there in the subcontinent in 1947? It will be seen that the number as well as the percentage remains today where it was thirty-five years ago in India, but if a similar comparison is made about non-Muslims in Bangladesh and Pakistan, the figures would be appalling. What is more unfortunate, the lot of the minorities in Bangladesh, which was created with the aid of India, seems to be bleak, for their homeland is on the way to being declared an Islamic state. Pakistan sometimes makes glib references to communal clashes in India and their absence in Pakistan. There are communal clashes in India as there are other forms of conflict and strife. But are there enough Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan to fight the majority even in sporadic clashes?

Vivekananda, who is a monist rather than a monotheist, goes to the roots of the problem and says that there can be no religious differences if we remember that all our creeds are but imperfect approaches to the Absolute or the Eternal Subject who cannot be objectified. If we remember this, there can be no conflict about the holiness of mosques or temples or churches, because all these are sacred buildings where we gather to pray to One who is identical with our own soul and has no separate existence, no power to grant prayers and punish offences. Buddhism, it may be recalled, was a proselytizing religion which travelled from one land to another, making converts, but it never used the sword or exterminated non-conformists.

A salient feature of Vivekananda’s philosophy is his doctrine of ‘gradations’ or gradualness or degrees of goodness and truth, all applicable in the universe seen through the glass of Time, Space and Causation. That is the origin of the cult of Bhakti, which may lead to idolatry. Hinduism and Roman Catholicism are much more inclined that way than Islam or Protestantism. This is the stage of Bhakti or devotion to a Personal God with whom personal relationship is possible, and there is no ground for conflict if we remember that these are imperfect ways of realizing the Absolute which is incomprehensible. That is how symbols and rituals enter into our creeds. The two religions which try to contemplate the Absolute in spirit and not through symbols, I mean Islam and Protestantism, have not been able
to do away with symbols altogether. Protestant Christians would not worship the Virgin Mary, who was a human being, but they have the same worshipful attitude to the church as Hindus have towards the temples, and do Protestants quarrel with Catholics simply because Catholics say the mass and they do not? George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, went so far as to call the church the steeple-house and his followers dispensed with priests at their prayer meetings. Vivekananda points out that even Muslims cannot do without symbols. The priest who leads the prayers does not face his followers but stands amongst them—a mark of equality, but the mosque is a symbol of holiness, and I have heard it stoutly proclaimed: once a mosque, always a mosque; that is to say, the spot of earth where a mosque was once built should always be regarded as sacred. It is well known that the stone Caaba is regarded as sacred by the Muslims and so also the well of Zim-Zim, and wherever the Muslim says his prayers, he says them with his face towards the Caaba. This is far from polytheism and idolatry, but it is a concession to man’s inalienable attachment to symbols. All these arguments are not a plea for idolatry or polytheism, but they are intended to show that these are only an attempt to give form to what is Pure Spirit, and this tendency is innate in man.

Vivekananda recognizes four ways to salvation, which in Indian languages is called Yoga or Union with the Divine. Of these Raja-Yoga is a kind of practical exercise that gives concentration and prepares the mind for the consummation all pious men devoutly wish. Although important, this need not be elaborated in a discussion that is theoretical. It is an aid to the other Yogas, leading us to salvation or freedom. The merits of Bhakti/Love or Devotion and Jnana or Knowledge have been hotly debated by different schools of philosophy or religion, and even the great Bankimchandra involves himself in a contradiction by advocating Bhakti in the exordium and Jnana at the conclusion of Ananda Math. Vivekananda, who lacked Bankimchandra’s creative genius, had a firmer grasp of the problems of philosophy and religion, and he very lucidly explains the advantages and disadvantages of Bhakti and Jnana; though as a Vedantist he seems inclined towards Jnana, he makes a harmonious combination of all the three Yogas, be-
cause Knowledge and Bhakti find fulfilment in Karma or Action.

The basic principle of life is expansiveness, and expansion means union with something or somebody outside one's own self. Vivekananda gives the commonplace example of a man going out of himself to love a woman who bears him children, in whom both parents find a new bond of unity. It is from the intensity of longing for the divine that the devotee derives the mood of self-surrender; without this intense absorption, the quest for knowledge looks like ploughing the sands. As Omar Khayyam says,

Myself when young, did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint,—and heard great Argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

If one follows the path of Bhakti or Love, there is no coming out by the same door as in you went, but the insuperable limitation of this path is that here one cannot rise above the plane of sensuousness, nor can one rise above dualism, for God above is always separate from the devotee worshipping him on earth. Both these ways or paths fulfil themselves in Karma, which, however, belongs to the world of phenomena and should, therefore, be explored in a separate chapter.
CHAPTER 4

Karma-Yoga

Man lives to work. Even breathing is a kind of action, and a very complex kind of action. I breathe because I live; when my breathing stops, life will stop too. This means that I breathe in my own interest; but this involves the killing of innumerable microbes. The poet adjures us to turn our hasty foot aside in order to avoid trampling on the tiny worm, but if you follow that advice you cannot walk at all, because you cannot help crushing innumerable worms too tiny even to attract your notice. That shows that what is life for me is death for others. In other words, destruction, which is evil, is unavoidable. It is also undesirable to abstain from resisting evil; for if you attempt to practise the maxim ‘Resist not evil’, the whole social fabric will fall to pieces, and the wicked will take possession of our properties and lives.

It follows, therefore, that we have to accept both good and evil with equanimity. This world, says Vivekananda, will continue to be a mixture of good and evil, and there cannot be any action which is perfectly pure or totally impure. In another context he says that this world is neither good nor evil. It is the Lord’s world. He confesses that he uses words like God or the Lord, for lack of a better word in English. He means not the creator or the ruler of the universe, but Absolute Existence seen through the glass of the human mind which perceives everything in terms of Time, Space and Causality. The world is as it is and it will always be so.

In this world our first sensation is of our individual existence, and that is why the primary instinct is the instinct of self. So our strongest impulse is to look after our own interest—‘I and mine’, as Vivekananda puts it. But there is another interest, too. ‘I’ cannot stand alone; a man makes love to a woman whom he takes as his wife, and begets children. That is to say, self-interest means overcoming mere personal interest; in other words, as Vivekananda himself says in yet another context, the
first manifest effort of life is expansion. You must expand if you want to live. It is in this way that a woman risks her own life in order to beget a child she calls her own; nay, her and her husband’s own. So a man’s self-interest is mixed with unselfishness. In this way a man allies himself and his family with a class or a tribe, and these groups combine to make a nation and nations co-operate to form an international order. Since at every step there is co-operation, there is also conflict which has to be overcome. Using phrases which seem to have been Vivekananda’s favourites, we might say that every step in evolution must be followed by a step backwards in involution. That is why however strenuously we might strive to establish an international order, by founding a world empire, or by preaching a world religion or by uniting the workers of the world, the units of such empires soon disintegrate into separate nations, the contemplated world religion splits into warring sects, and the dream of world communism seems to dissolve into fragments of socialism in one country.

If we follow the primary animal instinct of self-preservation—everyone for himself and the devil take the hindmost—it will mean constant warfare which will end with the annihilation of the human race. It is one among many reasons for which many animals have become extinct, and the human race has come very near it, with the threat of biological warfare, chemical warfare—and now atomic or nuclear warfare. But man’s superior intelligence which invented these weapons has come to his rescue, and he has held back and will hold back. He knows that if he does not exercise self-restraint, he will be crushed, and so on purely rational considerations, he must do good to others so that others also might do good to him. In this way, a rationalistic system of ethics has grown up, which is known as utilitarianism or the doctrine of doing the greatest good to the greatest number. Although himself a great rationalist, Vivekananda does not find it acceptable. ‘Procuring the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number? Why should I do this? Why should I not produce the greatest unhappiness to the greatest number, if that serves my purpose? How will utilitarians answer this question? How do you know what is right or what is wrong? I am impelled by my desire for happiness, and I fulfil it; I know nothing beyond. . . . Whence
come all these truths about human life, about morality, about the immortal soul, about God, about love and sympathy, about being good, and about being unselfish?'

The above quotation expresses very clearly and strongly the case for an individualistic, hedonistic approach to life. One of the most insignificant characters in Shakespeare is Pompey in Measure for Measure, who was servant to Mistress Overdone, who had nine husbands one after another, and then became a courtesan and procuress. Questioned by the wise old Lord Escalus, to whom this little vermin of a man is brought under arrest, he thus describes himself, 'Truly, sir, I am a poor fellow that would live'. If this inalienable right claimed by Pompey is admitted, goodbye to law and morality, away with philosophy and ethics. But man is also a spiritual being who does not care merely for living but also for the quality of living.

II

The question, I believe, was discussed most comprehensively in the Gita, a series of discourses delivered by Lord Krishna to Arjuna on the eve of what might be called the Armageddon of Indian legend—the mighty clash of arms at Kurukshetra. When war breaks out between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the Kuru king Duryodhana, who had grievously wronged his cousins, the Pandavas, could claim the loyalty of all the leading men, because he was the reigning sovereign. But it was a difficult problem for those whose allegiance he sought. He was a reprobate who had gained by fraud what he now claimed as his right. Bhishma, the wisest man in his kingdom and the greatest soldier of his time, got over the qualms of his conscience by means of a compromise. His political obligation was to his king, the head of the state, if we can borrow a word from modern times, but he had his duty also to the Pandavas, who were as near to him as Duryodhana and whose demands were modest and just. He reconciled the conflicting claims by striking a balance between them. He would be the generalissimo of the Kaurava forces, but he would not kill any one of the Pandava brothers, and he also reserved the right to give them proper counsel. Indeed, this invincible warrior reveals to the Pandavas the secret of his own vulnerability. If he saw Sikhandi,
a hermaphrodite, fighting against him, he would lay down arms and might then be easily killed. It is this trick that, in fact, brought to the Pandavas their first great victory. Yet the course adopted by Bhishma is philosophically unsatisfactory, because ethics demands a categorical imperative and not a compromise.

The question, as I have said earlier, is discussed more comprehensively and in greater depth in the camp of the Pandavas, where we have the spectacle of Arjuna laying down arms even before the fighting has begun. The greatest of warriors, Arjuna is seized with a strange inertia when he finds that the men in battle array on two sides are all his own people. Duryodhana is his cousin, and the second-in-command, Drona, is his teacher, besides others who are also near and dear to him. On his own side are people even more closely related to him. What is the good of fighting such a war in which he is bound to witness the death of innumerable near ones, no matter which side wins? It is a strange question to occur to a man who was the hero of a thousand battles, on earth and even in heaven, where the king of the gods requisitioned his services to fight the demons. And it occurs at a strange moment and in a strange manner. He does not bring forward the personal wrongs Duryodhana did to them. Indeed, the many side-issues are brushed aside so that attention might be focused on the main problem: What is the goal of human action or, in other words, by what standard is the rightness of human action to be judged, or, to put it more simply, what is duty?

Lord Krishna realizes the complexity of the problem and so generalizes it that the discussion may apply to all men at all times when they are confronted with a moral crisis. In a sense, all of us have to face such a moral problem many a time in our lives. That is why this small book has exercised the minds of all Hindus and also many philosophically inclined people who are not Hindus. Krishna begins by giving a very simple answer. (I must make it clear that I am not arranging Krishna’s answers following the chapter divisions in the great little book.) If Arjuna wins the war, he and his brothers will enjoy all the pleasures of the earth which they will rule. If he is killed while fighting a righteous war, he will go to heaven and enjoy divine bliss. But Arjuna, at that hour, is not interested in the fruits
of victory, because he is not sure if it is a righteous war at all. Another argument offered by Krishna is the indestructibility of the soul, but this is incidental and is intended only to correct Arjuna’s erroneous notion that he could kill anyone. In reality, it is the body which is subject to birth and death, but not the soul. The argument is not convincing, for Lord Krishna only describes the soul’s indestructibility but does not prove that it can exist apart from the body and can retain its present individuality even when the body has been reduced to dust and ashes. Another objection is that this answer passes by the fundamental question whether it is right to fight a war in which close relatives and friends, many of them utterly guiltless, will be killed on either side.

A fresh argument put forward by Krishna makes a large demand on our credulity, and it will have no appeal for anyone who is not a devout Hindu. Krishna, the king of Dwaraka and friend of the Pandavas, reveals himself as the almighty ruler of the universe, who has preordained what is going to happen. He assumes an awe-inspiring form and opens his mouth to reveal that all the warriors whom Arjuna is afraid to kill are already dead. Arjuna’s charioteer Krishna is the incarnation of Vishnu, the ruler of the universe, and Arjuna is only an instrument in his hands. Whatever happens on earth is a manifestation of divine lila, a doctrine of Hindu Vaishnavism. That itself is an admission of the limitation of this interpretation of the Gita, which is held up as an exposition of non-sectarian philosophy and religion.

An allied interpretation, more generally acceptable, is that we are born in a certain situation and we find that certain duties are assigned to us. It is our business to perform our duties with a sense of dedication and ‘with God be the rest’; that is to say, those who are not atheists should perform their duties and leave the results to God. That is a very deceptive assurance. As all pious men will agree, more massacres have been perpetrated with God’s sanction, that is to say, in the name of religion, than possibly under any other impulse or from any other motive. Such solutions, indeed, shirk the fundamental problem: What is the right sort of action? Or, if, as Vivekananda says, there are ‘gradations of duty’, what duty should get priority?
Karma-Yoga

III

It is this problem which the Gita, which contains the essence of Hindu religion and philosophy, seeks to answer, and as the Hindus form the vast majority of the population of India, the solution is worth pondering; and if it can be spelt out in non-sectarian terms, there is no reason why non-Hindus too should not take it seriously. Of writing books on the significance of the Gita, there is no end. From the most learned pandit to the common man, all sorts of people with a flair for thinking and writing have tried their hand at this exercise in exegesis. Many of our national leaders have had something to do with the Gita. Annie Besant worked for the Home Rule League and suffered incarceration for it. Her election to the Presidentship of the Indian National Congress was a landmark in the history of this great organization. I do not know if she wrote any commentary on the Gita, but she translated it into mellifluous English prose. Aurobindo gave his own interpretation to it, but I do not want to consider it here, because he wrote his commentary after he left the field of nationalist activity, which is the subject of the present work. Neither am I inclined to consider Mahatma Gandhi’s interpretation, for Mahatmaji was a great apostle of non-violence, but the Gita is patently a call to arms, an exposition of the doctrine of violence when it becomes a duty. From this point of view, Lokamanya Tilak’s Gita-rahasya (‘The Mysteries of the Gita’) is much more relevant, for he wrote it while he was in the thick of the nationalist movement, on which his views on the Gita exercised considerable influence.

Tilak’s book is a work of massive, almost forbidding, scholarship, but with all my respect for the great scholar and leader, I feel that his exposition, which is far from lucid, is also open to grave philosophical objections. Tilak’s starting-point is that although the Gita deals with three principal paths of life—Bhakti (Love or Devotion), Jnana (Knowledge) and Karma (Action)—the central theme of Lord Krishna’s discourses is Action. The devotee must show his devotion through deeds, and since a sage like Janaka also returns to a life of action after attainment of knowledge, the way of action must take precedence over knowledge and devotion. Tilak’s philosophic
justification for this view is best summed up in his own words: 'There is a fundamental unity underlying the Logos (Ishwara), man and world. The world is in existence, because the Logos willed it so. Man strives to gain union with God and when this union is achieved, the Individual merges in the Mighty Universal Will. . . . If man seeks unity with the Deity, he must necessarily seek unity with the world also and work for it. If he does not, then the unity is not perfect, because there is unity between two elements out of three—Man, Deity and the World.'

There are, indeed, passages in the Gita in support of the view that action has priority over everything else, that performance of duty, which is action, is superior to every other preoccupation. Lord Krishna has no need to work; still he is constantly working. To protect the pious, to destroy the doers of evil, to establish the reign of the true religion, he is born and re-born from age to age. If that is true of the Lord himself, it is more true of men of the earth whose life consists in continuous activity. Yet it must be admitted that the argument is weak both from the point of view of philosophy and from that of ethics. Philosophically, the old question remains, I mean the question: Who willed Ishwara who willed the universe? The reliance on Logos, too, is very unsafe. Logos means Thought and Speech, and in all religions, the Logos has been expressed in books—from the Vedas, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Quoran down to the Grantha-Sahib. Now if all the books are brought together, there will be found both agreement and disagreement, and if we try to arrive at a decision about truth and right conduct from these sacred books, all equally authoritative, the world will turn into a Babel and a Golgotha. The safest course is to read the books which contain wise sayings but to arrive at a code of conduct which is independent of the Deity and the Word.

Here Tilak gives an interpretation of the Gita which is generally accepted. The solution to our problems as well as the path to salvation lies in continuous activity but without any expectation of any personal benefit from it. This is what is called the religion of non-attachment. Vivekananda, who had the breadth of outlook we expect from an atheist, says that this is not very satisfactory, and may even breed hypocrisy. 'It
is the most difficult thing in this world to work and not to care for the result, to help a man and never think that he ought to be grateful, to do some good work and at the same time never look to see whether it brings you name and fame or nothing at all.' A householder has a desire to earn a living for himself and his family, and most worldly people are lured by love of wealth. If he is told by moralists that money is like muck, he will still go on hugging it, but he will also be a hypocrite and conceal his greed from others.

IV

What then is Vivekananda's own solution or prescription? He accepts the generally held view of non-attachment to results, which is so learnedly propounded by Tilak. But he makes significant modifications, and his arguments and illustrations give this hackneyed theory a new value. That is my apology for restating it in some detail. A man should pursue his own interests, which also include the interests of those he lives for. There can be no objection to this, provided he does not adopt dishonest means. But this has a narrowing effect, as he would himself realize even without any moral admonition from others. Secondly, pursuing the interests of one's own people also involves a contradiction. Love is Janus-faced, it makes us combine our self-interest with the interest of others who are near and dear to us. That is to say, selfishness itself presupposes an amount of self-sacrifice; in other words, we have to make an adjustment between selfishness and unselfishness, between love and duty. It is true that Arjuna fights to win back a kingdom that rightfully belongs to the Pandavas, and by winning the war he enjoys the fruits of it along with his own people. But, according to Vivekananda, that is not the way in which Krishna looks at it, for it is only a form of utilitarianism, doing good to a large number of people, including one's own self.

Arjuna is deterred by love for his kith and kin who are ranged on both sides, but in doing so, he is shrinking from a higher obligation. As I have said, there are gradations of duty. Arjuna loves himself and his people and may have a duty to them. But there is a higher duty, fighting a holy war to protect
virtue and to punish villainy, and Arjuna must do this higher
duty unflinchingly without any consideration of probable gain
for himself. As has been pointed out more than once, Vivekananda
does not believe in a heaven above, and he banishes a
personal God from the highest stratum of his philosophy. Man’s
love draws him towards others, and in the limited world
governed by Time, Space and Causation, he has to think in
compartments, of family, clan or class, nation and sect. But
he must also realize that this universe is only a manifestation
of the spirit that is derived from the Absolute, and since the
Absolute, as its name implies, is indivisible, it is the same as
the Soul or Spirit within every man, and from that point of
view, the more we feel kinship with it (Soham), the more we
shall be drawn to all men, all animals and also all lifeless objects
which have the soul hidden in them. Although we belong to
the world of manifestations, where there is inequality as well
as conflict, our duty is to proceed ahead with this realization
that the more we feel our nearness to our fellow-creatures and
even what we call the sphere of ‘stocks and stones’, the better
we are. That realization would give us a feeling of nearness to
the entire universe and ‘I and mine’ would yield place to
‘Thou’—or ‘Thou art That’.

The world is an imperfect place, a mixture of good and evil,
and the passion for perfection or absolute equality would be a
visionary’s dream or a fanatic’s mania. Who knows the Absolute
possibly is not perfect, but we have no means of questioning It.
All that we can do is to minimize misery, particularly human
misery, as much as we can, and that is possible if only we do
all our work, subordinating personal considerations to larger
public interests. That is the true meaning of non-attachment
or working without desire for profit. This is also psychologically
true. All through life we are pulled in opposite directions by
our selfish impulses and by our unselfish instincts. A little
experience of the world will convince all thinking men that
if we sacrifice personal happiness for the good of others, we
feel better, and it is our quality that matters. That is to say,
we should do good, because we feel that it is good to do good.
Above all, there is no slavery more galling than the slavery of
selfish impulses, and if we can throw off this incubus, we shall
feel free. This is how Vivekananda sums up his teaching, ‘Be
unattached. You should work like a master and not a slave; work incessantly, but do not do a slave’s work.’

Not only is Vivekananda’s exposition of Karma-Yoga (Realization through Action) convincing but it is also comprehensive, because it tries to make a harmonious combination of the three paths to Freedom or Salvation. Knowledge aims at aloofness, isolation, and is, therefore, dry disquisition unless it comes down to the world of Karma; it is only then that we feel that ‘the world should be renounced, but not on that account abandoned.’ Adapting the language of Rabindranath Tagore, we may say that it is in the midst of the bonds of action that knowledge shows the way to freedom. On the other hand, if it is intended that we should work without motive in such a way that neither pleasure nor pain touches our mind, we might be induced to revel in wanton cruelty. That is why it is necessary to control ‘the lower ego’ and seek the guidance of benevolent impulses; that is to say, action should be motivated by love even when it involves cruelty and destruction. There is a world of difference between Nadir Shah’s sacking of Delhi and Abraham Lincoln’s launching on a destructive, fratricidal war for the emancipation of slaves.
CHAPTER 5

Vivekananda on Nationalism

In course of a letter on ‘What We Believe In’, Vivekananda wrote in 1894, ‘We preach neither social equality nor inequality but that every being has the same rights, and insist upon freedom of thought and action in every way.’ This statement, clear and straightforward as it is, has to be understood in the light of Vivekananda’s thought in general. The cardinal point of his philosophy is the Absolute as Spirit, which is manifested in everything in the universe, especially in man, whose spirituality finds expression in various ways, not the least in different forms of worship. Although Religion is one, religions may be different, depending on circumstances, and economic, political and even personal necessities.

What Vivekananda insists on is that if we realize the basic sameness of spirit and recognize freedom of thought for all men, differences in external forms should cause no friction. But as we do not always remember this maxim, there are riots and conflicts with disastrous consequences. The Pathan rulers, according to him, interfered with the religion of the native population, and that is why no Pathan dynasty ruled for more than a few decades. The Moguls knew better and did not persecute their Hindu subjects, and they would have ruled much longer but for the principle of religious discrimination introduced by Aurangzeb. For the first few decades after the Battle of Plassey, the British rulers in India, busy with the consolidation of their power, did not touch the religious sentiments of their subjects. But they soon ‘tried to tamper a little with this point’, says Vivekananda in The East and the West, ‘and the result was the Mutiny of 1857’. The British, he warned, should not commit this blunder again.

Here Vivekananda oversimplifies a complex interaction of historical forces. But he cannot be faulted in his main argument, for it is by tampering in a big way with religious differences that British trickery dug its own grave, and in less than a
century after the Sepoy uprising the British ruled had to quit India, leaving a scar that would never heal. Even before Vivekananda wrote the above essay, Viceroy Dufferin had been busy devising a new principle of ruling India through separate electorates. This idea mooted in 1888 was given a concrete shape twenty years later by Lord Minto, and the last Viceroy, Lord Mountbatten, who was both unscrupulous and insidious, completed the work of his predecessors by dividing India into two parts, which soon became three, thus creating several problems under the pretext of solving one.

From this digression, we may return to Vivekananda and his ideas on nationalism. One of the principles Vivekananda lays down for all nations to follow is the recognition of variety in unity. Every nation should remember that it has a certain mission or theme, but subject to that fundamental unity, there would be differences amongst its people in religion, customs, language, and there would also be difference between one man and another in ability and quality. It is only a religious or a political fanatic who would try to abolish all distinctions. Rousseau preached the doctrine of political equality, which Robespierre took literally, and the result was the Reign of Terror, which ultimately led to the emergence of Napoleon, who swallowed the Republic and declared himself Emperor. Marx’s doctrine of a classless society, somewhat loosely phrased, was taken seriously by Lenin, who, while trying to put it into practice, made the breath-taking statement that he had no objection to the extermination of three-fourths of the world’s population provided the remaining one-fourth were converted to Marxism.

Vivekananda’s approach is sensible and practical. Inequality in the mundane sphere is a fact which cannot be wished away; one man will be stronger than another, a second will have superior intellect, a third will be able to make more money than his neighbours, and a fourth will have a nobler character than others. As with individuals, so with nations. Such differences would be conceded without objection if the superior people do not claim any special privilege on that account. ‘Privilege’, which Vivekananda calls the bane of human life, has been seen at its worst in two forms in the East and the West. In India, Brahmins, who were priests as well as savants,
constituted a hierarchy of castes with themselves at the top and reduced Hinduism into a religion of ‘don’t-touchism’. Vivekananda found justification for the original division of castes as a system of trade-guilds which did away with competition and promised security of employment. Even that does not explain how these distinctions hardened into rigid, insurmountable barriers. But his criticism of its degradation in historical, post-Buddhistic times is uncompromising, and it shows his fair-mindedness that he attributes the gradual softening of its rigours to our contact with the West, particularly to the effects of Western education and international commercial transactions. Almost in the vein of Karl Marx he also points out that the days of the ascendancy of the three upper castes are numbered and we are heading towards the advent of the Shudras or the rule of the Proletariat.

Privilege, as understood in the West, which is materialistic, means the pre-eminence given to knowledge that leads to the conquest of nature, the growth of industries and the hoarding of wealth. Keen competition for material success has meant the establishment of an affluent society which enriches itself at the cost of the less fortunate and less enterprising people. This means constant competition, conflict and warfare. There is a mad pursuit of wealth, which ends in moral degradation and is now threatening global destruction. Vivekananda admits that a more enterprising man may have more wealth than others, but it is the duty of society and the state to see that others have financial competence and nobody is allowed to starve or languish in poverty. The actual ordering of material affairs in which there might be differences without exploitation or oppression is a matter of detail which would not create any difficulty if there is proper spiritual education, supplemented but not replaced by scientific and technical education. We must realize that though religions differ, the religious sense is unchangeable and unchanging, and this tells us that the differences that divide men and nations are less important than the basic spiritual unity which draws them together. In a beautiful poem, two soldiers, who had fought on opposite sides in a World War, meet after death, and one of them says to the other, ‘I am the enemy you killed, my friend.’ This is the gist of Vivekananda’s teaching on nationalism. Nations would
exist as separate units, but they should remember that what
unites them is more important than what divides them.

II

Vivekananda’s writings on nationalism have made a more
powerful impact than those of other writers because they have
a broader base and also because they stem from a philosophy
that might be called perennial. Although he was a Hindu monk,
preaching a certain form of Vedanta, it is so catholic that men
of all faiths, including atheists and agnostics, may draw in-
spiration from his writings, which preach spirituality but do
not recognize any heaven beyond the earth, and he never
loses sight of the temporal forces—racial, economic and po-
tical—which sustain our quest for the beyond. An important
feature of this comprehensiveness is his discovery of the simi-
arity between his philosophy or religion and other faiths,
Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam and his frank
criticism of them all. Thus his philosophy or religion has an
appeal for all people because he has his feet firmly planted on
solid earth. Although no one has shown greater contempt for
pleasures that are merely sensual, his eyes were rightly fixed on
the material well-being of men, and although he preached
doctrines that are acceptable to all, he had as little faith in
internationalism and universalism as in mysticism and oc-
cultism.

Vivekananda’s principal contribution to religion, philosophy
and nationalism was the originality of his approach. For him
the Absolute which comprises all Existence is unknown. The
Eternal Subject can never be objectified, but it must be identical
with the Soul in us; otherwise from what source do we get our
spirituality? If we have to posit a separate source, we have to
accept a God and get entangled in the meshes of dualism. Since
all that exists is at one with the Absolute, the world of sensuous
perception and rational pursuits is the same Absolute, seen
through the prism of Time, Space and Causality. I do not say
—and Vivekananda nowhere claims—that he has thought out
everything anew, but no one has argued this philosophy more
cogently and persuasively, and no one has made a better
synthesis of what is mundane and what is cosmic and super-
cosmic. Each soul, said he, is potentially divine; the goal of life is to manifest that divinity.

Vivekananda’s nationalism is so catholic that it is acceptable to men professing different faiths, inhabiting different regions, and speaking different languages. And yet it is distinctively Indian; it is as thoroughly Indian as the Ganga and the Narmada. As is well known, Vivekananda thought that the word ‘Hindu’ had no religious meaning. It really meant the people who lived on this side of the river Sindhu; the Persians pronounced ‘s’ as ‘h’ and the Greeks pronounced ‘h’ as ‘i’ so that it should mean the nationality or religion of the people living on this side of the Indus. When India came under the British yoke, the people were dazzled by the splendour and might of Western civilization. Not to speak of the dumb millions who were awe-struck by the all-conquering prowess of the white races, or of the English-educated Indians who were lured by Western culture, even men versed in Eastern learning, like Rammohun Roy and Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, spoke of the barreness of Sanskrit grammar and Nyaya, Vedanta and Sankhya philosophies. There was a reaction against this tide of westernization, but no one held aloft the torch of Indian culture with greater vigour than Swami Vivekananda, who carried the war into the enemy’s camp. He refuted the allegation that Indians were too much absorbed in their past by pointing out how they were too forgetful of their rich tradition, and by showing that though Indians might have much to learn from the West, they had more to give to the westerners, that the successive waves of immigration into India have always been a turning-point in the history of the nations that made incursions into this land from abroad. The Western nations were more wealthy than Indians, but that does not mean that they were also superior in intellect or spiritual refinement. Ignorance and poverty are curses that should be eradicated, but the hoarding of material wealth may be and often is accompanied by intellectual arrogance and spiritual degradation.

Vivekananda reinforced the above conclusion by delving into the remote past and making a comparison between Western and Eastern—particularly Indian—civilizations. Asian civilizations throve on the fertile soils of large river valleys, the inhabitants of which took to peaceful agriculture which is
congenial to the growth of philosophy, arts and sciences. That is why Indian civilization was daiva or god-like. European civilization, on the other hand, originated in hilly tracts of land or on sea-coasts, and the people who dominated these regions were originally robbers and pirates. That is why their ways of life were originally Asuric (demoniac). Indeed, when Europeans developed a rich culture in Greece, this Hellenic heritage would have been lost but for the Arabs who preserved it. Vivekananda goes further and says that it was as a result of the Crusades that Europe began to be civilized by coming into contact with Asian culture. In this way the Knights Templars learnt Advaita Vedanta, and the Moors, a Mohammedan tribe, established a civilized kingdom in Spain. Even amongst the Asiatics, Indians could claim distinction for their peaceful, tolerant attitude to life. Jehovah, the Hebrew God, was an angry deity whom men had to propitiate in order to escape punishment. But the Aryans worshipped a God who was ‘not only a supreme Being but... the Father in heaven. This is the beginning of Love.’ This Aryan concept reached Palestine, where Jesus, who was rejected by the Jews, preached the doctrine of Love, saying that He and His Father in heaven are One.

III

To a people muzzled by military defeat and enervated by ceaseless propaganda about the inborn superiority of white races, Vivekananda’s message of courage and hope, sustained by logic and scholarship, was like milk and honey; an old nation seemed to be born anew. Young men, full of self-confidence, were urged to give up the politics of prayer and petition and to face their problems and their opponents courageously. They must be abhi (‘fearless’); the only sin is weakness and cowardice. This is one of the common points between Bankimchandra and Vivekananda. The chronicles speak of an isolated skirmish in which roving Sannyasins defeated a company of sepoys and killed an English captain. Bankim magnified this victory into a decisive triumph that might lead to the flight of the foreigners and the establishment of a national government. In the novel Mohendra, a timid Bengali gentleman, at first sceptical about the capabilities of a
few ochre-robed monks, is inspired by the message of Bande Mataram; he starts a gun factory in his own house and becomes one of the architects of the victory that consummates Satyananda's work.

Although Vivekananda does not mention Ananda Math, his advice about national regeneration is the same as Bankim's, and he supports it with a telling fable which he recounts in detail and mentions it more than once so that young men of India might never lose sight of it. A lion cub, orphaned at birth, was brought up amongst a herd of sheep and learnt to feed on grass and to bleat like a sheep. Although it grew up to be a big and strong lion, it always fled from another lion, bleating along with the sheep when they saw the other lion at a distance. One day this second lion took our sheep-lion to a lake, and when it saw its own reflection side by side with that of its companion, 'in a moment came the idea that it was a lion and the bleating was gone'. The second story recounts a personal experience. In Varanasi Vivekananda was once pursued by a large pack of monkeys. As he began to run away, the faster came the monkeys, pursuing and trying to bite at him. Then a voice from somewhere told him, 'Face the brutes.' He now turned back and faced the brutes which then fled pell-mell. 'That is a lesson for all—Face the terrible, face it boldly.' True, in both the stories, the context is of religion and spiritual freedom. But, in Vivekananda's philosophy, 'earth, heaven and all that is between have but one name—earth'; and so what applies to spiritual freedom applies to political (and economic) freedom also. We have to face the brutes and face them boldly. No wonder his favourite character in literature was Milton's Satan. 'The only good man I had any respect for', says he, 'was Satan', who thus exhorts his comrades,

Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering:

In 1897, in the course of a lecture at Lahore, he said, 'And slaves must become great masters. So give up being slaves. For the next fifty years that alone shall be our key-note—this, our great Mother India.' Let all other vain gods vanish for the time from our own minds. What the Mother wants is strength and fearlessness from her children who will be able to fight for
her if they realize that they are the ‘One Spirit that animates the universe’.

The Mother whom Vivekananda invokes stands for all her children who have come from different places and inhabit different regions on this side of the Sindhu or the Indus. It is a geographical unity, embracing different races, speaking different languages, professing different creeds, but all animated by the same spirituality. In 1898 Vivekananda wrote to Mohammed Sarfaraj Hussain, ‘Advaitism (= Monism) is the religion of the future enlightened humanity. The Hindus may get the credit for arriving at it earlier than other races. . . . Yet practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one’s own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally. . . . my experience is that if any religion approaches to this equality, it is Islam alone.’

No apostle of nationalism has exercised greater influence in the twentieth century than the Hindu monk Vivekananda. In a confidential report, the Police Commissioner Charles Tegart said that, not to speak of Vivekananda’s followers, Vivekananda’s own writings are ‘pregnant with sedition’. This is a very correct estimate which will be acceptable to all, provided we are allowed to replace ‘sedition’ by ‘patriotism’. Yet in spite of his patriotic fervour or even religious affiliations, he was very fair to Muslims and Britishers, who poured from outside into India, which was equally the homeland of Aryans and Dravidians, who, according to him, differed only in their language. The greatest Hindu thinker in historical times was Shankara-charya, the most famous exponent of Monism, but when he re-established Hinduism, he brought back the rigours of the caste system, thus undermining national unity. Vivekananda rightly pays tribute to the Muslim settlers and the British conquerors for striving to rid India of ‘privilege’, which, according to him, is the bane of what is popularly known as Hindu religion and civilization.

IV

Granting that the ‘mission’ or ‘theme’ of India is spirituality, what was the national problem that faced Vivekananda when in 1886 he became a wandering monk, and not only engaged
himself in meditation and studies but acquired first-hand experience of the people of India from the Rajas and Maharajas to beggars, from learned scholars to illiterate peasants and artisans? He was appalled by the terrible poverty and the massive ignorance of the vast majority of the people and also the unfair and unequal distribution of wealth which had accentuated the curse of poverty, ignorance and superstition, for he saw that when famine was stalking the land, vast quantities of gold and jewellery were being heaped in temples. The sons of the soil, rich and poor, were inert and the British rulers were callous or worse, for they saw only too clearly that any serious attempt at solving these problems would mean an end to their own exploitation, their flushing out the resources of India to enrich their own country. There Swamiji drew a distinction between the Muslim and the European conquerors. The former, after the first wave of Turkish invasions, settled in India, and even when oppressive, ploughed back their plunder to enrich the country they had ravaged. But the British were worse than plunderers, because by establishing a firm administrative hold on India, they only wanted to make it easier and seemingly more legal for them to take away India’s wealth to Europe. It was possibly with reference to the exploitation of the East by the advanced countries of the West that Vivekananda made the cryptic comment that poverty would not be abolished as long as there was a disease called ‘civilization’. Is there an oblique reference here to the exploitation carried on by the white races in the name of spreading civilization?

More important than material comfort or financial competence, necessary as such competence may be, is the power to think independently. Freedom of thought opens the way to freedom of action. ‘Liberty’, says Vivekananda, ‘is our natural right to use our body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others; and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge.’ The basis of all the other freedoms is political freedom, particularly in modern times when, with the advancement of science and conquest of space and time, the State can exercise complete control over all outlets for expression and expansion.

Vivekananda’s master Ramakrishna used to say that ‘an
empty stomach is no good for religion’. And what could we have except empty stomachs? Avenues of employment were daily shrinking, because our new masters were intent primarily on ‘blood-sucking’, in combing out our resources, and the only industry they left to us was procreation of children! India, he said sarcastically, is a land of Janakas, not so many sage king Janakas, but in another sense of the word, prolific in producing children. The result was perpetual famine, for which he held the British responsible, because they had no interest in the prosperity of India. Vivekananda was most outspoken when, towards the end of August 1893, at the house of Professor J. H. Wright, he said, ‘India has been conquered again and again for years and last and worst of all came the Englishman. You look about India, what has the Hindu left? Wonderful temples, everywhere. What has the Mohammedan left? Beautiful palaces. What has the Englishman left? Nothing but mounds of brandy bottles! If man cannot believe in the Vengeance of God, he certainly cannot deny the Vengeance of History. . . . the English have sucked the last drop of our blood . . . they have carried away with them millions of our money, while our people have starved in villages and provinces.’

Who are the men whom History, according to Vivekananda, might make the instrument of its vengeance? The Indian National Congress was eight years old when, in 1893, he went out on his historic mission; eight years after this, when the Congress met in Calcutta in 1901, he was a dying but also a world-famous man to whom the leading delegates went to pay their respects at Belur Math. But the occasional references in his speeches and writings to the Congress and Congressmen are not complimentary. He was glad that the Congress had tried to take all Indians within its fold, but he did not like the westernized ways of the leaders and their sole gift of ‘shouting’ at public meetings, and he had no patience with their politics of mendicancy, their begging the foreign Government for crumbs of favour, and he knew, too, that most of these people had very imperfect knowledge of the Indian masses who form the vast majority of the population. He must have had these leaders in view when he wrote to his disciple Alasinga that he would have ‘no political nonsense’.

Amongst Congressmen there was one exception and that was
Bal Gangadhar Tilak, who seems to have made an impression on Vivekananda by reason of his massive scholarship and his patriotism which was marked by sacrifice, fervour and militancy. In 1892 an unknown Sannyasin stayed at Tilak’s house for about ten days but did not disclose his name. The monk had visitors with whom he would discuss various matters, and then one of these men brought him a ticket and the monk left. Later on, when Tilak read about the tremendous impression made by an Indian Sannyasin at Chicago, he put two and two together and saw that this was his unknown guest. As Vivekananda makes respectful references to Orion, it might be presumed that he accepted Tilak’s hospitality only because he had read his works or heard about him. A great scholar, Tilak was also a fearless patriot who wanted to meet the challenge of British Imperialism with passive resistance and boycott of British goods. This programme came to the forefront in 1905–7, some years after Vivekananda’s death. It would be idle to speculate on what Swamiji would have said about this programme if he had been alive during the Swadeshi agitation, but we know that Tilak gave publicity to Vivekananda’s work abroad and wrote eloquently about him after his death in 1902. Tilak stood for three principles at this time—National Education, Swadeshi and Boycott, which the sponsors broadened into Passive Resistance to British administration. It was on these principles that Tilak split the Congress at Surat and went into the wilderness with his followers, known as the Extremists, among whom the principal figures were Aurobindo Ghose, Bepinchandra Pal and Lala Lajpat Rai.

Tilak left the scene of Indian politics in 1908 when he was sentenced to transportation for six years on a charge of sedition. Of his chief lieutenants, Aurobindo Ghose quietly left British Indian territory in 1910 and settled at Pondicherry to devote himself to spiritual activity. Bepinchandra Pal went on a European tour and was very soon out of agitational politics. Lajpat Rai also went out on a foreign mission, and when he came back, he shuttled between the Moderates and the Extremists. The fact that he was seriously considered for the Presidentship of the Congress in 1914, when the Extremists had no place in it, shows that his extremism was somewhat thin.
V

'Thus ended the Extremist Party,' says Tilak’s biographer Ram Gopal, 'so sedulously built up by Tilak.' This, however, is far from true. The Extremist Party was not built up by Tilak, who was at one time its foremost leader; neither did it end with Tilak’s incarceration in 1908. It is a matter of history that the Extremists were out of the Congress till 1916, but they had to be received back in 1917 when their representative Mrs Annie Besant was elected President in preference to the Raja of Mahmudabad, the nominee of the Moderates who were soon on their way out. As I have already mentioned, the President, in her analysis of the forces that led to the national awakening, especially referred to the influence of Vivekananda’s inspired writings and speeches. Extremism, or Nationalism, as Aurobindo preferred to call it, stands, I believe, for the motto and methods of that school of politics which aimed at complete independence of India, to be attained by non-violent means, if possible, and by violent means, if necessary. This was, of course, the height of sedition when the Government against which this movement was directed claimed that it had been established by law. It was only when Mahatmaji took charge of the movement and pledged himself to non-violence that it was possible for the Indian National Congress to adopt a resolution pledging itself to the attainment of ‘swaraj’ by peaceful means. But the movement for the wrestling of freedom—obviously by violence—had started much earlier, and Wasudeo Phadke, who might have inspired Bankimchandra, was its first martyr. Greater publicity was achieved by the Chapekhar brothers, who killed two oppressive officials, Rand and Ayerst, in 1897 at Pune (Poona). These gallant deeds were the achievements of isolated individuals in Maharashtra and elsewhere. As far as I can see, the Extremist Party, as I have described it, was formed in Bengal in the early years of the twentieth century, and it owed its inspiration primarily to the writings of Swami Vivekananda.

It is necessary at this stage to give a precise account of Vivekananda’s ideas on nationalism. He wanted Indians to awake from the hypnotism of fear and cowardice and acquire strength, for self-realization is not possible unless we have
strength—physical, mental and moral. It is only men ‘with
strong biceps’ that can have self-confidence and self-respect. In
this connexion, he also refers to the debilitating effect of
Western education, which by making us run after new exotic
fashions undermines self-respect. But Swamiji, who had few
prejudices, knew that if we confine ourselves too much to our
own heritage and tradition, we shall find ourselves in a blind
alley. On the other hand, the principal recommendation of
Western education is its tendency to expansion and expression.
It is a ‘man-making’ religion or culture that he wanted. This
culture should be basically Indian, but it should also widen
our outlook and open our eyes and minds to the world outside.
Above all, we must shake off indolence and fear; and to be
good nationalists, we must love our brothers, our own people,
and as Indians we must first try to raise the millions of down-
trodden people who subsist on mohua leaves. These are the
manifested gods whom we should worship by helping them to
shake off indolence and fear and that feeling of dependence
which seizing men not accustomed to freedom of thought.
Vivekananda’s own words are like magic sparks: ‘Feel that you
are great and you will be great.’ That is the first requisite; the
next obligation is to feel for one’s own people. ‘Be free; . . . hope
for nothing from anyone. . . . if you cannot worship your
brother, a manifested God, how can you feel for a God that
is unmanifested?’ It is necessary to point out that when he
spoke of brother men as manifested Gods (‘Daridra-narayan’),
he did not use a trope as Mahatma Gandhi did when he
referred to the scheduled castes as Harijans. For him the
Absolute and the Soul of man were identical—Soham (‘I am
He’), Tattvamasi (‘Thou art that’).

Another point that should be noted here is that he had no
qualms, philosophical or practical, about the use of violence.
He was opposed to the policy of non-resistance, because once
you adopt such a policy, you give a long rope to the wicked to
revel in the harassment of others. I do not think he ever heard
of passive resistance or non-violent non-co-operation. But talk
of violence would not arouse any qualms of conscience in him,
for he knew that a man has to kill millions of microbes if he
has to breathe and several worms if he has to walk, and also
millions of insects if he has to read the Gita by candlelight.
And, though somewhat lightheartedly, he said, 'You can reach heaven more quickly by playing football than by reading the Gita.'

As I have said, his favourite hero in literature was Satan, who adopts all means, good or bad, to carry on a relentless war with an invincible enemy. I need hardly add that he wanted to emphasize Satan's unyielding courage and tenacity rather than his wickedness. Swamiji had also admiration for Robert Clive, who had faith in himself and his mission, and by force and fraud conquered India for England. He paid rich tributes to the Rani of Jhansi, who died on the battlefield fighting for her own rights and the rights of her people. That is the point. If we have to die, we must die fighting for a good cause, and that cause is good which we feel is noble from a spiritual point of view. He found heroism in the Mahrattas led by Shivaji and also in the Sikhs who were welded into a fighting race by Guru Govind Singh, but after the death of Shivaji and Ranjit Singh, the spiritual power of the Mahrattas and the Sikhs declined and so did their physical prowess. Your strength will be like the strength of ten only when your heart is pure.

Vivekananda died in 1902, and within a few years of his death, concerted efforts were made to wrest freedom by violence; this national movement received encouragement from his writings. Although I was not a participant in revolutionary movements, I watched from close quarters such activities fanning out to different parts of Bengal and also extending to other parts of India and even beyond the shores of India. All these patriots, to whichever party they might belong, had to dodge the law; they had to procure arms by surreptitious means from abroad or make explosives in secret hide-outs at home. Even when Jyotin* Mukherji met the British military police in an open encounter, he and his men had to fight with stolen military pistols. Other rebels put on disguises, assumed false names in order to elude official agents and collected money through secret donations or open robberies. Of the leading politicians in India Tilak alone recognized their selfless patriotism, but he did so in an indirect way by resuscitating the Shivaji–Afzal Khan affair or by referring to Krishna's teaching

* He is popularly known as Jatin Mukherji or Bagha Jatin. I have adopted his own spelling of his name.
that no blame attaches to any person who is not activated by any selfish motive or does not derive any personal profit from his actions. He went a little further when he said that Kshudiram and Praphulla Chaki were inspired by a desire to mend the administration by a murderous assault when they found that the British would not do it themselves. He would not defend the use of bombs, but said that the rulers by their persistence in their ruthless ways had invited such reprisals.

Vivekananda’s exhortations were more general and more forthright. He wanted a revival of the Kshatriya spirit; I cannot say whether he was influenced by Michael Madhusudan’s portrait, but it is significant that he extolled Ravana as more and not less civilized than Rama because the demon king was more spirited than his righteous victor. Vivekananda’s religion and his patriotism stemmed from the same impulse—desire to attain freedom from bondage, from foreign rule as well as from selfishness or sensuality, because both are an incubus on the spirit. That is why our militant nationalists could make a religion of patriotism out of his message without stretching or straining it. For the same reason when our guardians spoke of law and order, patriots would remember Vivekananda’s dictum: ‘If living by rules is the standard of excellence, who is more virtuous than a tree?’ Nature has its laws; man obeys them, but when necessary also supersedes them. ‘It is constant struggle against nature that constitutes human progress, not conformity with it.’ ‘Good and evil are not separate existences; they are inextricably intertwined.’ Such teachings were heartening to young men who were determined to break laws and pave the way to national freedom with their own blood as well as the blood of their oppressors. They drew inspiration from Swamiji’s message: ‘We must die; that is certain; let us die for a good cause. . . . The true man is he who is as strong as strength itself and possesses a woman’s heart.’

Son of a solicitor, Vivekananda himself belonged to the upper stratum of society, and he spoke to many educated audiences both at home and abroad. But his eyes were fixed on the dumb, labouring millions of India with whom the future of the nation lay. It is the eradication of their poverty and illiteracy which was his first concern. No dogmas, said he, would satisfy the cravings of hunger; rather our leaders should first try to give
a piece of better bread and a piece of better rag to the sunken millions. The upper classes are mummies, because their vitality has been sapped by centuries of parasitism and exploitation. The masses are like the sleeping Leviathan. The Leviathan will wake up one day; that is to say, the advent of the Shudras will supersede the domination of priestly Brahmins, warlike Kshatriyas and prosperous Vaishyas. This would mean a better distribution of material wealth, which might involve a lowering of the standard of culture. But if we place Swamiji's exhortation about the awakening of the masses in the context of his philosophy as a whole, we cannot miss his emphasis on the antidote to this probable deterioration in culture. The masses should be raised from their abysmal poverty, but they should also be educated spiritually. That is the mission of India as a nation, and there she would find the panacea that has eluded Western materialism.