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CHAPTER I

SOME GENERAL ASPECTS OF NATIONALISM IN INDIA

Nationalism is generally acknowledged to be one of the great driving forces — perhaps even the most powerful of them — in modern history. This statement will probably not meet with much opposition, but it might very well evoke a polite question as to its precise meaning, or even the blunt comment that it has no meaning at all. The problem is that no concise and acceptable definition of the concept of nationalism has been formulated thus far, notwithstanding the fact that a good many historians, and political theorists as well as practitioners, have attempted to find one.¹ Probably no definition combining conciseness with relevancy is possible in the case of a concept which, in common parlance, covers such disparate phenomena as the nationalism of revolutionary France about 1800, Italian nationalism about 1860, Indian nationalism about the beginning of our century, Russian nationalism in the era of Stalin, and African nationalism at present. For that reason, any general definition is apt to be lacking in substance, like this one quoted from H. Kohn, a well-known authority on the subject: "Nationalism is the state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due to the nation-state."² Apart from containing the word "nation", badly in need of definition itself if this definition of nationalism is to be of any use, this sentence does not convey very much. But this is a fact of which Kohn is well aware: his definition is not a conclusion, but only a starting-point for further argument.

But luckily we are not obliged to solve all the problems arising here. We are not primarily interested in nationalism as a general concept, but with its concrete shape in the Indian environment. Therefore, we will feel free to use the term "Indian nationalism" if we are able to make clear what we mean by it. In other words: we think we may be content with a very vague definition of nationalism if we are able to point out the special features of Indian nationalism as we see it.

We might start from the truism that nationalism is a kind of group loyalty. But, like every truism, this one, too, poses more questions than it answers. What exactly is the group involved? And has the loyalty it commands any special qualities when compared with other loyalties?

The group involved is, of course, the nation, but then, what is a nation? To this question, there are two kinds of answer, an "objective" one, defining the nation by more or less outward qualities like the possession of a territory, of a common language, culture, religion, history, and so on, and a "subjective" one, stressing the consciousness of a group that it is constituting a nation because its members wish to do so. In the first case, the nation is mainly looking backwards for its legitimization. This attitude suited many European nations which in the 19th century already existed as fairly homogeneous groups — we are thinking of the Germans, the Italians, the Hungarians for instance. With them, nationalism was an attempt to make the boundaries of the state and those of the nation coincide.³ In the second case, however, it is the future which has to prove the nation's right to exist. This attitude had to be assumed by many recently acknowledged Asian (and African) nations made up of rather heterogeneous components, which had been brought together by foreign domination and were united mainly by the urge to get rid of it.

In the Indian context, the possibility of these different approaches is important because the choice between them, to some extent, determines whether further analysis will result in one or two (or even more) nations in India — the "two-nation theory" justifying the demand for Pakistan was based partly upon the "subjective" theory of the nation. Therefore, it is not surprising that an adversary of the partition of India, like A. R. Desai, bases his view on the "objective" theory; he calls the Muslim community in pre-partition India "a socio-religious group", or a "minority", and not a nation because it did not have a territory of its own, nor a language or an economy which it did not share with non-Muslim Indians.⁴ On the other hand, to a partisan of Pakistan, like K. K. Aziz, "the first and most prominent" of the conditions or beliefs making up nationalism is "the common group feeling which inspires the members of a nation."⁵ Several modern theorists show a tendency to lean towards the latter point of view. One of them is Kedourie, considering nationalism in the last resort as an act of the will;⁶ another is R. Emerson, writing: "The simplest statement that can be made about a nation is that it is a body of people who feel that they are a nation; and it may be that when all the fine-

spun analysis is concluded this will be the ultimate statement as well.”⁷ Nor could it be contended that these theories are made up to accommodate the Pakistanis or some other of the “young” nations who recently claimed their place in the international community; they go back to, at least, Ernest Renan who, as early as 1882 already, wrote that “the existence of a nation is a plebiscite of every day.”⁸ But it is the emergence of Pakistan which, in our opinion, makes it difficult to deny any relevance to the “subjective” theory when considering nationalism in pre-partition India.

It is the subsequent history of Pakistan, however, which demonstrates the restricted validity of the same theory. Evidently, the desire to constitute a nation which is held together only by that desire and by a common religion, does not provide the new nation with a very secure basis for further development. Another way of putting this is that the outward qualities stressed by the “objective” theory are most helpful in creating the sense of belonging together required by the “subjective” theory. But we should bear in mind that an imaginary possession of these qualities may, to some degree, replace their real presence. An imagined or invented common past may have the same effect as a common past legitimated by historical research; myth may stand for reality to a large extent. But it is very much open to question whether a nation could do wholly without a basis in factual reality.

Possession of a territory is considered as the least dispensable of these outward qualities. Territory “... is the only element, with the will of the population itself, whose presence is generally considered as the *sine qua non* of the realization of a nation.”⁹ The reason — or one reason, at least — might be that a territory is necessary for the establishment of a state, which is the political self-expression of a nation. The doctrine of nationalism, as Kedourie expounds it, “divides humanity into separate and distinct nations, claims that such nations must constitute sovereign states, and asserts that the members of a nation reach freedom and fulfilment by cultivating the peculiar identity of their own nation and by sinking their own persons in the greater whole of the nation.”¹⁰ It is this separateness of nations that makes it impossible for any of them to accept being ruled by another nation. Nationalism can never be a purely “national” matter; it is always, to some degree, setting off the nation it is serving against other nations, or against foreigners.¹¹ Remarkably often it takes the form of a fight for freedom and independence, and quite naturally so in the case of colonial peoples. Anti-foreignism, notably anti-westernism, has been a clearly visible component

in Indian nationalism since the days of Tilak at least. A drawback of this tendency, however, is that the foreigner may become the scapegoat for all evils besetting the nation. This too may be observed in the case of Indian nationalism; not a few nationalist leaders told their followers, and probably thought themselves, that poverty and internal strife would cease once the British Raj was ousted from power. Anti-westernism, in most colonial relationships, was intensified by racial antagonism, which in India seems to have made itself felt, notably since about the year 1890, more strongly than before.¹²

The concept of a nation as a separate identity with a character of its own raises, for those who are becoming aware of this fact, the question as to the nature of this identity. In plain words: when a man realizes that he is an Indian and as such fundamentally different from Englishmen, he will be inclined to ask himself what exactly it means to be an Indian, or wherein his Indian-ness exists. It is only when some progress on this road has been made that the fight for political independence will make sense. Minogue describes nationalism as a three-stage process, consisting of an initial stage of stirrings, characterized by the search for a cultural identity, a second stage marked by the struggle for independence, and a third stage of national consolidation.¹³ This analysis of the process is quite appropriate, we think, in the case of Indian nationalism.¹⁴ Looking at it this way, we may call Rammohan Roy, the founder of the *Brahmo Samaj* movement, one of the first Indian nationalists, representing the initial stage of nationalism.

This observation leads to another, to which we have already alluded when comparing the two theories of nationalism: that nationalists are often championing nations which do not — or not yet — exist, a problem confronting nationalism notably in former colonies.¹⁵ Many nationalists, therefore, have declared themselves to be engaged in “nation-building”; in India we might cite the case of Gokhale, mentioning it as one of the aims of his Servants of India Society.¹⁶ The British often spoke slightly of Indian nationalists as “a microscopic minority” of the Indian people, or even denied the existence of an Indian nation. In a sense they were right, for early Indian nationalists were pleading the rights of the Indian nation in a time when national consciousness had not yet spread among the masses, and when they spoke about national rights, many of them probably had in mind only the rights of their own limited group. But it was not very statesmanlike to act upon the assumption that this situation would remain the same for ever, because a people not constituting a nation may become one.

Another aspect of the consciousness of a national identity is a sense of national dignity. Finding their own identity was the only way for colonial peoples to liberate themselves from the suffocating pressure exerted upon them by the rulers' example, which always started from the assumption that the rulers' civilization was a better one than that of the "natives".¹⁷ And the feeling of being second-rate subjects of a foreign power is considered by Emerson to be one of the strongest motivations of nationalism, far more important than any other kind of oppression or exploitation.¹⁸ In India this tendency is revealed by Tilak, advocating "militancy — not mendicancy" in dealings with the British rulers; it was also one of the prominent incentives of Gandhi's feelings and actions. His first full-time occupation with public work was occasioned by a law against which he revolted because, as he wrote: "It strikes at the root of our self-respect."¹⁹

Thus far we have tried to establish some aspects characterizing the concept of the nation, but it may be useful to ascertain as well what is not a nation. We started from the statement that nationalism is a kind of group loyalty — but there are groups other than the nation, also commanding man's loyalty: the family, the tribe, the caste, the religious community. In the context of our subject it is important to compare the nation with the religious community, since nationalism and communalism were rival forces in the last half-century of British rule in India.

W. C. Smith defines communalism in India²⁰ "as that ideology which has emphasized as the social, political and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and has emphasized the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups."²¹ We would like to adopt this definition, though much is left unsaid by it. Smith follows it up with the comment that no definition of communalism remains valid for long, because the phenomenon is changing and developing; in the last years — he refers to the period from about 1940 to 1945 — it has developed into something that might be better called "nationalism". But unfortunately he does not make quite clear wherein this development lies, a question to which we will come back later. The first problem in our context, however, seems to be the growth of communalism from about 1900, a growth all the more remarkable because, on the face of it, it would seem that circumstances — foreign oppression suffered by all Indians alike — were propitious for engendering a sense of national unity. The explanation given by Smith for this phenomenon may be outlined as follows: (a) the Muslim middle class was economic-

ally backward as compared with the Hindu middle class, and (b) the British played off the upper and middle classes of one community against those of the other.²² This last part of his explanation actually means that he is denying that all Indians were suffering *alike*. Apart from British favouritism along communal lines which certainly occurred, but, in our opinion, was not quite as deliberate and consistent as Smith represents it, we may think here about the colour bar. Even this, though operative against all Indians, hampered mainly the westernized élite in their social and economic aspirations, far more than it did the lower classes. This may be one reason why nationalism originated among that élite rather than among the masses.

The explanation Smith gives for the growth of communalism is closely bound up with the view he takes of the causes of communalism itself. As such he enumerates "many and intricate factors: economic, religious, psychological, and so on."²³ But he makes it quite clear that from this group he singles out economic circumstances as "the efficient cause", whereas religion is "an accompanying factor."²⁴ This accompanying factor, however, is apt to be put forward by communal leaders or other interested parties (like the British) as the main cause, concealing by this means the real issue: "In fact . . . communal riots have been isolated instances of class struggles fought in communal guise."²⁵

True, these contentions should not be taken in too narrow a sense; in the course of his elaborate argument he introduces many reservations and elucidations. So it is clear that by "class struggles" he understands not only conflicts between different classes, like peasants and landlords, but also competition between various sections within the same class, for instance between the Muslim middle class and their Hindu counterparts. And speaking about religion as an "accompanying factor", he adds: "In emphasizing the fact that religion is not the efficient cause of communal riots, we do not mean to deny that when it is an accompanying factor it is an exceedingly important one."²⁶ But all the same, the tenor of his whole exposition with regard to the growth of communalism is that — apart from the role the British played — economic factors are by far the most important agents in the process. Here we think the author is somewhat one-sided, and, as a consequence, is underrating the part other factors may have played.²⁷ We consider religion as one of these; as another, the changes in the structure and distribution of political power in India. They were apt to be combined because of the religious aspects of worldly power in Islamic thought.²⁸

Nevertheless, the analysis given by Smith may contain a good deal

of truth. In the case of any political or religious movement it is very appropriate to ask: "Who is going to profit by it?", or: "Which result would be the most profitable for the leaders?" It seems highly probable that "the leadership of these movements, even though they assume an idealistic terminology... may well be in the hands of groups which fight in the first place to oust and supplant those who, in the traditional structure, had a monopoly of certain prominent functions."²⁹ These suspicions may be confirmed by the observation that the purely religious content of communalism tends to be somewhat meagre: religious practices, customs, rites, and ceremonies gain importance, at the cost of genuine convictions and spiritual attitudes.³⁰ We may safely assume that many members of the Muslim League were more concerned about opportunities for the Muslim upper and middle classes than about the interests of the Muslim community as a whole or about the future of Islam. The same, however, does not quite apply to revivalist movements. The Wahabi movement in India, though not communalist, prepared the way for later communalism by stressing the values of pure Islam as it saw them.³¹ Pan-Islamism in India found its adherents among the Deoband ulama as well as among members of the westernized middle class; it was not communalist in itself, but it gave an impetus to communal distinctions which could easily lead on to communalism.³² On the Hindu side, we may note the same effect with regard to the revivalist movement of the *Arya Samaj* which, quite understandably, found its following mainly in the Punjab, where the Hindus constituted a minority population.³³ In these cases we see what Dumont calls "the separative effect of revivalism."³⁴ Some leaders of these revivalist movements probably were motivated by genuine religious feelings; we think this is the case with at least some Khilafat leaders, like, for instance, the Ali brothers. On the other hand, the revivalist movements may have been used by political leaders who wanted to further their own worldly interests or those of the group they belonged to, but the following they recruited by emphasizing religious values and distinctions might be motivated by intentions other than those of the leaders. A process of this kind is, to our opinion, very aptly illustrated by the ultimate evolution of Muslim communalism in India. If this had not been, or had not become, anything more than the expression of a class struggle or of middle class competition, it would be difficult to explain the religious character Muslim nationalism in India assumed about 1940, and in this case the religious impulse came from the following rather than from the leaders.³⁵ Whether this religious impulse was strong

enough to create a viable “Islamic state” as Pakistan wanted to be is another matter — but we think the impulse was a reality, something more than a “guise”. In other words, the following had given the movement a content other than that which many of its leaders may have wanted it to have.

Speaking about this development of communalism into nationalism we must say something about the difference between the nation and the community. In our opinion, an important point is their relationship to political power. A nation is considering the state as its natural expression in the political field, which means that a nation is either wielding sovereign power or is aspiring to do so. The religious community does not, as a rule, assume the same attitude. In a multi-communal state, like India was, the communities acknowledge the sovereign power of the ruler; in pre-partition India this was either an Indian prince or the British Raj. This situation influences their mutual relationship; conflicts between them are suppressed or settled by the sovereign power, and therefore the communities live mostly in a condition of enforced or voluntary compromise. Violence between them may occur, but is considered reprehensible.

The mutual relationship between nations is not the same. There is no authority above them. Nations with conflicting interests may compromise if they think it opportune, but violence is an accepted means of solving conflicts. The *ultima ratio* of the nation is war, or, in the case of a nation under foreign domination, revolt; the use of violence in the service of a nation is not looked upon as reprehensible, but as perfectly legitimate or even laudable.³⁶ The fact that violence became more and more accepted in intercommunal relations in the last decades of pre-partition India might perhaps be interpreted in the sense that the religious community was taking over the role of the nation, wanting to establish itself as a state.

These considerations may, partly at least, explain why a change in the structure and distribution of political power could not but influence the character of Muslim communalism in India.³⁷ Under the arbitrary rule of the princes in the pre-British period, and, thereafter, in those Indian states which maintained their “independence”, communal conflicts could hardly manifest themselves.³⁸ When, in British India, princely rule was replaced by the rule of law, one consequence was that economic power became independent from political power; it was the middle class of merchants and bankers, mainly Hindus, which profited by this development, whereas the Muslim élite, whose position had been closely

connected with political power, lost its employment. The demand for privileges from this side was a natural reaction which had not to be invented by the British. This was one cause of the growth of communalist tension. Moreover, the British government, not wanting to interfere with religious matters — certainly not after 1857 — did not do much to suppress these tensions which, as a consequence, were able to come out into the open. But the most radical change was coming when a democratic government along parliamentary lines came into the offing, at first advocated only by Congress but, after the announcement of the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms in 1917, accepted as the aim of government policy. The prince had been replaced by the law; now the making of the law would — in a future which British officials hoped was very remote, but which Indians tried to bring as near as possible — be put in the hands of the Indians themselves.

But of which Indians? The Hindu upper and middle class, or the Hindu upper caste? The Muslim upper and middle class, or the Muslim religious leaders? Or an Indian upper and middle class, irrespective of creed or caste? These were the parties most likely to make a bid for power, and the Muslim upper and middle class, being the weakest and feeling unsafe, became intent on getting at least a share in sovereign power. This made them want an independent state,³⁹ and therefore they had to constitute a separate nation. But they then had to enlist the masses, and religion proved to be the most effective means to get a hold over them, evidently because their Muslim identity counted most for them. By this process, however, the nature of the political aspirations of the movement was also determined, to some extent at least: it became tinged with religion. This is how, in our opinion, Muslim communalism developed into Muslim nationalism.

The Khilafat movement probably did something to promote this development. In the first place, it made Indian Muslims fully realize what the loss of worldly power meant to them as Muslims; and, in the second place, by their participation in this movement they got entangled in international politics and therefore became aware that they had to act as the equals of other nations. This might have been, with regard to the Khilafat question, within the framework of an Indian nation, and many leaders, Hindu as well as Muslim, intended it to be so. Nevertheless, the Khilafat movement remained largely a communal movement; its failure furthered Muslim communalism, and, in its wake, Indian Muslim nationalism.

On the other hand, we should realize that this whole development

did not present itself at the time as an unescapable fate, predictable from the very beginning, since there were counteracting forces. Indian nationalism, of which Congress was the main political exponent, was perhaps the most effective of them. On the Muslim side, part of the westernized middle class was willing to co-operate with Congress, especially when, after about 1910, they got the impression that England was an enemy of Islam; we are referring here to men like the Ali brothers and Dr. Ansari. No less important was that the ulama — at least those of the famous Deoband school — distrusted the middle class communalist leaders and were not averse to co-operation with Congress.⁴⁰ Eventually they accepted Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's theory of composite nationalism, aiming at an integrated alliance between Hindus and Muslims in an Indian nation, in which, however, both communities would preserve their own identity.⁴¹ But these forces opposing communalism were, in the last resort, not able to carry the Muslim masses with them.

After this digression on communalism and some of the problems related to it, we want to return to the concept of nationalism proper. We have yet to say something on the kind of loyalty that the nation commands. As we said before, nationalism as we see it is based upon the assumption that humanity is divided into separate and distinct nations — a division ordained and willed either by God or by Nature, or by both of them.⁴² The individual is seen solely as a part of the organic entity of the nation. The nation, or the national state, takes on a quasi-religious character, and the key-words referring to the relation between the individual and the nation, or between the citizen and the national state, are service and sacrifice.

National loyalty was called by Kohn the "supreme loyalty"; Emerson writes about a loyalty "overriding the claims both of the lesser communities within it and those which cut across it or potentially enfold it within a still greater society, reaching ultimately to mankind as a whole."⁴³ Nationalism is always in favour of "desperate struggles" and "heroic deeds", and often worships violence; it spurns "compromise" and tolerance. It does fight for national freedom, but individual freedom often fares badly when nationalism reaches its goal.⁴⁴ The nation is an imperious master; it is impatient of any rivals which might lay claim to supreme loyalty themselves, such as the religious community, class, or the individual conscience.

This disdain for any compromise and this leaning towards sacrifice and heroic struggles, condoning even political murder, are clearly to be

noted in Indian nationalism since about 1900 when the Extremists in Congress and the terrorists in Maharashtra and Bengal came to the fore. It is their rejection of compromise where the nation is concerned which surely entitles them to the name of nationalists, whereas Moderate leaders like Gokhale are sometimes considered as the exponents of "patriotism" only.⁴⁵ We do not agree with this latter view. A leader like Gokhale, devoting his life to the reform of Indian society, which meant for him at the same time an effort towards nation-building, may be called a nationalist even if his nationalism had not yet fully developed.⁴⁶ If we want to distinguish between nationalism and patriotism we should, in our opinion, primarily look out for the ideological background of the former, which is absent from the latter. We propose to apply the term "patriotism" to a kind of group loyalty of a more primitive and universal character, whereas nationalism, as we see it, is based upon a particular set of ideas.⁴⁷ Patriotism, therefore, is easily compatible with Islam, whereas to reconcile nationalism to Islam is much more difficult.⁴⁸ Patriotism will often be one of the elements contributing to the force of nationalism, and therefore it will often be impossible to distinguish between them in historical reality — but patriotism does not, by itself, constitute nationalism.

The same could be said of xenophobia or anti-foreignism which, like patriotism, is a very common reaction in any group brought into contact with other groups, and is not dependent upon any theory about these groups. Like patriotism, xenophobia will often be one of the incitements used by nationalism, but is not the same thing. Xenophobia is described as a basic trait of Hindu society by Nirad C. Chaudhuri⁴⁹ and he even writes about "xenophobic nationalism" already existing in India by the year 1000 A.D., but we prefer to omit the term nationalism in that case, because, from the examples quoted by him, it nowhere appears that the concept of an Indian nation, in the modern sense of the word, had been evolved by then.

The modern concept of the nation was introduced into India from the West in the 19th century. The contents given to the structure were, to a large extent, also of western origin. In this respect, two trends at least may be discerned: (a) a liberal trend, emulating the example set by the British national ideal, notable for its stress on reverence for the law, on individual liberty, and on the free consent of the governed as the basis for government, and (b) a revolutionary trend, inspired by Italian and Irish nationalism. The first trend determined the course of the leaders of Congress in its first three decades; the second one is

to be found among the Extremist faction which constituted itself about 1900. It is not surprising that the British rulers in India felt much more sympathy with the former than with the latter, and perhaps not only because it was easier to keep in check, but also because it was in conformity with what the British themselves thought possible or desirable in India, whereas they abhorred the revolutionary methods of men like Parnell and Mazzini.⁵⁰

This liberal trend in Indian nationalism decidedly lost much of its vigour and influence after the Surat split in Congress in 1907, the occasion of its last complete victory. But it remained strong enough to provide independent India with a democratic, parliamentary form of government after the western model, working better — at least if we judge it only according to its political merits — than in perhaps any other of the colonies which acquired independence after the Second World War and tried to set up a government of this kind. But it would be erroneous to depict Indian nationalism as a movement borrowing its orientation from the West only. Nationalism is always apt to look to the past for inspiration — in the origins of a culture its identity is most clearly visible, and moreover, by selecting a special part of the past, one may select just those values one is in need of.

In the nation's history, Indian nationalism found Hinduism which, from Rammohan Roy's days onwards, became one of the elements moulding it.⁵¹ This could be a reformist Hinduism like the *Brahmo Samaj*'s, but since the beginning of our century this has been superseded by orthodox and revivalist varieties of Hinduism.

There is yet another way in which the impact of the West influenced Indian nationalism: by making room for it. In the old, traditional society no nationalism could come into being since the loyalties to the family, the caste or the religious community were supreme; these loyalties, moreover, were often regionally limited. The development of a capitalist economy provoked new social mobility and gave rise to a new middle class, while regional frontiers lost something of their former importance. The security of having a traditionally assigned place in society was lost by people whose lives were influenced by the social mobility, and they sought for a new security, originating from a new loyalty. Nationalism may thus be understood as a phenomenon of change in the social order.⁵² There can be little doubt that British trade and British rule were largely instrumental in bringing about this change in Indian society, but we should bear in mind that the Indian reaction to this development was greatly influenced by Indian traditions, and

that possibly the establishment of British rule only accelerated a process which had already started entirely without its interference.⁵³ Nor should we forget that it is not only a change in economic conditions which may cause the feeling that the social fabric of life has become too narrow and needs to be widened or even to be set on a wholly different course. Rammohan Roy's own experiences with child marriage and *suttee* probably suffice to account for his reforming zeal, and Shah Wali-ullah, in the early 18th century, was not moved by any stirrings of early capitalism, but by the dilapidation of the Mughul Empire, for which he sought a remedy by restoring the purity of Islam.⁵⁴

If we look upon nationalism as a reaction to the external pressure of western economic and political expansion — and this is certainly an aspect of it in former colonies in general, as well as in India's case in particular — we would see it as an indirect result of British rule. But another view is also possible: the British may be seen as the rulers who united India by providing it with modern means of communication embracing the whole country, by providing it with a language in which the westernized élite, *i.e.* the new national leaders, could exchange ideas, by providing it with an administrative and political unity such as it had hardly ever known before. It is a view held by many British authors,⁵⁵ and it is not illogical when we consider the state of division characterizing India when the British entered it, as compared with near-unity when they left. Nor is it illogical when we consider the many dividing forces still threatening India's national existence: "communalism, casteism and linguism" are, in independent India, still denounced as the three threats to unity.⁵⁶ Both aspects of this situation are expressed by Amaury de Riencourt in this way, writing about Indian nationalist leaders: "Forgetting, or wanting to forget, that the real unifying element in India was precisely English culture, many leading Indians carelessly stimulated the dividing forces that could tear India apart again; they awakened all the dormant centrifugal forces that lay deep in India and had been laid to rest by the unifying action of the British. They encouraged the profound cultural cleavages that split the Hindus from the Muslims . . . They also awakened the cultural separatism of the various provinces by reviving the vernacular literatures . . ."⁵⁷

With regard to this opinion, some remarks seem to be called for. First, that "the dormant centrifugal forces" may have been stimulated not only by "leading Indians", but could also have profited by the contact with British civilization and culture. Just as some Indian authors are inclined to ascribe all evils in their country to British rule, in a

passage like the one quoted above there seems to prevail a tendency to blame the Indians themselves for everything that went wrong during the period of British rule. Secondly, we should not overestimate India's lack of unity. At least three times in its long history, India reached a stage of political unity nearly equalling that of the British period, and up to the spring of 1947 there seemed to be a fair chance of avoiding partition. But with respect to one of the dividing factors, linguism, we should like to point out two facts which, in our opinion, are significant. The first is that the nationalist movement increased the desire of linguistic communities to be recognized as separate units.⁵⁸ To some extent we may see here a parallel to the growth of communalism; one not unimportant difference is that, to our knowledge, the British have never been accused of having deliberately provoked linguistic discord. And the second is that some of the remedies proposed in themselves testify to an essential lack of unity: pleas were made both for accepting a "basic Sanskrit" as the *lingua franca* for India,⁵⁹ and for assuming Urdu in that capacity.⁶⁰

Resuming our argument, we state that some authors considered Indian national unity as the direct, but unintentional, result of British rule. We think there is some truth in this opinion, not contending, however, that it contains the whole truth. But there is yet another way of looking at it: the British may be seen as deliberate nation-builders. There is, indeed, a continuous thread running through British-Indian history, at least from the Mutiny onwards: the growth of representative and, after 1919, of responsible government, training the Indians in a "civilized" way of handling the country's government and enabling them at last to constitute an independent national state. Naturally, this thesis is to be found in the works of some British historians.⁶¹ An obvious objection to it would be that this thread — which is not an imaginary one — may be explained in a quite different way: not as the product of deliberate British intentions, but as a British reaction to a development the Government of India had neither foreseen nor desired, to wit the growth of Indian nationalism, which forced the government to grant concessions time and again, however grudgingly.

We think there is some truth in this view too. The objection that it seems to be inconsistent to claim two opposite explanations as (partly) correct, we should like to meet with the observation that British policy towards India was not always consistent itself. It was a product of rather heterogeneous forces and tendencies, the strength and character of which could vary from moment to moment. British policy towards India was,

therefore, not constant, nor could it be expected to be so when viceroys of so different a political outlook and personality as Lord Ripon and Lord Curzon were, within less than twenty years, relieving each other at the top of the Government of India.

So far we have discussed two possible explanations of the relation between British rule in India on one side, and national unity and nationalism in that country on the other. The latter, as we have seen, are considered by some to be either the direct or the indirect result of the former. But the opposite view is held as well, as we have already indicated in the previous paragraph. The British, it is then contended, regarded national unity and nationalism as the gravest dangers to their position in India and did their utmost to hamper their progress by a policy of divide-and-rule. It is, by the way, possible to combine these two views, though they seem to be mutually exclusive. British efforts to thwart Indian nationalism might be explained away as attempts to delay the advent of Indian national unity and independence until a time when India would be ripe for it — for India's own good, so to speak.

This theory of a divide-and-rule policy could assume several shapes, the most common of which are that the division took place along class lines — the British favouring the landlords above the peasants, or the *haute bourgeoisie* above the proletariat — or along communal lines, by playing off Hindus and Muslims against each other. These proceedings could also be combined, which is the interpretation of Nehru, writing: "A new class, the owners of the land, appeared; a class created by, and therefore to a large extent identified with, the British government. The break-up of the old system created new problems, and probably the beginnings of the new Hindu-Muslim problem can be traced to it."⁶² In the same context he speaks about "the deliberate policy, pursued throughout the period of British rule, of creating divisions among Indians, of encouraging one group at the cost of the other. This policy was openly admitted in the early days of their rule, and indeed it was a natural one for an imperial power. With the growth of the nationalist movement, that policy took subtler and more dangerous forms, and though denied, functioned more intensively than ever."⁶³ In the same vein W. C. Smith writes that after a period of having held the Muslims in disgrace, the India Office changed its attitude about 1870. But, he continues, "The India Office did not abandon its communal policy. It continued to play off the middle and upper classes of one community against those of the other, and in fact has steadily intensified such tactics ever since."⁶⁴ A psychological explanation is offered by Thornton,

arguing that British sympathies in India were more with the Muslims than with the Hindus and that therefore, whether by policy or by instinct, they were apt to side with the former against the latter.⁶⁵ But the reproach could take much cruder forms. Not unfrequently one may come across the charge that the British instigated Hindu-Muslim riots.⁶⁶ And this macchiavellism of the British could, in its turn, use more subtle devices; Muhammad Ali writes about Hindu leaders displaying "religious bigotry against Musulmans chiefly as the result of the deliberate mis-education in the history of Moslem rule over India given by the British Government."⁶⁷

But not only is there a variety of mechanisms seen to be at work in this connection; it is also the direction of a divide-and-rule policy that can be viewed in quite different ways. The aforementioned authors put roughly the following construction upon events: after the Mutiny the British distrusted the Muslims and consequently favoured the Hindus, but when, after about 1870, nationalism reared its head among the Hindus, the Muslims were restored to British favour, with the ultimate result of partition in 1947. But the opposite view is defended by an author like A. Aziz, who contends that after the Mutiny the Brahmins were chosen by the British to act as their underlings, and to keep the Muslims down. This policy was continued up to 1947; "Indian" nationalism was invented and supported by the British as a boon for the Brahmins, as by this device one hundred and fifty million people of the old races — non-scheduled castes and aborigines — were put under the Brahmins' thumb.⁶⁸

Confronted with these rather sweeping statements of a sometimes diametrically opposed character, we should watch our step before accepting too readily this theory as an interpretation of British rule in India. On the other hand, a divide-and-rule policy seems to provide so obvious a pattern of rule for a foreign conqueror trying to keep his hold over a population showing a great deal of diversity, that it would have been amazing if the British Raj in India had not made use of it. But, if it was so obvious, why then was it no longer openly admitted?⁶⁹ And, if no longer openly admitted, might it be expected to be continued in fact? To get an answer to these questions, we think it advisable to examine the concept of divide-and-rule more closely; thus we might get some idea of the kind of relations it may explain.

A striking aspect of the theory, as it occurs in the historiography of British rule in India, is the clearly deprecating sense in which it is used; when mentioned, it is nearly always with a connotation of moral denun-

ciation — it is something like a term of abuse. This meaning is not necessarily implicit in it. When reading that Talleyrand in 1805 recommended to Napoleon a policy which would drive a wedge between Austria and Russia as well as between Russia and Great-Britain,⁷⁰ we do not think him a scoundrel because of it, but a shrewd statesman.⁷¹ In foreign politics, nothing seems to be amiss with the maxim. In that context, it is considered as an obvious expedient, and the more so since an alliance between foreign enemies would be, just like the divide-and-rule stratagem itself, an opportunistic move, recommending itself by a temporary community of interests, but not by any higher principle.

It is only when higher principles are at stake that the divide-and-rule policy acquires its repellent qualities, and these principles may concern either the object of the division or the nature of the rule. To begin with the last: we are not surprised when a despot adopts a policy of divide-and-rule towards his subjects, because we assume the relation between ruler and subject to be one of open or latent hostility; a despot has always to be on his guard against rebellion.⁷² In this, a despot's rule is like foreign rule: there can be no identification between subjects and ruler. But things are different with a more democratic kind of rule, which needs the consent of the ruled, and where the principles of representation, and responsibility of the government lessen the distance between the government and the subjects. The opposition under a democratic government has its own place: it will disagree with the government on certain issues, but it can identify itself with the kind of government and with the state it belongs to.⁷³ The relation between government and citizens is not that of "foreigners", as it is between a despot and his subjects, and therefore a democratic government can hardly "divide" the people it governs. It will, however, try to get as large a following as possible by persuading people of the correctness and efficacy of the policy it stands for, by implementing plans taking the wind out of the opposition's sails, by putting as favourable an interpretation as possible on the policies it realized thus far, and so on. By these and similar means it will attempt to win over part of the opposition, or groups which show a tendency to slide over to the opposition. These proceedings may occasion rather bitter altercations between the government and the opposition, but the ultimate aim should not be looked upon as bringing about a "division" of the people by which the government might ensure its stay in power. A government acting in that way could not pretend to enjoy the consent of the people. There is, of course, more to be said about this; we do not take into

account here class antagonisms within the people, but a democratic government acts upon the assumption that these can be solved in a satisfactory way, and, in a national state, they will indeed yield to the interests of national unity.

This is bringing up the point we mentioned first in our discussion of the circumstances conferring a repellent character on a divide-and-rule policy: the object of the division. In the field of international relations, a policy creating divisions is not disreputable because no "sacred unity" is affected by it. In 16th century Europe, in the age of the wars of religion, it was considered quite normal and not at all ignominious when German princes sought the support of the King of France against the German Emperor, or when Philip II of Spain backed the Ligue in its struggle with Henry IV of France. Philip's meddling with French affairs provoked some French patriotism, but he was never accused of damaging French national unity, which is not surprising, since the French state depended upon God, not upon the nation.⁷⁴ But Napoleon's meddling with German affairs provoked Fichte's "*Reden an die deutsche Nation*". When the nation is acknowledged as the natural and God-willed division of mankind, and as the organic group from which individuals derive their importance, any attempt to play off groups belonging to the same nation against each other is thoroughly reprehensible — it is a crime equal to lese-majesty in former ages.

The above is a very sketchy analysis of very complicated relationships, but it allows us to draw some tentative conclusions. In the first place, it explains why a divide-and-rule policy becomes "inadmissible" when (a) it is put into practice upon a people who are in the process of developing into a nation, conscious of its national identity and unity, and (b) when the ruling power is trying, or is pretending to try, to base its government upon more or less democratic principles. The question remains whether these conditions were prevailing in India.

We think both of them were, though perhaps not to the same degree, in the period we are mainly interested in, to wit the first quarter of the 20th century. We need hardly elaborate the fact that nationalism in India was, in those years, a growing force, even if it was threatened by equally growing communalist tendencies. This last circumstance would have made it particularly easy for the British to rely on the tactics of divide-and-rule — in fact they are, by some authors, accused of fostering communalism because they needed it as a prop for their own position, as we have seen above. But the nature of British rule in India was changing. The Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 were intended

by the Viceroy to introduce a "constitutional autocracy",⁷⁵ but they could not but lead on towards the introduction of a parliamentary system.⁷⁶ The latter was inaugurated, if only in a very modest form, in 1919.

Probably not a few members of the Anglo-Indian community⁷⁷ took a gloomy view of this development. They looked upon themselves as a white aristocracy in a foreign country, and, wide as the gulf might be between civilians and officials, they felt united in this respect.⁷⁸ They could hardly feel much sympathy with democratic institutions which would play havoc with their privileged position. In a way, the Government of India, being the summit of Anglo-Indian society, could not but sympathize with them.

But from two sides the Government was urged in a different direction. It was not only at the apex of the Anglo-Indian hierarchy; it was also an extension of the British nation, responsible to the Secretary of State for India, and, in the last resort, to the British Parliament. Since about 1900, India's rulers knew their autocratic position was threatened by political liberalism at home.⁷⁹ Moreover, the Government of India was confronted with the aspirations of the new westernized élite in India, appealing to the same liberal ideas and ideals the British were professing at home. Leaders like Gokhale, and even Gandhi up to about 1920, took these ideas seriously,⁸⁰ and since they were, to some extent, accepted as spokesmen for the people of India by the Government of India, they could not fail to have some influence on the mind and the behaviour of their rulers. These circumstances were creating a climate in which a divide-and-rule-policy could not thrive as it had done before.

No doubt the authoritarian, autocratic trends did not disappear, as they had a long tradition of colonial rule behind them. They were safe with the die-hards like Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Sir Reginald Craddock, and general Dyer; they found expression in acts of repression⁸¹ like the Amritsar massacre and the wholesale arrests of November 1921. But the democratic trends asserted themselves too. Philip Woodruff, writing about the period after 1909, contends that the majority of the Indian Civil Service considered self-government as the inevitable and proper result of British rule in India.⁸² A less rosy view is taken by an Indian observer, H. N. Mitra, editor of *The Indian Annual Register*. He argues that the larger part of the I.C.S. assumed a hostile attitude towards the reforms of 1919, but even he notes the existence of a group of "mufassal moderates" among them, who were ready to give the reforms a fair chance.⁸³ The co-existence of these two schools of thought,

both of them represented in high quarters, confers a very ambivalent character on British rule in India during the period we are examining.⁸⁴ Therefore, it seems hardly probable that the divide-and-rule theory will provide a wholly adequate frame of reference for interpreting British policy during those years; some of its aspects call, we think, for an explanation in terms of a democratic government. Neither of these methods of explanation will be quite satisfactory, but to neglect either of them would probably mar our judgment.

As an example of British policy the interpretation of which would gain from a double approach, we might cite the reforms of 1909. It is possible to put forward a case that these were intended to drive a wedge between the Hindu and Muslim upper and middle classes;⁸⁵ but it is also possible to consider them as an attempt of the Government of India to bring about a "representation of interests" in the best style of Whig principles.⁸⁶ But our whole argument about the twofold frame of reference which the interpretation of British policy in India requires is aimed mainly at the years about 1920, that were taken up, politically speaking, by the reforms of 1919, the non-co-operation movement, and the Khilafat movement, constituting three closely interconnected problems. The principal authors of the reforms and the most important policy-makers with respect to British India were then Chelmsford and Montagu. The former was influenced by the Round Table group, which held that British colonial conquests had to result in liberty and self-government;⁸⁷ the latter had, in his first Indian budget speech in 1910, already declared⁸⁸ that terrorism had to be fought, but that His Majesty's Government was determined to encourage "legitimate aspirations" of the Indians. This decision seemed quite logical to him since he looked upon Indian nationalism as "a movement of Indian thought which had been inspired, directly or indirectly, by English ideas, to which the English and the Government of India gave the first impetus." For men like Montagu and Chelmsford a divide-and-rule policy along communal lines was unacceptable. They tried to get the "Moderates" — meaning those Indians who wanted to co-operate with the British Raj — on their side. But, in our opinion, we should not see this attempt in the perspective of "dividing" Moderates and Extremists, but rather of "convincing" an opposition that it was in the wrong. A reflection of Montagu's intentions we find in two letters,⁸⁹ in which he states that it is his aim to "convert" or "reform" the Extremists; among the latter he can discern a group of fine young men, desirous of social reform and a truly self-governing India, and he hopes to win them over

to co-operation with the recently announced reforms.

This does not mean that other approaches to the problems with which British rule in India was confronted in those years were lacking. Even if official British policy was formulated by men like Chelmsford and Montagu, it had to reckon with the men who would have to implement it, and a number of those were at variance with it. Apart from meeting with strong opposition on the part of British Conservatives, causing his downfall in February 1922, Montagu evoked the criticism of many members of the I.C.S.⁹⁰ And the tragedy of it is, we think, that even those Britons who felt genuine sympathy with India and its political aspirations, could never shake off an attitude of condescension towards the men they proposed to take on as partners.⁹¹

It was this condescension, this never-questioned assumption of the superiority of western culture and western values, which marred the lofty ideals of a government by consent of the ruled and the granting of self-government. Indian nationalism was accepted only in so far as it was nurtured by British ideas; Indians were only thought "fit" to manage their own affairs after they had adapted themselves to the standards of the British gentleman. It is hardly surprising that Indian nationalists did not quite relish the prospect of self-government, if getting it compelled them to renounce their own identity.