pression (as prescribed in the notorious "Law of Shame" of 1980, for example) and the manipulation of the electoral system to maintaining the wide-ranging subventions initiated under Nasser and the balancing of corporatist divisions against each other.

Although the regimes that govern Egypt, Syria, and Iraq may continue or even expand their experiments with limited economic liberalization in the future, their policies will most likely also continue to have little impact on the political sphere. As a number of scholars have observed, so long as the power of states and the power of those seeking expanded economic privileges remain asymmetrical, so long as economic liberalization and political democratization remain incommensurable except to the states which reserve the right to define the permissible terms for their equation, so long as a population fragmented by corporatist structures retains a stake in regime survival, and so long as the Islamist "cure" seems for so many far worse than the authoritarian "disease," no "democratic bargain" is likely to be struck. In the meantime, the ardor with which broad segments of the population first greeted the revolutionary regimes in the early post-Suez period may have dissipated as a result of chronic repression, unfulfilled promises, and, in Egypt and Syria, the regular substitution in official discourse of \textit{raison d'etat} and the ostensibly non-ideological, "scientific" rhetoric of free-market capitalism for the populist appeals of their predecessors. The structures and norms institutionalized by these regimes, however, continue to regulate the relationship binding the inhabitants of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq not only with the regimes that govern them, but with the movements that oppose them as well.

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\textbf{Ideas of Freedom in Modern India}

\textbf{SUDIPTA KAVIRAJ}

In his essay on two concepts of liberty, Isaiah Berlin warned against conceptual conflation between two ideas about freedom. The first idea of freedom referred to the liberty of the individual, the different institutional arrangements which led to its expansion or contraction. The second, with which the first was never to be confused, was the very different meaning of the "freedom" of a collectivity such as a class or a nation. While acknowledging that in real historical contexts, it was difficult to prevent groups from speaking a language of freedom, Berlin thought it was analytically essential to show that these were not ideas of freedom proper, but more of injustice. In studying the history of ideas in a colonial context like India, however, it is impossible to separate these two concerns, except analytically. This chapter tries to follow the story of the ideas of modern freedom in India in both senses, as liberty of individuals to choose their lives, but also the freedom of specific social groups like castes and the nation to follow what they regard as their "destiny." In studying intellectual history in India, the central organizing principle is not the distinction between negative and positive liberty, but the liberty of individuals and communities.

\textbf{Methodological Choices: Two Forms of Intellectual History}

There is general agreement that in doing history of ideas it is essential to follow historically reliable "contextualist" methods. On closer inspection, there can be some further problems of finer methodological choice involved in this type of intellectual history. In contemporary discussions about contextualism, it is possible to dis-
cern two analytical styles. Although they share fundamental historicist principles of interpretation, their actual analytical and interpretative practices contain somewhat different emphases.

The first form of contextualism is represented by the Cambridge school, which focuses on the study of “intellectual” or theoretical texts to find their correct historical meanings by recovering authorial intentions. The meanings of concepts fundamental to theoretical arguments are established by studying linguistic conventions of a particular time from a wider study of “small texts.” It is the circulation of concepts within a general political discourse that gives them particular common meanings. Even when major thinkers introduce innovative inflections of the current meanings, these can be precisely established by measuring their difference from norms of common linguistic practice. Although these contextual studies use at times a vast repertoire of “small” texts, the object of study is usually the “great texts” of social theory. The humbler texts are usually the means to an understanding of the great ones. At times however this form of intellectual history transcends its focus on exemplary theoretical texts, and its purpose shifts to an illumination of an historical “structure of thought” of which great and small texts are illustrations. A second feature of this interpretative style is a certain hesitancy about the “political.” Its insatiable curiosity about how people talk about politics, its “language” in the wider sense, is usually not matched by its interest in politics, what this language talks about. The context it considers methodologically relevant is primarily linguistic and intellectual.

By contrast, the begriffsgeschichte produced by Reinhart Koselleck and his collaborators in German intellectual history follows a somewhat different strategy, focusing less on theoretical constructs, more on practical meanings of individual concepts which are central to the successful operation of modern social practices. For engaging in modern economic practices successfully, social agents have to acquire an abstract concept of a “market,” altering the traditional connotations of the idea. Concepts like these—market, state, society, law, others—are practical concepts in a double sense. They are required for the successful conduct of social practices central to modern existence; but, conversely, they are real or correspond to something substantial in social life, only as long as social practices animate them. When social practice moves away, they become hollow. Usually these new concepts are set in something like a new conceptual field, like the idea of an “economy,” an abstract conception that combines the totality of all practices of a particular kind. The two other concepts of a similar kind are obviously “society” and the field of public exchanges that constitute “the political.” This form of conceptual history seeks to establish the meaning of these concepts (of both the small and large types, that is, market and economy) by looking at the slow evolution of their historical relation with determinate practices. Often there are no privileged texts associated with individual concepts like these; their historical evolution has to be read through texts and other types of documents. This method involves more attention to humbler forms of writing like journals, newspapers, or other pieces of utterly ordinary discourse, rather than intellectual construction of theoretical arguments.

Evidently, the difference between the two styles is in their emphasis, not in methodological principles, and actual studies usually combine them. Yet this is not an insignificant question of methodological choice. In the Indian case, there are some obvious advantages in either following the second method, or combining the two, since there is no self-conscious tradition of social theorizing in the Western sense until the twentieth century. But the fact that there is no “theory” of freedom developed by recognizably specialized political thinkers does not mean there were not enormous shifts in mentalities on the question of freedom. Nor does it imply that ideas of freedom in civil society and public domains of politics did not fundamentally alter everyday operations of power. In the Indian case, it might be most fruitful to combine the two approaches.

Translation of Ideas and Translations of Practice

In any case, historical semantics in the modern Indian context would require a procedure different in some obvious respects from the standard methods of studying European political thought. In the European cases, the transformation of concepts they are trying to analyze is internal to the Western tradition, within a larger framework of cultural and intellectual continuity. The clashes and conceptual transformations in colonial India were of a vastly different
Indian societies had fairly developed and institutionally entrenched intellectual traditions at the time of entry of European colonialism. The process by which European concepts entered this cultural world and the structures of semantic transactions that ensued had a specific pattern of complexity. A successful project of historical semantics here would involve three successive steps.

The first is to look for a practical concept or a cluster in earlier intellectual traditions. Second, we must establish the precise form in which a particular European concept enters the discourses of colonial India: after all, concepts like freedom, or property, or law differed a great deal in their particular semantic connotation, theoretical inflection, and institutional purchase between distinctive European traditions. It is therefore important to understand precisely which particular concept is introduced, or indeed, if it is a single or homogeneous one at all. Third, we must look at how the presence of each concept affects the practical and conceptual shape of the other. Often the traditional concept, discredited, displaced, or undermined by the modern European one, continues a shadowy existence of subterranean influence, subtly refracting the meanings of the modern term. This is particularly likely in cases in which the European concept enters and works through a translating term in the vernacular. The European term then has to be converted to a vernacular term by literal translation. Sometimes, this is not an easy transition of signification as the new meaning has to work through and gradually displace a stubborn older meaning.

Because ideas like freedom are practical concepts which exist as constituents of a conceptual field, they raise problems of translation—not merely the linguistic translation of straight intellectual terms, but “translation” of practices. There is an odd, implausible, but widespread implication that when new practical concepts like “privacy” or “publicity” come into colonial society they get written as it were on a clean slate. The historical process of translation is far more complex and untidy. In most cases, there existed premodern social practices and concepts necessary to them, over which new, different institutions came to be placed. In many cases, this led to the apparent establishment of a new practice, though, if one looked at the actual daily routines within the formal institutions, traditional forms continued to shape the understandings and behavior of actors. The first step in the history of modern freedom in India, then, is to ask if there were similar concepts in pre-colonial intellectual traditions. Or were there ideas sufficiently similar, so that these could form an indigenous substratum of thinking on which modern Western ideas could be grafted.

Were There Traditional Concepts of Freedom?

Is there then an earlier story of “freedom”? Does the modern Western ideal of freedom come as an entirely unfamiliar, unsettling idea, or as one that had traditional equivalents, though differently inflected? It is a curious fact of intellectual history, that India had highly developed traditions of philosophical reflection, but none of these took “society” or social principles, like justice, as a serious object of analytical attention. Although classical Indian philosophy developed highly sophisticated and intricate traditions of thinking on logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and aesthetics, there is hardly any application of these skills of distinction, analysis, elaboration, or critical debate to social problems in a narrower sense: like the justification of the caste system. The two great traditional texts which deal with problems surrounding political power, the Arthasastra and the Manusmriti, have the character of compendia, rather than of philosophical justification, which, by its very discursive form, admits of the theoretical possibility of skepticism. Some of the most powerful reflections on the justifiability of social restrictions can be found instead in the great narrative texts. But despite the great moral complexities portrayed in the epics, and sometimes direct invitations to reflect on the undecidability of the good, they did not generate a tradition of critical debate on the justifiability of social arrangements.

A curious feature, often noted, of the complex architecture of Hindu culture was its strange combination of enforcement of social orthodoxy and tolerance for intellectual difference. Not only were the six systems of philosophy allowed within the general framework of trust in the Vedas; there could be an immense variety in the imagination of God’s nature and his manifestations in the world. God could be worshipped in any of the canonical forms—Visnu, Shiva, Shakti, and others—each one having sub-forms according to
the mood or disposition that predominated. By contrast, the actual social life of Hindus was bound to strictest details by rules of caste which governed the most significant aspects of social relations—the choice of an individual’s occupation, marriage, sociability. The Hindu system, therefore, was a strange combination of considerable freedom of purely intellectual enquiry and the strictest observance of social rules.

The classical tradition of pluralism of religious imagination was given a more elective bent by the medieval religious movements of bhakti (devotion) which swept through most parts of India and introduced a deeply emotional, voluntaristic conception of religiosity. Most of these bhakti movements were anti-brahminical and, significantly, preached an elective conception of religious life. Individuals decided consciously to adopt these new ways of finding God and a set of values, which justified them. Intricately devised and detailed rules of individual behavior not merely restricted room for maneuver in the negative sense, but actually commanded specific courses of action. The Manusmrti is the classical example of a moral text that produced a grid of moral commands arranged on two axes. One provided an intricately detailed biographical line of activities, specifying a set of general principles and details for obligatory ceremonies from the individual’s birth to death. The other axis, of relation with other people, was equally significant, since without that there could not be a complete system of moral conduct encompassing the entire society. The Smritis consequently laid down in equally painstaking detail how an individual belonging to caste A should behave with other castes B to Z. The moral order can thus be seen, for all individuals of a particular type, as an intricate grid in which responsibilities and right ways of conduct are set down so minutely that there is little room for maneuver or innovation. Hindu individuals thus lived socially standardized lives in which freedom of choice in vital matters was not just limited, but conceptually absent. Only the renouncer (sannyasi) could leave the life of a householder and not be bound by caste rules: the price that the renouncer had to pay was as radical as the freedom he was allowed to enjoy. The doctrine of the renouncer could not be considered an archaic or inchoate version of a theory of freedom, for freedom makes sense only in the context of society and an amplitude of social actions; the terrible freedom of the sannyasi was predicated on his being out of society’s demands and comforts.

Hindu doctrine spent considerable time to reflect on the nature and forms of mukti within the mundane, everyday, householder’s world. It was a concept closely connected, in original religious philosophies, to more cosmic ideas of disentanglement—nirvana in the Hindu tradition or moksa in the neighboring Buddhist one. And, in both traditions, the search for mukti or deliverance goes on in the framework of a predominantly pessimistic picture of ordinary human existence—condemned to social prohibitions, vulnerability to disease, death and death, the insatiability of desires. The original ideal of mukti was, to use a Weberian conceptual distinction, entirely otherworldly. It suggested an impossibility of freedom in mundane social terms; true freedom meant disentanglement from the unending predicaments of daily human life, and was to be sought outside it. This “outside” could be interpreted in several ways: it could mean going outside the circle of the ordinary householder’s life by accepting renunciation; or going outside the succession of lives in which souls are trapped by winning deliverance from the chain of rebirths.

Some religious doctrines, like the famous schools of Advaita and Buddhism, offered more complex and subtle forms of such renunciation, by advising non-attachment to desires and persons within worldly life. This could be interpreted to say that achieving a form of high indifference was possible while accepting the fetters of ordinary life. But none of these forms referred to the question of freedom from social restrictions, and thus could not qualify, without a fundamental conceptual re-inflection, as a translation of the modern concept.
Their principal characteristic was that they suggested ingenious ways of enlarging an internal "freedom" of the mind, taking social restrictions as given—unlike modern freedom, which turns the principle of freedom of action itself into a force which determines forms of social life.

However, one of the more interesting questions of comparative history of ideas is the technical nature of translation. Because the vocabulary of the traditional culture lacks an exact equivalent, the new ideas have to find awkward translations and slowly work their way into the semantic structure. After repetitive and consistent use, the older term is often invested with the new meaning, erasing the conventional one, or the two meanings exist side by side, differentiated by native users by the use-context. In the Bengali language, the early search for a semantic equivalent for the modern idea of freedom led to this type of linguistic displacement. An excellent example of such semantic operation on the term mukti can be found in a group of poems by Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore insisted that intellectual modernity must be accessible through the resources of the vernacular but felt at the same time the conceptual inappropriateness of traditional terms like mukti. His solution was to argue for a re-conceptualization of mukti in distinctly this-worldly terms. Directly addressing the traditional form of alienating religiosity, one of his poems suggests the impossibility of such deliverance, since the creator himself is tied to every part of the universe by his acceptance of the bonds of creation.29 True deliverance (mukti), therefore, must have a this-worldly, mundane, sensuous meaningfulness. In another poem, he declares directly "my mukti does not lie in cultivating detachment. I want the joyous taste of freedom within innumerable bonds. Again and again, You will fill this earthen cup with Your nectar of colours and fragrance."28 Though this is a poetic reflection, it shows the precise difficulties with the older concept of mukti—its otherworldliness, and the implicit belief in the cycle of rebirth, both unacceptable to a modern consciousness. The kind of semantic and conceptual shifts that Tagore proposed in his poems became fairly general by the end of the nineteenth century; and in modern language, the term came to carry increasingly modern connotations of freedom. Eventually, mukti would come to stand, at least in Bengali writing, for not merely social freedom, but also the new all-encompassing desire of the people-nation for freedom from colonial rule.30

Colonial Influences: Liberty and Modern Institutions

Ideas of modern liberty entered colonial Indian society through three different routes; and the peculiarity of the route by which an idea came in influenced its reception, its precise meaning inside the Indian conceptual structure, and its eventual fate. Some institutions of colonial rule, like the legal arrangements of property, required a tacit understanding of the rights or freedoms of individuals to acquire and dispose of wealth. Any approach to the new colonial government also implied, however minimally, a vague right of a subject to the British rule of law.31 A second institutional influence, of inestimable significance, was the new educational culture, produced by the establishment of institutions for the spread of modern, Western education. These were established primarily through the initiative of modern Bengalis, though with ample encouragement from the British administration. A third kind of influence, which depended on the success of the second, institutional spread of Western-style education, was the more direct intellectual influence of Western social thinking. Rousseau and John Stuart Mill became required reading for aspiring intellectuals in Calcutta, which also boasted quite early an energetic Positivist Society.32

Colonial rule, once settled, brought in several types of administrative practices that required, because they conceptually presupposed, conceptions of modern freedom. One of the first was the freedom to possess and dispose of private property, an idea involving huge silent shifts of conceptual understandings about ownership. Traditional forms of ownership were legally revised and fitted increasingly into modern conceptions of private property and administrative rules formulated for its protection. When the colonial administration created new types of secondary rights over property through the Permanent Settlement, a new land revenue arrangement introduced by Lord Cornwallis, disputants had to make their way through the new, intricate legal system of property rights. Besides property, other legal practices under colonial rule similarly implied the existence of the right to freedom—from the publication of newspapers to the marriage of minor girls.

In all these fields of changing social practice, frequently complex and difficult cases occurred which led to either highly publicized
court cases or considerable agitation in the vernacular press. In both contexts there had to be discussions about the nature of these rights and two types of justifications: justifiability of individual acts involved in these cases, but, through them, more indirectly, also justifiability of the larger, interconnected system of individual rights themselves. In highly significant cases of reform, like the abolition of sati, the advocacy of remarriage of widows, or legal prevention of marriage of girls considered too young, the arguments invariably moved from the dispute about the specific rule of conduct to a larger one of choosing between two moral orders. In the traditional one the primary appeal was to performance of duty or social responsibility by actors according to the rules of their caste/community, while the modern moral culture rested on giving individuals “civilized” treatment, because of their intrinsic moral worth.

In actual disputes often the lines between these two types of moral arguments were fudged for practical reasons. Ram Mohan Roy, the first significant modern thinker and social reformer, for instance, used both types of arguments to persuade the Bengali Hindus to abandon widow-burning. He deployed his considerable erudition in the *sastras* (Hindu scriptures) to point out that in earlier, “purer” stages of Hindu thought, women were treated with respect, if not accorded equality; it was only in more recent degraded times that Bengali moral codes placed severe and unjust restrictions on them. But the major part of the argument had to appeal to reason, in asking the educated middle classes to choose the first part of their tradition over the second. Although traditional material or evidence was used in the argument, the decisive element was an appeal to a liberal rationality.

Born in a traditional Brahmin family employed in administrative offices of the Islamic rulers, entirely fluent in Sanskrit, Persian, and English, Ray acquired an English education and eventually concluded that Europeans were “generally more intelligent, more steady and more moderate in their conduct.” “I gave up my prejudice against them, and became inclined in their favour, feeling persuaded that their rule, though a foreign yoke, would lead more speedily and surely to the amelioration of the native inhabitants.” By the end of the nineteenth century, English-educated professional classes were deeply attracted by an alternate style of social life outlined by Western ideas and vaguely encouraged by the colonial regime. This segment of the new, English-educated elite was already intensely active in reforming Hindu society. They demanded the legal abolition of sati, formed societies like the Brahma Samaj, fiercely advocating a rationalistic and anti-ritualistic Hinduism, and supported re-marriage of Hindu widows. The curricula followed in the first colleges, like the Hindu College in Calcutta and later the Calcutta University, were of course imitative of the contemporary regimes of knowledge in the West. Students in these establishments absorbed a highly celebratory narrative of Western modernity which systematically neglected the internal contradictions and complexities of the rise of modern society in the West. To attend these institutions itself was at times an act of courage, an assertion of an individual’s or a family’s freedom in face of the disapproval and ostracism of surrounding Hindu society. By the end of the eighteenth century, the battle of education and cultural instruction had been decisively lost by the Hindu traditionalist forces. Inside half a century, the Bengali enthusiasm for a critical ingestion of modernity completely restructured the curricular structure, personnel, social purposes, and sociological arrangements associated with education.

Once modern education became widespread, creating a substantial intelligentsia that could read Western texts in the original, the Bengalis developed an insatiable curiosity about literature and social theory. In the field of moral and social reflection, European social theory entirely replaced traditional Hindu scriptures. Not surprisingly, of the dominant social theories current in contemporary Britain, individualist liberalism had the deepest influence in colonial Bengal. Young people eagerly learned the arguments and often the texts of modern British political theory, particularly Mill and Spencer. Acquaintance with other cultures of European theory, especially the very different theoretical inflections of German thought, was naturally more limited.

However, the assessment of Western civilization with its offer of a new liberal moral order was subjected to critical reflection. Reformist authors emphasized that rules of Hindu social conduct should be evaluated by rational arguments, not accepted simply because of their scriptural authority. This emphasis made it easy for more skeptical intellectuals to argue that identical evaluative prin-
ciples should be applied to Western practices as well. Otherwise, this kind of thinking constituted an invidious suspension of rational criticism; and Western practices could be adopted by Indians not because they were rationally defensible, but on the basis of authority—because these were the ways of the colonizer. This would merely substitute for the social power of tradition the coercive power of colonial rule. Western forms of sociality and conduct needed to be subjected to rational critical analysis as much as Hindu ones. As a consequence, three types of dissenting ideas emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. First, because of an emerging concern that Western thought is endemically atomistic, some writers took interest in European traditions or thinkers critical of individualism—like Rousseau and later Hegel. Second, discomfort about inequality attracted some writers toward early ideas of socialism. Third, from the middle of the century, some more original thinkers began to ask if the task of social thinking is best served by simply an imitative discussion about the merits of various Western modes of thought; or if it was, in fact, the task of social thinkers to develop less materialistic and individualist arguments which suited Indian (Hindu) society more closely.

The pre-eminent Bengali writer of that generation, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, a novelist, humorist, and essayist, evinced all these tendencies in his writings. An early convert to positivist certainties, he came to question Mill’s combination of utilitarianism and positivism and wrote an enormously influential essay on “Equality,” hailing Rousseau as the third great apostle of equality (samyavata) after the Buddha and Christ. However, in his humorous essays, he used a cat which has been converted to socialism to question humanity’s exclusive possession of milk and other goods which ought to be, in an ideal world, more equitably distributed between various species on earth. The most systematic exploration of the third question was done by Bhudev Mukhopadhyay, who compared pascatya bhav [Westernness] with Indian civilization, offering a cogent summary of its essential features: “What are generally referred to as Western attitudes/dispositions are among the following: [1] selfishness [2] belief in progress [3] equality [4] this-worldliness [5] independence/autonomy [6] scientificity [7] the state’s representativeness of society.”

Bhudev believed that the major conflict in India was between two different civilizations: The nature of Hindu society is its pacific quality, of the British a constant effort in search of prosperity. Hindu society is primarily agricultural, the English predominantly industrial and commercial. Hindu society recognises collective property and ownership, the English recognise primogeniture and has intense preference for private property. In Hindu society child marriage is customary, in the English marriage at a later age is normal. Hindus are in favour of internal governance of society, the English strive to make the jurisdiction of the state paramount in preserving rights. In India a conflict between these two different societies has arisen. The English are energetic, efficient, arrogant and greedy. Hindus are diligent, peaceable, submissive and easily contented. On considering these things carefully it becomes apparent that Hindus should learn efficiency from the English, nothing more, indeed, it is better that they learn nothing else.

Most writers held a less self-confident view about the strength of their civilization and were less extreme in their rejection of Western practices. Most significantly, even thinkers like Bhudev had to present their arguments in a new rationalistic form which immediately undermined the idea that scriptural citation was proof or justification. Clearly, this form of reasoning could eventually subvert not merely an intellectual style, but also major parts of the Brahminical social system resting on that intellectual basis. In all these spheres, the idea of freedom and autonomous decision was central. Appeal to rational arguments and intellectual freedom undermined scriptural authority and asserted the cognitive autonomy of the rational individual. Subsequently, the arguments about freedom spread from this highly abstract cognitive form to more substantive social areas and were expressed in claims to the freedom of individuals from parental or communal authority and of women from traditional social repression. In literature, there was sometimes a general romantic celebration of artistic individuality.

Realms of Freedom: Individuals and Family Life

Ram Mohan Roy’s life illustrates in some respects the paradigmatic forms of the struggle for personal liberty. He came from an ambidextrous Brahminical background; his father’s family taught him Persian to prepare for administrative service for Muslim rulers, and his
They had to assert the moral right of individual young men to decide respectively of gender—which already involved a liberal conception of males were inevitably involved in questions of moral autonomy. human lives. Additionally, in deciding to marry widows, Hindu widows, where again the primary argument was to stop wasting forms, these considerations tended to snowball and extend into in- abstract individuality. Next the debate extended to remarriage of tion by asserting the moral rule of humane treatment of persons, ir- terconnected spheres. Initially, driven by a humanistic argument he remonstrated with Talleyrand, French ambassador in London, about the legal requirement for a passport to enter the land of the free.

Although Ram Mohan Roy's celebrated heterodoxies started in the purely intellectual sphere of doctrinal disputation about whether the ancient Hindu scriptures sanctioned idolatry, the attack on Brahminical authority soon spread to social issues. Roy played a major role in persuading the colonial government to legally ban the performance of sati, and debate around that question forced him to assert with greater vehemence and clarity two principles of liberty. First, the liberty of conscience and of religious practice and observance implied the prior intellectual freedom of rational disputation and unforced judgment. Second, the argument about sati, as it went along, brought out more undisguised declarations of the dignity of women as human beings and objects of civilized treatment.

Once ideas of freedom were introduced in their intellectual forms, these considerations tended to snowball and extend into interconnected spheres. Initially, driven by a humanistic argument about stopping cruelty to women, intellectuals justified their position by asserting the moral rule of humane treatment of persons, irrespective of gender—which already involved a liberal conception of abstract individuality. Next the debate extended to remarriage of widows, where again the primary argument was to stop wasting human lives. Additionally, in deciding to marry widows, Hindu males were inevitably involved in questions of moral autonomy. They had to assert the moral right of individual young men to decide whom they wished to marry rather than allow their families to arrange their marriages. Such arguments slowly became more generalized and went on to assert the superiority of marriage based on personal attraction and love rather than customary considerations of caste compatibility and mercenary gain. Literature played an immensely significant role in disseminating the new culture of family life and celebrating its superior values. Romantic love thus came to acquire astonishingly radical associations in Bengali culture, and the tradition of Bengali novels and short stories never ceased to celebrate the ideals of love and, less directly, a companionate marriage. While in actual life Bengali middle-class individuals might generally acquiesce in arranged matrimony, they read romantic novels insatiably and tried to adjust the realities of an arranged union retrospectively to the ideals of romantic love.

This did not mean that the trajectory of the Bengali family followed closely on the social history of Europe. Social changes were not accompanied by massive industrialization which could destroy traditional large families. Bengali society remained primarily rural, although the expansion of the British Empire in India created a large market for Bengali professionals who generally supported moderately modern social forms. The forms that this social change took were sometimes surprisingly mixed. Modern men often had to marry child wives, but many who had the means got them privately educated so that they could give their husbands company in all spheres of life, and fit in with the social circle of their colleagues and friends. Some of these women became writers and poets of standing. The altered social context in which women could come out of the antahpur [inner part of the house] into the society of strange men required not merely acquiring education, but also more mundane changes like invention of a proper social dress, which continued with the much later stage of women joining professional work. The famous Tagore family experimented with various combinations until it devised a combination of a Western-style blouse to be worn under a traditional sari—which became the emblematic dress for the modern Indian woman. In an understandable transposition, at times wearing this dress itself became a declaration of freedom.

Yet this acceptance of the principle of individuality of men and women, and the legitimacy of a domain where its traits could be allowed to flower, did not immediately spell the end of the joint fam-
ily. Even individuals committed to reform remained part of large joint-family households and accepted the responsibilities, often splitting their lives between traditional village and modernist Calcutta, juggling as best they could their very different social habits. Instead of an eruption of nuclear families, there was a new kind of moral legitimacy to the conjugal relationship within the larger joint family. Although women’s subordination was not ended, its forms were changed and degradation of women reduced.

Traditionally, the wife was mainly the “producer of sons,” and the relation with the wife was regarded as far inferior to other familial relationships with father, mother, or brothers. The relation of the wife to the husband was of such complete subordination that it precluded companionship, often additionally for reasons of substantial difference in age. Under new conditions, successful professionals were often obliged to live outside their ancestral household, in considerable official opulence with only the company of their wives. Differentiation of professions encouraged this trend, as family labor in a common occupation was slowly antiquated in the middle class, with individual males occupying well-paid non-ancestral jobs. Eventually, the moral hierarchy of relationships was completely reordered and the middle-class professional learned to look upon his wife as his closest relation; and because she partook of his professional life and its very different demands of sociability, it was essential for her to acquire equal education and cultivation.

This new conception of intimacy came to be celebrated in modern literary forms. Romance based on elective affinity came to be the staple of Bengali novels, stories, songs, and eventually in a different age, films. Most often the narrative structure would follow either a trajectory of the European bildungsroman where the hero would slowly, through character-forming adventures, find himself, or it would be a story of adventures constituting tests of romantic loyalty through which the protagonists would eventually come together. It became a convention to portray the families and their authority figures as the obstacles in their path: but love would always win. Winning had two predominant forms: either directly in the course of the narrative (in Bengali classification, milananta, ending in union), or by a narrative resolution where they might be forcibly separated by family, fortune, or death, which was another way of showing the triumph of their love over everything (in Bengali, again, viyoganta, ending in loss). Such romantic unions or separations were vastly different in theoretical terms from traditional narratives of transgressive love like the famous narrative of Radha and Krsna. Bengali lovers, with the assistance of the Bengali romantic novel, came to engage in an activity that was recognized, however grudgingly, as socially legitimate. In both types of narratives, the formation of the hero, his slowly finding himself, discovering who he was, or finding himself through love, the underlying theme was an endorsement of ethical individuality. The distinctive contribution of the novel to the grand narrative of the birth of human freedom is not to be underestimated.

Another novelistic theme that confirmed this cultural trend was the astonishing emphasis on friendship. Decline of the ties with the family led to the inevitable exploration of alternative forms of sociability. Traditionally, an individual’s social energies were entirely absorbed inside the circle of intense and intricate family relationships. The altered circumstances of urban life in colonial Bengal, when successful professional men had to live away from the family home, forced them to seek relations of sociability with others, often without consideration for caste or kinship affiliation. In deliberative processes of everyday life, when individuals or couples had to decide about significant questions, since family advice was not available, they tended to depend on friends, making these relationships more intense and valuable.

A new kind of sociability developed, understandably much portrayed and valued in novels; intellectual elaboration of its principles emphasized the elective principle. Family relationships were a matter of accident: one could not choose one’s brothers; and there was no guarantee that when they became adults siblings would have common inclinations. In a startling inversion of literary values, family relationships with parents in romantic plots, or with brothers or sisters in social novels, were often described as oppressive, obstacles in the untrammelled search for one’s self. Friends were found through common entanglements of occupation, common intellectual pursuits, or simply a sympathy of temperament. The sociability of friendship was therefore elective, based on rational choice, a considered judgment about one’s own temperament and of someone else’s, and compatible with the freedom of development of personality of the new individual.
Unsurprisingly, the modern Bengali novel, particularly in its early phase, represented by the works of Rabindranath Tagore and Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, is full of friendship relations and a counter-position of the two principles of sociability—of the family and friends. What is significant for a story of the concept of freedom is that initially the caste-based Hindu family was seen as a primary obstacle to a modern form of self-realization. Gradually, the change in the climate of ideas and underlying structural changes in the economy transform the family. At least for the educated upper middle classes, the new family provided a framework conducive to development of individuality of the person. From a social institution in which he was smothered by responsibilities toward others, it became, in its altered form, the individual person’s fortress, where he could find emotional refuge. Although these developments began in colonial Bengal, as colonial modernity spread to other parts of India, similar cultural patterns emerged. By the middle of the twentieth century, the intimate companionate marriage, the family, and the private individual were increasingly common in the social life of the Indian middle classes—although subject to regional variations.

< VI >

Re-conceptualization of Society

Schematically, it is possible to argue that the ideas of freedom first entered Indian society through the rationalist disputations about the grounding of religious beliefs. As religion, particularly Hinduism, is composed of theological beliefs and interconnected social practices, the rejection of the purely intellectual aspects of religion cannot be without serious social consequences. Because social practices like caste are grounded in the metaphysics of Brahminical Hinduism, the decline of its intellectual authority leads necessarily to challenges to its social conduct. It is hardly surprising therefore that the rationalistic ideas of intellectual and cognitive freedom led not merely to a re-structuring of the forms of intimacy in elite circles, but also to larger upheavals of the caste order itself. When ideas of freedom moved into the field of social practices, the bearers of freedom were not primarily individuals, but communities, especially caste groups. But the re-structuring of families and the larger demands for freedom from caste practices are impelled by the same intellectual and social forces.

Moving outside the boundaries of the affinal sociability of the family immediately places the individual in a different kind of social field. Accumulated effects of these exploratory practices slowly led to a discernible change in the conceptualization of the idea of society (samaaj). One commentator remarked that from the mid-nineteenth century, the Bengali term “samaaj” came to be used exclusively as the equivalent of the English word “society,” and not in its traditional, indeterminate meaning. Several scholars have argued persuasively that the modern conception of society emerged in the West around the time of the French enlightenment and replaced earlier usages. A similar case can be made for colonial Bengal and later for all of India. The term for society, samaaj in original Sanskrit, meant a group of things/beings who are not clustered accidentally, but exist together habitually. In social discourse it referred to individuals who lived inside the normal entanglements of social/domestic life.

In ordinary usage of premodern vernaculars, particularly in Bengali, the term samaaj was commonly used, but not to mean what it connotes in modern social discourse—an abstract field, or combination of all possible groups and individuals—probably because there was no practical need to think of an abstract entity of that kind. The connotation of the traditional term was quite precise, but in important ways different from the modern one. A reference to one’s samaaj meant one’s community in an indeterminate, context-dependent sense—to indicate the relevant form of community in a particular context of use. Thus it was wrong to marry outside one’s caste, because the “community” would not accept it, referring here to kinship groups. But it could similarly refer to the village, the religious sect, or other specific forms of sociability which were relevant in the case of each social practice. Usually the reference would be to a local, normally face-to-face community in which, by such an act of infraction, individuals could lose face. To speak of the brahman-samaaj, or the vaishnava samaaj of a town or a locality would have made perfect sense, but to speak of something like the Bengali samaaj, or still better, the samaaj in Bengal—such an inescapable staple of modern discourse, would, to traditional users of language, have appeared linguistically awkward and referentially opaque. Ref-
erences to society indicated primary groups composed of dense, local, everyday concrete relationships. The idea of something like a second-order, or abstract field of relations in which such primary groups all existed, and which could be known by rational analysis, was difficult to articulate in the grammar of traditional concepts. This was, I would like to suggest, because the conception of a reflexive relation to the social self, which this abstract conception of society presupposes, was difficult to conceive. 16

The first significant change is the rapid emergence of the abstract idea of a society in the modern sense—a society made up of communities [a samaj or samaj-eyes in Bengali, since the same word has to work as two concepts]—the idea of a field, a secondary order of reality, a plane on which all communities of the first type existed. But there was also a second, highly significant semantic alteration implicit in the new usage. The central Brahminical strand of Hindu religion had always emphasized orthopraxy, but significant religious sects, like the Vaishnavas, admitted considerable degrees of voluntarism in the choice of religious beliefs. Vaishnavism, for example, could be adopted by an individual through a process similar to conversion, and it therefore implicitly accepted choice in matters of religious worship. Yet it would be misleading to see this as equivalent to modern voluntarism and associationism.

After the introduction of Western education, progressive groups began to set up associations for religious reform like Ram Mohan Roy's Brahmo Samaj. Brahmo Samaj uses the same term, samaj, in its name, but its denotation is quite different from the earlier given communities; this was, by contrast, a chosen community of individuals brought together by a religion of their choice, and on a fellowship of spirit based on rational reflection on religious matters. Freedom of the new type expresses itself, in colonial Bengali society, as the freedom to practice religion as individuals wanted. Implicitly included are freedom of thought on religious matters, critical application of rational principles to the doctrines and practices of one's community, and the right to reject them and to follow radically new forms of worship.

Religious freedom included within itself the freedom of individuals and groups of similarly inclined individuals to form associations. Naturally, this led to disputes on religious questions among Hindus and between Hindus, Brahmos, and Christian missionaries. These disputes could not be prosecuted without freedom of expression and, once a public sphere of discussions emerged, freedom of the press. Indeed, when colonial authorities sought to close a journal and deport its English editor on grounds of fomenting trouble, Roy petitioned the viceroy with an interesting analysis of colonial control. American colonies rebelled against English dominion because they were denied representation and expression of their grievances; Canada remained within the empire because its demands were heard. Entirely unrestricted freedom of the press was necessary if India was to remain within the empire, like Canada, and not take a resentment American way. 17

Associations based on a common purpose began for religious pursuits, but soon spread to other, mundane fields of enterprise. Soon upper middle-class and elite society in colonial India saw an astonishing growth of associations of all kinds—for pursuit of knowledge and science, religious worship, worthy social causes like upliftment of women—but most significant were associations of various castes to present their demands to the colonial government. Implicitly, these caste associations realized a most important difference in the colonial context. Political authorities in Hindu society were always culturally precommitted to a preservation of the caste order—continuity of closed occupations and an inflexible hierarchy among them. With the British government, for the first time, a new kind of political authority existed which was either indifferent or skeptical about the caste system. Caste associations could therefore present their demands and petitions for favorable treatment to this government.

The new definition of samaj (as used in Brahmo Samaj) referred to something important in the relation of a group of people to themselves: the individuals' inclusion in this group was out of rationally grounded choice, not mere ascription. The new domain of a restricted colonial civil society was created by an extraordinary proliferation of associations. 18 Two types of associations became increasingly common in urban India: voluntary associations for the establishment of educational projects, of literary committees, of projects for the advancement of women, and of sports clubs in a process likely to delight liberal theorists; and curiously, other, equally effective and influential ones, based on caste or religion, whose relation to liberal principles was more ambiguous.
Caste associations are particularly significant as they demonstrate a strange combination of apparently contradictory principles: the universality of modern liberal associations and the particularity characteristic of traditional groups. A *kayastha sabha* for instance was in principle open to all *kayasthas*, but closed to others: a strange form of segmentary universality. This acceleration of the associational principle led to greater articulation of a concept of "interest" of the individuals formed into these groups; and in some cases, the more these particular groups organized themselves, the more their interests clashed with others. The creation of this restricted domain of "colonial civil society" was seen by commentators as both liberating and dangerous. The logic of segmentation of caste society ensured that goods were available segmentarily: Brahmins could not hope to amass great wealth; merchants could not acquire political power. In a modern social context such "goods"—wealth, political influence—were in principle universally accessible, and therefore could be coveted by all; and the chances of getting these goods increased in proportion to the extent these groups were numerically large, organized, and internally coherent. Principles of freedom and self-determination for individuals and groups were evidently undermining Hindu caste society, and it was hardly surprising that Hindu conservative groups tried to provide reasoned criticisms against these trends. Paradoxically, however, the more sophisticated defense of Hindu orthodoxy had to appeal increasingly to the same principles of reason and human dignity. Although religious groups might have fierce differences on doctrines and practices, increasingly a common alphabet of rational reasoning was accepted as general intellectual currency.

Indian social thought shows, not surprisingly, great variety across its different cultural regions. Different cultural regions of India—Bengal, Oudh and northern Gangetic plains, the Punjab, Gujarat, and Maharashtra; entire South India—formed distinct regional cultures, with highly specific language-based cultures of thought and historically established forms of political rule. British rule reached these areas at different points in its colonial expansion, and made adjustments with regional circumstances. What was selected out of British influences depended partly on these regional histories. Thus the intellectual or social history of Bengali modernity is not repeated in other regions; each develops its own encounter with what colonial modernity offered.

One significant difference lies in the centrality of the debates about caste and Brahminical privilege. In Bengal, the initial attack on traditional society was led by groups who came from the upper-caste elite. In other parts of India, in the west, south, and north the question of social freedom became increasingly focused on the dominance of Brahmins and upper castes. In Maharashtra, initial opportunities offered by colonial administration and English education were secured by Brahmins and upper castes. Thus, although liberal ideas about the economy, education, and politics created an active public sphere in which questions of public interest and public policy were intensely discussed, opportunities of entry into this charmed sphere were restricted to upper-caste elites. It was only a section of the traditional elite, more alert to opportunities, which came to form the new elite. Modern ideas of freedom circulated among these groups with intellectual consequences similar to the Bengali example. Social reform was introduced. Western education was embraced on a wide scale. Rationalist thinking undermined traditional Hindu orthodoxy.

However, cultural transformation in western India showed a distinctive feature, absent from the Bengali precedents. Soon after the emergence of the new education and social effects of modernity, intellectuals from lower-caste groups pointed out the restrictive logic of this modernity and used ideas of social freedom to mount a fierce attack on caste hierarchy. Jyotirao Phule, the most significant figure of the lower-caste argument for social liberation, published a powerful tract called *Ghulamgiri*, literally meaning slavery, a searing indictment of the Hindu social order. He compared it to European and particularly American practices of slavery, and dedicated the book to Abraham Lincoln. Phule's actual writing relied on a kind of speculative, radical reinterpretation of classical Hindu scriptures, taking them primarily through an inversionist reading. Partly appropriating colonial orientalist arguments, he regarded the Brahmins as descendants of the invading Aryans who defeated an indigenous people and imposed the degrading caste system on them. In Phule's reading, the Brahminical system punished social groups according to the intensity of their defiance, and the lowest groups were
therefore those that resisted Aryan-Brahmanical domination the longest and most fiercely. The main divide in Hindu society was the line separating the Brahmans from all the other castes below them, who formed a single radical bloc. Phule's publicistic writings and practical efforts were directed at convincing this social bloc to come together and see itself, against Brahminical ideology, as a single community of social interest, and to persuade the colonial government to shift benefits to them, against the Brahminical conspiracy.

Several interesting points come out of this early movement for lower-caste assertion against high Hindu orthodoxy. It put the question of “social reform,” that is, transformation of inequalities internal to Hindu society, at the center of the arguments on freedom, implying that the ideals of freedom were unreal if they were confined only to the inchoate, emerging “public sphere” of administrative and political questions. The meaning of freedom was located in the tiny, unobserved, incessant transactions of everyday life, governed by caste exclusions and indignities. Freedom therefore meant the emancipation of lower-caste groups from upper-caste domination; but this emancipation was supplemented by an additional demand for preferment and reservation in new modes of advancement opened by colonial government. However, this demand had interesting implications. The mode of argument placed the caste groups at the center of the emancipatory process, and made them, rather than the individual, the main protagonist of social change. It also showed a possible conflict between the strand of social reform, seeking an end to social domination of upper castes, and political emancipation, which was to be concerned primarily with the conflict between Indians and the British government. Several movements for radical social reform in different parts of India saw the colonial government as a potential ally in their fight against upper-caste domination and supported colonial authorities, accusing political nationalists of creating distraction by calling for national independence from British rule.

Eventually, these two meanings of freedom—social freedom from caste domination and political freedom from colonial rule—remained in a state of potential conflict in Indian thinking of the twentieth century, producing three alternative strands of thinking about how this tension could be resolved. First, writers most intent on social inequality at times saw pan-Indian nationalism as an essentially upper-caste and class movement, unlikely to deliver radical social reform. For them, the British were more likely to behave as impartial authorities, probably even inclining in favor of the lower castes. These groups at times supported British authorities against early nationalism. A second strand was a direct response by upper-class groups in Indian nationalism to this line of attack. Arguing that fight against colonialism required complete unity among all sections of Indians, these nationalists sometimes used nationalism as a means to deflect attention from issues of social inequality, suggesting that raising issues of lower-caste indignity or untouchability was a betrayal of the national struggle against imperial rulers. Generally, however, the broad mainstream of Indian nationalists adopted a third position—that there must be some subsumption of the demands for social equality within the overarching political demands of Indian nationalism—although there were large variations inside the Congress on this point. However, the most well-known nationalist writers in the twentieth century—Rabindranath Tagore, Gandhi, and Nehru—all recognized in their own ways the inextricable link between the questions of social and of national freedom.

Freedom of the Nation

One of the most interesting questions in the history of British colonialism in India is how the structure of thought and practice of the modern Indian elite, which initially inclined rationalistic ideas about freedom toward loyalty to the European empire, turned into a very different structure directed against colonial dominion. Usual histories of colonialism and nationalism slide over this problem by offering a plausible teleological account of Indian nationalism. It is true that, chronologically, movements of rationalist thinking demanded social reform, then encouraged energetic efforts at commercial and economic improvement, and finally evolved into political nationalism. Yet the actual direction of rationalistic modern thinking and the precise structure of alignment of arguments are radically different between different historical epochs. To understand this historical movement it is essential to go against the logic of the history that nationalism gives to itself. That account is not merely un-
critically celebratory, but also technically teleological. It assumes the function of each stage of patriotism in modern Indian history is to “produce” the next stage, thus overstressing the genetic logic of evolution at the expense of the structural differences between discrete stages. This history can be presented more realistically if we attend to the ruptures between these structures of thinking at the expense of their genetic connection. Only that can explain how the style of thinking encapsulated by Ram Mohan Roy’s demonstrative loyalty, which pleaded with the British for European settlement on a large scale and hoped that British rule should continue for three centuries, could turn in the course of a century into Gandhi’s characterization of British rule in India as Satanic.

The coming of colonial modernity forced various communities to reflect on their suddenly altered historical situation since all were affected deeply by astonishingly rapid social transformation. In some cases, like Bengalis, especially the middle class, the unmixed beneficiaries of colonial settlement and expansion, it produces an instant sense of self-regard, of cultural preciousness. As the Bengalis absorbed Western education and were rewarded by instant and unprecedented economic prosperity, they naturally thought of themselves as an elite. This gave rise to an intense but odd sense of patriotism. This sense of patriotic pride cannot be unproblematically regarded as an early stage of Indian nationalism, for two clear reasons. First it is regional: the more the Bengalis feel special and superior to others, the more they find it difficult to make common cause with more “backward” peoples of the Indian empire; second, it is inextricably linked to a deep sense of gratitude to the Empire and the civilizing benefits it had brought to them. So it is not nationalist either in spatial spread, or in its critical attitude toward colonialism. In early Bengali literary productions effusive expressions of loyalty to Britain were common; and some of the early lyricism about the specialness of Bengalis also contained deep attachment to Mother Britannia. It took some time for this beneficent, protecting, all-powerful mother to change her personality radically, to turn from Britannia into the more recognizable shape of Bharatmata (Mother India). Loyal Bengali middle classes thus saw the early stage of British rule as a period of expansion of their freedom in social terms, although within a beneficent framework of British dominance. But in a certain sense, their freedoms and their secure enjoyment depended on continuation of British rule. Not surprisingly, the new Bengali middle class extended their complete loyalty to the East India Company’s side in the great conflict of 1857, when British rule was seriously challenged for the first time.

Patriotism naturally took a form and flavor derived from the distinctive history of regions and communities. Muslims constituted one of the most politically powerful and culturally eminent communities in precolonial India. Although internally heterogeneous in terms of regions, languages, and status, they had an identifiable elite based in northern India. Apart from the Mughal emperor, ruling families in many of the north Indian kingdoms were Muslim, and they constituted much of the ruling elite and landed nobility. As a result of Islamic domination of political authority for several centuries, the high culture of northern India had a predominantly Islamic character.

Initially, the Muslim community in north India did not respond enthusiastically to establishment of British rule. Unlike as in Bengal, British authority did not come stealthily, through a series of almost imperceptible steps, but rather as conquering power; and with the establishment of British control, the Muslim ruling elite were the immediate losers in terms of political eminence. After the annexation of the important northern Nawabi of Oudh a rebellion broke out in northern India in 1857, when large sections of the army mutinied and installed the old Mughal emperor on the throne of Delhi for a brief interlude. The Muslim nobility and minor royalty were sympathetic toward the rebels and their advocacy of the emperor of Delhi. After the defeat of 1857, the traditional Muslim elite retreated in sullen resentment against British power; the traditional religious leaders were alienated by educational reform and advances of rationalistic thought, and the political leadership alienated by their sense of defeat. Their alienation from British rule was intensified by the perception that Hindu elite groups were making rapid progress by adopting Western education and taking up professional jobs created by colonial rule.

The sense of community pride and patriotism took a different character among the north Indian Muslims. By the middle of the century a small elite emerged which received Western education and abandoned the traditional attitude of sullen rejection of British ways. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98), the first modern leader of
the north Indian Islamic community, argued, against the religious and political traditionalism of the Islamic elite, that the Indian Muslims must accept the offer of modernity by adopting Western education and affiliating themselves to British power. However, this was not just an argument in favor of political loyalty to the empire; the British should be emulated for cultural reasons as well. "The natives of India, when contrasted with the English in education, manners and uprightness, are like them as a dirty animal is to an able and handsome man." Consequently, Sayyid Ahmad Khan "felt that some of the characteristics of English society—its discipline, order, efficiency and high levels of education, along with science and technology—must be adopted by the Muslim community."

Limited acceptance of rationalist arguments involved Sayyid Ahmad Khan in bitter controversies with the traditional Ulema, who feared the long-term consequences of such religious reform. He asserted that "the Quran contained ultimate truths, and existed prior to the knowledge of science", but science and laws of nature which it discovered were also true, and did not conflict with the truths of religious beliefs. But Muslim orthodox opinion could be incensed by his suggestion that "it was all right to wear shoes for prayer in the mosque, to participate in Hindu and Christian celebrations, and to eat at a European style table." Thus, the reforms advocated by Khan were in some respects parallel to Ram Mohan Roy's defiance of Brahminical orthodoxy. However, Khan and his associates among the Muslim notables of north India established the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, which was to turn into one of the major centers of Islamic opinion in modern India. Parallel to his ideas about cultural and educational reform of the Islamic community, Sayyid Ahmad Khan's writing showed increasing concern about the political fate of Muslims as a social group, and the anxiety that under British rule, this group, which was once the ruling elite of north India, would fall behind the Hindus and come under their domination. He therefore saw the future of Indian Muslims in unfailing loyalty to the British and laid down a trajectory of Islamic politics that led to religious nationalism by opposing the establishment of the Indian National Congress for its openly political objectives; he also set up the United Indian Patriotic Association in direct opposition to the Congress, giving the term "patriotic" a most ironic twist.

Admiration for modern rationalistic ways of Europe took a third, distinct form in western India. Here a Maratha regional empire had grown after the decline of the Mughals from the mid-seventeenth century. This period of highly successful rule of the Peshwas was a fairly immediate political memory for the military and Brahminical groups of western India. But several social groups responded positively to the opportunities opened by British victory. Using their traditional literacy skills, Brahmins and other upper castes, earlier engaged in administration, acquired Western education and professional posts in the modern sector. Western India traditionally had an energetic commercial culture, centered on famous trading ports like Surat, and Gujarati merchants were renowned for their commercial skills. Gujarati and Parsi merchants welcomed the entry of British control and benefited by the opening of new commercial opportunities, particularly in the new port city of Bombay. The first effects of Western education and acquaintance with European ways were similar to those in Bengal and northern India. They led to the rise of a new professional elite, intent on the expansion of Western style education." One of the peculiarities of the western Indian reception of rationalist ideas was an intense criticism of caste privileges of the Brahmins.

However, the logic of associationism for social welfare mixed with the commercial spirit of western Indian society to lend to its intellectual discourse a distinctive character which played a crucial role in the formation of Indian nationalism. Of the rationalistic doctrines coming from the West, some intellectuals placed a peculiar emphasis on the teachings of the new science of political economy. In the discourses of modernity in western India, improvement was not only social and intellectual, it meant not merely emancipation from traditional customs; "improvement" in the economic sense came to occupy a primary place. Social reformers engaged in discussing means for the "improvement" of Indian social life came to place far greater emphasis on the question of material prosperity and reduction of poverty of the common people—a strand of thought hardly significant in the Bengali or north India reflection on colonial modernity. Major intellectual figures of the western Indian modernity gave to the question of economic prosperity a far more central place in their general reflections.

Ironically, some of these dissenting ideas evolved through piece-
meal transactions with elements of British colonial ideology and administrative thinking. At the peak of British power in India it became a principal article of administratve claim and academic writing that British rule had brought unprecedented prosperity to India and brought it out of a barbaric civilization. The first generation of reformers did not argue against these claims particularly strenuously, but careful study of political economy put the claims into some doubt. Certainly, British rule and associated economic changes had brought unprecedented prosperity to a small modern stratum of Indian society, but study of political economy forced them to calculate the "wealth of the nation" in less selfish ways. It appeared, on more critical economic reflection, that under British rule India was going through a phase of de-industrialization, as competition from English textile mills ruined domestic artisanal craft. Ironically, debates about the claims of colonialism's "civilizing mission" led, in surprising ways, to the first steps toward a nationalist argument, by authors who entirely sincerely declared their undying loyalty to the Empire.

Familiarity with European capitalist societies was accentuated by study of modern science and political economy, selected, as we have seen, by Indian writers as the two subjects from the West really worth emulating. In the general literature on colonialism there was an implicit belief that European colonialism was justified precisely because governments should be judged consequentially—not in terms of who ruled, but what resulted from their rule. The fact that Indians were ruled by a foreign power was outweighed by the modernizing consequences of their administration. However, there was an interesting twist in this argument. Justifying colonial power by its modernizing consequences immediately brought into play comparisons with the social and political conditions in England, because the purpose of colonial rule was presumably to create similar conditions in India in economic and political terms. Comparisons with England brought out stark contrasts between the two countries: England's prosperity with India's poverty, England's scientific advance with India's backwardness, and the most awkward contrast of all, England's freedom and India's colonization. Some counterarguments were advanced on behalf of colonial ideology. Lack of prosperity was at times attributed to the different geographic and climatic conditions, a vestigial influence of Montesquieu and Buckle, and the incurable sloth of natives. Absence of free institutions was similarly explained/justified, often by libertarian writers like Mill, by lack of education and a backward stage of civilization. "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end." Mill stated in On Liberty, "Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one." Indians, in this view, were fortunate in finding the British to rule over them during their period of slow growth into historical maturity. Additionally, this lack of self-government was the condition for steady improvement of the economic condition of the country.

Study of political economy by entirely loyalist politicians cast doubt on this view. Early economic studies by British radical writers and Indians claimed, on the contrary, that India had declined economically as a result of British rule; and these students of political economy detected a damning trend toward ruralization of Indian society. Classical authors like Adam Smith extolled the virtues of the commercial impulses of the city in the transformation of modern economies. Ruralization, if true, thus showed the falsity of the claims of colonial ideology: instead of progressing economically, India was languishing or slipping back. Readers of John Stuart Mill were not slow to point out that in such matters it is only those affected who can represent their interests; no one else can, not even a paternalistic colonial government. Arguments famously marshalled by Mill in advocating the enfranchisement of the working classes in Britain could, with slight adaptation, be used with great force to demand self-government for economic improvement.

Ironically, the first writers of this school could be called "economic nationalists" only retrospectively; they began, in reality, as economic loyalists. This was the first genuine school of Indian liberals, because they extended the arguments about intellectual rationalism in the direction of a celebration of commerce and material prosperity—the classic arguments of liberal bourgeoisie. One of the clearest and most concise statements of this mode of thought came from M. G. Ranade, a principal figure in Western Indian social
thought. In a lecture in 1892, later published as a highly influential essay, Ranade quoted Mill's *Political Economy* to argue that "purely economic questions" do not always have "purely economic" solutions. While claiming at the start of one of his essays that "here we eschew politics altogether, for there is really no conflict of interests between rulers and the ruled, who all alike desire to promote the industrial and economic progress of this country," Ranade's argument slowly but surely moves toward a complaint about industrial decline: "India, fifty years ago, clothed herself with her own manufactures, and now she is clothed by her distant masters." From this he concluded: "Political ascendency is not the only particular vantage ground which we have lost. Commercial and manufacturing predominance naturally transfers political ascendency and in this our collapse has been even far more complete."

By strange pathways, the entirely loyal concerns about harmless associationism for the welfare and upliftment of society, and its corollary, a search for development of manufacture and industry, had brought social thought in western India to the brink of economic nationalism. The intellectual associationism of Bengal, its spread of education, and the exclusively intellectualist and literary emphasis of Bengali rationalist thought had led to the first uncertain stages of political demands for limited autonomy and self-government; yet, paradoxically, it was strangely uninterested in the economic questions of industrial development and capitalism. The more economic and commercial emphasis of social thought in the works of the significant writers of western India brought an essential element into the pre-history of Indian nationalism.

Dadabhai Naoroji, the first serious exponent of a theory of a drain of wealth from the colony, wholeheartedly accepted the idea that the ultimate objective of British rule was to produce conditions similar to those in Britain and thought the evidence of widespread poverty proved the un-British character of colonial government. His lectures and public writings argued with passion and consistency that Indian poverty was linked to the exploitative nature of colonial rule and the systematic drain of wealth from India. This line of argument became increasingly important in Indian public life, as authors like R. C. Dutt, in his large *Economic History of India*, sought to make it more systematic and academically undeniable. However, this line of thought accomplished two important tasks for the growth of Indian nationalism. First, it introduced a powerful theme of economic exploitation alongside the growing sense of the purely political indignity of colonial rule. Second, the centrality of the theme of development of manufacturing and industry ensured the staunch support of the emerging Indian capitalist class for the movement of political nationalism. It was the liberal writers of western India like M. G. Ranade, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and Dadabhai Naoroji who were the closest in intellectual spirit and rigorous political argument to the liberal strand of Western political thought, though their emphasis on loyalty kept them firmly inside purely constitutional criticism of British rule, thus allowing succeeding generations to accuse them, with some justification, of an attitude of mendicancy rather than self-respect.

Freedom of the Nation: Stages and Forms of Indian Nationalism

By the first decade of the twentieth century, Indian intellectual discourse had gone through an irreversible transformation: all other concerns get slowly connected to and dominated by the problem of nationalism— the demand for the end of British rule. That does not mean that earlier concerns in this intellectual story—demands for the liberty of conscience, to shape individual lives electively, for the freedom of lower castes from Brahminical oppression; or the question of unrestrained pursuit of commercial growth free of governmental control and British monopolies—disappeared. Some of these concerns continued, but were less noted—for two reasons. They were not equally novel and therefore caused less comment; and in some cases they were linked to colonial rule. For example, the question of freedom of expression or thought became increasingly political. Formerly, the threat to freedom of thought and conduct came from Hindu social orthodoxy; now increasingly from curbs imposed by colonial authorities. Freedom of expression remained significant, but it became subsumed within the more general question of national independence. However, the struggle of the person to be free from social control remained an important theme. Gandhi and Nehru, for instance, wrote highly influential autobiographies in which
there was an intense concern about the discovery of the self. Clearly, however, this self-discovery was in the context of the growing political movement, and inevitably, as Nehru's book showed, the story of the individual man was submerged and subordinated to the story of the movement of the nation. Considerations on the nature of freedom in the twentieth century became inextricably connected to the question of freedom of the nation.

Nationalism proper, when it emerged at the turn of the century, gradually divided into several strands, each giving its particular spin to the idea of freedom. As a political movement, it developed in some clearly identifiable stages. Generally the current history of Indian nationalism identifies four clear stages. In a first stage from the late nineteenth century, ideas of political liberalism get transformed into a cautious, constitutional, almost mendicant movement for self-government. However, the earlier tradition of social reform, critiques of religion, and intellectual rationalism are dominant, and political writers develop compelling arguments about freedom for individuals, groups, and the whole society. A second stage is represented by more radical petit-bourgeois constructions of the freedom of the nation, which is more politically adventurous and populist, and is inclined toward support for extremism. The third stage is represented by Gandhi's popular movements, and a fourth by the startlingly modernist reinterpretation given to Indian nationalism by Nehru's rather fortunate rise to power in the 1950s. The question of freedom in all these stages is rendered complex by the ways in which the claims of the individual and the community are reconciled by various strands.

As nationalist sentiment began to gain strength, it gave rise to a feeling that the "nation," its people, is special. But in a heterogeneous society like India, this sense of special quality or favor could move in several different, at times contradictory, ways. The precise sense in which the nation was "special" depended on which exact group of people constituted it. Those who regarded the nation as Hindu naturally constructed a history which saw the ancient past of India as particularly glorious, followed by subsequent decline through loss of freedom to Islamic conquerors. The iconic repertoire this strand developed naturally depended heavily on the use of the Sanskrit language and Hindu iconic systems, in particular the imaginative merging of the idea of a beneficent, protective mother goddess and the idea of India. The famous song Vande Mataram displayed all the distinctive features of this iconic mode of representation—use of direct Sanskrit words, the feminization of the land, and the transfer of the religious iconicity of the mother goddess to a secular image of the nation. This iconic structure had contradictory effects; by giving the idea of the nation a visual, feminine representation, combining the Hindu ideas of her vulnerability and irresistibility, it produced an image which became a focus of intense nationalistic emotion. At the same time, Muslims would find this iconic construction alienating, and impossible to accept. Rise of Hindu nationalism was paralleled by similar growth of Islamic patriotism which saw the Muslims as the basis of a rival nation with appropriate cultural structures.

Hindu nationalism itself was in some ways a complex intellectual tradition, with considerable internal diversity. Some early Hindu reformers, like Swami Vivekananda, clearly saw the agenda of nationalism as containing within itself all the demands of rationalist religious reform. Vivekananda distinguished social practices like caste and patriarchy from the philosophical beliefs of Hinduism and associated its philosophical core with the Vedantic tradition in particular. Given this definition of what was Hinduism and what was central to its self-recognition, it was not difficult for him to continue crusading against caste inequality while defending Hindu culture against Christian and rationalistic criticisms. Vivekananda's attitude toward the Muslims varied considerably, and according to some interpreters he could not be accused of communal hostility toward Muslims. Some recognizably communal writers, like V. D. Savarkar, who coined the term "Hindutva," argued that Indian nationalism could include only those for whom India was not merely a place of mundane dwelling, but also a holy land. This obviously excluded Muslims from the true people of India; but Savarkar continued to recognize that practicing caste would make Hindu nationalism impossible. However, Hindu nationalists more commonly asserted that defense of India meant the defense of Hindu culture, which was inextricably associated with caste and patriarchy, and used arguments of cultural relativism to defend them.

Gandhi's views on questions of nationalism were highly complex and idiosyncratic. His classic early statement on the content of Indian freedom and the preferred mode of winning it was written in
Gujarati and used the vernacular word for freedom in its title, *Hind Swaraj.* Although translated as Indian Home Rule in the English version, the term *swaraj* came to stand for national freedom in many north Indian languages. Gandhi’s construction of an argument for *swaraj* was ingenious and used ideas of self-rule of individuals in a highly idiosyncratic fashion. Gandhi famously argued in the *Hind Swaraj* that, contrary to common belief, “the English had not taken India, we [Indians] have given it to them.” Yet this was not the usual argument about dissension among Indian princes or social groups, making it possible for militarily advanced and institutionally well-organized British to rule India. Gandhi’s argument went in a startlingly different direction. The British were in India because Indians wanted the modern civilization in which the British were more advanced.

But Western civilization for Gandhi was not true civilization, as its only object was to extend man’s material comfort. In a famous diatribe, reminiscent of Rousseau, he denounced those aspects of modern civilization most vaunted by Indian modernists—railways, modern medicine, the legal system—as contributing to India’s misery. True civilization consisted in peoples’ gaining control over their minds and their passions. “The tendency of Indian civilization was to elevate the moral being, that of the western civilization is to propagate immorality.” *Swaraj* or freedom would mean Indians learning to rule themselves in terms of their civilization: if Indians did not want Western civilization, the cultural authority of the West, and consequently British rule, would become redundant. The method of driving the British out, Gandhi held, in another famous argument, was not through the use of force, for that would turn Indians into images of the British, and those groups who would muster the greatest amount of brute force to destroy British domination would subsequently establish their own domination over ordinary people. The only secure way of making India free, thus, was to use methods of passive resistance: to disobey British laws, but accept the punishments associated with sedition. Not to return force against force required a superior, moral strength, and could only be practiced by those who have conquered fear. Passive resistance, in Gandhi’s brilliant inversion, was the method of the brave; terrorism, of the cowardly.

This is not the place to expatiate on Gandhi’s political thinking. It is clear that Gandhi is an advocate of an intense sense of freedom of the individual—to hold onto and practice his beliefs, and to be different from others, ideas central for instance to Mill’s advocacy of liberty. Yet Gandhi’s emphasis and specific inflection take his construction of individual freedom in a different direction from common liberal thought. Human beings must search for their truth, true self, or true nature (*svabhava*), with a strong, uncompromising moral emphasis that makes it closer to Kant’s ethics than to Mill’s. At least the ideas about individual liberty strongly emphasized the need not to live by either custom or authority, but they placed equal emphasis, like Kant, on individuals learning to control their passions and interests by a higher moral sense, though Gandhi does this by using the standard Hindu idea of bringing the senses (*indriya*) under control. This is *swaraj* for the individual: rule over himself, and clearly, in his thinking, it is only an individual who has established self-mastery (*swaraj*) in this sense, who can, without inconsistency, desire or demand *swaraj* (self-rule) from British dominion over India. The second sense of *swaraj*, or self-rule, applies to daily lives of common people. In a powerful passage in the *Hind Swaraj*, Gandhi states, for him, true *swaraj* does not mean simply the end of British rule: “My patriotism does not teach me that I am to allow people to be crushed under the heel of Indian princes, if only the English retire . . . If I have the power, I should resist tyranny of Indian princes just as much as that of the English. By patriotism I mean the welfare of the whole people.”

By these arguments *swaraj* stretches from individual moral self-determination to larger areas of collective freedom from want and indignity. It goes some way in the direction of social and economic freedom, although ultimately what he made of this aspect of freedom remained vague. The third and final aspect of freedom, which was true freedom for India, the real meaning of *swaraj*, was of course freedom not from British rule, but from Western civilization. India’s freedom was meant to be free not to be like Europe, not to choose European modernity as the ineluctable future of mankind.

Modernist radicals in Congress, communists and socialists, differed with Gandhi principally on this point. Gandhi saw freedom as an opportunity for India to be unlike modern Western societies, to retain her traditional social forms, because that was true civilization. For Jawaharlal Nehru, the most eloquent radical in the 1930s
and 1940s, the purpose of freedom was exactly the opposite. Nehru and the radicals continued the tradition of economic nationalist critique of British rule. They saw colonialism as the primary obstacle to the achievement of true modernity, which consisted in industrialization, establishment of democracy, and general development similar to modern Western forms, although they had a strong preference for a socialist organization of modern society. In opposition to Gandhi, they saw welfare of society to consist in industrial growth, urbanization, parliamentary democracy; Gandhi saw in each of these fundamental deficiencies and real degeneration of civilizing values. Curiously, in India communism established itself as an ideology earlier than socialism, but communists’ early efforts, coordinated long-distance from Europe by the intellectual leader M. N. Roy, met with sporadic success in organizing trade unions and the peasantry. It was a communist sympathizer who moved the first, unsuccessful resolution demanding “full independence” in the Indian National Congress, an unpardonable extremism in 1921 in the eyes of more reformist Congress leaders. Within eight years of this, however, in 1929, Nehru was to move a successful resolution for full independence.

But the real influence of the radicals within the Congress consisted in emphasizing that real pressure on the British Raj to move out of India required the wholehearted involvement of the poorer classes, the peasantry and the proletariat. They were unlikely to find much enthusiasm for the Congress if it did not take up their economic demands more seriously. From the 1930s, the Congress party’s ideology acknowledged a link between political and economic freedom, and extended support, often lukewarm or divided, to trade union or peasant struggles over economic demands. The tardiness of British response to demands for independence steadily radicalized the Congress, and the influence of the radical strands increased spectacularly during the 1940s, with the socialists playing a major role in the Quit India movement in 1942.

The clearest exposition of this extension of the meaning of the idea of freedom from a narrowly political to a wider economic one came in the works of Jawaharlal Nehru. In two presidential addresses to the Indian National Congress, in 1929 and 1936, Nehru outlined this construction of the idea of Indian freedom, especially what it meant for common people to be free, and for India to be independent. Nehru had a complex intellectual biography, starting with immense fascination for “scientific socialism,” being disillusioned about Soviet communism after Stalin’s show trials, and eventually adopting a much milder social democratic approach to social revolution, when it really mattered—when he came to power in 1947. Ironically, he was very radical when he did not have real power; when he actually did, he had abandoned much of his early radicalism. Even so, his arguments retain great significance for the clarity and passion with which a particular case about freedom was made.

Although the principal question in the 1929 Congress session, which overshadowed everything else, was Congress’s demand for “full independence,” and his task as the president was to argue for it, Nehru subtly bent the reinterpretation of the fullness of freedom in a radical direction. Admitting that his view was a minority in the Congress, he asserted:

I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings and princes, or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry, who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy. I recognise, however, that it may not be possible for a body constituted as is this National Congress, and in the present circumstances of the country, to adopt a fully Socialistic programme. But we must realise that the philosophy of Socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over, and almost the only possible for a body constituted as is this National Congress, and in the present circumstances of the country, to adopt a fully Socialistic programme. But we must realise that the philosophy of Socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over, and almost the only points in dispute are the pace and methods of its full Realisation. India will have to go that way too, if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality.

In a famous article, “Whither India?,” Nehru showed the structure of the socialist argument and its major disagreements with others with sharp clarity. “What are we driving at,” the article asked, “Freedom? Swaraj? Independence? Dominion Status? Words which may mean much, or little or nothing at all. Again whose freedom are we particularly striving for, for nationalism covers many sins and includes many conflicting elements.”

“The nation does not have concrete enough interests in the abstract, at every step of real political decisions, some interests have to be sacrificed for others.” “A more vital conflict of interests arises between these possessing classes as a whole and the others: between the haves and have-nots... We cannot escape having to answer the question, now or later, for the freedom of which class or classes is
India especially striving? Do we place the masses, the peasantry and workers, first, or some other small class at the head of our list? ... To say that we shall not answer that question now is itself an answer and taking of sides, for it means that we stand by the existing order, the status quo. There could be no clearer presentation of the socialist case within and against Indian nationalism. "India's struggle today is part of the great struggle which is going on all over the world for the emancipation of the oppressed. Essentially, this is an economic struggle, with hunger and want as its driving forces, although it puts on nationalist and other dresses."

Nehru's presentation of the socialist interpretation of the objectives of the nationalist movement, however, contained several ambiguities, or potential contradictions which were yet undeveloped. First, he was simply urging nationalists to acknowledge and incorporate within nationalism the legitimate demands of the peasants and workers. This merely made the list of freedoms longer, adding economic freedoms to the usual list of individual and national freedom; it did not say what should be done in case a conflict arose between them. As Nehru's political experience grew, and his disillusionment with the Soviet Union increased, he inclined toward a less radical, at least a less impatient presentation of the socialist idea. By the time independence was won, he clearly believed that political democracy was too valuable to be sacrificed for rapid achievement of economic equality and reduction of poverty. Clearly, he also felt that the constitution and its formal arrangements of democracy were vital for a democratic future for free India. This subtle turn in Nehru's thinking also caused a serious rift between him and the Indian communists who attempted, for a short period (1948-1951), to destroy his government through armed insurrection.

The evolution of Indian nationalism over the twentieth century shows an interesting feature of collective reflection on the nature of modern freedom. By the beginning of the century, two important developments had taken place. First, through the discussions of the English-speaking intelligentsia, a recognizable liberal doctrine started taking shape in the works of the moderates in the early stages of the Indian National Congress. Second, in vernaculars, a new conceptual language for the expression of the demand for modern liberty takes shape, although in the vernacular writings the modern European civilization is assessed more negatively from the mid-nineteenth century, particularly for its exclusive emphasis on this-worldliness, usually seen as crass materialism, and individualism, seen similarly as a license to unbridled selfishness. However, the emphasis on individualism, the freedom of the autonomous individual, increasingly comes under serious scrutiny and criticism. Individualism, often celebrated in a romantic conception of artistic creativity, is condemned in social conduct as egotistic behavior.

The criticisms of individualistic thought and behavior ground their argument in very different premises, but their conclusions have a strange convergence. First, a section of the modern intelligentsia revised their opinion about Europe and its rationalism as a liberating force and criticized its tendency to dissolve communities and turn toward militaristic nationalism. Second, Gandhi continued this tradition of criticism against the modern European civilization and gave it a new, highly individual, form. Finally, the rise of the left inside the national movement began an assault on the economic individualistic premises of modern European civilization and urged socialist solutions.

Liberal individualism, in its most uncompromising forms, never became immensely popular or prestigious in India's intellectual life. But the map of intellectual ideas, the relation between individual and collectivist conceptions of freedom, remained a complex matter. The fundamental argument about the expansion of autonomy of individuals continued unobtrusively, at times through these ideologies, at others, despite their conscious decisions. Often, joining the nationalist movement or playing an active role in political life itself involved individual self-assertion against family and parental authority. Ironically, all these trends welcomed and applauded women's participation in the political struggles, which could not be done without a certain relaxation of patriarchy. Participation in political movements itself was to bring traditional individuals into a field of social mixing and miscegenation where caste and community identities were put into question, and people had to develop trust among strangers. Independent of the ideological self-understanding of political groups, the relentless sociology of a mass movement surreptitiously widened the conditions for individual assertiveness.
In 1936 the young Nehru wrote with characteristic radical impatience, "We have got into the extraordinary habit of thinking of freedom in terms of paper constitutions." Yet after independence, he recognized the significance of establishing a permanent framework for political and social life and devoted most of his intellectual energies to this task for about three years. Congress, in a display of remarkable generosity and foresight, invited into the Constituent Assembly legal figures like B. R. Ambedkar whose relations with it were not entirely trouble-free. As a consequence, India received a constitution which, with the important shortcoming of being excessively detailed and legalistic, was exceptionally sensitive to emergent problems of a new nation-state, and which strenuously abjured over-simplifications. Consequently, the legal structure of democratic politics was constructed in great detail with enormous technical care, and after exhaustive, often extremely subtle, theoretical debates in the Constituent Assembly.

In some ways, the nature of political discourse was significantly altered after independence—not in its ideological positions, but in its medium. Before independence, as real power was not in the hands of nationalists, political positions could be articulated only as ideas, in a theoretical form. Traditionalists, communalists, conservatives, Gandhians, liberals, socialists, communists—all presented their views to a political public audience in the form of theoretical arguments about future social arrangements and political possibilities. After independence, this suddenly stopped. Except for Nehru's occasional attempts to argue his positions theoretically and the communists' inertial adherence to Marxist doctrine, large theoretical arguments became less common. Political discourse focused understandably on more mundane and pressing issues of quotidian politics. But the most powerful influence, which acted silently and unseen, was from the structure of constitutional arrangements adopted after independence: the particular inflection given to the ideas of nationalism, federalism, social reform, individual liberty. The constitution, astonishingly, was a primarily liberal document. For various reasons, more radical political aspirations like the communalists' desire for a Hindu state, or Nehru's for a more redistributive commitment were either defeated or bartered away in the service of reaching compromise.

What was left, and therefore set firmly into the basic structure of government and its commitment to citizens' rights, was a solid, internally coherent structure of liberal principles centered on a section on fundamental rights. Its configuration of rights was centered in its turn on a right to freedom conceived in a primarily negative liberal manner: of speech, association, belief, faith, acquisition of property—an unsurprising recitation of liberal freedoms. Critically significant was the translation of the right to equality into a liberal conception of political, and in the peculiar Indian context, social equality rather than economic. The juridical structure established to defend this pattern of liberties followed equally liberal principles, based on the independence of the judiciary, a formalistic legalistic system of judicial defense of freedom rather than a reliance on popular activism. If we accept a simple distinction between procedural and participatory aspects of democracy, this will imply that there are two distinct ways of securing freedom. The first, the procedural way, advocates relying on the liberal state and the rules of procedure for equal treatment it put in place. The second, participatory, trend often concentrates on opposing the state and forcing it through political mobilization, to recognize demands for justice. The nationalist movement was based on vast participatory impulses: its primary target was after all the colonial state. Despite the powerful participatory rhetoric in nationalist thought, and in spite of the historical fact that the new state was created by a period of strong mobilization, the nation, when it came to decide its institutional fate, opted for a broadly individualist liberal conception of parliamentary government.

The political history of independent India can be divided into two distinct historical periods to date. The first extended to the end of the 1960s, over four general elections. Political life in these two decades appeared to fit unproblematically into the liberal-individualist format of the constitutional arrangements. Constitutional disputes, reflected in the judgments of the Supreme Court, involved personal liberties of expression or the sanctity of the right to property. Debates in Indian political life were carried on primarily in the language of familiar Western democratic discourses, in terms of conflicts between political ideals of laissez faire and state intervention,
mainly capitalist freedom and socialist redistribution. The underlying sociology of these ideological conflicts saw the movement of social classes like the industrialists, managerial elites, and proletariat as central to political life. What is remarkable, in retrospect, is less the contents of the debate, than their implicit sociology. On all sides—from Nehru's centrist socialism, the advocacy of unrestricted capitalism by the Swatantra [Free] party, the strident egalitarianism of the Communists—there is a calm indifference toward the discourses of caste and religious identity which were to break with massive fury into the political domain within a decade.

Within ten years, Indians would be forced to recognize that these discourses were the vernacular of Indian politics, as opposed to the rationalist English discourse of the first two decades, which imparted a strange unity to the combatants. From the 1970s, Indian political discourse began to speak a kind of political vernacular, and it was the inequalities of caste, region, and religion which would completely dominate political demands, entirely erasing the earlier language of class interests, capitalism, and socialism. Indira Gandhi's victory in the elections of 1971 on the basis of the slogan Garibi Hatao [remove poverty] was the last, and already disingenuous, recourse to the discourse of socialism. By the mid-1970s, communists had lost their intellectual significance at the national level, being effectively reduced to regional parties, too engrossed in winning elections to care much about high principles.

The historical movement of political ideas in India shows that there can be two different ways ideas of collective freedom from oppression and individual liberty from interference can be related to each other. Many analyses in political theory have concentrated on cases in which the ideal of collective freedom of a group suffocates and eventually abrogates liberty of the individual. Intense demands for freedom or self-assertion of a religious community might restrict the freedom of individuals by interpreting all aspiration for individualization as disruptive of the community's identity. The ideals of the freedom of a community and of individuals are certainly not the same, as Berlin argued in the context of the Cold War, indeed the two can be opposed to each other in specific contexts. The relation between these two aspects of freedom in India has followed a peculiar trajectory. After independence, the overt, dramatic, explicit political conflicts centered around group rights of various kinds. Since the 1970s, the conflicts have occurred especially around the assertion of the lower castes, former untouchables, and the strata immediately above them in traditional caste hierarchy. These strata make their claims on the state and other social groups in the liberal language of rights, but obviously their focus is the assertion of the right of their groups in the political arena. Yet, neither in caste-based electoral mobilizations nor in the Hindu communal politics can one detect a simple conflict between group identity and expression of individual freedoms.

In the case of lower castes, this assertion of group rights and a heightened public sensitivity toward caste inequality has created greater space for lower-caste individuals. Because of their collective numerical power, political parties can hardly ignore them. It has been a peculiarity of the Indian social debates of the past century that although conservatives have occasionally tried to defend their practices in the name of continuity of culture, there have been no serious, straightforward arguments defending practices like untouchability or explicit indignity of lower castes. Some sections of the upper-caste groups have voluntarily abandoned practices of separation and hierarchy through their conversion to modern beliefs and indeed have been major agents of reform. Less progressive elements among them, who would like to practice caste inequality, have in effect accepted the formal directions of the state, and have resorted to the freedom of private belief and private behavior to practice such conduct where possible. Their hostility to the, albeit slow, uplift of the lower castes has to be expressed in the mendacious form of an acute concern for merit. Traditional forms of conduct have been sent decisively into the defensive, they are forced to seek respectable subterfuges. The historical result is that although the attention of political movements and mobilization is rarely directed toward questions of personal liberty, for lower classes at least, there is a slow but perceptible expansion of personal freedom, at least in the negative form of the lesser likelihood of insults, indignity, and formal discrimination within state institutions. In recent decades, however, Indian politics has seen a new form of danger to freedom of minorities through the rise of Hindu nationalism.

Thus the story of modern India since independence can be seen as a story of freedom, although its form and movements have been different from European precedents and somewhat strange. The
three domains of freedom we identified in accordance with nineteenth-century social thought—the domains of freedom of the individual, of freedom of association and forming groups to pursue collective ends, and of the freedom of large collectivities, particularly colonized nations—have all been affected by the movement of freedom in modern Indian political imagination. The relations between these aspects have never been simply linear, or simply encompassing. Rather there has been occasional restructuring of their hierarchy of significance for specific social groups, and consequently, in the domain of public discussions. Yet all three have slowly moved forward and expanded in a complex historical movement. The history of modern India tells us a complex, surprising, captivating, and yet unconcluded story of freedom. It is appropriate to express a Tocquevillesque astonishment at this historical phenomenon.

If we look from age to age, from the earliest antiquity to the present day, we can agree with Tocqueville that nothing like this has ever happened before. We have not yet seen the end of this unprecedented historical process; it is still puzzling because it is certainly not concluded. It is also true that “the past has ceased to throw light on the future,” but on one point at least, the mind of man does not wander in darkness. For the eventual shape of the destination of this process might be unclear, but the movement toward greater expansion of freedom is irreversible.

There are a number of apparent paradoxes when one examines freedom in Southeast Asia today. The questions of freedom for whom and freedom from what have to be asked here as anywhere else. If freedom is defined as the ability of relatively autonomous individuals to effectively pursue individual rights vis-à-vis the state and the current rulers, including the right to publicly criticize the authorities as well as to have at least an indirect and largely passive role in the choice of those rulers, then freedom is relatively constrained to a greater or lesser extent in all of the countries of the region. But Southeast Asian societies are far from unique in this respect. All polities place limits on individual rights as a condition of maintaining an orderly society. The degree to which this limiting is done, and the level of public awareness and acceptance of these constraints, are often contested, however, both inside and outside the legal institutions of the state.

Another concept of freedom, found in variations of theories of political pluralism, involves the idea of autonomy for the leaders of groups or institutions, who can operate largely outside the constraints of the state. This autonomy often requires the apparent subordination of the freedom of individuals in the name of a larger cause, while simultaneously denying the legitimacy of the state to constrain the rights of these same individuals. In the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity which exists in all Southeast Asian societies, the demand for freedom for the group, whether aspiring to nationhood or to recognized minority group rights, is often heard as an argument for independence or autonomy in the name of a good larger than the individual but a rather different collectivity than the internationally recognized state.