Discussion and debate among Marxists on problems of culture and consciousness have remained within the reductionist-non reductionist syndrome, drawing upon the formulations of Marx in *The German Ideology* and *The Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, and the later explanations of Engels on structure-superstructure relationship. About the forms of consciousness Marx said:

> Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their actual world, also their thinking and the products of their thinking.\(^1\)

Marx put this idea more rhetorically in the *Communist Manifesto*:

> 'What else does the history of ideas prove, than that intellectual production changes its character in proportion as material production is changed?'\(^2\)

Even during Marx's own lifetime the reductionist-determinist character of this formulation had its critics which led Engels to underline the interaction of various elements and to decry 'the stress on the economic side than is due to it' and to correct the fundamentalist misinterpretations. As a result, he insisted upon the interaction between all three levels—the material base, the political and legal superstructure and the ideological and cultural superstructure. Yet Engels' explanations continued to contain expressions as 'the ultimately determining element', 'the economic movement' that 'finally asserts itself as necessary' and 'the economic necessity which ultimately always asserts itself', expressions which hardly occur in Marx. In fact in Marx's scheme, the base and superstructure not only interdepend but interpenetrate as well. For the purposes of our present discussion what is important in the explanation offered by Engels is the emphasis on the interaction between the elements of the superstructure, an idea

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* Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

** Damodaran Memorial Lecture, delivered at Trivandrum.

* K.N. PANIKKAR*  

** Culture and Consciousness in Modern India: A Historical Perspective **  

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very much evident both in *The German Ideology* and *The Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. In a letter to H. Starkenburg on 25 January 1894, Engels wrote:

> Political, juridical, literary, artistic, etc., development is based on economic development. But all these react upon one another and also upon the economic basis. It is not that the economic condition is the cause and alone active, while everything else has a passive effect.³ (emphasis added)

Despite this early recognition of the importance of superstructure, the dialectic of intra-superstructural relations has been a relatively neglected area of Marxist concern, particularly so with respect to the Indian context, both historical and contemporary.

In the present political climate when the Indian bourgeoisie is gearing up to fabricate an ideological structure through the effective use of state apparatuses at its command, it is important to be alive to the social and political consciousness it is likely to engender. The rather rapid development of the state controlled media and the modernisation of administrative infrastructure are important links in the process of bourgeois hegemonisation. Politics apart, what are the ways and means for developing a counter hegemony, given the resources of the state the bourgeoisie commands? It is a question which demands immediate attention, as the bourgeois cultural and ideological onslaught is being currently mounted on an unprecedented scale.

My intention in referring to these theoretical and practical questions, it should be evident, is not to dwell on them as such, but to indicate the context in which I locate the cultural-ideological struggles in colonial India which form the central concern of my lectures. It also has important political implications to which I hope to come back for a more detailed consideration at the end.

**RATIONALISM AND THE CRITIQUE OF RELIGION**

In holding that the criticism of religion was the beginning of all social criticism, Marx indicated the connection of religion with social structure and state. Also implied in this statement is the ideological implications of religion which was forcefully articulated in the oft-quoted epigram—religion is the opium of the people. Marx, however, did not use it in contemptuous condemnation like his friend, Moses Hess, who bracketed religion with opium and brandy. His emphasis was on its ideological character and the reasons for being so. Religion to him was 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, the soul of a soulless environment.'⁴ The oppressed, therefore, took refuge in religion which by providing 'illusory happiness' and consolation helped them to put up with their misery. More importantly, religion also helped them to explain and legitimise the conditions of their worldly existence and consequently, as French materialist d' Holback stated, it prevented them from thinking about
the oppression committed by their rulers. The Hindu concepts of *Karma* and *Maya* encapsulate the legitimatory and illusory character of religion. Therefore, 'the abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is required for their real happiness. The demand to give up the illusions about its condition is the demand to give up a condition which needs illusions. The criticism of religion is therefore in embryo the criticism of the vale of woe, the halo of which is religion.'

In contemporary India religion as an ideology has embraced almost every sphere of existence, thereby masking the socio-economic and political reality. Therefore, if people are to be made to face the reality, the illusion that masks that reality is to be removed. Developing a critique of religion therefore becomes an immediate political task.

Given the ideological character of religion, developing its critique with a view to its eventual abolition is beset with grave practical difficulties. Looking at the attitude towards religion during our immediate past—the colonial period—in order to see how historically religion was brought within the critique of reason, would afford us some useful insights.

Historians generally tend to regard socio-religious reform as the major concern of intellectuals in nineteenth century India. That a critique of religious system, if not religion itself, was an important component of this concern is not generally recognised. The early expression of the critique was in *Tuhafat-ul-Muwahiddin*, a text composed by Ram Mohan Roy in 1802. Based on oriental knowledge, it is a general and speculative treatise on the origin and character of religion and religious system, in which Ram Mohan came very close to an atheist stand. Not that he denied the existence of God and the other world, but he accepted them only with reservation for pragmatic reasons. The reservation was that neither the existence of God nor of the other world could be proved. Yet he considered them as necessary for the proper conduct of man in society:

> Mankind are to be excused [he said] in admitting and teaching the doctrine of the existence of the soul and the next world for the sake of the welfare of the people as they simply for fear of punishment in the next world... refrain from the commission of evil deeds.

This practical use of religion—the function of the Penal Code—that Ram Mohan envisaged is reminiscent of Voltaire's statement: 'I want my lawyer, tailor, valet, even my wife, to believe in God. I think that if they do I shall be robbed less and cheated less.'

The emphasis on the pragmatic role of religion led to an inquiry into its origin. Why did religion come into being in a society, what was its need, what was its purpose? It is important that Ram Mohan rejected the supernatural and revelational explanations of the origin of religion. Instead he located it in societal needs and in the exigencies of
social relations. In other words, religion was looked upon as a mechanism to preserve the existing property relations and to regulate social intercourse. Lest you should think that I am giving an unwarranted interpretation to Ram Mohan’s ideas let me put this in the words of Ram Mohan himself.

Human beings are naturally social beings and they are required to live socially. But as society depends upon individuals understanding the ideas of each other reciprocally and on existence on some rules by which the property of one is defined and distinguished from that of another and one is to be prevented from exercising oppression over another, so all the rulers inhabiting different countries, and even the inhabitants of isolated islands and the submets of lofty mountains, have invented special words indicating certain ideas, which form the basis of the invention of religion and upon which the organisation of society depends.\(^8\)

This social explanation of religion inevitably led Ram Mohan to question and reject the dogmas of faith and miracles which were not necessarily integral to the original character of religion. They were a part of an accretionary process brought into play by religious leaders purely for their selfish interests, which they achieved by misleading their unsuspecting followers. Supernaturalism and monopoly of scriptural knowledge were the effective instruments used to achieve this end. The religious system, beliefs and practices, therefore, assumed the character of deception. All religious systems, Ram Mohan argued, were systems of human deception.\(^9\) Ram Mohan’s critique of religion was indeed very trenchant and also too radical to be accepted by contemporary society. That was possibly the reason why liberal scholars later on dismissed it as an immature work. Ram Mohan himself had found it difficult to sustain it for long and during the latter part of his life substantially revised his opinion.\(^10\)

What is more important is that Ram Mohan did not limit the application of rationality to religion alone, but extended it to all social and natural phenomena, by underlining the principle of causality linking the whole phenomenal universe. He wrote:

The secret of the universe lies in this that in this world, the existence of everything depends upon a certain cause and condition. . . . It is not hidden from those who have a sound mind and are friends of justice, that there are many things, for instance many wonderful inventions of the people of Europe and are not obviously known and seem to be beyond the comprehension of human power, but after a keen insight acquired by the instruction of others these causes can be known satisfactorily.\(^11\)

The intellectual implication of this rational explanation is clear enough: there is nothing in the social and phenomenal world which is
not susceptible to causal explanation. In other words, what is true is not to be determined on the basis of supernaturalism or on the authority of religious leaders. To Ram Mohan the sole criterion was demonstrability—that is, truth should not be repugnant to reason.

Although Ram Mohan gave up this rather extreme rational stand during the latter part of his life, he had worthy successors who undertook its further elaboration. Most notable among them were the members of Young Bengal and Akshay Kumar Dutt. The former were 'ruthlessly rational', applying the critique of reason uncompromisingly to all social and religious problems and practices. They stood for a total rejection of Hinduism as they considered it 'irrational and superstitious'. 'If there is anything that we hate from the bottom of our hearts, it is Hinduism', claimed Madhav Chandra Mallik, one of the members of the Young Bengal group.

Agnostic and atheistic ideas also found expression during this phase. One of the charges against Henry Vivian Derozio, the young and popular lecturer of Hindu College and the main inspiration behind Young Bengal, for his dismissal from Hindu College was that he had propagated atheistic ideas through his classroom lectures. In defence, Derozio denied that he ever preached atheism but had only told the students the doubts the philosophers had about the existence of God. Derozio's ideas did create a ripple at that time, but it was Akshay Kumar, the influential editor of Tattawabodini Patrika, and perhaps the staunchest rationalist of colonial India, who raised the critique of religion to the level of public debate. His motto was 'universal nature is our scripture, pure rationalism is our preceptor'. To him reason was the fundamental touchstone and anything which did not conform to it had no validity. He rejected supernaturalism and the concept of God and subjected all natural and social phenomena to logical and mechanical explanations. Within Brahma Samaj he championed the rejection of the concept of the infallibility of the Vedas as being repugnant to reason. Although after a long discussion and debate, his viewpoint prevailed within the Samaj. Another aspect which he brought within his rational critique was the mode of worship. In fact he opposed the very idea of worship as an irrational practice. Needless to say, it was too radical a stand to be accepted in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The attitude of Keshub Chandra Sen, the most radical Brahmo, towards reason appears to be rather ambivalent. He initially advocated a total rejection of the authority of the scriptures and upheld rationality as the only criterion for truth. The emphasis on individual conscience led to the idea of adesha—intuition—which was central to the religious thought of Keshub. At the same time he underlined the limitations of human reason and later gave up the subjective element in his concept of adesha.

The critique of reason was not limited to matters religious alone; it embraced the secular domain as well. Social issues came to be decided
not by religious faith and sanction but by the criteria of reason and social requirements. A rational and scientific basis for social change, instead of traditional authority and religious sanction, was thus sought to be employed. The attempt was to divorce social institutions and practices from their religious connection and bring about their transformation strictly on secular grounds. For instance, Akshay Kumar argued that the criterion for abolishing child marriage should solely be its effect on society. The determining factor should be medical opinion and not the sanction of religious priests. More forceful in this matter were the ideas of Gopal Hari Deshmukh, popularly known as Lokhitavadi (1823–1892) and the author of *Shatapatra*—one hundred letters dealing with various social and religious issues. He dismissed the importance of religious sanction even as a pragmatic measure, in bringing about changes in society. Religion, he held, was made by man and meant to serve man and not vice versa. Therefore, if the existing religious tenets did not admit changes, what is to be done is to change them and not to allow religion to hamper progress. The obsession of several reformers with Vedic authority appeared to be quite baffling to Lokhitavadi, for he believed that what the Vedas preached was quite irrelevant to the nineteenth century Indian context. Like Ram Mohan Roy he also believed that ethical and moral ideas linked to religion were bound by time and space.

A rational approach to social and religious problems was not limited to those who tried to bring about reform among the Hindus. The reformers of other communities took an almost similar view. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, for instance, made reason the guiding principle in social and religious matters.

I came to the conclusion that the only means of obtaining knowledge, conviction of faith is reason. . . . But if knowledge or conviction of faith is not based on reason then their achievements in any age or period of time are impossible.

Sayyid, who believed in the necessity to develop an *ilm-i-kalam* (scholasticism) according to the requirements of every age, sought to interpret Islam to suit the needs of modern age. The central point in his religious thought was the primacy of reason, which he scrupulously applied to the *ahadis* (traditions of the Prophet) and advocated the rejection of all *ahadis* which were against reason or were opposed to human experience. He took a dynamic view of Islamic law and tradition. It was not surprising that Muslim orthodoxy tried to dismiss his opinion as theologically unsound.

In the development of the rational perspective two trends are broadly discernible. First, an attempt to apply reason to religious problems and thus to develop a critique of the religious system prevalent in the nineteenth century. Second, an effort to advance from what can be called theological rationalism to scientific rationalism by endeavouring to create a system regulated by reason. These efforts did
not develop through a unilinear path, but suffered from serious deviations and even retreat. The roots of obscurantism in contemporary society lay, at least partly, in this distortion and retreat.

HUMANISM AND RELIGION
The rational critique of religious system was closely linked with a humanist perspective. Like the Roman poet Terrence, intellectuals in India seemed to hold the view that 'I am a man and nothing that concerns a man is a matter of indifference to me.' Yet the humanist commitment in colonial India was not general and universal but was enclosed within a bourgeois outlook.

One of the chief characteristics of Renaissance humanism in Europe was a revolt against the otherworldliness of medieval Christianity and an effort to bring into focus the problems of existence in this world. It was only in this respect humanism in India had some parallel with the European phenomenon, for India did not experience the great surge of creativity which was the hallmark of humanism in Europe. The religious protest and reform movements during the pre-colonial period—beginning with Buddhism to the heterodox sects in the eighteenth century—were invariably concerned with the ways and means of salvation. In contrast, religious reform in colonial India was almost indifferent to the earlier preoccupation. On the other hand, a definite shift in emphasis from otherworldliness and supernaturalism to the problems of existence was quite evident. The initial expression of this shift was characterised by a comparative perspective on the importance of religion and material needs of existence. Even those who assigned a dominant role to religion, like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Vivekananda, emphasised the latter. Vivekananda, the high priest of neo-Hinduism, almost consistently tried to make spirituality take cognisance of material needs.

Integral to this shift in focus from otherworldliness was the civil use of religions. In all reform endeavours in the nineteenth century religious sanction was invariably sought as an instrument for bringing about social change. The study of the scriptures was primarily, although not exclusively, undertaken for this pragmatic reason, and not for theological reasons as in pre-colonial India. The social practices deriving their strength from religion, it was realised, could be abolished mainly through an intervention which had the backing of religion. In other words, use religion to fight what religion itself has brought into existence. That explains why even an agnostic like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar confessed that he had not taken up his pen in defence of widow marriage till he was convinced of Vedic sanction. In fact, religious reforms in colonial India were not undertaken as an end in itself, but as a means through which social problems could be confronted. They were intended to ensure social comfort and political advancement.
Another dimension of the civil use of religion was the application of religious belief to eradicate social institutions which were perceived as impediments to progress. Apparently paradoxical, but all the same true, that religious ideas were so interpreted as to promote anti-caste consciousness and the abolition of caste. The social implications of monotheism as explained by Keshub Chandra Sen is a good example. Keshub was skeptical about the effectiveness of the negative and destructive approach enshrined in anti-caste movements. Unless a positive alternative is offered, one which would create a different sense of belonging and identity, it would be difficult to do away with caste. Such an alternative, he believed, could be derived from monotheistic belief which provided for the fatherhood of God and brotherhood of mankind. If everyone looked upon one God as their common source and inspiration and hence united by brotherly bonds, distinctions based on caste had no place in society. Not only caste, religious differences would also then disappear automatically:

If I believe that my God is one, and that he has created us all, I must at the same time instinctively, and with all the warmth of natural feelings look upon all around us whether Parsees, Hindus, Mohammadans or Europeans—as my brethren.30

This view, firmly rooted in the universalist perspective, had the potential of both integration and protest. Narayana Guru’s idea of one God, one religion and one caste for mankind was an expression of the latter.

Drawing attention away from the problems of soul and salvation had implications for religious exploitation to which the believers were subjected. Most important of them was its impact on the influence of priests, who used their monopoly of scriptural knowledge and their mediatory role between the worshipper and the worshipped not only for extracting money but also to debase and dehumanise their followers. The Maharajas of the Vallabhachari sect in Bombay was one of the glaring examples of religious exploitation. The women devotees of the Maharaja readily submitted to his sexual desires and even the water in which he bathed was eagerly sought after as a divine potion.31 The Maharaja’s misdemeanours were exposed in public by Karsondas Mulji, which was an indication of the challenge posed to the influence of religious leaders. Although several devotees came to his defence, the libel case that followed undermined the hold of the Maharaja over his followers.

The Maharaja libel case should not be viewed in isolation but as a part of a consistent attempt to break the priestly monopoly of scriptural knowledge and to disseminate religious knowledge contained in the scriptures among the masses. Ram Mohan Roy had initiated this process and reformers in almost all other parts of the country pursued this ideal. Dayanand Saraswati not only advocated the right of the non-Brahmins to read the Vedas but also upheld their right to
interpret them. The nineteenth century attempts to popularise scriptural knowledge, however, were qualitatively different from those of the Bhakti saints and of the heterodox sects in the eighteenth century, as they did not subscribe to the notion of a guru as the channel for communion with God.

The above perspective, relatively indifferent to the problems of soul and salvation and at the same time responsive to the immediate, was indicative of a new ethos, seeking to release the individual from various bonds which restricted his freedom of action. By questioning religious superstition and priestly control, which were associated with the quest for salvation, it paved the way for the restoration of human dignity and development of individualism.

The humanist concern also embraced a wide range of issues outside the religious domain. The most significant of them were matters relating to human suffering, human dignity, poverty and social exploitation. I may briefly touch upon these issues in order to indicate the areas in which the humanist concern expressed itself as well as to underline its limitation and character.

Inequality and poverty seen as the main causative factors of human suffering attracted considerable attention from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Like in several other areas, Ram Mohan was a path-finder in this respect also. Giving evidence before the House of Commons, he underlined the overwhelming poverty of the people and pointed out how, except a few landlords, almost everyone lacked even the common comforts of life. Ram Mohan did not elaborate upon this, but Akshaya Kumar, who considered poverty as the worst form of suffering, did so. The most instructive part of Akshaya Kumar's inquiry was about the reason for poverty. His conclusion was that poverty was the result of a section of society forcing another section—the labouring classes—to surrender the fruits of their labour, despite their natural acquirements being the same. Keshub went a step further in his powerful essay, significantly entitled the 'Men of Consequence', in which he argued that wealth was created by poorer classes but enjoyed by the rich. Addressing the poor, whom he described as the 'men of consequence', he exhorted them to act in self-interest:

There will come a time on earth when the proletariat will not remain dumb, will not remain lying down on the ground in misery... Those of you who are farmers or artisans, do you unite and stand up. Exert yourselves to the utmost to improve your condition, to forcibly stop outrage, cruelty and oppression to the tenantry. Sleep no more. It is time to wake up.

A more complex exposition of poverty and inequality was undertaken by Bankim in his celebrated treatise, Samya, which like Tuhaft-ul-Muwahiddin, is a milestone in the intellectual history of India. Drawing upon a variety of sources—Rousseau, Proudhon and Mill on the one hand and Louis Blanc, Robert Owen and Saint Simon on the other—
Bankim set out to locate the causes of inequality and the nature of its manifestation in Indian society. He accepted and justified inequality based on natural differences, but considered inequality engendered by unnatural differences 'unjust and harmful' to mankind. In the Indian context he identified three kinds of unnatural inequality: between the Brahmin and the Sudra, between the foreigner and the Indian, and above all between the rich and the poor. These unnatural inequalities were considered responsible for India's social backwardness and retrogression.

A major part of *Samya* deals with the development of the philosophy of equality. Bankim traced the idea of equality from Sakya Singha Budhadev and Jesus Christ to Rousseau and the Utopian Socialists. An important strand he identified was the idea of common ownership of land which 'wise, discerning and learned men' propagated. These 'wise, discerning and learned men' were the Utopian Socialists whose ideas Bankim summed up as follows:

... land and capital, from which further wealth accrues, should be commonly owned by all. In this there was no difference between the rich and the poor; all are to labour equally. All will be equal sharers of wealth. This is true communism.

Recapitulating the main points of the philosophy of equality Bankim ended by advocating the equal right of everyone to property, be he a Maharaja of Maharajas or a poor peasant of Bengal. The absence of this equal right was highlighted by giving a moving account of a poor peasant, Paran Mandal, and by contrasting his life with that of the zamindar.

Although an essentially eclectic effort, *Samya* sought to locate the problems of Indian society in the context of the existing social thought. It represented the ideological limitations within which the Indian intelligentsia functioned in the nineteenth century. Despite the obvious appreciation, bordering on approval, of socialist ideas, Bankim refrained from their application to the Indian social situation. In fact, the section on peasant exploitation in Bengal was deleted in the second edition of *Samya*.

The general critique of inequality and poverty in nineteenth century India was enclosed within a bourgeois perspective, for it was more concerned with ways for reinforcing the system which generated inequality, rather than transforming it. However rhetorically and graphically the misery of the common man was detailed, remedy was sought in either enlightenment or class compromise. For instance, after exhorting peasants and workers to rise up in self-defence, Keshub Chandra Sen offered the following remedy:

In advanced countries there has already begun a class war. . . .
We do not desire that the proletarians should commit outrages. But we do certainly wish that they should without committing
unlawful deeds, bring the landowners to their senses. . . . Did not God equip you with consciousness and understanding when he created you? Why then do you continue in ignorant slumber. . . . Exert yourselves; put forth effort; receive enlightenment.  

Similarly Vivekananda, despite his vision of the future belonging to the Sudras and identifying God with the poor, repeatedly came back to the acquisition of knowledge and spiritual enlightenment as solution.  

That the intellectuals in colonial India were involved with the problem of poverty was in itself not very significant; given the then prevalent conditions they could not have remained insensitive to it. What was important, however, was how they viewed this question; whether their approach was from the standpoint of the poor or of the privileged. Generally it was tilted in favour of the latter and therefore while poverty was decried, the system and the structure which created it was not denounced. The emphasis was therefore on amelioration and trusteeship and on providing opportunity to the poor to improve their condition, as otherwise the privileged themselves would be adversely affected. Such sentiments in different forms can be traced in the social thought of almost everyone in nineteenth century India. Akshay Kumar's Dharamniti, although a part of a plea for organic growth in society, quite explicitly pointed out the adverse effects of poverty on the privileged. This class partisan perspective, among others, indicated the bourgeois ideological hegemony over the intellectuals in colonial India. In this context it is important to underline the fact that from the point of view of social and political importance, what is crucial is not the idea itself, but how it is linked with a vision of future. In our own contemporary society, the bourgeois leadership has consistently harped on the condition of the poor, while managing a system which creates and perpetuates poverty and exploitation.

SECULARISATION—A PERSPECTIVE

The rationalist and humanist ideas that emerged in colonial India have bequeathed to us two important legacies. First, a struggle to develop a system of belief and social practice regulated by reason through a rationalist critique of religion and social mores. Second, an attempt to de-emphasise otherworldliness and to focus attention on the reality of material existence. These were part of the ideological formation integral to the development of a stunted and distorted capitalist order occurring under the colonial aegis. As such the growth of these ideas were adversely affected, since colonialism did not bring about a social order in which their full potential could be realised. Moreover, they had to be partly abandoned in the wake of the intellectual and cultural defence that developed during the latter part of the nineteenth century in response to the colonial hegemonisation. This had serious implications for secularism in India, as its
development was inextricably enmeshed with rational and humanist thought.

The concept of secularism as applicable to Indian society in which various religious communities live together without being subjected to political discrimination requires some clarification.

Let me begin this exercise by narrating a personal experience. About twenty years ago when we had just started living on the campus of Jawahar Lal Nehru University, a group of people came to me for contribution and participation in a public celebration of Id. I was opposed to public celebrations of religious festivals and hoped that at least the University will be free of public exhibition of religiosity. The result was a heated argument during which we traded with each other our notions of secularism. At the end they condemned me as a Hindu communalist, as I refused to be part of a Muslim celebration. Not long after this incident a Hindu festival was sought to be celebrated on the campus. I repeated my objection which, needless to say, did not cut much ice. But for my accidental birth as a Hindu I would then have been dubbed as a Muslim communalist. A welcome fallout of these altercations was a meeting of a few senior dons to discuss the modalities for observing religious festivals on the campus, in which a proposal that Hindus should take initiative to celebrate Muslim festivals, the Muslims of Christian festivals and the Christians of Hindu festivals was made. This suggestion is obviously rooted in the noble desire to promote communal harmony and peaceful co-existence, if not to minimise communal distinction, through equal reverence and recognition of all religions. What the dons were trying to put forward was the practical application of what has come to be described as the Indian concept of secularism, which is based on two principles advocated by the state. First, an equal recognition of all religions, and second non-discrimination against the followers of all religions. The functionaries of the state and the government-controlled media try to project these ideals without however overlooking the considerations of electoral politics. Thus the national leaders claim secular credentials by visiting places of worship of all religious denominations with a demonstration of equal piety and the media allots time equally to broadcast or telecast the prayers of different religions. These principles and practices appear to draw inspiration from religious universalism which has a long tradition in Indian society, at least going back to the Bhakti movement.

Emphasising the common features in all religions, universalism seeks to establish that all religions are essentially true but pursuing different paths for the realisation of God. Religious thought in nineteenth century India was not only rooted in this idea but also explored and elaborated its various dimensions in the context of the multi-religious situation in India. Ram Mohan, for instance, considered different religions as national embodiments of one universal theism, whereas Sayyid Ahmad Khan underlined the universalist idea by
suggesting that all prophets had the same din.\textsuperscript{48} Ramakrishna, who is reported to have practised all religions, emphasised their commonality by employing the analogy of water which assumes the shape of the vessel to which it is poured. Deriving inspiration from this idea Vivekananda argued that different religions of the world are neither contradictory nor antagonistic. On the contrary, he looked upon them as one eternal religion applied to different planes of existence. He said:

There never was my religion or yours, my national religion or your national religion, there never existed many national religions, there is only one . . . . We must respect all religions.\textsuperscript{49}

Religious universalism in India was the early expression of the need for solidarity within and between religions in a society beleaguered by colonial domination. It, however, could not serve this purpose for long, as universalism was not compatible with the defence of religious tradition which became necessary for countering colonial cultural hegemonisation. Only religious particularism, which emphasised the superiority of one religion over the other, could fulfil this need. Hence universalism gave way to a Hindu or Muslim particularistic perspective. As a consequence Hinduism or Islam was conceived as superior to other religions. Even Vivekananda, the disciple of universalist Ramakrishna, turned universalism upside down by declaring Hinduism as the only universal religion.

The Indian concept of secularism is an idealisation and romanticisation of nineteenth century universalist ideas, integrated into a bourgeois political structure. Our historical experience of the nineteenth century is enough of a proof that neither respect for all religions nor the idea of unity of godhead in themselves could create secularism. Instead they circumscribe social consciousness within religious parameters and thus keep the possibility open for particularistic and antagonistic tendencies to re-emerge at opportune moments. This is precisely the weakness of the 'Indian' notion of secularism. It keeps religion in play and in turn enhances religiosity; it preserves and projects religious identities and thus increases the social distance between different religious communities.

That the separation of state and church as developed in the European situation is not the central issue in our country needs no emphasis. Even in Europe it primarily represented the political dimension of a process which had originated with the Protestant reformation. The social and cultural implications of secularism are not necessarily encompassed within this separation.

To have a state not ordering its function on the basis of religious considerations is indeed a crucial element in achieving a secular society, for religious partisanship of state is imbued with ominous prospects. Even an implied support to a particular religion by the state can prove to be the deathknell of secularism. In India the state is not
allied with any particular religion nor is it an instrument of any 'church'. Yet in practice the Indian state does not dissociate itself from religion as such, but only embellishes itself with an aura of neutrality by publicly recognising all religions and their social practices. In the process even customs and practices deriving sanction from religious obscurantism are held sacrosanct and maintained. The issue of maintenance to Muslim women is the latest example. Inherent in this nebulous neutrality is the danger of the state going religious, if political exigencies so demand.

In a multi-religious society like ours religious identities and communal loyalties continuously come into play in social and political life. A remedy often suggested is secularisation of religion and relegation of religion to the portals of private life as strictly personal belief, without allowing it any place in public life. This is an irrelevant nicety as secularisation of religion is a contradiction in terms. Moreover, the dichotomy between the private and public life is rather unreal, for such a compartmentalisation does not really exist in actual life. The personal belief may not interfere in public life all the time, but it surfaces quite easily when individual identities merge with the collective.

The historical experience of colonial and contemporary India demonstrates the difficulties in the evolution of secularism as a positive force in society. Neither universalist beliefs nor the notion of religion as a private concern has helped its growth. During the last forty years secularism has been a major contingency and the society has been increasingly communalised. Political parties and public associations based on religion now proliferate all over India. Caste associations masquerade as political parties and caste groups function within political parties with distinct identities as pressure groups. The caste and communal divide in Indian society is well marked. Caste and communal considerations have become the accepted norms in politics and communal tensions and riots have become the order of the day. The question with which intellectuals and political activists are concerned with is why communalism, and not why secularism has not become a powerful commitment in our society. We seem to be fighting a monster and not creating a positive belief.

The only way out of this impasse appears to be a frontal confrontation with religion—an all-out critique of religion, with a view to its eventual negation—'a resolute, positive, abolition' in the words of Marx. That is the only foundation on which secularism can really rest. It might sound utopian, visionary and impractical, given the all-pervading influence of religion and ever increasing religiosity in our society. It might also sound unwise as many might think, like the German Communist Party at the end of the nineteenth century, that 'those of us who declare war on religion . . . do but strengthen the enemy'. Yet the danger of isolation from the people may not prove to be difficult to overcome. A distinction between the two components of
religion may be useful in this context, viz. faith and culture. The culture of the people, when divorced from faith, would provide the necessary channel for communication. Perhaps a beginning can be made by dissociating fully and critically with all religion-based organisations, political parties and activities. This is a task to be undertaken by all those who believe in secularism, even if they cannot go the whole hog in the matter of opposing religious beliefs. In other words, it is necessary to shift the terrain of discourse from the acceptance of religion as a component of secularism to the possibility of divorcing religion from our notion of secularism.

It is in this context the critique of religious system initiated by bourgeois ideologues during the colonial period assumes importance. It is a tradition worth invoking as it would provide the breach for an initial charge, from which further strategies could be effectively evolved. Our critique, however, has to be qualitatively different, as to us it is not an end in itself, but only a path leading to the end. 'The criticism of religion', Marx said, 'ends with the teaching that man is the highest essence for man, hence with the categoric imperative to overthrow all relations in which man is debased, enslaved, abandoned . . . .'

The critique of religion, therefore, is a struggle for consciousness, a battle for men's minds, for the sake of bringing about a social revolution. In other words, the struggle for secularisation has to be made a part of a general struggle to usher in a consciousness which would contribute to a fundamental transformation of socio-economic structures. Such an undertaking demands an exploration and understanding of the nature of the existing consciousness and the problem of creating a new one.

Dynamics of Culture and Evolution of Consciousness

Earlier I had briefly referred to the structure-superstructure debate, which in a way is central to the Marxist theory of culture. It has been suggested that Marx only outlined, but never fully developed, a cultural theory. Even so there is enough in Marx to draw upon for developing an analysis of culture and defining its importance in the evolution of social consciousness and structural transformation. In the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy Marx observed:

The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual process in general . . . . With the change of economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. In considering such transformation the distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic—in short,
ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out.\textsuperscript{51}

The references in this text to the character and transformation of superstructure are made with qualifications—'general' to the former and 'more or less rapidly' to the latter. Moreover, at least by inference, the elements of superstructure are subject to a less precise mode of investigation when compared to the material transformation of the economic conditions of production. What is underlined here is the complex character of superstructure, constitutive of human consciousness. As Raymond Williams has pointed out, it is complex not only because it is diverse, but also because it is historical: 'at any time, it includes continuities from the past as well as reaction to the present'.\textsuperscript{52} The Marxist theory of culture is rooted in this complexity, without overlooking the economic structure and the consequent social relations with which culture is organically linked. This complexity is also suggested by the centrality attributed to man and his potential to transform the conditions in which he is placed. He is not a passive element in the historical process; on the contrary he is an active agent, influencing it in a decisive manner. 'To be radical', Marx said, 'is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root is man himself.'\textsuperscript{53} Therefore, it is important to understand man and the nature and manner in which his consciousness is constituted.

Drawing upon the insights thus provided by Marx, scattered all over his writings, there have been explorations into the realm of superstructure, not as pure academic exercise indulged in by 'objective' scholars, but to realise its potential in the process of social transformation. These attempts have been collectively labelled as 'cultural Marxism', a description with which those who were responsible for it are unlikely to be very happy. A distinguishing feature of these explorations was their sharp focus 'on the capacity of human agency to consciously intervene in a series of events so as to alter their course' and on the human potential 'to act as rational and moral agents'. Without relinquishing the economic or political orientation of Marxism, their efforts have been to shift the centre of attention to state and ideology and to emphasise them as forces of domination. In other words, they tried to direct the focus of Marxism from the infrastructure to superstructure and to 'confront the more traditional Marxist critique of political economy with the concept of conscious experience, not in a negating manner, but in a complimentary one', incorporating the socio-cultural dimensions neglected by mechanical materialism.\textsuperscript{54} Such a perspective has developed out of the theorising of a large number of Marxist thinkers, ranging from Antonio Gramsci and George Lukacs to E.P. Thompson, Raymond Williams and Lucien Goldmann. Obviously all of them do not speak with the same voice, yet there is an element of unity in their thought, characterised by the importance they attributed to the analysis of institutions and social practices, with
regard to transition to socialism. That is to say, there is a definite and recognisable political perspective and strategy of revolution inherent in their approach. For instance, to Antonio Gramsci, 'socialist revolutions are the product of a long, complex and molecular transformation of mass consciousness, the culmination of a long process of cultural emancipation of popular masses from the political and cultural hegemony of capitalist classes.' In other words, hegemony should precede the conquest of power. I may hasten to indicate the likely danger of 'cultural Marxism' being interpreted as an idealist approach to power which it is decidedly not. On the contrary it is firmly rooted in Marxian method and epistemology. Yet, anti-Marxists might distort the emphasis on superstructure to demonstrate the inadequacy of Marxism to contend with problems in our contemporary technological era.

The intellectual and cultural premises inherent in cultural Marxism are rooted in the European epistemological tradition and are to a large extent alien to our mental make-up. Despite the superstructural situation being qualitatively different, the fundamental issues raised by the debates within cultural Marxism are relevant to our context also. A rupture in the existing social and cultural consciousness appears to be a pre-requisite for countering the fast evolving bourgeois hegemony in our society. The domination of the Indian bourgeoisie is not yet fully hegemonic, but it is currently involved in perfecting a state system which would ensure domination based on hegemony. The development of effective opposition and eventual destruction of such a system would require strategies based on a close alliance between cultural and political struggles. A pre-requisite for conceiving and realising such an integration is an understanding of the existing state of political and cultural consciousness and struggles. While there is much enthusiastic debate and discussion about the former, the latter receives considerably less attention. I would, therefore, like to draw your attention to the latter dimension and its relationship or lack of it with political struggles as well as to its contemporary implications.

CULTURAL SYSTEM AND CULTURAL STRUGGLES

Before discussing the nature of the cultural system and cultural struggles in colonial India let us be clear about what we mean by culture. There are three definitions generally employed in cultural analysis. The first is the ideal, which views culture 'as a state or process of human perfection in terms of certain absolute or universal values'. The second is the 'documentary', in which 'culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work', recording in a detailed way human thought and experience. The third is the 'social' definition in which 'culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour'. All three definitions have some value in understanding the totality of a cultural system. For
the present purpose we are primarily, though not exclusively, following the third. That is, we are viewing culture as a way of life, incorporating within it the totality of life experience and social relations.

The nature of socialisation in a society is a crucial element in the making of cultural perspectives and identities. In pre-colonial Indian society the primary socialisation which took place within the confines of the family tended to instil religious and caste belonging in the mind of the child. The elaborate rituals and other religious practices observed within the family created the cultural milieu in which the child received his initiation. His religious and caste identity was thus formed even before he faced the world.

The secondary socialisation in India did not help dissolve this early influence; rather it led to its reinforcement through kinship, the caste and religious ties as the child's widening social circle was largely confined within them. What could have helped to overcome, at least partly, the prejudices imbibed by the primary socialisation was participation in open and secular institutions. Such possibilities rarely existed in pre-colonial India. The educational system did not permit of common participation, as education was mainly imparted either within the domestic sphere or through patashalas and madrasas, organised on religious and caste basis. Hence at the level of secondary socialisation also religious exclusiveness came into play and more importantly, it was complemented by caste segregation. The identities thus formed were further reinforced by personal habits and public behaviour. Distinctions in dress, language and even food fostered sectoral identities based on caste or religion, as they served as channels for conveying ideas of mutual exclusiveness. Consequently caste and religious communities, even if they did not exist organisationally, did exist in social consciousness.

Despite the introduction of secular education and relatively greater opportunity for participation in public affairs the situation was not substantially different during the colonial period. The liberalising influence of English education as a social solvent is often emphasised. This impact, however, was limited to a small fraction of the population. The overwhelming majority of the people remained enclosed within the traditional cultural milieu. Even in the 'emergent' culture of the English educated middle class, forms of 'residual' culture were quite prominently present. The changes in cultural consciousness and identity brought about by the avenues of secondary socialisation created by colonial rule were therefore quite marginal.

The deviations from prescribed caste and religious norms which became inevitable during participation in public activities were not always voluntary pursuits, but were forced by circumstances. Consequently, different set of norms were observed in public and domestic space. The rules of purity and pollution, which could not be observed outside, were assiduously safeguarded within the family.
Despite the avenues opened up for secular secondary socialisation, the sphere of primary socialisation was kept relatively unchanged. Even the reformers who championed changes in society were unable to overcome the religious and caste prejudices within their own families.

The caste and religious identities formed the basis of the organising principles in public life also. The early public organisations, agitations and discussions drew upon caste and religious associations. Even the theatre was community based—the Hindu and the Parsee theatre in Bombay, for example. Thus the individual's public existence was only as a part of a caste or religious community. Although religious communities at a national plane had not yet come into being, they did exist and function as such at local levels. As a consequence communal tensions, confrontations and riots were quite common in the nineteenth century.

From the end of the nineteenth century religious identities, instead of submerging within the national consciousness, became the rallying point for political organisation and mobilisation. Religious communities were given recognition in public matters, as evident from the Simla deputation, separate electorates, the Lucknow Pact and the Khilafat agitation. As a result, a perspective of 'us' and 'they' increasingly informed the public life. Even the most secular leaders found it difficult to avoid a community-based outlook. It might sound paradoxical, even objectionable to some, but true all the same that Mahatma Gandhi, who was the most ardent champion of Hindu-Muslim unity, often took a communitarian view. His attitude towards the Khilafat issue was strongly suggestive of religious assumptions. It was more unambiguously expressed during the Malabar Rebellion of 1921. He wrote:

A verbal disapproval by the Mussalmans of Moplah madness is no test of Mussalman friendship. The Mussalman must naturally feel the shame and humiliation of Moplah conduct about forcible conversions and looting, and they must work away so silently and effectively that such things might become impossible even on the part of the most fanatical among them.58

By suggesting this course of conduct Gandhiji did draw a communal line: it was for the Muslims to feel ashamed and humiliated for what the Mappilas had done and it was for them to ensure that Mappila 'fanaticism' would not errupt again. In other words, the Muslims as a community was responsible for the violence committed by the Mappilas, because they professed the same religion. If this was how Gandhi felt one could guess about lesser mortals, whose ability to overcome the influence of primary socialisation was extremely limited. What Rabindranath Tagore said in the context of communalism is extremely suggestive: 'We should look within us.'

Colonial intervention did not culturally impinge upon an overwhelming majority of the population. Not that it did not attempt
to culturally hegemonise the society. This was not done through a general cultural and ideological onslaught as in modern class societies. Understandably so because of the limitations of the ideological apparatuses at the command of the colonial state. Unlike the modern state colonial state did not have an effective and controlled media—television, radio and press—to make use of. Hence the Macaulayian remedy: the creation of a class who would be the recipients and reproducers of colonial culture and ideology as well as their interpreters to the masses. It was this task assigned to the western educated middle class during the colonial period which at least a section of them fulfilled admirably. The nineteenth century autobiographical works, particularly of people who lived in Presidency towns, are full of interesting, even if hilarious, accounts of the manner in which the new cultural syndrome developed. They conversed in the morning like English gentlemen about possible changes in weather in a country where weather hardly experienced any fluctuation for months together, wore double-breasted suit and tie in hot and sultry Indian summers and learnt to waltz and trot in dancing halls. Their social prestige was measured in terms of the number of invitations to the Governor’s banquets and to the tea parties and dinners hosted by lesser English officials. More importantly, their intellectual perspectives were directed at the metropolis. Admission to prestigious schools in England was highly sought after and a degree from either Oxford or Cambridge became the ultimate in intellectual attainment. Regardless of their intellectual ability, they returned to India to occupy positions of power and prestige. Despite all this, the expectation of the colonial rulers remained unfulfilled: colonial culture and ideology did not filter down to the popular level through the channel of this newly created class. The anglicised babu might have generated curiosity and even awe and respect, but he was not accepted as a cultural ideal by the common man. The popular response appeared to be similar to the Chinese attitude to the fork and knife which the English merchants imported to China, but had no takers among the Chinese. When asked for the reason, a Chinese comprador remarked that the Chinese used the knife and fork when they were uncivilised, but had given up the practice since then. The monkey in Bankim Chandra’s novel, *Kamala Kanter Daftar*, kicking the English-speaking babu as it could not understand his tongue is a good pointer of popular mentality towards the cultural complex being propped up by the British. The influence of colonial culture, therefore, remained by and large enclosed within a small segment of the population. However, it is not suggested that it remained totally isolated from traditional popular and elite culture. On the contrary, interaction did occur, creating grey areas in between, yet the two remained distinct and separate.

The cultural-ideological struggle in colonial India which developed in this context inevitably assumed two dimensions. The first, a struggle
against the backward elements of traditional culture and the second, against the hegemonising influences of colonial culture. Although they appeared to be two distinct manifestations, they were induced by the same objective situation, namely the colonial presence. The effort to reform the traditional culture on the one hand, and to resist the colonial culture on the other, were not divorced from each other; they were part of the same urge. The development of this struggle as well as its strength and weaknesses were crucial to the evolving socio-cultural consciousness, for the modern Indian elite culture was rooted in its dynamics. The contemporary cultural situation arose not out of a synthesis or eclectic combination of traditional and colonial culture, but out of a struggle against both which was initiated and elaborated by the intellectuals with the bourgeois and petit-bourgeois classes as the social base of the movements they unleashed.

The struggle against traditional culture embraced a variety of issues relating to caste and religion, marriage and family, education and language and so on. Collectively, they represented the first intellectual break in modern India, directed at the ushering in of modern values in society. One of the positive aspects of this was the attempt to liberate the individual from innumerable bonds which traditional society had imposed upon him.

I may briefly refer to anti-casteism as an example because of its historical importance and contemporary relevance. The opposition to caste was total and uncompromising in ideas, if not always in practice. It was looked upon as morally and ethically abhorrent, socially debilitating and politically divisive. Even those who supported chaturvarna, like Dayanand, did so on the basis of virtue: 'He deserves to be a Brahmin who has acquired the best knowledge and character, and an ignorant person is fit to be classed as a Shudra.'59 Understandably, the most virulent opposition came from lower caste movements like those initiated by Jhotiba Phule and Narayana Guru, two unrelenting critics of the caste system and its consequences.60 A conversation between Gandhiji and Narayana Guru is highly instructive. In an obvious reference to chaturvarna and the inherent differences in quality between man and man, Gandhiji observed that all leaves of the same tree are not identical in shape and texture. In reply Narayana Guru pointed out that the difference is only superficial, but not in essence: the juice of all leaves of a particular tree will be the same in content.61

It is ironical, although not illogical, that anti-caste movements almost invariably transformed into caste solidarity movements. The Kayastha Sabha in U.P., Sarin Sabha in Punjab and Dravida Kazhakam in Tamil Nadu are examples of this transformation. What happened in Kerala with the Sri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam and Nair Service Society was precisely the same. This was a change inherent in the nature of these movements, which grew out of the social transformation leading to the emergence of a middle class
within these castes. The SNDP movement, for instance, represented the aspirations of the Ezhava middle class to create a distinct cultural identity, in order to demarcate itself from the popular and hegemonic culture and to achieve social and political advancement. It was not a movement which encompassed the interests of the caste as a whole, except marginally and indirectly. However, it appeared to be so, as the aspirations of the middle class were universalised as that of the community as a whole. It is reminiscent of what caste-and-religion based political parties are doing today.

The struggle against colonial culture was less articulate and intense. This was partly because the importance of culture in political struggles was not adequately realised in India. The anti-colonial struggle was primarily viewed as a political phenomenon, despite the evolution of anti-colonial consciousness having had a wider basis. Culture formed an important constituent of this consciousness. In fact, in colonies where the principles which informed the functioning of state institutions and apparatuses were 'progressive' compared to those of the pre-colonial state, resistance against colonialism found its initial expression in culture. This was so because the reality of political domination was not easily realised, whereas the consequences of the intrusion of colonial culture was more quickly felt. Amilcar Cabral, one of the few political activists to have emphasised the role of culture in national liberation, has observed:

> Study of the history of liberation struggles shows that they have generally been preceded by an upsurge of cultural manifestations, which progressively harden into an attempt, successful or not, to assert the cultural personality of the dominated people by an act of denial of the culture of the oppressor. Whatever the conditions of subjection of a people to foreign domination and the influence of economic, political and social factors in the exercise of this domination, it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement.

In India too 'the germ of challenge' was formed in the cultural field. Beginning with an introspection about the strength and weaknesses of traditional institutions, it progressively encompassed within it the entire cultural existence, embracing the whole way of life and all 'signifying practices' like language, religion, art and philosophy. It was a struggle against colonial culture more in a negative way: the creation of an alternate cultural-ideological system and the regeneration of traditional institutions. It led to an attempt to preserve the indigenous way of life, as evident from the response to social legislations, the opposition to evangelisation, the discussion regarding the comparative merit of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food and the debate regarding the use of the shoe and turban in public offices. Attempts to revitalise Indian systems of medicine, to probe into the
potentialities of pre-colonial technology and to reconstruct traditional knowledge were also part of the same process. Given the ambivalent attitude towards the West the contestation with colonial culture remained at a superficial level; it did not assume the character of a serious quest to come to terms with the intellectual and epistemological foundations of Western culture which were responsible for social progress and advance in knowledge. As a consequence, the Indian response became increasingly nativistic and assumed more of a defensive character than of struggle. The evolution of a composite culture based on a synthesis of Indian and Western intellectual and epistemological traditions was, therefore, blighted. At best what happened was an uneasy mix of the Western and the traditional, resulting in the contemporary spectacle of the Westernised, and assuredly not modernised, Indian being more traditional than the traditional Indian. The enigmatic Indian seems to have disproved Rudyard Kipling's dictum about the meeting of the East and the West; the twain after all did meet!

DISJUNCTION BETWEEN CULTURAL AND POLITICAL STRUGGLES

Let me narrate to you an incident cited by Cherukad, a Malayalam novelist, in his autobiography, Jeevithapatha, which would throw some light on the relationship between the cultural and political consciousness during the national movement. Sometime in the 1920s, a young Nambudiri came to serve as the priest of the temple in Cherukad's village. As was common during those days the Nambudiri looked for a girl for sambhandam and the choice fell on Cherukad's sister. On the very first night he brought a calendar with him which he nailed to the wall. Every day morning before going to the temple he religiously stood before the calendar and prayed for some time. The picture on the calendar was not one of innumerable Hindu gods and goddesses, but that of Mahatma Gandhi. The Nambudiri remained in the village only for a year and then moved on to another village as a priest. In the meanwhile he had become a father. Yet, he never returned to the village to look after his wife and child nor did he make any inquiries about their welfare. Probably he had taken another girl as his wife in the new village. Despite imbibing nationalist sentiments as evident from his reverence for Gandhiji, he remained very much traditional in his private life, adhering to a system of marriage which was culturally backward. It appears that his cultural and political consciousnesses had no inter-relationship.

This disjunction between the political and cultural consciousnesses had a long history, beginning almost simultaneously with colonial conquest. The early perception of political reality was based on the concept of divine dispensation—colonial rule being a gift of God, intended to save Indians from moral degradation, social backwardness and political anarchy. The colonial intervention was seen as the
instrument for the regeneration of the country, political progress and social advance. 'It is not a man's work', wrote Keshub Chandra Sen, 'but a work which God is doing with his own hands, using the British nation as his instrument.' Given this perspective of the role of colonial rule, a confrontation with it was naturally obviated. An implication of this understanding of the nature of colonial rule was that Indians should make use of the opportunity afforded to them to set their house in order. In other words, what was urgently required was social and cultural regeneration. As a consequence, cultural struggle had no chance to link itself with a political movement. Therefore, during the early phase of colonial domination Indian intellectuals were only involved with social and cultural questions. They could not relate themselves to the resistance offered by several Indian rulers or to popular opposition like the Revolt of 1857. While the Revolt was raging in North India, the educated intelligentsia in the Presidency towns prayed for the success of the British and the speedy re-establishment of British authority.

A dichotomous view of politics and culture continued to hold ground even after the emergence of the national movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The nationalist intelligentsia betrayed an ambivalent attitude towards the problem of cultural regeneration, as evident from discussions that were held about social reform and legislation. The political activists were apprehensive about the possible disruptive repercussions of social reform on the nascent anti-colonial movement. Given the religious underpinnings of the nativistic tendency, cultural struggle developing on religious lines was a distinct possibility, which the nationalist intelligentsia involved in promoting secular politics was keen to obviate. Moreover, the political activists also believed that efforts at social reform would hamper the progress of political struggle to which they assigned primacy. As a consequence, while the Indian National Congress took charge of political agitation, social matters were left to the purview of the Indian Social Conference. Obviously the importance of both struggles—political and cultural—was realised, but they were conceived as distinct and separate.

The nationalist intelligentsia was not only interested in keeping political and cultural struggles divorced from each other, they were also keen on assigning precedence for one over the other. This was a major controversy during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The Age of Consent Bill of 1892 brought this issue sharply into focus. To many who opposed the Bill the question was not the desirability of reform, but how it should be brought about. The discussion centred around precedence and at best on simultaneity. The possibility of integrating the cultural and political struggles was not considered at all as a possible alternative.

The relationship between politics and culture assumed greater importance with the freedom movement acquiring a mass base under the leadership of Gandhiji. Gandhiji's handling of the cultural
question was so complex, it would be difficult to sketch even its main contours here. Yet it is clear that he, more than any other leader in modern times, took a comprehensive view of anti-colonial struggle. He considered that political liberation would remain incomplete unless social and cultural emancipation also took place, for his politics was based on moral strength, self-reliance and human dignity. This view was reflected in his strong disapproval of violence in Chauri Chaura, suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement and emphasis on social and constructive work. Despite this realisation even Gandhiji did not succeed in integrating the cultural and political struggles within the national movement; they moved independently of each other. In other words, in spite of being conscious of the cultural question, the national movement did not succeed in integrating it with its political programme. Not that the movement or its leadership was insensitive to it, but the political programme did not encompass cultural issues in a manner that in the collective consciousness of the people they became an integral part of national regeneration, and not just an epiphenomenon of the political struggle. That a large number of people who supported and even participated in political struggles were unable to go along with temple entry or eradication of untouchability was an expression of this. A distinct gap existed between their cultural and political consciousness. As in the case of the Namboodiri youth they remained in mutually exclusive compartments.

I may hasten to caution against a possible misconstruction that I am trying to establish a causal relationship between the cultural situation and political struggles. On the other hand, what is indicated is the lack of simultaneity in political and cultural advance. In other words, to emphasise the fact that the change in political awareness and perspective did not automatically bring about a transformation in cultural consciousness.

The lack of integration between political and cultural struggles had important implications. When the anti-colonial movement gained strength and popularity after 1919, cultural struggles understandably lost much of its teeth. The latter could have maintained its vitality only if it could draw strength from the political movement. In its absence, when the political movement grew increasingly popular, the cultural struggle became weaker and weaker. Secondly, at a time when political movement was the dominant force, a transformation of backward elements of culture was possible only through an integration with it. As it did not happen, backwardness in culture not only continued to exercise its influence over the popular mind, it also succeeded in dominating it.

What happened in India was not an integration of cultural and political struggles, but an intrusion of culture into politics. Instead of politics transforming backward culture, politics was vitiated by cultural intrusion. We find this tendency developing, even if unintended, from the time of Bal Gangadhar Tilak's Ganapati festival
and Gandhiji's Rama Rajya, to assume monstrous proportions in the religion-based politics of the Muslim League and the Hindu Maha Sabha during the national movement. In independent India it has reached an alarming state. The Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh communal politics appears to receive legitimacy and rationalisation from cultural identity. The malaise has now gone much deeper—to the level of caste. In Bihar it is Brahmin-Bhumihar, in U.P. Brahmin-Rajput, in Andhra Reddy-Kamma, in Tamil Nadu Brahmin-non-Brahmin, in Kerala Nair-Ezhava and so on. Indian politics seems to reinforce religious and caste loyalties and through that a backward and conservative social outlook.

TOWARDS A NEW CONSCIOUSNESS

Discussing the complexity of popular consciousness Antonio Gramsci observed in Prison Notebooks:

The active man-in-the mass . . . . has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. But this verbal conception is not without consequences. It holds together a specific social group, it influences moral conduct and the direction of will, with varying efficacy but often powerfully enough to produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity. 71

Gramsci's concept of contradictory consciousness is particularly relevant to understand the maintenance of cultural hegemony as well as its political implications. The working class, Gramsci suggests, has its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes. The cultural hegemony exercised by the ruling class strives to suppress and overcome, if not destroy, the 'embryonic conception'. What is required, therefore, is to create conditions in which the common man's embryonic conception of the world in which his historic destiny is posited can grow into fruition. In other words, to extricate him from the hegemonic culture in order to enable him to overcome moral and political passivity. The idea of counter hegemony implicit in this perspective need not be counterposed to the question of power or to politics. Instead it should be placed within a dialectically unified structure.

Viewed from this position working towards 'a molecular transformation' of contemporary cultural consciousness assumes considerable significance. In the situation in which Indian society is today the question of the disintegration of civil and political society cannot be counterposed to each other. Both are strategically important
for establishing a historical bloc committed to socio-political transformation.

A struggle against the complex of ideological and cultural relations has necessarily to begin with the domain of primary socialisation. A new element which has recently entered into this domain—earlier confined to the influence of traditional culture and ideology—is the culture of consumerism which as Eric Fromm says, makes man more and more a thing—*homo consumens*. One of the channels of the exposure to this new culture is through the 'idiot box' which now covers almost the entire range of the population, even those who do not have drinking water and two square meals a day. The consumerism thus projected is unrealistic to most but what is important is the cultural mix it produces—the traditional and the modern, the artificiality of which only helps to further mystify the reality.

The arena of this cultural-ideological operation being the family it is rather difficult to counter it. The alternative is to contend with it at the level of secondary socialisation, which is not bereft of difficulties, given the near monopoly of the state in public institutions. Yet, there is enough social space to generate a counter socialisation which would not only neutralise the influence of primary socialisation, but would also bring about a consciousness at least approximating to the reality of existence. This necessarily has to be a complex operation in which the entire superstructure has to be brought into play.

No one can perhaps hazard an opinion as to how it could be achieved. That could be decided only accordingly to the actual objective situation, which is vastly different in different parts of the country. In Kerala, for instance, traditional cultural backwardness has been compounded by an evident lumpenisation and cultural vulgarisation induced by an artificial and parasitic affluence. In contrast, large chunks of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh are still in the grip of feudal relations, almost uncontaminated by modern or progressive ideas. Obviously the strategies and methods have got to be different.

In order to formulate and, more importantly, to elaborate strategies and methods to confront the dominant ideological and cultural system it is necessary to bring together, to create, an intellectual community. Not a community of mental workers, not the intelligentsia as a whole, but of critical men who are committed to the creation of a new equilibrium and the perpetual innovation of the physical and social world.72 Such a community of intellectuals does not exist in India today. The intellectual community which was formed during the period of the national movement disintegrated after independence. Most of the members of that community almost automatically became part of the administrative machinery. A substantially strong community did emergence from within the left bloc, particularly in areas like Kerala, Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Over the years it has been a diminishing community. The reason attributed by Gramsci for
such a tendency in Italy is 'transformism', the process of assimilation of intellectuals of subaltern classes by the dominant class, depriving them of their organic intellectuals. In India too the pull of the system has been strong and its ways manifestly subtle to incorporate a large number of intellectuals into the state machinery. Resisting 'transformism' would need greater ideological commitment and organisational effort to knit them together as a community, which occurs only when the members are involved in active cultural-ideological struggles.

Our historical experience demonstrates how cultural consciousness did not undergo a qualitative ‘transformation in the absence of its integration with political struggles. The cultural question should be viewed in the light of this experience and thus to intensify cultural struggles, without which a radical transformation of society is likely to be incomplete, if not difficult to pursue. For as Marx said, 'the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living'. The tradition of dead generations could not only be conjured up at the time of a revolutionary crisis, it could also be employed to prevent revolution itself. Hence the need for a molecular transformation of the contemporary cultural consciousness in our society.

Mainly I have reflected upon two aspects of the cultural question. First, a synoptic view of its historical dimension and secondly its implications for a radical transformation of our society. I have referred to the latter because of the importance of culture in struggle for hegemony in a bourgeois society, for in India too 'fortresses and earthworks' are being erected around the outer ditch, the state. The domain of culture is therefore becoming increasingly important as the area of the battle for the minds of men.

NOTES AND REFERENCES
5. Ibid, p. 42.
8. Iqbal Singh, Rammohan Roy, Bombay, 1983, pp. 73-74. In the translation given in J.C. Ghosh the wording is different, but there is no substantial difference in the central idea.
13. Ibid.
15. Tattwabodhini Patrika, Saka, 1773, Phalgun.
27. For a detailed examination of this phenomenon see K.N. Panikkar, Presidential Address, Modern Indian History section, *Indian History Congress Proceedings*, 1975.
29. Bimanbehari Majumdar, op.cit., p.151
33. The only notable exception was the *Nabha Bidhan* started by Keshub Chandra Sen who made the *adesha* he received from God to-be applicable to all.
35. Bimanbehari Majumdar, op.cit., p. 74.
40. Ibid.
41. 'One who has inherited property from his father because of unjust law and by virtue of that adorns himself with titles like *Maharaja of Maharaja* (King of Kings) signifying un-restricted strength and power, even he should remember that the Bengal peasant Paran Mandal is his equal, and his brother. Birth is not subject to badness and goodness. He has no other fault. The property that he is enjoying alone, Paran Mandal also has a justifiable right to that',Ibid., p. 166.
42. Ibid., p. 167.
45. Bimanbehari Majumdar, op.cit., p.67.
48. Sham Mohammad (ed), *Writings and Speeches of Sayyid Ahmad Khan*, Bombay, 1972, p. 60
50. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right', op.cit., p. 50.
57. For the distinction between 'emergent' and 'residual' culture see Raymond Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture, London, 1980, pp. 40-42
65. Sambhandham is a form of marriage between the junior members of Nambudiri families who could not marry from their own caste and Nair women. The offsprings of these alliances had no right to the property of their fathers.
68. Bombay Gazette, 14 Sept. 1857. The Bombay Gazette reported that the Parsees of Bombay celebrated the 'fall of Delhi' with great jubilation. 'Long Live the Queen, Long Reign She in India were the expressions from every mouth', Bombay Gazette., 28 Sept. 1857.
69. For a discussion of this question see K.N. Panikkar, 'Roots of Cultural Backwardness', Mainstream, 7 Nov. 1981.
70. The Age of Consent Bill sought to fix the age of girls for the consummation of marriage at 12. For an account of the age of consent controversy see Charles Heimsath, Indian Nationalism and Hindu Nationalism, Princeton, 1964, pp. 147-75.
72. Ibid., p.9
73. Leonardo Salamini, op.cit., p. 111