



Changing Trajectories of Indian Political Thought

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Ananya Vajpeyi. 2012. *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 368 pp., ISBN: 9780674048959, £ 29. 95.

Gurpreet Mahajan. 2013. *India: Political Ideas and the Making of a Democratic Discourse*. London: Zed Books, 192 pp., ISBN: 978178-0320939, £ 75.00.

Christopher A. Bayly. 2012. *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 404 pp., ISBN: 9781107025077, \$ 88.00.

Pradip Kumar Datta, Sanjay Palshikar and Achin Vanaik, eds. 2013. *Indian Political Thought: Volume 3, ICSSR Research Surveys and Explorations: Political Science, Volumes 1-4*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 320 pp., ISBN: 9780198082224, £ 140.

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There has been a sudden expansion and interest in Indian Political Thought (hereafter IPT) (Datta & Palshikar 2013: 1-2) and this review article seeks to map its changing trajectories. One marked difference among these new publications on IPT from previous ones, like V. R. Mehta's *Foundations of Indian Political Thought* (1992), is the departure from the conventional approach of studying IPT through politico-intellectual biographies. Thus, Datta, Palshikar and Vanaik's edited book on IPT critically evaluates the state of research in ancient, medieval, and modern IPT¹ and identifies the gaps in the field and possible lines of enquiry in the future. Gurpreet Mahajan's book focuses on how concepts central to the modern democratic political imaginary of India like freedom, equality, religion and diversity were interpreted in Indian thought and how they shaped the political institutions and practices of independent India. Ananya Vajpeyi retraces the field of modern IPT to



examine how India's canonical figures thought about Indian selfhood. C. A. Bayly's book maps the history of political thought in India with a specific focus on liberalism and demonstrates how Indian intellectuals contributed substantively to the making of liberal thought.

The aforementioned books provide a comprehensive coverage of the ideas of Indian political thinkers, specifically of modern IPT. As such, three out of the four books under review come under the rubric of Modern Indian Political Thought; and only the ICSSR edited volume by Datta et al. covers the entire spectrum of ancient, medieval, and modern IPT. Thomas Pantham observes an "essential continuity" (an assumption which this review article seeks to problematise) between ancient and modern Indian thought seen clearly in the works of Dayanand Saraswati, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and M.K. Gandhi. He therefore feels that an analysis of ancient Indian thought constitutes a prolegomenon to the study of modern IPT (Pantham 1986: 16). A different view of Datta and Palshikar demonstrates how the "discovery" of IPT took place at a time of intense consolidation of a modern political tradition of thought that had developed through movements against the British colonial rule in India (Datta & Palshikar 2013: 3).

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In this review then, modern IPT is the focus, but ancient and medieval Indian political thought provide the wider context through which the production, expansion, and changing trajectories of IPT are mapped. In their introduction to *Indian Political Thought*, Datta and Palshikar note that this current interest in IPT has sprung conversations about the possibility of IPT emerging as "Indian Political Theory." While recognising the hierarchy between thought and theory, Datta and Palshikar ask, whether IPT is better described as it stands, rather than as theory? In order to answer this question, they raise a preliminary problem: "Can we, in our insistence on the distinctiveness of the 'Indian' in 'thought,' erect a division with the 'West'?" That is, is it possible to recover an authentic Indian thought different from Western theory (ibid.: 2)? The books under review, in my view, contribute to answer these questions. For instance, the conceptual framework of the authors exemplifies how to understand the division between Indian and Western political thought. Additionally, these books also contribute to the ongoing debates in intellectual history – global and Indian (cf. Capper, La Vopa & Phillipson 2007; Moyn & Sartori 2013).

Ananya Vajpeyi's book *Righteous Republic: The Political Foundations of Modern India* engages with the question of how the Indian sub-



continent's rich knowledge traditions of two and a half thousand years influenced India's nationalist leaders as they undertook the task of constructing a nation during Britain's colonisation of India. Vajpeyi states that five prominent "founding" figures – M.K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Abanindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru, and B.R. Ambedkar – engaged themselves with the question of swa (self) in 'swaraj'. In the context of India's anti-colonial movement, the term swaraj did not just signify self-rule as political independence; it also signifies "rule by the self" and "rule over the self" (Vajpeyi 2012: ix). It therefore meant both – the struggle for India's sovereignty and its quest for the Indian self that would allow it to come into its own as a modern nation-state. Vajpeyi maintains that it was this word which dominated Indian politics from the 1880s, when the Indian National Congress was founded, until India's independence in 1947 (ibid.: 1).

While swaraj is the ligature between 'self' (swa) and 'sovereignty' or 'rule' (raj), it is the latter which, in Vajpeyi's opinion, has dominated the historical narrative of the creation of the Indian nation. She seeks to correct this neglect by arguing that in their collective search for Indian selfhood, the "founders" were deeply influenced by Indian traditions of moral and political thinking and turned to ancient and classical texts, ideas and ideals in formulating their political values and vision. She identifies particular classical texts that each of these founders took recourse to in order to understand Indian selfhood. She follows Gandhi's reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* to show how this engagement yielded the category 'ahimsa', that is, "the self's orientation towards others [...] devoid of the intent to harm". For Rabindranath Tagore, she chooses the fifth century Sanskrit poem by Kalidasa, *Meghaduta*, a text whose principal category according to her, is 'viraha', "the self's longing, a yearning for reunion with a beloved who has been estranged [...]" (ibid.: xxii). The longing for the beloved, a metaphor for India's estranged past, is tinged with the knowledge that this loss can never be recovered.

For Abanindranath Tagore, she treats the term 'text' broadly to include Abanindranath's Shah Jahan paintings, which yielded for the painter, the category of 'samvega' – the self's "aesthetic shock," an experience that "produces both the momentary pleasure of art and the abiding knowledge of truth" (ibid.). The self's shock is the self-recognition, an ability to know the truth about itself when it comes face to face with powerful aesthetic representations of itself (ibid.: 25). Nehru's fascination and engagement with the texts and artefacts of the Mauryan Empire (320-185 BCE), specifically the moral edicts of



Emperor Asoka, and the *Arthashastra* (a treatise on statecraft) of Kautilya, yields the categories of 'dharma', "the self's aspiration, its tendency towards its own perfection," and 'artha', "the self's purpose [and] its ability to act in goal-oriented ways". Finally, for Ambedkar, Vajpeyi focuses on his reading of the Buddhist canonical literature, especially *Dhammapada*, in the last stage of his life, because it is here that Ambedkar, in her opinion, discovered 'duhkha', "the self's burden, which is... the suffering, individual and collective, produced in any society [...] immiserated by caste" (Vajpeyi 2012: xxiii).

According to Vajpeyi, from mid-1890s onwards, Indian nationalists faced a political crisis that led to their quest for the sources of the Indian self. In their search for the self, the five founding figures in her book looked to the past for "understanding the self whose sovereignty they sought," and "delved deep into the texts, monuments, traditions, and histories of India" to reboot and rejuvenate a tradition in crisis as a result of colonial encounter (ibid.: xiii-xiv). Vajpeyi's study of the founders' search for self is informed by Alasdair MacIntyre's understanding of tradition in terms of an "epistemological crisis" and an "epistemological break." In her reading of MacIntyre, an epistemological crisis is a state of affairs which affects the consciousness of either an individual or culture, wherein existing epistemologies, or ways of knowing, fail to acquire the knowledge necessary for understanding and explaining the world in the present. Further, a crisis in the self is also traceable to and concomitant with a crisis in the tradition that has formed the self (ibid.: 57).

For Vajpeyi, founders like Gandhi and others² resolved this crisis in the Indian political tradition by engaging with classical texts and concepts and thereby made an epistemological break by reorienting a tradition in crisis and rejuvenating it in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Implicit in this central claim of Vajpeyi's is an understanding of the Indian tradition (which in her view begins with the life of Buddha in the fifth century BCE) with an internal coherence and continuity traceable right up to the twentieth century. The Indic here is also an indigenous political tradition, where such "indigenism" assumes that the historical trajectory of each society is incomparably peculiar, and should be analysed as far as possible by its own "internal" concepts (Kaviraj 2005: 501).

This approach to the intellectual history of modern India in terms of an indigenous, and coherent and continuous tradition defies her own



observation of the Indian political tradition as constructed in modern times where certain accounts of the past were left out because

they are relatively recent; others because they regionally constrained; some because they are affiliated to Islam or to minority religions; many on account of their uncertain or supposedly low-caste status; some because they are miscegenated with “foreign” cultures; and yet others because they do not bear a strong relationship to any of the subcontinent’s languages that were transregionally powerful prior to English: Sanskrit, Pali, Tamil, and Persian. (Vajpeyi 2012: 12)

The six Indic categories that Vajpeyi associates with the five founders – ahimsa, viraha, samvega, dharma, artha, and dukkha – are neither western, nor political categories. For her enquiry it is crucial that these are non-political Indic categories. She asks:

Why are we so surprised to discover traces of millennia-long debates and traditions in the thought of modern India’s founding fathers? [...] Did we think...that knowledge of the self, the central concern of Indic civilization for the entire length of its existence, had simply been erased from Indian minds by the late nineteenth century? Or did we become so distracted by how Indians dealt with Western categories – capital, reason, justice, race, nation, citizenship, science, democracy – [...] that we lost track of continuities in Indic political thought from a long precolonial history? (Vajpeyi 2012: 26)

An enquiry into the genealogy of Indic categories, then for her, refocuses our attention to the presence and importance of these concepts, which, in her opinion, have been consistently ignored in IPT. She also observes that for many scholars of the Subaltern Studies like Ranajit Guha, Shahid Amin, and Partha Chatterjee, the invocation of Indic categories among Indian nationalists simply mirrored and reinforced Western categories such that any investigation on IPT stops at a “derivative discourse.”³ Vajpeyi further argues that while many of the Indian political categories like 'danda' (punishment) and obedience by 'bhakti' (devotion) were co-opted into the dominant ideology of rule of the colonial regime, the fact of the non-political nature of her Indic categories did not lend them to be easily usurped by or be useful to a polity which is thoroughly Western in its conception and form. It seems that implicit in her anxieties about the derivative nature of Indian concepts and the co-option of Indian political concepts by western (colonial) structures of power is the assumption that the adoption of western concepts and the use of Indic political concepts (like danda



and bhakti) by Indian thinkers did not involve the same kind of new meanings and creativity that she finds in her non-political Indic categories.

However, Sudipta Kaviraj argues that when a European concept enters Indian society and works through a translating term in the vernacular, often the traditional concept which is discredited, displaced, or undermined by the modern European one, continues as a shadowy existence of subterranean influence, subtly refracting the meanings of the modern term (Kaviraj 2002: 100).⁴ Further, Datta and Palshikar point out that contemporary Indian political thought has explored the hybrid character of a series of preoccupations that have been debated in the West like debates on public sphere, civil society and citizenship.⁵ They give the example of the debate on secularism in India which has included radical interrogations of the concept of secularism, positing different versions of toleration, the distinctiveness of Indian secularism and so on.⁶ As a result, Datta and Palshikar maintain, in these elaborations, that the position and significance of Western thought has changed as a necessary relational framework. This dynamism in IPT has been embodied over time in the way that the West has figured in recent times in contemporary Indian political writings, ranging from sharp division of the Indic from the West to the more nuanced double position of the West: "as both the frame of contrast and a constitutive element of the 'Indian'" (Datta & Palshikar 2013: 6-7).⁷

Vajpeyi's six Indic categories which correspond to five founders' search for self – ahimsa (non-violence) with Gandhi, viraha (longing) with Rabindranath Tagore, samvega (shock) with Abanindranath Tagore, dharma (norm) and artha (purpose) with Nehru, and dukkha (social suffering) with Ambedkar – are the central concepts through which the founders resolved the crisis in the self. While for Gandhi ahimsa was indeed the central concept in his political thought and action, evidenced in his books (like *Hind Swaraj* and *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*), articles, letters and speeches, for the other founders we do not have similar evidence to construe the above-mentioned Indic categories as the fundamental principles of their political thought and action. For instance, in the chapter on Abanindranath Tagore Vajpeyi imputes the category of samvega on him through Ananda Coomaraswamy (an historian and philosopher of Indian art) who translated it as "aesthetic shock" (Vajpeyi 2012: 129-31). Thus, samvega is not a term that Tagore used to express his emotions about India's national art, rather it is Vajpeyi's own charac-



terisation of what this painter experienced in his encounter with the history of Indian art.

Further, her book provides thin textual evidence and analysis in terms of how these founders (save Gandhi) defined these terms and linked them to their larger political vision. As such, the analysis of these Indic terms are based on Vajpeyi's interpretations of them and less on how these founding figures understood them. Had she clearly introduced these categories as heuristic devices that she developed to understand the texts and ideas of these figures, one may not have wondered whether these terms were used by the founders themselves. However, she claims, "duhkha, Ambedkar's category, shares with Gandhi's ahimsa, Rabindranath's viraha, Abanindranath's samvega, and Nehru's dharma the peculiar quality of being a hybrid between non-modern and modern meanings of the term; an apparently archaic concept *deployed* at an utterly unprecedented historical conjecture for pressing political reasons [...]" (ibid.: 21, emphasis added). To argue that the founders 'deployed' these Indic categories and concepts requires that the author shows textual evidence of such deployment in the works of these canonical figures. Despite such methodological vagueness, *Righteous Republic* is an attempt to pave a new trajectory of modern IPT as it paints a novel picture of the moral imaginary of the founders' thoughts through a detailed exercise in intellectual history and critical philology.

As discussed above, there are two assumptions implicit in Vajpeyi's *Righteous Republic*; first, that of a division and distinction between an Indic/ indigenous thought and Western thought, where the former being consistently ignored needs to be retrieved and revived, and second, that of the derivative nature and co-option of Indian political concepts by Western categories and structures of power. Gurpreet Mahajan's book, *India: Political Ideas and the Making of a Democratic Discourse* (2013) questions these two assumptions by arguing that the specificity of the "Indian" in IPT needs to be understood in terms of "difference," by which she means the distinct meanings we associate with concepts that mark our historical time (Mahajan 2013: 8). To elaborate, her enquiry into the history of ideas is informed by a notion of a "historically situated self," wherein, this notion following Gadamer foregrounds a fusion of horizons. Such a conception of the self assumes that individuals are constituted through a productive interaction between "the prism of culture in which they live, and the horizon that marks their historical universe. The play of these two horizons shapes the historically situated self" (Mahajan 2013: 6).



Difference then, for Mahajan, needs to be understood in terms of how values get articulated in a particular context. She argues that constructing an Indian Political Theory through such a framework does not require us to search for authentic Indian concepts, or probe where the idea first originated, or whether the concept exists in the vocabulary of a given culture. It requires one to examine the way ideas, irrespective of where they originate, enter into public discourses and shape the political imagination of the people (Mahajan 2013: 6). The project of constructing an indigenous social science and political theory, on the other hand, Mahajan argues, is rooted in a conception of difference and cultural membership where it is assumed that each culture and civilisation is unique, it has its own system of values, ways of thinking, and means of evaluating what is good and desirable (ibid.: 2). Doing Indian political theory through such a framework involves that one searches for authentic indigenous concepts (in order to reject the hegemony of western categories and concepts), retrieve and revive them.⁸

According to Mahajan such a search for an authentic indigenous knowledge rests upon notions of cultural essentialism and incommensurable difference and the notion of the self here is based on an idea of a "culturally embedded self," a self that is rooted in its tradition and cultural way of life. Mahajan finds "strong methodological reasons" for grounding IPT based on a notion of historically situated self. She maintains that throughout India's struggle for freedom, as well as in the Constituent Assembly (which framed the Constitution of independent India), concepts such as liberty and equality, state and bureaucracy, were used without anxieties about their origin. The social and political leadership in modern India invoked these concepts to think about their own social and political situation and aspirations, and in doing so imbued them with new meanings (ibid.: 7). Thus, through a specific understanding of difference, Mahajan maps the journey of ideas of equality, freedom, religion and diversity in Indian political thought which, for her, are the central categories in understanding the distinctiveness of India's democratic discourse.

Mahajan argues that while liberal political philosophers like Hobbes, Locke and Mill envisaged the political in terms of the relationship between the individual and the state, in India the community (such as a religious or a language community, or caste-based and tribal communities) also configured the political. Democracy in India therefore involved a triadic relationship of the state, the community and the individual. She begins with the idea of equality/ inequality that shaped



India's modern democratic imaginary. It is interesting to note that the author construes the concept of equality as equality/inequality. Mahajan articulates this concept in this way because she observes that discussion on equality in colonial India was almost always understood as the absence of existing structures of inequality and oppression. She contends that while most writings assumed a fundamental equality of all persons as human beings, Indian thinkers and socio-political leaders primarily attempted to identify the prevailing structures of inequality, and associated equality with the absence of these relationships. Thus, Mahajan points out, one rarely gets a clear enunciation of the idea of equality independently of the existing structures of exploitation and subordination (Mahajan 2013: 13).

She identifies four figures central to debates on equality/inequality namely, Jyotirao (Jyotiba) Phule, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, B.R. Ambedkar and M.K. Gandhi. The first two figures of the mid-nineteenth century, in her view, offered two distinct representations of the idea of equality/ inequality that formed two ends of the spectrum within which this concept came to be discussed in later years. The latter two early twentieth century socio-political leaders gave a new articulation to these two different notions of equality/ inequality. She argues that while Phule and Ambedkar saw the caste system as the root cause of inequality which was responsible for the oppression and subordination of the 'Shudras' (people at the bottom of the caste hierarchy), in Bankim and Gandhi's works there was a recognition that the centres of exploitation were many, each equally important and irreducible to one another. All these structures of domination and exploitation – like, subordination of Indians by the British colonisers, the domination of women by men, of the labouring poor by the capitalists, and of the lower castes by the upper caste Brahmins – needed to be challenged and rejected.

Mahajan contends, "When India began the task of framing its constitution these two dominant conceptions of a just and equal society informed the discussions in the Constituent Assembly. The idea that there were many different sites of inequality and oppression in society – something that figured centrally in the analysis by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Gandhi – was the point from which the deliberations began. But, within this larger understanding, it was caste-based inequalities [...] that remained a constant point of reference" (ibid.: 32).



Mahajan's next central concept of freedom charts out the varied conceptions of *swaraj*, and like Ananya Vajpeyi she notes the layered meanings of the term. To unveil the varied notions of freedom or *swaraj* in Indian thought, Mahajan mainly discusses this idea in the works of Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, M.K. Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore. She argues that *swaraj*, when understood in its limited form as political freedom, was considered to be an essential condition of human well-being without which one could not lead a decent life. Without *swaraj*, one not only could not imagine a good life, it also hindered the possibility of enjoying basic rights such as the right to speech, thought and expression. Political freedom and self-government was desired because it would provide a responsible government that would protect and promote the interests of the people and give them an opportunity to determine their own future. Since *swaraj* also meant self-determination, spiritual (internal) freedom was closely intertwined along with the conception of political (external) freedom. Spiritual freedom, Mahajan observes, was understood in different ways as "inner freedom," "self-dependence," and "self-reliance." However, at the most basic level, being morally and spiritually free, or self-determining meant being "true to one's being" (Mahajan 2013: 45).

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On the question of when is one true to one's being, Mahajan notes, there were significant difference of views. She outlines three different interpretations of this idea which surfaced in the public domain and offered three different conceptions of political citizenship and of the nation. The first perspective maintained that being true to one's self meant abandoning of all forms of Western influence and being shaped by the Indian civilisation. Mahajan notes that the idea of 'swadeshi' captured this sentiment (Mahajan 2013: 46). In the economic sphere, *swadeshi* involved giving up goods manufactured in factories abroad and endorsing products produced in the villages of India. In the political sphere it asked for self-rule, and in the cultural sphere, this idea was expressed sharply in the writings of Vivekananda and Aurobindo, who called for cultural self-determination.

Mahajan identifies the second perspective with Gandhi who suggested that it is by following one's moral conscience that one could be truly self-determining. This was a consciousness that emerged "from an engagement with existing traditions and the truths that were embodied in them" (ibid.: 50). Freedom here entailed recognising one's situatedness (that is, being part of a community, a tradition, a species, and the universe) and the obligations that this form of being placed



upon each of us. In other words, freedom here meant voluntarily acting in a responsible way and recognising for oneself what one owes to others. In such a conception, political freedom, while desirable, was not a sufficient condition for being free. It had to be accompanied by the necessary condition of inner freedom. For Gandhi, this was to be cultivated through the practice of ahimsa or non-violence, which involved action motivated by love and compassion towards all others. The third point of view emerged in the writings of Tagore who associated swaraj with the freedom of the mind and spirit, and sought to create a space to think for oneself and express one's views without fear. For Tagore, realising true swaraj entailed challenging and overcoming the social and political boundaries constructed by society such as, religion, caste, language and nationality, and seeing oneself as a part of the humankind.

Mahajan states that while all these conceptions of swaraj were different in significant respects, each of them challenged the conception of man and freedom that prevailed in the scientific rationality of the post-enlightenment world (Mahajan 2013: 56). As opposed to enlightenment reason which separated reason from passion/emotion, these conceptions of swaraj invoked the category of the spiritual to refer to "a perspective in which reason was moderated by the moral and/or the aesthetic so as to arrive at a truth which allows the self to transcend the limits imposed by ego and perspectivism" (ibid.: 58). With regard to the influence of ideas of swaraj on India's modern democratic imaginary, she concludes by observing that:

The votaries of *swaraj* had emphasised [...] individual responsibilities and obligations to the larger whole [...] Individuals were expected to realize the truth for themselves and determine what was right and appropriate. This understanding had to be arrived at by the self, and not imposed from the outside even by an enlightened other [...] It was this centrality accorded to the individual that made room for individual liberty within these frameworks and prevented the collective speaking on behalf of its members. This element changed in the post-independence period. From being mindful of the presence of the other, there was a marked shift to making the group speak for the individual. The effect of this move and the altered relationship between the individual and the collective have been manifest most sharply in matters involving freedom of expression (Mahajan 2013: 68-9).

For Mahajan two other concepts that shaped India's democratic imaginary are religion and diversity. She observes that religion emerged in the public domain in colonial and post-colonial India in three



different but interrelated ways: (i) as a site of and resource for change; (ii) as a ground for political mobilisation and the construction of identities; and (iii) as a mode of training the will and arriving at the true purpose of one's existence (Mahajan 2013: 73). Mahajan's discussion on religion shows a dual and conflicting representation of religion: while religion was associated with spiritual truth, as a source of moral and social ethic, and as a means of preparing the will, it was also a site for the formation and mobilisation of identity.

She maintains that this dual representation of religion framed the discussions of the Constituent Assembly on matters relating to religion. While the instrumental use of religion created anxieties (which emerged from the experiences of the demand for a separate homeland for the Muslim community (Pakistan, and the Partition and communal riots that followed in its wake), the Constituent Assembly members also recognised that religion was an important source of personal identity and the basis of a moral ethic. Therefore they struck a balance between these two different conceptions of religion. Instead of treating religion as a purely personal matter that must be restricted to the private domain, the Constituent Assembly accepted its public dimension and made room for it in the public domain (ibid.: 84).

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This de-privatised nature of religion in India has led to a greater intervention of the state in matters of religion. Due to Indian state's continuous engagement with religion (for example, the legal ban on the prohibition of 'Dalits' (the ex-untouchable castes) into temple entry), critics of secularism in India question or even deny secularism's applicability and usability in India (Nandy 1998; Madan 1998; Chatterjee 1998). Indian secularism, it is argued, has been unable to erect a 'wall of separation' between religion and state/ politics that western secularism demands. In making a case for the distinctiveness of Indian secularism, Rajeev Bhargava has argued that unlike western secularism where separation entails mutual exclusion of religion and politics, secularism in India is based on the idea of "principled distance." The policy of principled distance, he states, takes a flexible approach on the inclusion or exclusion of religion, engagement or disengagement of the state, which at the level of law and policy depends on the context, nature, or current state of relevant religions (Bhargava 1998: 519-20).

In discussing the last value of diversity, Mahajan points out that for several leaders diversity (religious, linguistic, and cultural) was a distinctive attribute of India and valuing it was a natural expression of who 'we' are as a people (Mahajan 2013: 129). After illustrating how



diversity was an important value for leaders like Nehru, Iqbal, Gandhi, Tagore, and Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, she argues that while the majority and the minorities began with a shared view about India's diversity, they conceptualised the relationship between diversity and unity differently. For the minorities, unity was frequently predicated upon separate recognition of their contribution and needs so as to ensure their equal membership in the polity (Mahajan 2013: 103). For the minorities, recognition of difference could not be simply based upon the good faith and promise of the majority. It required formal institutional arrangements by way of special consideration, separate representation, space for community institutions and cultural rights.

Mahajan further contends that it is the anxieties of the minority populations that structured deliberations of the Constituent Assembly and the thinking about the constitution of independent India. She also points out that while most of the time multicultural theorists speak of cultural diversity in terms of its survival and protection, diversity in India demonstrates that one cannot speak of it in the singular. One needs to consider the question of which diversity must be accommodated and how? She argues that India has not been able to determine a suitable criterion for differentiating between the claims of different minorities that desire to protect their cultural diversity. Thus, the question, as to who receives recognition in India, Mahajan observes, has been settled on an ad hoc basis, often depending upon the capacity of groups to muster political support (ibid.: 118-9).

Thus, Mahajan provides a comprehensive account of how Indian thinkers and leaders layered familiar concepts of freedom, equality and difference with new meanings and signification. However, in her book one is unable to see these political ideas in terms of alternative conceptions in the thoughts of various Indian intellectuals. So for instance, in her discussion on diversity one does not get a clear understanding of Gandhi's views on diversity, or how it differed from say, Iqbal's views on diversity. This may be because she adopts a methodology where the focus is less on individual authors and more on multiple meanings of individual concepts which are central to the modern democratic imaginary in India. Nevertheless, Mahajan's book moves beyond the conventional thinkers-centric understanding of political thought to explicate the distinctiveness of IPT through a framework of concepts/ ideas informing her study.

While Vajpeyi and Mahajan reconfigure the 'Indian' in IPT, Christopher Bayly's book, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the*



Age of Liberalism and Empire (2012) shows how liberalism was not simply a British tradition but rather a transnational creation, such that understandings of liberalism in colonial India influenced British, European and American attitudes to the world. In his book, Bayly aims to show that Indian intellectuals contributed substantively and originally to the making of liberal thought. Thus for him, understanding the genesis of liberalism in India reveals much about its nature in Europe, America and beyond. By demonstrating how ideas that we associate with major Western thinkers – like Mill, Comte, Spencer and Marx – were received and transformed by Indian thinkers and public intellectuals in the light of their own traditions, Bayly situates the debate on IPT in the context of global intellectual history. Through a broad construal of the term liberal, Bayly re-evaluates the political and social thought of Indian liberals from 1800 to 1950. He argues that liberal ideas were foundational to all forms of Indian nationalism and the country's modern politics. He contends, "Indian liberalism as a diffuse sentiment and a set of loose political practices has apparently outlasted socialist centralisation, Gandhianism and even, thus far, Hindutva" (Bayly 2012: 357).

To charges of 'inauthenticity' and 'derivativeness' of liberal ideas in modern IPT, Bayly points out that even if Europeans or Americans set the broad terms of debate, Indian intellectuals did not simply copy Western ideas. Instead, "they cannibalized, reconstructed and re-authored these ideas, often using them in an intellectual assault on the policies, moral character and culture of their rulers" (ibid.: 3). He further maintains that all modern political languages have mixed together global and local discourses such that it would be difficult to find any single global movement of political ideas which could not be characterised in those terms (ibid.: 8). Indian liberalism for him represents a broad and internally contested range of thought and practice directed to the pursuit of political and social liberty. He identifies freedom (from colonial rule, traditional authority and corrupt domestic or religious practices), political representation, free press, individual property rights and education (particularly of women) as the common features of Indian liberalism (ibid.: 1).

Bayly insists that through liberal ideas, arguments and practices, Indian liberals not only resisted colonial rule, but also engaged in debates about the 'good life' as would-be citizens of a global republic. The political ideas of these liberals even when transformed beyond recognition by their political successors and enemies were, in his opinion, formative of India's modern ideologies and institutions. Thus,



he argues, Indian liberals may even have helped to provide some of the conditions for the emergence of India's democracy (Bayly 2012: 343-4). The historiography of Indian liberalism in Bayly's book can be broadly divided into three phases: (i) the dominance of constitutional liberalism from 1820s to 1880s (ibid.: 42), (ii) the emergence of, as Bayly terms it, "communitarian liberalism" in the 1860s and its dominance in the 1890s (ibid.: 15, 245-76), and (iii) the decline and transformation of liberal ideologies in India after the First World War (ibid.: 276-342).

The first phase of constitutional liberalism is characterised by the critique of colonial authoritarianism, demands by Indians for freedom of press, place in jury service, and support for constitutionally limited government. The next phase of communitarian liberalism is different from the communitarianism of Charles Taylor and Michael Sandel which is opposed to liberalism in its emphasis on the individual self's cultural embeddedness. Bayly's communitarianism is akin to the liberal communitarianism of T. H. Green and William James (ibid.: 245). Bayly argues that this type of liberalism was concerned with the fate of society rather than the individual, was more hospitable to the idea of state intervention in the economy, and emphasised the notion of common good. The third phase begins in 1919 and continues till 1950. This is the phase when liberalism as an ideology declined and survived in the form of "hybridized and modified indigenous ideologies" (ibid.: 277). Here, in Bayly's view, liberalism survived as a residual tradition through the political thoughts and practices of people like Radhakumud Mookerji's "economic regionalism," Ambedkar's "counter-liberalism," and even among proponents of Hindu nationalism, Muslim separatism, integral nationalism and orthodox Marxists (ibid.: 276, 310).

As Bayly traces the genealogy of Indian liberalism, he not only attempts to show the elective affinities and divergences between Indian and classical British liberalism, but also Indian liberalism's engagement with other traditions which it drew on and through which it reworked its arguments giving it its specific character. The latter two exercises show the frequently tense relationship between Indian and British liberal values. Let us first begin with some of the analogies that Bayly draws between Indian and British forms of liberalism. As people living under colonial rule, the ideas of J. S. Mill particularly on freedom of opinion and the limitation of government resonated with Indian liberals. Mill's support for local representation as a moral as well as political necessity appealed to Indian leaders who were demanding their place in grand juries, municipalities and legislative assemblies.



However, Indian liberalism also differed from Millian liberalism. Bayly argues that Mill's individual autonomy based on "comprehensive liberalism" was rejected by Indian liberals. Mill's "harm principle," which forbade society's intervention in the individual's freedom to impose public morality, unless his or her behaviour harmed others, was challenged with the notion of "social rights" by Indian public intellectuals. As per the idea of social rights, state restrictions on individual liberty is justified (for example, alcohol consumption) if it threatens to erode the social fabric of society. Bayly says that Indians strengthened this notion of social rights by adding arguments of Indian custom and tradition. This appeal to social rights allowed for arguments to be made for the banning of cow-slaughter which was seen as an invasion of Hindu social rights, as also the opposition to the practice of playing music before mosques on grounds of social rights of Muslims (Bayly 2012: 15-6).

Other issues on which Indian liberals contested key elements of a metropolitan liberal consensus from mid-century onwards were free trade and racist assumptions of British civilisational superiority. Bayly observes that Indian economic liberals questioned the idea of free trade well before German economic nationalist Friedrich List's arguments for the protection of national economies were disseminated in India. He demonstrates how in the 1820s Rammohan Roy approved the limited colonisation of India by skilled European settlers so as to break East India Company's monopoly. Later the idea of 'drain of wealth' from India took much greater force in the arguments of public intellectuals and economic nationalists like K. T. Telang, Dadabhai Naoroji and R. C. Dutt.

But Indian liberalism also influenced and was influenced by a number of other "recessive traditions." Bayly argues that the selective use of ancient and medieval texts – *the Mahabharata*, *the Bhagavad Gita*, and *the Ramayana* – provided both liberals and conservatives with arguments against British liberalism. So, ideas of Brahmanical immunity were used to strengthen the sacrosanct nature of property and references to ancient 'constitutions,' conciliar advice (the *parishad*) and local assemblies (*the panchayat*) buttressed the demand for self-government under the Company and the Raj. Muslim liberals like Sayyid Ahmed Khan and Syed Ameer Ali drew on Indo-Muslim ethical literature (*akhlaq*) to argue for the importance of Indian counsellors to advise the British rulers (*ibid.*: 20-1). Bayly notes that by 1914, Indian liberalism, which had always stressed the individual in community, further drifted towards communitarianism. Here Bayly broadens the



definition of liberalism to include its southern and central European variants. He further says, “the idea of communitarianism employed [here] [...] tinged all political positions, from neoconservatives, through advocates of violence in the service of the nation, to liberals and even idealist socialists [...]” (Bayly 2012: 245).

This broad definition of communitarian liberalism allows Bayly to include communal Hindu political figures like Madan Mohan Malaviya, whom he construes to be a communitarian liberal (ibid.: 222).⁹ Further, in the last chapters of his book, leaders and thinkers with as different ideological persuasions as Nehru [“it was his liberal, rather than his socialist political judgement which characterized Pandit’s rule” (Bayly 2012: 353)], B.R. Ambedkar [“he remained typical of late Indian liberalism in many ways” (ibid.: 305)], M.N. Roy [“he inherited fragments of the old liberal sensibility and its projects” (ibid.: 320)], Subhash Chandra Bose [“his thought retained a strong tincture of the old liberal internationalism” (ibid.: 327)], and S. Radhakrishnan [“he epitomised the neo-vedantist humanist liberalism” (ibid.: 333)], among others, are shown to have components of liberal thought in their political vision and practice. Many of these leaders that Bayly pronounces as liberals explicitly rejected this description.

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Of course, affinity to liberal thought can be found in many such leaders who did not define themselves as liberals. Sugata Bose therefore rightly points out that the question is never asked as to why those Indians who set out to recover liberties, national as well as social, tended to shun the liberal label (Bose 2012: 306). Also, this loose use of the term liberal by the author leads the concept to lose its conceptual and analytical specificity. Thus we see that Bayly is at pains to show that Indian liberals were neither mere ‘mendicant office-seekers’ nor ‘inauthentic mimic men’ as some post-colonial writers have held them to be. While liberalism came to be widely employed as a language of colonial domination, Bayly shows that Indian liberals constantly subverted colonial and elite interpretations of liberalism, deconstructing and reassembling British liberal ideas and liberally borrowing transnational ideas to reflect Indian conditions and structures of thought.

In the introductory paragraph of this review article it was observed that the production and ‘discovery’ of IPT coincided with a need for a past of political thought felt by the anti-colonial movements in colonial India. In order to examine the changing trajectories of modern IPT, it was claimed here that we must also examine the field of ancient and



medieval IPT. Therefore let us begin with Kumkum Roy's essay, "Revisiting Early Indian Political Thought: Texts, Practices, Material Culture," in the edited book *Indian Political Thought* by Datta, Palshikar and Vanaik (2013).

Roy begins her discussion on early IPT by drawing our attention to the ideal of kingship as it emerges through two recent translations of the classics of the Sanskritic/Shastric tradition – the *Manavadharma-shastra*, popularly known as the *Manusmriti* (Olivelle 2005 cit. in Roy 2013) and the *Santi Parvan* of the *Mahabharata* (Fitzgerald 2004 cit. in Roy 2013). She argues that while textual traditions, often identified as Shastras, have remained central to our understanding of early Indian political thought, it is necessary to bear in mind that there were other linguistic, textual, and oral traditions in early India. She urges us to see the Sanskritic/Brahmanical tradition itself as having grown through dialogue and contestation with these other traditions like the early Pali, Prakrit, and Tamil traditions. She observes that both Olivelle and Fitzgerald who have translated and annotated these classics attempt to locate them in a more delimited historical context. As such, their construal of these texts is embedded in the political, social, and religious environments within which they were generated (Roy 2013: 65-8).

Olivelle notices a flexibility and fluidity in different Shastras, a tradition that is claimed to be constant, if not consistent. An illustration of the fluidity in the *Manusmriti* is the redefinition of 'dharma'/ 'dhamma' within the Asokan regime. The word dhamma, during the reign of King Asoka (304-232 BCE), no longer retained its specific association with the Brahmanical definition. It was redefined to incorporate a range of broader, more universalistic, albeit nebulous set of ethical concerns like respect for parents, teachers, elders, as well as the practice of generosity, kindness towards slaves and labourers, and so forth (Roy 2013: 71). Similarly, Fitzgerald has also highlighted the context sensitivity and therefore alternative possibilities of the category of dharma. Roy argues that the implicit and often explicit conflicts among these strands of dharma are not always resolved harmoniously such that dissonances abound and leave space for readings that were not standardised (ibid.: 74). She also reminds us of the drawbacks of focusing exclusively on the pan-Indian Shastric tradition and therefore, goes on to discuss the Kavya tradition (poetry, drama and fiction written in highly artificial Sanskrit literary style employed in Indian court epics from the early centuries of the Common Era)¹⁰ and the material culture/archaeological remains as embodiments of early Indian political ideas and processes.



At this point one may pause and ask whether the knowledge of these texts is of any relevance today, specifically to contemporary IPT? We have already seen how for Vajpeyi Nehru's search for self was structured around old Indic categories of dharma and artha. It is through these traditional categories, Vajpeyi has argued, Nehru negotiated the challenges encountered in the present. Historians like Romila Thapar have carefully scrutinised classical texts and traditions to challenge the proposition of contemporary scholars (like Ashis Nandy and T.N. Madan) that secularism is alien to Indian civilisation. She demonstrates that an element of "proto-secularism" is visible in earlier heterodox traditions of Buddhism, the Bhakti tradition (part of Puranic Hinduism), the Sufi tradition etc. (Thapar 2012: 75-86). More recently, Rajeev Bhargava has argued that the Asokan edicts of third century BCE opened up a "conceptual space" that contributed to the growth of modern secularism in India (Bhargava 2014: 173-202).¹¹

All these contemporary writers have attempted to re-read classics, be it texts or artefacts, in order to locate answers for contemporary issues that beset modern society. And most of these scholars have also reiterated the diversity, fluidity, and flexibility that characterise classical texts and traditions. As is evident already, these scholars have not reverted to the classics in order to draw timeless, eternal wisdom to illuminate the present (which may also be important); rather the classics have been a source to examine the ways in which our traditions have shaped our understanding of the present.

Writing on the recent scholarship on the political thought of the 'middle period' (eighth to eighteenth century CE), Nandita Sahai also presents studies that go beyond the elite, formally political, discursive texts of the so-called medieval period. In her essay, "Revisiting Middle Period Political Thought: Texts, Practices, Material Culture," she begins by noting the dissatisfaction among historians with the various ways of periodising Indian history. She points out that while the colonial/communal historiographical categories of the "Hindu" period followed by the "Muslim" stand rejected today, so does the subsequent deployment of a "secular" tripartite division of "ancient," "medieval," and "modern." As this latter typology was seen to construe the medieval period as a single unchanging entity and failed to take cognisance of substantial transitions within its chronological span, it was also found wanting. This latter categorisation, she observes, were later broken down into "early medieval," and "early modern" phases.



However, even these new categories carried some of the erstwhile concerns and hence, historians have begun to deploy the neutral category of middle period. Despite these historiographical advances, Sahai argues that the middle period of Indian history continues to be imagined as "Muslim India". She however notes that in the last decade the scholarship has become increasingly cognizant of the multiplicity of texts and traditions (which are also derived from the indigenous Hindu traditions – Brahmanical and heterodox) that proliferated in the middle period (Sahai 2013: 90). Sahai proceeds to examine works that have delved into the internal differentiation and historical developments within both the "mirror of princes" (adab) literature on the one hand, and the Shastric tradition on the other.

She then discusses the ascetic cultivation of the body of the king for the Mughal political culture of Akbar's times. Here she also notes the importance of harem and the norms of conduct for the members of the harem. She further examines the monarchical strategies of communicating power of the king through the visual language of paintings and architecture. Another interesting theme that Sahai discusses is the literature that has delved into the political significance of courtly practices, and the sartorial styles of kings. Through such discussions, Sahai demonstrates that there was a gradual process of blending and assimilation of ideas and practices recognised as "Hindu" and "Muslim" that played out over six centuries. She argues that this gave rise to the "Indic" and "Islamicate" categories such that "there was no single dominant tradition, and the result was a range of dynamic political and social alignments" (ibid.: 111).

Now we turn our discussion back to modern IPT and begin with the essay titled, "Time and Knowledge," authored by Prathama Banerjee. Banerjee argues that the question of time and knowledge where time is redefined as secular time in modernity (as opposed to say, eschatological time of earlier times), is central to modern politics. While in earlier times politics did not necessarily see time as linear, progressive, homogeneous, and forward looking; the temporally charged vocabularies of modern politics (like transition, modernisation, progress, development and revolution) share the assumption that human beings can change their social and political institutions towards a higher and better future with the right kind of knowledge. Banerjee argues that the configuration of politics, time and knowledge in these terms is specific to modernity (she identifies this period between roughly late eighteenth and late twentieth century).



Banerjee argues that till the 1970s time and politics in Indian academics was thought through the hegemonic colonial binary of tradition versus modernity (that is, 'traditional' India and 'modern' West) and from the 1980s onwards there has been a rethink on tradition and modernity. She divides her survey on time and knowledge around three broad heuristic rubrics. Firstly, she discusses works that have questioned the purity, priority, and universality of the European modernity. One, recent research demonstrates that modern knowledge forms (for example, medicine, meteorology, forensics, political economy etc.) and social scientific categories (for example, race, tribe, caste etc.) were not produced in Europe a priori but emerged out of the imperatives of colonial governmentality. Therefore, it was no longer possible to think of the modern as innocent of the colonial, and simply as progressive and emancipatory. Two, recent research has also questioned the apparent universality of the modern temporal imagination, which argues that all nation-states must travel the path of advancement already charted out by Europe. Thus, Dipesh Chakravarty talks about the "provincialization" of European history, that is, the local, contingent, and the particular nature of modernity in the West.

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Additionally Sudipta Kaviraj offers a "revisionist" theory of modernity. Arguing for a "sequential reading" of the history of modernity, Kaviraj states that the precise sequence in which the constituent processes of modernity appear in a particular society (like, democracy, individualism, capitalism and so on) determines the specific form of modernity in that context. For instance, in the Indian case, democracy comes before the coming of individualism, capitalism etc. and leads to a different political dynamic from that of England. Three, a result of two is that there is no singular modernity in the world, and therefore we should talk about multiple or heterogeneous modernities. Four, by showing that modernity always exists in the form of 'hybridities', recent research has also questioned Eurocentric claims of pure or originary modernity (Banerjee 2013: 33-4).

Secondly, an important implication of this recent scholarship on modernity, discussed above, is that it has opened up the question of historical periodisation and it has destabilised history as a discipline leading to a rethinking of the public and political life of history. Here Banerjee explores the workings of history at such sites as testimonies, monuments, and autobiographies. Thirdly, she discusses works which question the idea of a singular world history governed by the logic of capitalism. For instance, geographers like Sharad Chari and Vinay



Gidwani question the global, capitalist present, and analyse colonial archives to demonstrate how a specific space-time emerges historically as both a moment and an interruption of the "time of capital" which is the singular, global history of capitalism. Further, Partha Chatterjee differentiates between "corporate" and "non-corporate" capital. Others still, like Aditya Nigam argue for a space of "non-capital" in everyday practices of livelihood, trade, manufacture and migration (Banerjee 2013: 50-1). Finally, Banerjee surveys works which seek to recover histories suppressed by the nationalist temporal scheme brought in by the post-colonial and the post-national temporal sensibilities. Thus, through a discussion on time and knowledge in contemporary IPT, Banerjee shows the distinctive formulation of the question of time as political, as opposed to its conception as a philosophical project in Western scholarship.

This next essay by Krishna Swamy Dara titled "Demystifying Democracy in the Dalit-Bahujan, Adivasi, and Feminist Discourses" surveys the Dalit literature in IPT. He begins by surveying political thought in thinkers like Jyotirao Phule, Iyothee Thass and E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker or 'Periyar' to explore the emergence of Dalit-bahujan thinking, the question of Buddhist identity, and the influence of Thass on Naicker's self-respect movement. Dara also surveys works on Ambedkar and Phule in scholars like Valerian Rodrigues (1993, 2002), Anupama Rao (2009), and Christophe Jafferlot (2003). He next looks at debates on the question of labour and whether one can assume that all 'Bahujans' (the masses which constitute, in academic and administrative parlance, the 'other backward classes' or OBCs) are part of labour, or whether labour itself is a differentiated category such that there is division of labour along caste lines. Using insights from postcolonial and postmodern theories, in the next section, Dara notices that a lot of research has been generated on the role of colonial encounter in shaping caste as we know today, such as Nicholas Dirks's *Castes of Mind* (2001).

He then goes on to explore the problem of domination of Indian academia by Brahmanism and solutions presented for the inegalitarian nature of social science academia. This issue, he notes, has raised the question as to whether only the Dalit can theorise for himself, as also the need to acknowledge the specificity of Dalit experience. Dara then discusses Dalit politics and movements that have emerged within the democratic framework of India. He observes that democratic institutions are used by the lower castes, particularly Dalits, to gain political power rather than to attempt to undermine or reject them. In this



section, Dara also reviews works by Gopal Guru who has argued that humiliation is a socio-political tool for the upper castes and this category should be identified as the core politics of *Dalits* in India. In the next section, Dara points out not only the emergence of Dalit feminism, which has challenged the hegemonic assumptions of Brahmanical feminism, but also internal debates and differences within feminist movements. He maintains that both these factors have helped democratise movements and radicalise feminist thinking in India (Dara 2013: 210).

In the final section of his essay, Dara examines the 'Adivasi' (indigenous/tribal people) political discourse. The case of Adivasis is different because firstly, they are not interested in transforming society but in preserving their habitations and their status. Secondly, the very term tribal/Adivasi is problematic due to its association with colonialism and the fact that this category seeks to suppress the massive differences among them in geographical, cultural, and historical terms. Since Adivasis are regarded as backward, they have been located in relationship to the issue of development of which they are the primary sufferers. For instance, Dara points out that in their book, *Ecology and Equity* (1995), Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil link issues of development, deforestation and displacement, where tribals have become "ecological refugees" in the process (Dara 2013: 213). In conclusion, Dara observes that there is no such thing as Adivasi political thought in the same manner as Dalit-Bahujan or feminist thought. Yet Adivasi political leaders have actively fought for rights of self-governance and access to natural resources unhindered by governmental agencies, rather than simply being passive subjects who are victims of exploitative developmental projects (ibid.: 222-3).

The essay by Rinku Lamba "Nationalism" attempts to outline the diverse narratives of Indian nationalism by taking Partha Chatterjee's influential explanation on Indian nationalism as the starting point. Chatterjee emphasises the distinctiveness of anti-colonial nationalism in India by articulating the influential distinction between an inner and an outer domain. He argues that alongside a contestation with the colonial power in the domain of the outside, which is the material domain of the state, there also existed another site of struggle, the "inner domain," which reveals Indian nationalism's distinguishing feature. This inner domain is where the anti-colonial nationalism created its own domain of sovereignty within the colonial society, well before it began its political battle with the imperial power. So while the nationalists acceded to the superiority of the West and emulated them



in the domain of the “outside” – of the economy, statecraft and science – there was a staunch refusal on the part of the nationalists to permit colonial power’s intrusion in the inner domain which was seen as a marker of India’s cultural identity.

At the same time, the form of modern community endorsed by the Indian nationalist elite was imitative of the structures of disciplinary power seen in the institutions of the modern colonial state (although Gandhi’s notion of community provided an exception, but historically it was a doomed alternative). Here Chatterjee laments that the root cause of “postcolonial misery” lies not in an “inability to think out new forms of the modern community but in [...] surrender to the older forms of the modern state” (Lamba 2013: 123). Lamba argues that what remains unavailable in Chatterjee is an explicit articulation of the kind of community that can offset the realm of disciplinary power (ibid.: 125).

By making a distinction between emancipatory and disciplinary facets of institutional power, Lamba draws attention to other ways of looking at the state-community relationship, like in the writings of Phule and Ambedkar. She shows how both Phule and Ambedkar recognised the emancipatory potential of intervention of law-state combine in matters pertaining to religious community. The Ambedkarite vision demonstrated aspirations towards a communicative and associative democratic political community grounded in notions of freedom, equality, and fraternity (ibid.: 127-28). These examples show that there can be a multiplicity of perspectives about state power in colonial and post-colonial contexts. Lamba also notes that Chatterjee articulates a thesis that views the logic of capital to be antithetical to the notion of community. That is, the only form of community acceptable to capital is the nation-state that, allegedly, is a homogenising instrumentality incapable of coping adequately with questions of ethnicity (ibid.: 125).

Lamba says that the scholarship of Rajeev Bhargava, Sunil Khilnani and Sudipta Kaviraj offer resources to study ideas, institutions, and politics without entirely subsuming them under the requirements of the logic of capital. For instance, Kaviraj has noted that Nehruvian nationalism, which turned out ultimately to be politically successful, was only one among several possibilities that loomed during the phase of anti-colonial nationalism. He has further observed an enchantment with the state in modern India which stems from the fact that the low castes can use the state to address the indignities imposed by the



caste order. This, Kaviraj opines, has contributed to a transformation of the basic language of Indian politics, which is the turn towards vernacularisation of democracy (Lamba 2013: 131). Lamba goes on to scrutinise Chatterjee's critique of civil society and his formulation of "political society." She raises questions about the extent of the divide between these two spheres and whether they cannot be seen as different modes of operating within democracy.

Apart from the structural resemblance between civil society and political society, Lamba also notes that both these sites of democratic practice are equally susceptible to the dangers of democracy (such as majoritarianism), famously highlighted by Alexis de Tocqueville. She concludes by probing the affinity that democratic movements can have with projects of nationalism as pointed out by Charles Taylor. She observes that recent works on religious nationalism in India highlight some of these connections between democracy and nationalism. Bhargava for instance, has argued that the Hindu nationalists have been able to use the normative vocabulary of the Indian Constitution by expanding the meanings of such evaluate terms like democracy and secularism so that they begin to signal very different, if not opposed, meanings that are normally associated with them. Democracy, for example, in the Hindu nationalist agenda means rule by a permanent majority; the concept's requirements such as, all decisions be arrived at in ways that have the widest possible range of individual and group representation, are subtracted from Hindu Right's understanding of democracy (ibid.: 144).

A counter to Lamba's theme of nationalism, is the essay "Cosmopolitanism: A Review of Literature in Indian Political Thought" by Mohinder Singh. Singh notes that although the idea of cosmopolitanism is quite old in human history, what is new about contemporary invocations of cosmopolitanism is that the idea is now aligned with what has been called the "cosmopolitanism of reality." Cosmopolitanism of reality refers to

the current global situation which is a product of the processes of globalization of the last three decades: the growing global networks created by the world market; media and internet; migration; cross-cultural encounters; proliferation of transnational human rights organizations; rise of global cities; emergence of hybrid cultures; and large scale and relatively freer travels across the world. (Singh 2013: 150)



Singh defines cosmopolitanism as “a normative orientation, or an ethics, or an ethical attitude” (ibid.: 150-1). He points out that as an ethics there is no agreement among the users of the concept of cosmopolitanism, except that it requires thinking beyond national horizons. As an ethical attitude, it is used as a description of cosmopolitan practices, like cosmopolitan styles of certain artistic, literary, and architectural practices; practices linked to cosmopolitan travellers etc. At the same time, cosmopolitanism is also a thesis about identity and belongingness and refers to an orientation of the “self” (ibid.: 151).

Singh begins his review of cosmopolitanism with Martha Nussbaum’s article, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” (1994), where she develops her theoretical position on cosmopolitanism through two philosophical positions – that of Stoics, who think of themselves as citizens of the world (kosmos polites), and Immanuel Kant’s notion of cosmopolitanism. In Nussbaum’s view the cosmopolitan ideal can be promoted only if people consider other intermediary affiliations – such as nation, region, religion, and cultural community – as parts of the whole, which is the humanity. Kwame Anthony Appiah criticises Nussbaum’s universalist position for conforming to the image of cosmopolitanism as rootless people, and develops a theoretical position which he calls “rooted cosmopolitanism” or “cosmopolitan patriotism” (Singh 2013: 154). Against Nussbaum’s approach, Appiah’s argument is that the lover of humanity can be a lover of patria also. Singh observes that postcolonial critiques of cosmopolitanism move beyond Eurocentric and liberal notions of cosmopolitanism as they find cosmopolitan visions to be based on Enlightenment universalism governed by the will to control and homogenise. Uday Mehta, for instance, in *Liberalism and Empire* (1999), develops a powerful critique of cosmopolitanism grounded in liberal universalism by showing its historical nexus with imperialism (Singh 2013: 154-5).

With regard to the idea of cosmopolitanism in IPT, Singh argues that the idea of Asian continent as a source of non-Western notions of cosmopolitanism makes it possible to move beyond Eurocentric notions as well as narrow notions of cosmopolitanism. He points out works of two thinkers who have received attention in recent literature – Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin. Rustom Bharucha, for instance in his book *Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin* (2006), talks about “subaltern cosmopolitanism,” which refers to those travellers, particularly non-Europeans, who travel across international borders in their capacity as servants or employees of elite cosmopolitan travellers. These subaltern cosmopolitan travellers, while



have serviced the narratives of cosmopolitanism, remain on the periphery, rendered invisible under conditions of coercion, humiliation, economic exploitation and so on (Singh 2013: 162). Singh goes on to discuss the idea of cosmopolitanism in Tagore through the works of Louise Blakeney Williams (2006), Ramachandra Guha (2011), and P. K. Datta (2011).

He also discusses the idea of “ethical cosmopolitanism” found in Uday Mehta’s reading of Mahatma Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* (1999). Important within this overall trend of looking beyond the national boundaries are works in the field of intellectual history of modern India where historians have been able to show the transnational field in which the nineteenth and twentieth-century Indian leaders’ ideas are located. The works of C.A. Bayly, already discussed in this review article, is an example. Thus, Singh provides a comprehensive overview of the literature on cosmopolitanism and the attempt to seek alternatives to the universalistic cosmopolitanism of liberal modernity in IPT. He concludes by stating, “The interesting scenario for the near future may be a case of the interaction and clash of various versions of cosmopolitanisms in the cosmopolitan public sphere” (Singh 2013: 182).

The last essay by Rajarshi Dasgupta entitled, “Ethics and Politics” demonstrates just how far the ethical has shaped the explorations of the grounds of IPT in various sectors. He begins his survey of the ethical dimensions in politics with two nationalist thinkers – M. K. Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore. Dasgupta says that there has been a call to revisit Gandhi’s thoughts with a set of new and different questions, often more practical as well as moral and philosophical (Dasgupta 2013: 234). For instance, Surinder Jodhka’s (2002) discussion of Gandhi on Indian villages demonstrates how Gandhi based his ideas of swaraj on village republics as an alternative to the Western city-centric modality of government. Ajay Skaria (2002), on the other hand, explores Gandhi’s ashram practices in Sabarmati ashram to illustrate how Gandhi conceived the development of an alternative modality of politics through a critique of liberal modernity.

Akeel Bilgrami (2003) further has shown how Gandhi’s notion of truth goes against the Western enlightenment idea of truth as a cognitive notion. In Bilgrami’s reading of Gandhi, truth must be understood as a moral and experiential notion, the satyagrahi (Gandhi’s non-violent activists) being a “moral exemplar.” Here the notion of “exemplar” in Gandhi involves setting up oneself as an



example worthy to follow by everyone (Dasgupta 2013: 235-6). Dasgupta also identifies Silvia Federici's (1994) comparative reading of Franz Fanon and Gandhi in their respective colonial contexts as another provocative interpretation of Gandhi. This approach, Dasgupta notes, has thrown up a rich discussion on the respective concepts of selfhood and, the contrasting valuation of violence in the two great anti-colonial thinkers (ibid.: 237).

While discussing recent works on Tagore, Dasgupta points out Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2009) critical mediation on the role of "imagination" in Tagore. Chakrabarty, he says, uses the word imagination in the context of Tagore's thought with a particular problem of the act of loving the nation: "How do we love, when the object of love daily confronts us with despairing sights of poverty, disease, and decadence? [...] How does one think and represent the nation under these conditions?" (Dasgupta 2013: 239). Chakrabarty has argued that Tagore devised a systematic strategy to tackle this problem through a distinction that Tagore created between his prose and poetic visions.

While Tagore placed prose within the reformist agenda of articulating the 'real situation,' his poetry (and songs) animated a very different image of the nation. The latter is understood to reveal the eternal entity hidden behind the apparent protean reality. Dasgupta says that there is a conceptual distance between Chakrabarty's formulation of Tagore's imagination from Benedict Anderson's "empty homogenous time" of the nation, where the nation is imagined through newspaper circulation and print capitalism. For Chakrabarty, Tagore's poetic visions create a caesura in historical time, affecting a kind of transcendence into an imagination that can be distinctly experienced (Dasgupta 2013: 240). Other works on Tagore, like P. K. Datta (2010), demonstrate how Tagore based his conception of globality and civilisation in terms of hospitality rather than competition, where the principle of interrelatedness of the globe rests on respect and love.

Dasgupta then transits to a general consideration of the ways in which the Self has been conceived in IPT. In this section, he identifies the various sites in which different notions of the Self have been identified: the Hindutva Self based on highly exclusionary Hinduism; the notions of Muslim selfhood; the vernacular translation of the Marxist ideology and its entanglements with available notions of Brahmanism; jail narratives of political prisoners produced in the prison cell in colonial India; and the different conceptions of the urban and the rural in modernity producing a deep schism in the notion of



the Self. Another important site for ethical intervention, identified by Dasgupta, is provided by critiques of development and alternatives to the model of development. Such alternatives range from Vandana Shiva's (1988) contrast between masculine domination of nature found in Western development and a feminine conception of forestry which views forests as part of the ecosystem, the revival of a Gandhian approach in Venu Madhav Govindu and Deepak Malghan (2005), to Arun Aggarwal's (2005) conceptual framework of "environmentality" based on the Foucauldian idea of governmentality. Finally, Dasgupta reviews the ethical readings of classical Brahmanical concepts, such as dharma and ahimsa, which are deployed to understand modern conditions.

Let me conclude by outlining some of the changing trajectories of IPT, as it emerges from our review of the above discussed literature. Firstly, recent works on IPT have taken a thematic turn and departed from the traditional model of IPT based on the study of individual thinkers. While there are advantages of examining a thinker based study of ideas, it poses certain problems, like a figure becomes iconic in terms of both thought and political choice. That is, the author – especially in modern IPT – is identified with both a body of thought as well as the political commitments of that author. Such a framework overlooks the deep complicities between different thinkers, the ideas that circulate between them, and which are deployed differently in different systems of thought (Datta & Palshikar 2013: 14-5).

Secondly, there is a greater affirmation among authors of modern IPT that the application of western ideas and concepts such as freedom, equality, modernity, secularism and so on are not simply imitative of western conceptions. Many of the essays and books under review here showed the creative adaptation of liberal and democratic values by Indian thinkers and leaders, as also the transnational nature of western values and concepts themselves. Thirdly, the field of political thought has itself expanded such that the very definition as to what constitutes the political has broadened. This has resulted in a greater interaction and exchange of ideas between not just political science, history and philosophy, but also other disciplines like economics, geography, sociology, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, literature and poetry and so on. Lastly, the field of IPT itself has become more dynamic and there is growing recognition that the nature of IPT is better described by both continuities and discontinuities, and as such the tradition of IPT also involves "tensions, short cuts, regressions as well as jumps" (Mehta 1992: 5).



In this scenario, we end our discussion with the question that we posed in the beginning of this review essay, which is: Is IPT better described as thought or theory? While the practical orientation of IPT clearly stands out in contrast to a theory, Datta and Palshikar argue that it is not just a compendium of practices. They opine that it may be better understood as “thought that works itself out in practices” (2013: 8). And yet while IPT is better described as thought, this review article shows the productivities and varieties of thought, such that it questions the necessity of IPT emerging as a theory.

Endnotes

¹ As the periodisation of Indian history into ancient, medieval and modern is seen as problematic, the editors of *Indian Political Thought* have chosen to deploy ‘Early Indian’ and ‘Middle Period’ Political Thought instead.

² Vajpeyi briefly also considers the question whether there was an epistemological break in Muslim knowledge traditions during the same time (1857-1947), that is, the kind of rejuvenation and reorientation of tradition that she sees in Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*.

³ This is a phrase used by Partha Chatterjee in his book: *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (1993). Chatterjee here argues that the nationalist thought in India is essentially a derivative discourse as it has fashioned itself on the modular form of nationalism which developed in the West.

⁴ Kaviraj further argues that sometimes due to repetitive and consistent use, the older (vernacular) term is often invested with a new meaning, erasing the conventional (western) one, or the two meanings exist side by side, differentiated by native users by the use-context. While examining whether there were traditional concepts of freedom in India, he illustrates this point with the vernacular term ‘mukti’ that is found in Rabindranath Tagore’s poems. The older term *mukti* (true deliverance) was understood in terms of otherworldliness, and in the implicit belief in the cycle of re-birth, both of which were unacceptable to modern consciousness. Tagore re-conceptualized *mukti* in his poems in distinctly this-worldly terms such that by the end of 19th century, the term came to carry increasingly modern connotations of freedom (Kaviraj 2002: 104). In contemporary political usage, one can think of this term as used by the *Mukti Bahini* (Liberation army) – the Bengali resistance forces that fought against the Pakistani army during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971.

⁵ Datta and Palshikar make a distinction between modern IPT and contemporary IPT where the latter is distinguished from the former by the fact that it has been articulated not by nationalist activists for whom political thought is a part of their public praxis, but by academics located in universities in India and abroad (Datta & Palshikar 2013: 6).

⁶ For instance, see the debate on secularism between Ashis Nandy, T.N. Madan, and Rajeev Bhargava in the edited book *Secularism and its Critics* (1998). Mohinder Singh’s essay on Cosmopolitanism in the book under review, *Indian Political Thought* (2013), also shows how this western concept has been complicated in IPT producing multiple understandings of the idea of cosmopolitanism.

⁷ In discussing the ideas of freedom in modern India, Sudipta Kaviraj contends that while there was no self-conscious tradition of Western type social theorising in India until the 20th Century, this does not mean that when Western ideas entered into Indian intellectual and practical life, they replaced or supplanted existing ideas. He argues that for studying intellectual history in India



it may be more fruitful to combine the contextualism represented by the Cambridge school (like for instance, Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock), and conceptual history produced by Reinhart Koselleck and his collaborators. While the former approach focuses on the study of theoretical texts to find correct historical meanings of concepts by recovering authorial intention, the latter approach focuses less on theoretical constructs and more on practical meanings of individual concepts which are central to the successful operation of modern social practices (Kaviraj 2002: 97-100).

⁸ For a defense of doing Indian political theory through indigenous concepts and categories, see Gopal Guru (2011). In this essay Guru argues that in order to “escape” the epistemological grip and gaze of the western discourse one needs to use the methodological language of the “desi” and the “beyond.” While the desi (indigenous) is self-referential, superior, and autonomous from the west, the category of the beyond, the language of dalit discourse, is based on a ‘negative’ language, where the ‘authentic’ articulation requires the west as a negative reference point. As opposed to the desi, this thought emerged in adversarial intellectual conditions, and is expressed through dissonance, difference and defiance. Guru identifies the dalit and shudra thought of B. R. Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and “Periyar” E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker in this category.

⁹ By ‘communal Hindu’ political figures I mean those Indian leaders and thinkers who were engaged with Hindu nationalism during the freedom struggle and who were advocates of politicised Hinduism. Madan Mohan Malaviya, a sanatani (orthodox Hindu), was a key figure in the Hindu revivalist movement in the United Province (renamed as Uttar Pradesh after independence) and the leader of Hindu Mahasabha which emerged in the 1910s as a reaction against the extension of a separate electorate in favour of Muslims at the municipal level. Malaviya is best remembered for initiating the foundation of the Banaras Hindu University in 1916 (Jaffrelot 2007: 12).

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¹⁰ Kavya (or poetry) finds its classical expression in the so-called mahakavya (great poem), in the strophic lyric, and in the Sanskrit theatre. The great masters of the kavya form were Ashvaghosa, Kalidasa, Bana, Dandin, Magha, Bhavabhuti, and Bharavi. The earliest surviving kavya literature was written by Ashvaghosa, a Buddhist (Encyclopaedia Britannica).

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/313574/kavya> [Retrieved 21.08.2014]

¹¹ In order to avoid the criticism of anachronism in arguing that Asokan edicts provided resources for formulating India’s conception of modern secularism, Bhargava makes a distinction between a “concept” and a “conceptual resource/space.” He says that a reasonably articulated and complex concept draws elements from multiple conceptual spaces. Conceptual spaces open up simultaneously or over time that enable multiple historical agents to imagine new concepts. A conceptual space may open up and may remain unutilized for long periods of time, or it may get filled up by concepts which in turn may be clearly formed, or may be semi-developed, or even barely born (Bhargava 2014: 173-5).

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