Avatāra and Śakti: Traditional Symbols in the Hindu Renaissance

By ERIC J. SHARPE

The Hindu Renaissance is commonly regarded as having begun seriously in the 1870's, consequent upon the foundation in 1875 of the Ārya Samāj in the West of India.[1] But this is in many ways a date of convenience. The roots of the movement go back, particularly as far as Bengal is concerned, to the time of Rammohun Roy, when on the one hand there was created a serious, though small-scale. Hindu reform movement, and on the other there was introduced into Calcutta the remarkable catalyst of Western education.[2] Hindu reform and Western education were closely linked for the greater part of the nineteenth century. There was gradually created a new class of Indian intellectual, often partly and sometimes wholly secularised, called by some of their own people "men without a dharma"—a significant form of words. Politically, they were brought up to be copies of their British mentors, reading the same historians and the same philosophers, and taught the same ideals of reason, moderation and constitutional government. The first important point, therefore, is that in them the process of secularisation was well under way by the 1880's, when the Indian National Congress was created as a forum for Indian political discussion and debate.[3] To the British rulers of the time, religion, whatever its virtues, was to be kept at a safe distance from the business of ruling their biggest and most important colony; and most of the new class of "educated Indian" accepted this secular view as a matter of course. The consequence was that in its beginnings the Indian national movement was almost entirely out of touch with the common people of the land. The movement was not intended to be popular, and it was not popular.

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[1] Cf. Farquhar 1915, 25 ff, Sarma, 89 ff.
[2] Cf. Sharpe, 57 ff, Laird, 179 ff.
[3] Cf. Dunbar 2, 564 ff.

The early Hindu reform movements to a very great extent shared the same characteristics: small-scale and elitist, they were not designed to appeal, and did not appeal, to the masses. The Brāhma Samāj, for instance, never succeeded in achieving popularity; it began and continued very largely as a somewhat rarefied worship-society.[4] The Theosophical Society had very much the same character, being eclectic and eccentric: so too were its leaders, of whom Annie Besant was the most important.[5] The Ārya Samāj had a somewhat wider appeal, but rested its case on a view of Hindu scripture and tradition which was simply heretical for a great many Hindus;[6] in addition it was local, having its main catchment area in the Punjab, away from the Bengal centre of activities.

Thus whatever its underlying sentiments, as the turn of the century approached the national movement and the Hindu revival were both limited in their appeal. But the years between 1893 and 1897 were the years of Swāmī Vivekānanda's "mission" to the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago and his tours in the countries of the West.[7] Perhaps it was in the figure of the Swāmī that the Indian national movement found its first powerful human symbol. "The going forth of Vivekananda" wrote Aurobindo Ghose in 1909, "[...] was the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not to survive but to conquer."[8] Here there were perhaps two human symbols, for the Swāmī emphasised constantly that he was merely speaking for his master Ramakrishna.[9] But in the event the impact of the Swāmī, though powerful, was short-lived: he died in 1902, by which time the Indian national movement was about to pass into a decisive new phase. Up to this point, the symbols around which the movement had gathered had been of less than national—and certainly far from universal—significance. Plagued, not for the first time, by the spectres of national disunity and "communalism", leaders had already begun to realise that if the common people (as opposed to the Western-educated élite) were ever to be enlisted as active, and not merely as passive, patriots, it would be necessary to rally them

[4] Cf. Farquhar 1909, 813 ff.
[5] Cf. Farquhar 1915, 208 ff.
[6] Cf. Dayanand Sarasvati 195 ff, 327 ff.
[7] Cf. Ghanananda, 7 ff, 106 ff.
[8] Ghose 1972 *b*, 37 (*Karmayogin,* June 26, 1909), and cf. Sharpe, 155 f.
[9] Cf. Devdas, Nalini, 31 ff, who argues that there were indeed considerable differences between the teachings of master and disciple, due not least to Vivekananda's exposure to Western ideas.

around some banner, some transcendental cause, which would overcome and nullify their differences of language, caste, culture and occupation. Again Aurobindo Ghose may serve as the spokesman of the new spirit. As early as 1893 he was writing that Congress was "a body not popular and not honestly desirous of a popular character";[10] at the same time the only possible springs of a national movement worthy of the name were being systematically ignored:

"The proletariate among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariate—now that the middle class is proved deficient in sincerity, power and judgment—with that proletariate resides, whether we like it or not, our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future."[11]

The problem, in short, was how to mobilise the proletariat, to bring its "very great potential force" to bear on the destiny of the new India.[12]

It was in this connection that a series of deliberate and conscious attempts were made by nationalist politicians to enlist the support of the common people of India by appealing to the world of symbols and myths by which their everyday lives were lived. I believe this to have been from the very first a political movement, conceived and executed as a matter of immediate expediency. In time, certainly, the Hindu revival was able to shake off some (though not all) of these early influences; but in the beginning—that is, up to about 1910—it was motivated to a very great extent by the need to make nationalists of the common people, and by the no less pressing need to reject that particular brand of nationalism—Western and secular—practised by the Indian National Congress.

One of the earliest attempts to enlist such popular support was made in 1895 by Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the Maratha country.[13] Tilak's device was to elevate the figure of Śivaji, a Maratha chieftain of the late seventeenth century who had led his countrymen in their resistance to Muslim invaders, into a hero of the new national awakening, and to this end to institute a festival in his name. The purpose was precisely that of rousing the masses; it was reasonably successful. The political dimension of the Śivaji festival was, however, scarcely hidden; as a later commentator noted shrewdly,

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[10] Ghose 1972*a*, 43 (*Indu Prakash,* December 4, 1893).
[11] Ib., 44 (*Indu Prakash,* December 4, 1893).
[12] Cf. ib., 55 (*Indu Prakash,* March 6, 1894).
[13] Cf. Shay, 53 ff.

"Those who are prone to condemn Tilak because of his organising celebrations of Shivaji's birthday, may well bear in mind, that in countries where political training of the people is almost neglected, some such expedient may be necessary to arouse the illiterate masses to vigorous political action."[14]

The really significant words here are, I feel, "some such expedient may be necessary [. . .]".

Perhaps the Śivaji movement was religious only by implication. But Tilak made wide use of religious language in his appeals to the people of India. For instance (and here we anticipate slightly) we find him turning to the Bhagavad Gītā for support in the matter of Śivaji's assassination of the Muslim general Afzul Khan. "Did Shivaji", he asked, "commit a sin in killing Afzul Khan? The Divine Krishna teaching in the Gita tells us we may kill even our teachers and kinsmen, and no blame attaches if we are not actuated by selfish desires [. . .]"[15] Śivaji was, in other words, qualified as a leader of men in part because he was a student of the Gītā and a devotee of the Lord Krishna—an attitude which brings us to the first of the two main areas of our concern: the Vaishnava symbol of the *avatāra*.

In Bengal, where the focus of the national movement was to be found, the Vaishnava element was to be found more in the lower than in the middle or upper classes, the higher castes tending to be Śaiva or Śakta rather than Vaishnava.[16] The most important Vaishnava tradition in this area down to about the 1880's was whatever remained of the influence of Krishna Chaitanya, reinforced from time to time by the influence of some individual devotee—such as Ramakrishna or Keshub Chandra Sen—though in these cases there was no real pattern of exclusive devotion to Krishna.[17]

The first impulse toward what has been called the Neo-Krishna movement was, it seems, literary, as certain gifted Bengali writers turned afresh to the Krishna tradition, and produced works extolling the character and achievements of Krishna. Foremost among these was the father of the Bengali renaissance, Bankim Chandra Chatterji; another writer of im-

[14] Bannerjea, 189. Cf. Tilak, 48 f, Chirol, 45.

[15] Quoted in Chirol, 46f. But Tilak, 48f, was also forced to add that "It is not preached nor is it to be expected that the methods adopted by Shivaji should be adopted by the present generation [. . .]."

[16] Cf. Farquhar 1903, 67.

[17] Cf. Farquhar 1915, 294.

portance was Nobin Chandra Sen.[18] There followed many works in which the character of Krishna was depicted and his deeds were retold; and devotional works, such as "The Imitation of Sree Krishna".

The nationalist dimensions of some of this early writing were implicit, rather than explicit; but it was not long before it came to be recognised that the symbol of Krishna as an *avatāra* could serve a nationalist, as well as a devotional, purpose. Here the primary source was the passage in Book IV of the Bhagavad Gītā in which Krishna is represented as saying:

"Though unborn and immutable in essence, though Lord (*Īśvara*) of beings, yet governing Nature which is mine, I come into being by my delusive power (*ātmamāyayā*). For whensoever right (*dharma*) declines, O Bhārata, and wrong (*adharma*) uprises, then I create myself. To guard the good and to destroy the wicked and to confirm the right (*dharma*), I come into being in this age and in that (*yuge-yuge*)."[19]

But the Gītā is only one of the sources in which the character of Krishna is delineated; and for the purposes of popular devotion it had hitherto been overshadowed by the Bhāgavata and Vishnu Purāṇas. The early Bengali literature we have mentioned was eclectic in its use of source material, drawing from each impartially; but by the end of the century there came to be a widespread replacement of the Purāṇas by the Gītā, not least among the classes from which the nationalists came.

The first reason for this was simply that the Gītā was of a convenient size, at least when compared with the vast Purāṇas, and could therefore be marketed cheaply and sold widely. We may recall in addition that there was by this time a new reading class—the students and ex-students—and it was to these that the Gītā was offered. The masses, of course, continued to receive their teaching from the Purāṇas and Epics orally, rather than through the printed page. But there were very cogent reasons why the Gītā should have been made available to the intellectuals. One was in order to counteract the already widespread and intensive influence of Christian missionary literature, directed at this class.[20] As a result, an intellectual dimension was added to what had previously been a strikingly emotional form of devotion.

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[18] Cf. Farquhar 1903, 71: "Nobin Ch. Sen seems to have been the first to conceive the idea of a modern rendering of the character of Krishna; for he laid the project before some of his friends in 1882."

[19] *Bhagavad Gītā* 4, 6–8.

[20] Cf. Sharpe, 194 ff.

The second major reason for the popularity of the Gītā was connected with the nature of the *avatāra* of Krishna as revealed in the Gītā, again when compared to that of the Purāṇas. In the Purāṇas, Krishna was shown as something of a Trickster, a mischievous youth who delighted in his supernormal powers. In the Gītā he could be seen as a leader of men, a powerful personality, a warrior, a philosopher-politician. In a word, the Krishna of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa had traditionally appealed to women; the Krishna of the Gītā appealed directly to men, and therefore also to budding politicians.

The third reason was a matter of content. The Gītā of course contained many strata of doctrine, but it was and is arguable that its central teaching was the doctrine of *nishkāma karma,* or selfless endeavour. This was in the situation of the time the ideal complement to personal devotion to Krishna —a total commitment to the cause with which Krishna was himself identified, a commitment which did not aim at personal rewards or personal profit, a commitment to the restoration of *dharma*. Other closely related political lessons derived from the Gītā included the notion (used by Tilak, as we have seen) that one might legitimately slay even one's kinsmen in the execution of one's *dharma* without incurring guilt thereby.

Thus there emerged a string of political commentaries on the Gītā. But it was enough in many cases simply to display a picture of Krishna instructing Arjuna at Kurukshetra, the field of *dharma,* in order to convey the desired meaning.[21] This application did not escape the attention of the authorities, who came in the early revolutionary years to regard the Gītā as an anarchist manifesto, and to regard anyone possessing more than one copy as in all probability a revolutionary ringleader.[22]

Krishna was of course a traditional *avatāra*. But in these years attempts were even made to describe nationalism itself as an *avatāra,* most notably by Aurobindo Ghose, the most consistent and thoughtful of the religio-political leaders of the period before 1910. Here we may take Aurobindo's Bombay speech of 1908 as an illustration.[23]

This speech, on "The Present Situation", has been called "a startling declaration of the religious significance of Indian nationalism";[24] it is a mag-

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[21] As with Aurobindo Ghose's journal *Karmayogin*; similarly the revolutionary paper *Juguntur* had *Bhagavad Gītā* 4, 7 as its motto.

[22] Cf. Ronaldshay, 126.

[23] Cf. Singh, 150.

[24] *Sources,* 176.

nificent example of political hyperbole: but it is more, since its main aim was to convince a wide public that nationalism was more than just a political movement, that it was of divine provenance, in fact.

"Nationalism is not going to be crushed. Nationalism survives in the strength of God and it is not possible to crush it, whatever weapons are brought against it. Nationalism is immortal; Nationalism cannot die, because it is no human thing, it is God who is working in Bengal. God cannot be killed, God cannot be sent to jail."[25]

There follows a direct appeal to the Vaishnava avatāra tradition. Every avatāra was ordained as a self-manifestation of the Supreme in a given situation to save the world from chaos and *adharma*. To the nationalist, *adharma* was manifested everywhere in the activities of the British: on all sides there were forces set up in opposition to the nationalists. Thus: "As in the ancient time, when the Avatars came, there were also born the mightiest Daityas and Asuras to face the Avatars, so it always is."[26] From this point it is the shortest of steps to the statement that the latest incarnation of the Supreme, come once more to restore Dharma to the world, is—nationalism. To his audience Aurobindo was therefore able to say:

"You see a movement which no obstacle can stop, you see a development which no power can resist, you see the birth of the Avatar in the nation [...]."[27]

And then, in a supremely evocative passage, Aurobindo binds together the avatāra of nationalism with the best-known and most popular of avatāras, that of Sri Krishna: but not the warrior of the Gītā, the statesman-philosopher; but instead to the pastoral, peasant Krishna of the Srīmad Bhāgavatam. The implication is that in some way the avatāra is linked with the peasantry; perhaps the avatāra *is* the peasantry, the proletariat, still slumbering in political innocence in Vrindaban, but soon to awaken in power.

The work will go on, says Aurobindo,

"[...] until Sri Krishna, who has now hid himself in Gokul, who is now among the poor and the despised of the earth, who is now among the cowherds of Brindaban, will declare the Godhead, and the whole nation will rise, filled with divine power, filled with the inspiration of the Almighty, and no power on earth shall resist it [...]."[28]

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[25] Ghose 1948, 8f.
[26] Ib., 30.
[27] Ib., 33.
[28] Ib., 34.

For reasons which we cannot enter into here, in August 1908 Aurobindo was arrested, and spent the better part of a year at Alipur; that the experience was for him both traumatic and formative is obvious enough. For one thing, it was in a way a nationalist politician's necessary initiation. But it was for Aurobindo an initiation in another, more religious, sense, and left a profound mark on the way in which he was in future to apply Hindu teaching to his nationalist calling.

Aurobindo's vision, of which he gave an account in a celebrated speech in May 1909, began with the perusal of the Gita: "Then He placed the Gita in my hands. His strength came into me and I was able to do the Sadhana of the Gita."[29] Aurobindo was brought to the realisation that "the Hindu religion" was not only "true"; it was life itself, and as such the property of the whole of mankind. He saw Krishna-Vasudeva in all things, even the Prosecuting Counsel; and he received the message that more was involved than the clash of secular powers:

> "I am in the nation and its uprising and I am Vasudeva, I am Narayana, and what I will, shall be, not what others will. What I choose to bring about, no human power can stay."[30]

And then comes the final confession on Aurobindo's part that all his doubts have vanished, and that he is convinced of the universality of the Sanātana Dharma. He concludes:

> "I say no longer that nationalism is a creed, a religion, a faith; I say that it is the Sanatan Dharma which for us is nationalism. This Hindu nation was born with the Sanatan Dharma, with it it moves and with it it grows [. . .]. The Sanatan Dharma, that is nationalism."[31]

Thus the vision of the avatāra has in a sense pointed beyond itself, to the world on the stage of which the drama was being played out, and Indian nationalism has given place to Hindu universalism. But we cannot follow this particular transition further on this occasion. We must move on, to the second of the major groups of symbols pressed into national service, that centring on the concept of śakti.

The position with which we shall be concerned now was as follows: that

[29] Ghose 1972*b*, 3 (The Uttarpara Speech, May 30, 1909).
[30] Ib., 6.
[31] Ib., 10.

the Motherland is Divine, being known by a variety of names—Kali, Durga, Bhawani, Sarasvati—and that whoever offers worship to any of these goddesses is a worshipper and servant of the Motherland as śakti, as the creative power of Deity, and hence an "anonymous patriot". It is unnecessary in this context to trace the roots of the worship of the Mother in the Indian context, except perhaps to say that it is a natural form of religion for an agrarian people, and had deep roots throughout India. From the Indus Culture to present-day peasant piety, it has been a constant feature of the Indian situation.

As far as our present purposes are concerned, the patriotic worship of the motherland was perhaps to begin with a local Bengali expression of *Nationalromantik,* appropriately expressed in the pages of a popular novel. But in a short space of time it was to ally itself to much deeper religious and political impulses and instincts.

Bankim Chandra Chatterji is today credited with having more than any other individual raised the Bengali language from a coarse vernacular dialect to a language capable of giving expression to high sentiment and high literature.[32] Further, in his concentration on the past, and not least the spiritual past, of his people he has been compared to Sir Walter Scott; but he was no mere romantic antiquarian. To him nationality was a religion—not in any vaguely sentimental sense, but in the sense of being the focus of his every thought and action; and it was he who provided the movement, in the years around the turn of the century, with one of its most powerful and evocative revolutionary symbols. There is a slight touch of irony about this, since Bankim Chandra himself is said to have believed revolutions to be "very generally processes of self-torture".[33]

Bankim Chandra's most famous novel, *Ananda Math* (The Abbey of Bliss, 1882)[34] tells a story of the so-called "Sannyasi Rebellion" of the 1770's, a local manifestation of what Farquhar has called "the fighting ascetics of India", finally suppressed by Warren Hastings.[35] In this romanticised version of the story, the sannyasis are called "the Children", i.e., children of the Motherland, who is variously called Jagaddhatri, Kali, Durga,

[32] Cf. Dutt, 227 ff, Ronaldshay, 105.
[33] Ronaldshay, 106.
[34] Translated into English by Sen-Gupta, 1906.
[35] Cf. Farquhar 1925, 18.

Lakshmi, Sarasvati and Bhawani (the latter the name of the goddess to whom the Thags sacrificed their victims, incidentally). Their headquarters are in a remote monastery called *Ananda Math,* in which there are separate temples to Jagaddhatri, the Motherland as she was; Kali, the Motherland as she is today; and Sarasvati, the Motherland as she would become. When the hero of the story is asked when and under what conditions the Mother would show herself in this final form, he is told, "When all the children of the Mother learn to call her so."

There are many reasons why Bankim Chandra's novel captured the imagination of young Bengal towards the turn of the century, but the limits of this present paper do not permit further analysis on this point. Suffice it to say that it came to serve as a paradigm of national sentiment, and to some extent of national practice. It is also worth remembering that it was in the pages of *Ananda Math* that Bankim Chandra placed his poem "Bande Mataram" (Hail to the Motherland!) which became the motto, the slogan and the anthem of the national movement, and assumed the character of a sacred *mantra*.

B. C. Pal and Aurobindo Ghose were among those who did most to apply the *śakti* symbolism of this novel to the national struggle, impressing on the readers of their journalism that in worshipping the great mother-goddess, Durga-Kali, they were taking part in a nationalist demonstration. This was a further measure whereby the proletariat were to be mobilised to national effort. For instance, the popular Durga Puja festival Aurobindo reinterpreted on nationalist lines, calling it a "national festival" and claiming that it could be understood only by a "patriot".[36] But Aurobindo's identification with the theme of the worship of the Mother, and with the general atmosphere of *Ananda Math,* went further.

Of uncertain date, but apparently written before 1906, is Aurobindo's manifesto entitled "Bhawani Mandir" (The Temple of the Mother).[37] This is a purely political treatise, and appears to announce the formation of a company of nationally-minded revolutionary ascetics, clearly based upon the prototype of "the Children" in *Ananda Math,* and dedicated, like them, to the liberation of the motherland from the invader. It is a moot point whether this order ever actually existed, but that is not the main issue; of more importance is the language of piety in which the manifesto is worded.

[36] Ghose 1948, 149.
[37] Cf. Ghose 1972*a*, 59ff.

It begins by stating that "A temple is to be erected and consecrated to Bhawani, the Mother, among the hills".[38] The Mother has already been known in various ways, as Love, Knowledge, Renunciation, Pity and Infinite Energy, and known by both Vaishnavas and Shaivas: "She also is Durga, She is Kali, She is Radha the Beloved, She is Lakshmi, She is our Mother and the Creatress of us all."[39] But she is also Bhawani, and once more we recall the sinister connection with the Thags. In the present age, the document went on, the chief manifestation of the Mother is as Power, as "pure Shakti": she is known in her various forms as the Shakti of War, of Wealth, and of Science. But these are the Shaktis of the foreigners in the land; they are "Mleccha Shaktis", and are therefore to be shunned. Instead India needs Arya Shaktis, manifestations of power which are not copies either of England or (significantly, in view of the events of the time) of Japan. For the nation of India is herself the greatest of Shaktis:

"For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty Shakti, composed of the Shaktis of all the millions of units that make up the nation [...] The Shakti we call India, Bhawani Bharati, is the living unit of the Shaktis of three hundred million people."[40]

The realisation that India had this immense power at her disposal came first, the manifesto continues, from Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda—and at this point one hears echoes of Vivekānanda's celebrated address to the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions.[41] The Rāmakrishna–Vivekānanda message was, in short, that man is divine. Rāmakrishna taught India *bhakti,* Vivekānanda *jñāna:* together they set an example to demonstrate that India must send forth "[...] the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies [...]"[42] But significantly, although Ramakrishna taught such a unity of religions, "[...] it was Kali, who is Bhawani, Mother of strength whom Ramakrishna worshipped and with whom he became one."[43]

The political call therefore is for a revival of religion, for a reversal of the Western imposed process of secularisation, for it is in religion that India's real strength is to be found. To follow, as Congress had been attempting to do, a Western path of constitutional debate and gradual development in

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[38] Ib., 61.
[39] Ib.
[40] Ib., 65.
[41] Cf. Sharpe, 155, Sarma, 153.
[42] Ghose 1972*a*, 68.
[43] Ib.

the direction of self-determination, was to involve India in a game which she had no chance of ever winning. India must turn afresh to religion, for the sake of her future:

> "All great awakenings in India, all her periods of mightiest and most varied vigour have drawn their vitality from the fountainheads of some deep religious awakening. Wherever the religious awakening has been complete and grand, the national energy it has created has been gigantic and puissant; wherever the religious movement has been narrow and incomplete, the national movement has been broken, imperfect or temporary."[44]

Up to this point what we have seen has been a conscious attempt on the part of an enthusiastic minority of young Bengali intellectuals to mobilise the Indian proletariat by interpreting some of their most powerful and pervasive symbols in terms of the Indian national awakening. But we should be unwise to assume this to have been in any sense a mass movement. It is hard to obtain firm evidence of the actual response which these efforts aroused among the proletariat at whom they were aimed, though one's general impression is that they appealed largely to a small group, an educated elite who saw things more or less as Bepin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghose saw them. The British administrators for their part viewed the whole movement with intense (and from their point of view justified) suspicion; while even among Hindus, and Bengalis, there were those who believed that this particular venture in counter-secularisation was completely misconceived. Foremost among these was Rabindra Nath Tagore.

The source of the trouble, in Tagore's view, was precisely the concept of the nation, which he once defined as "the aspect of a whole people as an organised power".[45] This he considered to be an error of the West, a symptom of a sickness, a failure to see mankind as a whole, to understand the other person's point of view, or to place the affairs of India in the larger context of humanity. To accept Western ideals of nationalism, he considered, would be simply to deny India's cultural heritage, not to affirm it.

It is perhaps worth noting at this point that many of the nationalists Tagore had in mind were Bengali, rather than Indian, nationalists, whose horizons scarcely stretched even to the whole of India. But Tagore's criticism of the West as being the heartland of national sentiment was entirely justi-

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[44] Ib.

[45] Tagore 1918, 110.

fied. A curious bypath of our study might have been to ask what the West *expected* of India in these years, not least since there had come to be much theorising about the importance of "national heritage", *das Volkstum* and *volkstümlich* in certain quarters in the West.

Tagore's reactions to the phenomenon of nationalism are to be found, first, in his book *Nationalism,* from which we have already quoted, but secondly and more powerfully in a novel, "The Home and the World", set in the *swadeshi* agitations of the period 1905–1908, though published a decade later. Space does not permit an analysis of this fascinating book, but mention must be made of one of its central characters, the politician Sandip, who is made to say:

"I have long been nursing a plan which, if only I could carry it out, would set fire to the whole country. True patriotism will never be roused in our countrymen unless they can visualise the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. My colleagues saw the point at once. 'Let us devise an appropriate image!' I admonished them. 'We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country—the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep-cut grooves of custom.''[46]

If dishonesty is involved in the creation of this symbol, what does it matter? The needs of *Realpolitik* are the important thing, and dreams (like visions) are useful devices in reinforcing such steps as Sandip was contemplating:

"I will spread it abroad [says Sandip] that the goddess has vouchsafed me a dream. I will tell the Brahmins that they have been appointed her priests, and that their downfall has been due to their dereliction of duty in not seeing to the proper performance of her worship. Do you say I shall be uttering lies? No, say I, it is the truth—nay more, the truth which the country has so long been waiting to learn from my lips."[47]

And he goes on to say that as far as the past of Bengal is concerned,

"I can swear that Durga is a political goddess and was conceived in the image of the *Shakti* of patriotism [. . .].'[48]

Whoever may have been the prototype of Sandip in Tagore's mind (a question which it is difficult to discuss), there would seem to be little doubt that

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[46] Tagore 1919, 183f.

[47] Ib., 186.

[48] Ib., 187.

Tagore is here criticising precisely the type of use of the *śakti* symbol that we have outlined, as a device of the "religious nationalism" employed in order to ensure the support of the Śaiva element among the people of Bengal for the nationalist cause.

Was this then dishonest? Whatever our final judgment may be, Tagore at all events seems to have thought so. In conclusion, therefore, we may quote one final passage from "The Home and the World". Again Sandip is speaking, this time reflecting on the enormous popular support which his manipulation of words and ideas and the minds of men was in process of bringing him:

"This is hypnotism indeed—the charm which shall subdue the world! No materials, no weapons—but just the delusion of irresistible suggestion. Who says 'Truth shall triumph' Delusion shall win in the end. The Bengali understood this when [during the period of Muslim domination] he conceived the image of the ten-handed goddess astride her lion, and spread her worship in the land. Bengal must now create a new image to enchant and conquer the world. *Bande Mataram*!"[49]

Writers of the period were haphazard in their use of diacritical marks. In this paper I have spelt Indian words as they appear in the sources, and used diacritical marks sparingly. Where there are conventional Anglicised spellings (e.g. Krishna, Tagore), I have used these.

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