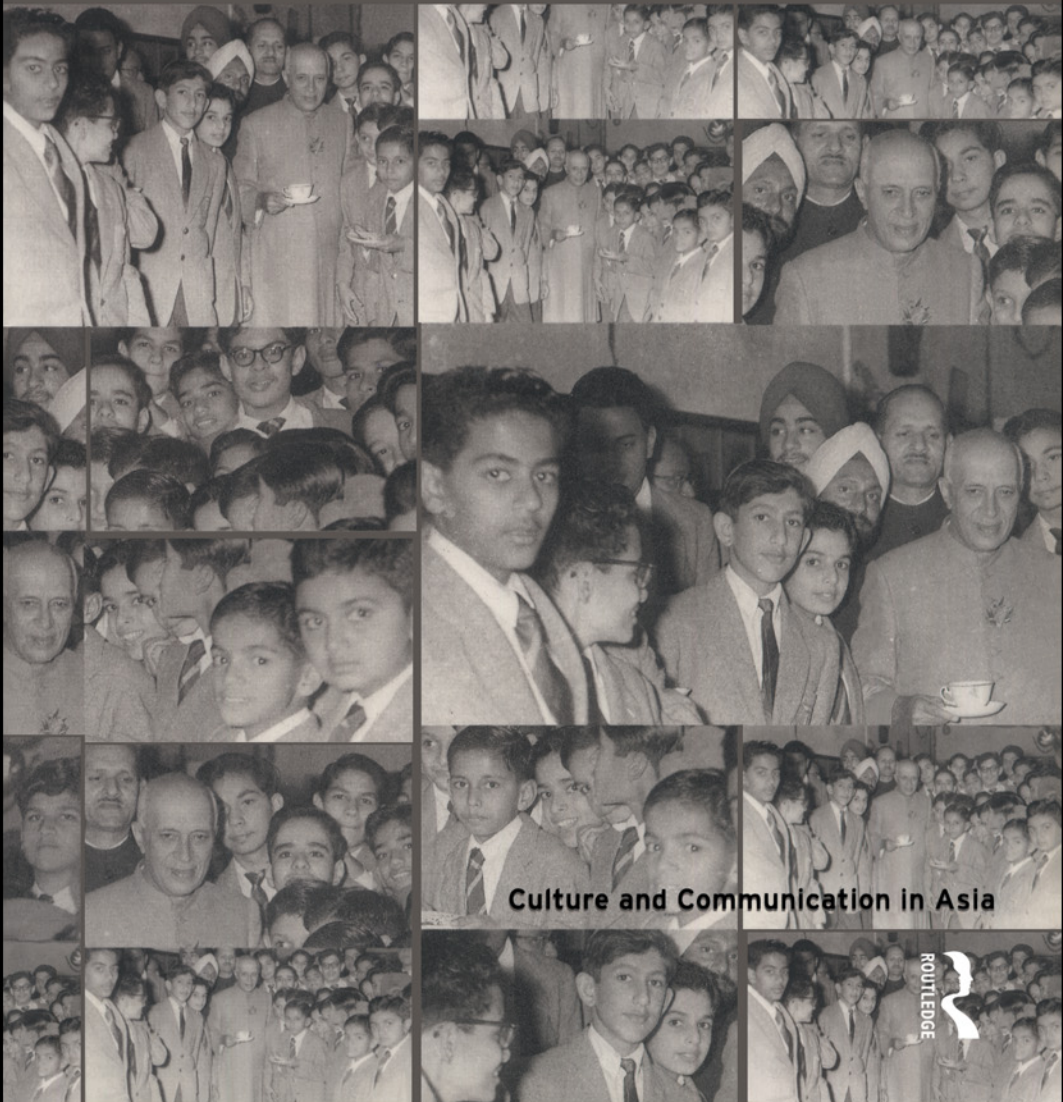




Constructing Post-Colonial India

National Character and the Doon School

Sanjay Srivastava



Culture and Communication in Asia

ROUTLEDGE

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Constructing Post-Colonial India

The Doon School, a famous boarding school for boys in India, inculcates in its students the notion that to be post-colonial is to be rational, secular, and metropolitan. The School numbers many of India's political, social, and intellectual elite among its former students; its code of conduct for the modern Indian citizen has been extremely influential.

In this detailed and engaging study, Sanjay Srivastava digs deep to find the roots of the ideological construction of post-coloniality in India. The Doon School is the site of his analysis but his work ranges far beyond the School itself. He uses historical sources, ethnographic fieldwork, and perspectives from cultural theory to question the prevailing theoretical positions of post-colonial studies, arguing that post-coloniality is meaningless unless it is located in historical, social, and cultural space.

Sanjay Srivastava trained as a social anthropologist and is presently senior lecturer in the School of Literary and Communication Studies at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

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Constructing Post-Colonial India

National character and the Doon School

Sanjay Srivastava



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For my parents, and Radha and Ishana-Rahin

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Series editor's foreword

Critical scholarship in cultural and communication studies world-wide has resulted in an increased awareness of the need to reconsider some of the more traditional research practices and theoretical/analytic domains of arts, humanities and social science disciplines, towards a recognition of the differing imperatives of what critical studies of culture and communication might look like in an Asian context. The demands for research materials, undergraduate textbooks and postgraduate monographs grow and expand with this increased critical awareness, while developments across the world continue to recognise the need to situate work in communication and cultural studies on and in Asia within a more global framework.

This series is designed to contribute to those demands and recognition. It is aimed at looking in detail at cultural and communication studies from critical perspectives which take into account different 'Asian' imperatives. In particular, it focuses on work written by scholars either living in or working on the region, who have specific interests in opening up new agendas for what constitutes critical communication and cultural studies within and about Asia. The overall aims of the series are to present new work, new paradigms, new theoretical positions, and new analytic practices of what might often be traditional and well-established communication and cultural activities and discourses.

The theoretical direction of the series is principally targeted at establishing these new agendas and by critically reflecting upon the appropriateness, or otherwise, of theories and methodologies already well established, or developing, in cultural and communication studies across the world. Having said this, however, the series is not aimed at producing a monolithic blueprint for what constitutes critical cultural and communication studies in or about Asia. Nor is there a specific agenda for what the series might consider to be an appropriate critical cultural and communication studies for Asia.

The series is not, therefore, designed to create an orthodoxy for 'Asian' communication and cultural studies, but to open up new ways of thinking and rethinking contemporary cultural and communication practice and analysis in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The series is aimed to counter, as much as possible, those essentialising processes of colonialisation, marginalisation, and erasure, which have taken place in the past by the unproblematised imposition of western theory upon cultures, societies, and practices within, and on behalf of, Asia.

Many of the books in this series may not necessarily fit comfortably into traditional disciplines and paradigms of Asian studies of cultural and communication studies, and nor are they intended to. The main aim of the series is for all of its books to argue for a diversification and opening up of existing theoretical positions and specific discourses

across a wide range of texts, practices, and cultures. All of the books in the series will be positioned to argue persuasively for the development of studies in culture and communication which are able to frame critical commentary through theoretical and analytic practices informed first and foremost by a concern with Asian cultures and discourse.

The series has as its fundamental premise a position which argues that analysts can no longer operate as neutral, disinterested, observers of some 'reality' which supposedly pre-exists the discourses that they are analysing. To be critical necessarily means to be self-reflexive. In that sense, then, the series is designed to position cultural and communication studies in and about Asia as critical disciplines which require, within their own practices, an approach to developing some sort of praxis that enables the work that we do as analysts to contribute significantly to political, social, and cultural discourses and awareness, at the local, regional, and global levels.

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Some of the chapters in this work have appeared in earlier versions in: *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Social Analysis*, *Social Semiotics*, *South Asia*, and *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*.

Introduction: the seductions of capital

Of all the seductions capital could offer post-coloniality, that of a new *cultural* identity was perhaps the most sumptuous. And, with further largesse, the combined enterprise between capital and post-coloniality hummed the incantatory tones of an additional promise: the manufacture of the immortal community, the nation. This book seeks to explore the cultural elaboration in the Indian context of certain cross-cultural phenomena of our time: it is concerned with the minutiae of post-coloniality in general, and the 'nation-building' project in particular. The underlying analytical focus is the manner of articulation of a regime of post-colonial capital with the cultural-politics of post-coloniality.

And, though the focus of this study is an Indian public school ('public', in the contrary British sense of 'private'), my chief interest does not lie in the mechanics of the classroom or in that stream of the sociology of education concerned with innovations in pedagogical methods. My primary intent, above everything else, is to provide an ethnography of Indian modernity. I lay no claims to attempt to 'speak in the "objective" voice of history' (Chatterjee 1986:52), nor to the 'dispassionate' demeanour of a 'scientific' attitude; for what follows constitutes a *political* engagement with politico-cultural assemblages which challenge us to take sides. The intellectual and ethical inspiration for the spirit of this engagement has come from many sources. It is admirably summarised, however, by Partha Chatterjee's comment that:

The critical analysis of nationalist thought is also necessarily an intervention in a political discourse of our own time.... Thus analysis itself becomes politics; interpretation acquires the undertone of a polemic. In such circumstances, to pretend to speak in the 'objective' voice of history is to dissimulate. By marking our own texts with the signs of battle, we [may] go a little further towards a more open and self-aware discourse.

(Chatterjee 1986:52)

I do not, then, claim this work to be an anthropology, sociology or history of an entire society, but only of a section of that society. The subject matter of this book—post-coloniality, modernity, citizenship—is part of the discourse of a narrow segment of the Indian population and my focus is on that segment; though small in numbers, this segment has played an important role in manufacturing representations of 'India' in the contemporary period. Further, given that to speak of representations is to speak of a

contested field of social facts—about the career of truths rather than truth itself—Aijaz Ahmad's recent caveat may serve as an epigraph to the argument of this book. To think of the portrait of rulers as a portrait of the country itself, Ahmad says, 'is an error...not only of politics...but also of the social imagination' (Ahmad 1994:151).

In 1974, Alfred de Souza, author of an 'intensive sociological study' of Indian public schools, noted that his study was 'the first of its kind' in as much as it attempted to present, 'on the basis of empirical data, a systematic and comprehensive sociological analysis of Indian public schools' (de Souza 1974:8). De Souza hoped to 'avoid polemical considerations' and concentrate, instead, on 'the central purpose' of his study—which was to 'explain in sociological terms the social and cultural structure of [Indian] public schools as elite institutions of secondary education, and to discuss their relationship with the wider society of which they form a part' (*ibid.*). On several counts, the objects of my own study differ considerably from those that animated de Souza's research. Not least of these is his implied stricture against 'polemical considerations'. For, the institution which is the focus of my study, the Doon School, owes its existence to a vehemence of political manoeuvres on the part of the state, and a ferocity of cultural rhetoric on the part of individuals which make any attempt to skirt the eddies of 'polemical considerations' an intellectually meaningless exercise; that is the task of gracious biographies and pliant histories.

My interest lies in exploring the cultural constructions of a *specific* post-colonised civil society in India: in issues of the image of the 'ideal' citizen for the age of modernity. By implication, then, I am also interested in identities consigned to the margins of the realm of modernity; those cast from the estates of 'progress' and 'rationality'. I understand the term 'civil society' both in the political spirit in which Pateman (1989) speaks of it as that public sphere constituted through patriarchal discourses, and in a sense which is perhaps peculiar to post-colonised societies such as India; for there, the civil is also the metropolitan (versus the provincial), the English-speaking and reading (versus the vernacular world, hence 'post-colonial literature' is both the signifier of post-British rule literature as well as civil society itself), and the religiously neutral or 'secular' (versus the 'fundamentalist'). To comprehend civil society in this manner is to attempt to track the gendered, class- and caste-specific narrative of post-coloniality in India. This book is concerned with analysing the nationalist dialogue—both as theory and practice—of the liberal intelligentsia, and the Doon School as one of the 'salons' for such a dialogue. My use of the term 'intelligentsia' is a culturally delimited one and refers to the milieu of the post-colonised urban space.¹ In my discussion I posit an explicit differentiation between two kinds of intelligentsia: between the discrete worlds, both culturally and linguistically, of the metropolitan, English-speaking groups on the one hand and of the provincial, vernacularbased group on the other. And though my explicit concern is with the discursive universe of the former, the analysis is fundamentally concerned with the implicit interaction between the two worlds.

The Doon School ('the School'/'Doon'), a North Indian public school located in the city of Dehra Dun in Uttar Pradesh, is an important site of construction of the 'modern' Indian citizen. Its historical and political significance lies both in the formidable 'nationalist' credentials of its *dramatis personae* as well as in the eloquence, clarity, and resolution of its dialogue on nationhood. It has served as the palimpsest of a rejuvenated, wilful nationhood, whose anthem was inscribed firmly upon the faded forms of an effete

past, forced to yield to the dictates of a vigorous ‘new’ science of personality. For it is as the lexicon of personality—the omnipotence of agency—that the School’s charter of ‘nation-building’ should be understood.

The fieldwork on which this research is based was carried out during 1989–93 and consisted of residence on the campuses of the Doon School, the Mayo College (Ajmer) and the Lawrence School (Sanawar, Himachal Pradesh), and meetings and interviews with a wide cross-section of people connected with these institutions. Further, this work is an attempt to combine ethnographic research with historically and ‘textually’ orientated analysis. And, though Doon is the primary focus of analysis, the other two schools also figure in the discussion in the book. Doon is a fully residential boys’ school and though it revels in the description of an ‘all India school’, its clientele is largely North Indian. Despite the fact that the School charges a high fee in comparison to private day schools, demand for admissions—favourable throughout its sixty-odd years of existence—continues to grow, and intending parents are advised to ‘register’ their child at birth for future admission. Boys are admitted at age ten or over in class VI or at eleven or over in class VII and ‘are expected to spend six or seven years in School before they pass out after standard XII’.² Students are accommodated in different ‘Houses’, as the hostels are referred to, and the five main Houses are named in honour of some of the School’s benefactors.³ The Indian Public Schools Society (IPSS) formed by the founder of the Doon School, S.R.Das, and conceived by him as a vehicle for establishing a number of public schools in India, administers the School.

Doon is a member of the Indian Public Schools Conference (IPSC), established to represent the interests and define the ‘essential character of public schools’ (de Souza 1974:24) in India. In June 1939, the Headmasters of four private North Indian schools met in Simla to discuss, *inter alia*, ‘the problems of residential schools, the formation of an association, the inadequate provision for examinations in Indian languages by the Cambridge Syndicate, and a memorandum to be submitted to the Army Indianisation Committee of the Central Legislative Assembly’.⁴ The most concrete result of their deliberations, chaired by the then Educational Commissioner with the Government of India, John Sargent, was the formation of the IPSC. The Conference, whose current membership includes over fifty public schools, was modelled on a similar association of public schools in England.

The leading lights of the IPSC at its formation were the British Headmasters of what were then known as Chiefs’ Colleges, established for the sons and wards of princely families (see Chapter 2). The men who established the Conference:

endeavoured to adapt the good things of British public school life and administration to Indian ways of life and thought and so build up public or residential schools in India with their roots springing from the culture of the country, fertilised by the experiences of residential school life in the UK.

(Handbook 1964)

To qualify as a ‘public school’, then, a school must be elected a member of the Indian Public Schools Conference. To qualify for membership, it must ‘comply with a set of technical criteria relating to the academic freedom of the headmaster, conditions of

service of the staff, facilities for games and extracurricular activities, and residential accommodation for a certain proportion of the student body' (de Souza 1974:2). Among the work conditions for teaching staff which characterise public schools is the facility of free education for their children (so there is a handful of girl students at Doon), and accommodation on campus at a nominal rent. The overwhelming majority of the membership of the IPSC, reflecting the predominance of boys' public schools in India, consists of all-male schools.

British manners, colonial mirrors, and post-colonial dreams

Historically, the public school in its Indian incarnation has been more than just the site of a narrow curriculum for its local proponents: it represented a *novum organum* for the 'total' transformation of a 'people'; a processing sieve to distil and absorb the ethos of a new age, the Age of Reason with its 'ethic' of Rationality. 'Reasoned' and 'rational' existence was, in turn, that which was tuned to the cadence of the regime of capital.

For the British advocates of the colonial public school, however, there were added meanings to these implants in colonial spaces. Along with several other manifestations of the cultural politics of the Empire, the colonial public school functioned as an indicator of the potency, the vigour, and the inventive superiority of an island and a culture separated from its colonies by an oceanic barrier which was both navigable and impregnable according to need. And, just as Englishmen born and reared in the colony could quite often be regarded as inferior to their counterparts nurtured in an English environment, the colonial public schools' efforts at emulating the English ideal proceeded, at best, along an asymptotic curve. Its physical positioning within the complex matrix of a subject environment—subjugated both intellectually and physically—syllogistically ruled out any parity with the prototype. In British eyes these remained the instruments of a labour of civilising which must be carried out, though not with the expectation that it would lead to emulation of the ideal. Rather, the colonial public school would pay homage to the ideal through never quite attaining its standards, never quite replicating its milieu.

To the 'original', mimicry pays the homage of asymptotic effort towards realisation (see Bhabha 1984 for another formulation). It is the praise contained in the perceived debility of a liminal state of being (the valorisation of this state is, of course, part of a discourse of *our* time). And herein lay the appeal of the overseas public school to the British: an imitative culture pays obeisance to the declared original through both the fact of the initial act of imitation as well as through the ceaseless effort at attaining authenticity; the effort is ceaseless because it is unattainable. Public schools in the non-European colonies could, in a perverse sense, be said to have aroused even greater fondness among the British, for these could even less, for crippling reasons of race and climate, hope to impinge on the *beau idéal*.

With the style and the energy becoming of paladins of Empire, its chosen representatives indefatigably reiterated these messages of the immanent superiority of the centre. Thus, early this century the Rhodesia Scholarship Trust provided Montague J. Rendall, Headmaster of the English public school Winchester and a man committed to 'strengthening the spiritual growth of Empire' (Mangan 1986b:29), with the opportunity of articulating the intellectual and cultural hierarchy which extended from the centre to

the peripheries. In 1924 Rendall was funded by the Rhodesia Trust to undertake a tour of the Empire 'to review the method of selection of Rhodesia Scholars' (*ibid.*). The account of the journey unfolds along a centripetal trajectory, each observation reinforcing the irrevocable superiority of the 'mother' civilisation. And, if his evaluation of schools in the 'New World' is anything to go by, his unrecorded view of similar schools in the 'tropical' colonies may be gauged fairly accurately.

Rendall dismissed well-known Canadian schools such as the Upper Canada College, St Andrews, Toronto, and University School, Victoria, as being of low quality. A Tasmanian candidate for the Rhodesia Scholarship was described by him as a 'star of the commerce school', and he concluded his remarks on South African public schools and their students with the words that 'these schools are not meant for Mowgli' (*ibid.*: 32). Similar reservations were voiced at the state of affairs within that most prominent of cultural step-children, Australia. 'Culture is a plant of slow growth', Rendall argued, 'and is not easily inculcated (to take an example) in a squatters' son, who came to learn the elements at an Australian school as a new boy of twenty-seven' (*ibid.*).

The homage of the 'not quite' (Bhabha 1984) entities was a well-recognised one, and the state of amorphism was attributed to both colonial public schools and those who studied there. The normalising mission of these schools to the natives was always constrained, it was often noted, by some very real difficulties in the field. References to the approximate nature of the mission can be found in the prologues of 'the little ceremonies of the granting of grace' (Foucault 1979:179) which were a common feature of public school life in India. In his annual prize-giving address in 1926, the Principal of Mayo College in Rajasthan, a public school founded in 1875 for the education of princes, ⁵ noted that it was essential 'that the English element in the College should not be overwhelmed by numbers if we are to *approximate* to our ideal of turning out products something only *faintly approximate to the English Public School boy*, in acquirements and character' (*Mayo College Magazine* 1926. Emphasis added).

This was, then, the set of attitudes which formalised the relationship of the public school in England to those in the colonies. It reflected both the intellectual fervour of the age of Darwin and Bentham and the missionary imperatives of an ascendant Christianity. Both of these took on a special significance and inspired particular commitment to the public school project when the theatre of action was in the tropics. For, apart from being charged with the responsibility of acting as agent of transmission of British-Christian establishment culture, the public school in these regions also carried a more onerous responsibility. Its task was also to propagate sentiments of the 'natural' moral and cultural superiority of the ideas of the ruling 'race' among the frequently troublesome elite section of the native population. In India, these ideas of culture, morality, the cult of manliness, and the magical and immutable qualities of heredity, were, in turn, adopted and *adapted* by an indigenous intelligentsia towards its own circuits of power. The Doon School, the pre-eminent institution of its type in India, has played a crucial role in this process.

The national identity project in post-Independence India has largely been formulated and conducted by a relatively small group of political, social, and cultural functionaries. These may be characterised as the ideological heirs of the early nationalists who 'accepted as the basis for their thinking about the future of India many of the formulations of nineteenth century British liberalism' (Embree 1989:134). Indeed, the

spirited condemnation in the recent past by sections of the English-educated intelligentsia of the demolition of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya by certain Hindu organisations should, in addition to other factors, also be seen as a part of the national identity discourse. The 'Hindu fundamentalists' were attacked not merely because they raised the spectre of communal violence but also because they attempted to 'steal' the national identity agenda from its traditional custodians.

The opposition to Hindu militancy by sections of the 'secular' should not be seen simply in terms of the defence of the rights of religious minorities and of religious pluralism in general. For the Indian liberal discourse of 'secularism' is itself circumscribed by (as I will argue in Chapter 4) and permeated with a Hindu world view. The mosque-temple issue can also be understood as a contest on the cultural and ideological terrain between different groups, one defending its inherited dominant role in the national identity project against the other's encroachments upon it. To critique Enlightenment-inspired perspectives on the fundamentalists who are always 'out there' ('we' are always progressive) is not, however, the same thing as playing into the hands of religious bigotry as it far too often seems to be asserted (Chakrabarty 1995).

The Indian public school has been an indispensable adjunct to Indian liberalism, embodying and refining the philosophical grounds of its discourse. It is the central argument of this book that the construction of the urban post-colonial Indian identity owes a considerable debt, intellectually and philosophically, to one of the most comprehensively adapted of all British institutions in India—the public school; and that this identity has remained remarkably unfragmented across widely differing political positions (of the liberal-conservative and left-right kind), united through an abiding commitment to a modernist paradigm of being on the part of the intelligentsia of various shades. And further, that schools such as Doon have contributed to this, producing several generations of a post-Independence middle-class steeped in the boys'-own tales of the all-conquering, modernist, male hero, astride the white steed of Development Theory, the guardian of free-market, and the bridge-builder between a progressive West and a recalcitrantly regressive India. It is appropriate to note here, however, that my discussion treats the Doon School as prototypic, and one of the several sites of a particular type of citizenship project in India—rather than a singularly allpowerful institution. It is as an important *link* in a modernist discourse of class, gender, and national identity that I focus on Doon.

I must emphasise that I do not speak of a national identity project which sustains the interest of the majority of the population; my discussion is concerned, rather, with a section of the population for whom it is a consciously articulated concern, and one which has many avenues of public dialogue and dissemination. This public dialogue also seeks to establish a monopoly of the representation of 'citizenship' in the cultural loam of the post-colonised nation state. However, necessary as the analysis of colonial and post-colonial political and cultural ideas is to the study of contemporary Indian society (e.g. Viswanathan 1989), one is struck by the relative lack of critical attention paid to post-colonial *institutional sites* where such ideas find a conducive location for practical elaboration. The public school in India is one such site. To speak of actual sites (and not just metaphoric ones, though of course, 'actual sites' also have metaphoric dimensions) is also to attempt to move the debate away from a temporal regime towards an attention to the politics of 'the production of space' (Lefebvre 1994). The neglect of space as a

'historico-political problem' (Foucault 1980:149) in western scholarship, has come under increasing scrutiny, and this book, while it does not purport to be anything like the history of spaces Foucault suggests still 'remains to be written' (*ibid.*), is an attempt to engage the idea of spatialised analysis. Ideologies need spaces to anchor their abstractions in order to ground the fleeting figures of speech in an artefactual configuration that is then made to speak the self-referential language of proof and permanence. 'What would remain of a religious ideology—the Judaeo-Christian one, say—', Lefebvre asks, 'if it were not based on places and their names: church, confessional, altar, sanctuary, tabernacle? What would remain of the Church if there were no churches?' (Lefebvre 1994:44).

Nation and citizen: the dynamics of personality

The functioning of institutions can only meaningfully be understood as part of a wider system of symbolic activity and language where the articulation of their goals in the pragmatic vocabulary of every-day existence ('schools educate') and in the sacred language of transcendent goals ('for the good of society') both masks and unmasks the elaboration and consolidation of historically constituted positions and aspirations. It is this historical constitution of a cultural identity, and its political moorings, which is the focus of this study. I have already noted that my interest is not in the pedagogical practice *per se*, but rather in the post-colonised cultural terrain of which public schools in India are a part; the Doon School is the window which affords a view of the cultural politics of the post-colonised state, a daguerreotypic representation of its 'twists and turns, the suppressed possibilities, the contradictions still unresolved' (Chatterjee 1986:22). An important site of post-colonised liberalism and contemporaneous with the Indian nation state the Doon School is a précis of the larger treatise of post-coloniality.

Michael Young admonishes sociologists for forgetting that 'education is not a product like cars and bread, but a selection and organisation from the available knowledge at a particular time which involves conscious or unconscious choices' (Young 1971:24). It should also be said, however, that the cultural analysis of an education system in the post-colonial situation must be willing to 'leave school' and explore the annals of the nation state itself, and that the 'citizenship issue' here is of a different order from that encountered in colonising societies. For in the post-colonised situation the figure of the citizen is, in the first instance, a figure of *cultural* import, and only later the anthropomorphic reification of legality and order; that is, the constitutional subject. This is a consequence of the specificity of historical experience: for the 'national question [in post-colonial societies] is... historically fused with a colonial question.... The assertion of national identity was, therefore, a form of the struggle against colonial exploitation' (Chatterjee 1986:18).

In the Indian context, the citizen is a figure suspended in the wash of the nationalist skirmishes with the colonising power and the subsequent conversion of the nationalist project into post-colonial agendas of power and domination. In this, it bears the marks of a tension peculiar to post-colonised societies. For the nationalist struggle for an independent nation speaks the language of inclusiveness: all the members of the national entity are regarded as equals as citizens. Hence, at this point, 'the nationalist's claim is

that... backwardness...is not a character which is historically immutable: it can be transformed by the nation acting *collectively*' (Chatterjee 1986:50–1. Emphasis added). However, the struggle against the colonial power is waged on two fronts: direct political challenge to colonial authority, and the challenge to the *self*—to the 'native'—to 'improve', to become 'modern' so as to 'rightfully' claim his (*sic*) position as a free person, the citizen of a sovereign nation state.

It is through this second movement—dealing with the perceived problems of the native personality—that the citizen figure becomes embroiled in the cultural elaboration of post-colonised structures of power. For whereas the anti-colonial struggle requires the enlistment of mass support for its success, the emergence of the nation state leads to very specific ideas about who is and who is not part of the post-colonial civil society: women, 'tribals', and 'provincial' populations, among others, come to form the 'masses', who must be nurtured in the ways of public modern life before being allowed to join—or influence—the serious business of civil life. It is here that 'citizen' operates as a cultural category towards the delimitation of groups that have access to the largesse of the state and those who do not qualify. Now citizenship becomes the definition of exclusivity, and power becomes a function of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986), understood in both gendered and non-gendered ways. Also, the citizenship debate, guided by intellectual exertions of the liberal intelligentsia devoted to the production of the discourses of modernity, takes its place in the matrices of class and gender. It is a modest analysis of these discourses concerned with the cultural requirements of access to the privileges of the state that is the object of this book. For class relations 'which are not already cultural relations', as Connell puts it, 'are as mythical as the bunyip, and an equally bad basis for theory' (Connell 1980:41).

The Indian discourse of the nation state operates simultaneously, then, on two mutually reinforcing levels: on the level of the *political* concerns of the state and that of the *cultural* preoccupations of the nation. The notion of 'membership' to a delimited sphere of civil society for a specified group, is itself a cultural one. It is elaborated through an 'assemblage' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986) which consists of the qualifications for membership to the civil society. Here, my argument also draws from Gandhi's criticism of the constitutive features of 'modern' existence. Gandhi's philosophical critique of modernity targeted several features of bourgeois existence, and, in addition to feminist critiques, it is his inventory of civil life that I take to be constitutive of post-colonised representations of the civil society. Gandhi's political and moral philosophy (if it is possible to separate one from the other) was in the nature of:

a fundamental critique of the entire edifice of bourgeois society: its continually expanding and prosperous economic life, based on individual property, the social division of labour and the impersonal laws of the market...its political institutions based on a dual notion of sovereignty in which the people in theory rule themselves, but are only allowed to do so through the medium of their representatives whose actions have to be ratified only once in so many years; its spirit of innovation, adventure and scientific progress; its rationalisation of philosophy and ethics and secularisation of art and education.

(Chatterjee 1986:90)

The cultural aspects of the post-colonised situation are intertwined with questions of membership of the civil society of modernity Gandhi spoke of. This membership issue—its symbolic and other constructions—constitutes the focus of analysis of this book.

There exist a considerable number of approaches to the study of the schooling process. These range from symbolic-interactionist (de Souza 1974; Thapan 1991) to those inspired by Marxist theory (Willis 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), and still others which combine a class perspective with a feminist one and seek to analyse economic as well as gender oppression (Connell *et al.* 1982). In this study—which is not so much about schooling but rather an ethnography of post-colonial modernity—I wish to make a case for positioning the Indian public school in a context which takes account of the uniqueness of post-colonised engagements with issues of citizenship and national identity based on the specificity of historical experience. The vectors of domination, dissent, and conflict in post-colonised societies can seldom be discussed under such convenient headings as ‘class’ and ‘false consciousness’, travelling as they do over a social reality made complex by the inescapable binds of the colonial experience. In such an environment the ideographs of difference and the cartographies of congeniality are etched with the potent hues of language (English versus the vernaculars) and ‘race’; and in terms of arguments regarding ‘rationality’ and ‘irrationality’, the ‘primitives’ versus the ‘civilised’, the ‘secular’ fending off the ‘fundamentalist’, the tasks of modernity, and the urgency of a national identity. Class becomes merely one of the variables to be analysed and not an inevitable category to be fitted, as Chatterjee’s critique of theorising on nationalism points out, ‘to certain universal and inescapable sociological constraints of the modern age’ (Chatterjee 1986:22).

It is true that economic class is an observable fact in India and just as correct that the analysis of class dynamics must form an important part of research into educational issues. However, I would like to suggest that studies within the field of education which have as their point of focus the reproduction of the class structure through the elaboration of a ‘dominant culture’ pedagogy will, for the post-colonial situation, tend to conceal as much as they reveal; and the assumptions on which they are based are more likely to be true of non-colonised (post-colonial) rather than post-colonised societies. Perhaps the most important of these assumptions is the one which concerns the dyadic nature of the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor, between domination and dissent, and between exploitation and resistance. The dominant and the dominated, in other words, are clearly identified, and, further, just as clearly seen to have conflicting interests with respect to each other.

One of the most acclaimed expositions of the so-called reproduction approach in education theory is Paul Willis’s *Learning to Labour*. Since its publication in 1977 the book’s conclusions have been disputed only in as much as one may dispute the tendency—as also apparent in the writings of Bourdieu—to exaggerate ‘a good insight’ (Connell 1980:188).

Willis investigates the reproduction of the structure of inequality through the schooling system in industrial societies, which is both the central argument as well as the object of inquiry in the reproduction approach, by positing, both implicitly and explicitly, an every-day world of disjunctive cognition: there is ‘us’ and there is ‘them’. The little battles for personal dignity, the ground gained and the strongholds relinquished, and what, following Gramsci, we may call the larger war of position, are then fought across

this class divide. I am not, of course, suggesting the absence of differences and discontinuities between the cultural and social ethos of different classes in post-colonised societies. This would be clearly absurd. What I would like to suggest, however, is that in the process of the invention and reinvention of cultural forms through which society is institutionalised—gains its system of meanings—there emerges the emotionally potent and historically specific third figure of the ‘citizen’. And that it is through this anthropomorphic reification of the civil society that we seek to mediate structural contradictions that may exist between groups.

The dialogue of citizenship speaks of the need to address the ‘shortcomings’ of personality. Here, the discourse of class difference and economic exploitation is reconstituted into differences based on ‘absences’ and ‘lacks’ and the need for specific institutions which will alleviate these shortfalls of character. The Doon School, I will argue, has conducted its national identity and citizenship dialogue through such a ‘science’ of personality which has emphasised the need to develop the secular, rational, metropolitan citizen, and the depredations of the opposite personality-type upon the health of the civil society. The conflict becomes one between the ‘modern’ type of personality—the light of the nation state—and the ‘backward’ psyche, forever ready to undermine its integrity. In the enterprise of ‘nation-building’, then, social analysis—incorporating, *inter alia*, class and gender issues—becomes an ‘unpatriotic’ rubric, undermining the doctrine of citizenship through interrogating the national attitude. In this book I would like to explore the *cultural* terrain on which the Indian dialogue of citizenship is carried out, rather than begin with a model of research which takes class analysis as the most appropriate one for a study on ‘elite schools’.

From a post-colonised perspective, there are other difficulties as well in analysing seeming class institutions such as Indian public schools within the strict framework of class analysis. If we understand a class as ‘a set of individuals who have “similar” relations with the means of production... and who are such that they have no “contradictions” among themselves’ (Rudra 1989:142) then class analysis (as the *sole* method of problematising society) offers a limited understanding of a school such as Doon which functions quite comfortably, as I discuss in the book, in the embrace of conflicting ideological interests. My discussion seeks to understand the process through which a wide range of seemingly conflicting positions in the discursive formation of the post-colonised nation state become imbricated and produce an agreement—one which is built around the ‘truths’ of modernity. We find some indication of the attempt to invent a *cultural* space of post-colonised commonality and homogeneity in the ‘mature’ phase of Nehru’s reflections on the national community—during the period in his intellectual career when ‘nation’ and ‘state’ became synonymous terms. During this stage for Nehru, ‘the world of the concrete, the world of differences, of conflict, of the struggle between classes, of history and politics, now [found] its unity in the life of the state’ (Chatterjee 1986:161), and the Indian nation state became the protector and interpreter of the cultural unity of the modern ‘Indian people’, defining both modernity and Indianness. The post-colonial period in India, and the period preparatory to it, has been marked by the production of spaces which are both the commodities of capital and processes through which other commodities—such as the idea of an Indian people transcending all differences and conflicts—are produced (Lefebvre 1994).

The Doon School, I will argue in the book, is precisely such a cultural space of ‘domesticated difference’ such that it brings together in mutual accommodation a range of seemingly opposed interests—both political and cultural, in the broadest sense of the two terms—and prevents these differences from threatening the existent positions of dominance; and that this occurs (to paraphrase Anderson 1986) in the act of stretching the spiritual robe of commonality, woven in the name of the sacred image of the nation and the consecrated figure of the citizen, over a demographic body indelibly marked by the differences and degradations of unimaginable inequality. This aspect of the discussion seeks to point out that in the regime of the bourgeois-liberal intelligentsia it is impossible to clearly mark out the ‘system’ from its ‘critics’, and the ‘radicals’ from the ‘reactionaries’; that ‘difference’ is itself dissipated, and that the Doon School can be recognised as one of the sites of the domestication of such differences.

The epic of the nation and nation-building in the Indian context is congruent with a discourse of personality built out of the specificities of certain experiences and ways of thought generated in the recent period of Indian history. The figurative body of the citizen was, in its earliest incarnation, forged from nationalist aspirations to displace the image of the ‘subject’ and the ‘native’. Since then, the citizen figure has become enmeshed in a subject—object dialectic of a different nature: as part of a project of delineating the *new* ‘natives’ of the nation state and as an instrument of its cultural and political strategy which seeks to elide the deeper structural contradictions of society. It is the implicit three-way ‘dialectic’ between the dominant and the dominating classes and the citizen figure, where contradictions and conflicts are sought to be shown up as unnecessary, unimportant, and unpatriotic, which is of interest to me.

This book is an attempt, therefore, to deal with what are commonly referred to as ‘elite’ Indian schools in terms of the construction of a national identity, the image of the ideal citizen, as I believe this to be an important element in the history of class processes in India. Also, and perhaps more importantly, ‘national identity’ and ‘citizenship’ are indispensable rubrics—imbued with the passions and emotions of the freedom struggle—of modern Indian history itself. The alternative when dealing with ‘elite’ schools is, as indicated above, to analyse them within the reproduction framework and investigate ‘how an oppressive and exploitative social system is stabilised’ by positing that:

the production of the right kind of labour-power is increasingly a matter of formal schooling. The school not only teaches basic skills, but also the rules of behaviour and attitudes appropriate for the positions in production the children are destined for, as workers or as agents of capital.

(Connell 1980:35)

In outlining my preference for a different approach in the study of Indian ‘ruling’-class schools I would also like to emphasise that not only do I consider the reproduction approach inadequate in dealing with the Indian situation but also that the idea of reproduction is itself (of cultural forms generally and in education specifically) a somewhat unsatisfactory trope. If we are to recognise that the ‘economic’ and the ‘cultural’ are not two separate spheres, and that the cultural is used to reinforce the effectiveness of power relations, then we must account for the cultural specificity of class

dynamics through historicising and specifying the ‘truths’ of culture, rather than proceeding from a pre-given reproduction framework.

It is also not satisfactory to deal with such schools, as a recent study has done, in terms of the ideals and objectives set by the founders of the school and the extent to which these have been realised. Thapan’s study of the Rishi Valley School in South India—established according to an educational blueprint provided by the philosopher J.Krishnamurty—is an attempt, she tells us, to ‘render the educational institution intelligible sociologically’ (Thapan 1991:1). Thapan sought to establish the social reality of the school along with its pedagogical processes

by examining the relations between the participants engaged in these processes within an overall sociological framework that takes account of both the structure of the school as an organisation and of the social world of the participants.

(Thapan 1991: jacket)

Thapan considers ‘the most significant aspect of school organisation...the fundamental dichotomy between the “transcendental” and the “local” orders’ (p. 28), where the former refers to Krishnamurty’s philosophical guidelines for the functioning of the school and the latter ‘constitutes the *actual* schooling process and tends to function independently of the transcendental order’ (*ibid.*; emphasis in the original). The book then proceeds to analyse and highlight instances of and reasons for ‘the conflict between the transcendental and the local orders’ (*ibid.*: 219). With the aid of ample and admirably presented ethnography, Thapan is able to demonstrate that there does indeed exist a conflict between the two ‘orders’, engendered, *inter alia*, by the demands of ‘good’ academic results and imperfect commitment on the part of substantial sections of the teacher and student community to the transcendental order.

There are several questions we must ask of a study such as Thapan’s. The Rishi Valley School

may be traced to its beginnings which take us back to 1918, when Dr. Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society, formed the Society for the Promotion of National Education. A school was then started at Teynampet in Madras based on the principles of education enunciated by Besant.

(Thapan 1989:30)

Annie Besant was a prominent, if somewhat quixotic, figure in the early stages of the nationalist movement in India, having formed a Home Rule League in 1915 which, ‘At its height in mid-1917...had 27,000 members’ (Sarkar 1983:151). The League was mainly supported by ‘Tamil Brahmans ...urban professional groups in the United Provinces...younger Gujarati industrialists, traders and lawyers in Bombay city and Gujarat’ (*ibid.*). Further, Besant’s foray into nationalist politics was one which ‘desired to “restore” the lost pride and glory of the Brahmins’ (Geetha and Rajadurai 1995:1768; see also Jaywardena 1995) and return them, once again, to positions of leadership in the life of the nation. It seems somewhat inadequate therefore (though not wrong, of course), to

deal with a school whose historical pedigree forms a moment in the life of a very specific type of nationalist activity within such an ahistorical framework as that employed by Thapan.⁶ We are entitled also to ask of such a study whether, due to its own unreflexive location within an analytical framework which is oblivious of the cultural, political, and class history of the society in which the school is located, it has actually achieved the task which it set itself, namely ‘to examine the relationship between ideology, school and society’. The symbolic-interactionist mode, within which this study is firmly anchored, may well tell us a great deal about what happens within a school, but its results remain of limited interest if the institution cannot also be firmly located within the tangled skein of colonial and post-colonised power and cultural politics. The discourse of ‘political Brahmanism’ (Geetha and Rajadurai 1995:1768) espoused by Annie Besant and her associates and their ‘discovery’ of an ancient golden age of ‘Hindu-Sanskritic civilisation’ (*ibid.*) are important aspects of the inventions of India during the colonial period—and schools such as the one studied by Thapan need to be investigated as part of the investigation of these discourses; otherwise the late twentieth-century social scientist runs the very real risk of merely reproducing colonial (and post-colonised) discourses of, among others, Brahmanism, patriarchy and orientalism (*cf.* Appadurai 1993a; Chatterjee 1986; Ludden 1993; Mani 1993).

Following Erving Goffman (1976) the concept of ‘total institutions’ has found considerable favour with social scientists as a tool of analysis for institutions such as boarding schools, prisons, and mental hospitals. Goffman defined a total institution as:

a place where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life.

(Goffman 1976:xiii)

Total institutions, he further suggested, have ‘encompassing tendencies’, and that the encompassment is most palpably manifest in ‘the barrier to social intercourse with the outside world and to departure that is often built right into the physical plant, such as locked doors, high walls, barbed wire’ (*ibid.*: 4). Later, the point is made again that the ‘inmates...have restricted contact with the world outside the walls’ (*ibid.*: 7).

Lelyveld’s (1978) study of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College (MAO) at Aligarh in North India is a prominent example of the application of Goffman’s total institution idea to the analysis of residential educational establishments. For Lelyveld, the College defined itself as a total institution through the ichnography of its presence: the walls surrounding it and the gates, which provided selective passage to the world without and acted as barriers to the realm within. So, Lelyveld suggests:

The proposed residential framework for the college, rather than the curriculum itself, was what represented a real departure from the existing system of English education in India. What Sayyid Ahmed [the founder] advocated was the creation of a ‘total Institution,’ where young men would be cut off from ordinary life and raised in highly controlled surroundings.

(Lelyveld 1978:128)

With the consolidation of British rule in the erstwhile United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), the traditional Muslim elite found it increasingly difficult, Lelyveld suggests, to secure 'appropriate' employment through the once well-established avenues of kin alliance and patronage. The Persian influenced culture of the Mughal court had once provided the liveried umbrella under which men of 'breeding' instituted a community through language, music, and poetry; but now the umbrella was gnawed at the edges, its ambience and delicate hues, which encompassed both a shared culture and the sharing of power, were slowly made effete with the advance of a more robust, if more vulgar, system of meanings. It was, however, important to engage with the new order in order to wrest from it some measure of the benefits which would, otherwise, accrue exclusively to the Hindus. The establishment of the MAO, according to Lelyveld, was the result of this view:

in nineteenth century India, the British colonial regime offered new incentives for developing social ties that emphasised voluntary participation, personal achievement, and non-familial cooperation: hence the invention of institutions that would temporarily isolate the young from the rest of society in order to prepare them for later life.

(Lelyveld 1978:x)

In the ensuing description of the various aspects of college life, images of a 'world unto itself' occupy a central place. The students, enclosed within the carefully managed, experimental space of the campus, were to be guided in every aspect of their existence by the minutiae of an epigraph of discipline and control dictated by the founders of the College.

Its enthusiastic adoption by Lelyveld and others notwithstanding, I believe that the total institution idea is not only of limited analytical utility in general, but is also quite inappropriate in the context of educational institutions which have their origin in the cultural politics of colonialism and post-coloniality. To label an institution as 'total' is to deny the dynamics of *social* interaction between the part (the institution) and the whole (the society), the consideration of which should be regarded as the main object of an inquiry into the functioning of institutions. The total institution idea, in as much as it seeks to raise the part to a position of exclusivity, is unsuitable for the purposes of sociological and cultural research in as much as it constitutes a denial of the understanding that 'the whole is always in some sense superior and even prior to its parts, which it serves to make effective in the world as well as to explain and render intelligible to the mind' (Uberoi 1978:20).⁷

The establishment of an institution (mental hospital, prison, boarding school) is a statement of societal intent: the walls, the gates, the windows, and the nooks and crannies are, as it were, constructed from ideological brick and mortar. The institution lies midstream among the currents and eddies of contesting political and cultural intents; it is the reification of social thought. So it is with boarding schools. Hence, in their functioning not only do these schools maintain an active relationship with the outside world but also their 'inmates' are actively aware of the 'outside' world to which they belong and are steadfastly in consonance with its prevailing punctilios. The institution established under the 'orders' of 'society' cannot but be veined by the political and

cultural catechisms of social thought. The institution is inextricably, though not always obviously, enmeshed within the power relationships which animate that society.

It is not surprising, then, to learn that the MAO did, in fact, engage in an active dialogue with the 'outside' world with which it maintained an ocular distance. The choice of the 'total institution' rubric for the MAO is curious also, as Lelyveld regards as his primary objective the examination of 'the ideological matrix into which the new institution was set, how the founders hoped to make it fit into the total situation of their social relationships and ways of thought' (Lelyveld 1978:102). Further, there is also the explicit recognition that:

The founding of the Aligarh College also involved the definition and mobilisation of a constituency. Immersed in a whole new ideology about the history and present status of Indian Muslims, Aligarh was not only a school, it was a political symbol.

(Lelyveld 1978:103)

Also, the 'political symbol' was in a constant state of innovative flux through conscious interaction with the outside world, a world which was sometimes its cultural paradigm and always its *deus ex machina*:

Beck [the Principal] always emphasised that cricket could serve to establish bonds between Aligarh and significant groups outside...put Aligarh students in an exclusive network.

(Lelyveld 1978:255–6)

So, the College functioned against the sheer face of an inescapable social situation, and its life was a snapshot in a larger colonial pastiche, 'subject to circumstances of power beyond the college boundaries. That power was ultimately in British hands' (*ibid.*: 269). The label 'total' would only seem to be applicable to the College in a rather limited sense: that it *endeavoured* to a totality of form. It is curious then, that a study which is as historically rooted and methodologically refined (as it is totally engrossing) as Lelyveld's, should yield to the seduction of form over content, which is how the total institution idea may be described.

In several implicit ways, I will suggest in this book that the cultural specificity of Goffman's analysis (his references to the 'norms' of 'civil society' are the most explicit pointers to this) should make us wary of utilising it in an arbitrary manner. So, for example, though the explicit purpose of my discussion of 'surveillance' and 'self-discipline' (Chapter 3) is to dispute the universality of the Foucaultian frameworks, it should also be seen as a disputation of Goffman's conclusions on the matter. Goffman suggests that constant surveillance is part of the process through which total institutions seek to place 'barriers...between inmates and the wider world' (p. 14), whereas my argument seeks to point out that in the colonial and post-colonised contexts these processes can be better seen as a complex engagement with the aspirations to modernity and 'civility' on the part of a very specific section of the population. There are some other problems as well with Goffman's model—such as the 'staff-inmate split' (p. 9), and 'impermeability' (p. 119)⁸ as defining characteristics of total institutions—which make it

unsuitable for deployment in a work that attempts to delineate the historically and culturally specific conditions of non-western modernity. For, as my discussion will seek to demonstrate, the specific contexts of non-western modernity require that we subject all claims of universality of analytical categories to critical scrutiny. This is not to argue for an absolute difference in the human condition, but rather to foreground the complexities engendered by the very different histories of different sections of the human population.

The Doon School, its presence declared by a boundary wall, its students distributed among different Houses or hostels, their conduct and academic training under the strict purview of a disciplinary mosaic, was never intended by its founders to be anything like a 'total institution': its 'inmates' were to be the 'leaders' of the world outside and hence it developed a conscious view of its place within the wider society; a view which was, once again consciously, shared by the School population. The inside-outside distinction inherent in the total institution framework is somewhat difficult to sustain here. The 'outside' was very much within its boundaries. The School was born of a set of intentions and aspirations, the gestation period of which spanned the length and depth of that contentious period of Indian history known as the Bengal Renaissance and which continued to be adapted to different situations in the post-colonised period. It was society, to paraphrase Marx, which spoke through the School, reciting the colloquy of the nation and of the citizen.

To speak of the citizen, of the 'modern' Indian man (and it is a gendered entity, as I will argue later in the book), as Dipesh Chakrabarty has recently pointed out, is to speak of an anthropomorphic narrative born of a fruitful collusion between European imperialism and third-world nationalism (Chakrabarty: 1992). The gift of 'History', as it emerged from the lecture halls of the European university to mingle with the milling crowds in search of a 'collective consciousness', was 'to universalise the nation state as the most desirable form of political community' (Chakrabarty 1992:19). In turn, the great achievement of imperialism lay not just in establishing material empires, but also in leaving behind the testacy of a much more enduring universe, that of 'historical' existence; a universe where the tautological child of the nation, the citizen, could find sustenance. Third-world nationalists readily adopted this child, incorporating its being into the dialogue of post-coloniality and pronounced all other identities 'non-modern' or even, 'anti-modern'. Modernity, in its various forms, thus became the desideratum of post-colonised existence. One of its most valorised forms was citizenship, which could both serve the interests of dominant positions—the better off as instant citizens—and be established *publicly* and *legally* within a reasonable time. The written word—the autobiography, the novel, the constitution—and other, ocular, representations, such as the flag, guaranteed for it an unquestionable public existence. In turn, the post-colonised nation state, administered its birth rites by an indigenous class imbued with an awareness of the requirements of modernity, and of citizenship, provided the legal guarantee.

The book is organised around four main issues, three of which are treated as 'qualifications' for citizenship in the cultural sense discussed above. The fourth is concerned with the 'reality' of the civil society itself or, to put it another way, with the strategies involved in inventing a discourse of a 'non-existent' reality. I treat the following as the 'qualifications' for cultural membership of the civil society: 'secularism', 'rationality', and (to coin a somewhat clumsy expression) 'metropolitanism'. Each of these is discussed in separate chapters of the book (though, of

course, all three constitute different parts of the same discourse on national identity and citizenship and should therefore be understood with reference to each other). The discussion of the concluding chapter on the 'strategies of the real' (Baudrillard 1988) is concerned to analyse the production of models of 'difference' which seek to separate the 'progressive' from the 'backward', and the 'civilised' from the 'primitive'. These are, I will suggest, strategies towards 'inventions' of difference in the service of existent positions of power.

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