
UNIT 9 NATION AND IDENTITY CONCERNS: E.V. RAMASWAMY NAICKER, NAZRUL ISLAM, PANDITA RAMABAI, JAIPAL SINGH, KAHN SINGH

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9.1 INTRODUCTION

Concern for Indian nation was never expressed in a homogeneous way. Social and political thinkers of modern India understood the nature of Indian society and polity in different ways for obvious reasons; therefore, construction of nation **was** never uniform. While some of them designed an **overarching** and encompassing Indian identity, others constructed Indian nation on the **foundation** of particular identities like religion, caste, **ethnicity** and gender, language, etc. In this lesson, an attempt has been **made** to understand the **central** ideas and concerns of some of the thinkers of modern India who represented and **championed** particular identities; they include: E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker(1879-1973), Pandita Ramabai(1858-1922), Jaipal Singh(1903-1970), Kazi Nazrul Islam(1899-1976) and Bhai Kahn Singh Nabha(1861-

1938). All these thinkers, unfortunately, have not received enough attention in the 'mainstream' literature of political science, **despite their** immense socio-political contributions and **mobilisational** capabilities.

9.2 E. V. RAMASWAMY NAICKER (1879-1973)

E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, popularly known as Periyar (Great Sage), was born in Erode, in a family of **well-off** artisans. He married at an early age of 13, but after six years became an ascetic. Wandering all over India, particularly the Hindu pilgrimage centres, he experienced the 'evils' of Hinduism and the priestly exploitations.

9.2.1 Critique of Hinduism and Brahminical Domination

Periyar's negative perception of Hinduism and Brahmins needs to be analysed in the socio-political context of Tamil Nadu. Like their counterparts in other provinces, in Tamil Nadu as well, Brahmins always enjoyed a dominant position in the Hindu scriptures and rituals. Though constituted only about 3 per cent of Tamils, they continued to dominate the public spheres even under the colonial rule. Their settlement in fertile areas further enhanced their social power. In the pre-colonial Tamil Nadu, although Brahmins did not monopolise the ownership of land, they virtually monopolised scribal occupation, which enabled them to acquire Western education much faster than others under the colonial rule. This gave the Brahmins an early lead in the professions. Further, they used a dialect having a distinct character and with a far greater Sanskritic content. Thus, many Tamil Brahmins were very conscious of the sanskritic nature of their sub-culture and claimed with pride to be 'Aryans', suggesting a quasi-racial distinction from other classes.

To Naicker, Hinduism was a tool of Brahminical domination and the Brahmins epitomised Hindu arrogance and perpetrated social injustice. He castigated Hinduism as an opiate by which the Brahmins had dulled and subdued the masses. Naicker blamed the Aryans for introducing an unjust and oppressive social system in the country and espoused a Dravidian racial **consciousness** to defend the rights of the Dravidians against the Aryan domination. He argued that a Hindu may be a Dravidian, but a Dravidian "in the real sense of the term cannot and shall not be a Hindu."

Naicker was convinced that Hinduism perpetuated casteism, and must be resisted. Thus, he **publicly** ridiculed the Puranas as fairy tales, not only imaginary and irrational but also grossly immoral.

9.2.2 Critique of the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi

The scope of the associational activity and self-government increased in the early decades of the century. Brahmins set the tone of Madras city politics in the **1910s**, of the Home Rule Leagues sprouting during the World War I and of nationalist mobilisation after the War. They controlled Congress's state level leadership until World War II. Naicker was active in the Congress-led Freedom Struggle for sometime. He participated in the non-cooperation movement, offered *satyagraha* and defended *khadi*. But Naicker's efforts to get Tamil Nadu Congress to adopt resolutions in favour of caste quotas in political **representation** were continually defeated between 1919 and 1925.

Moreover, he got disenchanted with the 'paternalistic' aspects of Gandhi's social programme, which he thought, was conducive to the legitimisation of the prevailing social order. Periyar was opposed to Gandhi's reconstructed version of varnashrama *dharma* as it did not correspond to the way the caste system had historically functioned. Periyar also interpreted Gandhian nationalism as a hegemonic project to maintain the dominance of the Brahmins and 'Brahminism' in Indian society and the predominant influence of north India in the national politics. Naicker's growing dissatisfaction with Gandhi and the Congress, which he began to express from 1925 onwards in the journal *Kudi Arasu*, led him and his followers to found the Self Respect Association in 1926.

Protesting against the Brahminical dominance in high politics, he quit the Congress and developed Dravidian cultural alternatives to the prevailing hegemonic Brahminical culture. In 1925, he organised the "Self Respect Movement", designed as Dravidian Uplift, seeking to expose Brahminical tyranny and the deceptive methods by which they controlled all spheres of Hindu life. Thus, Naicker advocated: "God should be destroyed; Religion should be destroyed; Congress should be destroyed; Gandhi should be destroyed; The Brahmin should be destroyed."

Naicker's methods of struggle included the destruction of the images of Hindu deities such as Rama and Ganesha. According to Periyar, "Rama and Sita are despicable characters, not worthy of imitation and admiration even by the lowest of fourth-rate humans." Ravana (a Dravidian hero presented as a demon in the north), on the other hand, is depicted as a Dravidian of "excellent" character. In his preface to *The Ramayana : A True Reading*, he slates that "the veneration of the story any longer in Tamil Nad is injurious and ignominious to the self-respect of the community and of the country." Periyar's methods of breaking idols and taking out anti-God processions, earned him a lot of criticism. Yet he was adamant that from his radical point of view, idols were symbols of Brahminical ideology and superstition.

9.2.3 Naicker's Discourse

Portraying Naicker as just anti-Brahmin or anti-God would be not doing justice. He was a radical social reformer. His determined campaign against Hindu orthodoxy accompanied by rationalism and social reform, transformed the social landscape of Tamil Nadu. His radical social reform campaign caught the imagination of the underclass. As in the Self-Respect Movement, one of Naicker's basic objectives was to remove all "superstitious belief" based upon religion or tradition. No member was allowed to wear the sectarian marks of faith across his forehead. Members were urged to boycott the use of Brahmin priests in ceremonies. He campaigned for widow remarriage and inter-caste marriage. Thus, his thrust on non-Brahminism must be placed in the context of the rigid rituals that had legitimised caste oppression at that time.

Naicker claimed that his brand of politics was oriented on the contrary, towards the emancipation of the subordinate groups in Tamil society, much as liberalism had opposed upper class and clerical dominance in the West. Naicker sought to associate himself with the enlightenment heritage by elaborating a materialist ontology and a genealogy of Brahminical morals as founded on a resentment of worldly non-Brahmin virtues. Further, he claimed Rousseau, Marx and Ingersoll as sources of inspiration and pointed to a future in which caste divisions and 'superstition' would yield place to pluralism, secularisation and acceptance of modern science and technology. Such self-representations promoted some scholars to view

the Self Respect movement as consonant with 'British liberal assumptions.'

Important aspects of Naicker's ideology and the manner in which it was deployed in mobilisation were out of tune with liberalism. Far from relying on the concept of abstract citizen central to British liberalism, Naicker adopted ethnic categories drawn from colonial knowledge and sought to accord Shudra primacy in the political community. In contrast to the north, the south India, even before the colonial rule, had experienced considerable social mobility at different points and the intermediate castes increasingly rejecting the traditional *varna* order. As kingly power grew, mercantile and warrior groups acquired more land as well as dominance. The onset of the British rule constricted the kingly path to political power. Naicker's vision of Shudra primacy provided the ideological basis on which later Dravidian ideologues reinforced the dominance of non-Brahmin elite, both old and new, such as rich farmers, merchants and industrialists. Thus, the emancipatory potential of Naicker's notions of social identity remained a subsidiary aspect of dravidianist project right through.

9.2.4 Dravidian Mobilisation

Naicker conceived Dravidian community primarily in terms of a coalition of megacastes—the non-Brahmin Hindu castes of Tamil Nadu, i.e. Tamil speaking Hindus who were neither Brahmins nor SCs. Non-Brahminism endured in Tamil Nadu because it was linked to Tamil nationalism from the 1930s onwards in a populist discourse. The opposition to Brahmin dominance had the potential of serving as a banner for subordinate non-Brahmin groups to buttress their dominance.

Under the Congress Ministry of C. Rajagopalachari in 1937, Hindi was introduced to the South as a compulsory subject in schools. Taking it as an affront to Tamil culture and its rich literary traditions, Naicker waved black flags of rebellion in his first anti-Hindi campaign. The campaign forced the government to change Hindi into an optional subject. Naicker saw the imposition of Hindi as a subjugation of Tamil people which could be avoided only through the creation of a Dravidian state. In 1938, Naicker was elected President of the Justice Party. The Party resolved that Tamilnadu should be made a separate state, loyal to the British Raj and "directly under the Secretary of State for India."

In 1939, Naicker organised the "Dravida Nadu Conference" for the advocacy of a separate and independent Dravidasthan. The demand was again reiterated the following year in response to the Lahore resolution demanding Pakistan passed by the Muslim League. Naicker gave full support to the scheme for Pakistan and tried to enlist support for the creation of a Dravidasthan. The basic presupposition of the movement was that the Dravidian non-Brahmin peoples (Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam) were of a racial stock and culture, which distinguished them from the Aryan Brahmins.

In 1944, the justice Party was reorganised as Dravida Kazhagam(DK). The object of the DK was proclaimed to be the attainment of a sovereign independent Republic, which would be federal in nature with four units corresponding to the linguistic divisions, each having residual powers and autonomy of internal administration. It would be a "classless society," an egalitarian Dravida Nadu to which the depressed and downtrodden could pledge allegiance. The party proclaimed its opposition to the British Raj, and Naicker called upon the DK members to renounce all titles conferred by the British and resign all offices connected with the National

War front. This action **greatly** enhanced the prestige of the movement and the DK could no longer be considered a handmaiden of the British, as was the Justice Party from the very beginning.

9.3 PANDITA RAMABAI (1858-1922)

Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was one of the greatest women of modern India. Exceptionally learned, Ramabai, an outspoken champion of women's rights and social reform, earned the unique distinction of being the sole woman representative in the male-dominated world of gender reforms. As Ramabai 'transgressed' the boundaries and contested patriarchy in her educational and missionary activities, she understandably became the most controversial upper-caste woman of her times, and hence, was consciously 'erased' from the modern Indian history for a long period.

9.3.1 Early Life: Non-conformist Background

Ramabai's father **Anant Shastri Dongre**, a **Chitpavan** Brahmin, a non-conformist, invited the ire of his powerful conservative community brethren when he decided to teach Sanskrit to his wife which was regarded 'heretical'. Sanskrit, the 'divine language' was after all reserved for the upper-caste men. As consequences of his **non-conformism**, he had to live outside the community and took to wandering the country with his family, living off of donations as a *puranic* storyteller. His life was unique in the sense that while leading a Brahminical way of life, he strongly rejected some of its core principles. Ramabai learnt Sanskrit and **Puranas** in those hard days, full of suffering and pain. Thus, Ramabai's break with Brahminism was inevitable, considering the life and the legacy she inherited from her father.

After the death of her parents, Ramabai arrived in Calcutta in 1878 at the age of nineteen. Interestingly, the religious elite of the city warmly welcomed her and encouraged her to study the Vedas and Upanishads despite the prohibition on women to do so. She impressed the religious elite of the city with her mastery over Sanskrit language and texts and received the title of 'Pandita' (Scholar) and 'Saraswati' (Goddess of Learning). Ramabai soon took up her social reform agenda by travelling widely in Bengal and addressing women on the need for their education and emancipation, drawing heavily on the mythological figures of educated and independent women.

9.3.2 Contesting Patriarchy: Hinduism and Christianity

Ramabai's reading of Dharmashastras made her deeply conscious of the contempt with which women of all castes and men of the lower caste were treated in these texts. Like women, rules did not permit the Shudras to perform the same religious acts as the upper castes. Ramabai rejected this discrimination in her personal life when **she** decided to accept the marriage proposal from a Bipin Behari, a Shudra, **thereby** decisively breaking with the tradition. Bipin was excommunicated as it was an inter-caste marriage by civil registration. Just after two years of marriage, **Bipin's** death forced widowhood on young Ramabai at the age of twentyfour. After her initial experiences of oppressive widowhood, Ramabai refused to be confined to the domestic space and catapulting herself into the public arena.

Returning to **Maharashtra**, Ramabai experienced her first public encounter with the **forces** of patriarchy when she set up the **Arya Mahila Samaj** in 1882 in Poona to mobilise women,

and aroused instant hostility. She brought out a book in **Marathi**, *Stree Dharma Niti* [Morals for Women] with the objective of counselling the helpless and ignorant women. The *Kesari* commented: "In reality, it is the task of men to eradicate these and other evil customs in our society. Women cannot therefore interfere in it for many years to come – even if they are 'panditas' and have reached the ultimate stage of reform ... Our women will have to be under the control of men for a long time to come." Undeterred, Ramabai set up a home for high-caste Hindu widows and made an appeal to the Hunter Commission to provide training facilities to women to become teachers and doctors enabling them to serve other women.

However, she failed to connect to the women in Maharashtra and felt alienated as she had no community, no social base and no real emotional bonds to fall back upon. This led to her search for solace in religion and God which could simultaneously accommodate her social agenda as well as her personal quest for religious fulfillment. Thus she got converted to Christianity by the Anglican Church.

Ramabai's encounter with the patriarchy of the Anglican Church across the globe was no less harsh. When she was offered a professorship which would involve her teaching to male students, the Bishop of Bombay protested, or "Above all things, pray believe that her influence will be ruined forever in India if she is known to have taught young men." **Ramabai** promptly replied: "It surprises me very much to think that neither my father nor my husband objected [to] my mother's or my teaching young men while some young people are doing so." Thus, the major contestation in Ramabai's educational and missionary activities was that of patriarchy.

A Christian convert and renowned social reformer, **Pandita** Ramabai was a scholar of Hinduism who had profound disagreements with its philosophical premises, particularly with regard to women, and later as a Christian convert who rebelled against Christian dogma. Thus, her life was a narrative of complex contestations—that of a woman against male hegemony both in Hindu society as well as Anglican Church, that of an Indian convert against the British Anglican bishops and nuns, that of an Indian Christian missionary against the oppression of Hindu women.

9.4 JAIPAL SINGH (1903–1970)

Jaipal Singh (1903–1970), was a multi-faceted personality—a distinguished parliamentarian, a champion sportsman, an educationist, a powerful orator and above all, the leader of the Adivasis. Jaipal alias Pramod Pahan was born at the Takra village of Khunti subdivision of the present day **Jharkhand**. In childhood, his job was to look after the cattle herd. His destiny had a turn around with his admission to St. Paul's School, **Ranchi**, in 1910. Then Jaipal moved to England and graduated from St John's College, Oxford with Honours in Economics. Jaipal was selected in Indian Civil Service from which he later resigned. In 1928 Amsterdam Olympics, he captained the Indian hockey team which won the gold medal. In 1934, Jaipal joined teaching at the Prince of Wales College at Achimota, Gold Coast, Ghana. In 1937, he returned to India as the principal incumbent of the Rajkumar College, Raipur. In 1938, he joined the Bikaner princely State as foreign secretary. Jaipal thought that with his varied experience he could be more useful to the country through the Congress. His encounter with Rajendra Prasad at the Sadaaquat Ashram in Patna, however, did not go well. The then Governor of Bihar, Sir Maurice Hallet offered to nominate him to the Bihar Legislative

Council but Jaipal declined. In deference to **their wishes**, Jaipal then decided to go to **Ranchi** and assess the situation for himself. The return to **Ranchi** was Jaipal's homecoming.

When the news got around that Jaipal had arrived in **Ranchi**, there was great excitement among the Adivasis. The united Adivasi forum called Adivasi Sabha, formed in 1938 made him the president of the-organisation. As **many as** 65,000 people gathered to listen to Jaipal's presidential speech on January 20, 1939. They came from all over, walked on foot for days together to have a glimpse of him as they had done in the past for Birsa Munda, the legend. His oratory, simultaneously in English, Hindi, Sadani and Mundari, mesmerised men and women from all walks of life.

"The Adivasi movement stands primarily for the moral and material advancement of Chhotanagpur and Santhal Parganas," he **declared** and set as his goal a separate administrative status for the area. He was instantly the people's "**Marang Gomke**" — their **Supreme Leader**. The history of the region changed henceforth. With Jaipal at the helm, there was no looking back. He worked ceaselessly for a better future for his fellow Adivasis everywhere, even beyond the frontiers of south Bihar.

The Adivasi Sabha was changed **into** All India Adivasi Mahasabha. On the national political front, Jaipal had alienated himself from the Congress personally. He played an active role in the anti-Compromise Congress conference at Ramgarh in 1940 in close alliance with **Subhas** Bose. He went against the Congress stand and supported the British in **the World War II** and recruited men and women from Chhotanagpur for the British army.

Since 1946, he was a member of the Constituent Assembly, the Provisional Parliament and was elected four times to the Parliament until his death in 1970. **As** a close friend of the doyen of anthropology, S.C. Roy and Verrier **Elwin** and supported by Ambedkar, he led his "glorious struggle" both inside and outside the legislature to establish the Adivasi identity. With the creation of the Jharkhand Party and the induction of non-Adivasis into it in 1950, he changed the emotive cultural movement in Jharkhand into a regional political movement, free from any communal bias.

The Jharkhand Party (JHP) was the first legitimate political party that drew the political agenda and gave the direction to the future of Jharkhand politics. The party became so strong that it played a vital role in the formation of the government in the **neighbouring** province of Orissa in 1957.

9.4.1 Championing Adivasi Identity

As a member of the Constituent Assembly Jaipal played **a** key role in raising the issue of Adivasi identity. The dominant view in the Assembly reflected a patronising attitude towards the tribals; the discontentment in the tribal areas existed due to their exclusion from the mainstream development pattern. It was believed that an industry-led model of development would be a panacea for all ills in the tribal areas. The emphasis was on the 'civilising mission' and assimilation of tribals into the national mainstream.

Jaipal Singh countered this dominant view. Participating in the debates on the **Draft** Constitution, 'on **24 August 1949**, Jaipal Singh delivered an important speech on Adivasi identity. He raised

the existence of a tribal community in Jharkhand. He emphasised that the tribal people were the true and original inhabitants of India, and as such had a claim to the whole of India. Yet, he emphasised that reservation of seats for tribals in the legislatures was necessary. He also made an effort to divorce the case of Scheduled Tribes from that of the Scheduled Castes.

Jaipal argued that Adivasi Society always emphasised on equality and democracy. As he stated: "Adivasi society was the most democratic element in this country. Can the rest of India say the same thing? ... In Adivasi society all are equal, rich or poor. Everyone has equal opportunity and I do not wish that people should get away with the idea that by writing this constitution and operating it we are trying to put a new idea into the Adivasi society. What we are actually doing is you are learning and taking something. . . . Non-Adivasi society has learnt much and has still to learn a good deal. Adivasis are the most democratic people and they will not let India get smaller or weaker. . . . I would like the members [to] not be so condescending."(*Constituent Assembly Debates* 1949)

Asserting an Adivasi identity and advocating a key role for the community in the national politics, he observed: "What is necessary is that the backward groups in our country should be enabled to stand on their own legs so that they can assert themselves. It is not the intention of this Constitution, nor do I desire it, that the advanced community should be carrying my people in their arms for the rest of eternity. All that we plead is that the wherewithal should be provided . . . so that we will be able to stand on our own legs and regain the lost nerves and be useful citizens of India. . . . I may assure non-Adivasis that Adivasis will play a much bigger part than you imagine, if only you will be honest about your intentions and let them play a part they have a right to play." (*Constituent Assembly Debates* 1949).

9.5 KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM (1899-1976)

Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976), the national poet of Bangladesh, was born in Churulia, Burdhanan district, West Bengal. He lost his father in his childhood and had a financial hardship, thereby forced to work as a teacher in a lower Islamic school at the age of nine. Though his education went only up to tenth grade, he continued learning Arabic and Persian languages. As a boy, he translated Persian ghazals and Arabic writings in Bengali. He also educated himself enough to enjoy the writings of Keats, Shelly and Whitman. Nazrul became a literary genius, writing 50 books of poetry and songs, 6 books of stories and novels, 3 books of translations, 53 plays, verse-plays and operas, 2 movie scripts, 5 books of essays and 4000 songs and ghazals. He holds the world record of recorded songs, for most of which, the music was composed by Nazrul himself.

9.5.1 The Rebel Poet (Bidhrohi Kobi)

Nazrul was opposed to the British rule of India and took an active part through his writings on *Swadishi* and *Khilafat* movement. He had to undergo rigorous imprisonment for a year for his writing *Andamoyeer Agamaney* which appeared in *Dhumketu*. Rabindranath Tagore called Nazrul "Dhumketu"—the Comet. For Mahatma Gandhi, Nazrul's poem was "the song of the spinning wheel" and Nazrul was "the ultimate spirit of the spinning wheel" and freedom ran through his vein.

Nazrul came to be known as Bidrohi Kobi—the rebel poet—for his astonishing masterpiece “The Bidrohi.” This was a furious manifesto of self-consciousness against immorality. As Sajid Kamal describes: “A universal proclamation, an affirmation, an inspiration, an invocation, of ‘The Rebel’ within the hearts of each ‘I’ of the common humanity which lay oppressed, subjugated, exploited, resigned and powerless.” It is said that Nazrul would have been Nazrul even if he had not written anything else but “The Bidrohi.” Thus, Kazi Nazrul Islam refused to compromise with the unjust.

9.5.2 Hindu-Muslim Issue

In the context of the Hindu-Muslim riots in Calcutta in 1926, quoting Rabindranath in ‘Hindu-Muslim [The tale of tails]’, he emphasised Gurudev’s comment: “You see, one can sever the tail that is outside, but who can sever the tail that is inside?”

To Nazrul, those who grow tails—inside or outside—become animals. Those tailed animals whose ferocity or cruelty is obvious through their “horny” display and one does not have to be as much concerned about them.

In this context, Nazrul criticises the conscious attempt perpetuated by Hindus and Muslims to construct their respective oppositional identities through Tiki (tuft) and Dari (beard). Nazrul’s satire is striking: “The birthplace of this inner tail must be Tiki-pur and Dari-stan. What a primitive (adim) and overpowering propensity of human being to be like animals! Their sadness about not being able to grow tail has found a remedial consolation in growing Tiki-Dari.”

Nazrul regrets how the universal relation of humanity has been transformed into adversity/animosity by raising walls after walls. He observes that one can live with the truth of religion, but the overbearing nature of the books of laws/codes create all the problems. Nazrul does not find difficulty “tolerating Hinduhood (hindutto) or Muslimhood (musalmanto), but Tiki-tto/Dari-tto is intolerable because those seem to engender lot of animosity and friction.” Nazrul argues that such symbols which construct the essentials of religious identities have nothing to do with religion. Thus, he comments: “Having Tiki is not essential to being a Hindu, it might be pedantry. Similarly, Dari is not essential to being a Muslim, it’s mullatto. These two brands of hair-bunches have caused so much hair-pulling.”

A strong believer in composite culture Nazrul blames pundits and Mullahs for being responsible for constructing confrontational identities on the basis of meaningless outer symbols and divide the communities. As he concludes: “Today’s squabble is also between pundit and mullah, not between Hindu-Muslim. The mace of Narayan and sword of Allah won’t have problem, because they are the same, and weapon in the hand of someone does not strike the other hand of the same person. He is pronoun (shorbonam), all names have merged in Him. In all this fight and squabble it is comforting that Allah or Narayan is neither Hindu nor Muslim. He has no Dari or Tiki. Absolutely “clean”! I am so upset about this Tiki-Dari because these seem to be reminders to human beings that I am different, you are different. These outwardly marks make humanity forget her eternal blood relation.”

He finds it unfortunate that Krishna-Muhammad-Christ have become communal property, and all these squabbles centre on this property rights. “One is saying, our Allah; the other

is saying, our Hari. As if, the Creator is like cow-goat. And the charge of settling such matters is on the shoulder of Justice Sir **Abdul** Rahim, Pundit **Madan** Mohon Malyobbo, etc. One easily can see the outcomes by visiting the wards (full of wounded bodies) of the Medical College."

9.6 BHAI KAHN SINGH NABHA (1861-1938)

Bhai Kahn Singh, a distinguished Sikh scholar, was born in the village of **Sabaz Banera**, Patiala. His father Narain Singh was the in-charge of a Gurdwara at **Nabha**. Kahn Singh did not attend any formal school or college, yet he mastered several branches of learning through traditional education. By the age of ten he could recite with ease the Guru Granth Sahib. He also studied Sanskrit as well as Persian. In 1887, he was appointed tutor to Tikka Ripudaman Singh, the heir apparent of Sikh State of **Nabha**. From the Maharaja's private secretary to the judge of the High Court, he held different positions in the state.

In 1885, he accidentally met Max Arthur Macauliffe who was working on Sikh scriptures and history of early Sikhism. Macauliffe took Kahn Singh to England and depended a great deal on his advice and guidance acknowledging his contribution; he assigned Kahn Singh the copyright of his 6-volume *The Sikh Religion*. From among Bhai Kahn Singh's numerous works, *Gurshabad Ratanakar Mahan Kosh*, the first encyclopaedia of Sikhism, will always remain a monumental one. Besides his maiden work *Raj Dharam* (1884), his other prominent works include: *Gurmat Prabhakar*, a glossary of Sikh terminology, concepts and institutions, *Gurmat Sudhakar*, an anthology of important Sikh texts, scriptural and historical, *Gur Chand Divakar* and *Gur Sabad Alankar*, dealing primarily with rhetoric and prosody employed in Guru Granth Sahib and some other Sikh texts. His *Gur Girah Kasauti* answers some of the questions raised by his pupil, Tikka Ripudaman Singh, about the meanings of certain hymns in the Guru Granth Sahib, and his *Sharab Nikhedh* is a didactic work stressing the harmful effects of drinking. Among his other works are *Visnu Purana*, *Sadd and Chandi di Var*. Bhai Kahn Singh lived his life totally immersed in his scholarly pursuits and left a permanent imprint on the subsequent Sikh literature. His works continued to enrich the contemporary Sikh life in its diverse aspects and his writings subtly moulded the course of Sikh awakening at the turn of the century.

9.6.1 Hum Hindu Nahin: We are not Hindus

In 1898, he published *Hum Hindu Nahin* (*We are not Hindus*) with a specific purpose. The title makes Kahn Singh's view abundantly clear. It was a response to the **Arya Samaj** propaganda that Sikhs were just a sect of Hindus. His book set forth forcefully the Sikh standpoint with regard to the Sikh identity. It represented the dominant view of the Singh Sabha movement and has ever since retained the fame, which it so quietly acquired. It is worth stressing that the approach adopted in this book is neither hostile nor aggressive. In his presentation, he took great care to stress that he sought peace, not discord.

Bhai Kahn Singh was a revolutionary *Gursikh* far ahead of his times. Kahn Singh justified the need of such a work as 'We are not Hindus' when "it is perfectly obvious that the Khalsa is indeed distinct from Hindu society." He brings out the significance of his work through a parable, which runs briefly as follows: Guru **Gobind** Singh once covered a donkey with a lion

skin and set it loose in the wasteland. Men as well as cattle thought it was a lion and were so frightened that none dared approach it. Released from the misery of carrying burdens and free to graze fields to its heart's content, the donkey grew plump and strong. It spent its days happily roaming the area around Anandpur. One day, however it was attracted by the braying of a mare from its old stable. There it was recognised by the potter who removed the lion skin, replaced its pannier-bags, and once again began whipping it to make it work.

The Guru used this parable to teach his Sikhs an important lesson. "My dear sons," he said, "I have not involved you in a mere pantomime as in the case of this donkey I have freed you, wholly and completely, from the bondage of caste. You have become my sons and Sahib Kaur has become your mother: Do not follow the foolish example of the donkey and return to your old caste allegiance. If forgetting my words and abandoning the sacred faith of the Khalsa you return to your various castes your fate will be that of the donkey. Your courage will desert you and you will have lived your lives in vain." Thus, Kahn Singh emphasises the casteless aspect of Sikhism which makes it different from the caste-ridden Hinduism.

Kahn Singh regretted that many of his brethren were in fact neglecting this aspect of the Guru's teaching. They regard themselves as Sikhs of the Khalsa but accept the Hindu tradition though Sikh religion is distinct from the Hindu religion. The reason for this, as Kahn Singh argues, "is that they have neither read their own Scriptures with care nor studied the historical past. Instead they have spent their time browsing through erroneous material and listening to the deceitful words of the self-seeking. The tragedy is that these brethren are falling away from the Khalsa."

Kahn Singh was convinced that India "will flourish when people of all religions are loyal to their own traditions, yet willing to accept other Indians as members of the same family when they recognise that harming one means harming the nation, and when religious differences are no longer an occasion for discord." He advised the Sikhs to practice their religion in the harmonious spirit of Guru Nanak, "for thus we shall ensure that mutual envy and hatred do not spread. At the same time, you will grow in affection for all your fellow countrymen, recognising all who inhabit this country of India as one with yourself." Thus, Bhai Kahn Singh, while advocating a separate Sikh identity, does not view it as oppositional to other religious/community identities.

Kahn Singh made a pioneering contribution to the Singh Sabha Movement. He had to face expulsion from the Nabha state because he recommended idols be removed from Darbar Sahib. He also undertook enormous efforts to establish the Khalsa college at Amritsar, thereby boosting a movement for Sikh education.

9.7 SUMMARY

This lesson dwelt on how these political thinkers, while analysing the socio-political milieu of colonial India, brought different identities to the political domain. Naicker focused on a Dravidian identity and culture; Ramabai's struggle was against the patriarchal order within Hinduism and Christianity; Jaipal Singh championed the cause of the adivasis; Nazrul's protest was against the artificial division of Hindus and Muslims on the basis of constructed symbols; and Kahn Singh sharpened a distinct Sikh identity. Manifestation of these diverse

identities sharpen our understanding of colonial as well as post-colonial India.

9.8 EXERCISES

- 1) Explain Naicker's ideology of mobilisation to establish just serial order.
- 2) Write a note on Naicker's Dravidian of movement in Tamil Nadu.
- 3) Explain pandita Rama Bai's contribution to Women's rise and reform.
- 4) Write a note on Jaipal Singh's political leadership.
- 5) Explain the various contribution of Nazrul Islam to the growth of Nationalism in India.
- 6) Write a note on Bhai Kahn Singh and his views on Sikh identity.