
UNIT 4 EARLY NATIONALIST RESPONSES: RAMMOHAN ROY, BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE, DAYANAND SARASWATI AND JYOTIBA PHULE

Structure

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

There are two different phases of Indian nationalism. The first one continues till the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 whereas nationalism, in its second phase, was articulated through popular mobilisation around various kinds of anti-imperial ideologies. Of all the competing ideologies, Gandhian 'non violence' was perhaps the most popular ideology in organising anti-imperial movements in India. Unlike the second phase when the national intervention was primarily political, viz., the capture of state power, the first phase was largely dominated by the zeal of reform that appeared to have brought together various individuals with more or less same ideological agenda. In these kinds of activities, individuals played decisive roles in sustaining the zeal of those who clustered around them. What inspired them was perhaps the idea of European Enlightenment that traveled to India simultaneously with colonialism. Drawn on the philosophy of Enlightenment, neither was the British colonialism condemned nor were there attempts to expose its devastating impact on India's socio-political map in the long run. In other words, colonialism was hailed for its assumed role in radically altering the archaic socio-political networks sustaining the feudal order. It is possible to argue that colonialism in this phase did not become as ruthless as it was later. And, in contrast with the past rulers, the British administration under the aegis of the East India Company seemed to have appreciated social reforms either as a matter of faith in the philosophy of Enlightenment or as a strategy to infuse the Indian social reality with the values on which it drew its sustenance. With this background in view, this unit will focus on the early nationalist response to the British rule that was largely appreciated in comparison with the socio-political nature of the past rulers. Not only will there be an argument seeking to explain the uncritical endorsement of the British rule by the socially

radical thinkers, but there will also be an attempt to focus on the changing nature of colonialism that also had a noticeable impact on their conceptualisation of the British rule in India that became coterminous with exploitation very soon.

4.2 EARLY NATIONALIST RESPONSE

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of the individual thinkers, it would be appropriate to identify the sources from which they seemed to have derived their ideas in the context of an incipient colonial rule. As mentioned earlier, the first formidable influence was definitely the Enlightenment philosophy that significantly influenced the famous 1832 Macaulay's minutes. Seeking to organise Indian society in a typical Western mould, Macaulay argued for an introduction of English education and British jurisprudence for their role in radically altering the feudal basis of Indian society. What was implicit in his views was the assumption that the liberal values of the British variety would definitely contribute to the required social transformation in India. So, the arrival of the British in India was a boon in disguise. Not only did colonialism introduce Indians to Western liberalism but it also exposed them to the socially and politically progressive ideas of Bentham, Mill, Carlyle and Coleridge, which drew attention to a qualitatively different mode of thinking on issues of contemporary relevance. The second equally important influence was the ideas of German philosophers, Schelling, Fichte, Kant and Herder. These ideas gained ground as the intellectual challenge against the British rule acquired momentum. In fact, there are clear traces of German ideas in Bankim's writings. Unlike Ram Mohan Roy whose historical mission was to combat the social evils in the form of inhuman customs, including the *suttee*, Bankim sought to champion the goal of freedom by drawing upon the German philosophy and Hindu past. Conceptually, the notions of *volk*, community and nation seemed to have inspired the early nationalists, including Bankim presumably because they contributed to homogeneity despite differences in the context of foreign rule. So, the primary concern of the early nationalists was not uniform: for some, the introduction of the ideas of European Enlightenment was unwarranted simply because that would destroy the very basis of civilisation of India that drew, in a considerable way, on the Hindu past; while there are others who adopted a very favourable stance vis-a-vis the English rule and its obvious social consequences. The third significant influence in the early phase of Indian nationalism was the French revolution and its message for Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Ram Mohan was swayed by the ideas that inspired the French revolution. In his writings and deeds, Roy launched a vigorous attack on the archaic social mores dividing India along caste and religious cleavages. For him, the priority was to create a society free from decadent feudal values that simply stood in the way of attaining the goal of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. The final source is of course the traditional Indian thought that was interpreted in the context of colonial rule. Not only were there writings of William Jones and Max Muller on India's rich cultural traditions, there were contributions from the renaissance thinkers, including Vivekananda, that provided the basis for redefining India's past glossing largely the phase of Muslim rule in India. Inspired by the message of Bhagvad Gita, the renaissance thinkers supported the philosophy of action in the service of the motherland. What they tried to argue was the idea that successes or failures were not as important as the performance of one's duty with 'the purest of motives'. Their attack on fatalism in Hinduism and Buddhist religion clearly shows how realists they were in conceptualising the outcome of human action. For them, life could be transformed in this world by individuals believing in the philosophy of action. So, it was not surprising that both Vivekananda and

Dayananda insisted on *karma*, or service to the humanity, as the best possible way of justifying one's existence as human beings.

The above discussion of sources is very useful in underlining the importance of intellectual threads in shaping the nationalist ideas of the early nationalist thinkers like Rammohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Dayananda Saraswati and Jotirao Phule. It should also be mentioned here that while seeking to articulate an alternative nationalist vision, the early nationalists were influenced by the processes of socio-economic and political churning of a particular phase of British colonialism when political articulation of freedom of the Gandhian era was a distant goal.

4.3 THOUGHTS OF RAMMOHAN ROY

Rammohan Roy was a social thinker *par excellence*. His role in doing away with *satee* among the orthodox Brahmins was historical. By founding Brahma Samaj, Roy sought to articulate his belief in the Islamic notion of 'one god'. In his conceptualisation, social reform should precede political reform for the former laid the foundation for liberty in the political sense. Given his priority, Roy did not appear to have paid adequate attention to his political ideas. Although he despised colonialism, he appeared to have endorsed the British rule presumably because of its historical role in combating the prevalent feudal forces. Not only was the British rule superior, at least, culturally than the erstwhile feudal rulers, it would also contribute to a different India by injecting the values it represented. His admiration for the British rule was based on his faith in its role in radically altering traditional mental make-up of the Hindus. The continued British rule, he further added, would eventually lead to the establishment of democratic institutions as in Great Britain. Like any other liberals, Ray also felt that the uncritical acceptance of British liberal values was probably the best possible means of creating democratic institutions in India. In other words, he appreciated the British rule as 'a boon in disguise' because it would eventually transplant democratic governance in India. The other area for which the role of Ram Mohan was decisive was the articulation of demand for the freedom of press. Along with his colleague, Dwarkanath Tagore, he submitted a petition to the Privy Council for the freedom of press, which he justified as essential for democratic functioning of the government. Not only would the freedom of press provide a device for ventilation of grievances it would also enable the government to adopt steps for their redressal before they caused damage to the administration. Viewed in the liberal mould, this was a remarkable step in that context for two reasons: (a) the demand for freedom of press was a significant development in the growing, though limited, democratisation among the indigenous elite in India; and (b) the idea of press freedom, if sanctioned, would act as 'a safety valve' for the colonial ruler because of the exposition of grievances in the public domain.

Rammohan Roy had played a progressive role in a particular historical context. While conceptualising his historical role, Roy appeared to have privileged his experience of British colonialism over its immediate feudal past. By undermining the obvious devastating impact of foreign rule on Indian society, politics and economy, he also clearly supported one system of administration over the other rather consciously simply because of his uncritical faith in British Enlightenment in significantly transforming the prevalent Indian mindsets. One may find it difficult to digest his invitation to the British planters in India despite their brutalities

and ruthlessness vis-à-vis the Indian peasants if discussed in isolation. But this was perfectly rationalised if one is drawn to his argument justifying the continuity of the empire on the basis of its economic strength. The more the planters acquire 'wealth', argued Roy, the better would be their defence for continuity in India. Given his historical role, it would not be wrong to argue that Ram Mohan Roy discharged his responsibility in tune with the historical requirement of his role in the particular context of India's growth as a distinct socio-political unit. It would therefore be historically inaccurate to identify him as pro-imperial thinker simply because nationalism did not acquire the characteristics of the later period. His ideas – whether supporting the British or criticising the past rulers – were both historically conditioned and textured; he authored his historical role in the best possible way reflecting the dilemma of the period and the aspiration of those groping for an alternative in the social and political doldrums of incipient colonialism.

4.4 BANKIM'S IDEAS IN SHAPING NATIONALISM

Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94) was probably the first systematic expounder in India of the idea of nationalism. His unique contribution lay in conceptualising nationalism in indigenous terms. In opposition to the Muslim rule, Bankim elaborated the idea by drawing upon the *Bhagavad Gita* that was widely translated in Bengali in the nineteenth century. In his translated version of *Gita*, what Bankim provided was a reinterpretation in the light of Western knowledge to make the *Gita* more suitable reading for the Western-educated intelligentsia in the newly emerged context of the nationalist opposition to the British rule. An entirely new *Gita* emerged reflecting the concerns of those seeking to provide a national alternative to foreign rule.

What was primary in Bankim's thought was his concern for national solidarity for on it depended the growth of the Hindu society. National solidarity is conceivable, as Bankim argued, only when there is a change in one's attitude in the following two ways: first, the conviction that what is good for every Hindu is good for me and my views, beliefs and actions must be consistent with those of other members of the Hindu society. And, secondly, one should inculcate a single-minded devotion to the nation and its interests. This was an idea that Bankim nurtured in all his novels and other writings because he believed that without care and love for the nation (and implicitly for the country) one simply failed to justify one's existence as a unit in a cohesive whole, called nation. Here lies an important theoretical point. Unlike typical liberals, Bankim was in favour of community and the role of the individual was explained in terms of what was good for the former. He admitted that the contact with the British enabled the Hindu society to learn its weaknesses not in terms of physical strength but in terms of what he defined as 'culture'. Hindus lack the culture simply because they are so diverse, separated by language, race, and religion and so on, and it would not be possible for them to create conditions for national solidarity unless this divisive content of Hindus completely disappeared.

From the notion of national solidarity, Bankim now delved into *anushilan* or his concept of practice. Elaborating this notion in his 1888 essay entitled 'The Theory of Religion', Bankim defined it as 'a system of culture', more complete and more perfect than the Western concept of culture, articulated by the Western thinkers like Comte and Mathew Arnold. Critical of the agnostic Western view of practice, anusilan was based on 'bhakti' (devotion)

that implied a combination of 'knowledge and duty'. In practical terms, anushilan means that it simultaneously imparts knowledge of what is good for the community and what the community is supposed to do under specific circumstances. Anushilan implies duty that is the performance of an act for which one should not expect reward. In other words, the community is duty-bound to perform certain acts not out of choice but out of devotion to a cause or a goal. From this, he derived the idea of duty towards the nation. There was no choice and the community had to work for 'the defence of the nation' that was completely crippled due to specific historical circumstances. For Bankim, this selfless and non-possessive notion of devotion lay at the foundation of *dharma* or religion.

By underlining the importance of *dharma* in national solidarity, Bankim sought to create conditions for a separate identity for the Hindu community. Not only was it necessary for a subject nation, it was also most appropriate for building a strong community on the basis of its inherent cultural strength and not merely by imitating the West. Superior in the domain of sciences and industry, the West represented a culture that succeeded in conquering the East. Hence he argued for emulating the West in the domain of material culture. But in the domain of spiritual culture, the East was certainly superior and hence should not be bypassed. Combining these two ideas, Bankim thus suggested that the West could be emulated in the domain in which it was superior while internalising the spiritual distinctiveness of the East. So, in the construction of a national identity, Bankim does not appear to be entirely xenophobic but a creative ideologue of the early nationalist movement appreciating the strength and weakness of both East and West simultaneously. In other words, the difference-seeking project of Bankim constitutes what Partha Chatterjee defines as 'the moment of departure' in our national thought.

4.5 RELIGIO - POLITICAL IDEAS OF DAYANAND SARASWATI

While Bankim had a clear political message for the nation that lacked solidarity, Dayananda (1825-83) who founded the Arya Samaj had concerns similar to those of Rammohan. Primarily a social reformer, the latter believed that the success of the British in subjugating the Hindu society was largely due to its divisive nature and also the failure in realising its strength. If Rammohan drew upon Upanishads, Bankim upon the Gita, Dayanand while articulating his nationalist response, was inspired by Vedas. The other contrasting point that marked Dayananda off from the rest lies in the utter absence of the influence of European culture and thought on him. Rammohan was fascinated by European enlightenment and his response was articulated accordingly. The influence of the positivist and utilitarian philosophy was evident in Bankim's conceptualisation of national solidarity. Unlike them, Dayananda found the Vedic messages as most appropriate for inspiring the moribund nation, plagued by several 'ills' that could easily be cured. Seeking to construct a strong Hindu society, Dayananda was strikingly different from other early nationalists in two specific ways: *first*, his response was essentially based on a conceptualisation that is absolutely indigenous in nature presumably because he was not exposed to the Western ideas. Unique in his approach, Dayananda therefore interrogated the processes of history in a language that added a new dimension to the early nationalist response. *Secondly*, his response was also an offshoot of a creative dialogue with the traditional scriptures, especially the Vedas – which appeared to have influenced the later Extremist leadership for its appeal to distinct civilisational characteristics

of India. Unlike those who were drawn to Western liberal ideas, Dayananda was probably the only thinker of his generation to have begun a debate on the relative importance of the ancient scriptures in inspiring a nation that was divided on innumerable counts.

Two ideas stand out in Dayananda's *The Satyarth Prakush* (Light of Truth) that was published in 1875. First, the idea of God as an active agent of creation appeared to have appealed him most. He asserted that the empirical world was no illusion but had an independent and objective existence. His refutation of *advaita* and *nirguna brahman* separated him from Rammohan and Vivekananda as his denial of *sakara* and *avatara* distinguished him from Bankim and Ramakrishna. On this basis, he further argued that human action was an index of punishment and reward by God. Here a theoretical effort was made by Dayananda to assess individual acts in terms of certain well-defined norms of behaviour in the name of God. This was what inspired Aurobindo who found in this contention a clearly-argued theoretical statement not only for analysing human behaviour at a critical juncture of history but also for mobilising a vanquished nation for a goal that was to be rewarded by God. In other words, by redefining God in a creative manner, Dayananda actually articulated the Old Testament God of justice and not New Testament God of love. Underling the importance of Divine in shaping human action, the Arya Samaj founder was perhaps trying to play on the religious sentiments for meaningful social activities. This was, in his views, the basic requirement for a nation to grow and prosper.

The second important idea that stems from *The Satyarth Prakash* is actually a comment on the divisive nature of Hindu society. According to him, the British victory in India was largely due to 'our own failings'. As he mentioned, 'it is only when brothers fight among themselves that an outsider poses as an arbiter'. Furthermore, the Hindu society was inherently crippled due to practices like child marriage, carnal gratification that clearly defied the Vedas and the principles it stood for. In his words, what caused an irreparable damage to our society was 'untruthfulness and neglect of Vedas'. Hence the first task was to grasp the substance of Vedas where lay the distinctiveness of the Hindus as a race. No attack on the British' would succeed till this was accomplished to our satisfaction. This was probably the reason why the Arya Samaj was not allowed to involve in direct political campaign against the British.

These ideas were unique given their roots in Hindu scriptures. Here lies the historical role of Dayananda who explored the Vedas primarily to inculcate a sense of identity among the Hindus who, so far, remained highly fractured and were unable to resist the foreign rule. In other words, he turned to the Vedas to discover a 'pure' Hinduism with which to confront the corruption of Hinduism in the present. He felt that the Vedas contained Hindu beliefs in their most ancient and pure form showing God to be just and infinite creator. He called for the purging of the degenerate practices of Hindus in the present. He was critical of the present divisive caste system that had distorted the Vedic practices since social hierarchies of Vedic society was based on merit, ability and temperament of the individual, rather than on his birth.

Similarly, while conceptualising God as a creative agency and not solely a spiritual being, he purposely redefined the Vedic notion of God to rejuvenate a moribund nation that appeared to have lost its vigour and zeal. By defending reward and punishment as inevitable for good and bad 'deeds' respectively, Dayananda probably sought to eradicate 'the evils', impeding

the growth of the Hindu society. In other words, for Dayananda the primary task was to strengthen the moral foundation of the Hindu society that, given its inherent weaknesses, remained highly divided. Like Rammohan, Dayananda was a social reformer with almost no interest in politics. And, accordingly he scripted the role of the Arya Samaj in a strictly non-political way. The reasons are obvious. In the context of a strong colonial rule, the evinced political role of the Samaj would certainly have attracted the attention of the government that was not desirable especially when the organisation was at its infancy. By deciding to stay away from politics, not only did Dayananda fulfill his historical role but also left behind a clearly-articulated nationalist response that drew absolutely on Hindu traditions and especially the *Vedas*.

4.6 JYOTIBA PHULE: A SOCIAL REVOLUTIONARY

Jotirao Phule (1827-90), like Dayananda, had the desire for a form of social organisation that would reflect the merits and aptitudes of the individual, rather than enforcing birth as the basis both for occupation and for religious status. The play, *Tritiya Ratna* (The Third Eye), which he published in 1855 is a powerful exposition of his ideology. The play is about the exploitation of an ignorant and superstitious peasant couple by a cunning Brahmin priest and their subsequent enlightenment by a Christian missionary. Three important points stand out in this play. First, critical of Brahmin domination, he made a wider point concerning the oppressive nature of Hindu religion that, in its present form, imposed an ideological hegemony on the *shudras* and by suggesting several purifying rituals, it also contributed to material impoverishment of the untouchables. Secondly, by underlining the role of a Christian missionary who rescued the couple from the clutches of the greedy Brahmin, Phule seemed to have explored the possibility of conversion as probably the only practical device to get-out of the exploitative Hindu religion. Although in the play, Phule did not talk about conversion per se he by supporting the conversion of Pandita Ramabai, a Chitpavan Brahmin scholar, defended arguments in its support. To him, Christianity was not only an escape from Brahminical oppression but also a religion offering salvation. Thirdly, underlying this story, there remained another major ideological point concerning the importance of education in sustaining the Brahminic hegemony in Hindu society. He was persuaded to believe that access to education, and particularly, literacy in English, conferred vital social resources on the Brahmins as a social group. As a result, the Brahmins continued to dominate the contemporary social, political and administrative domains. By acquiring the new skills in the changed circumstances of the British rule, the Brahmins therefore sustained their influence by redefining their roles in accordance with the requirements of the day. In other words, by being English literate, the Brahmins emerged as the most useful social group that the British government could ill-afford to ignore given their obvious role in running the administration.

What historical role did Phule play? Similar to the early nationalists, the principal message that he conveyed was concerned with his model of a society free from Brahminic exploitation. For him, the British rule was a boon in disguise for having struck at the foundation of the caste hegemony of the Brahmins. Presumably because of this dimension of the foreign rule, Phule appeared to have underplayed the exploitative nature of colonialism. It was also possible that Phule accorded top priority to his mission of securing a respectful place of the *shudratishudra* (untouchables) in the society in which the Brahmins held the hegemony. Phule was not so much against the Hindu scriptures per se as he was against the values and

- ideas sustaining the prevalent Hindu system. In other words, by deliberately articulating his opposition to Brahminical discourse and not Hinduism as such, Phule was perhaps trying to distance from the bandwagon against Hinduism. In his view, Hinduism is rooted in *Shrutis* (Vedas) and the *Smritis* and Brahmins distorted them to rationalise their hegemony. Similarly, the interpretation that the Varna system (the division of society into four different clusters) was god-given and hence unassailable was derived from 'the selfish desire' of the Brahmins to perpetuate their domination on the rest of the society. So, not only did he reject the Hindu system and its theoretical literature altogether but also argued, rather persuasively, against the dichotomous nature of the Hindu society nurturing Brahminic hegemony over the shudras. This was an arrangement in which, he argued further, members of the privileged segment of the society, viz., the Brahmins, tended to justify their hegemony by reference to the religious tracts and distorted practices. On the basis of his criticism of Hindu theology, he challenged the notion of *avatara* as an agency of change when the society was completely demoralised. In the Hindu conceptualisation of *avatara*, Phule found another design, quoted in a religiously-justified distorted version of 'good' and 'bad' to avoid friction in Hindu society. Drawn on his mission to create an equitable order striking at the roots of the dichotomous Hindu society, he never reconciled himself to the Brahminical gods and beliefs sustaining them. In other words, by challenging the Brahminical exposition of Hinduism from the shudras perspective, Phule successfully articulated an alternative discourse of history and its unfolding.

For Phule, literacy and especially English education, was most useful in substantially eradicating the Brahminic hegemony. Not only was literacy a powerful device in radically altering the existent social order it would also bring about gender equality. Phule was perhaps the first nationalist to have seriously pursued the women literacy and an exclusively girls school was established in 1842 at his behest. In this respect, he, like Rammohan, appeared to have appreciated the British rule for having laid the material and institutional foundation of a modern-equalitarian society. Though persuaded by liberalism of the Western variety, Phule was not particularly happy with the British response to people's needs and demands. Like the other early nationalists, there was no doubt that what prompted Phule to endorse foreign rule was its role in creating a completely new socio-political system undermining the prevalent hegemony of the Brahmins over the shudras.

The other distinctive dimension in Phule's response is that he stands out among the early nationalists for having implemented his ideas, as far as possible, into practice. *The Satyashodhak Samaj* (the Society of the Seekers of Truth) that came into being in 1873 was founded with this objective in mind. Not only was the *Samaj* involved in girls' formal education, widow remarriage and campaign against prohibition, it also led to vigorous debates on the nature of Hindu society and the scriptures, especially *Vedas* on which it was based. So, Phule was a forerunner of Gandhi in the sense that most of the major socio-political issues that the Mahatma raised were broached by him in a context when the British rule did not appear to be as oppressive as it later became. By consistently arguing against the orthodox Hinduism, denying a majority of their legitimate dues, he provided a powerful social critique of the prevalent Brahminical practices and values, justified in the name of religion and religious texts.

4.7 NATIONALIST RESPONSE : A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

Another major characteristic of the early nationalist response is the way the nation was conceptualised. By avoiding reference to Muslims, these nationalist thinkers seemed to have clearly identified the constituents of the proposed nation. By drawing on exclusively Hindu traditional tracts like Upanishads or *Vedas*, the early nationalists identified the sources of inspiration for the nation at its formative phase that clearly set the ideological tone in opposition to Islam and its supportive texts. Their idea of nation had therefore a narrow basis since Muslims hardly figured in the conceptualisation. The explanation probably lies in the historical context characterised by the declining decadent feudal culture, supported by the Muslim rulers on the one hand and the growing acceptance of the values of European modernity on the other. Apart from Bankim who had strong views on the Muslim rule, none of the early nationalist thinkers articulated their opinion on this issue in clear terms. What drove them to embark on a nationalist project was the mission to revamp and revitalise the Hindus who failed to emerge as a solid block due largely to the inherent divisive nature. Whether it was Dayananda or Bankim, the idea of consolidating the Hindus as a race seemed to have acted in a decisive manner while articulating their response. Given his interest in Persian literature and Islamic culture, Rammohan held different views from Bankim. Since Phule was critical of the dichotomous Hindu society, he argued in a reformist language and reference to Muslims did not appear to be relevant. In his perception, the British rule was providential simply because it provided him with intellectual resources to combat the archaic practices in Hinduism.

What is evident now is that in articulating a nation, these thinkers discharged a role that was historically conditioned. It would therefore be wrong to simply label them as partisan due to their indifference or critical comments on the Muslims and their rule. By critically endorsing the British rule as most appropriate for the nation they were persuaded in two ways: first, the Enlightenment philosophy provided an alternative system of thought to critically assess Hinduism and traditional scriptures on which it was based. Secondly, by drawing upon the civilisational resources of the nation, these thinkers had also articulated an intellectual search for a model that was socio-culturally meaningful for the constituencies it was conceptualised. In this sense, the idea of nation, though narrowly constituted, seems to be a product of historical circumstances in which they were placed.

There is a final point. Their response was hardly political. While Dayananda eschewed politics altogether for the Arya Samaj, Rammohan was concerned more with eradicating the evil practices in Hindu society. Bankim's historical novel, *Anandamath*, had a political message in his support for the sannyasi rebel against the ruler. Although his ideas of state and state power are not so well-developed, his argument for the spiritual superiority of the East seems to have given him an intellectual edge over other early nationalists. Phule was also reluctant to essay the role of the *Satyasadhok Samaj* in political terms. What was central to him was to challenge the Brahminical hegemony over the *shudras* who constituted a majority. Given this well-defined priority, Phule scripted the role of the Samaj accordingly. Furthermore, the avoidance of a clear political role was perhaps strategically conditioned in a context when an anti-British stance was likely to draw government attention. In other words, apprehending damage to the mission they undertook, these thinkers were persuaded to adopt an agenda allowing them to pursue their ideological mission without governmental intervention. Despite

all these, the ideas they floated galvanised the masses into action when the nationalists confronted the British government for a final show-down. Not only did they inspire the Extremists, they also provided intellectual resources to Gandhi and his followers. So, the early nationalist response forms an integral part of the nationalist thought that was differently textured in different historical circumstances depending on what was central in the nationalist vision.

4.8 SUMMARY

What runs through the early nationalist response – whether Rammohan, Bankim, Dayananda or Phule – was the concern for massive reform in Hindu society that lost its vitality. Given the fractured nature of Hindu society, it would be difficult, if not impossible, they argued, for the nation to strilce roots, let alone prosper. Drawn on his liberal values of the British variety, Rammohan welcomed the foreign ruie as a significant step towards radically transforming the Hindu society by injecting the basic ideas of Enlightenment. With an uncritical faith in *Gita*, Bankim found in *anushilan dharma* an appropriate device to galvanise a moribund nation. While Dayananda distinguished himself from the rest by depending exclusively on the Vedas, Phule appeased to have been influenced by Western Enlightenment in articulating his views on reform. There is an implicit assumption in what they wrote attributing the triumph of the British to the divisive nature of Hindu society. While Bankim endorsed Western superiority in the material domain and hence their success, he however drew on the spiritual resources of the Hindus in instilling a sense of identity. Interestingly, this was the running thread in the writings of Rammohan, Dayananda and Phule. By privileging conceptualisation, a difference-seeking agenda figured prominently and the distinction between 'us' and 'them' was pursued consistently to develop an alternative nationalist discourse.

4.9 EXERCISES

1. What was the basic argument in the early nationalist response for rejuvenating the moribund Hindu society?
2. How do you account for the difference between Rammohan, Bankim and Phule on the one hand and Dayananda on the other?
3. How was nation conceptualised in the early nationalist response? What are the basic ingredients of a nation according to these thinkers?
4. "A difference-seeking agenda seems to have governed the early nationalists while conceptualising a nation". Elucidate the statement with reference to the writings of Rammohan, Bankim, Dayananda and Phule.