Emergence of the Political Subject

Ranabir Samaddar

Centre for the Study of Culture & Society
Bangalore-11.

SAGE www.sagepublications.com
Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore • Washington DC

CSCS
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY
Acc No. 010280
Call No. 320.01 SAM
Date: 23.02.10

Copyright © Ranabir Samaddar, 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

First published in 2010 by

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B 1/I-1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area
Mathura Road, New Delhi 110044, India
www.sagepub.in

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320, USA

SAGE Publications Ltd
1 Oliver's Yard, 55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP, United Kingdom

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd
33 Pekin Street
#02-01 Far East Square
Singapore 048763

Published by Vivek Mehra for SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd, typeset in 10.5/12.5 pt Minion by Star Compugraphics Private Limited, Delhi and printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Samaddara, Ranabira.
Emergence of the political subject/Ranabir Samaddar.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
1. Political science–Philosophy. 2. Subject (Philosophy) 3. Citizenship. I. Title.
JA71.S265 320.01–dc22 2009 2009034895

ISBN: 978-81-321-0290-8 (HB)

The SAGE Team: Elina Majumdar, Meena Chakravorty, Mathew P.J. and Trinankur Banerjee

To

Jean Luc Racine and Josiane Racine

I must also declare my debt to SAGE Publications for once again agreeing to publish an experimental work, and my thanks go in particular to Sugata Ghosh, Elina Majumdar, and Meena Chakravorty.

I wish I had read Javed Majeed's *Muhammad Iqbal—Islam, Aesthetics and Postcolonialism* (Routledge, 2009) when I was writing this book, particularly Chapter 3. But it came in my hand only after I had handed over my revised manuscript to the publisher. But readers particularly interested in Chapter 3 are advised to read this wonderful book on Iqbal, in which the discussion on language and subjectivity surfaces again and again, and the book explains the point in a way better than what I do.

Finally, I feel enormously happy to dedicate this book to the continuing friendship with Jean Luc Racine and Josiane Racine. They have provided me warm companionship through the years and at difficult times. I want them to know that their encouragement has meant a lot to me.

Introduction

This book is on the political subject, the conditions of its emergence, the theoretical implications of this emergence, particularly the implications for our history. Philosophy has till date speculated on self, reason, and existence. Does politics obey its rules and findings? Does the political subject display other features—features that remain beyond our speculative texts? These questions arise as politics throws up unexpected array of actions and repertoires of experiences, and the political subject repeatedly emerges as the constitutive force of our life.

Or, we can reframe our introductory inquiry in this way: Can philosophy be reconceived under colonial and post-colonial conditions? By philosophy, if we mean the philosophy of the subject, and specifically, philosophy of the political subject?

THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE POLITICAL SUBJECT

There are two grounds for raising the question.

First, societies under colonial and post-colonial conditions had previously different speculative and inquiring traditions largely banished today to what can be called the popular sphere of thinking, or the 'extra-colonial' sphere of thinking.[1] These traditions did not have the 'normal' connection that they could have been expected to have with the new political thinking under the colonial conditions, either because in the East speculative traditions had not much to offer on the materiality of the political life except by way of some advices (in India Kautilya's *Arthashastra* being one of the early prominent texts and *Sier Mutaqherin* being one of the last when power was slipping into the hands of the new colonial rulers), or under modern colonial and post-colonial conditions the issues of concern demanded different frameworks of thought, or more significantly different ways of responding to new realities where speculation was no more a preferred social activity. To recall Pierre Bourdieu of *Pascalian Meditations*,[2] and to give the words there a twist, speculation as a social activity in this society was not popular among members of the wealthy or the political classes and the aristocracy, or was quickly dead, the sociology of meditating philosophy was nearly extinct, and as I demonstrate here in one of the reflections, what came in its place was a sociology of actions, and new theory of practice.

Second, the extremely contentious colonial and post-colonial politics skipped many centuries of transitions to arrive straightaway at the problematic of the political subject. The route was not through centuries long speculation on the self, but a dramatic arrival at the great question of the political subject, as ruthless colonial rule moved the colonised societies to a resistance culture where the normal question to be asked would be: Who are you to rule? What are our roles then? Who is the ruler and who is the subject? In short, the issue of political self emerged directly under specific colonial and post-colonial conditions cutting many philosophical knots of past centuries. Political necessities led to new thinking, political subject-hood became a practical question of society. What in the Western political history required centuries of thinking to emerge as a question, was asked on the streets in the East, namely, what does it mean to act in the name of freedom, what does it mean to act politically? This was a great transition in the East, whose significance unfortunately is still not fully understood by social theorists and political thinkers and philosophers whether in India or in the West where political philosophy has had a long tradition of being connected with inquiries of self and had a sort of renaissance in the later half of the 20th century. The consequent question has therefore remained un-addressed, namely what happens if the road to philosophy is not through metaphysics, but politics?

The present volume consisting of reflections on the different dimensions or conditions of the political subject is written in that background. These reflections are grouped in two ways: one set reflects on the conjunctions of the emergence of the subject; the other set is made of explanations and commentaries, which reflect on the repeated emergence of the political subject towards reconstituting the political society. The inquiry and the provisional results are all set in this perspective.

Emergence of the Political Subject carries forward the argument in my recent writings to visualise politics in a new way that is to say visualising the conditions of politics in a new way so that the general lessons of such inquiry can be presented to all in a systematic manner. These reflections therefore are not to be taken as commentaries on exceptional situations; they represent a mass of material leading us towards a theory of the political subject under the rules of formation of politics. Based on reflections of a number of texts, the work tries to find out, can we reframe the notion of the political subject in a material manner—in other words, can we rid the notion of political subjecthood of metaphysical traces, which are so typical of any discussion particularly in the West on the question of subject and subjectivity? Can we discuss the theory of the political subject based on rigorous discussions on the conditions of its emergence, without an unnecessary digression into a theory of the self? In other words, I have presented here events, actions, and reflexive commentaries with the consideration that these will at least indicate a range of various contentious situations of colonial and post-colonial politics and cast an all round light on the emergence of the political subject. I must also make clear at the same time that the texts reflected, critiqued, and commented upon here to be sure never claimed that they were conceptual exercises towards bringing out in the open the nature of the political subject. I cannot burden them with the particular expectation of a reader who is preoccupied with another search. But these texts have one thing in common. They encourage us into thinking of the contentious process of politics, collective claim-making, and the conjunctions of certain specific circumstances out of which the political subject emerges in modern colonial and post-colonial history. They provide us with 'situations'.

The texts are for instance some intelligence records on a revolt of a bygone era, an interview transcript involving a rebel leader and a television broadcaster, a short tract on memories, writings of a revolutionary that can be understood only when read as testaments on transition to freedom, a forgotten journal of a group of anti-colonial political activists, a cluster of writings around four exceptional lives, a similar assortment of texts throwing light on the formation of subject under conditions of an empire, and finally a short paragraph from the writing of a great philosopher of our time that is intolerably dense and is about to burst out in a range of meanings. All these texts throw light on the problematic of the subject-hood of politics. They are picked up from the colonial and post-colonial intellectual, political, and administrative history of the last 160 years. They present for the readers the significant sites of politics and political thinking, more significantly they also represent 10 'situations', 10 'positions'. In order to understand the process of hundreds and thousands of people emerging as political subjects and as political subjects authoring politics, we need to glance around for those, perhaps daily and ordinary, contentious 'situations' and 'positions' from which the political subject emerges—a 'subject' who was 'subjected' to colonial politics, but who refused to be mere object of politics and rule, and wanted to become 'subject'. Subjection and subjectivation, the words that indicate the practices of subject-formation, are thus two interlinked processes. It was necessary to mark out those variegated situations of contention, which were often unnoticed, producing what in mainstream social sciences would be treated as minor texts—minor situations—producing minor knowledges. These situations are thus in a sense marginal situations, characteristic, and therefore remind us of the marginality of the colonial and post-colonial situation itself in established political thought. These texts do not present theories, they present what Foucault said, 'thinking', not philosophy, but 'thought', not established ideologies but subjugated ideas. *Emergence of the Political Subject* is not a history of ideas, but a history of colonial and post-colonial situations, situations we must understand to grasp the conditions surrounding the emergence of the political subject.

POLITICS AS A DISCOURSE OF ACTIONS

As 'situation' therefore each of these is a concatenation of circumstances, and we can consider the marginal positions sketched out in this volume as particular concatenations of circumstances. For instance, a guerrilla leader has to comment on a desirable and possible political future in course of an interview because he wants peace now; the political subject learns to dialogue and court death in order to cope with situations of deadlock, itinerant preachers try to grasp the phenomenon of colonialism and alien culture, and attempt to make

sense of patriotism, which would take into account both religion and language, and would thus form a community of believers based on diversity of beliefs to create a political-spiritual nation free from colonial rule; or here is a position that the early militant political activists would need against colonial rule—a position that would require justification for killing of aliens, and therefore a position that is based on replies to definite questions of phenomenology, namely, What is action? What is death? What is good for the country? What is the ethics of the collective? What indeed is ethical existence under alien rule? What is obligation? The replies of the early militant nationalists to these questions, some of them classic political questions, are all clarifying exercises; they indicate the process of reflection by which the political subject emerges under specific conditions. Variegated in composition and concatenation, they do not show any pre-existing self in order to transform into political subject-hood; what they show in these compositions are certain common situations and common contentions leading to the emergence of the political subject. These texts in the process of reflecting on the emergence of the political subject help us also to reflect on the great question of political modernity, namely, 'how to address the contradiction between a subject defined by the freedom of rational thought and a subject grounded in the *determinations of material reality*'.

In an intelligence report I show how the rulers view the emergence of the subject as a process of the appearance of the fanatic, unruly, violent, and unpredictable. Who is a fanatic? Who calls him a fanatic? What precisely is this fanaticism? Here is again a typical situation where those working in the area of political history would have to work more. To the extent I could, I have shown the general lessons to be learnt from these questions and the historical answers, which are important to this study of the emergence of the political subject. The political subject 'exceeds' the standards set by the regime for permissible violence in its determination in the pursuit of a goal, hence its unruliness, its 'fanaticism'. Fanaticism is the readiness to go to war 'discontinuing' the prevailing mode of politics; it is the voice of the underground, it breaks the myth that politics is the product of E/enlightenment; it is unruly because it is still beyond the given formula of the time on the war/politics copula. Political subject exceeds rules of politics.[3] In this way, the unruly colonial subject in India not only repeatedly exceeded the overwhelming legal realities, against which and in the midst of which the colonial subject would have to work, but demonstrated by its life experience that the emergence of the political subject is fundamentally a matter of 'non-correspondence' with the dominant reality. Thus, a guerrilla leader 60 years after the promulgation of the Constitution finds no help from existing constitutional law of the country in order to reconcile or radically amend politics. The anarchist revolutionaries had earlier found that insubordination even under the most extreme degrading conditions may have had an ethical core, but sadly no legal core. Or, the political subject realises today that a continent may integrate on liberal-democratic agenda, still there would be no place for those who remain outside the law, therefore as in the case of the dream of equal national citizenship the nature of the trans-national citizenship also may remain non-inclusive. In short, if politics has to set its face at times against given legal rules and codes, and given political rules, how will it act?

With this great question, political philosophy under colonial and post-colonial conditions arrives at its most important gradient, namely, evolving a theory of action—action for mutiny, sedition, protest, revolt, revolution, challenging the monism of sovereignty with alternative ideas of shared sovereignty... Not that the political subject always succeeds, but s/he has set the agenda. As I try to show in one reflection, s/he faces the issue of history, memory, and action, and I have tried to argue following the way Walter Benjamin had put the matter, s/he is like the figure of a Paul Klee painting, whose face is set towards the past even though a storm propels him forward.[4]

In this sense political history as encapsulated in these chapters not only add new colour and form to philosophy, it proves to be fundamentally no different from political philosophy.[5] This study tries to suggest a new method too—a method which is critical, genealogical, and has to uniquely combine practicality and ethicality. To think of 'politics as a discourse of actions' is now possible because the colonial past was never banal; each moment of the day was violently destructive for nearly 200 years, genealogy and history came together naturally, and philosophy was grounded in that shattering present. This was possible, for reason here showed itself from its first moment of appearance in split form (violence and liberal preaching combined from day one), which is its original form—it needed no Immanuel Kant to demonstrate its practical and pure aspects. Finally this has been possible, for the ethics that this political subject has needed is of a practical kind or one might say of an applied kind, in the sense, that once again ethics was asked here not as a matter of 'care of the self' and 'self-caring technologies', but as a matter of achieving transformation of the conditions outside (though here we should remember that in Gandhi and in the advices of some other leaders, caring for the country had the essential gradient of caring for the self). But transformation was and still remains the great agenda of thinking, and this produces a particular kind of reflection on the political subject.

In this essentially hermeneutical task, I had two secret objectives in mind, which I admit here. First, I wanted to see if a new way of composing our political history is possible, whereby the actors of politics (whom I call in aggregate 'the political subject') would gain a place of more pride in our accounts than what they occupy in the present conventional ones. Second, because I knew that offering a straight definition of the 'political subject' will not help us much in understanding the complexities involved in the theme, this is an attempt to capture the conjuncture of events and forces—a force of circumstances—that produces the category of 'political subject', a category which is neither captured by the term 'citizen', nor by the evocation of the term 'political society'. These two inquiries (the first requiring shorter explanation and the second requiring a somewhat longer one) have developed from my earlier work on migrants, illegal immigrant groups, refugees, informal labour, fleeing peasants, displaced population groups, and shop-floor workers of industries with sunset technologies, in short all who are most of the time in non-citizen circumstances, for whom citizenship as a legal category makes increasingly little sense, even though we know that the term 'citizen' will be invoked for a long time to come for the association with the words such as liberty, equality, and fraternity. I realised as I kept on pondering over these texts that they provide certain grounds enabling me to look through certain conditions at the emergence of the political subject. The condition can be legal, or it may be a dialogic situation, or a situation of nation–region–globe interface, or the inevitable use of terror as a condition or form of political activity, or conditions that may be disciplinary, such as one where the post-colonial subject is constrained with the burden of memory as it moves to claim political agency.

In short, the inquiry is about the autonomy of politics: What can be the enabling or debilitating conditions affecting the autonomy of politics, the subject that claims and gains political agency?

This is therefore not a work on 'self-consciousness' of the oppressed, though that may be a necessary and certainly hazardous task. In Western political philosophy, attempts to recover in historico-political terms such self-consciousness (for instance, the effort of Georg Lukacs in tracing the consciousness of the workers—*History and Class Consciousness*, English translation, MIT Press, 1972) are not rare. The hazards of such a task in extricating itself from traces of the master's hold (Lukacs in a tract on Hegel calls him the Master waiting at a distance for everyone for the final reckoning[6]) are simply enormous. I am not making here any effort to write a history of the consciousness of a group, or a people. This is an attempt to understand how politics creates its subject, the subject who is not the slave of a politics guided by others, but who authors politics. How does such agency arise is the crux of this inquiry. What are the contentious conditions of politics, which allow the emergence of the political subject? What are the conditions that generate the autonomy of politics or conversely destroy this autonomy? I hope that these narratives and reflections on events will help the reader to make sense of the contentious circumstances from which the political subject emerges.

Once more therefore this is a genealogical inquiry. The precondition of conducting such an inquiry is of course taking a distinct attitude to politics, which I have described in my recent work as the 'materiality of politics, its physicality', which I submit is the other name of 'contentious politics'. The contention is extremely physical. Not 'bare life', not even 'naked life', but 'bare bodies' inhabit this politics; and 'bare body' expresses only one aspect of this physicality of the political process. This process is so violent and contentious, that either the sovereign power suffers the spectre of bare bodies everywhere, and therefore takes exceptional measures to cleanse politics of bare bodies, or it requires and creates a juridical structure to clothe politics effectively so that politics has little marks of bare bodies. In these reflections I try to make sense of this materiality or the physicality of the political contentions and the process, which allows through its own contentions the emergence of the political subject. The political subject emerges not through discourses, or the ideological thought of a great philosopher, or even by some sacred text called the Constitution, but as a result of certain conjuncture of conflicting circumstances. 'Situations' create 'positions'. In discussing the political subject we are discussing both situations and positions.

NOT THE IDENTITY OF SELF, BUT THE IDENTITY OF ACTIONS

Who is this political subject? I have already indicated several marks of this figure. At one level the political subject is the citizen-militant fighting at the barricades,[7] raising manifestos, assembling crowds, organising parties, writing and speaking on behalf of collectives, joining all these, voting with fervour or with feet, marching on to parliaments with petitions, organising peasant demonstrations, refusing to pay rent and other taxes, leading attacks on landlords or hunger marches, and declaring millenarian rule... However, this is more a 19th and an early 20th-century figure in the genealogy of the political subject, which lasted till the 1960s of the last century. At another level, the political subject is less of a citizen because s/he has either opted out, or s/he has not been taken in as a legitimate member of the political society. Refugees, dismissed workers, fleeing peasants, persecuted minorities, or groups or collectives demanding self-determination, or women claiming autonomy and agency in politics to frame politics show how citizenship is an inadequate expression of the figure. At the third level, we can see how the political subject is 'subject' to given politics, but aware of the subjection wants to subject politics to its own visions, that is authoring politics. At yet another, the fourth level, this figure does not indicate an individual militant but indicates a collective phenomenon in politics. Some say, this is the phenomenon of 'multitude'. Finally and here is the fifth level, the political subject is the product of democracy—democracy not in the sense of formal institutions, but in the sense of mass politics. Clearly we witness situations where people start contrasting representative democracy with avenues of directly controlling the rulers, situations of 'democratic entropy and the degradation of democratic energy', where people refuse to play the game of representation. Political subject emerges at that conjuncture, marked by a 'counter-democratic universe, that is to say, a universe composed of various manifestations of the citizens' distrust of the authorities … leading to a new cycle of questions',[8] and a reappearance of the structural tensions in issues of citizenship, representation, and sovereignty. We cannot of course arrogantly say that in the Middle Ages when power and politics were mainly a courtly affair, it was not possible for the political subject to emerge. There are countless instances when urban groups with distinct rural followings tried to take politics in their own hand, proposing new kings, new kingdoms, new republics, and new worlds. However, with modern democratic politics, the right to do politics becomes the basic human right, and the political subject emerges upsetting at times the fine calculations of democratic politics.

In all these manifestations the figure of the political subject conveys three senses: *a collective sense, a sense of resistance to power*, particularly to the legal resolution of issues of power, and *the sense of being a supplement*, in other words the figure is 'not absorbed or exhausted by, while being marked by, political regimes, control systems, power structures, legal codification, and present political establishments'. As I explain in one of the reflections, the figure symbolises desire, new flight paths of escape, resistance, and towards new existence. For instance, keeping in mind the long history of sovereigns, kings, and monarchs, terrified at the prospect of moving bands of peasant outlaws and heretics, proclaiming legal and administrative restriction upon restriction on the right to associate and movement, so that country remains under control, I show how 'group' becomes the *persona non grata*, the entity to be decimated, killed. Similarly, I show how even while through the act of constitution-making the subjects get legal rights, become citizens, and thus now legal subjects of law, the political subject refuses to buy this legal resolution of the fundamental problem of democracy. Now, these three characteristics to be sure have to do with the specific relation of the political subject with the sovereign power. It is a material relation that goes beyond the theory of bio-politics that Georgio Agamben for instance propounds in *Home Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.[9] The argument of the physicality of the political life, on which this work is based, also stands on the bio-political thesis as readers will find out in the following pages; but it speaks of contentions and actions that cannot be imagined in a bio-politically closed world.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben taking his cue from Foucault's fragmentary analysis of bio-politics probes with great breadth, intensity, and acuteness the covert or implicit presence of an idea of bio-politics in the history of traditional political theory. He argues that from the earliest treatises of political theory, notably in Aristotle's notion of man as a political animal, and throughout the history of Western thinking about sovereignty (whether of the king or the state), a notion of sovereignty as power over 'life' is implicit. This is so because of the way the sacred becomes integral to the idea of sovereignty. Carl Schmitt had already said that the sovereign's status depended on the power to make exception to the rules he safeguarded. Besides we have the anthropological theory of the close interlink of the sacred and the taboo. Agamben makes use of both these insights, and defines the sacred person as one who can be killed and yet not sacrificed. He finds this paradoxical in the status of the modern individual living in a system, which controls the collective's 'naked life' of all individuals. The *homo sacer* as an individual who exists in the law as an exile is a paradox, because while law enables the society to recognise the individual as *homo sacer*, law also mandates the exclusion, which thus gives the individual an identity. Agamben holds that life exists in two capacities. One is natural biological life, and the other is political life. Agamben likens the natural life to Hannah Arendt's description of the refugee's 'naked life' (*The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951). The effect of *homo sacer* is a cleavage between one's biological and political lives. As 'bare life', the *homo sacer* finds himself submitted to the sovereign's state of exception, and though he has biological life, it has no political significance. Agamben says that the states of the political refugees, those persecuted in the Holocaust, and others in similar outlawed conditions, are the states of the *homo sacer*. Thus, the so-called sacred and inalienable rights of man prove to be completely unprotected from the power of the sovereign at the very moment it is no longer possible to characterise them as rights of the citizens of a state. This is because the basic right to claim other rights is gone. Although human rights were conceived of as the ground for civil rights, the deprivation of those civil rights (as, for example, in the case of stateless people or refugees) made them comparable to 'savages', many of whom are periodically exterminated, as in the camps. In this way, the regime becomes the camp. Camp as the exceptional, yet the only possible form of political life under existing conditions, becomes the question mark for democracy. *Homo sacer* becomes the question mark for the liberal natural rights philosophers.

Yet, one may ask, does this naked person simply die? We know he must die. He is fated to die. He does not die for us, but dies as the 'first person in the row' to die. But does he die before our knowing, before we know the pain, the shock, the fear, the terror, the vengeance, the pity, the resignation, and the defiance—all that we know are combined with relief that the waiting is over, that s/he is finally dead? Who dies? Not you. Who is dying? Not I? The naked person; and then you, after you I...

This position of the 'bare life' brings forth one more question pertinent to what I am discussing in this book. Bare life facing death is free from identities. The possibility of naked life assuming the barest of identities—that is, the only identity possible and this is the fundamental political identity of being counter-posed to sovereign power, meeting at times the sovereign power in a state of near death—suggests the nature of political freedom, which is if we remember the state of 'naked life' the condition of being in a state that makes this oppositional to the sovereign, in this case meaning fundamentally beyond law. We can see that in terms of identity, 'bare life' is in a perfectly 'sayable' or 'describable' condition, yet we know it is 'unsayable', as much of this existence as a near-death condition is un-describable. Thus, politics rearranges in a fundamental way some of the fundamental questions of philosophy, such as the meaning of Being, Truth, and so on. 'Bare life' therefore has a political viability, because it not only brings up the possibility of counter-posing life to sovereign power, it also extracts politics from the bareness of language, the language that 'naked life' allows and then the language that it suggests as a future agenda. By making death a moment to be collectively shared 'naked life' makes the paradox of the simultaneous existence of 'sayability' and 'unsayability' the political condition of being. We can push the point a little more. If because of the compulsions of the sovereign, bare life becomes the subject of politics, then one may ask, and as Agamben himself seems to suggest in his book, how can bare life remain the subject of politics, when the legal resolution of democracy by putting rights of 'man' and 'citizens' together closes any chance of dissidence in politics—indeed which is what Aristotle wanted? Who would have reckoned with the possibility of bare life refusing such resolution, in other words, political actions, revolts, in short politics, exceeding the legal power of the sovereign, and the bare life never becoming good life in politics? To understand this process we need to study not so much the discourses of power, but or at least equally, the underground discourses of refusal, love, resistance, and alternative ideas of physical existence, that negotiate the problematic of public/private, polity/daily life, power/desire in a refreshingly new way. In that fissure of bio-politics the modern political subject stands.

In other words, the possibility of the political subject to emerge is due, first, to the presence of bio-political conditions in our history, and second, due to the fact that as yet these bio-political conditions never exhaust the possibility of autonomy in politics, precisely because these bio-political conditions finally bring 'bare life' in opposition to sovereign power. Because 'bare life' is never bare, but always socially constituted, it occasions exceptionality, also it occasions resistance. The political subject in one sense is the indestructible remaining of the bio-political conditions—the remaining that has claimed agency, autonomy. This is the moment I have tried to illustrate from our political, juridical, and intellectual past when the issue of claiming autonomy became an important one amidst our bio-political conditions of life. I have also tried to show in these pages that 'bare life' is never bare but always socially constituted, therefore the presence of 'bare life' before sovereign power has occasioned resistance, and political subject emerges from that confrontation. One can think in this context the emergence of women as political subject through a contentious process under which women repeatedly subjected their own selves to law in search for justice only to find repeatedly that not only justice had eluded them, but that law also has repeatedly required women to become victims of all kinds of patriarchal needs of the state. Similarly the anti-colonial Indian in order to emerge as the political subject had to pass through the colonial legal and intellectual processes and yet maintain the autonomy, at times even by thinking of resorting to bombs and courting death.

Thus, the situations I present here involve studying the figure of the political subject not only in its theoretical foundations, but analysing this figure in relation to a set of practices (agitating, organising, voting, defying, negotiating, appealing to law, moving, claiming rights and identity, mobilising, deliberating, associating, speaking, demonstrating, dialoguing, refusing to pay taxes, bringing out publications and selling them, writing petitions and memoranda and submitting them, articulating a vision of the future, redesigning the nature of polity, legislating, establishing congruence between political vision and other spheres of life, practising friendship and deciding 'who is a friend and who is an enemy', and of course preparing to fight to realise the vision, dying, etc.) that have become significant in the age of mass democracy. To conceive of the political subject is to conceive politics in the background of such practices. The theme of knowledge of politics becomes crucial in understanding how agency in politics is claimed, that is to say how self-knowledge of politics becomes the first step towards political activity, and the emergence of the political subject. It no longer remains the 'bare body'; endowment of political knowledge becomes a form of activity. Political knowledge becomes the precursor to a theory of practice appropriate to the age. I think we can now summarise the issue of the emergence of the political subject and acquiring political knowledge in this way:

1. First of all there is a critical function involved in getting ready to do politics—to 'unlearn' the present state of knowledge (academic, sentimental, theological, spiritual, economic, etc.) and preparing to *do* politics by learning new things about society and its power relations.
2. Knowledge therefore has a function of struggle. The practice of politics is thus conceived as an ongoing war. The individuals must have the required political instruments or weapons, which will enable them to fight all through the life. Thus, training and learning to do politics become important as human activity. Political pedagogy therefore becomes crucial.
3. Political subject does not emerge from the existence of the techniques of exercise of power, particularly legal techniques, but from resistance against those techniques. The Prince is not therefore a political subject. He is a ruler.
4. Thus, in this new education, the ethics of resistance becomes somewhat akin to what morality does in building up a religious soul, or to the role that desire plays in building up aesthetics.
5. Like in any subject-formation, a set of practices becomes significant in the formation of the political subject. Innovation of a new set of practices indicates the emergence of a new subject in politics who is the new author. These practices are both discursive and institutional.
6. These practices are essentially collective, that is to say relational (contentious on one hand, dialogic on the other), and because of this, the emergence of the political subject is possible only in a collective form.
7. Finally, the materiality of all these, the physicality of the process, its contentious nature, and the transformation of the 'bare body' into the political subject—a contentious and dialogic subject.

I do not claim that in this book I have been able to offer full explanation of these seven characteristics necessary for a study in understanding the emergence of the political subject. But the readers I hope will agree that at least I have conveyed the argument, namely, that the production of the political subject is not so much associated with a theory of the self, or human nature, or a set of cultural practices, but with a conjunction of circumstances associated with contentions, events, political practices, and new desires. As against power, it is resistance; against domination it is desire; against rule it is friendship; against sovereign authority it is bare body; against the 'culture of self' it is subject-hood—one can find in the story of the emergence of the political subject the overturning of the established world of knowledge. This is possible only by means of a radical 'anti-Platonism', a repudiation of the Kantian problematic itself, that is to say the problematic of placing the self as the central object of inquiry. 'Not the identity of the self, but the identity of the practice'—that is the watchword for a materialist view of politics. We did not inquire the self; we inquired the political subject here—not a brand name but a generic name.

POLITICAL SUBJECT AS THE CONSTITUTIVE FORCE

Of course the point that the hermeneutics of the political subject does not originate in the identity of the self, but the identity of the practice goes against the heritage of a model of politics, which is state-centric. In that sense it indicates an alternative way of political understanding that is transactional, contentious, continuously predicated, and the worst of all sins in the eyes of all philosophies; it is experiential, and in that sense, pragmatic. This too is a model with a lineage, a lineage of continuous dissolution through new practices and transformation. One great instance of such politics is the practice of friendship where contingency rules overriding centuries long morals and mores giving rise to new notions of citizenship, solidarity, hospitality, conditions of democracy, and new notions of unity and multiplicity,[10] or the practice of advice by non-rulers (mendicants, ascetics, holy men, fable readers, courtiers, Brahmins, etc.) to rulers on the appropriateness of certain conducts and the inappropriateness of certain others, as in the *Mahabharata* when Bhisma the elder on his deathbed of arrows counsels the pious Yudhisthira on how to manage economy (material affairs of the village and the country) and keep the subjects happy. In such politics, though strategy is a word still retaining value, what is of importance is the factor of the 'moment', that is tactic, the conditional relation to totality, and therefore a historicised adoption of notions of responsibility, ethics, law, justice, indeed to put the record straight, the concept of the political itself.

How can we explain the phenomenon of the political subject that is not state-centric, which is to say, not politics-centric, if we go by the teaching of classic political philosophy, which says that the state is the crux of politics and the political society? I think that this transformation came in political thinking when politics came to be associated not so much with state or rule, but with war. Not that this displacement was without problem as Etienne Balibar shows in a long tract on various Marxist understandings of Clausewitz.[11] But we can say at least this that from now on the identity of the practice became as important in politics as the identity of the self ... a point that anti-colonial thinking quickly grasped. Several features emerged as a result of this displacement.

First, politics became in a contentious framework a defensive enterprise against aggrandising rulers (added to it the factor that therefore such struggle had better chance of success, because defensive war would win finally over a tiring offensive campaign with the homeland advantage of the unity of people, army, and political organisation—a point stressed by both Clausewitz and Mao).

Second, by framing politics in terms of war (but we must not forget 'by other means'), this model of politics not only drew from the insight that war was politics by other means, it expanded the possibilities of means (that is at times violent means); by that token it also expanded the possibilities of politics. By making the series of inter-changeability of power, politics, and war interminable, it made politics action oriented, complementary, and always moving away from the state, making new 'flight paths' possible.

Third, such displacement opened up the unity of theory and history—the two masters of politics—as a problematic to the advantage of politics. Hitherto, politics was a matter of theory in the sense of totality, typical of a Platonic enterprise, which must accompany a theory of life, good life, just life, and become a part of it. Then it became a matter of history, whereby it must fall into a pattern, must look to precedents, and must fulfil a historical mission only to be explained by philosophy. But anti-colonial politics, and various politics of liberation, while mentioning its adherence to these masters, resisted their pressures, and conceptualised situations as singular ones. Therefore, each act was singular in possibility, each practice was to be carefully meditated before acting upon, and each possibility was to be new in history, whose antecedent may not be found in the scriptures. Therefore ancient philosophy never sat heavily on the shoulders of anti-colonial thinkers or the political subjects of the East, as they and they alone were faced with the possibility of a permanent rupture with the wise, ancient past. Fourth, and this is my final point, since anti-colonial politics began as actions against a state, and had to develop its theory of action, it looked at itself as a protracted feature (therefore the continuity of anti-colonial politics for more than one century almost everywhere), as extremely wide in scope (must cover the entire country), as a step that would isolate the enemy from the society (colonial state from the people), and build parallel power centres (in India the Indian National Congress, in China the Communist Party, or several power centres as alternative to state, etc.). The last point is important, for while political historians have a tendency to see this development with state-centric lens, that is from the point of formation of post-colonial state, this was a tremendous political advance from the point of democracy, in terms of historical orientation of popular politics against leaders, kings, governments, states, or a monopolist political leadership.[12] Unless we are to say that politics no longer needs a subject (as all American neo-conservatives would say following Fukuyama), it is difficult to reject the reality of this displacement and its consequences for a theory of the political subject.

The point to be made from all these brief observations is that the hermeneutics of the political subject not only cannot be state-centric, it cannot be self-centric also. Any standard history of Western philosophy will tell how the connection between the self and the state got established and has become inseparable today, so much so that it is inconceivable to even think of their disconnection. Here in the colonies and ex-colonies how the self, state, and politics claimed their autonomous spheres is of course another history, which has to be worked out in a complete manner, but whose fragments hopefully can be found in the following pages.

Finally, a few words on the necessity at this juncture of writing this book, close upon the heels of the second volume of my *Materiality of Politics*, titled as *Subject Positions in Politics*—where I tried to show how subject positions arise in politics, how a poet shifts his poetic gaze to a political gaze as literature, or literary reflections alone prove desperately short of the requirements of an anti-colonial position in the pressing time under colonialism, or how modern democracy produces the justice-seeking subject, or the subject that seeks autonomy of politics. But I realise that more work remains to be done on an urgent basis in the study of political subjectivity, particularly now, when scholars are abandoning all theories of social subjects, and recognising subjectivities in purely individual terms. On one hand, we witness the real subsumption of society under capital and the realisation of a generalised rule of capital, destroying subjectivities indiscriminatingly, on the other hand, the resultant encounters are providing opportunities for the subjectivities to reconstitute themselves. The reconstituted subjectivities are undergoing the process of transformation within the crises and the encounters. In this critical and reflective space, always new as this space emerges, the subjective reconstitution takes place.

We have to learn again from Marx here. In his works on political economy and history, he highlighted the specific process of the constitution of the subjectivity in the age of capital, and therefore the specific technologies or practices shaping this process of constitution. But this was not all. Not content with introducing the theme of the constitution of subjectivity, he went on to explore the theme of the liberation of subjectivity, in other words the theme of revolutionary subjectivity. This was at the heart of historical materialism, which has always seen subjectivity as something to be grasped in terms of the social processes of the production of subjectivities. The subject is thus both a product and productive, constituted and constitutive, participant as well as critical. This is the theory of the unruly subject that can never be expropriated by capital, as the accounts of the colonial and post-colonial encounters included in this book show. Its un-containable character upsets any equilibrium, its hatred against domination, coercion, violence, and exploitation remains perennial. Yet it is also true that state structures, legal structures in particular, are reforming. There is a desperate desire to contain the illegalities within law. The state wants to appear as a rights regime, where the social characteristics of the state are covered by its formal, legal characteristics. The unification of the juridical ordering eliminates or subordinates every other norm or form or procedure. The theme of the political subject is thus related from the beginning with law, legality, and legal subjectivity, and is thus at perennial relation with the citizen, the figure in which the resolution between the social and the legal had taken place.

Many bourgeois theories of subjectivity have understood in recent time the acuteness of the problem. Thus, John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (Oxford University Press, 1971) tries to lend a social determination to being through appeals to equality and common good. The proposition of the difference principle to him is a mechanism for the development of social equality. It is the principle of justice that has the power to constitute the social being with real determinations, with preference for the least advantaged members of the society constituting the social. There must be fair equality of opportunity through institutional management of the task of attaching the difference principle with the equality principle. Yet, the constitution of the social being stops at that point. The difference principle was subsequently subordinated to the principles of liberty and of the priority of right or fair opportunity. This shows how the bourgeois society today has lost the capacity of minimum social reform. Hence its intellectual problem: Does it go back to the idea of transcendence and the idea of a transcendental subject, or attempt once more to find out a theory of the socially constructed subject, where of course it would have to negotiate the problems of idealism, particularly the idealism inherent in Kantian moral framework? Given this dilemma, militant/intellectuals must grasp the central 'contradiction between a subject defined by the freedom of rational thought and a subject grounded in determinations by material reality'.[13] Therefore, it is the thesis of the collective political subject emerging from contentious circumstances and owing nothing necessarily to historical inevitabilities, as Louis Althusser would say 'wrenching history from the void'? But this would mean taking 'politics as real thought'. And we can say to our readers, this book is a plea to allow us to think of 'void' as political condition, which is neither an object nor a self-constituting production in thought, but only a contemporaneity that can open up to any kind of material determination. The void may have philosophical effects, but politics is not principally concerned with that. This book comes up repeatedly with such situations of void—1857 and the years around that year, the year(s) of the first Bengal Partition and the terrorist-revolutionary campaigns (that is the first two decades of the last century), 1947, and why not the first years of this century when a rebel leader decides to talk with the Indian state?[14]

In speaking of the subject therefore this book does not speak of inter-subjectivity, or inter-subjective situation, as the game of cultural studies would like us to frame the question of subject and subjectivity. *Inter-subjectivity, at least the way it is perceived, removes the issue of* choice, option, challenge, encounter, contradiction, and conflict. In such an understanding it is all a matter of interface. From this sociological revisionism this book clearly takes its step apart. Texts and instances of encounters chosen here for study are not documents of inter-subjectivity. They are commentaries of 'deep voids', of situations where the political subject appears as the constituent force destroying the claims of dominant norms. All the situations described in this book address or at least raise the question: How will the subject cope with the void, and take on a constitutive programme? How can the political subject constitute itself as if in a double bind—determined yet inventing? How can the productive capacity of the subject, its constitutive capacity, be reaffirmed again and again, acts that by themselves are declaratory of a promise? Politics in this way appears as the constituent power of the subject.

NOTES

1. For an understanding of the discontinuity we can read G.N. Devy's insightful work, *After Amnesia*, first published in 1992, now available as part of *The G.N. Devy Reader* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009).
2. Trans. Richard Nice, Polity Press, 2000.
3. I am indebted for this particular aspect to Alberto Toscani of the Goldsmiths, London, who while responding to my account of the *Wahabis* presented to an audience there, drew my attention to this. On this, however, we have to see how radical politics has been always discovered as against virtues of the Enlightenment, as if a legacy of the underground or the secret sects. We have to study rigorously the narrative of what is known as 'counter-Enlightenment' in this respect. See for instance an account of the debate on counter-Enlightenment, Robert E. Norton, 'The Myth of Counter-Enlightenment', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 4 (October 2007): 635–58; historians have also recorded the collective violence, oaths of solidarity, swears, use of harsh language, ardent appeals, forceful interventions, and the display of an energy produced out of the 'combustible mix of indignation, ritual humiliation, and the threat to shed blood'—phenomena noted for instance by William Beik, 'The Violence of the French Crowd from Charivari to Revolution', *Past and Present* 197 (November 2007): 75–110. Beik notes the moral indignation of the people, 'their desire to punish the authorities for the latter's abuse of power', 'the emergence of factional politics' out of this hyper energy, and a clear decision among the people, 'excluded from decision making (now) shifting their loyalty to the rioters'. Beik notes what we may call the 'moral contagion'.
4. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999[1940]), 249.
5. One of the well-known historians of our time Pierre Rosanvallon has expressed the same sentiment while remarking on the close relation between the two with these words, 'I do not think there is a necessary gap between political history and political philosophy'—Javier Fernandez Sebastian, 'Intellectual History and Democracy—An Interview with Pierre Rosanvallon', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 4 (October 2007): 712.
6. Georg Lukacs, *Hegel's False and His Genuine Ontology* (New York: Merlin Press, 1978).
7. Etienne Balibar notes the significant figure of the militant in the history of the political subject; see, Etienne Balibar, *We the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*, trans. Bruce Robbins (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 176.
8. Javier Fernandez Sebastian, 'Intellectual History and Democracy—An Interview with Pierre Rosanvallon', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 68, no. 4 (October 2007): 709.
9. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

10. On this I have explained at length in 'Friends, Foes, and Understanding', in *The Politics of Dialogue—Living Under the Geopolitical Histories of War and Peace* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), Chapter 6.
11. 'Politics as War, War as Politics—Post-Clausewitzian Variations'. Public Lecture, Alice Berline Kaplan Center for the Humanities, Northwestern University, Evanston, 8 May 2006. Available online at http://www.ciepfe. fr/spip.php?article 37. Accessed on 1 January 2009.
12. Once again I draw this from Etienne Balibar, 'The Vacillation of Ideology', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), trans. Andrew Ross and Constance Penley *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 159–209.
13. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Labor of Dionysus—A Critique of the State Form* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 248.
14. On this thought of void producing the subject, or correctly speaking, subject-position, see the essays of Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005a), particularly chapters 1–2.

Section One

Situations

which they were active ineluctable parts'. Further,

> This book is an experiment in what Melville might have called political astronomy. It attempts to map the gravitational force of anarchism between militant nationalism on opposite sides of the planet ... the movement did not disdain peasants and agricultural labourers in an age when serious industrial proletariats were mainly confined to Northern Europe... Just as hostile to imperialism, it had no theoretical prejudices against 'small' and 'ahistorical' nationalisms, including those in the colonial world (pp. 1–2).

33. On this, interesting is the Petition of Dodoo Meea, 'Petition of Moohsunnonoddeen Ahmed, otherwise called Dodoo Meea of Bahadoorpore, Fureedpore, Dacca, to His Excellency Director General of India (dated the 14th of March 1859)', Appendix B of Nurul H. Choudhury, *Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal—The Faraizi, Indigo, and Pabna Movements* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2001), 163–66.
34. I am grateful to Etienne Balibar for this in course of his comments on formulation earlier draft of this chapter.

3

The Singular Subject

Political subject is formed through political solidarity. And, we have no room to make any mistake, for it is solidarity, which often appears as the subject. How then are we to understand the question of solidarity and singularity?

As we know, anthropologists have examined the concept of solidarity in terms of social bond; Indian studies are replete with that. Anthropologists true to their vocation have been realists in judging the nature of the solidarity under inquiry. Solidarity has invited discussion on bonds, affinitive ties, network, gender, caste–clan cohesion, and village and territorial unity; discussions on all these we know are drawn from anthropological insights, though anthropologists have been at times less than warm in appreciating the virtual elements that can contribute to the emergence of a particular solidarity, or from the actual historical details of the contentious and contingent nature of the emergence of solidarity as a process. We need to understand the contentious nature of this process of solidarity—building in order to grasp the phenomenon of the emergence of the subject, or to put it in easier terms, we must make efforts to understand the entire issue of solidarity in the frame of historical sociology, of course marked by philosophical insights. Charles Tilly for instance had shown[1] how social solidarities were formed through collective actions giving rise to regimes of repertoires and rules. Tilly said that these were contentious actions, in other words, at the bottom of solidarity remained contentions that helped collectives to form. It sounds bizarre, but the logic is not absurd; solid elements of historical truth are present in such an understanding.

We owe our second instance to another rare thinker of our time, Benedict Anderson, who cutting through the jungle of area studies of varying significance, in a span of little more than 20 years twice changed our understanding of how solidarity develops. National solidarity, he had argued about 20 years ago (in *Imagined Communities*), depended on what one can call a virtual element, the reproduction of culture and cultural artefacts in the age of mechanical reproduction; in this case his case was built around the emergence of the print industry. We all know how this thesis built upon Walter Benjamin's insights ('Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in *Illuminations*) has influenced an entire generation of scholars in wide ranging fields. Then few years ago in a major revision of his earlier thesis Anderson picked up another major element in the making of solidarity—this time through a major study of nationalism in the Philippines. He showed how anarchism played a big role in helping anti-colonialism to grow and expand; internationalism was anarchism's watchword as it never gave respect to the institution of the state; and thus in the world of Spanish empire the anti-colonial constellations were drawing on each other. From the Philippines to Argentina to Cuba to Spain back to the Philippines—the sentiments spread. In Anderson's words, when you study the trajectory of the expansion of an anti-colonial sentiment of an emerging nation, look into its flight paths. The stars may seem stationary, the tropical night sky is humid, hot, and still, but you know that they are perpetually in motion, irresistibly pulling towards each other (*Under the Three Flags—Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination*).

SINGULARITIES AND SOLIDARITY

So, how are we to understand the two major marks of the political subject, namely solidarity and singularity? I aim to show in this chapter as to how we can fruitfully approach this apparent contradiction in our frame of understanding by way of once again reading some parts of our colonial past. We shall see the questions that await us: What lies beneath the process of trust-sharing? What is there at the heart of the emergence of a collective? How do we gain an understanding of the way a bond is formalised, at least to a certain extent, therefore a particular understanding of the two connected phenomena of equality and difference, an equally relevant understanding of singularities and universality, and differentiation and the making of the global? What

are the connections between collective actions, contentions, trust, and the phenomenon of solidarity? These answers must be drawn from our historical readings of the careers of the associated notions and events (such as solidarity, nation, internationalism, and citizenship).

We can begin by approaching the 'issues of singularity, singularities within singularity, and the making of the concrete universal'.

Ayesha Jalal in her majestic work on individual and the community in South Asian Islam since 1850, titled *Self and Sovereignty* (Lahore, Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2001), ends with a quote from Iqbal (a comment of 1924 addressed towards the Muslims of the subcontinent), which asks the Muslims of India not to compare their nation with nations of the West, 'for distinctive is the nation of the Prophet of Islam', and while their, that is in the case of the nations of the West, 'solidarity depends on territorial nationality, your solidarity rests on the strength of your religion, (and) when faith slips away, where is the solidarity of the community? And, when the community is no more, neither is the nation'. Of course we know today that the contradiction between community of the faithful and the nation was resolved precisely through a territorial partition of the subcontinent. Yet we know at the same time that while the contradiction was temporarily resolved, the principal issues remain, namely the issues of singularities within the singularity called the nation form, the issue of the co-existence of and conflicts between nation, community of the faithful, and the issue of territory in determining the relation between the community and the nation, and consequently the issue of the location of sovereignty.

But this is not a new thing in retrieving the history of the anti-colonial nation in South Asia. The significant point to note here is that all these were seen, more particularly, the community of Islam was always seen, as the 'crisis of the nation'. One of our aims in the study of the political subject should be to see how this philosophy of crisis was combated in the course of anti-colonial struggles, and how through a combination of the tactics of contention and dialogue solidarity emerged. In this, we shall see how anti-colonial politics had to pay rather systematic attention to a number of ideological themes propagated by the apologists of colonialism and whose weight lay in describing nationalism as always marked by crisis. This continues even today, as we can find bourgeois ideology everywhere painting the project of the anti-colonial subject as marked by crisis that is supposedly threatening its very existence. In the economic field, it is always 'the limits of growth', 'risks', and 'harmful effects'. In the political field it is always the 'crisis of the third world', at the social level, it is 'the breakdown of society', 'AIDS and other epidemics'. In the colonial time, Islam was a similar symptom of the crisis, the joining of the Muslims in thousands in anti-colonial struggle bore danger signals, and the colonial and the compradors always advocated that nationalists and colonial rulers should join hands to free nationalism of its critical illness. How did the anti-colonial political subject that could only take the form of solidarity respond to this discourse of crisis? How did it combat the discourse of crisis at both practical and ideological level? This was then, as it is now, a philosophical and a political question.

My argument is that the anti-colonial subject could not emerge as a collective, that is the 'solidarity could not emerge as a subject' in the colonial era, without dealing in thought and actions with the problematic of the singularities with singularity, also the issue of singularity within generality. These two ways of putting the question are not the same, but closely connected. I want to show that the emergence of the Muslim public sphere as a *part*, a distinct *circle* or *sphere* within the anti-colonial world, owed substantially to the negotiation of the problematic of the singularities within singularity. And, therefore, what seemed to the colonial and comprador thinkers and rulers as the crisis of nationalism was indeed a way of existence of the collective anti-colonial political subject who by its definition of existence had to negotiate the issue of singularity and universality.

In this respect my argument is that in the politics of anti-colonialism the dichotomy between the particular and universal was not the most significant foundational aspect, indeed today the discussion on particularity has reached a stage of banality; the more significant foundational aspect was how the universal of the nation (the anti-colonial nation) was being produced out of the negotiation of the singulars. As the histories of the emergence of a distinct Muslim public sphere in the anti-colonial world show, in the emerging universe of the nation and therefore the emerging universe of *a language of the nation,* the languages of the singulars were, endowed with what one call in today's style, 'pre-language or a 'proto-language' situations, which carried the imprints of a colonial reality relentlessly impacting on these singulars. It is not that these were not already developed languages, or that they did not have their respective long histories.

Indeed they were. But with the development of the colonial tools of rule (mostly in the early and middle periods of the 19th century), these languages gradually found themselves in the situation of being 'bhasas', more in the sense of pre-or proto-language—a token of an early consciousness moulded by the external world through the physical senses, and one can borrow from Hegels' *Phenomenology* here, also an indication of the inherent Paradox in the linguistic structure of colonialism that produced the universal of the nation. Colonial language was one way of starting the world *de novo* (and this is in spite of whatever the Orientalists were saying and thinking), because prior to its advent according to its own structure everything was by and large dark, yet we have to remember that at the same time it was creating new segments among the subject population, because its impact was differential, as it was bound to be since it was acting upon a society with its given structure, layers, and hierarchies. Besides, the colonial language encountered strong regional languages (*bhasas*)—products of strong local histories, literatures, administrations, various communities, and cultures, such as Urdu, Bengali, Telegu, Tamil, Oriya or Kannada. In short the interaction of community, nation, and the colonial power was marked, on one hand, with what came to be considered as the 'pre-language' of the colonial era, and on the other hand, the language (centralised, all India vehicle of technology, acquisition of knowledge, administration, and rule) that colonialism was bringing into existence.[2] The dialogic core of this 'pre-linguistic' phenomenon was borne out by the emergence of the political subject of the colonial time. Equally was borne out the contradictory reality of the colonial power and the colonised subjects. One can also put the same historical truth in another way. Singularities in the colonial world were in no way fundamentally separated from one another. As the philosopher would say, we 'always-already' exist in relations with one another. There is no singular self that pre-exists our relations with others. We always exist as singular-plural beings. And thus the Muslims in the colonial world could never say even if they had wanted, 'hell with other people', because this was not 'the pious land' or the 'land of the believers' or 'the virtuous'; there was no escape from that hell. In this singular-plural background the political pursuit by the Muslims of the colonial world for nationalist identity, subject-hood, and agency carried the remarkable evidence of the negotiation of the singularities—a process, out of which and of several such processes, the nation as the universal was produced. These singularities had always-already existed in relations with each other; and the 'pre-language' of colonial world helped the singularities to negotiate the interrelations in the new language of anti-colonialism. Nation was the concrete universal that emerged out of that engagements and encounters.

COLONIALISM, 'PRE-LANGUAGE', AND THE LANGUAGE OF DIALOGUE

The previous chapter discussed the related theme of the emergence of the political subject under rules of occupation, of which the colonial era is one instance, and how in the 1857 rebellion what is being called this 'pre-language' helped the anti-colonial Muslim rebels to find the common language of anti-colonialism. The colonial army officials noted, we have seen, that the *Wahabis* fought more heroically than the ordinary company (mutineer) soldiers, and that they fought 'without any apparently defined object', they were *gazis*. Chroniclers say that their extreme 'republican' or egalitarian views upset the delicate unity of the population of Delhi, the besieged city, while their contempt for the parasites of the still existing *durbar* in Red Fort only increased the animosity of the Mughal aristocracy. It is also said that they took the task of anti-colonial war most seriously, for they and they alone knew that it was a 'war of races, and a war that would end only with the extermination of one'. Yet we have seen on the other hand, notwithstanding this 'fanaticism', that there was no acrimony, no hatred shown against other communities, but only the iteration that God had commanded that the alien rule, rule of the infidels, and unholy must end, and therefore irrespective of what others did they would continue with their fight to the last. This determination to die in order to counter the racism of colonial rule struck at the root of the legitimacy of colonial occupation that claimed to be the symbol of universal values. This was a classic example of how imperial universalities were being countered with ideas of collective singularities. The lesson for a theory of solidarity is obvious. Many decades later the French thinker Deleuze would call this mode of thinking and existence as the 'fold'.

The *Wahabis* failed. But the process of the emergence of a distinct Muslim public sphere did not stop. As the memoir of the Abul Mansur Ahmed the famous public personality in colonial Bengal tells us,[3] the impact of the *Wahabis* on the villages of Bengal, Bihar, and Assam remained. A new crop of itinerant preachers and leaders came up, brought out journals and newspapers, organised the *Anjumans* of the preachers, propagated issues of politics, culture, language, inter-community relations, and the asset and burden of faith in the collective journey to forge the 'nation of the Muslims'. Did this nation of the Muslims signify the *umma*, the universal brotherhood? Yes. But did it mean specifically India? Yes. Did it include other faiths? Yes. And how were all these possible at the same time? Here again we shall have to understand the singularities within the singularity, and the way the concrete universal emerges through debates and dialogues.

If these singularities have any lesson for us, it is at least this: The emergence of the political subject has an inherent ambiguity in it, and precisely by retaining in a strategic sense ambiguities within assertions does a political subject come of age. And, therefore no wonder that while a nation wants stable citizenry, large bodies of population can come to salute more than one national flag in their lifetime. But more significantly, it is this ambiguity of identity assertions that allows the political subject to emerge—and I shall show this soon by way of recalling the ways the itinerant preachers of Bengal negotiated the contentions of anti-colonial existence to emerge as the political leaders of a 'concrete universal' called Muslim Bengal in the colonial time. These singularities had always already existed in relations with each other; and what I have unsatisfactorily described as the 'pre-language' of the colonial world helped the singularities to negotiate the interrelations in the new language of anti-colonialism.

THREE SINGULAR LIVES

Let us see how the ideal of solidarity and globality takes shape in actual life, and for that let us again go back to the history of colonial Bengal.

In colonial Muslim Bengal the *Anjuman* Movement at the start of the last century, primarily a pedagogic enterprise, owed above all to the efforts of Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, a preacher, organiser, and a publicist. He wrote profusely in Bengali on Islam in India, Islam's contribution to the development of the sciences, the message of freedom in the *Quran*, and on social reforms. His chronicles on the conditions of peasantry, published in the pages of two journals, *al-Islam* and *Mihir O Sudhakar*, helped establish his status as a leader of the peasantry. Born in Chittagong in 1875, Islamabadi's many years of wandering took him to Rangpur, Calcutta, Rangoon, Lahore, and parts of Orissa and Assam. His trail led him also to Kumedpur and Calcutta. He was a *maulavi* (the one who guides others in following Islamic rites), a *moktar* (clerk), and sometimes an *imam* (head functionary or priest of the mosque). He joined *madrasas* to teach there, founded new ones, gave *azans*, and began giving thought to the improvement of the quality of *madrasa* education. In Rangpur he received the *Wakil* (journal) from Lahore, and *Mihir O Sudhakar* (journal) from Calcutta. Till then well versed in Persian, Arabic, and Urdu, his grasp of the Bengali language soon became thorough. As his biographer Shamsuzzaman Khan notes, Islamabadi could now discuss 'the lives of Saiyad Ahmed Khan, Imam Gazzali, Mazzini, Jamaluddin al Afghani, Saiyad Ahmed Beralbhih, and Maulana Ismail Sahid'. He lectured differently from others. 'Politics, history, religion, ethics, geography mixed easily in (his) sermons. People would be happy at such lectures. They would donate money heartily.'[4] With Ismail Hossain Shiraji and Muhammad Shahidullah, both of whom were to become noted figures in shaping Bengali Muslim cultural identity, he founded the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Samity (later on Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Parishad) in 1911. He was writing on issues such as the Hindu–Muslim problem, discrimination against Muslims, quality of education, colonialism, Islam, the destiny of Islamic civilisation, the nature of imperial power particularly in Turkey, and the state of Bengali language.

He became a collaborator of Maulana Akram Khan and the co-editor of *al-Islam*. His campaign for the *Hanafi* sect created much bitterness. He himself was to later call this phase as one of 'idiocy and ignorance' (*aiyame jahaliat*). In any case he was now ready for politics—the politics of *Khilafat*, *Swaraj* (self-rule) and Islamic Mission (a missionary organisation), the politics of non-communalism and tolerance, of piety, of independence and mass-activism. Both Islamabadi and Shiraji were *pracharaks* (itinerant campaigners). Shiraji had used the term and had defined the aims of a *pracharak*'s life: to explain the principles of religion and to counter opposing arguments, to glorify the history of the Muslims, to invoke the past, and 'to think of the present'. They started campaigning on the falling price of jute and the depressed condition of the Muslim peasantry, and the havoc caused to the *ryots* (cultivating peasants) in Midnapore by Watson & Co. They propagated in their speeches the need for the unity of the *Hanafis* and the *Muhammadis*. Islamabadi proposed the establishment of an Arabic university for proper education of the Muslims now sunk in ignorance. To him, the nation, that is Muslim Bangla, was to be redeemed—*dharma* (virtue, the pious way, and Islamabadi used the word again and again) was the primary path.

Islamabadi soon joined the Bangiya Krishak Praja Dal and in 1937 was elected from Chittagong to the Bengal Legislative Assembly. But above all, his activities in setting up the *Anjuman-e-olema-e-bangla* had the greatest significance in the evolution of a Muslim nationalist leadership in Bengal. The *Anjuman* movement in Bengal had begun towards the close of the 19th century. The influence of *Wahabi* ideology was on decline, even though as Abul Mansur Ahmed's autobiography, *Atmakatha*, reminiscing on his childhood in Mymensingh testifies, many participants in the *Wahabi* campaign were still alive in the villages of Bengal. Qazi Abdul Wadud, one of the prominent members of *Shikha* (a new enlightened group of Muslim intellectuals of Bengal), admitted that pan-Islamism was not a major influence in the *Anjuman* movement, and that it was more a creation of the newly-educated middle-class Muslims emerging from the small towns and villages of Bengal. The National Mohammedan Association had become defunct and the new middle class Muslim intellectuals were more sympathetic to the problems and attitudes of peasant and semi-proletarian Muslims. Their motto was, as Islamabadi often used to put it, to 'awaken the society from the lowest strata'. The Muslim League was elitist and the patriotic *olema* (Bengali version of *ulema*) had little in common with either what Amir Ali had done in Calcutta or Nawab Salimullah had done in Dhaka. Anisuzzaman has commented in his introduction to the anthology of Muslim periodicals *Muslim Bangler Samayikpatra* (1969), that the *Anjuman* movement sometimes echoed *Tariq-i-Muhammadia*, sometimes Saiyad Ahmed and Amir Ali.[5] However, from the point of the growth of nationalism, the *Anjuman* was unique in significance. Islamabadi became involved in the *Anjuman* movement. The goal of the *Anjumans* was reform: of education, of rites and customs, but most importantly, that of the condition of the peasantry. *Anjumans* were being formed at the *thana* level also.

Maniruzzaman Islamabadi's activities in Rangpur brought him close to the *Anjuman* spirit. Himself a renowned cleric, he had now also Maulana Akram Khan as his colleague in the initiative. He knew Maulana Phulwari, Maulana Qadir Baksh, Munshi Meherullah and others who were regular visitors to the *alem-sammelani* or meetings of the *ulema*. In 1913, the *Anjuman-e-olema* (to become famous later on as *Anjuman-e-olema-e-bangla*) was formed in Baniapara of Bagura and in 1919 the *alem samiti* was formed. *Al-Islam* was the organ of the *Anjuman*. This was a different journey from the *Wahabi* and other revivalist paths. Resisting communalism, organising relief work among the flood affected and other distressed people, pleading the cause of the tenants, spreading Bengali language among the *ulema*, advocating the need to learn from the modern saga of the entrepreneur, bringing out newspapers and periodicals as organs, formed an agenda of a genre that was different from the call to return to the 'original' ('the golden age', 'the past')—the 'original purity' of Islam. These activities led the *Anjuman* to the *Jamait-e-olema-e-hind*. The literary conference of the *Jamait-e-olema-e-hind* in Bengal was held in Chittagong in 1930. Maulana Maniruzzaman presided over the conference. The Praja Movement drew strength from the nationalist *ulema*, and the leader who represented this phenomenon most authentically was Islamabadi.

At the core of this Muslim-nationalist identity there were ideas of anti-landlordism, cultural democracy, and a moral community of pious preachers engaged in invigorating the people with healthy thoughts, ideas, actions, in short the ideal of a community of the *alem*. Characteristic of this ideal was the combination of utopia and modernity—the link-up of three elements—agrarian democracy, divinity realised through spiritual minds and acts, and new ideas about the claims of a community, which extended beyond the constitutional chamber politics typical of the comprador class of the colonial age. His impassioned submission to the *ulema* was that the Muslim League had not cared for the peasantry, had not fought against the landlords, and what was most repugnant, it had no religiosity, no piety, the Muslim League people were not 'true Muslims'. The invocation of the democratic virtue of a 'true Muslim' was the critical element in his activism in the *Anjuman* movement. The *Anjuman* movement thrived for 20 years more. Nonetheless it was to be caught soon in the paradox of nationalism. After all the *Anjuman-e-olema-e-bangla* or the *Jamait-e-olema-e-hind* could not be a modern political party claiming universality and particular values at the same time. Too innocent of a reality marked by the 'dissociation of modernity and democracy', the movement lost its independent space by the mid 1930s, and most of its cadres soon merged with the Muslim League, a development symbolised by none else than Akram Khan. Islamabadi became a lonely voice marked by loss, disappointment, and despair.

If Maulana Maniruzzaman Islamabadi was a preacher who wanted to give birth to a new modern identity of the Bengal Muslims by purifying the modern through invoking morality of a universal again and again, his colleague, Maulana Akram Khan, may be said to have created a 'politics of identity' by creating a public-political sphere of Muslim Bengal through a strategy of modernising the utopia. As a publicist Akram Khan reached unprecedented heights in the public milieu of colonial Bengal. It began in the form of writing in a magazine called *Ahl-e-Hadis*. For some years he worked in several newspapers and journals in editorial and other capacities till 1910 when he could publish his own newspaper, the *Saptahik Mohammadi*. Then other publications too commenced under his guidance like the *Dainik Jamana* (1920), *Saptahik O Dainik Sebak* (1921), *Dainik Mohammadi* (1922), *Masik Mohammadi* (1927), *Dainik Azad* (1936), and the *Saptahik Comrade* (1946). He was also the first editor of *al-Islam*, the organ of the *Anjuman-e-olema-e-bangla*. Indeed he was soon recognised as the father of Bengali Muslim journalism. In 1905 he became associated with the Congress and was involved in protest against the partition of Bengal. After the revocation of partition in 1911 he gradually associated himself with Muslim politics and particularly the Muslim League and till 1928 was one of the important leaders of both the Congress and the Muslim League, as well as a crucial supporter of the Bengal Pact initiated by C.R. Das between Hindu leaders (in this case represented by the Congress) and Muslim leaders to ensure political unity and communal amity. But by 1928, fed up with the attitude of the Hindu leaders of the Congress who were determined to undo the pact (which was revoked in 1926), he severed his connection with the Congress. In 1936 as the most important leader of the Muslim League in Bengal, Akram Khan became busy in reorganising the League there. As the president of the Bengal Muslim League from 1941 to 1947, he became the most determined and consistent advocate of Pakistan and even after partition he remained a loyal champion of the Muslim League. Till 1962 he was connected with politics and journalism, apparently untouched by the surge of Bengali identity and the rise of Awami (popular) politics in East Pakistan. He died in 1968, after 100 years of leading an active and contradictory life.

Akram Khan has been often compared to Muhammad Ali Jinnah for his unflinching commitment to the idea of Pakistan. Like Jinnah he was a believer in composite virtues of nationalism in his early phase. Like Jinnah, it is said that he was not a practising believer. In *Anjuman-e-olema-e-bangla* he translated some *surahs* or verses in the Holy Quran into Bengali. In the presidential address to the third conference of the Bangiya Musalman Sahitya Parishad in 1919 he referred to the complexities in the Muslim mind regarding the question of language in these words:

> There are many strange questions in this world. 'What is the mother tongue of the Bengali Muslims, Urdu or Bengali?', is the strangest of them. It is like asking whether coconut should grow on a coconut tree ... if somebody approaches us with that query we shall have to raise money to send that person to Behrampur... Bengali has to be enriched with Arabic and Persian words ... in the current style of written Bengali the idolatry of the Hindus is so apparent and the Musalman loses his way in this. First we need publication of our religious texts and our national history in Bengali. The alem should learn Bengali. It is his holy task to serve the mother tongue. Muslims have their distinct notion of nation or jati. This is the particular feature of Muslim nationalism and the amulet of the Muslim nation. ...Muslim nationalism is completely religious. ...to its great peril the Muslims can forget that their national language is Arabic ... Look what Persia did to Arabic ... Urdu is neither our mother tongue nor our national tongue. However, for the protection and nourishment of Muslim nationalism we need Urdu.[6]

In engaging with modernity and designing a community's or a nation's own sense of the modern, he wrote in *Masik Mohammadi*,

> There is now a novel awakening in the many layers of Muslim Bengal with the arrival of different thoughts and influenced by the surroundings. On one side the hold of the old, on the other the lure of the modern.... The outlook of the first group is getting narrower increasingly, though it is not extinct.... And here on the other side though there is no dearth of light around the young group enchanted with modernity, they are totally blind today regarding Islam... We have to tell the first group, 'open the door', and the second group, 'open your eyes!'[7]

The venture of defining the Muslim nation in Bengal on the basis of a nationalist alliance of Hindus and Muslims that had consumed the preceding 26 years of his life failed finally in 1929. Akram Khan could not but feel betrayed. He severed all his connections with the Congress and the earlier type of nationalist politics based on communal unity. The leader, who was opposed by the clergy, particularly by the *ulema* of the *Ahl-e-Hadis* in the 1920s as un-Islamic, now became the pillar of the political aspirations of the clergy.

We of course know how the rest of his life evolved in this never-to-be-successful endeavour to solve the paradox of solidarity-building. In fact that too is a lesson for us. His writings became increasingly concerned with the 'Muslim' cause and not the cause of 'Muslim Bengal'. He became in due course the president of the Muslim League in Bengal. He had arrived at the natural(ised) idea of Pakistan. The journey of the intellectual had come to an ironic end. After independence he remained the Muslim League president in East Pakistan. Apart from supporting the language cause he showed no sympathy for the movement for autonomy. Awami politics was anathema to him. Even army rule was welcome. He extended support to Ayub Khan. The idea of Pakistan as the natural homeland of the Muslims of the subcontinent was not an utopia. It had been achieved. Islam as the religion of the intellect (as opposed to the religion of the plough or the bazaar) had been vindicated. By primarily intellectual means Maulana Akram Khan had created a public, aroused his followers, erected the intellectual framework of a nation, almost 'conjured up a nation', the Muslim Bengal. He had begun his journey with a policy of an alliance of this Muslim Bengal with Hindu Bengal. He had then given shape to the idea of Pakistan as the natural habitat of this nation. And when linguistic nationalism was breaking this habitat, he was at a loss to understand how any such consideration like claim on behalf of a language could disturb the natural journey of the Muslims on earth. Being a consistent Muslim meant to Akram Khan believing in the idea of Pakistan.

But in that garden of identity there was a snake. If Islam allowed in place of universal brotherhood a nation for the Muslims, that is Pakistan, where was the place of democracy in that argument? He had achieved a solution in his own mind. And it was final. In the permanently unstable world of nationalist solutions his intellect and his austere style marked with certitudes had proved unequal to the demands of the nationalist public of Muslim Bengal, a public that he had helped to create. His biography on Prophet Muhammad was an event in Bengal's intellectual history. Such intellectual history is in any case a battleground of legitimation or contestation. But ironically that which legitimates also contests. Akram Khan *'Mostafacharit*, a narration of Muhammad's life as well as an exercise in argumentation and refutation, was a demonstration of his 'belief in rationality.' It was the narration of a life that had to be rescued from myths as also neglected by the Muslims. It was indeed an elaboration of the supreme statement of Akram Khan that to be a believer was to be a rationalist also. Akram Khan had thought that with his intellectual writings on Islam, the Prophet, and on the political culture of the Bengali Muslims, he was achieving a settled disposition of the nation. But little did he realise that the identity of a nationalist public was a self-conscious projection, it involved invocation of memory in various forms and stages and therefore could never be settled.

The trajectory of the *Anjuman* movement in Bengal and the political careers of two of its prominent leaders point towards how utopia is a dream that always combines with reality, is fraught with conflicts and responses with contradictory pulls, and operates in the form of situations, ideologies, and institutions that are instrumental in 'creating' the public(s) of the nation. They are utopias because they can be dreamt in these sites (or, rather, in any of them) because utopia is never antithetical to 'heterotopia', but the 'heterotopic' character of public institutions has allowed utopias to flourish.[8]

Nothing illustrates this more than the way the Muslim League disintegrated in East Pakistan. In the conflictive politics of assertion, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi could have smiled in satisfaction, were he alive in 1949, to see how the Muslim Awami League was born to give the signal that utopia and modernity were combining again in the political space of Muslim Bengal. Utopia in any kind of nationalist thought, we must remember, is anyway a complex thing, and unfortunately this has remained neglected in readings of Bengali Islamic political thought. In that thought, moral judgement was always crucial. It involved themes of divinity, critique of the present civil society, and a demand that an ethical politics be sovereign—a form, it recognised, present only in the kingdom of the Almighty. Thus, political thought dealt with the contemporaneity of the *Quran*, the injustices on believers in the reign of the colonial masters and their supporters—mostly 'the Hindus'—and all that was relevant in explicating the *ethical* imperative of a homeland.

Utopia has a recursive legacy. Thinkers and leaders go back to the 'ideal' again and again. A thinker like Akram Khan had to rationalise the utopia, whereas another leader of Muslim Bengal, Maulana Bhasani whom we shall discuss later, found it self-evident. One relied on *written* words, the other on the *spoken*; one relied on organisation, the other on instinct; one on logic, the other on proselytising and evangelic campaigns. Yet both were tied to the anchor of utopia. In creating a solidarity, political ideas verged on being absolutely moral-utopian.

It has been pointed out that utopia makes *politics*, that is *noble politics*, self-evident. In other words, contrary to the common idea, politics is not the field where power is contested and arrived at; politics presupposes the power of which it is only a mode. And this power is, above all, *justice*, and it flows from the capacity to do justice. Power, then, takes the form of justice—justice for the believers, for the common man, for the oppressed, justice against *jalims* (wrong-doers, evil people). Thus, in Bengali Muslim political history, and more significantly, in its politico-religious discourse, utopia was invoked again and again (from Titu Meer to Maulana Bhasani): Power was presented as a capacity to do noble things and to punish evil acts and thoughts. Consequently, justice and power informed the core of a utopian vision of a Muslim land. In sermons to the faithful, the utopian vision had to be shared; the politico-religious discourse had to be congregational and open.

If the political had to be justified by the divine, the political emanated from the divine also. We must appreciate the break, as much as we appreciate the continuity. From 1949, the year of the birth of the Muslim Awami League, politics of Muslim Bengal attained a dreamy quality. The opposition became the mainstream by harping on the self-evident, on the just, on the inevitable. Political contestation was successfully grounded in total moralism. Thus, the national awakening in 1952 did not have to be 'secular'; it did not have to disconnect itself from a Muslim identity. The past of the Pakistan (movement) was to be rescued from the evil usurpers. If the Medinian golden age was unattainable fully, it was nonetheless there—as the standard, as the just, as the inspiration to overcome the dark period.

But here was the 'miracle of the modern'. For, it may be asked, if the utopian inspiration was the force behind such a dramatic change in leadership in Muslim Bengal in 1949–52, why did such inspiration not follow the celebrated path of utopia, that of the *Wahabis*? Or, as was being enunciated at that time, the path of Maulana Maududi? The creation of Pakistan had occasioned theological reflections on state, religion, polity, and a moral human existence. It is important to note that Maulana Bhasani's quest in this situation bore little resemblance to that of Maududi. We have to note that in Bengal the pursuit of the ideal took the modern form of open mass politics, democratic activities, and anti-fundamentalism, so that many commentators have been deceived into typifying this period as one of the growth of 'secular consciousness'. It is difficult to go into the details of that discussion now. However, we may note that the search for the pure, the just, the Medinian, and the divine, never strayed from the path of toleration. Bengal, at once a colonised and a plural land, produced as a resolution of the tormenting conflicts and contradictions its own utopia, which bore little resemblance with the principles of the Wahabite polity, though admittedly *Wahabi* ideology had had its impact on rural Bengal in the 19th century and contributed to the evolution of the form of the *pracharak* so crucial in the politics of Muslim Bengal. For this, Abul Mansur Ahmed's description of his family memory and his childhood is crucial for any scholar of Muslim Bengali activism; we have only to read the available autobiographies such as his to get a glimpse of that world.

The emphasis on the application of the Islamic law so characteristic of the *Wahabis* was singularly absent in the denunciation of contemporary rule by the 'new' leaders. They certainly condemned the corruption of the state leaders. But the ideal of a pure life of the divine was irrelevant to them. Clerics were crucial for the 'new awakening', but as *pracharaks*, not as clerics. In this utopia the script (the scripture) was not the absolute, the *spoken* and the entire *language* was the principal element. Until Akram Khan, the political was defined with the aid of canonical texts. But in a very dense atmosphere marked by partition, agrarian unrest, national awakening over the language issue, and the sudden loss of legitimacy of the ruling party, canonical texts lost their primacy to a significant extent. The result was Bengal's 'own utopia'. The inequities of the exterior were to be redressed not through a redefining of the interior. Redefining the exterior itself in the light of the 'natural' soul of Bengal was the way (it is remarkable that the language demand was often raised as the 'natural right' of a Bengali, the fight against the government was 'natural' for a populace which had fought for the 'natural' right of a homeland, that is Pakistan, and that

the demand against the *zamindars* [landlords] was a 'natural' one of the peasants). Thus, the conceiving of a new nationalist identity was a contentious act, marked by the moral and the ethical—the reinforcing of utopia as an inspiration for public politics. This was in effect an interrogation by the plebeian public of the aspirations of the ruling Muslim bourgeois political class. In this utopia, there was also a conflation of power and morality, of language and the entire range of civic culture, of democracy and the ideal of Pakistan; in short the interpreted past and the desirable future. And as every utopia suffers because the conflation of the two registers becomes impossible after some time, this one too was to meet its nemesis.

The decline of Bhasani-style politics in Bangladesh was the most marked instance of this. After the emergence of the comprador, crony-capitalist class, as the ruler of the new nation, as he realised that his version of radical *darbesh*-style politics had lost out, and he was nearing the end of his life, he would ruefully remark that he was alone in his dreams. The utopian, evangelical, *darbesh* (the wandering mystic) style of politics was not shared by others; this was a style with which even the organised leftist peasant politics of nationalism could not co-habit comfortably for long. The departure of utopia was in any case marked in the politics of the time as he passed his last year. The army took over power and a helpless and desperate Bhasani could only watch and place his faith in the army's capacity to deliver promise. The Awami League rule in Bangladesh had ended within four years after it began, in ignominy and disaster. Above all, the events of 1971 had shown how ineffective 'pious opposition' was in the time of tanks, cannons, mortars, foreign help, intervention, and the Seventh Fleet.

To Bhasani, however, a combination of Islam, piety, Muslim nationalism, and pride in being a Bengali had not been unnatural. In his youth he had come under the influence of the writings of Saiyad Nasiruddin Bogdadi, Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, and Ismail Hussain Shiraji with whom he had campaigned jointly in North Bengal. His spiritual quest had taken him from Assam to *Deoband* seminary. He joined the *anjumane olema* in 1915 in the Calcutta session, met Akram Khan and took *al-Islam* to Assam. He was now to educate and train the *ulema*. In 1915 he started relief-work among famine, flood, and cyclone victims, this time in Pabna. This became a life-long vocation and symbolised, more than any other act, his politics amongst the peasants of Bengal. He became the president of the Assam Congress in 1916 and wandered in those years from one *charland* to the other *charland* (land that surfaces from the riverbed due to shift in the river course). Peasants and *murids* (disciples) addressed him as *huzur*. His biographer tells us the story of the formation of the Banga-Assam Praja Samity and the Banga-Assam Praja Sammelan in Phulchuri in 1929, both supported by the communists and leftists and the envy that all this roused among the 'mullahs, maulavis'. The events of 1930 in Chittagong occasioned another outburst of activity. He was now founding schools in places like Shalmara in opposition to the *zamindars*, mobilising peasants against the Gauripur landlord and the landlord of Santosh, and was 'enchanting the audience with magic oratory and a bull-dog voice'. In 1937 he had formed the Assam Chashi-Majur Samity (Assam Association for Peasants and Workers) and started agitation against the coolie line system. The same year he was elected from south Dhubri to the Assam Legislative Assembly and was now a recognised political leader besides being an organiser, agitator, *pir*, and a *maulana*.

Rest of that political history is well known. The radical Left tried to infuse social radicalism into his politics of nationalist-religious identity—a desirable but often an illusory expectation. The moment Mujib came out of jail in 1969, Bhasani-led National Awami Party's 11-point charter lost its relevance. Federal autonomy, already a subterfuge for Bengali nationalism, became the main issue. Mujib for the first time became the unquestioned supreme leader of the nationalist public. From an activist of a nationalist party and subsequently a nationalist leader, he had become within 22 years the chief tribune of Muslim Bengal and of the opposition to the reality and the idea of Pakistan. In this congealed form where all other elements of opposition politics had been pushed to the margin, no one had anything else to say or offer—not, particularly, Maulana Bhasani, burdened with a half-century long association with the ideology of 'pious opposition'. In the strange interface of public and nationalism, he quickly became a castaway. From then on, the personal story of Bhasani, now busy in invoking moral politics, is inalienable from what we may call the sociology of mass upsurge.

The Left now found him inadequate, the Right found him unnecessary. His Islamic moralism was now arcane, possibly more suitable to the conditions of the early part of the century. One can read his speeches and short testaments after 1970—for example, 'Amar Parikalpanaye Islami Viswavidyalaya' (1970), 'Keno Islami Viswavidyalaya' (1971), 'Islami Viswavidyalayer Rup O Katha' (1974), 'Palanbad - Ki O Keno' (1973), 'Rabubiyater Bhumika' (1974), and his last speech to the conference of the Khuda-i-Khidmatgar in Santosh in 1976 three days before his death on 17 November. After 1971 he was a liability to the politics of the land. His 'return to Islam' in this period, if one can see this in his turning away from organised party politics to moral activism, was unsung. The public found his programme of achieving a fusion of religious moralism, democracy, and the politics of nationalism too ambiguous a legacy to hold on to. Yet, one can surely say that, with increasing bitterness about the reality of the nationalist state that emerged through 1971—its corruption, and the ruthless private use of public power and wealth—the *darbesh*-style politics would not be the only thing of memory for the public to preserve; the other passion in Bhasani's life, character building, would also be an equally abiding legacy. Pedagogy after all has always been one of the necessary conditions for a utopian project.

I think by now readers are clear of what I mean by 'concrete universal', a term that carries the sense of the 'fold'—singularity within singularities, and the negotiations, contentions, and dialogues—that is at the heart of my intervention here.

CONTENTIOUS SITUATIONS, MICRO-POLITICS, AND DIALOGIC EXISTENCE

In the current time, marked by paroxysm of terrorism and fundamentalism, the immigrants, minorities, and non-state people characteristically find themselves beyond the pale of law, order, rights, and a citizenship based polity. They are denizens of a shadowy world that inspires fear, while democracy, in order to secure itself, must draw for them elaborate and stringent restrictions and controls. Drawbridges are being pulled; and a new type of racism, based on fictive cultural identities bordering on almost biological differences, marks the strangers out. This is the milieu in which new political actors are emerging from several assertive identities. Yet, as the foregoing tales suggest, these assertions exhibit ambiguities. If this was true when the Muslim public sphere was appearing in Bengal 150 years ago, the ambiguity is equally evident in our time, when as I show in detail in my book *The Marginal Nation*, thousands and thousands of Muslim illegal immigrants from Bangladesh taking shelter on the other side of the border flock to mosques, yet their main cry is not to evoke a new 'brotherhood of the believers', but to acquire citizenship that can entitle them to life-saving means in a world where states have less and less of will and the means to care for them. New mosques, new charities, new networks, new dispensations, and new orders appear—yet in this growth of a huge amorphous mass of shadowy denizens, religious identity is a contingent product, being constantly predicated by the politics of democratic citizenship, that is, daily negotiations and transactions over rights and means. Declarations of political identities in this sense are contentious acts of singularities within singularities.

Declaration of political identity by the subject in this world of contentious politics is 'micro-politics'; that is to say, it does not follow the principle of the formation of majority-identity (which is often constituted by some fictive majoritarian principle of nation, race, ethnicity, or religion). Surviving always in face of a majoritarian state by becoming 'minoritarian', by which I mean constituting itself into a politics that positions itself as a minority, aiming to win the contest, and marking itself out as a separate territory in face of a state, the majority, and a centralising power bent upon erasing the territories of all others. Identity declaration is the act of constituting a subject in contentious politics, 'which takes as its object the very violence of identities'. Indeed, one can say, politics is taken to its extreme by the logic of identities, which cannot identify themselves without causing violence—the essence of contention. The mission of identity is fulfilled only in a war of annihilation that ironically makes the politics of identity sit on its head, by ending at least one identity.

To be true, this violence as we know can at times take extreme forms of cruelty, making human mass 'disposable'. The word 'neo-fascism' can barely describe the phenomenon, because in politics this survives only as epi-phenomenon. Since identities as political subjects are in fact non-realisable, responsible politics today can only strive for historical conditions where such ultra-violence can be dispelled. On the other hand, under conditions of extreme violence, where no macro-politics can make any significant dent on the milieu, micro-politics covers the process of resistance at every level. Study of 'identification', which means a study of a process, enjoins us to take 'identities' to be always over-determined, which means taking identities as performing several functions at the same time.

Let me go back to what I began with, namely the negotiation of the singularities in the production of the universal—in this case the concrete universal of the nation. What is critical in this process is the practicality 'of the negotiation, the practicality of the dialogic existence'.

A PRAGMATIC THEORY OF TRUTH

My arguments, the discerning readers will realise by now, form a pragmatic theory about truth. This theory may not have a philosophically interesting theory about truth, but for pragmatists, this truth is only the name of a property, which all other singularities may share. In this case it was the truth of colonialism, the truth of occupation, the truth of an anti-colonial existence, a matter of practical experience.

Thus, the Muslims fought in India against the colonial rule in 1857, later they dialogued with the Hindus to build up the nation, or Jamaluddin al Afghani, a Shia who took on a Sunni identity visited India to preach anti-colonialism, or the Sikh women committed suicide in the Punjab during the Great Partition, and so on. These are not unique events that lend to totalising conclusions. They were practical acts, necessary to perform, under the circumstances. There is little anything general and useful to say about what makes these actions all good, or good for all time. Pragmatists think that the history of attempts to isolate the True or the Good from the world of the co-existing singularities are doomed to failure. They make no sense to us. The history of the attempts to do so is roughly coextensive with the history of that literary genre we call 'philosophy'—a genre founded by Plato. Pragmatists see the Platonic tradition as never being of any use, or at least having outlived its usefulness.

In the 19th century two things happened: On one hand, there was a groundswell of rebellions, revolts, and protests in Europe and in the colonies around the world paying scant regard to the existing ideologies of the time, including the 'German Ideology'. On the other hand, the conflict in theory just mentioned briefly crystallised into one between 'the transcendental philosophy' and 'the empirical philosophy'. This opposition did not reflect properly the clashes in the material world. It was a grossly distorted representation. The terms were misleading. Yet, every intellectual knew roughly where s/he stood in relation to the two blocs. The transcendental camp thought that natural science was not the last word; the empiricists thought that knowledge of the spatial-temporal things helped to find one's moorings, in fact find Truth. Yet there was a critical tradition also, which tried to cut through the absolute formulations of these two camps. In the growth of this critical tradition historical consciousness played a big role. The critical tradition felt that historical awareness led to critical consciousness, most importantly consciousness of its own genealogy, from which it could trace 'the scientific method'.

One difficulty the pragmatist had in making his/her position clear, therefore, was that she had to struggle with the positivist also for the position of radical anti-Platonist. His/her critique of Plato would be different from that of the positivist. S/he knew that several hundred years of effort had failed to make interesting sense of the notion of 'correspondence' (either of thoughts to things or of words to things). The trick of breaking the aporia of correspondence lay elsewhere. In the anti-colonial world, as I have argued elsewhere, the problem of correspondence was simply absent. In the overwhelming milieu of colonialism the problem was not of correspondence, but of making non-correspondence work towards producing a universal which would make the problematic redundant. This should be evident when one re-reads the accounts presented by me till now in this chapter as a story of the growth of a distinct public sphere as one 'circle' in the universe of the nation.

What was the secret? My answer is that the world of colonialism and the anti-colonial movements was conducive to the gradual 'pragmaticisation' of any kind of positivism, which was after all one variety of fundamentalism and idealism. Metaphysical elements in thought had to be incessantly criticised in order to confront colonialism. The colonial world was most conducive to the growth of dialectical thinking—and of course through a much shorter route. When we re-study the *Wahabis*, the *Faraizis*, the *Anjuman* movement, the Revolt of 1857, the various thoughts about peasant insurrections, or the dialogues over the first partition of Bengal in 1905, the Lucknow Pact, the Bengal Pact, etc. it is impossible to miss the dialogic-pragmatic component in anti-colonial consciousness. The sense of finitude of one's time and place, of the contingencies and the necessary actions—this is the lasting legacy of the anti-colonial being, which became universal. Thank God, the colonised Muslims did not want to get out of their skin and escape!

In this sense, Foucault was right when he remarked that we are all now gradually losing our hold on the 'metaphysical comfort' which the philosophical tradition had provided. The anti-colonial political subject used reality's own language rather than merely the received vocabulary of a time and a place to make the 'universe and the universal of anti-colonialism'.

The way the anti-colonial negotiations went on in India offers food for more thought. I have pointed out that the mental world of these negotiations was opposite to the ideology of 'corresponding'. The microstructure of corresponding is characterised by two things: bivalence, which is the property of being either true or false, and a belief in making absolute claims to the possession of truth. On both counts the anti-colonial political subject proved to be pragmatists. The political subject of the 19th and the early 20th century knew deep inside that there was nothing absolute about the truth of colonialism (it was of course a reality) except what the subject was experiencing, and if any other truth was to be created, it was to be in the course of creating a practice. No standard of rationality could prove to them the absolute truth of colonialism; no rigorous argumentation that was not conforming to the subject's own practices could hold any water. These histories of the growth of an anti-colonial Muslim public sphere were veritable demonstrations of the passage of the subject from 'subjection' to 'subjectivation'—poor words to describe the manoeuvres of the singularities within the anti-colonial universe to make the nation. These manoeuvres were in the nature of dispersed and discontinuous offensives that left no room for durable peace till the war against colonialism was over. More significantly these offensives, dispersed and discontinuous as they were, seemed to say that if colonialism signified modernity, political modernity also signified that to get rid of the permanent schemata of peace/war we must establish other ways to construct the life of political being. This is where the significance of negotiation between the singularities lay. The nation was to emerge at that historical point of time and space, when (or where) the demand for virtues would be satisfied, when at the same time other subjects of colonialism, which was the rule of the infidels, would co-exist; it was at that point that one could say that yes, politics would be able to live in congruence with ethics. This signified the necessity of a dialogic culture.

In fact the investigation into the emergence of the solidarity called the nation, and an accompanying study of the dynamics of the twin factors of contention and dialogue, show us how a concrete universal emerges, and how in this emergence the idea of a fold operates in form of a practical operation of the principle of the singularities within singularity. As singularities jostle within themselves, we have the beginning of democracy. That is why in ex-colonies people say with some justification that our learning to become democratic began long before we became independent. In fact it was in the colonial world that we learnt to make 'always singular adjustments between freedom and equality'.[9] Politics became a concrete procedure of truth. But this also means, and I think that the historical material presented in bare sketches here also proves, that thinking of singularity in its pure form (by that I mean the historical form) also signifies at the same time thinking of pure multiplicity, consistent self-dissemination, and therefore limitless multiplicity. That is how the singular and the plural, the concrete and the universal went on negotiating each other in the emerging national or the collective-political life. Shorn of high words, all these not only mean that we must look at political life as practical life, but also as a practical way of negotiating the paradox of equality and difference in our collective life. Such practical wisdom tells us the possibility a 'post-philosophical culture'.[10]

Is there still such a possibility of pragmatic politics, which can conduct dialogues in order to widen resistance to power? Or is it only a story of the colonial past and anti-colonial resistance, and therefore can survive today mostly in a mythological form? In other words, is there no more possibility of building the national-popular? I shall request the readers in answer to that likely question to study the resistance in Lebanon to neo-colonial rule. Readers will only have to study the statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah, the leader of nationalist resistance in Lebanon.[11] The statements outline the situations and positions in Lebanon in circumstances of repeated Israeli aggression, the massacre of the Palestinians in Lebanon in the 1980s, or the earlier landing of the US marines in Beirut. The subject positions of resistance chronicled there, and reviled countless times in Hollywood movies, bear out many things I have discussed in this chapter. The legacy of anti-colonial politics demonstrates such possibility, in which men and women felt themselves as people with agency, even though with precious links to something beyond, and therefore a sense of limit, something finite. One can say, using the words of Richard Rorty (from whose insights I draw heavily here) in a slightly different way, in the colonial world the political subject was already halfway towards the creation of such a position. S/he was a believer, yet s/he was, as Sartre put it, doing without a singular absolute God.

NOTES

1. Once again readers are advised to G.N. Devy's writings on this theme. See *The G.N. Devy Reader* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2009).
2. Of Charles Tilly's many accounts of contentious politics, one of the recent ones is *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2004).
3. Abul Mansur Ahmed, *Amar Dekha Rajnitir Panchas Bachar* (Dhaka: Sahityaprakash, 1978).
4. Shamsuzzaman Khan, *Maniruzzaman Islamabadi, 1875–1950* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1988), 18–19.
5. Anisuzzaman, ed., *Muslim Bangler Samayikpatra, 1831–1930* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1969); hereafter *Samayikpatra*.
6. *Samayikpatra*, introduction.
7. *Samayikpatra*, p. 504.
8. The notion of 'heterotopia' made famous by Michel Foucault indicates a site of many meanings, many uses, and many transformations. The distinction from 'utopia' is evident as behind utopia there is a sense of one meaning, one vision, and one dream—a singularity that would mark the new city. Heterotopia indicates a new architecture, and a new ethos of the place. For this and many other meanings, see Michel Foucault in Robert Hurley, trans., 'Different Spaces', in *Michel Foucault—Essential Works*, ed. James Faubion, vol. 2 (London: Allen Lane, 1994). However, while Foucault makes the distinction between the two, I suggest the connection between utopia and heterotopia that political action creates.
9. Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005), 151; also Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, trans. Ray Brassier and Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2004), Chapter 6.
10. On this explanation, it is best to read Richard Rorty, whose argument I am following here; See Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 'Introduction'; also available in the The Marxists Internet Archive: http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/index.htm (accessed on 13 February 2008).
11. Nicholas Noe, ed., *Voice of the Hezbollah—The Statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrullah* (London: Verso, 2007).