

RETHINKING GLOBALISM AND INDIAN IDENTITY: CULTURAL  
COLONIALISM IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY?

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I. INTRODUCTION

On March 23, 2006, an unlikely symbol of the British colonial conquest of India passed into history. The date marked the death of Adwaitya, a 255-year old tortoise, rumored to have been the pet of Robert Clive, who, as every school-going child in India is taught, established colonial rule in India through the military defeat of the Nawab of Bengal in 1757.<sup>1</sup> As Vinay Lal wryly observes, Adwaitya had outlived the Raj, perhaps knowing “all along that the sun would set on the British empire.”<sup>2</sup> “We might even be tempted

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<sup>1</sup> Vinay Lal, *The Thief, His Tortoise, Their History, and the Revenge of Myth*, OUTLOOKINDIA.COM, Apr. 28, 2006, <http://www.outlookindia.com/full.asp?fname=inaylal&fodname=20060428&sid=1>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

into seeing in Adwaitya's story," Lal concludes:

[A] parable for our times as the lumbering giants of Asia, the Aldabra and Galapagos tortoises of our times, India and China, make their way past the hares that had all but won the race. But one thing is certain: long after the history of the British empire will have disappeared, the mythical world of tortoises (and hares) will continue to endure.<sup>3</sup>

Western governments and corporations have long held India in lukewarm thrall for its closed economy and socialist policies. Today, however, the emergence of India as a potential global technological power has captured the imagination of the international media, transnational corporations, and policymakers across the world. The Indian success story is typically associated with the benefits of globalization and free-market reforms, developments in information technology, and the growth of the internet. The story conjures up images of a fast-paced, networked universe quite different from the sedentary world of a tortoise. Many Western and Indian commentators point to the successes of the economic reforms in India as proof of the viability of free-market policies. These successes are said to provide a tantalizing glimpse of a prosperous and just world that is available to Indians as well as to the citizens of other developing nations if the societies remove the obstacles to pro-market frameworks of governance. That the reforms have had positive economic effects and some beneficial social outcomes is undeniable. It is also important not to caricature the views of supporters and skeptics of the reforms by unfairly ascribing reductive and diametrically opposed positions to both sides.<sup>4</sup> However, whether the new role of India in the global economy suggests the victory or defeat of the tortoise is a more complicated question than may appear at first sight. Does the new place for India on the world stage mark the passing of colonialism, even if it is accompanied by the emergence of new forms of inequality? Alternatively, does it signal the return of the logic of colonialism in a new form?

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> An excellent discussion between Pankaj Mishra and Salil Tripathi representing different perspectives about the necessity and impact of the economic reforms in India can be found on the website of the *Guardian*. In order of publication, see Pankaj Mishra, *The Western view of the rise of India and China is a self-affirming fiction*, GUARDIAN UNLIMITED, June 10, 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,1794500,00.html>; Salil Tripathi, *Escaping the 'Hindu rate of growth'*, GUARDIAN UNLIMITED, June 13, 2006; Pankaj Mishra, *Rescuing India from the condescension of the business-lounge class*, GUARDIAN UNLIMITED, June 14, 2006, [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/pankaj\\_mishra/2006/06/india\\_and\\_china\\_neoliberal\\_my.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/pankaj_mishra/2006/06/india_and_china_neoliberal_my.html); and Salil Tripathi, *Dragons and Democrats*, GUARDIAN UNLIMITED, June 15, 2006, [http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/salil\\_tripathi/2006/06/return\\_of\\_the\\_sequel\\_to\\_pankaj.html](http://commentisfree.guardian.co.uk/salil_tripathi/2006/06/return_of_the_sequel_to_pankaj.html).

I will explore these questions through a largely theoretical analysis of two kinds of discursive productions that relate Indian cultural identity to the operations of the global economy. The first is an argument about the relationship of culture and economy typified by works such as *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, the bestselling book by journalist Thomas Friedman. The second is a discourse of national and global identity, seemingly shared by Indian state and society, that links Indian cultural qualities with Indian economic and technological ability. I argue that in these discursive productions, India is variously affirmed as an irresponsible or exemplary case of a global actor from the developing world. Indian economic and technological actions are linked to cultural traits or qualities, whether positive or negative. Indian cultural identity is, relatedly, judged according to a performance-based standard and sought to be reshaped according to this standard. The project of cultural reshaping is at once a project of individual self-fashioning that is taken up and advocated by segments of Indian society in the present-day context.

*A. Theoretical Framework: Cultural and Economic Fields and Capital in the Global Economy*

In presenting my case, I am not taking the position that economy determines culture in the ultimate analysis. Nor do I hold the view that economic rationality can effectively govern the political space of a nation. Ironically, scholars of neoliberal persuasion as well as some Marxists share these assumptions and beliefs. Rather, following the work of French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, I understand culture and economy as autonomous if overlapping domains of existence, or fields. Each has its own logic of accumulation and currency (cultural capital and economic capital respectively).<sup>5</sup> Bourdieu argues that the logic of a field corresponding to a particular sphere of social existence — the social, political, cultural, economic, intellectual, academic, and so on — cannot be conflated with the logic of another field. However, fields do overlap, and value or capital in one area of social life can be translated into value in another field according to particular exchange rates. For example, cultural capital (often taken as synonymous with social status) may translate into economic capital to some extent. However, it will not necessarily automatically guarantee its possessor wealth. Conversely, economic capital will not necessarily bestow its owner with social status or cultural capital. The same dynamic holds for different species of capital. The state, through its policies, sets the exchange

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<sup>5</sup> See Rohit Chopra, *Neoliberalism as Doxa: Bourdieu's Theory of the State and the Contemporary Indian Discourse on Globalization and Liberalization*, 17 *CULTURAL STUD.* 419-44 (2003).

rate between different species of capital.

In a globalized world, transnational forces increasingly influence the domestic policy decisions of states. There is, no doubt, significant variation in the degree of vulnerability of various states given the inequalities that characterize global power relations. However, the susceptibility to transnational factors arguably holds true for powerful states as well as weaker ones. Transnational forces, even if disproportionately impacted by the actions of some states as opposed to others, then, can influence the exchange rates between different fields *within* a particular state. I am concerned here with how the global economy, via the Indian economy, effectively functions to redefine the exchange rate between economic capital and cultural capital in the Indian context. I also seek to examine how this process creates the imperative for a particular definition of Indianness in terms of the attributes of global responsibility and economic-technological capability.<sup>6</sup>

Based on insights from the work of Partha Chatterjee and Ashis Nandy, I will assess whether this recalibration of economy and culture is consonant with a logic of colonialism. In focusing on the discursive production of notions of Indian cultural identity through the operations of the global and Indian economy, I also draw on the work of Cindy Patton.<sup>7</sup> Patton describes how the American new right, through invoking a particular understanding of social space, co-opted a discourse of progressive identity politics to argue for parity with minority claims to civil rights.<sup>8</sup> My claims in this paper regarding the construction or “rewriting” of Indians as global subjects are indebted to Patton’s argument that “discursive agonistics do more than *affect* the terms of debate: insofar as some terms undergird the production of the spaces occupied by bodies, discursive intervention is itself material.”<sup>9</sup> Indeed, inasmuch as new notions of Indian cultural identity shape social practices among Indian communities, the discourse of Indian cultural identity that is enmeshed with the functions of the global economy in the space called India clearly has material and concrete consequences for Indian bodies.

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<sup>6</sup> An evaluation of the successes and failures of the economic reforms initiated by the Indian state in 1991 is beyond the scope of this article. It is not my objective to dismiss (or, for that matter, endorse) globalization or the free market reforms. I am not claiming that the economic reforms in India have been without benefit. Nor am I concerned here with offering a defense of the pre-1991 Indian model of the economy. My focus, rather, is on specific effects of operations of the global economy in the realm of culture and vice-versa.

<sup>7</sup> Cindy Patton, *Refiguring Social Space*, in *SOCIAL POSTMODERNISM: BEYOND IDENTITY POLITICS* 216, 216-49 (Linda Nicholson & Steven Seidman eds., Cambridge University Press 1995).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 223.

II. CULTURE, ECONOMY, AND INDIAN IDENTITY IN THOMAS FRIEDMAN'S  
*THE LEXUS AND THE OLIVE TREE*

In Thomas Friedman's bestselling work, he conceptualizes the "drama of the Lexus and the olive tree" as the encounter between "the age-old quests for material betterment and for individual and communal identity" in the context of "today's dominant international system of globalization."<sup>10</sup> Friedman presents a series of national-global scenarios, each reflecting a particular relationship between the Lexus and the olive tree. The scenarios range from an ideal balance between the two to the domination of one entity (and all that it symbolizes) by the other. India figures into his explication of the book's central idea, with reference to the event of nuclear testing in 1998. The tests were an example of "[t]he olive tree trumping the Lexus and then the Lexus coming right back to trump the olive tree."<sup>11</sup> In terms of the thesis of the book, the nuclear tests represented an assertion of Indian national and cultural identity at the cost of pragmatic concerns. The tests, however, led to a scenario where global economic forces compelled the Indian state to push its newfound cultural assertiveness to the backburner because of its material needs.<sup>12</sup>

Friedman argues that a desire for self-respect, even stridency, motivated India's decision to go nuclear. These sentiments characterized the reactions of most Indians in the government and other sectors. They were typical of urban city dwellers as well as impoverished villagers, and were echoed by uncritical supporters of the decision as well as those opposed to the tests.<sup>13</sup> Friedman's argument is curious since a number of Indians of left-liberal political persuasion very strongly opposed the tests in the media and in public discourse.<sup>14</sup> As is well documented, in the weeks following the event, there were numerous protests and marches in Indian cities in opposition to the nuclear tests.<sup>15</sup> An evaluation of the merits and demerits of the substantive arguments for and against nuclear testing is beyond the scope of this paper. My point here, however, is that Friedman, based on his personal experience, perceives an *overwhelming consensus* among Indians about the test. He views the decision to test nuclear by the Indian state as well as the public reaction that follows in primarily *national-cultural* terms. He goes on

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<sup>10</sup> THOMAS FRIEDMAN, *THE LEXUS AND THE OLIVE TREE* 34 (Anchor Books 2000).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Arundhati Roy, *The End Of Imagination*, OUTLOOKINDIA.COM, Aug. 1, 1998, <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/nukes/endOfImagine.html>.

<sup>15</sup> See generally South Asians Against Nukes, <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/sacw/saan/ndex.html> (last visited Nov. 10, 2007) (compiling sources after May 11, 1998 nuclear tests by Indian state).

to argue that this primarily nation-cultural sentiment and act came at great cost to India. He points to the fact that Moody's Investor Service, the international credit rating agency, downgraded India's status from "investment grade" to "speculative grade."<sup>16</sup> The benefits of cultural pride, misguided anyway, were more than offset by the negative economic consequences of going nuclear. Importantly, the punitive action was meted out not by Indians but by an international organization that happened to be headquartered in New York.

Friedman suggests that the act was foolish: "I kept waiting for the Indian who would say to me 'You know, these nuclear tests were really stupid. We didn't get any additional security out of them and they've really cost us with sanctions.' I am sure that sentiment was there but I couldn't find anyone to express it."<sup>17</sup> The Clinton administration and Capitol Hill mirrored Friedman's view. Drawing attention to the shortsightedness and foolishness of the Indian state, then Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms stated:

The Indian government has not shot itself in the foot. Most likely it has shot itself in the head.... By conducting five nuclear tests, India made a major miscalculation not merely about the United States but about India's own capability. The Indian government has deluded itself into the absurd assumption that the possession of nuclear weapons will make India into a superpower at a time when hundreds of millions of India's people are in abject poverty.<sup>18</sup>

However, if the olive tree had temporarily triumphed, Friedman goes on to argue, the Lexus would come back with a vengeance. About a year and a half after the nuclear tests, the Bharatiya Janata Party (which led the Indian coalition government at the time) and then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had shifted their administration's emphasis to economic reforms. Friedman suggests that the fact that the Indian state was seeking global capital and investment signaled a dramatic reversal from the policy position that necessitated conducting the nuclear tests. Since the tests resulted in economic sanctions, hurting rather than benefiting India, pragmatic material concerns, symbolized by the Lexus, once more took center stage. They pushed aside the cultural pride embodied by the olive tree.

Translating Friedman's argument in terms of the model of fields and capital, Indian cultural assertiveness functioned as an obstacle to the Indian

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<sup>16</sup> Friedman, *supra* note 10, at 39.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* at 38.

<sup>18</sup> John Bisney, *Lawmakers Call For Tough U.S. Response To India's Nuclear Tests*, CNN.COM, May 13, 1998, <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1998/05/13/senate.india/>.

economic field. The Bharatiya Janata Party, one might argue, sought to gain political capital by attempting to redefine the logic of the Indian cultural field in terms of a narrowly nationalistic idea of military strength and cultural pride, symbolized in the image of the “Hindu bomb.” This may have provided some cultural capital to diasporic or inhabiting adherents of Hindu nationalist ideology, who celebrated a nuclear Hindu India as a marker of Hindu pride.<sup>19</sup> However, the event could not be mobilized positively for economic gain in the global or even national context, producing instead the opposite effect. Additionally, in Friedman’s schema, the short- or medium-term domestic political fallout of the tests was primarily the result of the actions of international actors. The global economy, in other words, functioned as an instrument of disciplining the Indian nation. The process of disciplining would last until the Indian government clearly signaled that it was shifting focus to economic reform as an end in itself and not as a supplementary or subsidiary project of cultural or political affirmation in the international arena.

Today, however, with a nuclear deal between India and the United States a real possibility, the same Indian cultural stubbornness or assertion is not defined as short-sighted national pride. It is subsumed under another narrative on which there is basic agreement between representatives of the Indian state and the United States (if not among other players on the world stage). That narrative is one of Indian *responsibility*. Both the Bush administration and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have stressed that India is a *responsible* nuclear power.<sup>20</sup> Compared to earlier characterizations, this narrative marks a radical departure in the mode in which it relates Indian cultural-national attributes to India’s status as a *de*

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<sup>19</sup> See Vijay Prashad, *Dusra Hindustan*, SEMINAR, June 2004, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2004/538/538%20vijay%20prashad.htm> (last visited Jan. 11, 2008) (“Indeed, after the May 1998 nuclear tests, Indian-American newspapers bore advertisements that congratulated the BJP government for its audacity. The radioactive policies of the ‘homeland’ allowed certain fragments of Yankee Hindutva to feel emboldened to act in public.”).

<sup>20</sup> Bryan Bender, *U.S. to aid India on nuclear power*, BOSTON GLOBE, July 19, 2005, [http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2005/07/19/us\\_to\\_aid\\_india\\_on\\_nuclear\\_power/](http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2005/07/19/us_to_aid_india_on_nuclear_power/); see also Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh, Statement in Parliament on his Visit to the United States, (July 29, 2005), available at [http://www.indianembassy.org/press\\_release/2005/July/31.htm](http://www.indianembassy.org/press_release/2005/July/31.htm). The deal is currently in suspended animation with Indian left parties, who are part of the coalition Indian government, bitterly opposed to it. The Indian left does not object to the violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty nor to any potential dangers of the use of nuclear power for energy purposes. The left parties argue that the deal threatens Indian sovereignty and exposes India to excessive influence from the United States. An assessment of the merits and demerits of the nuclear deal and of the positions for and against it is outside the scope of this paper. A comprehensive record of the complex history of, and ongoing developments pertaining to, the nuclear deal can be found on the portal [rediff.com](http://www.rediff.com). See Rediff.com, *Indo-U.S. Nuclear Tango*, <http://www.rediff.com/news/nukedeal05.html> (last visited Nov. 14, 2007).

*facto* nuclear power. The rhetoric of national maturity has replaced that of national immaturity. In the earlier view, the decision to test nuclear was symptomatic of the inherent failure of Indians to understand the nature of global politics. Now India has earned the right to play a proactive role as a shaper and mover of world politics. The dramatic inversion begs the question of what explains the sudden shift in emphasis. It also calls attention to the rationale by which that shift is sought to be justified by the actors in question.

According to a definition of “empire” recently proposed by Partha Chatterjee, the very acknowledgment of India as a nuclear power by the United States reflects imperialist sentiment.<sup>21</sup> Chatterjee argues that this new “general” notion of empire is not linked to direct territorial conquest but is derived from “the power to declare the colonial exception.”<sup>22</sup> Those who assume the right to decide that one nation but not another can possess nuclear weapons, or that one state but not another should be invaded on grounds of supporting terrorism, are guilty of appropriating and assuming an “imperial prerogative.”<sup>23</sup> The monopoly over the right to declare colonial exceptionality is closely linked to the phenomenon of globalization. Chatterjee understands globalization as the reconfiguration of the world order through developments in the realm of international finance and capital, advances in communications technologies, and consequent challenges to notions of sovereignty, models of citizenship, and the very idea of the nation-state.<sup>24</sup> Chatterjee suggests that the imperial imperative — which, importantly, remains a national imperative — must now seek to work with this transnational apparatus and utilize the possibilities of control that it offers.<sup>25</sup> The monopoly over colonial exceptionality can be interpreted as the right of a nation to declare itself judge, jury, prosecutor, and defense with regard to matters of international import. It is a strategy by which a national imperial project (or an imperial project in which several nations collude) might “capture the new forms of indirect and informal control that have become common in recent decades,” or the diffuse and slippery structures of the present-day globalized world.<sup>26</sup>

The declaration of colonial exceptionality, Chatterjee goes on to argue, is invariably followed by a project of imperial pedagogy. It carries an

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<sup>21</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Empire and Nation Revisited: 50 Years After Bandung*, 6 INTER-ASIA CULTURAL STUD. 487, 495 (2005).

<sup>22</sup> *Id.*

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at 489-90.

<sup>25</sup> Chatterjee’s model of empire is clearly quite different from the idea of a de-centered empire proposed by Hardt and Negri, which Chatterjee critiques in his article. *Id.* at 492-94; see also MICHAEL HARDT & ANTONIO NEGRI, *EMPIRE* (Harvard University Press 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Chatterjee, *supra* note 21, at 495.



agenda of “educating, disciplining, and training the colony.”<sup>27</sup> Either the colonized must be subjected to force (a pedagogy of violence) or brought up to scratch through a civilizing mission (a pedagogy of culture).<sup>28</sup> Both these paradigms of pedagogy, Chatterjee suggests, are at once normative and normalizing projects. They propose a standard to measure and judge the colonized, and a model in accordance with which the colonized are to be reshaped. Similarly, in an earlier work, Chatterjee has suggested that imperial pedagogical projects are bound to fail in accomplishing their professed objectives of raising the colonized to an equal status with the colonizers.<sup>29</sup> The “rule of colonial difference,” as Chatterjee terms it, “or the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group” is the fundamental reason for the very existence of the colonial state.<sup>30</sup> The colonial state can thus never fulfill its professed goal of leveling the playing field between colonial rulers and native subjects in terms of capacities (for example, intellect or rationality) as well as benefits (such as rights, representation, equality of pay). The necessity for a colonial apparatus to *produce* difference continuously to justify its own continued existence limits the modern state’s “normalizing mission.”<sup>31</sup>

Chatterjee’s arguments are effective in diagnosing the assumptions inherent in the Friedman thesis and in explicating the dramatic shift in the U.S. view of India’s nuclear status. Friedman’s comments and Helms’ scathing criticism share one fundamental assumption about Indians as a people and the Indian state. They assume the inability or incapacity of Indians to recognize or understand what is best for them. This prepares the ground for a pedagogy of culture and simultaneously marks a distinction between Indians and Americans that resembles the logic of the rule of colonial difference. In either case, an American assumes the knowledge about what is best for Indians. And it is an American who claims the right to educate Indians about their interests, and, for that matter, their place in the world. That pedagogy of culture, inflected as it is with chastisement and pejoratives, is at once an instrument of symbolic, if not literal, violence. The fact that that Friedman does not speak as an American, but rather as a purportedly disinterested party concerned with examining the dynamics of globalization is central to my point. The discourse of globalization, with its creation of the *global voice*, fulfills the function of a hegemonic and spurious universalism and operates in much the same manner. It masks its

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<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 496.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*

<sup>29</sup> PARTHA CHATTERJEE, *THE NATION AND ITS FRAGMENTS: COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL HISTORIES* (1993).

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

local, particular, roots and its alignments with very specific and concretely identifiable structures of power. The ascription of the quality of responsibility to India's behavior as a nuclear power in the discussions pertaining to the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal is another example of an imperial pedagogy at work: the reward that follows the punishment.

In general agreement with Chatterjee's argument, I want to emphasize one modality of disciplining the exceptional colony through the global economy, exemplified by the United States' shift on the legitimacy of India as a nuclear power. Through economic punishment or rewards (the "forms of indirect and informal control" synonymous with globalization that Chatterjee speaks of) an external state or non-state power can rapidly ascribe or withdraw legitimacy to another nation's domestic policy position or stance on certain issues. That legitimacy or lack thereof, importantly, can be framed in national-cultural terms. One may note that the modern state does not intend for the impact of economic sanctions to be purely economic or political. Economic sanctions or punitive economic measures also operate as markers of *difference*. They signify the cultural inability of a state — peculiarly anthropomorphized, one might say — to belong to the world of civilized nations. As U.S. state officials noted in 2001, when the administration was considering removing sanctions that had been imposed on India in 1998 after the tests, "the sanctions were symbolic as much as practical."<sup>32</sup> It bears noting that while the American state is not synonymous with the global economy, some U.S. state decisions clearly influence allocations of capital through the structures of the global economy. The perfect equivalence of America, capitalism, and imperialism is suspect. Indeed, the equation America = capitalism = imperialism is an exaggeration of American power, and a misunderstanding of the nature of capitalism and imperialism. However, the power of the American state to regulate capital flows through its domestic policies or its actions in the international domain can translate into pressures. These pressures in turn produce consequences that may embody a logic of colonialism.

The pressure on India to conform to the standard of the colonial exception reinforces the emphasis on the cultural domain. India has to prove continually what distinguishes it from China or Russia in the global economy, that is, from other emerging economies or rival colonial exceptions. India also has to prove what marks it as *similar* to the United States. If the modality of colonial exceptionality requires the imperial agent to produce difference continually to justify the right to declare the imperial exception, then the subject must constantly strive to overcome that difference in the theater of international relations. The irony is historically

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<sup>32</sup> U.S. Ready to End Sanctions on India, PEOPLE'S DAILY, Aug. 28, 2001, [http://english.people.com.cn/english/200108/28/eng20010828\\_78564.html](http://english.people.com.cn/english/200108/28/eng20010828_78564.html).

resonant. One may note Chatterjee's argument in the context of nineteenth-century Indian anticolonial nationalism: "Ironically, it became the historical task of nationalism, which insisted on its own marks of cultural difference with the West, to demand that there be no rule of difference in the domain of the state."<sup>33</sup> But the disciplinary function of the global economy cannot be reduced simply to a case of America (or any one nation) imposing its imperial ambition on the world. As discussed in the next section, the Indian state and segments of Indian society in their participation in the global economy also move to regulate and obliterate difference *internally* within Indian society. That obliteration of difference is, in turn, linked with the attempt to constantly align Indian interests with U.S. interests.

### III. INDIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE DISCOURSE OF GLOBALISM

Once the Indian response to global events is framed in national-cultural terms, then, within the domestic space of India a range of practices are similarly branded or recast as "cultural" — they become manifestations of deeper Indian cultural traits. By way of illustration, among the many perspectives on the Indian state's decision to enter into a nuclear deal with the United States, one finds the following culturalist arguments mingling with more utilitarian rationalizations and justifications grounded in *realpolitik*. Skeptics of the decision frame it in terms of a longstanding historical or cultural readiness on the part of Indian rulers to abdicate national sovereignty to invaders, outsiders, and colonizers. Supporters of the deal point to a natural cultural affinity between India and the United States, in terms of the attributes of democracy, initiative, and enterprise. Those who disagree with the Indian left's opposition to the deal lament the cultural inability of Indians to agree on anything. Moreover, across the left and right one finds some shared logics of culturalist reasoning.

I am not suggesting passivity on the part of Indians in their actions in the global economy or in the Indian economic and cultural fields. Rather, I wish to emphasize that there is a *shift in priorities* that is effected in the Indian context by the modality of ascribing Indian state actions in national-cultural terms. A crucial characteristic of fields may partly explain this. According to Bourdieu, the contest or struggle among participants in a field to accumulate capital can be understood as a game that is played according to the rules of that field. The very act of participating in the game is to accept tacitly the rules of the game. It is to be "interested" and "absolutely invested" in the game.<sup>34</sup> Participation, in turn, legitimates the logic of the field. Even if a player wishes to challenge the stakes by which capital is

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<sup>33</sup> Chatterjee, *supra* note 29, at 10.

<sup>34</sup> PIERRE BOURDIEU, *PASCALIAN MEDITATIONS* (Richard Nice trans. 1997).

defined in a field, they can do so only by playing according to those very stakes. Through the simple act of participation, every player in the game affirms the existing principle of accumulation as valid. This means that as players seek to accumulate capital in a field, they must utilize those very strategies, techniques, and choices that are beneficial to dominant groups. They must do this at least until the point where the “challengers” can accumulate a critical mass of capital to redefine the rules of the game.

Because of the pressures of the global economy, as well as political pressures effected through the global economy, the exchange rate between the Indian economic and cultural fields changes. The response required of Indians to a particular global situation — such as a willingness to provide outsourced services to another nation — is imputed at once to the domains of both economic capital and cultural capital. Consequently, in post-liberalization and globalizing India, practices belonging to other fields are yanked into the cultural and economic fields. The technological and scientific aptitude of Indians, middle-class Indian aversion to financial risk-taking or debt, particular religious practices and customs, and so on are designated as either desirable or undesirable *cultural* attributes. Their desirability or undesirability is linked to the extent to which they translate readily into economic capital, or, more narrowly, conform to the qualities of productivity and efficiency. Conversely, certain Indian cultural traits are viewed as potential sources of revenue or economic capital, and there are attempts to structure markets around these cultural traits.

This shift in Indian priorities is reflected in the redefinition of Indian social practices. It paradoxically emphasizes their exceptionality as well as similarity to a perceived American social imaginary. This may be considered consonant with a logic of colonialism. As Ashis Nandy has argued with regard to the impact of British imperial rule in India, colonialism:

... includes codes which both the rulers and the ruled can share. The main function of these codes is to alter the original cultural priorities on both sides and bring to the center of the colonial culture subcultures previously recessive or subordinate in the two confronting cultures. Concurrently, the codes remove from the center of each of the cultures subcultures previously salient in them. It is these fresh priorities which explain why some of the most impressive colonial systems have been built by societies ideologically committed to open political systems, liberalism, and intellectual pluralism.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> ASHIS NANDY, *THE INTIMATE ENEMY: LOSS AND RECOVERY OF SELF UNDER COLONIALISM 2* (1983).

Nandy's critical insight helps explain some of the effects of India's participation in a global economy. After the reforms of 1991, a new paradigm of Indian identity has begun to crystallize. It defines two overlapping categories of Indians as ideal national-global citizens: the high-tech professional worker and the Non-Resident Indian or NRI, especially the U.S.-based variant.<sup>36</sup> One important fact to stress here, as several scholars have pointed out, is that the Indian diaspora, technology professionals, and the "New Middle Class," as professors Leela Fernandes and Patrick Heller term it, are a strong source of support for the majoritarian cultural nationalist ideology of Hindutva or Hindu nationalism.<sup>37</sup> This new model of national-global Indian identity can be understood in terms of a reprioritization of existing elements of Indian culture. It reflects the legacies, various and simultaneous, of: the Nehruvian emphasis on science and technology in India after 1947; the histories of Hindu nationalism; and the claims of English-speaking middle class segments of Indian society to speak for the Indian nation. Most importantly perhaps, and where Nandy's argument about shared codes is especially useful, the model of Indian identity draws on, and foregrounds, the precedent of the Indian state and the educated middle class Indian segment of inhabiting a shared discursive field with actors in other societies about ideas of modernity, development, and progress. Despite professed ideological opposition to capitalist models of development, the Nehruvian project of postcolonial state building did not reject the ideas of development, modernity, and progress. To the contrary, it fetishized and embraced these goals within a professed socialist framework. What is interesting, indeed astonishing, is the ease with which Indian state and society have transferred those affiliations to the pro-market framework.

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<sup>36</sup> Paula Chakravarty, *The Emigration of High-Skilled Indian Workers to the United States: Flexible Citizenship and India's Information Economy*, in *THE INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION OF THE HIGHLY SKILLED: DEMAND AND SUPPLY AND DEVELOPMENT CONSEQUENCES IN SENDING AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES* 325, 325-49 (Wayne A. Cornelius, Thomas J. Espenshade & Idean Salehyan eds., 2001); Kenneth Keniston, *Introduction: The Four Digital Divides*, in *IT EXPERIENCE IN INDIA: BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE* 11, 11-36 (Kenneth Keniston & Deepak Kumar eds., 2004); HIMADEEP MUPPIDI, *THE POLITICS OF THE GLOBAL* (2004). Professors Lela Fernandes and Patrick Heller have analyzed the formation and dynamics of a 'New Middle Class' ("NMC") that has emerged in India following the economic reforms. See Leela Fernandes & Patrick Heller, *Hegemonic Aspirations: New Middle Class Politics and India's Democracy in Comparative Perspective*, 38 *CRITICAL ASIAN STUD.* 495 (2006).

<sup>37</sup> See generally Arvind N. Das, *The End of Geography: Nationalism in the Era of Globalization*, in *NATIONS UNDER SIEGE: GLOBALIZATION AND NATIONALISM IN ASIA* 31 (Roy Starrs ed., 2002); Fernandes & Heller, *supra* note 36, at 498-99; Vinay Lal, *The Politics of History on the Internet: Cyber-Diasporic Hinduism and the North American Hindu Diaspora*, in *IN DIASPORA: THEORIES, HISTORIES, TEXTS* 179 (Makarand R. Paranjpe ed., 2001); Arvind Rajagopal, *Hindu Nationalism in the U.S.: Changing Configurations of Political Practice*, 23 *ETHNIC AND RACIAL STUD.* 467 (2000).

This has happened even as the underlying assumptions about the necessity for the nation to continue on the trajectory of progress, modernity, and development have endured.<sup>38</sup> Such connections explain why the phenomenon of national-global identity cannot be seen merely as imitative of American identity.

I propose that the Indian state's endorsement of these models of Indian identity through its policies translates as a containment of cultural difference. For instance, notwithstanding proclamations of secularism, in several discursive representations of Indian identity in state and public forums, Indian culture is tacitly or explicitly affirmed along majoritarian lines of a very specific idea of Hinduism. Historian Romila Thapar calls this idea "syndicated Hinduism."<sup>39</sup> Alternately, the culture of particular Indian groups is sought to be transcended through technological qualifications or achievements, described in state discourse as the overcoming of caste disadvantage or religious backwardness through the embrace of cultural modernity. In this narrative, a particular version of Hinduism can quite easily claim the Indian nation in terms of defining its essential character and hence can take credit for Indian economic and technological achievements. But other conceptions of Indian identity cannot do the same. Thus, technological or economic opportunity are viewed as helping individuals from subaltern groups *overcome* caste disadvantage, but, as seen on many Hindu nationalist websites, the technological achievements of Hindus are *attributed to* their Hinduism (defined as synonymous with Indianness).<sup>40</sup>

The framing of Indian identity along these lines by the Indian state can neither be entirely explained as a voluntary reshaping for participation in a global economy nor as the imposition of colonial discipline through the instrument of that economy. The history of Hindu nationalism precedes globalization and there are other histories and forces at work here as well. One can argue, however, that the privileging of a certain idea of *globalized Indian postcolonial identity* converges with a disciplinary colonial imperative, as described earlier, in reshaping notions of both economy and culture. In other words, there is a calibration between the economic and cultural fields and species of capital in India that is simultaneously

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<sup>38</sup> See Fernandes & Heller, *supra*, note 36, at *passim*.

<sup>39</sup> See Romila Thapar, Institute of Social Sciences' Seventh D. T. Lakdawala Memorial Lecture: The Future of the Indian Past (Feb. 21, 2004), available at [http://www.sacw.net/India\\_History/r\\_thaparLecture21022004.html](http://www.sacw.net/India_History/r_thaparLecture21022004.html) ("Interestingly, this reformulation of Hinduism, also borrows from certain aspects of Islam and Christianity, aspects that were previously not regarded as essential to Hinduism, such as, emphasizing historicity — preferably of a founder, locating a sacred topography, adopting a sacred book, and simulating an ecclesiastical authority. I have elsewhere referred to this as Syndicated Hinduism.").

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., Freeindia.org, Great Scientists, <http://www.freeindia.org/biographies/greatscientists/vikramasarabhai/page6.htm> (last visited Nov. 15, 2007).

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structured by the containment of cultural difference by the Indian state and by the ascription of colonial exceptionalism to India by the United States and the global economy.

#### IV. CONCLUDING NOTES: CULTURAL COLONIALISM IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY?

The insights of Chatterjee and Nandy shed light on the ways in which we can understand the cultural impact of the global economy as consonant with a logic of colonialism. Inasmuch as the discursive productions of Indian identity in cultural-national and global-national terms embody a narrative of *globalism*, that narrative does not appear very different from a hegemonic universalism clothed in the fashionable idiom and vocabulary of our times. Under British colonialism, Indians could only be subjects never citizens, and this is true for colonialism generally. The logic of shared humanity could never ultimately overcome the logic of colonial difference. In the age of a global economy, discourses of globalism confidently invoke and proclaim the idea of the shared humanity of all the world's inhabitants. Yet it is an open question whether this idea can translate into a basis for genuine model of inclusive and participatory global citizenship. Whether the tortoise will outrun the hare or try to metamorphose into one remains to be seen.