

## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION: TECHNOLOGY AND NATIONALISM IN INDIA FROM COLONIALISM TO CYBERSPACE

*It was science alone that could solve these problems of hunger and poverty, of insanitation and illiteracy, of superstition and deadening custom and tradition, of vast resources running to waste, of a rich country inhabited by starving people.*

—Jawaharlal Nehru<sup>1</sup>

*Arithmetic, the number, have always had a decisive role in the State apparatus: this is so even as early as the imperial bureaucracy... It is even more true of modern forms of the State, which in developing utilized all the calculation techniques that were springing up at the border between mathematical science and social technology (there is a whole social calculus at the basis of political economy, demography, the organization of work, etc.). This arithmetic*

*element of the State found its specific power in the treatment of all kinds of matter: primary matter (raw materials), the secondary matter of worked objects, or the ultimate matter constituted by the human population.*

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari<sup>2</sup>

This book examines the use of the Internet by global Indian communities for the promotion of Hindu nationalist ideologies, a phenomenon that I term “technocultural Hindu nationalism,” with reference to the relationship between technology and nationalism in India from the period of British colonial rule in the mid-eighteenth century to the present era of an economically and technologically interconnected world. Since the introduction of Western science and technology under colonial rule in India in the eighteenth century, science and technology have been used as instruments of mapping, controlling, and transforming Indian society. Equally, scientific and technological expertise have been authorized as attributes of modern Indian selfhood—as markers, at once, of a universality and an essential Indianness. Since the colonial era, in the imagination of both state and society, the possessors of technological skills have been vested with the authority to speak for the nation. State and society have granted the holders of technological skills and qualifications economic opportunities, educational advantages, and social status. Even as the relationship between technology and nationalism has been marked by continuities and discontinuities over the passage of time, it has endured as fundamentally constitutive of Indian modernity.

As Gyan Prakash has compellingly demonstrated, in the nineteenth century, an upper-caste educated Hindu intelligentsia argued that the defining characteristic of ancient Indian civilization was its scientific and technological character—one that could be mobilized to effect an Indian renaissance and liberate India from the effects of Islamic invasions and British colonial domination.<sup>3</sup> In elite Indian discourse, scientific expertise was valorized as a traditional Hindu attribute and the means to a unique Indian modernity. This conception of scientificity was inextricably woven into emergent narratives of anticolonial nationalism. With independence in 1947, in keeping with the model of the Indian

nation-state envisioned by Jawaharlal Nehru, science and technology in tandem with official philosophies of socialism and secularism were entrusted with the task of nation building. It was hoped that ambitious state projects of technological development would lead to economic prosperity and social justice for all segments of Indian society. The idea of the scientific temperament as a highly desirable individual and collective national characteristic was also strongly reinforced through state policies. Indian socioeconomic elites selectively internalized this statist discourse, for example, by delinking the imperative of social justice from the acquisition of scientific and technological skills. In 1991 the Indian state, through policy changes in favor of globalization and free market economic reforms, adopted economic neoliberalism as the official framework for governance and national development. The 1980s and 1990s also witnessed the resurgence of the ideology of Hindu nationalism or *Hindutva*—the idea that India is essentially a Hindu nation and that minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, are outsiders—in Indian society. The domain of technology, especially the Internet, is a key area where these respective perspectives on the Indian nation converge. On Hindu nationalist Web sites addressed at a global Hindu audience, Hinduism is defined as ideally suited to the demands of a global capitalist modernity exemplified by free market ideologies and technologies such as the Internet. On these Web sites, Hindu religion and culture are also emphasized as the authentic foundations of Indian national identity. Technology, particularly the Internet, enables and symbolizes the conflation of the categories of Indian and Hindu into a new articulation of national identity and nationalism.

This book describes the historical negotiation between varied, often oppositional, discourses of technology and nationalism from the colonial era until the Internet age, with the objective of illuminating the complex dynamics of Hindu nationalist identity politics in cyberspace. This inquiry involves addressing four broad, related questions:

1. What are the defining characteristics of the relationship between technology and nationalism in different historical phases (the era

- of anticolonial nationalism, the period of Nehruvian socialism, and the present context of globalization and Hindu nationalism)?
2. How do these multiple legacies inform technocultural Hindu nationalism?
  3. What is the consequence of the intersection of Hindu nationalist discourse and the Internet when compared to other Indian nationalisms as these manifest themselves online?
  4. How do the modalities of Internet communication contribute to the forms taken by Hindu nationalism in cyberspace?

A description of technocultural Hindu nationalism, with reference to its immediate and longer histories, will illuminate the salience of these concerns.

To the observer of Indian affairs, the twenty-first century presents two strikingly contradictory sets of images about the Indian state and society. India simultaneously appears as a rising economic star in the international firmament and a politically unstable and fragile society, at once the vital technology hub of the global future and a land devastated by primordial religious and nationalist conflicts, a nation both poised to play an active role in world matters in the new millennium and condemned to infinitely repeating the traumas of her past. On the one hand, the Indian state and citizens exemplify scientific and technological prowess coupled with economic enterprise—qualities that optimally place the country and people to reap the rewards of global capitalist modernity. On the other hand, the Indian nation and inhabitants seem to stand for chauvinistic nationalism and religious discord—atavistic burdens that bode ill for the economic, political, and social future of the country.

For the last several years, the diasporic Indian media, at least its English-language component, has been churning out stories on the rise of the nation as a new global economic and technological superpower, a development attributed to the free market reforms initiated in 1991. Coverage of India in the American press, although less extensive, has emphasized the same kinds of facts, with cover stories and op-ed pieces touting the success of the Indian information technology (IT) industry

as proof of the benefits of the free market and globalization. Even to those skeptical of the hyperbole about the meteoric rise of India and free market miracles, the stories provide a welcome foil to the standard fare in the Indian media about the myriad failures of the Indian state. For diasporic Indians in the United States and other Western nations, the positive portrayal of India in the Western media has been doubly refreshing, long accustomed as these expatriates are to seeing their country of origin covered in the Western press in terms of Orientalist stereotypes, with mandatory references to the caste system, cows, and poverty. A modicum of national pride, even the most dour cynic would grudgingly admit, is not out of place.

The new millennium, however, has also witnessed the ugly manifestations of misguided national pride in India, exemplified by the events in Gujarat in 2002. On February 27, 2002, a train car of the Sabarmati Express was set afire at Godhra in the western Indian state of Gujarat, allegedly by a mob of Muslims. In the weeks that followed, Hindu nationalist mobs systematically targeted Muslim communities in Gujarat in revenge, setting Muslim-majority villages ablaze and burning Muslims to death. The anti-Muslim violence had the blessings and logistical support of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) state government and its chief minister Narendra Modi. The central National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, a coalition spearheaded by the BJP, reacted slowly to curtail the situation, tantamount to deliberate inaction at a time when an urgent response was the need of the hour.

Neither communal violence nor the dangers of Hindutva, the ideology of Hindu nationalism, are unknown to India. Close to a decade before the Gujarat riots, the country had been afflicted by Hindu-Muslim riots in Mumbai in the state of Maharashtra in December 1992 and January 1993 following the destruction of a mosque by a Hindu nationalist mob on December 6, 1992. On that occasion as well, the state government of Maharashtra had been complicit in the violence against Muslims. But the anti-Muslim pogrom of 2002 was a chilling reminder that the ideology of Hindutva had lost none of its inflammatory and divisive potential in the course of a decade. The events of the year also indicated that

foreign direct investment could not be a panacea for all of India's social problems and that Hindu nationalism remained a potent threat to Indian society at a time of economic growth, technological development, and imminent global ascendancy.

The two disparate images of India dominant in media coverage in the last few years can justifiably be seen as a foreshadowing of the fate of the nation in the twenty-first century. What is less obvious is that these strongly contrasting expressions of the Indian state and society should be so deeply and fundamentally related in the imagination of many Indians. Many Hindus in India and elsewhere did not see the actions of Hindu mobs and the state apparatus as anti-Muslim at all. As Ashutosh Varshney points out with regard to the anti-Muslim violence in 2002, "The Hindu right believes that its elected government did exactly what was required: namely, allowing violent Hindu retaliation against the Muslims, including those who had nothing to do with the mob that originally torched the train."<sup>4</sup> For those who held such opinions, there was no necessary contradiction between the brand image of India as an emerging global technological and economic power and its perception as a society at threat of being torn apart by Hindu fundamentalism and nationalism. To the contrary, in the Hindu nationalist perspective, as seen online and offline, in India and in the diaspora, Narendra Modi's actions were viewed as assertions of Hindu *cultural* pride and honor.<sup>5</sup> In tandem, numerous Hindu and Hindu nationalist Web sites strongly emphasize technological and scientific ability as Hindu cultural qualities—another source of Hindu cultural pride and honor.<sup>6</sup>

The juxtaposition of technological achievement with antiminority sentiment as different forms of the same phenomenon—an assertion of cultural and national identity—reflects but one of the modes in which contemporary online Hindu nationalist discourse yokes together technology and nationalism. Other related forms in which the two discourses combine with each other can be seen on Web sites aimed at a global Hindu population. Sites like the comprehensive *Hindu Universe* portal reveal several propositions about Hindu and Indian identity that embody the core claims of technocultural Hindu nationalism.<sup>7</sup>

According to one proposition, Hinduism is a religion that is fully compatible with a technologically and economically interconnected globe. The value of Hinduism as a source of economic tools, skills, or solutions is explained in terms of a foundational cultural universalism purportedly found in the Hindu faith. Web sites like *Hindu Universe* market Hinduism as a globally saleable product. They define the act of economic purchase as a cultural obligation to Hinduism. The activity of consumption, actively encouraged, is itself branded as Hindu. Participation in a chat room discussion about Hindu culture or history on *Hindu Universe*, followed by the act of purchasing a Hindu-branded calling card or cell phone through the same portal, allows an economic transaction to be recast as a more fundamental act of cultural loyalty or duty. The implication is that Hindus and Indians can participate in the world of today *precisely because* they are culturally grounded in a universalist Hindu ethos and heritage that is uniquely attuned to a global marketplace. The post-1991 turn of the Indian state to free market economic policies is tacitly, if not explicitly, recognized as the enabling condition of possibility for this aspect of Hinduism and Hindu culture to flourish in its unhindered form.

Yet another proposition found on the site, squarely in keeping with Hindu nationalist ideology, is that “Indic” identity—the sum of religions, sects, and practices rooted in the history of the indigenous Hindu dharma of the subcontinent—equals and exhausts Indian identity, the former granting the latter its essential character, particularity, and uniqueness: in a word, its soul. Consequently, non-Indic identities, such as those of the Indian Muslim or Indian Christian, do not, strictly speaking, count as Indian in the cultural sense, even though they may qualify as Indian in a legal sense by virtue of constitutional citizenship. This narrative of cultural and national identity privileges its narrow interpretation of Hindu identity as the purest and most authentic incarnation of Indian identity. In addition to the exclusion of Islam and Christianity from the category of Indian faiths, strong condemnation is reserved for Indian Muslims and Christians, as seen in the content on Hindu nationalist sites.

For example, the *Hindu Universe* portal includes a category of content that focuses on the forced conversion of Hindus to Christianity and Islam.<sup>8</sup> The section on Hindu-Muslim relations intones, “Moslem invasion of India has been one of the most brutal events in the history of mankind. During the Moslem [*sic*] rule, millions of Hindus were massacred and converted by force.”<sup>9</sup> There are at least two Web sites, *Hindu Holocaust Museum* and *Online Hindu Holocaust Memorial Museum*, dedicated to chronicling the Hindu “holocaust” and “genocide” at the hands of Muslims.<sup>10</sup> The *Hindu Universe* portal also includes a history section, which contains numerous articles espousing anti-Muslim and anti-Christian sentiments.<sup>11</sup> Squarely in keeping with the central premise of Hindutva ideology—the claim that the Indian nation-state is predicated on a Hindu cultural foundation and that Hindu dharma is the overarching and determining structure of identity for all Indians—the articles in the section define Islam and Christianity as alien religions that have been forced on Indian society by Islamic invaders and European colonizers.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to these characteristics, online Hindu nationalism also reflects other tenets of Hindutva ideology. Prime among these is a rejection of the “pseudosecularism” of the Indian state, Congress Party, and Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India. Other targets are socialism, communism, and Marxism and the individuals, groups, and political parties associated with these ideologies in the Indian context. Left ideologies are deemed responsible for contaminating the academic and intellectual culture of Indian universities, which, the Hindu nationalists argue, is patently anti-Hindu and abusive of Indian heritage and culture. Especially virulent are the attacks aimed at the current president of the Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi.<sup>13</sup>

From the content on Web sites sympathetic to Hindu nationalism, we can identify many of the salient characteristics of technocultural Hindu nationalism. These may be summed up as the following: an insistence on the universalism and globality of Hinduism, a focus on the inherent scientificity of Hindu ethos and culture and the technological expertise of Hindus, ambivalence toward the shifting signifier of the “West,” an

essentialized interpretation of Hindu and Indian identity accompanied by antiminority prejudice, a rejection of Left ideologies, an embrace of the free market and capitalism, and a rejection of Indian secularism. A look at the profile of the producers and consumers of online Hindu nationalism further enriches our view of the complex entanglements between technology and nationalism as embodied in technocultural Hindu nationalism. There appears to be a significant overlap between the respective profiles of the supporters of Hindu nationalism and Indians working in the technological field in India and overseas. The Internet seems to be the preferred medium and technology of choice for Indian professionals with Hindutva sympathies to promote the ideology and to wage war with competing narratives of national identity.

Following the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, IT products and services aimed at global and domestic markets now occupy the pride of place once granted to industrialization as the motor of the Indian economy. Greenspan observes that “inside India, there is no doubt that the IT industry has created jobs, strengthened exports and made substantial contributions to economic growth.”<sup>14</sup> India’s value for the global economy is perceived as significantly dependent on its IT capabilities. Sachs, Varshney, and Bajpai note that “India is becoming one of the most important players of the world in the IT sector and it is the fastest growing foreign exchange earner for the country.”<sup>15</sup> The Internet, in particular, is viewed as both agency and symbol of the benefits of liberalization and technological development. Wolcott and Goodman point out that “the Internet is central to the new vision of India as an IT power in many respects.”<sup>16</sup> The importance of the Internet stems from its “core” role in IT development, its potential to profoundly change the nature of business and private communication, its widespread reach, and the fact that it is an agent of change in related “technologies, government policies, laws and services.”<sup>17</sup> The Internet is one of the main attractions for American and European companies to set up back-office operations in Indian metros.<sup>18</sup> The Indian central government and numerous Indian state governments seem to agree on the potential of information technology and the Internet for socioeconomic development. Several

Indian states have implemented ambitious e-literacy and e-governance initiatives. National and state government projects are in the process of bringing the benefits of information technology and the Internet to rural Indian communities.

Access to information technology and the Internet, however, is the privilege of an elite in liberalized India. Keniston points out that for “Indians who speak no (or little) English, the barriers to the Information Age are almost insuperable,” since fluency in English is a requirement for the use of operating systems, software, and Web sites.<sup>19</sup> The reach of the Internet is far more modest than its instrumental value in driving economic reforms. By February 2005, the total number of phone subscribers in India had increased to 97.03 million.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as of December 2005, India had only 5.56 million Internet subscribers.<sup>21</sup> And the number of Internet users in India as of 2006 was just 40 million—a fraction of its population of more than 1 billion.<sup>22</sup> Internet usage, as Wolcott and Goodman suggest, is dominated by an “urban core” and the predominant users of the Indian Internet are the educated middle classes.<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting here that the Indian “middle classes” are actually socioeconomic elites and can broadly be defined as the top 25 percent income-earning segments of Indian society.<sup>24</sup> Almost 90 percent of all Web sites visited by Indians are in the English language.<sup>25</sup>

The chief beneficiaries of the developments in technology in liberalized India are largely English-speaking middle-class and upper-class urban groups. As will be described shortly, to a significant extent, these are the same demographic segments that have historically benefited from the technology policies of the post-1947 independent Indian state, although there have been some important changes in the internal composition of these elites. Keniston speaks of a new elite group in India comprised of workers in high-tech professions. The “digerati,” as Keniston calls them, are “the beneficiaries of the enormously successful information technology (IT) industry and the other knowledge-based sectors of the economy, such as biotechnology and pharmacology.”<sup>26</sup> Affluent, cosmopolitan, and globally mobile, the status of the digerati derives from the digerati’s technological education and expertise and not from

caste, wealth, or social privileges. Through its policies of economic and technological development since the 1980s—but especially the 1990s—the Indian state has also endorsed nonresident Indians (NRIs) working in technology as an immensely valuable resource of human capital for the Indian nation.<sup>27</sup> Muppidi argues that with liberalization the NRI has been inscribed in state discourse as the most authentic incarnation of postcolonial citizenship.<sup>28</sup> Indian expatriates, such as students and professionals, are also a key segment for promoting the growth of Internet usage.<sup>29</sup>

Scholars agree that the core support for the Hindu nationalist movement is drawn from India's middle classes or Indian elites.<sup>30</sup> Corbridge and Harriss view Hindu nationalism as an "elite" revolt, reflecting "the interests and aspirations especially of the middle classes and upper castes."<sup>31</sup> They also note that India's urban socioeconomic elites have provided strong support for the Hindu nationalist BJP in the 1996 and 1999 general elections in India. Urban Indian socioeconomic elites are also among the prime beneficiaries of advances in technology in liberalized India. A strong bastion of support for Hindu nationalism is an overseas, largely U.S.-based, Hindu population.<sup>32</sup> The IT professionals feted by the Indian state are well represented among the diasporic Hindu nationalists.

The Internet seems to be the chosen medium for the Hindu nationalists working in technology to promote Hindutva. "The much touted thousands of computer and software experts," who count among the recent Indian migrants to the United States, "help maintain over five hundred VHP Web sites ([www.vhp.org](http://www.vhp.org)) with their messages of Hindutva, Hindu history, and Muslim-bashing."<sup>33</sup> Rajagopal notes that "with the proliferation of software engineers from India, the internet has become a site for expansion" of Hindu nationalist discourse.<sup>34</sup> According to Vinay Lal, many Hindu nationalist Web sites are produced by politically and culturally conservative Indian software programmers in the United States.<sup>35</sup>

The overlap between the profiles of technology workers and Hindu nationalists suggests the existence of a group whose members view both technological expertise *and* a narrowly defined Hinduness as

ideal attributes of Indian identity. The frame of technocultural Hindu nationalism combines these qualities such that technological expertise gets recast in terms of a Hindu cultural ability. As Chakravartty notes, “[C]orporate networks between India and the United States promote a cyber-capitalist rereading of Hindu values, locating the success of high tech Indian entrepreneurs in essential characteristics associated with ethno-religious identity.”<sup>36</sup> “For example, Indian competence in the Internet economy,” the author observes, “is associated with the ‘web of interrelations’ that tie together Indian families across national borders.”<sup>37</sup> Correspondingly, technocultural Hindu nationalism also rephrases characteristics of cultural identity in the idiom of a model of global significance. For example, on Hindu nationalist Web sites, “Hindu” principles and values are promoted akin to the catchphrases of global corporate capitalism.<sup>38</sup>

This overview provides a sense of the complexities of technocultural Hindu nationalism and the social groups involved in the production, consumption, and propagation of the discourse. But while developments since 1991 allow us to grasp some aspects of the more immediate history of the phenomenon, they do not tell the entire story. It is true that the Indian state has transitioned from a socialist framework to a neoliberal framework within the last two decades, that shift being one of the conditions of possibility and enabling factors for technocultural Hindu nationalism to emerge. But the other factors that influence and shape the discourse—such as the history of Hindu nationalism, the statist valorization of science and technology, the social status accorded to technological skills and occupations—also reflect longer histories and prior incarnations of the relationship between technology and nationalism.

The ideology of Hindu nationalism was formulated as a theory of state and society in the early part of the twentieth century. Marginalized in the decades after independence, it emerged again in visible and conspicuous fashion in the 1980s. Not least among the reasons for its revival were the decaying of Indian political culture under the Congress Party and the accompanying attrition of Congress hegemony in Indian politics

and society. Until the 1970s, in the political sphere, the topics of national integration, economic development, and the eradication of poverty and illiteracy were the familiar subjects of electoral campaigns and political agendas. By the 1980s, the terms of political debate had been expanded to accommodate the claims of Hindu nationalism. The vocabulary of Indian politics began to grant a more central role to the idea of India as a Hindu nation and to the necessity for political parties to win over Hindu sentiment. As Brass notes, in the 1984 general elections, “the Hindu majority was mobilized in an atmosphere of hostility to minority demands and behavior. The Congress itself appealed to Hindu nationalism and communalism in this election.”<sup>39</sup> The communalization of politics was most visibly reflected in the role played by Indian politicians in polarizing the Hindu and Muslim communities over the controversial Babri Masjid, a disputed religious structure in the city of Ayodhya that both Hindus and Muslims claim as their own. The controversy reflected “the self-conscious and deliberate resurrection by national political leaders of a long dormant local dispute and its transformation into a vital issue affecting the faiths and requiring the solidarity of the two communities.”<sup>40</sup> The communalization of Indian politics would bear disastrous consequences; indeed, the political landscape of late twentieth-century India is stained with its bloody legacy. Upadhyaya points out that there were nearly 4,500 incidents of religious violence between 1982 and 1989 “in which over 7,000 people lost their lives, almost four times as many deaths of this type in the 1970s.”<sup>41</sup> The riots of 1992 and 1993 that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid marked, in a sense, the full-fledged return of Hindutva ideology as a formidable political and cultural force in Indian society.

The dominant social understandings of technology and the statist legitimization of scientificity and technological expertise reflected in Hindu technocultural nationalism are also rooted in histories that precede the post-1991 shift. Ironically, they can be seen as partly stemming from the legacy of the socialist, secular vision of Nehru, the very perspective that Hindu nationalists dismiss as anti-Hindu and anti-Indian. Scientificity, socialism, and secularism were the three fundamental components of

Nehruvian nationalism. Together, they embodied the rationalist vision that informed Nehru's dreams and aspirations for independent India. Nehru also strongly emphasized the necessity of cultivating the qualities of scientificity, or the "scientific temper," in Indian society—attributes that embodied a rational enlightened outlook toward the world.<sup>42</sup> In Nehru's vision, the policies of the independent Indian nation-state would reflect the same foundational principle of scientific reason.<sup>43</sup>

In keeping with Nehru's dream, with the onset of independence, the Indian state implemented a program of centralized planning and state ownership of heavy industry. Dams, steel plants, hydroelectric plants, and factories constructed across the country were the new symbols of modern India. Industrial development was given pride of place in the new nation. Over fifty years after independence, the Indian state also set up numerous institutes for industrial training, higher education in engineering and technology, and forty-eight national laboratories for applied scientific research.<sup>44</sup> In independent India, science was authorized as a "reason of state."<sup>45</sup> It would not be an exaggeration to say that science was conferred with a quasi-religious sanctity. Visvanathan notes that "Dams and laboratories were literally the temples of India."<sup>46</sup> The policies of the Nehruvian state also ensured that the institutions of scientific research and development planning were placed outside the political process and immunized from the demands of popular politics.<sup>47</sup> In postcolonial India, a scientific and technological education, especially from the premier educational institutions, operated as a marker of talent and capability and ensured job opportunities and security. Those holding an education or an occupation designated as scientific and technological were perceived as working in the service of the nation, a perception that was internalized and echoed by the Indian people—especially, but not only, socioeconomic elites.

It is one of the profound ironies of Indian history that the technology professionals in India and the United States who vocally advocate the causes of Hindutva and lambaste Nehruvian nationalism owe a significant debt to Nehru's vision of modern India. They are the beneficiaries of the Indian state's socialist policy of subsidizing higher education.

They have benefited from the valorization of scientific education and occupations in independent India. And they have benefited from the notion—strongly endorsed by the Indian state and society—that working in technology-related fields is an act of serving the nation.

But there are other, still older, antecedents of the relationship between technology and nationalism whose shadows still fall on the 1947–1991 context of socialist industrial development and secular nationalism as well as the post-1991 context of neoliberalism and Hindu nationalism. Here, the more distant shores of the colonial past of the Indian nation beckon. Following the conquest of Indian territories by the British East India Company around the mid-eighteenth century, the nascent colonial state in India began the task of accumulating information about the native land and people through topographic, statistical, and other surveys, setting in place a relationship between Western science and technology and the act of defining the Indian nation and people.<sup>48</sup> In the bargain, India was transformed from the heart of darkness to a “space constituted by technics,” a land primed for the functioning of roads, railways, and telegraphs.<sup>49</sup> But there were other kinds of consequences, too. For example, Keay suggests that the tremendous human cost of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India (GTS) and the activities related to the Great Indian Arc of the Meridian of the nineteenth century might have contributed to the tide of anti-British sentiment that culminated in the 1857 Rebellion, the first anticolonial uprising in India.<sup>50</sup>

It was only after 1835, when the colonial administration extended its patronage to scientific education in the medium of English, that Indians were granted the opportunity to prove their scientific abilities.<sup>51</sup> Prakash has argued that the decision to extend scientific learning to Indians embodied a paradox with powerful consequences for a manner of thinking national identity.<sup>52</sup> On the one hand, the decision reaffirmed the discourse of civilizational difference between Europeans and non-Europeans, which defined the European West as rational, enlightened, and civilized and the non-West as primitive and irrational. On the other hand, the decision was an indirect admission by the British that Indians were capable of rational scientific thought. Indians could stake a claim

to a universal humanity and rationality via the medium of science, since science embodied universal and rationalist values.<sup>53</sup>

The British decision presented a problematic task for Indian nationalism—the reconciliation of one’s universalism with the realities of subjugation under the colonial power.<sup>54</sup> As a solution, a predominantly educated English-speaking Hindu elite, encompassing reformers, historians, writers, and scientists, constructed a narrative of Indianness through a particular interpretation of Hindu oral epics. In this reading, Hinduism was described as a universal scientific, religious, and cultural worldview—a “Hindu science.”<sup>55</sup> However, if this science had manifested itself in all its fullness in an ancient time, Indian civilization had been reduced to backwardness because of the savagery inflicted by waves of invaders and the economic exploitation caused by British rule. This recuperation of science as Hindu offered a basis to challenge the hegemony of Western claims over reason, since, the argument went, Hindu thought had been scientific since its very inception, predating the European Enlightenment by centuries.<sup>56</sup>

Scientific knowledge and learning in colonial India operated as an arena in which the supremacy of the West could be contested, yet this contestation meant accepting, to a significant extent, the categories of classification proposed by the colonial state. For, while the Indian elite, through making a case for a “Hindu” science, did not accept the self-definition of science as inherently *Western* in its origins or character, they did, however, accept the self-definition of science as synonymous with rationality and enlightenment. Inasmuch as science stood for the intrinsic cultural superiority of the British colonizers or European civilization, a superiority manifested as a set of capacities that Indians lacked, that proposition was contested by the Indian anticolonial nationalist elites. For example, the Indian anticolonial nationalists articulated a case for the right and capability of Indians to govern themselves on *economic* grounds, arguing that British policies favored European businessmen over Indians, that British rule had resulted in a systematic drain of wealth from India, and that Britain could not reconcile its interests as an imperial power with the economic well-being of Indian society.