Greater India- A Nationalistic Narrative
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GREATER INDIA: A NATIONALISTIC NARRATIVE

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Introduction

'To know my country in truth, one has to travel to that age when she realized her soul, and thus transcended her physical boundaries; when she revealed her being in a radiant magnanimity which illuminated the Eastern horizon making her recognized as their own by those in alien shores who were awakened into a great surprise of life.'[1] *– Rabindranath Tagore*

In the early twentieth century, as India sought to break free from British colonial rule, there emerged a pressing need to establish and define the nation's identity. Within the inaugural journal of the Greater India Society published in 1934, the great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) passionately advocated for a shift in perspective. He urged not to view India solely through the European colonial perspective but rather through its own historical achievements such as the rich culture it built and which it spread across large parts of Asia. Tagore emphasized India's role in the past as a harbinger of progress and civilization, reaching beyond its geographical boundaries to enlighten other cultures. This perception of an expansive Indian civilization was a central aspect of the theory of 'Greater India' which was written about in the publications of the Greater India Society. The concept included large parts of Asia but mainly focuses on Southeast Asia. The Greater India Society provided a perfect platform for the nationalist writers to promote accounts of the strong influence of ancient Indian culture in the sub-continent and assert India as a civilizing force. The society was formed in 1926 (although it took considerable time to publish its first journal in 1934) and was based in the region of Calcutta. Many Hindu Bengali writers and nationalists such as Kalidas Nag (1892-1966), R.C Majumdar (1888-1980) and P.C Bagchi (1898-1956) played a significant role in the society, and they were seen as progressive nation builders. The society wanted to rewrite the history of India through a very different lens where they wanted to focus on the cultural influence of ancient Indian civilization in the regions of Southeast Asia. It promoted the vision of cultural diffusionism where they believed that the ancient Indian culture spread across the whole subcontinent. The writers who contributed to the publications of the Greater India Society focused on the vast period of time ranging from the last centuries BCE to the medieval period (roughly up to the 15th century CE).

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[1] *'The Journal of the Greater India Society',* ed. U.N Ghoshal, *Calcutta, Vol I,* (1934). The journal published a 'Foreword' written by Tagore to introduce the audience about the theory of 'Greater India' that became the central theme in the series of articles that were published in several journals of the society.

The aim of the thesis is to investigate the research question of how the writers of Greater India Society promoted the concept of 'Greater India' to reshape national narratives in twentieth century India. The idea of historical revisionism is key to approach this research question in order to understand how these writers used historical sources associated with the theory of 'Greater India' to create national identity in the period between 1920-1950 when India was fighting towards Independence from British colonial rule. To contextualize the role of historical sources in the process of nation building, this thesis aims towards specifically dealing with the 'Greater India' thinking and the role of Indian nationalist writers in constructing national narratives during the early twentieth century. My hypothesis for this research paper is that the writers of the Greater India Society constructed nationalist narratives that were constructed upon a glorified past. Through this study, I aim to establish strong foundations to support this argument and explore how historical events and cultural diffusion contributed to the shaping of national identities rooted in a sense of the grandeur of one's own past. I will do so by examining the works of twentieth century Indian nationalist writers, especially Kalidas Nag and R.C. Majumdar who were prominent members of the Greater India Society and how the idea of 'Greater India' was promoted in their writings in order to construct a national identity.

The views of Nag and Majumdar hold significant importance as both were influential figures in the Greater India Society who provided distinct approaches in reshaping the idea of 'Greater India' in order to promote a Hindu national narrative. Nag's most prominent work on 'Greater India' is published in the Greater India Society Bulletin in 1926 where he envisions 'Greater India' as a cultural force that extended beyond Indian territorial boundaries. He also identifies inscriptions from the reign of great emperor 'Asoka' (273 BCE to 232 BCE) vital to trace the influence of Indian cultural progress in Southeast Asia. He took an internationalist approach in contextualizing the theory of 'Greater India' and attempted to highlight India's civilizational progress to the eyes of the western world. He laid emphasis on the usage of historical sources such as inscriptions from the period of the Asokan Dynasty and focused on the notion of humanity mentioned in the Vedas that went beyond India's territorial boundaries. In focusing on the usage of these historical sources, Nag was one of the most influential writers in the Greater India Society and worked towards the common aim of the society of emphasizing ancient India's cultural dominance in creating a national narrative.[2] R. C. Majumdar's works on the theory which are studied in this thesis are taken from volume 1 and volume 3 of the

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[2] See, Yorim Spoelder, 'An 'Indian Hermes' Between Paris and the Pacific: Kalidas Nag, Greater India and the Quest for a Global Humanism'. *In South Asia Unbound, 5, Amsterdam University Press,* (2023), 167.

Journal of the Greater India Society published in 1934 and 1936 respectively. In his account, Majumdar concentrates on integrating the concept of 'Greater India' into the grand narrative of Hindu civilization. He attempted to approach the theory within a national framework where large emphasis has been given to associate the idea with Hinduism and exclude Islamic influence from the Greater India theory. This approach is central to examine in order to answer the research question of the thesis. It is also important to note that the works of these Indian writers were heavily inspired by the vision of French scholars such as Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935) who primarily studied the powerful civilizing force that India was at one time. The influence of the French scholars will be discussed in detail later.

Therefore, I intend to examine the parts of the work of these two writers that mainly focus on the usage of historical sources in the creation of national narratives in the twentieth century. Apart from these two nationalist writers, there were other Greater India scholars whose works will be discussed briefly in the later sections. O.C Gangoly (1881-1974), who was an art historian, contributed to the publications of the Greater India Society. In the seventh edition of the journal that was published in 1940. Gangoly and his fellow Greater India writer B.R Chatterjee (1904-1987) wrote extensive accounts on the influence of Indian philosophical thought in the regions of Southeast Asia. Gangoly looked at the sacred Brahminical texts known as Puranas to formulate the narrative of a Brahminical influence in the region of Southeast Asia. On the other hand, Chatterjee focused on the usage of architectural evidence such as the famous temple 'Angkor Vat' in Cambodia to establish a Hindu cultural link with the regions of Java and Cambodia. Therefore, analyzing the works of the scholars of the Greater India Society provides a strong framework to understand how historical sources have been used in the Greater India studies to build national narratives in the twentieth century.

Historical Context

The creation of national identity involves complex and ambiguous processes where cultural, political, and historical consciousness play a vital role. In the context of the theory of 'Greater India', the varied interpretations involved in approaching India's great civilizational past contributes towards applying the theory within a national framework. The complex interpretations evident in the historical accounts of nationalist writers will be discussed in detail. The phenomena of a 'Greater India' entails cultural and religious elements which requires scholarly attention to explore in which particular framework the concept can be associated with. Moreover, the underlying foundation of the theory rests on the notion that

India in the ancient times, through Hinduism and Buddhism left a strong imprint in the regions of Asian continent and especially in Southeast Asia. The notion that Hindu-Buddhist thoughts and philosophical ideals were a key cultural marker in ancient regions of Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia and others, gave a solid foundation to build the theory of a 'Greater India' that depicted India's cultural expansion and established 'Hindu' colonies in these regions.[3] This concept of 'Greater India' played a significant role in the writings of many twentieth century Indian nationalist writers and coincided with the theory of cultural diffusion which started to gather pace at that period of time. The work of Indian historian, D.P. Singhal on 'Cultural Interaction' in 1977 provides a detailed account of the progress of India's cultural civilization throughout time. He states that 'the striking feature of the Indian civilization was to survive the ruins of time and established strong cultural influence all over the world. Apart from the reason of its own vitality, the continuity of Indian civilization is largely due its ability to adapt alien virtue to harmonize contradictions and mould new ideas into a pattern of its own.'[4] This view suggests that India experienced cultural change yet it survived through the damages of time. Although, this work was published in the late 1970s, long after the publications on the concept of 'Greater India' by the society, it provides us to contextualize India's cultural progress and trace the changes that it survived throughout time.

Importantly, the time frame of this thesis is set in the works of the Greater India writers that were published in the early twentieth century when India was fighting for Independence. It is in this period that people in India started realizing that the country needs to look beyond the colonial rule and establish its own national identity. The formation of Greater India Society and the promotion of the theory of a 'Greater India' in the 1920s is relevant to the study of nationalism. In the context of Hindu Nationalism, the Indian politician and writer V.D. Savarkar (1883-1947) was an important figure in the construction of a Hindu national narrative in the 1920s. He advocated for a Hindu identity in that time period when the Greater India Society

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[3] See, Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' *University of Cambridge, Modern Asian Studies 38, 3* (2004), 703-44. Jayashree Vivekanandan, 'Indianisation or indigenisation? Greater India and the politics of cultural diffusionism' *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics, 56;1*, (2018), 1-21. These secondary literatures out of many others are crucial to understand the cultural impact of 'Greater India'. This will be discussed in greater detail throughout the thesis.
[4] D.P Singhal, 'Cultural Interaction' *Journal of Indian History, University of Kerala*, Vol. LV Part III, (1977), 114-15. He also examines the two cultural theories of evolution and diffusionism to trace the trajectory of various civilizations such as the Indian, Egypt and Greek civilizations and their influence all over the world. He leans towards the fact that there has been more cultural diffusion in the past that we are aware of.

worked towards spreading the idea of a 'Greater India.' The connection of Savarkar's Hindu narrative with how he identified the Greater India concept will be discussed later.

This brings us back to the main question of how the nationalist writers of the society used historical sources to promote the 'Greater India' theory in order to reshape national narratives. Therefore, to examine this question carefully, we need to consider questions such as: was the theory of 'Greater India' approached in a manner that conformed to the national narratives that were formulated in the process of nation building in the twentieth century? To what extent was this concept utilized as a means of reshaping historical narratives to forge a national identity during India's journey towards independence? It is important to also examine the relation of the society with the promotion of Hindu Nationalism as whether most of the scholars were ardent Hindu nationalists or not. and how did they envision the cultural and religious framework in the nation-building process? These are the kind of question that need to be addressed to understand the significance of the 'Greater India' theory within the broader context of nation-building during India's struggle for independence.

Literature Review

There are at least three strands of literature relevant to this thesis: the debate over the correct historiographical placement of the Greater India theory, the relevance of the Greater India theory in the post-independence period in the Asian context, and the cultural and religious aspect of nationalism involved in the Greater India theory.

A) The debate over the correct historiographical placement of the Greater India theory

The idea of 'Greater India' is much discussed in the current historiographical debate. One of the most recent works on the development of the 'Greater India' concept is carried by Jolita Zabarskaite. In her 2022 book *'Greater India' and Indian Expansionist Imagination,* she provides intriguing questions as to how one can fit the 'Greater India' concept within present-day historiographical trends. Firstly, she attempts to analyze the theory within the framework of Global history, which in turn proves to be quite difficult. She states that 'Global history is often a retrospective category, but to frame a history that is parochially directed at seeing one country at the center of a civilizing mission as a 'global' project is not useful at all'[5]. This suggests that it is not completely accurate to see the 'Greater India' concept as a form of global history. Subsequently, she attempts to fit the Greater India theory within 'Pan-Asianism' which

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[5] See, Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965', 5.

again proves to be an ill fit. Zabarskaite believes that 'Greater India' can be described as a failed Pan-Asianism as the notion of Indian civilization being the carrier of progress and harmony was not acceptable to the rest of Asia.[6] The reasons for this will be discussed later in this review. Therefore, it opens up possibilities to locate the 'Greater India' theory within other present-day historiographical trends.[7]

The current strength of Hindu nationalism in Indian politics has sparked historiographical interest in the emergence of the ideology. Recent scholarship has traced the emergence of Indian nationalist ideology to at least the 1920s and attempted to create a link between the idea of 'Greater India' and the nationalist agenda embedded within it. [8] This thesis attempts to locate the concept of 'Greater India' within the context of Hindu nationalism and identity creation. This is done by analyzing as to how the concept was used to construct nationalist narratives by the Greater India Society writers in the 1920s, a period where Hindu nationalism was emerging as a powerful ideology in India. The examination of the accounts of the Greater India writers in the early twentieth century provides a vital space to examine the historical revisionism incorporated in these accounts. Focusing specifically on the use of source material by the Greater India Society writers contributes to the current literature written on the 'Greater India' concept as it gives us a more precise understanding of the construction of national narratives.

The existing literature on the concept of 'Greater India' provides a strong framework to understand how various Indian and even European writers interpreted the concept in order to construct an Indian national narrative. Susan Bayly (a Cambridge Historian) examined the both the translocal and national aspect of the functioning of the Greater India Society. She also focused closely on the network of the twentieth century Indian writers who worked on nationalist cultural topics and mentioned frequently how the works of Sylvain Lévi, and other researchers inspired and supported their vision of ancient Indian cultural colonialism. According to her, 'Greater India thinkers were not generally inclined to extol either violence or authoritarian state power. Yet they did root many of their claims in narratives of collective loss and displacement which had much in common with nineteenth-and twentieth century imaginings of Greater Germany (Gross Deutschland), and also with some Arab nationalist

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See, Christophe Jaffrelot, 'The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s', Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1999 (1993), 6. This book provides crucial insights into the different reasons of the rise of Hindu nationalism and how it emerged and evolved in the 19th and 20th century.

visions of a Greater Syria.'[9] In her study, she focuses on the Greater India thinkers and political actors in an attempt to provide a trans-local history of the concept that went beyond the limited boundaries of the Indian nation. Moreover, this line of thinking by Bayly was later supported by another author named Jayashree Vivekananda who supports the argument that writing on Greater India was an exercise in trans-local identity making. It imagined an ancient network of connected histories even as it sought to reinvent the idea to address the contemporary concern of nation building.[10] Vivekananda also states that 'the idea in itself had been generated by the proponents of Indian nationalism and rearticulated in the contemporary context to mirror modern India's regional and global aspirations.'[11] This view suggest that the 'Greater India' thinking has been associated with the discipline of national history, such as Bayly thought as well.

B The relevance of the Greater India theory in the post-independence period in the Asian context

Moreover, the idea of 'Greater India' is important even in the post-independence period (after 1947) in the context of the development of international relations within Asia. The challenge involved in looking at the theory from a Pan-Asianism model needs attention. There has been considerable amount of literature written to analyze the 'Greater India' concept through the lens of aspirations to Pan-Asian unity in the post-independence period. T.A Keenleyside in his work 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes towards Asia' extensively deals with how the Indian nationalist in the post-independence period attempted to highlight the cultural and political dimensions of the 'Greater India' thinking to establish relations with Southeast Asia. He states that 'the Greater India idea seems, therefore, to have complicated independent India's development of close and amicable relations with its Asian neighbors.'[12] The primary belief within the nationalist element of the Greater India theory revolves around the notion that in the twentieth century, the entire South and Southeast Asian region shared historical ties with India, with the nation playing a central role in advancing the spiritual and cultural progress of the East. This vision eventually led to the aspiration for Asian unity under Indian leadership. The theory of Greater India served as a cultural catalyst to establish this sense of Asian unity, with

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[9] Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 703-704.
[10] Jayashree Vivekanandan, 'Indianisation or indigenisation? Greater India and the politics of cultural diffusionism,' 1.
[11] Ibid.
[12] T.A. Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia: A Troublesome Legacy for Post-Independence Indian Foreign Policy', *Pacific Affairs, University of British Columbia*, Vol.55, No.2, (Summer 1982), 229.

some Indian nationalists emphasizing the idea of the Asian continent as a unified Hindu-Buddhist civilization. Since the rest of the continent was not always very receptive to this idea however, it mainly served as an obstacle to this aspired unity.

Additionally, Keenleyside argues that beyond its cultural dimension, the concept of Asian identity held political significance, as it motivated Indian nationalists and other Asian countries in their collective struggle against Western imperialism to attain independence. He states that 'those Indians who in the twentieth century desired to resurrect the Greater India concept anticipated that the overseas Indian communities would be mainspring of the new movement. Bolstered by close association with the motherland, it was hoped, they would preserve and strengthen the existence of Indian culture and spiritual values in the countries of South and Southeast Asia to which they had emigrated largely during the previous century.'[13] However, the notion of a 'Pan-Asian' identity was met with criticism where Keenleyside again deeply examining the shortcomings in which he targets the Sino-Indian spiritual unity that was misplaced in the narratives of Indian nationalists. He further argues that 'the Greater India concept, too, depended on links that had been forged long ago and which in most, if not all, instances were never close enough to justify the contention that the South and Southeast Asian region had once been a veritable Indian dependency. More obviously, however, the Greater India idea overlooked the manifold differences that had developed between India and the countries of the area in the intervening centuries since India's great age of cultural expansion.'[14]

Moreover, in the post-independence period, scholars tend to trace the influential role of the Greater India thinking within the political spectrum that integrated the policies of different Asian nations. Bayly argues that 'in the 1950's and 1960's, Greater India thinking underpinned many expressions of the Nehruvian goal of establishing India's leadership over the alliance of newly independent ex-colonial states which in 1961 became known as the Non-Aligned movement under the leadership of the Indian prime-minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), the Indonesian president Sukarno (1901-1970) and the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970). In this period, Nehru's attempts to invoke ideas of shared inter-Asian cultural affinity and common spiritual heritage were of great interest to Greater India polemicists.'[15] Furthermore, Stolte and Fischer-Tine added to the discussion as they mentioned the influence

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[13] T.A. Keenleyside, 'Nationalist Indian Attitudes Towards Asia', 214.
[14] Ibid, 219-20. He also states that the political unity based on anti-imperialism was pre-mature to establish Asian federation as Japan itself became an imperialist power.
[15] Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode',736.

of the idea of 'Greater India' had on Nehru's attempt to unite Asia which was evident in the proceedings of the Asian relations Conference in 1947. However, Stolte and Fischer-Tine argued that 'one need not take an Asianist perspective to locate problems inherent in conceptions of 'India Magna.' The idea of India as a benign colonial power is pervaded by a paternalistic attitude toward 'Island India' or Southeast Asia, perceived as culturally similar. Such rhetoric was politically volatile, not least because of the existence of large Indian diasporas in Southeast Asian countries.'[16] Marieke Bloembergen in her article 'The Politics of 'Greater India': a Moral Geography' contributed to the debate related to the long-term consequences the Greater India thinking entailed on the Southeast Asia. She took a different approach in analyzing the archaeological objects, arts and paintings depicted in the museums to demonstrate how the supposed supremacy of a Hindu-Buddhist civilization influenced the perception of the world towards Asia. She states that 'from the Metropolitan Museum in New York to Musee Guimet in Paris and the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, well-choreographed exhibitions strategically use light and space to emphasize the spiritual power and inner beauty of Hindu and Buddhist statues, evoking ideas of Greater India. In this way, they obfuscate the violence underlying how objects were collected and depict Southeast Asia as the passive recipient of a superior Indian civilization.'[17] This demonstrates that the theory of 'Greater India' generated political effect on the relations with Southeast Asia. It therefore becomes of greater interest to understand how exactly this apparently controversial narrative was established.

C The cultural and religious aspect of nationalism involved in the Greater India theory

In order to analyze how the idea of 'Greater India' was used to construct national narratives by the Greater India Society writers, it is crucial to give context about the cultural and religious aspect of the 'Greater India' theory and how it can be associated with the broader field of nationalism. The interplay of culture and religion is a crucial part of how we can approach various national narratives. Before proceeding further with the argument, it is vital to first understand the variable trajectories that the definition of the term 'nationalism' entails. The concept might encourage several scholarly debates surrounding its meaning and connotations, yet the exact meaning of the term is contested. Benedict Anderson, an Anglo-Irish historian, provided a crucial lens in 1983 by defining the hotly debated terminology of 'nation' and

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[16] Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tine, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905-1940),), *Comparative studies in Society and History*, (2012), 87.

[17] Marieke Bloembergen, 'The Politics of 'Greater India', a Moral Geography: Moveable Antiquities and Charmed Knowledge Networks between Indonesia, India, and the West', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, (2021), 172.

'nationalism' where he proposed the idea of a nation as an imagined community and nationalism as a feeling of shared symbols that create a sense of belonging within a certain community. He states that 'in an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'[18] While Anderson's understanding of nationalism is deeply rooted in the cultural aspects of a community's shared symbols of a common past, there are various other scholars who have interpreted the definition in a more political and revolutionary sense. Hedva Ben-Israel, who gave her own analysis on the concept of nationalism in her article in 1992, states that 'great changes in history involving masses of people are never sufficiently explained by the birth of new ideas. Mental attitudes are formed in a region of history where ideas, slogans, symbols, figures of speech and metaphors merge with more tangible conditions, opportunities and motives to produce a collective political attitude that produces historical change. Nationalism, like revolution, is the sum of collective mental attitudes that are formed and expressed through action.'[19] These interpretations of the terminology align with the purpose of this research where I intend to argue that the concept of 'Greater India' was promoted as a nationalist narrative by the twentieth century Indian scholars to create a nationalist feeling based on cultural and revolutionary dimensions of the concept.

Consequently, another aspect that requires thorough exploration is whether the notion of 'Greater India' transcended religious boundaries and functioned more as a cultural phenomenon intersecting with nationalistic approaches. This investigation aims to shed light on the multifaceted nature of 'Greater India' and its implications in shaping cultural and national narratives, beyond its religious connotations. However, to assert that the idea of 'Greater India' incorporated a predominant cultural approach might prove to be controversial in the academic sphere. It still remains vital to analyze the concept through various dimensions. Moreover, the current nature of Indian nationalism or one is to say 'Hindu nationalism' propagates the agenda of creating a national identity based on Hinduism. Thus, the above-mentioned arguments reflect that culture and religion are hard to separate in nationalist narratives. Therefore, it becomes important to examine the historical accounts of the Greater India writers of the twentieth century and to examine how they perceived India's civilizational

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[18] Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, 'Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism', *London: Verso*, 2006 (1983), 6. According to his definition, he transcends the individual agency in order to create an imagined community where they feel a sense of belonging. He intends to perceive nation as a deep, horizontal comradeship.

[19] Hedva Ben-Israel, 'Nationalism in Historical Perspective' *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.45, No.2, (1992), 368.

expansion in intertwined cultural, religious, and intellectual framework that played an important role in the formation of national narratives.

In addition, to delve into the various connotations that are associated with creating national narratives deeply, it is important to consider Anderson's argument where he reiterates the fact that his cultural interpretation of nation-building does not necessarily exclude religious connotation. Rather, he proposes that 'nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which-as well as against which it came into being.'[20] This an interesting perspective on the idea of 'Greater India' in which it is vital to understand in whether the idea was cultural or specifically religious in nature and whether it is possible to exclude the religious aspect in creating a national identity based on a glorified past. It seems a difficult prospect to underline such a statement where religious connotations are completely eradicated from the nationalistic perspective. Nevertheless, the aim of this thesis is to analyze this question through the lens of historical usage of sources that are prevalent in the ideology of 'Greater India.'

The wide range of contexts associated with Greater India needs to be assessed carefully. The interplay of culture and religion becomes significant when we approach the 'Greater India' concept as it contributes towards establishing the theory within nationalist framework. Sadanand Menon weighs in by arguing that 'culture and nationalism have ever been close allies. Culture has always set up contours for national movements and nations have used culture as a convenient flag to wave in ideas of superiority or exclusivity.'[21] Therefore, historical revisionism becomes central to the idea of rewriting India's cultural conquest as a way of achieving a 'Hindu' national identity. According to Menon, 'to project India as a Hindu country and reclaim it exclusively for Hindus, it has rewritten Indian history as essentially a history of Hindu civilization, and sees it as an essential prerequisite for establishing a grand Hindu vision of India.'[22] Moreover, the cultural discourse on promoting Hindu nationalism entails this version of primarily putting the Hindu civilization at the forefront of historical writing on 'Greater India.' This claim holds contentious issue within the evolutionist and diffusionist proponents of cultural change. The national narrative largely formed around the 'Greater India'

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[20] Benedict Anderson, 'Imagined Communities', 12. Again to reiterate his argument, he mentions that the cultural systems that drive the nationalist narratives in the process of nation-building are comprised of religious community and the dynastic realm.
[21] Romila Thapar, A.G Noorani, Sadanand Menon, 'On Nationalism' (2016). See, Sadanand Menon essay on 'From National Culture to Cultural Nationalism' which is a part of the book.
[22] Ibid.

concept indicate towards the notion that the Greater India Society writers aimed to characterize the Indian civilization as a marker of cultural diffusionism. The emphasis on the diffusionist theory was integral as it aimed to illustrate that Indian cultural influence surpassed the existing cultures of the Southeast regions. Instead of subscribing to the theory that pre-existing cultures evolved independently, the nationalists sought to highlight the extensive impact of supreme Hindu and Buddhist thought on the indigenous cultures within the colonies. This is also observed in the work of Jayashree Vivekanandan where she reflects that 'the notion of Greater India appears to be synonymous with 'Farther India' that argued for 'Indianization' through cultural diffusionism.'[23] She also cites that 'Lévi, Nag and P.C Bagchi rejected the teleological slant Orientalists gave to civilizational progress, which placed cultures at different junctures of evolution, preferring to support diffusionism instead'[24]. Therefore, the cultural orientation of the Greater India theory established a framework for the Greater India Society nationalist writers in the early twentieth century to construct a national identity based on the idea of a Greater India.

Methodology, Sources, and Contribution to the Debate

The primary research conducted for this thesis is based on the publications of the Journals of the Greater India Society which provide crucial insights into the works of these nationalist writers and the accounts on the theory of 'Greater India.' This is a vast corpus of articles by numerous writers with varying perspectives that have been published in several volumes of these journals which have contributed to the research of understanding how historical sources have been used in the study of 'Greater India' to reshape national narratives. During the early twentieth century, when the society started to publish the accounts on the theory of 'Greater India', the journal claimed to be the only journal in India at that time concerned with the investigation of Indian cultural influences in foreign lands.[25] This provides an intriguing platform to investigate in what ways the accounts in these journals wrote about India's ancient cultural civilization and imparted knowledge when according to the claim, they were the only journal that extensively researched the idea of 'Greater India.' The particular focus behind analyzing this primary source is to understand what form of narratives were created by these

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[23] Jayashree Vivekanandan, 'Indianisation or indigenisation? Greater India and the politics of cultural diffusionism',5. In this article, she also proposed the viewpoint held by H.G Quaritch Wales who argued that indigenisation rather than Indianization was more accurate when studying about India's cultural influence.
[24] Ibid,6. She cites Bayly's argument about the Greater India writers supporting diffusionist theory. She believed that deciphering the sculptural and architectural workmanship that established historical connections between India and Southeast Asia were of significant interest to the Greater India thinkers.
[25] '*The Journal of the Greater India Society*' ed. U.N Ghoshal, Calcutta, Vol. VIII, 1941, iii.

Greater India writers to promote national unity and how they interpreted the theory of 'Greater India' in the process of nation-building. In these texts, I intend to examine how writers such as Nag and Majumdar have used historical sources to promote the idea of a 'Greater India' and identified India's cultural influence in the Southeast Asia as a signifier of supreme Hindu civilization. I also intend to trace the influence of French scholars such as Lévi in the writings of these Indian scholars in the Journals. This is done to analyze why there are large amount works by French scholars mentioned in the Journals of the Greater India Society and whether the vision of these French scholars have inspired the Indian writers to gain legitimacy to promote the 'Greater India' theory in order to reshape national narratives.

The majority of the articles in these Journals provide Indian perspectives on the regions of Southeast Asia in order to claim the establishment of Hindu-Buddhist influence. Using the framework of national history, the examination of certain articles published by Bengali writers on the Hindu cultural dominance in the past becomes central to this study on 'Greater India.' However, the limitation arises out of the fact that the journals might have only published and selected those articles that worked towards promoting the idea of 'Greater India' associated with Hindu nationalist framework. It limits our approach to view the theory from the lens of a certain group of nationalist thinkers who had a definite idea about establishing India's cultural expansion in order to form national narratives. Therefore, I intend to further contribute to the academic research by examining a political manifestation of Hindu nationalism in the work of Vinayak Savarkar.

This thesis is structured into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the 'Greater India' thinking of the Greater India Society. It also delves into the national narratives intricately woven in the historical accounts of Kalidas Nag and R.C Majumdar who actively promoted the theory of a 'Greater India.' It explores how these narratives were constructed through the use of historical sources. The second chapter focuses on the historical framework established by Indian nationalist writers of the twentieth century based on the influence of French writers such as Sylvain Lévi. It carries the discussion further as to how these Indian writers sought to construct national narratives that were inspired by the theories put forward by their French counterparts on the concept of 'Greater India.' This chapter will pose the question of whether such influence evident in the writings of Indian thinkers proved to be source of legitimization in positioning the idea of India's cultural expansion within a national framework. In the final chapter, a more argumentative approach is taken in order to analyze how historical revisionism became central in the writings of the Greater India thinkers. It aims to examine to what extent

Greater India thinking intersected with Hindu nationalist agendas. The work of Savarkar will be analyzed to understand the creation of a 'Hindu' identity during the twentieth century. Therefore, through this structured approach, the thesis aims to provide a comprehensive exploration of the complex relationship between national narratives, cultural diffusion, historical frameworks, and the construction of national identities involved in the diverse theory of a 'Greater India'.

CHAPTER 1- 'Greater India' embedded in the Accounts of Indian Nationalist Writers

1.1 The Connection between Indian Nationalism and Hindu Nationalism

The term 'Indian Nationalism' occupies a debatable space when it aligns itself with the concept of 'Hindu Nationalism.' This association of terminology creates a paradox in understanding nationalism, as it places religion above the idea of a common sense of belonging in the formation of national identity. India has been at the center stage of identifying its national roots, where proponents of nationalism have employed religious identity as a crucial factor in establishing a robust national consciousness. Consequently, this intertwining leads to the entanglement of Indian Nationalism with 'Hindu Nationalism.' John Zavos in his work 'Searching for Hindu Nationalism in Modern Indian History' traces the emergence of Hindu Nationalism to the early twentieth century. He argues along similar lines when assessing the paradoxical equation of Hindu nationalism with Indian nationalism where he states that 'the concept of Hindu nationalism has a significance and meaning which has been ferociously contested in modern Indian politics. Its exponents often present it as the 'real' or 'true' form of Indian nationalism, to be contrasted with the western inspired, universalist concepts of 'pseudo-secularist' nationalists. Opponents, on the other hand, present it as the very antithesis of 'real' or 'true' nationalism.'[26] Furthermore, Partha Chatterjee in his work 'The Nationalization of Hinduism' illustrate that 'the idea that Indian nationalism is synonymous with Hindu nationalism is not the vestige of some pre-modern religious conception. It is an entirely modern, rationalist, and historicist idea.'[27] This contrast in approach towards nationalism opens various opportunities to examine the construction of a 'Hindu' national narrative.

The period of early twentieth century witnessed the emergence of the Hindu Sabha movement that fueled the rise of Hindu nationalism in that period. Zavos mentions the purpose of this movement where he states that 'from 1906, a series of Hindu Sahaik Sabhas were established

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[26] John Zavos, 'Searching for Hindu Nationalism in Modern Indian History- Analysis of Some Early Ideological Developments*', Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.34*, (1999), Pp 2269. In this paper, Zavos also trace the trajectory of the Hindu Sabha Movement in the first decade of twentieth century which largely focused on promoting nationalism based on the idea of Hindu identity. This was a major period in the rise of Hindu nationalism and he put emphasis on the struggle experienced in twentieth Century Indian politics between religious communalism (which is controversially related to Hindu nationalism) and secular nationalism.
[27] Partha Chatterjee, 'History and the Nationalization of Hinduism.' *Social Research 59, no.1* (1992), 147. He supports this equation of Hindu nationalism with Indian nationalism as believes that it allows for a central role of the state to maintain unity and sovereignty. His argument lies on this notion that this form of nationalism is solely based on political rather than religious framework. This becomes central when we study 'Greater India' narratives as it requires more attention to understand what form (religious, political and cultural) did the ideology took shape into when it was actively promoted in the twentieth century by the nationalist writers.

which consisted of 'cream of the Arya, Brahmo, Theosophist, Sikh, Sanatanist Societies.' The principal aim of these Sabhas were to protect the interests of the Hindus by stimulating in them the feelings of self-respect, self-help and mutual co-operation so that by a combined effort there would be some chance of promoting the moral, intellectual, social and material welfare of the individuals of which the nation is composed.'[28] The idea of promoting Hindu identity in the nation-building process highlighted the religious connotation involved in creating national narratives and therefore, it took the shape of the so called 'Hindu Nationalism.' It became vital to provide the context of Hindu nationalism as it gives a crucial link to analyze its importance when we study the concept of 'Greater India' and how it was actively promoted by the Indian nationalists' writers of the twentieth century which coincided with the rise of Hindu nationalism. Furthermore, Amalendu Guha states that 'there was no nationalism or subjectively conscious nationality in pre-colonial India. Not that those objective marks of identity (such as common language, script, belief system etc.) indicating a territorialized community of culture were not there. Such things might have even been casually taken note of. The concept Bharatavarsha, extending from the Himalayas to the Seas and peopled by the descendants of Bharata, for example, was an ancient one that still persists in our heritage.'[29] Moreover, the Greater India Society which was formed in 1926 was at the forefront of constructing the narrative of an ancient Hindu culture as a civilizing force that enlightened and left a significant cultural impact on the Asian continent.

Several notable historians and scholars such as Kalidas Nag, P.C Bagchi, R.C Majumdar and U.N Ghosal, who were predominantly of the Bengal origin, joined the society that was set up in Calcutta and expressed their nationalistic views which were evident in their writings largely dedicated towards the great influence Indian culture had over countries like China, Indonesia, and Malaysia. This chapter will delve into the intricate nationalistic narratives present in the works of Kalidas Nag and R.C Majumdar. Their writings offer distinct methods of incorporating the concept of 'Greater India' into the national framework, and their accounts hold particular significance as they are prominently featured in the publications of the Greater India Society journals. By closely examining their contributions, this chapter aims to uncover the diverse approaches taken by Nag and Majumdar in shaping the idea of 'Greater India' within the context of national identity. This approach will be carried out to understand the

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[28] John Zavos, 'Searching for Hindu Nationalism in Modern Indian History' Pp 2273.
[29] Amalendu Guha, 'The Indian National Question: A Conceptual Frame' *Economic and Political Weekly, Vol.17*, (1982), PE 3.

circumstances behind the construction of Hindu national narratives and whether the purpose of the society was to align the concept of Greater India with the Hindu nationalist ideology, thereby, constructing a national narrative and identity.

1.2 The Bengal Origin in the Narrative of The Greater India Society

The city of Calcutta, now known as Kolkata, was a hub of prominent intellectual scholars in the nationalist sphere during the twentieth century. The Swadeshi movement of 1905, which was a groundbreaking event in the development of Indian nationalism, led to the formation of narratives centered around attaining freedom from colonial oppression, recognizing a glorified history, and promoting unity. The movement aimed to protest the oppressive policies of the British, particularly the partition of Bengal, and was a mass movement that called for the boycott of foreign goods, igniting a nationalist struggle. It proved to be a stepping stone in establishing the nationalist framework. In addition, Sumit Sarkar argued that 'the Swadeshi upsurge set off by the Bengal Partition of 1905 was marked by certain shifts at least for a few years in the ideals and techniques of Indian nationalism- from seeking reforms within the existing colonial political structure to a direct challenge to it in the name of Swaraj (Independence).'[30] Bengal played a significant role in formulating nationalist agendas and generating mass reactions on the subject of nationalism. The establishment of new universities and improved methods of disseminating knowledge in Calcutta paved way for the advancement of intellectuals and scholars. According to Kwa Chong Guan in his edited version 'Visions of Early Southeast Asia as Greater India,' Calcutta was experiencing intellectual ferment when Greater India Society was founded. He states that 'the vision of India as a culturally dominant civilization in the past left imprints all over the world and that India rising to lead Asia into a new Asian renaissance period inspired the founding fathers of the Greater India Society to project an earlier cycle of Indian humanism and spiritualism emanating from Bengal across the Indian Ocean to civilize the indigenes of Southeast Asia.'[31] Jolita Zabarskaite in her book *Greater India and the Indian Expansionist Imagination* deals with the influence of Bengal in the emergence of the concept where she states that 'it was mostly Bengali educationists, journalists, politicians and scholars who had developed the 'Greater India' discourse not only

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[30] Sumit Sarkar, 'Imperialism and Nationalist Thought (A Case Study of Swadeshi Bengal)' *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, Vol.32* (1970), 111. The mention of Swadeshi Movement is relevant because it becomes vital to understand the major nationalistic agendas that were prevalent at the time and place where the concept of 'Greater India' was promoted actively.

[31] Kwa, Chong Guan, 'Introduction-Visions of Early Southeast Asia as Greater India' *Early Southeast Asia Viewed from India: An Anthology of Articles from the Journal of the Greater India Society, Manohar publishers*, (2013), xxxvi (36).

in British India but also abroad.'[32] This indicates that the national narratives formulated to promote the concept of 'Greater India' included the intellectual and geographical influence of Bengal. However, Kwa Chong Guan mentions that the extent to which the regional history of Bengal contributed to the national framework of India remains a debatable aspect, given that the ideology of 'Greater India' largely incorporated the Hindu narrative.

The 'Greater India' narrative contained numerous dimensions that needed to be explored in depth to understand the concept's religious, cultural, and political notions. The Greater India Society worked towards this mission of narrating India's past in a glorified manner which showcased the superiority of the nation's religious, cultural, and even political influence that extended the territorial boundary and marked a long-lasting impact on the Asian continent. The study on this movement initiated by the society in the twentieth century enters the dynamic field of national history where indefinite literature has been composed to understand how the idea of 'Greater India' was implanted in rewriting the nation's glorified past. The continuous use of the term 'glorified' has been done to synthesize the aim of the society which is explicitly mentioned in the publication of their journals. The term 'glorified' has not been used implicitly in the several journal publications of the society. Although, the purpose of these publications largely aligns with the notion of portraying India as a colonizing power that established ancient Hindu colonies in Southeast Asia. This motive is well documented in one of the journals of the Greater India Society particularly published in 1944. The journal mentions that the aims of the society are to 'organize the study of Indian culture in Greater India (Serindia, Indo-China), Korea and Japan. It also aims to arrange for publication of the results of researchers into the history of India's spiritual and cultural relations with the outside world and educate the students in several universities of India about the historically significant phenomenon of 'Greater India.'[33] This was done to create a sense of unity and express the nation's supreme ideologies that stemmed from the origin of Hinduism and Buddhism at a time when India was still under colonial rule. The underlying question then remains whether the society's aim was to promote a 'Hindu identity' in the name of arousing nationalistic sentiment which clearly relates to the

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[32] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Introduction', *'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination, c.1885-1965- The Rise and Decline of the Idea of a Lost Hindu Empire, De Gruyter Oldenbourg,* (2022), 2. She also argue that the framework of 'Greater India' gathered pace around the swadeshi movement in Bengal.

[33] See 'The Journal of the Greater India Society', *Vol XI, No.1, Calcutta,* (1944). It underlines the society's objectives. Although, this volume was published long after the foundation of the society in 1926. Still the aims highlighted in the journal adds to our understanding of how they wanted to promote their agenda and given the large volume of work published in this journal, it gives us ample amount of space to historically analyze their works within a nationalist framework.

religious side of the argument or whether the idea of 'Greater India' was promoted to culturally signify the civilizing power of the nation and put India into the world map as a leader for advocating a pan Asian identity. In either way, it took the shape of formulating national narratives and created a debatable space for historians to study the concept from a nationalistic framework.

The driving force behind promoting the Greater India Society's purpose were the nationalist writers (mentioned in the previous section) and historians who extensively travelled and studied the intriguing connections and evidence related to the Hindu influence in different parts of the Asian continent that fueled the idea of a 'Greater India.' They contributed to the society by the means of publishing their research and experiences which were largely influenced by the experts in the field of Indology like Sylvain Lévi and notable personalities such as Rabindranath Tagore. The scope of these scholars' work varied based on the geographical territory, language, heritage, and religion they intend to investigate. The works of these scholars will be discussed in detail in the coming sections to understand the different approaches and historiography towards construction of national narratives based on the idea of 'Greater India.'

1.3 The Accounts of Kalidas Nag and R.C Majumdar

Kalidas Nag, one of the most prominent writers and historian of the twentieth century contributed to our understanding of the concept of 'Greater India' and was one of the founding members of the Greater India Society. He earned his post-graduate from University of Calcutta and completed his doctorate from University of Paris. As a student in Calcutta, he was exposed to the intellectual world where he was introduced to the likes of Tagore. He was a great admirer of Tagore as the poet helped Nag's intellectual development and introduced him as a potential student to the prominent French Indologist Sylvain Lévi.[34] Recall from the introduction that Nag was seen as one of the Bengal's most prominent historians, Nag's perception of the 'Greater India' concept has attracted scholarly attention which requires detailed examination of his methods and frameworks that he used to generate national narratives.[35] Nag's 1926 'The Study in Indian Internationalism' is one of his most influential works of Nag. The work challenges the perception of the western scholars regarding their view towards the unsystematic

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[34] Yorim Spoelder, 'An 'Indian Hermes' Between Paris and the Pacific: Kalidas Nag, Greater India and the Quest for a Global Humanism',169.

[35] See for example: Yorim Spoelder, 'An 'Indian Hermes' Between Paris and the Pacific: Kalidas Nag, Greater India and the Quest for a Global Humanism' and Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode.'

national history of India. In response to this perception, Nag attempted to shed light on the role of Indian culture that played a crucial part in the development of not only the eastern but western part of the world throughout centuries. Although, in doing so he 'identifies the paradox as to why the Indian diaspora never developed a tradition of national history which track to the reasons of lack of political cohesion and oriental fatalism.'[36] Therefore, he urges to revive Indian culture by focusing on the contributions of India towards international history. He acknowledges 'the role of internationalism as a key to the national evolution of the country that focused more on eternal philosophy of existence and non-existence as compared to other civilizations (such as ancient Babylonia and Egypt).'[37] He believed that for a large period of time, India neglected its national history and focused on field of philosophy throughout centuries that resulted into the controversial perception of India's isolation by the Western world which required scholarly attention. He substantiated the need to develop a framework where India should look beyond its territorial boundaries to realize the great power it once was. Nag extensively focused on the relations India had not only within the Asian subcontinent but also with the Western world.

Moreover, he contextualized the philosophical influence of India in that spread across the world. For instance, 'the discovery of the inscriptions of Boghaz-Kuei that mentioned the existence of the Vedic gods (Indra, Mitra and Varuna) in the land of Cappadocia in 14th century [BCE] further strengthens the argument of the religious expansion of Indian culture in western and central Asia.'[38] Nag strongly argued that the finding of the inscriptions was a 'landmark in the history of Indian internationalism where the Indian gods acted as a peace maker in the Western world and therefore, it promoted the notion of peace and spiritual unity.'[39] Moreover, this idea of India's contribution to international history expanded to the great legacy of the emperor Asoka who according to Nag, 'spread the Indian values of righteousness and 'Dharma' that influenced the empires in Greece, Persia and even Mongolia.'[40] Nag asserts the strategy of

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[36] Kalidas Nag, 'A study in Indian Internationalism' *Greater India, Book Centre, Bombay*, 1960 (1926), 117. He emphasized on the lack of attention by Hindu's towards developing a national history and focusing largely on integrating aesthetic disciplines into their art and culture that created a spiritual belief.

[37] See, Kalidas Nag 'A study in Indian Internationalism', 118. At that time, the Indians added economics and jurisprudence to Indian science of equity and ethics that resulted into Dharma shastras with Dharma (religion) as the mainstay of her secular history. This was quoted by Nag in his work on internationalism.

[38] See, Kalidas Nag, ''A study in Indian Internationalism', 119. He states that this discovery by the German archaeologist Hugo Winckler in 1907 led to the explosion of the isolation theory. He cited C.F Dr. Sten Konow work on 'The Aryan Gods of the Mitanni people' Modern Review (1921), to expand his theory of Indian internationalism.

[39] Ibid, 120.

[40] For more detailed account on the influential role of Asoka in these empires, See, Kalidas Nag, 'A study in Indian Internationalism' 124-125.

Asoka where he studies the emperor's decision to send his missionaries of humanism to other parts of the world. This included Syria, Egypt (under Ptolemy Philadelphos), Macedonia and to Epirus (under Alexander). Consequently, according to Nag, it led to the humanization of politics for the first time in history and symbolized India's status as a carrier of peace and progress under the rule of Asoka. He argued that this philosophy of true internationalism symbolically united Asia, Africa, and Europe.[41] In analysis, Nag's vision of a 'Greater India' transcended the Asian boundaries and created a spiritual influence on the different cultures existing in the ancient world. This was also evident in the argument made by Yorim Spoelder in his work 'Kalidas Nag, Greater India, and the Quest for a Global Humanism' where he examines the orientation of Nag's writing beyond the Asia. He states that 'Nag's schemes were fully invested in the civilizational discourse of 'East' and 'West' and steeped in historicism.'[42] The image built by Kalidas Nag of 'Greater India' strongly hold its essence of establishing cultural connection. It largely aligns with the theory of cultural diffusion that became central in the arguments made by the Bengali scholar. It appears that Nag promoted the historical image of India as a bringer of intellectual and cultural cooperation. He wanted to portray India as a peace maker for all the mayhem in the West and promoted the 'Greater India' notion as a pathway to spread the influence of Indian culture all over the world. He viewed the Greater India Society as a perfect platform to disseminate his internationalist ideology and educate young minds regarding the cultural influence India had over the past centuries where art and literature played crucial role in the cultural overlap with Southeast Asia.

The question remains whether Nag advocated strongly for promoting intellectual and cultural influence of India where spirituality and humanism were at the core of the idea. If so, it is appropriate to associate his ideas within the nationalistic framework of promoting a 'Hindu' national identity. It is crucial to remember that his vision of 'Greater India' went beyond the Asian boundaries and he was an adamant disciple of the Tagore school of humanism that believed in the concept of universalism and that humanity above all is the key for creating national identities. Spoelder states that 'Nag occupies an ambivalent position in an intellectual trajectory that connects the visionary ramblings of Tagore and the legacies of colonial

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[41] Kalidas Nag, 'A study in Indian Internationalism', 127. This seems that nag played the concept of Greater India expansion and civilizing mission on the front of humanity and spirituality.

[42] Yorim Spoelder, 'An 'Indian Hermes' Between Paris and the Pacific: Kalidas Nag, Greater India and the Quest for a Global Humanism'. *In South Asia Unbound, 5, Amsterdam University Press,* (2023), 167. He wrote an extensive account on Kalidas Nag's findings and believed that Nag was one of the key driving forces behind the Greater India movement that helped Calcutta turn into the South Asian node of a trans imperial knowledge network.

archaeology with the appropriative rhetoric of the RSS [Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist body that emerged in the early twentieth century].'[43] Spoelder argues along similar lines that 'Nag was not a typical Hindu nationalist and several of his ideologies on the 'Greater India' concept turned out to be philosophical at most.'[44] On the contrary, it is essential to argue that the influence of Hindu colonization and Buddhist philosophical imprints on Asian culture becomes evident in Nag's writings in the 1920s, where he actively promotes the idea that India placed significant emphasis on the instruments of human progress such as art, literature, philosophy and religion. He explicitly uses the terms 'Hindu renaissance' and 'Cultural Colonization' to depict the establishment of Hindu colonies in Southeast Asia, signifying the dominance of Hindu and Buddhist cultural thought that facilitated the assimilation by great ancient civilization transcending territorial boundaries.

The reference made to the Asokan reign as a marker for India's progress provides one of the examples of how Nag had used the historical source (in this case, Asokan inscriptions) to establish a claim for India's glorified past. Furthermore, in the same study that Nag focused on in 1926, he referred to another set of inscriptions that were found on Java and in Champa (modern-day Vietnam), which stemmed from the 3rd century CE. In this analysis, Nag looked at the emergence of sea and land routes as a vital way of proving the reach of Brahminical and Buddhist imprints in the inscriptions of Java and Champa.[45] This led Nag to argue that in the first movement of the expansion, the Indians had a considerable influence in the regions of Pegu, Burma, Malaya, and Java. The use of this historical source formed the basis of Nag's assertion of a 'Greater India.' Moreover, it is arguable that Nag portrayed this assertion in the form of the establishment of Hindu colonies in Southeast Asia. This was crucial in the formation of a Hindu narrative that emerged out of the writing of Nag in the early twentieth century. To provide briefly his view from his account, Nag states that 'the second cultural colonization was in the 5th century A.D. where not only Champa and Cambodge were thoroughly Hinduised, but fresh Hindu colonies appeared in the Malay Peninsula, Laos and Sumatra. In this grand epoch of (…) Hindu renaissance, we find Brahmanism and Buddhism

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[43] Yorim Spoelder, 'An 'Indian Hermes' Between Paris and the Pacific: Kalidas Nag, Greater India and the Quest for a Global Humanism', 182.

[44] Ibid, 182.

[45] Kalidas Nag, 'A study in Indian Internationalism',142. He quotes Prof. Paul Pelliot research on the evidence found in the inscriptions of Java tracing the influence of Brahmanic and Buddhist ideas. Pelliot also discovers that India appears in the history of Funan (ancient Cambodia) which fuels the argument of an intense cultural colonization that Nag tried to depict.

flourishing peacefully in these cultural colonies of India in South-eastern Asia. '[46] Nag's perception of 'Greater India' emphasized both the cultural and religious dimensions of this ideology. However, it aligns with the nationalist framework as it not only reinforces the Hindu aspect of the argument but also attempts to foster a sense of Asian solidarity due to the significant cultural influence observed in Asian countries.

Ramesh Chandra Majumdar was a prominent Indian historian that focused extensively on the study of ancient Indian colonies in Southeast Asia. He was also a member of the Greater India Society and provided several accounts in the Journals of the Society in the 1930s. He was from Bengal and started his academic career in the study of Ancient India. He expanded his study field from the regional history of Bengal to the political and cultural influence of India in Southeast Asia. Along with Nag, he was an expert on the subject of the Indian colonization of Southeast Asia and published works related to the conquest of great empires on the Malay Peninsula and the linguistic links featured in the script of Malayans and Indo-Aryans. The research carried out by Majumdar was published in the Journal of the Greater India Society in 1936 where he deals with the linguistic similarities of the Malayans with some of the primitive tribes of Indian culture.[47] He also delivered a series of lectures on the 'Ancient Indian Colonization in South-East Asia' in 1955 (post-independence period) as he received an invitation from the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda. In contrast to Nag's more subtle approach towards emphasizing Hindu elements within 'Greater India', Majumdar approached the concept by straight out associating it with the term 'Hindu colonization.' He does not shy away from referring to the establishment of the colonies on the Malay peninsula, Sumatra, and Java as 'Hindu' colonies as he believes that the term 'Hindu' appropriately defined the population of India in earlier times.[48] This analysis is also evident in the work of Zabarsakite where she argues that 'Majumdar in his first lecture on the Background of Hindu Colonization made it clear that 'Greater India' was the achievement of Hindus. He uses the term 'Hindu' (derived from the river Sindhu) in a geographical sense to claim that at the time of 'Hindu Colonization', Islam was not involved in the process, therefore, completely excluding the Muslims from his narratives.'[49] Defining the concept of 'Greater India' as a form of total

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[46] See, Kalidas Nag, 'A study in Indian Internationalism', 142-143.

[47] R.C Majumdar, 'The Malay', *The Journal of the Greater India Society, Vol III, Calcutta,* (1936), 86-96.

[48] See the lectures by R.C Majumdar, 'Ancient Indian Colonization in South-East Asia' *B.J. Sandesara, Oriental Institute, Baroda,* (1955), 3-4.

[49] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'The Decline, Revival and Afterlife of 'Greater India' c.145-1965', 358.

'Hindu Colonization' plays into a religious narrative that Majumdar either intentionally or unintentionally propagated.

Majumdar viewed the 'Greater India' idea through not only cultural but also from a political lens where grand Hindu empires of India spread their conquests in the far east of the Asian subcontinent (there remains archaeological evidence and inscriptions that are found in the far east that provide links to the establishment of powerful empires in the colonies). These notions of 'Hindu' conquests are evident in Majumdar's writings which were published in the society journals.[50] Majumdar advocated the theory that in the eight century CE a powerful Hindu kingdom named the Sailendra Empire ruled over major part of the Malay Peninsula. This theory was based on the examination of four inscriptions (The Ligor Inscription, Kalasan Inscription, The Kelurak Inscription and The Nalanda copper plate Inscription) that were found in Malaysia which according to Majumdar, was crucial to prove that there was a Hindu influence in Southeast Asia in the form of powerful kingdom of Sailendra. He states that 'during the last quarter of the eight century A.D the petty Hindu kingdoms of Sumatra, Java and Malay Peninsula had all to succumb to or feel the weight of this new power. The Sailendra's ushered in a new epoch in more sense than one. For the first time in history Malaysia, or the greater part of it, constituted a political entity as integral parts of an empire'.[51] This demonstrates that Majumdar traced the establishments through a political spectrum where he focused on the conquest of Hindu kingdoms in Southeast Asia. Once again, the incorporation of inscriptions in the work of Majumdar adds to the understanding of how historical sources were used to assert the establishments of Hindu kingdoms abroad, and thus construct a national narrative in which India is a great civilizing power.

In the 1920s, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, one of the founding members of the society, painted a glorious picture of India's past and trusted that the society's vision of constructing the idea of 'Greater India.' He quotes that 'Greater India was an achievement of the glorious days of India's history and forms one of its most beautiful chapters. Unlike the rest of the world, India extended her spiritual dominion and founded her cultural colonies through peaceful methods. If we agree that the past is of no small importance in the formation of a wider outlook of the youths of the country, and if, after all, a true interpretation of the past history of a nation is

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[50] See, R.C Majumdar, 'Sailendra Empire (up to the end of the Tenth century A.D.)', *The Journal of the Greater India Society, Vol.1 (1934)*, 11-27. According to him, the Sailendra kingdom were great promoters of Mahayana Buddhism that had influences of Hinduism as well in the region of Java in 8th century.
[51] Ibid, 15.

necessary for vindicating its amour-propre, the Greater India Society will have a justification for its coming to existence.'[52]

It appears that Kalidas Nag and R.C Majumdar were primordial nationalists. Based on their writings and emphasis on the cultural and religious aspects of Indian civilization, it is more accurate to align them with the primordial nationalist approach which focuses on a nationalist perspective that emphasizes the ancient and historical roots of a nation or community to strengthen the sense of national identity and promote unity among the people. The definition surrounding the concept of primordial nationalist and other forms associated with the complex process is mentioned in the work of Nakul Kundra on 'Understanding Nation and Nationalism' where he states that 'the primordialists favor the antiquity and naturalness of nations where nationality is an integral part of human life. On the other hand, modernists posit that nations and nationalisms are the outcome of modernity and have been created as means to political and economic end'[53]. Furthermore, Ronald Grigor Suny contributed to our understanding of the primordial nationalism where he explains that to the primordial nationalists 'the primordial base of the nation is rooted in its genetic makeup, which is then reflected in its cultural production. Nation is not a choice but a given.'[54] This explains the foundation of primordial thinking which emphasizes the shared cultural roots as a key factor for nation-building. In context of colonial India, Chetan Bhatt gives a more detailed analysis of primordial nationalist theory within the notion of Hindu nationalism. He states that 'an overarching framework that served to provide ideological coherence for the idea of a primordial nationalism, primarily defined through an invention of archaic Vedic Hinduism, mainly gained force from the nineteenth century.'[55] Further, he argues that 'primordialism, here refers to the cultivation of primordialist thinking that gave shape and coherence to ideas of 'national unity' framed through discourses of archaic Hindu civilization, and which was instrumental in the concomitant development of the power of regional, vernacular and caste elites.'[56]

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[52] See, Kalidas Nag. 'Greater India', *Book Centre, Bombay,* 1960 (1926), 189-190. In this compilation of works from different authors, there is a segment on 'India and China' written by P.C Bagchi from which this statement has been cited.

[53] Nakul Kundra, 'Understanding Nation and Nationalism', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies, Vol.21*, (2019), 132. This definition of primordial and modern nationalist is cited from the work of Umut Ozkirimli on 'Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction'.

[54] Ronald Grigor Suny, 'Constructing Primordialism: Old Histories for New Nations', *The Journal of Modern History 73*, (2001), 889.

[55] Chetan Bhatt, 'Hindu nationalism: Origins, ideologies and modern myths', *Routledge*, (2020), 10.

[56] Ibid, 10.

The above-mentioned academic debate surrounding the theory of primordial nationalism suggests that Nag, Majumdar and other writers of the society were primordialists who constructed national narratives on the basis of highlighting India's strong cultural roots that influenced and civilized other cultures in Asia. The national discourse surrounding this idea of 'Greater India' brought out the nationalistic agenda forwarded by these twentieth century writers. Therefore, it will not be unsubstantiated to argue that the scholars who contributed to the society's vision played a crucial role in writing accounts on 'Greater India' that constructed national narratives in the early twentieth century. Moreover, it becomes intriguing to explore from whom did these Greater India writers derived inspiration from and how did the works of European nationalist writers influence the vision of the Greater India Society and vice-versa. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2- The Reinterpretation of the French Savants' Vision by the Greater India Society Writers

The idea of 'Greater India' was constructed on the notion of establishing India as an epitome of civilizing power that would challenge the Western perception of India's isolation in the ancient period. The nationalist writers such as Kalidas Nag and R.C. Majumdar whose ideas have been discussed in detail in the previous sections, have provided a strong framework (along with other scholars of the Greater India Society) to create a vision of a glorious Indian cultural civilization of the past. Moreover, the Greater India Society writers hoped to promote this idea of a 'Greater India' to connect with the people of the nation in the hope of establishing a national identity that they could affiliate with. They thought such an attempt required extensive research to identify India as a powerful ancient civilization that influenced other cultures and places. This research on such a vast field was not a result of efforts by the Indian historians and scholars alone. Instead, several European, often of French origin, contributed to the idea of 'Greater India.' In this chapter, I attempt to focus on the contribution of the French scholars in the study of 'Greater India' and how they were appreciated or received within the Greater India Society. Renowned scholars such as Sylvain Lévi, Jean Przyluski (1885-1944) and many others played a prominent role in promoting the idea that largely inspired the Indian writers who were working on this concept in the twentieth century. By investigating the interplay between the interpretations of Indian writers and the influences of French savants, this chapter seeks to shed light on the dynamic process through which the Greater India narrative evolved and found its place within the broader context of Indian nationalist thought.

The question that needs to be addressed is that to what extent the Indian scholars incorporated the works of French savants on 'Greater India' in order to gain legitimacy in the formation of national narratives. It is important to consider the role played by these scholars as an influence on the work of Indian writers. Therefore, it requires attention to examine the role of specifically French writers in the Greater India Society from a different perspective. Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tine reflects on the impact French Indologists such as Sylvain Lévi and Jean Przyluski had on Greater India writers such as Kalidas Nag and P.C Bagchi. According to Stolte and Fischer-Tine, 'Nag and Bagchi derived their concept of Asia from European academic discourses, although they did not draw from the German and English Orientalism prevalent in British India, but rather from the autonomous French variety.'[57] It remains to be explored in

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[57] See, Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tine, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905-1940), *Comparative studies in Society and History*, (2012), 86. This was because the Indian writers

what ways did scholars in the field of Indology, such as Sylvain Lévi, conducted their research to introduce the Western world to the richness of Indian culture. Regardless of the intention behind their work, these European writers were highly respected and acknowledged in the journals of the Greater India Society, which adds an intriguing aspect to the main argument of viewing the concept of 'Greater India' within a nationalist framework that led to the formation of a 'Hindu' national identity.

2.1 The Influence of Sylvain Lévi

The vision of Sylvain Lévi takes a crucial place in our understanding of how the Greater India thinkers were influenced by foreign thinkers. Lévi was a French scholar and Indologist, who made groundbreaking progress in examining the cultural significance of a country like India which was largely unknown to the Western world. His travels to Southeast Asia to explore the connections between the different cultures have been widely admired and received warmly by the Indian nationalist writers of the twentieth century. Lévi's scholarly works, such as 'Acvaghosa, Le Sutralamkara et ses sources' and 'Abel Bergaigne et l'Indianisme', offer crucial insights into early visions of India's profound civilizational prowess. Nevertheless, a limitation of this thesis is the inability to directly interpret the French primary sources mentioned above. Nonetheless, it provides an alternative perspective by examining how the writers of the Greater India Society interpreted and assimilated the visions of Lévi and other French scholars to shape Greater India narratives within a national framework. This examination primarily revolves around scrutinizing the content of the Journals published by the Greater India Society and discerning how Indian writers incorporated the ideas of Lévi and others to construct national narratives. This approach assumes central importance as it aids in comprehending how Indian writers not only interpreted but also derived inspiration from the works of French scholars to validate their own viewpoints.

After the death of Sylvain Lévi in 1935, the Greater India Society issued a journal which included a section of articles that were published as a tribute to the great French savant. In this journal, Rabindranath Tagore wrote a piece 'In Memoriam' as a marker of tribute and respect. He expressed his gratitude towards Lévi as 'one of the very few European scholars who accepted to impart valuable teachings of Indian culture and historical methods to young Indian

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appreciated the cultural diffusion theory of the French Savants compared to the evolution paradigm promoted by other European scholars in particular. Also see for further explanation, Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India;' French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode'.

scholars in Tagore's widely popular ashram named 'Shantiniketan.'[58] Furthermore, Greater India writers such as Kalidas Nag and P.C Bagchi were ardent disciples of Lévi. In the society's journal published in 1936, Nag had written an extensive account on the various volumes of work that Lévi had done in the field of Indology. 'In 'Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology', Nag reflects on the journey of the French scholar towards contributing to an idea of 'Greater India.'[59] He acknowledges and admires Sylvain Lévi's commitment and passion in promoting and decoding Indian religious texts, particularly the Vedas. Lévi's notable focus on the influence of Hindu drama and epics demonstrates his keen interest in exploring diverse aspects of Indian culture. His dedication of interpreting Sanskrit and Pali texts further exemplifies his pursuit of conducting comprehensive studies on the rich Sino-Indian cultural connections. Within the publication, Nag intend to provide the scholarly background of Lévi in order to depict the foundation that led the French scholar towards pursuing the dynamic aspects of Indian history. He states that 'Sylvain Lévi entered the arena of Indian studies just one century after its inauguration: 1784 witnessed the foundation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal under the initiative of Sir William Jones and in 1884 we find Sylvain Lévi sitting at the feet of Abel Bergaigne, one of the rarest types of the teachers of Sanskrit in Europe.'[60] He further argues that 'India and not Iran was the pre-destined sphere of Lévi's work. And thus, we find him preparing for his memorable researches under the instruction of his master, Bergaigne. Lévi learned his elements of Sanskrit rhetoric and prosody not from academic Indian treatises on the subject but from concrete epigraphical documents discovered in Cambodge.'[61] It is important to mention that Nag acknowledged the notion that the field of Indology was gathering pace as he argues that 'It is not only the physical wealth but the cultural and spiritual legacy of India that is attracting Europe. This orientation of the oriental outlook is as mysterious as, and coincides strikingly with, the startling declaration of American Independence and the epoch-making phenomenon of the French revolution.'[62] It suggests that such an outlook towards acknowledging the varied dimensions of the Indian history led to

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[58] See, 'The Journal of The Greater India Society' *Calcutta, Vol. III* (1936). This journal was published after the death of Lévi and contained some of the articles that were inspired by the work of Lévi. For example, see R.C Majumdar, 'The Malay', (1936), 86-97. Also see Kalidas Nag, 'Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology', (1936), 3-17. These works were published in the same journal as a means of dedicating the work of Lévi.

[59] Kalidas Nag,' Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology', *The Journal of the Greater India Society, Calcutta, Vol. III* (1936), 3-17.

[60] Ibid, 3.

[61] Kalidas Nag, 'Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology', 6.

[62] Ibid, 4.

several scholars such as Lévi himself, involved in studying the Indian history beyond the realms of politics and economics and delving into its cultural aspects.

Nag explicitly quotes Lévi's vision of Indian history where he states that 'from Persia to the Chinese Sea, from the icy regions of Siberia to the islands of Java and Borneo, from the Oceanea to Socotra, India has propagated her beliefs, her genius, her tales and her civilization. She has left indestructible imprints on one-fourth of the human race in the course of a long succession of centuries. She has the right to reclaim, in universal history, the rank that ignorance has refused her for a long time and to her place amongst the great nations, summarizing and symbolizing the spirit of humanity.'[63] This perception of Lévi shows an idea of 'Greater India' that transcends the territorial boundaries of India itself and inherits the spirit of humanity and universalism as its core ideologies. Such a vision of 'Greater India' aligns with the writings of Nag where he explicitly mentions the idea of Indian cultural civilization going beyond the notion of territorial and political boundaries and emphasize on the philosophy of humanism. Susan Bayly also aligned with the argument where she mentions that 'Nag clearly saw the above quote as a key summation of Lévi's genius as an interpreter of India's historic civilizing mission beyond the Ganges, which in Nag's reading propounded a visionary account of a personified female India acting through history as a purposeful and universalizing cultural essence.'[64] Lévi took the task of interpreting Indian culture for Europe which mainly focused on this grand vision of 'Magna India' that was conceptually close to the narrative of 'Greater India' as propagated by the writers of the Greater India Society. This usage of the term 'Magna India' appealed to the Indian scholars as it is evident in the memorial written by Nag where he expresses gratitude to the French scholars 'who widened the horizon of Indian history which is not circumscribed by the modern political delimitation of India.'[65] Bayly added to the argument that the approach taken by the French scholars was widely appreciated within the group of several Calcutta polemicists as it 'defined the 'Indic' in a way that subsumed virtually the whole of Buddhist and Hindu-Buddhist east and southeast Asia into the purview of Indian

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[63] Kalidas Nag, 'Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology', 12. This same quote has been used in Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 722-723. She also examines the role of European writers such as Sylvain Lévi in the Greater India Society and explicitly argued on similar lines regarding the influence Lévi's ideas had on nationalist writers such as Nag and Bagchi. She uses this passage of Lévi as a reference point today in both Hindu supremacist and 'secular' nationalist thinking.
[64] Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 723.
[65] See, Nag, 'Sylvain Lévi and the Science of Indology' 6. He also mentions the names of Burnouf and Bergaigne in contributing towards depicting the image of India as a vast civilization that expanded cultural boundaries through Hinduism and Language affiliations.

civilizational study.'[66] According to her, 'the focus on establishing strong connection in the East was a key cultural marker of the Bengal region. This became a crucial reason to explain why Nag and other thinkers were so receptive to the work of Lévi and other French scholars as Bayly argued that these writings could be taken as glorifications of ancient Indians in general and Bengalis in particular as dynamic voyagers, adventurers and civilizers rather than the dreaming, other worldly mystics portrayed in much anglophone scholarship.'[67] This viewpoint held by Bayly strengthen the argument of the great reception and influence, the works of French scholars had on the writings of Greater India thinkers.

Jean Przyluski, a French linguist, was another great European scholar whose ideas were appreciated by members of the Greater India Society. In the inaugural volume of the journal published by the Greater India Society, an article by Przyluski stands out as a significant contribution. 'It delves into the influence of Indian philosophy on Western thought during the third century A.D.'[68] This seminal work marked the beginning of a collection of publications that the society aimed to produce, serving as a foundation for comprehending the profound philosophical concepts mentioned in the Upanishads and their supposed impact on the Graeco-Roman world. The examination of this influence assumed paramount importance as it establishes a strong framework for tracing the often-neglected impact of Indian thought on Western intellectual traditions. 'Within this study, Przyluski delves into the life of Plotinus, a Hellenistic Platonist philosopher, and illuminates how Plotinus integrated Indian ascetic ideas into Western thought, ultimately leading to the development of the philosophy of Neo-Platonism. This investigation is conducted through an extensive exploration of the travels and experiences of Mani, an Iranian prophet who introduced Indian universal concepts of Hindu asceticism and mysticism into the Western world.'[69] Przyluski considers this fusion of ideas as crucial in establishing a connection and unity between the East (the Orient) and the West. Further, he states that 'an interchange of ideas is established between the East and the West. Indian asceticism colors the dualism of Mani and the monism of Plotinus. Thanks to these two powerful spirits moral bonds were established between Rome and the distant Orient.'[70]

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[66] Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 718. She used the term 'Polemicists' to refer to the Greater India writers and reflect on the controversial nature of the debate surrounding 'Greater India' that these writers' comment on.

[67] Ibid, 718-19.

[68] Jean Przyluski, 'Indian Influence on Western thought before and during the third century A.D.' *The Journal of the Greater India Society, Calcutta, Vol. I* (1934), 1-10.

[69] Jean Przyluski, 'Indian Influence on Western thought before and during the third century A.D.' 6-10

[70] Ibid, 10.

Consequently, it served as a significant stepping stone in building the concept of a 'Greater India.'

Przyluski also dedicated a memorial to Sylvain Lévi, who he deeply admired, in the Journal of Greater India Society in 1936. He emphasized the approach taken by Lévi to focus on the impact of valuable Indian epics. In the memorial, he quotes Lévi by stating that 'the great epics mark a critical moment for the Indian soul: like the human hero of the Bhagavad-Gita, it was hesitating yet between the exigencies of practical duty, and the seductions of inertia.' He believed that Lévi was the first one to explore the expansion of Indian civilization and argued that it was at the origin of the epic age, that both the continental and the naval expansion of India began. It also allowed Buddhism to spread over different regions of Asia.'[71] The historian Kwa Chong-Guan mentions how Przyluski reflected on the approach of Lévi in the memorial where 'the idea of reconstructing the Indian past of Brahmanism diffusion and embodying of the local was done through the science of onomastics, the linguistic study of how the meanings of proper names change in time and space and social construct.'[72] This exemplified Lévi's methods of exploring the realm of a 'Greater India' that also according to Przyluski, inspired many Indian scholars to adopt this method and review the great vision of India's cultural conquest through a varied perspective.[73]

2.2 The Interpretation of French Scholars Works by The Greater India Society Writers

The influence of French scholars in particular, such as Przyluski and Lévi as mentioned above, on the study of 'Greater India' provides a valuable context in the investigation of how international collaboration was one of the major aims of the Greater India Society. It fostered the spread of the narrative based on rewriting India's cultural past that the society tried to promote. The works of Indian scholars on the ancient Indian colonization gathered credible support from their counterparts and the research of these French scholars showed valuable progress in the debate of a 'Greater India' concept that the Indian (especially the Bengali) thinkers reciprocated with citing their methods and findings. R.C Majumdar and P.C Bagchi, to name a few of the Greater India Society members, were crucial to recognize one of the major

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[71] Jean Przyluski, 'Greater India and the work of Sylvain Lévi', The Journal of the Greater India Society, Vol.III (1936), 18. In this memorial, Przyluski mentions how Lévi have constantly traced the ways for the future study of Greater India. Lévi showed that Ramayana had its origin around the Christian period. He emphasized on the need to determine the age of these epics as a primary task for any historian in order to deconstruct the expansion of the vast Indian culture that included the influence of these epics on other existing cultures.

[72] Kwa, Chong Guan, 'Introduction-Visions of Early Southeast Asia as Greater India' xxiii (23).

[73] See, Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 710.

approaches taken by the French Scholars related to the establishment of a linguistic unity found in the regions of Far East and South Asia. The language approach became central in defining the cultural interaction that stretched from India to Southeast Asia. P.C Bagchi translated a collection of work conducted by Lévi, Przyluski, and the French linguist Jules Bloch (1880-1953) on 'Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India' in 1929 that extensively dealt with the issue of combining several southeastern languages into one single family.[74] Amitabh Bhattacharya in his article on the centenary of Prabodh Chandra Bagchi in 2009 states that 'it may be regarded as a pioneer attempt to present before researchers of this country the pre-Aryan problems of Indian history as viewed by some European savants.'[75]

In this collection of academic research, the argument revolved around establishing the Mon-Khmer language groups into one single linguistic family named 'Austro-Asiatic.' This finding was a vital step towards proving the expansion of the Indian culture in the far east. Both Bagchi and Majumdar extended their support to the theory of Mon-Khmer languages subsiding from the larger group of Austro-Asiatic languages. According to Bagchi, 'the Munda and Khasi tribes of central and northeastern India characterizes with the usage of similar linguistic notions that can be found in the Mon-Khmer linguistic group which predominantly existed in Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, and even on some of the Indonesian Islands.'[76] This linguistic interaction directs towards the main argument of associating these groups into one single 'Austro-Asiatic' language family. Therefore, it creates not only a linguistic effect but also a cultural impact in several regions where scholars put India at the origin of these linguistic and cultural developments. Bagchi explained the different methods used by the French scholars to further deconstruct the narrative where he states that Przyluski has tried to explain a certain number of words of the Sanskrit vocabulary as fairly ancient loans from the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. He also studied the Mahabharata story of Matsya Gandha in the Indian epic literature and connected them with similar tales in the Austro-Asiatic domain that led to the belief that these stories and legends were mostly conceived in the regions near the sea.

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[74] Sylvain Lévi, Jean Przyluski and Jules Bloch, 'Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India', Translated by Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, *University of Calcutta, Second Impression,* 1975 (1929), 1-184. The original French edition was published in 1929.

[75] Amitabha Bhattacharyya, 'Prabodh Chandra Bagchi: As an Indologist', India and Asia- P.C Bagchi Centenary Volume, edited by B.N Mukherjee, *Kolkata, Progressive Publishers*, (2009), 29. In this collection of works on P.C Bagchi, it mentions his area of interests regarding the field of Greater India. According to this volume, Bagchi was a true disciple of Sylvain Lévi. He believed that the driving force behind the exteriority of Indian culture was Buddhism which left valuable imprints on world thought and philosophy.

[76] See, S.K Chatterjee and P.C Bagchi, 'Introduction', Pre-Aryan and Pre-Dravidian in India, i-xix. This is the introduction part of the book written by Lévi and other French savants which was translated by Bagchi.

Moreover, Bagchi also examines the argument of Lévi where he tried to show that some of geographical names of ancient India like Kosala-Tosala and Anga-Vanga can be found in the morphological system of the Austro-Asiatic languages.[77] These arguments show different approaches taken by Lévi, and Przyluski towards defining the expansion of Indian culture. On one hand, Przyluski focused on the linguistic vocabulary in establishing the connection of Austro-Asiatic group, while Lévi examined the cultural and political facts of the ancient history of India that can be explained by admitting an Austro-Asiatic element.[78] This claim is also evident in the 1936 article published in the Greater India Society journal by R.C Majumdar on 'The Malay' which has been discussed earlier. Majumdar also examined this approach by 'tracing the migration of the Austro-Asiatic tribes from India to different regions of the South east Asia, especially Malaysia.'[79] In this work, the origin of the Malay tribe and the examination of its migration to different regions through land and sea, covers a debatable space in the study of 'Greater India' that Majumdar tried to explore.

The prominent observation made by Sylvain Lévi that gathered admiration and great scholarly attention was shown in the statement where he quotes that 'India has been too exclusively examined from the Indo-European standpoint. It ought to be remembered that India is a great maritime country, open to a vast sea forming so exactly its Mediterranean, a Mediterranean of proportionate dimensions- which for a long time was believed to be closed on the south. The movement which carried the Indian colonization towards the Far East, probably about the beginning of the Christian Era was far from inaugurating a new route, as Columbus did in navigating towards the west. Adventures, traffickers and missionaries profited by the technical progress of navigation, and followed under the best condition of comfort and efficiency the way traced from times immemorial by the mariners of another race whom the Aryan or Aryanised India despised as savages.'[80] In other words, India did not discover Southeast Asia and then colonize it. There had been connections for centuries, and only around the first century CE did India expand into this area. Majumdar analyzed this viewpoint as a crucial framework of defining the starting phase of the connections between the Indian peninsula and Southeast

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[77] Ibid, xii-xiii. Bagchi also analyzed Jules Bloch argument in the book where he states that Bloch has criticized the position of those who stand exclusively for Dravidian influence and has proved that the question of the Munda substratum in Indo-Aryan cannot be overlooked.
[78] Ibid, xii.
[79] R.C Majumdar, 'The Malay', 86-96.
[80] This famous observation is cited in both Majumdar's work and P.C Bagchi translated version. See, R.C Majumdar, 'The Malay', 88-89. And Sylvain Lévi, Jean Przyluski and Jules Bloch, 'Pre Aryan and Pre-Dravidian India', 125.

Asia from a time prior to the arrival of the Aryans and the Dravidians in the third and second millennium BCE. He elaborated the theory that with 'the advent of Aryans in the Indian subcontinent, the primitive settlers were forced out to look for new settlements across the seas.'[81] Susan Bayly also commented on this linguistic approach and believed that it was a major success amongst the Greater India Society members. She believes that French savants promoted a diffusionist theory of cultural change. This meant that cultures spread and influenced each other, rather than in an evolutionist theory in which cultures move up or down a universal ladder of moral and civilizational development.[82] Instead of concentrating on the evolutionist part of cultural colonization, the Bengali thinkers were of this diffusionist school. As Bayly puts it: 'the key attraction of the work of Lévi and his colleagues was clearly this broadening of their interests beyond the supposed predominance of Indo-Europeans, Aryans or 'Aryanized' Indians in the making of Indian or (Hindu) civilization.'[83] This method of approaching the Indian history beyond the Aryan and Dravidian influence was vital in how the Greater India Society wanted to promote the ancient Indian civilization.

Therefore, such assumptions fuel the central idea of a 'Greater India' where the 'Hindu' settlers migrated from India to establish colonies in Southeast Asia. Consequently, it provides a strong framework for the nationalist writers to promote a narrative as argued that suits their national agenda of constructing a 'Hindu' national identity based on the theory of an ancient Indian colonization of Asia. It is arguable that such narratives formulated in the writings of the Greater India thinkers are heavily inspired by the researches and theories of the French scholars who have massively contributed to the Greater India concept. Bayly supported the idea of how the Greater India scholars embedded the French savants' vision of local agency and cultural interaction. Further, she argues that 'the Calcutta polemicists' Greater India vision was a simplified, more narrowly nationalist, and indeed explicitly India-centered account of overseas 'cultural colonization' which favored the Hindu nationalist tellers in a way of distinguishing India's benign civilizing influence in Southeast Asia from a more brutal form of a colonial conquest.'[84] In addition, Zabarsakite also contributed to the debate by revisiting the influence of Lévi on Nag and examining further connection between India and the West. To contextualize her argument, she states that 'The unity of the West and the East in an attempt to letting India establish its humanity was the main theme discussed by the intellectuals in Paris and Calcutta.

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[81] R.C Majumdar, 'The Malay', 89.
[82] Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode', 716.
[83] Susan Bayly, 'Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode', 719.
[84] Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode', 721.

In the circle of both French and Indian Nobel Laureates Romain Rolland (1866-1944) and Rabindranath Tagore, the founders of the Greater India society had generated the narrative of 'Greater India' based on a nationalistic Hindu framework that was at the same time framed as India's Internationalism.'[85] The contribution of this academic research reflects on the overarching theme of the ebbs and flow of ideas between French scholars and the Greater India thinkers of the twentieth century. Therefore, we can safely say that the influence of the French scholars discussed throughout this chapter is evident in the writings of the Greater India Society scholars and to some extent it is fair to assume that the Indian nationalist writers interpreted the vision of the French scholars to legitimize the association of 'Greater India' theory in the process of constructing an Indian national narrative.

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[85] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965' ,143. She also examines the influence of Romain Rolland in the works of Nag and how the French writer played a large role in shaping Nag's approach to 'Greater India'.

CHAPTER 3 – The Association of Greater India with 'Hindu' National Identity

It is crucial to revisit the central narrative that revolves around the creation of 'Hindu' identity in the twentieth century. To achieve this, analyzing the construction of national narratives through different perspectives, which formed the foundation of the Greater India Society, becomes essential. The writings of prominent scholars associated with the society, as discussed earlier, played significant roles in constructing a national. The recurring evidence of the theory of 'Hindu' nationalism within the objectives of the Society provides a pathway for identifying constructed 'Hindu' national narratives that positioned the idea of 'Greater India' as a driving force in reinterpreting India's past. According to Zabarskaite, 'the discursive construction of Indian national identity was based on the category 'Hindu' defined in terms of a geographical origin, and yet based on Hindu cultural achievements that were strictly defined in terms of Hinduism as a superior system of culture and civilization.'[86] Additionally she states that in the twentieth century, the discourse on 'Greater India' attracted large interest among cultural nationalists who attempted to revive an Indian glorious past and to prove that India had been a nation already in ancient times.[87]

In order to examine these narratives, it is important to understand how nationalist writers used historical sources and archaeological evidence (including scriptures, figures, inscriptions) to fit the idea of 'Greater India' within a Hindu nationalist framework. The findings of inscriptions related to powerful Hindu kingdoms in Southeast Asia, the marvelous architectural phenomena of Angkor Vat in Cambodia, and the excavation of figures of Hindu deities like Shiva and Vishnu in the Malay Peninsula, as well as the reliance on knowledge imparted from the Puranas, comprise some of the many historical pieces of evidences studied by the writers of the Greater India Society to establish the notion of a glorified Hindu past associated with the central theme of Greater India. In this chapter, I intend to identify how these archaeological and historical sources related to the foundation of 'Greater India' contribute to the overarching issue of 'Hindu' nationalism which effectively leads to the formation of national narratives. It will also include an examination of how Indian nationalist such as V.D. Savarkar promoted a 'Hindu' national identity within the framework of Greater India.

The underlying notion of the Greater India Society writers promoting 'Hindu' narratives have been addressed carefully by scholars such as Susan Bayly. In her discussion of the idea of a

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[86] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965', 86.
[87] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965', 84.

'Hindu' Greater India, she has provided arguments that favored 'the cultural diffusionist idea by examining the accounts of various Greater India scholars who analyzed the presence of Hindu images and 'Indianized' monuments in all these overseas lands that clearly demonstrates the expansive nature of Hinduism.'[88] However, significant academic interest remains in understanding the prevalent process of historical revisionism in the Greater India writings. Therefore, it is relevant to further examine how the Greater India writers reshaped historical narratives to align with the agenda of creating a national narrative for India during British colonial rule. Moreover, the Greater India Society writers in that period attempted to construct narratives that emphasized India's glorified past.

3.1 The Usage of Historical Sources

The establishment of national narratives hinges on the crucial aspect of relying on justifiable historical sources that offer valuable perspectives, which can be skillfully transformed into well-crafted historical accounts. In the case of 'Greater India', scholars have reinterpreted various historical sources such as religious texts to understand the interaction between Indian culture and its influence in the Southeast Asia. To decode such narratives, let us take a closer look into the publications of the Greater India Society. In one of the issues of the Greater India Society published in 1940, the art historian O.C Gangoly aimed to study the examination of India's cultural contact in the ancient period with Indonesia and other Islands of the Malay Peninsula.[89] The historical approach that he intended to apply focused on studying the nature of the relationship of the 'colonial' Indian culture with the indigenous culture of the colonized. He challenged the underlying idea that people who travelled from India across the sea to establish colonies in the Malay regions from at least first century CE onwards, were second-rate men. Instead, he argued that those who planted the seed of the Indian culture were learned Brahmins who possessed valuable skills and preached Hindu-Buddhist ideologies. He gave importance to the influence of art and architecture as a crucial part of connecting the Indian religious philosophies with the colonized world. He states that 'In the spheres of architecture,

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[88] Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 726. She also stated that in the Greater India writings, the Hindu presence in the far east had to be represented as an inexhaustible cultural force that left a vast imprint in the cultural life of the regions that it transcended. This imprint comprised of the luxuriant themes and images from the temples, texts and devotional iconography of puranic Hinduism that dominated both popular worship and court life in the trans Gangetic lands. This explanation by Bayly enable us to move further with discussion of analysing other forms of historical sources being used to approach the idea of 'Greater India'.
[89] O.C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture', *The Journal of the Greater India Society, Calcutta, Vol.VII,* (1940), 51-69.

sculpture, applied arts, and crafts, the Indian continent must have sent some of its greatest masters to the 'colonies' in order to cater to the artistic needs and to carry out the architectural ambitions of the Indian princes in Indonesia and to fashion innumerable images of the highest sculptural merits, for the use of religious devotees. Borobudur of Java, - the 'Parthenon of the East' and Angkor Vat, the chef d'oeuvre of Cambodia, to name only two of the supreme masterpieces, eclipse anything that has been achieved on the soil of India itself.'[90]

The careful linking of these works of art and architecture with ancient Indian culture serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it provided crucial historical and archaeological evidence that contributes to the theory of 'Greater India'. Secondly, as highlighted by Gangoly, these artistic creations showcase the remarkable skills of individuals who carried the essence of Indian culture and established a strong Hindu-Buddhist influence on the indigenous cultures of these regions. The emphasis placed on the skillful Brahmins who undertook sea voyages invites a closer analysis, suggesting that Gangoly's account of 'Greater India' represents another significant step in substantiating the profound Hindu influence on art and architecture within the colonies.[91] This aligns with the central theme of placing 'Greater India' within a Hindu nationalist framework. Additionally, Gangoly's account, published by the society, includes several references to the Puranas, ancient sacred Brahminical texts. These references add credibility to the concept of 'Greater India' that Gangoly denotes using the term 'Bharatavarsha' which includes nine islands that cannot be satisfactorily identified but are probably located in the Indonesian archipelago. Gangoly's ancient Indian sources including the Puranas also mention different lists of nine islands.[92] Gangoly himself states that the exact identification of these islands is not important for his analysis. His focus in on the content of India's cultural influence, not its exact geographical boundaries.[93]

Further, Gangoly states that 'what we are seeking to establish is that the nine islands of Greater India were regarded as integral part of Bharatavarsha, and an equal sanctity attached to the component parts of Island India, as strongholds of national Indian culture-where Indians lived, fought, traded and performed their religious duties.'[94] He referred to the passage of the Vamana Purana which mentions that 'The nine islands have been sanctified by the performance of sacrifices, by trade and by warfare. Put into modern parlance, the canon of sanctity laid down

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[90] O.C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture', 55-56.
[91] O.C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture' 53.
[92] O.C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture' 56-57.
[93] O.C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture' 58.
[94] Ibid, 59.

in the Vamana Purana would mean, wherever the Indians have lived and rendered their homage to the Divine.'[95] This observation published in the journal is another example of how the Greater India Society writers used historical sources, in this case the Puranas, to construct a Hindu national narrative in the context of Greater India. It indicates that Gangoly made references to the ancient Hindu texts of Puranas to give credibility and legitimacy to the idea of 'Greater India' spreading across the seas. By incorporating these references, Gangoly further reinforces the notion of a 'Greater India' that is associated with Hindu cultural and religious traditions. Through the exploration of these artistic, archaeological, textual sources, Gangoly presents an argument for the existence of 'Greater India' within a 'Hindu' nationalist framework. The convergence of historical, archaeological, and textual evidence strengthens the credibility and significance of this notion, shedding light on the profound Hindu influence experienced by the colonies in the domains of art and architecture. It is fair to assume that such references to religious historical sources provide strong framework to reshape national narratives and assert the creation of a 'Hindu' identity.

3.2 The Case of 'Angkor Vat' and The Hindu National Narratives

The varied interpretations involved in the examination of archaeological and historical evidence are useful to challenge pre-conceived notions. However, the reinterpretation of sources is largely evident in historical accounts that suits the narrative one needs to promote. According to Zabarskaite, 'the discovered and revised archaeological evidence was used as an argument for establishing the claim about ancient Indian influence in Asia.'[96] This observation is central to the study of 'Greater India' and takes up significant space in the discussion of this thesis. To further contribute to the discussion, the famous temple of Angkor Vat in Cambodia became another point in the historical examination of Indian cultural expansion. *The Journal of the Greater India Society* (1940) provides another scholarly account that deals with the examination and re-interpretation of archaeological evidence such as monuments to cement the presence of a supreme Hindu civilization in Southeast Asia. B.R Chatterjee in 'Recent Advances in Kambuja Studies' provides a brief examination on 'the purpose of Khmer

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[95] Ibid, 59. This statement by Gangoly on 'Bharat Varsha' is also evident in Bayly's article on 'Imaging 'Greater India', 727. After exploring the term 'Bharat Varsha' in Gangoly's account, Bayly also argued that this is a key part of his account on 'Greater India that depicts as a domain of exclusively Hindu cultural expansion, a claim for which he uses one of the key Hindu nationalist terms for India, Bharata Varsha.

[96] See, Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965',49. In this, she provides her own historical examination regarding the interpretation of archaeological evidences used by Greater India scholars to prove that India was once a civilizational force in Asia in the past.

monuments and the dynasties that held significant impact over the monuments.'[97] The scholarly debate surrounding the nature of Angkor Vat requires attention and Chatterjee reflects on the issue that undermines the importance of the Vishnu temple of Angkor Vat. He disagrees with the notion of several scholars that see Angkor Vat as a mausoleum built after the death of the monarch 'Suryavarman II' in 1150 CE. Instead, he sided with French archeologists such as 'M. Coedes that established (based on conclusive epigraphical evidence) the site of Angkor Vat as a sacred place where deceased rulers were worshipped under the aspect of divinities of the Brahminical and Buddhist Pantheon.'[98] Chatterjee states that 'Angkor Vat is a Buddhist monastery today. But it was not so in the beginning. The principal image in the central shrine has vanished, but a set of images of the avatars of Vishnu (Narasimha, Varaha, Matsya, etc.) still remains as vestiges of the original statutory of the great Vishnu temple.'[99] This perception held by Chatterjee is also evident in the work of Bayly which has been discussed at length. She observes that 'Chatterjee saw the royal mausoleum argument associated with the historic 'Greater India' site of Angkor Vat as robbing it of its true meaning as a work of translocal Hindu genius. He saw the monument in a quite a different light, that is as a temple for the worship of Khmer kings as the human manifestations of Vishnu, who is revered by Hindus as a personification of kingly ordering power.'[100] Angkor Vat became a site that entailed different scholarly perceptions and this argument made by Chatterjee in the *Journal of the Greater India Society* proved to carry the discussion forward. Therefore, this reinterpretation based on a set of images related to Vishnu aligns with the overall theme as it shows how Chatterjee perceived the archeological evidence to reshape narratives, which is clearly evident in the historical writing on the Hindu cultural expansion. Apart from the varied interpretations involved within the significant structure of Angkor Vat, the site holds crucial importance beyond the re-interpretations of the archaeological evidence to shape narratives. Angkor Vat symbolized the close cultural ties between India and Cambodia that reimagined the significance of the monument within the national framework. Kwa Chong Guan mentions that in 1982 Indira Gandhi (1917-1984), then the prime minister of India, approved the project of Archaeological the Survey of India's archaeologists to study the feasibility and restoration possibility of Angkor Vat. This was initiated by the Cambodian Government led by Heng Samrin to preserve the architectural beauty. The project was led by the Indian archaeologist K.M Srivastava, and

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[97] B.R Chatterjee, 'Recent Advances in Kambuja Studies', *The Journal of t he Greater India Society, Calcutta, Vol.VII,* (1940), 43-50.
[98] B.R Chatterjee, 'Recent Advances in Kambuja Studies', 46.
[99] Ibid, 46
[100] Susan Bayly, ''Imagining 'Greater India'; French and Indian Visions of Colonialism in the Indic Mode' 727.

aimed to survey and report on the feasibility to restore the monument.[101] This suggest that the site of Angkor Vat was seen as of great historical significance to India as it symbolized the genius of Hindu architecture and became central to establish supposed close cultural and historical ties with Cambodia.

It is intriguing to examine such narratives that are evident in the Greater India writings to connect with the broader issue of nationalism. The above-mentioned accounts, out of the vast volume of works published in the journals of the Greater India Society provides a crucial framework to carefully examine the nationalist agendas. This creates an interesting area for debate among scholars. Romila Thapar, an Indian historian, in her 2016 essay 'Reflections on Nationalism and History,' elaborates on the different proponents of nationalism that exists in the form secular, religious, and pseudo-nationalisms. She reflects on the role of history in the narratives formed by these different proponents and goes on to state that 'differences among historians arise when the pseudo-nationalisms exaggerate the importance of a single history of one religious community as being the pre-eminent history of the nation, and denigrate and distort the history of other communities.'[102] This approach of focusing on the historical achievements of one single religious community results in the exclusion of other communities' contribution towards shaping the national identity based on the shared past. Therefore, it is arguable that some of the Indian nationalist writers created a narrative of religious nationalism that largely excluded the influence of Islamic civilization in the theory of 'Greater India.' To support this argument, it is crucial to trace back to the 1955 work of R.C. Majumdar which is already discussed in Chapter 1 in detail where he reaffirms that 'Greater India' is the achievement of Hindus and establishes the supremacy of Hindu civilization that influenced the cultures of Southeast Asia.[103] However, the claim that the Greater India Society writers promoted pseudo and religious nationalism depends on the specific interpretations of different scholars. Such assertions are based on how the Greater India writers perceived historical sources that led them to either promote a nationalist agenda rooted in religious and cultural narratives or concerned solely with the academic examination of historical and cultural interactions.

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[101] Kwa, Chong Guan, 'Introduction-Visions of Early Southeast Asia as Greater India' xxxix.

[102] Romila Thapar, A.G Noorani, Sadanand Menon, 'On Nationalism', (2016). Reflections on Nationalism and History by Romila Thapar is a part of the collection of essays that is printed in this book.

[103] Once again, See the lectures by R.C Majumdar, 'Ancient Indian Colonization in South-East Asia' B.J. Sandesara, Oriental Institute, Baroda, (1955), 3-4.

3.3 Veer Savarkar and The Greater India Narrative

The methods adopted to characterize the Greater India concept leaned towards exploring the cultural and religious framework that was in accordance with 'Hindu' national narratives. Zabarskaite reiterated that 'Greater India was crucially connected with a history of Hindu revivalist nationalism, which seeks to establish a Hindu-inflected political order in India.'[104] The struggle for freedom from colonial rule in the twentieth century underwent a national transformation, with fervent nationalists striving to create a national identity for India based on Hindu supremacy. Veer Savarkar, a politician and dedicated Hindu nationalist, played a central role in instilling nationalist sentiments among the population. He introduced the concept of 'Hindutva' which is a political ideology that intends to develop a national identity which according to him 'rests on three pillars; geographical unity, racial features, and a common culture.'[105] He was also a prominent leader of the Hindu Mahasabha which was a radical Hindu body in the early twentieth century that promoted the concept of 'Hindutva' and strongly supported the idea of turning India into a 'Hindu' nation under the umbrella term of 'Akhand Bharat' (a term used for a unified Greater India). Exploring the works of Savarkar and the writers associated with the Greater India Society becomes intriguing in order to understand how they reshaped national narratives in the early twentieth century.

In general, Savarkar proactively in 1920s mobilized the notion of uniting India under the umbrella of 'Hindu' culture. He proposed a definition of the term 'Hindu' which clearly indicated as to who can be characterized as a 'Hindu.' He stated in his famous 1923 work 'Hindutva- Who is a Hindu' that 'a Hindu means a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland that is the cradle land of his religion.'[106] Savarkar stressed the importance of a shared past where a nation

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[104] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965', 5. Commenting on the cultural element associated with the formation of national narrative, she stated that Indian intellectuals approached the Greater India concept to mobilize Indian who lived abroad and claimed modern Hindu colonies were everywhere. By this, she argued that Greater India was not only a cultural concept that aimed to build national identity but also a political project that intend to establish India's expansion in western countries.

[105] Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Vinayak Damodar Savarkar', Hindu Nationalism: a reader, *Princeton University Press*, (2007), 86. In this chapter, Jaffrelot examines the concept of 'Hindutva' by Savarkar and states that Savarkar minimizes the importance of religion in his definition of a Hindu by claiming that Hinduism is only one of the attributes of 'Hinduness'. This notion reflects on the fact that Savarkar was not himself a believer which attribute to the fact as to why he minimized the religious aspect in his philosophy.

[106] V.D Savarkar, 'Hindutva- Who is a Hindu?', *Hindi Sahitya Sadan, New Delhi,* 2009 (1923). The use of the term 'Bharat Varsha' proposes an intriguing connection of how the Greater India writer, O.C Gangoly referred to the Puranas where the term 'Bharat Varsha' included nine territories across the seas that comprised of Greater India. See again, O.C. Gangoly, 'Relation between Indian and Indonesian Culture', 55-56.

can associate itself with in terms of cultural and geographical unity. This played a crucial role in propagating the beliefs and ideas which drove Hindu nationalism. In addition, Savarkar also touched upon his views on the grand Indian civilization that influenced the ancient cultures of the regions it spread into. He argued to 'let our colonists continue unabated their labors of founding a Greater India, a Mahabharat to the best of their capacities and contribute all that is best in our civilization to the upbuilding of humanity. So long as ye, O Hindus! Look upon Hindusthan as the land of your forefathers and as the land your prophets and cherish the priceless heritage of their culture and blood, so long nothing can stand in the way of your desire to expand. The only geographical limits of Hindutva are the limits of our earth.'[107] This vision of Savarkar's Greater India largely focuses on India as a civilizing nation that extended its cultural influence beyond the seas. He envisaged a concept that transcends geographical boundaries and effectively highlight the importance of shared cultural heritage as one of the crucial factors in establishing national identity. Savarkar's narrative on the ideology of 'Hindutva' collides with establishing India's cultural expansion. Moreover, Zabarskaite analyzed Savarkar's intention to connect the Mahabharata epic with Greater India. She believed that 'by using the title of the epic, it inculcated Hindus with a notion of a common religion, common literature and common tradition through which Savarkar might have sought to imply the greatness of India, which as a unitary entity could achieve a 'Greater India' through the establishment of Hindu colonies outside India.'[108] Therefore, Greater India in Savarkar's view held a prominent role in promoting 'Hindutva' and creating national identity.

Carolien Stolte in her work 'Compass Points: Four Indian Cartographies of Asia' examined various notions surrounding the concept of Asianism. She briefly examined Savarkar's view on the Asian subcontinent where she states that 'Savarkar's cartography of Asia was influenced strongly by Greater India thought, which held that ancient India had played an active role in the cultural and religious development of Southeast Asia through the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism.'[109] The scholarly research on Savarkar's ideology largely focused on how he perceived Asia as a Hindu-Buddhist continent which beyond academic discourse, it took a political turn where Hindu radicals worked towards claiming the notion that Hinduism and

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[107] Ibid, 119.

[108] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965',309. She emphasized that Savarkar did not always translate the Mahabharat as Greater India. Instead, the association of Mahabharat was related to the appropriation of the Mahabharat battle during India's struggle for independence.

[109] Carolien Stolte, 'Compass Points: Four Indian Cartographies of Asia, c.1930-55', In Asianisms: Regionalist Interactions and Asian Integration, *NUS Press*, (2016), 66.

Buddhism were one single entity. According to Vivekanandan, 'no longer an academic figment, Greater India fed directly into the Hindu right's political agenda in 1932 for an independent Hindu India. It was to prove to be convenient vector for the right-wing Hindu Mahasabha's interpretation of Asia as a Hindu-Buddhist geographical entity.'[110] Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tine also contributed briefly to the debate surrounding Savarkar's reimagining of Asia as an extended version of India's cultural civilization. They argued that 'Savarkar maintained a lively correspondence with Rash Behari Bose, who was a Japan based Indian revolutionary. In 1938, Bose wrote to Savarkar that 'The Buddhists are also Hindus, and every attempt should be made to create a Hindu block extending from the Indian Ocean up to the Pacific Ocean.'[111] This appealed to the Hindu Mahasabha in establishing the claim that Asia was a Hindu-Buddhist continent. Therefore, the discourse on Greater India entered a political sphere where ardent nationalist such as Savarkar promoted the 'Hindu 'national narrative that mainly relied on past cultural influence to legitimize the idea of a glorified 'Hindu' past.

The purpose of exploring the vision of Savarkar is to provide a radical perspective on the theory of 'Greater India'. This sheds light on how the theory was utilized as a historical source by ardent right-wing nationalists, such as Savarkar himself, to legitimize the grandeur of a 'Hindu' past. While Savarkar's approach may be considered aggressive in terms of reshaping historical narratives to align with political agendas, the Greater India Society tried to approach the concept from an academic dimension. Their intention was to delve into India's cultural conquest and establish a national narrative that would justify the nation's supreme past.

This chapter attempted to examine other Greater India Society writers apart from Nag and Majumdar. The account of Gangoly and Chatterjee published in these journals of the society gives another example of how historical sources have been used by the Greater India writers to construct narratives in a period that has been associated with the emergence of Hindu Nationalism. The use of the ancient texts Puranas and reshaping narratives about the architectural significance of Angkor Vat are important to answer the main research question of this thesis. The role of Savarkar has been studied to understand the narrative of a Hindu identity prevalent in the 1920s. This in turn has been used to gain clarity about the context of

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[110] Jayashree Vivekanandan, 'Indianisation or indigenisation? Greater India and the politics of cultural diffusionism',15.

[111] Carolien Stolte and Harald Fischer-Tine, 'Imagining Asia in India: Nationalism and Internationalism (ca. 1905-1940), 86.

establishing a Hindu narrative and how the idea of a 'Greater India' fitted within that narrative in that decade.

Conclusion

This thesis has analyzed how historical sources in the context of a 'Greater India' were used by the Greater India Society writers to construct Indian national narratives in the early twentieth century. It has done so by carefully examining contributions of multiple writers in the journals of the Greater India Society. This society promoted the idea of a 'Greater India' and located ancient India's cultural influence, especially in Southeast Asia. In the 1930s to 1950s, the society published several volumes of the Journal with an aim to spread the knowledge about India's cultural colonization. This research argues that writers such as Kalidas Nag, R.C Majumdar, and O.C. Gangoly, associated with the Greater India Society, played a significant role in constructing an Indian national narrative based on a glorified 'Hindu' past which had a significant impact beyond Indian borders, especially on Southeast Asia. The analysis of Nag's approach towards the idea of a 'Greater India' provides a vital framework of historical revisionism. He wanted to promote India the image of in the ancient period as a harbinger of peace and progress. Nag's idea of a Greater India transcended both Indian and even Asian boundaries as he focused on the philosophy of internationalism and humanism. The use of different set of inscriptions (one found in Boghaz Keui that mentioned the existence of Vedic Gods, and the rest found on Java and Champa including the imprints of Brahminical and Buddhist influence in the early centuries) are evident in the writings of Nag. They are used as crucial historical sources to argue for the existence of Hindu colonies in Southeast Asia as well as depicting India's glorified past in the context of Greater India.

Moreover, R.C Majumdar, who was also an important contributor in the Greater India Society, wrote several accounts in the journal of the society. He advocated to view 'Greater India' as a Hindu civilization and excluded the Islamic influence within the idea of a 'Greater India.' He studied the inscriptions found in the regions of Malaysia that argued for the existence of a powerful Hindu kingdom named Sailendra in Southeast Asia. Other instances of the usage of historical sources in the Greater India theory have been discussed where Greater India writers such as Gangoly and Chatterjee have constructed narratives based on depicting India's civilizational and cultural influence in Southeast Asia. In this case, the use of the Puranas and the temple of Angkor Vat in Cambodia have been seen as important historical sources that became central to the idea of historical revisionism evident in the accounts of these writers published in the *Journal of the Greater India Society*. These points of references play vital role in understanding how the Greater India Society writers have incorporated the use of historical sources in their writings on Greater India. This usage of sources assists the writers to assert

claim about India's glorified Hindu past and construct national narratives based on the idea of a 'Greater India.'

The examination of the various perspectives put forward by Nag, Majumdar, Gangoly and other prominent scholars on the 'Greater India' theory led examine several national narratives that involved a 'Hindu' national identity creation. From Nag's vision of transcending territorial boundaries beyond Asia to Majumdar's openly admitting Hindu's sole contribution in establishing colonies in Southeast Asia, these accounts become crucial historical sources to fit 'Greater India' into a national framework. Consequently, it is necessary to trace the influence of European scholars such as Sylvain Lévi on the works of Greater India Society. It is arguable that such an influence of European scholars on the theory of 'Greater India' proved to be a source of legitimacy, that it gave to the vision of Indian nationalist writers in establishing the supremacy of India's cultural expansion. Therefore, these 'Greater India' accounts prove to be vital in our understanding of how historical sources can be used in the formation of national narratives.

Moreover, the thesis has examined the work of V.D Savarkar, who played an important role in the promotion of Hindu Nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. It is relevant that Savarkar studied the idea of a 'Greater India' and proposed radical views related to considering the Asian continent as one Hindu-Buddhist region. This narrative was constructed based on the analysis of the Greater India theory and is crucial within the context of Hindu Nationalism. Although not directly inspired by the writing of the Greater India Society, Savarkar's actions and work show how such narratives can be used in politics. The idea of Greater India's influence on politics did not stop with Savarkar. Zabarskaite articulated a crucial view in the debate surrounding the several narratives associated with the theory of a 'Greater India' where she states that 'in the building of a Hindu nationalism. the 'Greater India' theme is central, not only because the protagonists of 'Greater India' were many of the same people active in the Hindu Mahasabha or as a ideologues of Hindu nationalism, but because the normalizing of thinking about an Indian expansionist history glorified a 'Hindu' period (that included a Buddhist period and subsumed it within a definition of 'Hindu') of Indian 'civilizational' and 'racial dominance in Southeast Asia.'[112] Furthermore, Spoelder argued that 'the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) government's endorsement of a cruder and decidedly less inclusive vision of a Hindu 'Greater India' is in many ways only a less nuanced and 'saffronized' version of this same story that

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[112] Jolita Zabarskaite, 'Greater India' and the Indian Expansionist Imagination. C.1885-1965',5.

Nag and his colleagues of the GIS [Greater India Society] had impressed on their compatriots since the 1920s, and which proclaimed that Hindu-Buddhist civilization was a superior cultural force with a mission to fulfill abroad.'[113] It becomes prevalent to examine the accounts of these journals from a 'Hindu' perspective as they reshape historical narratives to suit national agenda. It is evident that the theory of 'Greater India' is entangled with this historical revisionism, and it provides a crucial juncture where this thesis aimed to contribute further to the discussion in terms of how such historical sources were used to construct national narratives in the early twentieth century and approach the idea of a 'Greater India' from a national framework.

Even if it hard to trace how exactly a narrative influenced politics, we can be sure that in general national narratives have a profound political impact. This begs the question how such narratives are constructed, and by focusing on the use of primary sources in the construction of an Indian national narrative based on the idea of 'Greater India,' this thesis has attempted to solve that piece of the puzzle.

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[113] Yorim Spoelder, 'An 'Indian Hermes' Between Paris and the Pacific: Kalidas Nag, Greater India and the Quest for a Global Humanism', 182.

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