CASTE AND THE CITIZEN*

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This article discusses two contrasting ways of representing India. The first is its representation as a society of castes and communities, and the second as a nation of citizens. When the British established their rule in the country, they were much struck by the distinctive features of Indian society, and particularly its division into castes and communities. Through their censuses and ethnographic surveys, they sought to map the social landscape of India and, in that process, heightened, to some extent, the social divisions that existed among the people. They maintained that democracy could not work in India because it was not a nation of citizens but a society of castes and communities. But, as the nationalist movement gathered strength in the 20th century, progressive Indians pointed to the many changes taking place in Indian society, and set themselves to the task of making it into a nation of citizens.