Religion and Nationalism in Modern India

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IN MAY 1995, two judges of the Supreme Court directed the Government of India to bring forward legislation for a uniform civil code or family law. The case on which they were pronouncing judgement related to a man who converted to Islam in order to take a second wife. Although not unheard of, such cases are relatively uncommon. More the reason why the court's directive to the government on a contentious political and sectarian religious issue is deserving of notice. Maintaining that Hindu family law had been reformed in the 1950s, the judges argued that those who elected to remain in India after 1947 knew that 'there would be one nation', and as such 'no community could claim separate identity in the name of religion'.[1]

Sectarian religious mobilization is relatively muted now in comparison with the early nineties. But the latest judgement of India's apex court, and the reactions to it, serve once again to emphasize that more than a century after the idea of an Indian nation quickened the pulse of its early protagonists and offered the possibility of a platform to resist, and eventually end, colonial rule, the content and meaning of the concept are once again live issues. Even allowing for the burden of history, the contemporary salience of these issues does not, as it might seem on the surface or from the propaganda of Hindu chauvinists, arise from within

[1]As quoted in the *Times of India*, 13 May 1995, p. 4.

the narrow context of relations between the majority Hindu community and the Muslim minority, or between the latter and the state. The Shah Bano affair, and the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's action in reversing a Supreme Court judgement directing a Muslim man to pay maintenance to the wife he had divorced, is often cited as a major influence on the trajectory of sectarian religious mobilization in India. This it may have been. At the same time, it would be wrong to overlook the role of the Mandal controversy (1989) — which was in some sense a historical legacy of the caste system — in fuelling the agitation to replace the Ayodhya mosque with a temple dedicated to Lord Ram. This, and the nearly seamless telescoping of the Shah Bano, the Mandal, and the Ayodhya controversies suggests that whatever the perceived challenges to it, increasingly the unity of the Indian nation is now sought to be defined, constructed, and directed explicitly *against* a significant segment of her society, viz. the Muslims who constitute nearly an eighth of India's population.

Notwithstanding recent events, the idea of a secular (in the sense of non-sectarian in which it is used throughout this paper) and democratic Indian society continues to hold an appeal and generate a resonance not matched by any other. Even the most die-hard proponents of a sectarian Hindu order often claim to stand for 'genuine' secularism. Still central to the self-definition of a substantial segment of the country's middle classes, the idea of a secular and democratic India is commonly invested with a historicity deriving from the philosophy and practice of the national movement which freed the country from colonial rule in 1947. In this case, as in others, the 'advantages of "myth"' are not all on one side, and there is much to commend in it. For example, activists who campaign to promote the idea of a secular state and society promised by the Indian constitution regularly come face to face with its everyday denial, but they still find the idea of great value in combating this denial. There is also considerable strength in the more general argument that this particular method of attributing historicity to secular and democratic values in contemporary India presents her secular democrats with a key weapon in the attritional battle in which they are engaged. Therefore, to question the intrinsically secular character of India's modern national tradition

is to give up an important *contemporary* instrument of realizing it.

At the same time, myths have a way of running away with their proponents. Belief in the essential secular character of the modern Indian state and society can often be little more than an exercise in self-congratulation which overlooks or rationalizes the sectarian religious outlook pervading large areas of contemporary social and political practice. Equally, the sense of the historical inevitability, and infallibility, of a secular and democratic outcome in India can, at times, be so overwhelming that the failure to realize it may often be attributed, even by individuals who are otherwise not disposed to thinking in religious sectarian terms, to the social and cultural 'exclusivity' of minority communities. Few would deny the mileage that religious clerics derive from preserving and nurturing the social and cultural exclusivity (as opposed to distinctiveness) of their communities. But to focus on such manifestations, to the exclusion of others, in a society characterized in recent times by deep social and religious divisions is, at best, to conflate the constitutional discourse of rights with that of everyday conflict where neither the constitution nor the rights it offers are seriously protected. At worst, it is to endorse the majoritarian agenda which can hide behind the liberal discourse of the constitution and point to the minority communities as its principal violators. More dangerous, an uncritical faith in the 'naturalness', as it were, of secular and democratic values in India relegates the role of human agency in realizing these values in everyday life and activity and weakens their already tenuous hold in contemporary India.

In what follows, therefore, I have taken a deliberately linear, some might say provocative, view of Indian history of the last century, mainly in an effort to highlight the sectarian origins of the national idea in modern India, and the central role played by sectarian issues, bodies, and individuals in the evolution of the platform of Indian nationalism. As the references show, these historical features of Indian nationalism are, by now, well recognized by historians. However, the latter are notably wary, with good reason, of pursuing their line of inquiry into the more recent period. To some extent, this silence arises from the apprehension

that the goal of a secular and democratic India might become more difficult to realize if social and political practices were allowed to be burdened by the full weight of a divisive and contentious past. But such silence can easily become collusive in a context where a particular construction of modern history, or the history of the national movement, is invoked to justify the practice of majoritarian nationalism in a liberal garb. Finally, to implicitly assume that change unambiguously dominated continuity in the trajectory of political and social developments in post-1947 India is not very helpful when one seeks to understand the relative 'calm' of the first two decades after partition against the background of the decades of 'friction' which preceded and followed them. Hence I carry my linear tale through virtually to the present. In this tale may lie a few pointers not only to how we handle issues affecting the two great religious communities in India, but also to the wider questions of social and economic mobility associated with the development of the Indian economy and the deepening of its social processes under the stimulus of representative democracy.

II

It is almost a truism to say that the concept of the Indian nation, in which the ideology of Indian nationalism is rooted, is mainly an outcome of the complex encounter between indigenous society and colonial rule. This encounter operated at various levels and led to the construction or hardening of several identities, each often superimposed upon, and nestling uneasily with another.

Most versions of modern Indian nationalism seem to take India's seemingly ageless and inherent cultural and civilizational unity, going back three millennia or more, for granted. It is clear however that thanks to British rule, India managed to achieve a degree of political unity which, as much as geographical boundaries, helped redefine the mental and emotional horizons of her indigenous elite. And yet, there was nothing inevitable, even given this overarching political unity, about the emergence of an Indian identity, whether alongside other identities, or by supplanting them. Thanks, for instance, to the spread of both English and 'vernacular'

education, the later decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a 'renaissance' in some regional languages, notably Bengali, Marathi, and Tamil. As publishing activity in these languages expanded, new publications helped standardize and spread these languages and identities based upon them; at the same time, they became vehicles for regional histories, literature, social reform tracts, and some of the most bitter contemporary criticism of the British rulers. Thanks to the growth of a middle class and the spread of 'print capitalism', identities which may now be regarded as 'regional' began to take strong root with, for example, the sense of a somewhat mystical collectivity suffused with Hindu religious symbolism called the *Bangali jati* emerging ahead of a sense of any wider collectivity in Bengal.[2] A similar movement was underway in the Bombay Presidency as well.[3] At the same time, since these languages began to flourish and new identities based, loosely speaking, upon them were forming among a section of the middle classes in administrative provinces which brought together a number of language communities, other linguistic identities (Telugu in Madras, Assamese and Oriya in Bengal, Hindi in the Bombay Presidency, etc.) also came into contention.[4]

Despite the late-nineteenth century setting, the process of identity formation was not confined to the formation of 'national'

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[2] On 'print capitalism', see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1982, pp. 32-49: in the Bengal context, see Robert I. Crane, 'The Development of Nationalism in India in the Late Nineteenth Century: The Bengal Press and Associations in the Diffusion of Nationalism', in Paul Wallace, ed., *Region and Nation in India*, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 85-110; on the *Bangali jati*, see Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', *Subaltern Studies VII*, Delhi, 1992, p. 15.

[3] Jayant Lele, 'Caste, Class and Dominance: Political Mobilization in Maharashtra', in Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, Delhi, 1990, vol. 2, pp. 149-52.

[4] Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the later Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 31-2; for the growth of Oriya nationalism, see J. Boulton, 'Nationalism and Tradition in Orissa, with special reference to the Works of Phakirmohan Senapati', in R.J. Moore, ed., *Tradition and Politics in South Asia*, pp. 239-49; and B. Mohapatra, The Politics of Oriya Nationalism, 1903-36, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1990; for Hindi nationalism, see Paul Brass, *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India*, Delhi, 1974.

or 'regional' identities. In late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Africa, for instance, colonial intervention enhanced social and economic mobility, and the emergence of an indigenous elite deriving its self-perceptions from the perceptions of colonial officials and missionaries led to kinship, lineage, or clan-based identities being replaced by those based on newer European constructions like tribes.[5] A similar process, though involving 'non-tribal' communities, colonial authorities, as well as missionaries, has been outlined for some regions of India as well.[6]

Other identities were similarly 'constructed', or existing definitions made more rigid and exclusive in the changing administrative, social, and economic environments of nineteenth century India. One of the more important of the processes at work pertained to the way the 'other' was perceived, and the 'self' and its world defined in relation to it.[7] An important unconscious contribution here of the later colonial authorities in areas where their influence was most visible, was perhaps to replace the earlier sense of different, diffused 'others' which prevailed, by the new dominant, and socially exclusive 'other', represented by the British official, soldier, trader, missionary, etc.. Equally, as well as European perceptions of themselves influencing indigenous evaluations of the 'superior' race, European/British perceptions of Indian society helped also to construct several aspects of the indigenous perception of the self and its environment.

Thus one important reason why Bengal saw the first efforts to perceive and define a wider India may, for instance, have owed to the fact that the Europeans identified Bengal with India; in seeing Bengal, they believed, they were seeing India.[8] Further, the British

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[5] Terence O. Ranger, 'Race and Tribe in Southern Africa: European Ideas and African Acceptance', in R. Ross, ed., *Colonialism and Racism*, Leiden, 1982; also see Basil Davidson, *The Black Man's Burden*, London, 1990.

[6] S.M. Dubey, 'Inter-ethnic Alliance, Tribal Movements and Integration in North-east India', in K. Suresh Singh, ed., *Tribal Movements in North-east India*, Delhi, 1982, vol. 1, pp. 4-6; Susanne B.C. Devalle, *Discourses in Ethnicity: Culture and Protest in the Jharkhand*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 49-76.

[7] Tapan Raychaudhuri, 'Europe in India's Xenology: The Nineteenth Century Record', *Past and Present*, 1992, pp. 156-82.

[8] Ainslee T. Embree, *Imagining India: Essays on Indian History*, Delhi, 1989, p. 101.

drew heavily on the tradition of European Orientalism to understand 'Hindu society', using selected Brahminical texts as their point of entry into, what consequently became, an unchanging, and so timeless, social order dominated by a rigid *varna* system. The world-view of the Brahmins thus found its most potent publicists. Their beliefs and their rituals also became definitive representations of these aspects of the 'religion' which, since the Arabs, India was associated with.[9] Their perspective also became the implicit basis of those parts of the Anglo-Indian legal order dealing with Hindu family or personal law, which all but reified the *varna* order 'as the ideal type of social structure across regions'.[10] This nineteenth century construct of Hinduism was, as it were, internalized, propounded, criticized, or defended, and through each of these means reproduced by an indigenous elite exposed to Western or 'vernacular' education.[11] The resulting 'objectification' of religious beliefs enabled individual elements within it to be taken out and reformulated for conscious, often overtly political, ends.[12] The centralization into a religion of disparate but loosely connected beliefs, rituals, practices, myths, and histories had begun; and this religion, as numerous cow-protection and Hindi language (anti-Urdu) agitations, and even the 'Swadeshi' movement of 1905

[9]T.N. Madan, 'The Quest for Hinduism', *International Social Science Journal*, 1977, pp. 261-78.

[10]David A. Washbrook, 'Law, State and Agrarian Society in Colonial India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1981, pp. 652-8, 673-4; Francine R. Frankel, 'Conclusion: Decline of a Social Order', in Frankel and Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power*, vol. 2, p. 483.

[11]Milton Israel, 'Ramananda Chatterjee and the *Modern Review*: The Image of Nationality in the National Press', in Milton Israel, ed., *National Unity: The South Asian Experience*, New Delhi, 1983; Raychaudhuri, 'Europe in India's Xenology', pp. 162-7; David Kopf, *The Brahmo Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind*, Princeton, 1979, pp. 179-86; for an interesting account of the impact of English education upon the world-view of an upper-caste Hindu from Bihar, see Surendra Gopal, 'An Elite Group in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century in Bihar', in Sachidananda and A.K. Lal, eds., *Elites and Development*, New Delhi, 1980, pp. 171-86.

[12]Bernard S. Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure, and Objectification in South Asia', in Bernard S. Cohn, *Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, Delhi, 1988, p. 229.

or the activities of 'terrorist' groups in Bengal and Maharashtra showed, also swiftly became a vehicle for militant political activity.[13]

Early nationalist discourse in India emerged out of this coalescence of the local, regional, religious, and supra-regional identities which European intervention, whether in the form of the Orientalists, or more directly in the form of colonial rule, assisted. The Indian identity was preceded by, or overlapped with, the new Hindu identity; and almost overwhelmingly, it was 'Hinduism' in the sense of a 'great tradition', and a perception of its history as constructed in the nineteenth century which mediated the distance between locality or region-based identities which were also emerging at this time, and a wider, all-India identity.[14] As Sudipta Kaviraj points out, whilst discussing the changing self-perceptions of middle-class Bengali intellectuals in the late-nineteenth century, the latter

> found ways of believing, against formidable evidence, their indisputable descent from the Aryan ancestors of the Vedas. ... they convinced themselves that their complexions had only somewhat darkened, their structure somewhat shortened, their noses had lost some of their aquilinity due to the ravages of the tropical weather. Otherwise their racial purity was self-evident. .... But even if their image of the past – of what the Aryans did – was correct, what was doubtful was the claim that it was their past, something that was taken for granted. Actually, what was happening inside the discourse was very complex. In the business of stitching together Bengalis with

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[13] Embree, *Imagining India*, pp. 158-64; M.J. Harvey, 'The Secular as Sacred? The Religio-Political Rationalization of B.G. Tilak', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1986, pp. 321-31; McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, pp. 332-57.

[14] Seal, *Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, pp. 249-52; Embree, *Imagining India*, pp. 16-25; Kopf, *Brahmo Samaj*, pp. 193-214, 319-33; John R. McLane, 'The Early Congress, Hindu Populism, and the Wider Society', in Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert, eds., *Congress and India Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 57-8; on early nationalist historiography of 'ancient India' and its roots in Orientalist constructions, see Romila Thapar, 'Interpretations of Ancient Indian History', *History and Theory*, 1968, pp. 318-35.

> a certain past, they were also ... stitching Bengalis with others in the present.[15]

Similar perceptions spread rapidly in the fertile environment of late-nineteenth century India which saw the accelerated rise of the 'literal' and 'commercial classes' over large parts of the country. The vertical and lateral mobility which northern India witnessed during these decades also helped transform fairly passive and leisurely exercises to 'define' Hinduism into active efforts by a class of 'new-Hindus' to realize it through 'revival'. Such 'revivalist' activities were often conducted around single issues like the defence of the cow, the promotion of Sanskrit, Hindi, etc., and in the form of organizations like the Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharm Sabha, Bharat Dharm Mahamandal, the Hindu Sabha, etc.

Some of these agitations, particularly those to protect the cow, had distinct anti-British overtones. Others, such as the campaign for Hindi, were sometimes initiated by those who were not overtly sectarian in their attitude towards other religious communities. Yet, even their initiatives reflected an unself-conscious majoritarian conviction that there was no contradiction between 'Hindu' and 'Indian' identities. Thus, as Sudhir Chandra notes about the late-nineteenth century slogan of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan', those who advanced it failed to realize that

> many of the 'children of Bharat' might feel attracted to the cause of the country without feeling enthusiastic about the other two causes; indeed, that (this) insistence on the latter might adversely affect their concern for the former.

Hence, even when they were not so intended, initiatives of this type had the effect of sharpening and reinforcing religious divisions.[16]

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[15] S. Kaviraj, 'Imaginary History: Narrativizing the Nation in Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya', in P.C. Chatterji, ed. *Self-Images, Identity and Nationality*, Simla, 1989, p. 231; also see Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution', and Israel, 'Ramananda Chatterjee'; on Bankim Chandra and Bengali-Hindu nationalism, also see J. Boulton, 'Nationalism and Tradition in Orissa', pp. 236-8.

[16] The quotation is from Sudhir Chandra, 'Communal Elements in Late Nineteenth Century Hindi Literature', *Occasional Papers in Society and History*, no. 15, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1984, p. 26; also see Chris A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the Age of British*

Moreover, the most decisive efforts to consolidate and reinforce a Hindu identity during these decades were decidedly sectarian in character. The Arya Samaj was the most prominent of the Hindu organizations founded in late-nineteenth century India. Deriving its perception of Hinduism from the West and drawing its inspiration, even its language, from Christianity, the Arya Samaj marshalled 'shastric authority ... for a new tradition' which strove to exclude rituals, idolatry, and the notion of 'pollution'. It defined Hindus in explicitly homogeneous terms, and seeking to create a Hindu religious order, launched mass 'reconversion' (or *shuddhi*) movements to salvage lapsed or converted 'Hindus', the depressed classes, and the 'untouchables' for the order.[17] Although born in Bengal, the Arya Samaj's influence was first felt in a big way in Punjab, where it helped a palpable religious identity mature among a section of the middle classes emerging from the growth of trade and the expansion of employment in the government sector. The Arya Samaj's efforts to 'convert' adherents of Sikhism (or Sikhs) to Hinduism forced the former to assert their separate religious identity, which since the British conquest of the Punjab had been on the wane. Apart from its proselytizing activities, the Arya Samaj's strident campaigns against cow slaughter and its virulent propaganda against Islam and Muslims in general, also helped widen the gulf between the two communities in urban Punjab.[18]

Expansion, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 450-7; Richard G. Fox, 'Urban Class and Communal Consciousness in Colonial Punjab: The Genesis of India's Intermediate Regime', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1984, pp. 459-89; Peter Robb, 'The Challenge of *Gau Mata*: British Policy and Religious Change in India, 1880-1916', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1986, pp. 285-319; Francis Robinson, *Separatism among the Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923*, Delhi, 1975, pp. 57-69.

[17] G. Pandey, 'In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1991, pp. 566-7.

[18] Indu Banga, 'The Emergence of Hindu Consciousness in Colonial Punjab'; J.S. Grewal, 'The Making of the Sikh Self-image before Independence', both in P.C. Chatterji, ed., *Self-Images*, pp. 201-17, and pp. 187-200 respectively; J.K. Dhillon, 'Emergence and Growth of Sikh Alienation', in *Journal of Sikh Studies*, 1988, pp. i-ii; also Fox, 'Urban Class and Communal Consciousness'; McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, pp. 280-8, 296-304; Kenneth W. Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Century Punjab*, Delhi, 1976, pp. 149-52, 195-7, 202-15; Robinson, *Separatism among the Indian Muslims*, pp. 68-9, 77-8; Dhanpati Pandey, *The Arya Samaj and Indian Nationalism*, Delhi, 1972, pp.

In the more caste-divided societies to the east of Punjab, in Bihar and the United Provinces, the Arya Samaj's influence was slow to spread. In these regions, it sought to make inroads through organizing the cultivator castes of Kurmis and Ahirs (or Yadavs) into separate caste associations, sanskritizing their rituals, encouraging them to challenge the priestly monopoly of the Brahmins, and establishing educational institutions for the children of these communities.[19] Confronted now with a rigid definition of their orthodoxy and the pressure to conform to and defend it, the upper castes responded to these reformist initiatives through bodies like the Sanatan Dharm Sabhas and the Dharma Mahamandal. Although overtly in competition and conflict, yet the growth of these and other outfits provided the organizational basis for competitive mobilization aimed at drawing wider areas into agitations of a religious nature on issues like cow slaughter, etc..[20]

It is important to note that campaigns on sectional and religious issues were the first organized agitational initiatives targeted at a middle class growing in numbers, affluence, and self-confidence. These agitations gave this middle class, as they did Lala Lajpat Rai, Punjab's foremost Hindu politician and an Arya Samaji, the 'first lesson in Hindu nationalism'.[21] Although the cow was an important aspect of popular religion, and not uncommonly a source of friction between those who consumed it for the spirit and others who consumed it for the flesh, by the latter part of the nineteenth century the animal had become an issue separating communities which were coming into new forms of being in the process of

[19] F.R. Frankel, 'Caste, Land, and Dominance in Bihar: Breakdown of the Brahmanical Order', in Frankel and Rao, eds. *Dominance and State Power*, pp. 63-5; R.K. Hebsur, 'Uttar Pradesh: Belated and Imperfect Mobilization of the Backwards', in R.K. Hebsur, 'Reactions to the Reservations of Other Backward Classes, a Comparative Study of Four States: A Report submitted to the Backward Classes Commission', Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Report of the Backward Classes Commission*, Delhi, 1980, part 2, vol. iv, pp. 159-61; one effect of the Arya Samaj influence on the peasant castes of this region may have been that the latter subordinated secular to ritual mobility for far longer than, say, their southern counterparts did.

[20] Chris A. Bayly, *Local Roots of Indian Politics: Allahabad, 1880-1920*, Oxford, 1975, pp. 105-17.

[21] Lala Lajpat Rai, quoted in Indu Banga, 'Emergence of Hindu Consciousness', pp. 215-6.

fighting over it, and forging new internal bonds of solidarity. Contemporary 'Hindu' leaders were not unaware of the import of these developments, Lala Lajpat Rai, for instance, welcoming religious riots because they helped consolidate the Hindu identity.[22] In this sense, the *gaurakshini* (cow protection) movement had already become a 'species of sub-nationalism', and although the campaign largely petered out after 1893, the new communal organizations founded in its wake continued to articulate religious identities more sharply.[23] Moreover, the cow's popular religious aspect meant that it would help spread community definitions widely, and even to the villages of northern India.[24]

The social perceptions of the colonial rulers also inevitably guided their administrative initiatives, some of which, such as the decennial census, also helped realize these perceptions. For example, the British rulers saw caste and religion as keys to the organization of Indian society, and these categories soon became critical inputs into their 'technology of governing'.[25] Apart from gathering information on aggregate numbers, censuses in British India were used to develop these inputs through gathering detailed information about the caste and religious affiliations of the population. However, while 'beginning as a set of categories in the minds of its creators, the census went on to define those categories....'[26] Introducing caste and religion into the census enumeration procedure meant that Indians were being encouraged to ask these particular questions about themselves, and about their

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[22]McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, p. 335.

[23]McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, p. 275, pp. 328-9.

[24]Anand A. Yang, 'Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-Cow Killing" Riots of 1893', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1980, pp. 576-96; Sandria B. Freitag, 'Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a "Hindu" Community', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1980, pp. 597-625; McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, pp. 296-331; Bayly, *Local Roots of Indian Politics*, pp. 111-2; also see in a wider context, Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930*, Delhi, 1991, pp. 225-41.

[25]Richard Saumarez Smith, 'Rule-by-records and Rule-by-reports: Complementary Aspects of the British Imperial Rule of Law', in Veena Das, ed., *The Word and the World: Fantasy, Symbol, and Record*, 1986, pp. 172-3.

[26]Kenneth W. Jones, 'Religious Identity and the Indian Census', in N.G. Barrier, ed., *The Census in British India: New Perspectives*, Delhi, 1981, p. 100.

cultural and social systems. Apart from involving the whole population, colonial perceptions of Indian society were most directly transmitted to the over half a million enumerators, all literate and educated Indians who were potentially capable of occupying key positions of leadership in indigenous society.[27]

Besides, census reports also

> provided a new conceptualization of religion as a community, an aggregate of individuals united by a formal definition and given characteristics based on qualified data;[28]

and as well as receiving these definitions, the groups involved grew self-conscious enough to take steps to alter them in their own favour. For instance, the 1881 census included the adherents of all residual and unspecified religious categories among the Hindus, and classified as a Hindu any 'native who was unable to define his creed, or who described it by any other name than that of some recognized religion or of a sect of some such religion'.[29] But as the distribution of government jobs and political power came to depend on census returns, this definition was challenged by a Punjabi Muslim deputation which noted that

> if a reduction be made for the uncivilized portions of the (Hindu) community enumerated under the heads of Animists, and other minor religions, as well as for those classes who are ordinarily classed as Hindus but properly speaking, are not Hindus at all, the proportion of Muhammadans to the Hindu majority becomes much larger.[30]

E.A. Gait, the Commissioner of Census at the time of the 1911 operations, seemed in agreement, and suggested creating a category of 'debatable Hindus'. The classification of the Sikhs in a separate religious category had already diminished the number of census Hindus. Members of 'untouchable' communities accounted for some

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[27] Cohn, 'The Census', pp. 230-48.

[28] Jones, 'Religious Identity', p. 84.

[29] Government of Punjab, *Census Report*, 1881, p. 101, quoted in Jones, 'Religious Identity', p. 92.

[30] The *Punjabee*, 6 Oct. 1906, p. 2, quoted in Jones, 'Religious Identity', p. 89.

42% of the census Hindu population of Punjab, and the thought of losing them caused great alarm among the province's Hindu leaders.[31] As their attentions turned towards the 'reform of Hinduism', the Arya Samaj organization and its campaigns received a boost from an unexpected quarter.[32] As Lala Lajpat Rai noted, the

> Gait circular had a quite unexpected effect and galvanized the dying body of orthodox Hinduism into sympathy with *its* untouchable population, because that was necessary to avert its own downfall. The possibility of losing the untouchables has shaken the intelligent section of the Hindu community to its very depths....[33]

Preventing the secession of the 'untouchables' from the Hindu order has since been an important pre-occupation of many politicians and legislators in India.

By listing and describing castes and collecting returns on this basis, the census operations also helped 'liven up the caste-spirit'.[34] Caste ceased predominantly to be the local phenomenon it had been earlier; moreover by trying to rank castes in terms of social precedence based on the *varna* system, the British authorities all but froze the caste system and increased its significance. For, contrary to the contemporary British view, Indian society presented several opportunities for vertical mobility within the caste-*varna* order, particularly for the affluent, arms-bearing peasantry. So long caste identities could be re-negotiated, the former were relatively muted, and the building of vertical caste affiliations remained uncommon. But the government's efforts to rank castes seem to have reduced the possibility of upward mobility, since occupational

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[31]The 42% figure is from the report of the Simon Commission (1928-30), quoted in Marc Galanter, *Competing Equalities: Law and Backward Classes in India*, Delhi, 1984, p. 124.

[32]Cohn, 'The Census', pp. 245-7; for the effects of these campaigns on relations between the two communities, see Jones, 'Religious Identity', pp. 91-5.

[33]Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj*, London, 1915, p. 2, quoted in Jones, 'Religious Identity', p. 93.

[34]G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, New York, 1932, quoted in Cohn, 'The Census'.

categories, caste, the latter's position in the *varna* order, etc. were all closely, and seemingly finally, matched in the census descriptions, especially after the 1891 and 1901 censuses. To the extent that upward mobility was possible at all within this order, it could be achieved only through the formation of caste associations to petition the authorities, usually on the basis of evidence drawn from historical, mythological, and literary sources.[35]

III

Competition for jobs in the public services helped elite mobilization along religious and caste lines, as well as along linguistic and regional lines. Although regional differences should not be overlooked, in general throughout India, upper-caste Hindus took more readily to Western education, and were therefore better equipped to fill jobs in the government. While the growth of linguistic movements was partly an outcome of this process of mobility, the latter acquired sectarian religious overtones in northern India as the Hindu literate classes began to press for the replacement of Urdu, written in the Persian script, by Hindi, written in the Nagari script, some (but not all) influential participants in the campaign seeing it as an opportunity to deprive '*mussalmans*' of their 'monopoly' of '*peshkarships, sarishtadarships, muharrirships*, etc.'[36]

In a few cases, the growth of religious and caste identities also helped fracture regional elite affiliations, and widen caste and religious alliances. For example, initially the Kayasth elites of the North-Western Provinces (later United Provinces) joined the region's Muslim elites in opposing recruitment through examination

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[35] For a brief discussion of Risley's attempts to create an ordering of caste by rank at the time of the 1891 census, see Cohn, 'The Census', pp. 245-7; also see Frankel, 'Caste, Land and Dominance in Bihar', p. 64.

[36] Robinson, *Separatism among the Indian Muslims*, pp. 69-77; the quotation (pp. 76-7) is from Babu (Bharatendu) Harish Chandra's statement to the North-Western Provinces and Oudh Education Commission; also see Krishna Kumar, 'Hindu Revivalism and Education in North-Central India', in K.N. Panikkar, ed., *Communalism in India: History, Politics and Culture*, Delhi, 1991, pp. 173-95.

to the civil services out of fear that it would favour educated migrants from Bengal. But once the region's Kayasths themselves gained an educational edge over their Muslim allies, their objection to merit-based recruitment weakened. Further they strove to distinguish themselves from their erstwhile allies, and to use the Congress Party to affiliate themselves with the higher status Kayasths of Bengal.[37] Similarly, Bengali speaking settlers in Bihar took the lead in the agitation to replace Urdu as the language of the administration with Hindi since they found it easier to master a new language in the Nagari script familiar to them.[38] Faced with the challenge that a new and assertive upper-caste Hindu elite might pose to their positions which derived their legitimacy largely from pre-British social and administrative structures, the campaign of the Muslim elites within the community in favour of Western education, and outside it on the principle of communal job representation, gained in strength.[39]

The widening of the political arena from early this century also helped sharpen elite conflict, while the institution of separate communal electorates and representation helped reinforce competing identities. Initiated at the time of the Minto-Morley reforms of 1909, communal electorates were legitimized through the Lucknow pact concluded in 1916 between the Congress Party and the Muslim League, and the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. Whatever its perceived merits, in practice, constitutional separatism narrowed the focus of political debate within and between increasingly self-conscious religious communities, made it more rewarding for them to stress their separate religious identities, and helped transform 'socio-cultural identity into political identity'.[40] Designed also to give the British rulers control over the evolving political framework, separate electorates meant that leaders of one community did not have to contend with voters belonging to the other communities.

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[37] Seal, *Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, pp. 320-9; John R. McLane, 'The Early Congress', pp. 51-2; Jones, *Arya Dharm*, pp. 241-52.

[38] Seal, *Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, (pp. 326, f.n.) quoting A.K. Majumdar, *Advent of Independence*, Bombay, 1963, pp. 41-2, 57.

[39] Robinson, *Separatism among the Indian Muslims*, ch. 3.

[40] J.S. Grewal, 'The Making of the Sikh Self-image before Independence', in P.C. Chatterji, ed., *Self-Images*, p. 197.

Communal bastions could thus be established more easily, and this might partly explain why, during the mid-1920s, the Congress, though professing a non-sectarian ideology, could seem to speak in the voice of the Hindu Mahasabha in northern India.[41]

As well as a widening of the franchise, the 1920s saw an increase in the political and agitational activities of the Congress party organization, particularly below the provincial level. Although more overtly political than the Hindu revivalist or separatist movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the support bases of these movements and the Congress movements overlapped to a great extent. The Congress Party at the local level was 'sometimes indistinguishable from the movement for the protection of cattle or for the propagation of Hindi', and there was a 'sharp contradiction between the secular, and non-communal, catch-cries used in the Congress publicity or official pronouncements, and the idioms adopted by its orators'.[42] The religious and mythical associations which the idea of India evoked in the middle-class consciousness also helped strengthen the tradition of articulating the goals of the national movement in religious terms, and of using religious (or caste) slogans, symbols, and sanctions to effect popular mobilization. The involvement of the United Province Congress Party's volunteer organization in arranging and conducting Hindu fairs and festivals, for example, kept Muslims away from it even at the height of the Khilafat movement. The widening of the Congress Party's support base during the 1920s, when it attracted growing numbers of the provincial middle and lower middle classes, increased the use of Hindu instruments and idioms in terms of which the party's goals were represented or interpreted, and mobilization effected. These features helped reinforce the Hindu image which the party seemed to present to all except its most uncritical admirers.[43] Gandhi himself was

[41]David Page, *Prelude to Partition: The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control*, Delhi, 1982, ch. 4.

[42]Bayly, *Local Roots of Indian Politics*, p. 132, 142; McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, pp. 322-51.

[43]Ambree, *Imagining India*, p. 158-64; Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India*, Delhi, 1990, pp. 288-90; Ranajit Guha, 'Discipline and Mobilize', *Subaltern Studies VII*, pp. 79-90; Ghanshyam Shah, 'Caste Sentiments, Class Formation

sometimes directly responsible for some of the idiom: his definition of freedom from British rule as *Ramrajya*, for example, was widely used by party campaigners at all levels. At other levels, and sometimes by Gandhi himself, freedom from British rule was equated with the ban on cow slaughter, and the sacred cow was a recurring symbol in Congress propaganda.[44] *Swaraj* (self-rule or freedom) acquired a mystical, semi-religious connotation, with the nationalist leaders, particularly Gandhi, being credited with miraculous powers, and becoming objects of veneration.[45] In fact, as Sandria Freitag has pointed out, Hindu communal symbolism became a 'measure of success' in interpreting the Congress's all-India programme in 'locally meaningful terms'.[46] Besides, the widening of the franchise which brought new sections of society into the political arena shifted the latter's fulcrum from the club-room (where, as the Lucknow pact of 1916 showed, agreements could be reached) to the real world of the *ganjs* and *qasbahs* whose preoccupations and languages came increasingly to dominate the political agenda. Thus as the arena of mass politics came to be defined in the 1920s, the use of religious slogans and symbols, if not directly of sanctions, increased greatly in northern and eastern

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and Dominance in Gujarat', in Frankel and Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power*, pp. 74-5; Francis Robinson, 'The Congress and the Muslims', in Paul Brass and Francis Robinson, eds., *The Indian National Congress and Indian Society, 1885-1985: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Dominance*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 169-72.

[44]Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, pp. 219-20; Gandhi's use of religion has been evaluated differently by Ashis Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays in Politics and Culture*, Delhi, 1980, particularly essays 2, 3, and 4, and *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Delhi, 1983, pp. 102-6; and by Partha Chatterji, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London, 1986; Richard G. Fox, 'Gandhian Socialism and Hindu Nationalism: Cultural Domination in the World System', in Sugata Bose, ed., *South Asia and World Capitalism*, Delhi, 1990, p. 246.

[45]Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-2', *Subaltern Studies III*, Delhi, 1984 , pp. 1-61; also see Raja Rao's fictional account of the Congress movement in a Mysore village in his novel *Kanthapura*.

[46]Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*, pp. 237-9; the dominant 'upper-caste Hindu' aspect of the Congress movement also comes out strongly in *Kanthapura*.

India, and not surprisingly, the expansion of agitational activity on secular issues often became the spark which lit the fires of sectarian religious strife. In consequence, political mobilization, though overtly on secular issues, often became a medium for sectarian religious assertion.

The expansion of Congress activity in the United Provinces during the 1920s and 1930s is particularly instructive in these respects.[47] As the Congress Party emerged, through a series of splits and mergers, as the most important voice of an increasingly assertive 'national' movement in the late 1920s, a number of tendencies and organizations which had earlier carried on their activities largely independent of the Congress came into the folds of the party. These included members or adherents of the most overtly Hindu political and social reform movements of the period, such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj. Some leaders like Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai, for example, combined leadership of religious conversion movements and organizations set up to 'safeguard the distinct and separate interests of the Hindu community', with support for the broad Congress platform.[48] There was a significant Hindu Sabha faction within several provincial Congress committees, notably in the United Provinces, Bihar, and the Punjab, and most Congress leaders, including some with a non-sectarian reputation, were not averse to using this faction for their own ends. The religion card was also used to affect the outcome of factional disputes within the Congress movement over elections to the provincial and central assemblies, with 'pro-Muslim', 'anti-Hindu', and 'beef-eater' being some of the compliments freely exchanged in public between rival

[47]The following account is based on Pandey, *Ascendancy of the Congress*, and Freitag, *Collective Action and Community*; also see Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, pp. 209-21; because these studies focus mostly on 'communalism', caste and status assertion codes tend to be ignored; for example, often Hindu religious assertion meant also the assertion of the ritual high caste status of the local 'leader' of the Congress party; for a fictional account which brings out the popular, religious, as well as the caste and status aspects of Congress political mobilization, the reader is once again referred to Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*.

[48]Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, pp. 24-5, 208-9, 240-3.

Congressmen. By the early 1930s, despite growing evidence that the Congress Party was losing the support of the Muslim community at the same time as it had set its face against separate communal electorates and representation, the organization's ties with the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Sabha had grown quite close.[49]

The use of festivals and religious processions (notably *prabhat pheris*) as media for political propaganda, the more sanskritic Hindi used by some of the younger sections of the Congress leadership educated in Arya Samaj schools and colleges, the Benaras Hindu University, or the Kashi Vidyapeeth, etc. reflected the growth of a powerful 'Hindu-Hindi' cultural movement, often in connection with the Congress political movement.[50] There was considerable fluidity and movement between the ranks and leadership of Hindi promotion organizations, sectarian religious groups, and the Congress Party, and by the end of the twenties, the latter was coming increasingly under the sway of a new type of leadership, particularly at the lower levels. As the gulf between the party and the Muslim populations widened, at some places the latter began reacting to *prabhat pheris* with *tanzim* processions and *tabligh* campaigns, and not infrequently, its agitational initiatives ended in sectarian clashes.

Where its activity did not directly alienate the Muslim masses, the confident assumption held by a majority of the Congress leadership that national solidarity was inherently a quality of India's cultural heritage and the 'moral superiority' of their movement meant that the broad unity of the anti-colonial movement would not be pursued as a 'goal which had to be achieved in terms of practical politics'.[51] The resulting self-righteousness, especially when combined with the Congress Party's seeming

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[49] Pandey, *Ascendancy of the Congress*, pp. 115-27.

[50] Krishna Kumar, 'Hindu Revivalism and Education', pp. 173-95.

[51] D. Rothermund, 'Traditionalism and National Solidarity in India', in Moore, ed., *Tradition and Politics*, p. 194; Robinson, 'The Congress and the Muslims', p. 180; Mukul Kesavan, '1937 as a Landmark in the Course of Communal Politics in the U.P.', *Occasional Papers in History and Society*, second series, no. 11, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, November, 1988, pp. 20-4.

readiness to allow Hindu chauvinists to dictate terms to it, appears to have ensured that minority concerns would not be handled with any sensitivity, and that any flexibility that Muslim leaders showed in a wider cause would go unreciprocated.

For example, during the 1926-9 discussions on constitutional reforms, secular Muslim leaders showed considerable flexibility and moderation. A majority of them, including Jinnah, aware that communal electorates were widening the gulf between India's two largest religious communities and strengthening the religious sectarian elements within them, accepted the principle of joint electorates, subject to three conditions. These were: (1) that, a third of the seats in the Central Legislative Assembly would be reserved for Muslims (who constituted about a quarter of the total population); (2) that, since eligible Muslim voters under the restricted franchise then operating were a small proportion of the total Muslim population in Bengal and Punjab, for a period of ten years or until adult suffrage was introduced, whichever was earlier, Muslims would be represented in these two provincial assemblies in proportion to their population; and (3) that, residuary powers would rest with the provinces. The Congress Party, under pressure from the Hindu chauvinists within its ranks, refused to make any of these concessions, thereby gifting the initiative to the colonial government, which was able, through the so-called Communal Award of 1932, to perpetuate the principle of separate electorates.[52]

Although its nationalism continued to be characterized by its fit with Brahminical Hinduism, the party lurched, from the mid-1930s onwards, towards more overt secular postures. Influenced largely by left-wing radicalism, younger leaders, among whom Jawaharlal Nehru was the most important, tended to reject religion as an explicit factor in modern nationalism, and believing that its contemporary importance stemmed from poverty and ignorance, tried to reach out to the ordinary Muslims over the heads of their traditional leaders. They experienced some moderate success.[53]

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[52]Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, pp. 271-80.

[53]Mushirul Hasan, 'The Muslim Mass Contacts Campaign: Analysis of a Strategy of Political Mobilization', in Sisson and Wolpert, eds., *Congress and Indian Nationalism*, pp. 198-22.

However, given especially the background in which this tendency came into prominence within the Congress, the republicanism of Nehru and the younger party leadership was unavoidably refracted through the reality of growing sectarian religious strife. As such neither ordinary Muslims nor a majority of their leaders could readily distinguish between what appeared to them as the assimilative Hindu nationalism of the Congress Party and the seemingly non-sectarian, but nevertheless assimilative, nationalism of a younger Congress leadership which was not fully in control of the party, and their respective support bases.[54] Hence this stratagem was only partially successful.[55]

At the same time, the Congress Party's claim to being the sole secular representative of the national movement seemed more opportunistic than principled. For example, the Congress aligned with the Muslim League to fight the 1937 elections to the U.P. legislature. But once it secured an absolute majority, all sections of the Congress Party, with the exception of Maulana Azad who thought this step a mistake, insisted that merger (and not a coalition which would concede the Muslim League's representative character) could be the only basis upon which the latter's members could participate in government. In this context it has been remarked that while Nehru's secular liberalism was undoubtedly genuine, his views sometimes merely seemed to provide respectability to those '... within the Congress fold for whom this political model was a means to the end of showing the Muslim minority in U.P. ... its place'.[56] Once in power, the Congress ministries in U.P. and elsewhere seemed insensitive towards Muslim interests. This perception, together with the growing conviction among Muslim League politicians that separate electorates and

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[54]At several places, the Congress Party's local and district level leadership ensured that the mass contacts campaign would not get off the ground; such was their power that they also managed to sabotage a party move to disaffiliate Hindu Mahasabha members; see Mushirul Hasan, 'The Muslim Mass Contacts Campaign', pp. 213-6.

[55]Pandey notes that the objectives of the mass contact programme were extremely unclear, and that it 'offered too little too late'; *Ascendancy of the Congress Party*, p. 151.

[56]Kesavan, '1937 as a Landmark', p. 25.

representation would not be sufficient to guarantee them a share of political power, strained relations between the two most important components of the middle-class leadership of the national movement, strengthened the more extreme sections of its Muslim component, and helped push it in the direction of 'separatism'.[57]

Yet, Pakistan was not an inevitable outcome of an uncontrollable surge towards separatism by India's Muslims. For one thing, although elite conflict and religious mobilization had helped reduce the fluidity of the two categories, Muslims were no more homogeneous as a group in terms of their attributes and interests, than Hindus. The forms in which the practices of Islam were interpreted and followed varied over large regions of the country, the personalized adherence to Islamic norms which the *ulema* desired and preached with some success in the United Provinces being quite distinct from the mediatory style of Punjab's rural Islam based on Sufi shrines and the hereditary *pirs* who controlled them. In Bengal as well as in the southern parts of the country, the boundaries between Hindus and Muslims, and between their rituals and beliefs, remained quite fuzzy.[58] Above all, the political interests of the Muslim political leadership in the Muslim-minority regions (United Provinces, Bihar, etc.) and the Muslim-majority regions (Punjab, Bengal, Sind, etc.) of undivided India diverged significantly. Punjab's most powerful Muslim leaders came together under the Unionist Party which was dominated by large landowners of all communities. These leaders were extremely sceptical of Jinnah and the Muslim League leadership, and of the latter's demand for a separate Muslim state in the north-west. They saw no reason to give up their pre-eminent position in the province, which the existing electoral system had given them, for what was,

[57]L. Brennan, 'The Illusion of Security: The Background to Muslim Separatism in the United Provinces', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1984, pp. 237-72; Mushirul Hasan, 'The Muslim Mass Contacts Campaign', p. 212; Zoya Hasan, 'Congress in Aligarh District, 1930-1946: Problems of Political Mobilization', in Sisson and Wolpert, ed., *Congress and Indian Nationalism*, pp. 330-51; Kesavan, '1937 as a Landmark', pp. 20-4.

[58]For a discussion of rural Islam in Punjab and the attitude of the *ulema*, see David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam: Punjab and the Making of Pakistan*, Berkeley, 1988; on South India, see Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge, 1989.

to many of them, a fantastic idea. Even in urban Punjab, support for the Pakistan idea was, at best, equivocal.[59]

The reaction of Punjab's Muslim leadership to the Pakistan idea was critical, since the province was supposed to be at the heart of the proposed new arrangement. Hence Jinnah tried very hard, but until 1946 with conspicuously little success, to make inroads into the province. Although rising communal tensions elsewhere in the country did not leave Punjab unaffected, the province's capitulation to the Muslim League in the course of the 1946 elections did not result from a transformation in the majority Muslim population's attitude towards the idea of Pakistan. On the contrary, it reflected the factional realignments taking place in rural Punjab under the economic and social pressures arising from the war, and the changing mediatory agency of the Sufi *pirs*, particularly those belonging to the revivalist Chishti order.[60]

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[59]It is far from clear what the concept of Pakistan meant to Jinnah and the Muslim League during the 1940s. While it is mostly assumed, particularly on the subcontinent, that the idea of Pakistan meant the same to Jinnah and the League from 1936 through 1947, Ayesha Jalal has shown that the former was quite flexible, until almost the last possible moment, about the precise constitutional arrangement which he wished to see emerging out of the demise of the British-Indian Empire. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, Pakistan is referred to in this section as an idea, rather than as a final blueprint for a separate state; see Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, Cambridge, 1985; Ayesha Jalal and Anil Seal, 'Alternative to Partition: Muslim Politics between the Wars', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1981, pp. 415-54.

[60]Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, ch. 6; David Gilmartin, 'Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement in the Punjab', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1979, pp. 510-16; Ian Talbot, 'The Growth of the Muslim League in the Punjab, 1937-1946', *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics*, 1982, pp. 5-24; *Punjab and the Raj, 1849-1947*, Delhi, 1988, pp. 238-9. It is one of the ironies of the period that while having troubled political relations with the secular, non-religious Muslim leadership, the Congress platform drew on the support of the reformist *ulema*, notably those belonging to the Deoband school; the latter remained suspicious till the end about Jinnah's allegiance to Islam, while syncretic, 'popular Islam', usually distinguished by its opposition to the sectarian, inflexible, orthodox *ulema*, helped mediate between rural Punjab and the Muslim League's urban-based politics; see in this connection, Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics*, pp. 172-6, and David Gilmartin, *Empire and Islam*, pp. 52-6, 190, and 215-6; also see Gilmartin, 'Religious Leadership and the Pakistan Movement', pp. 509-10.

The overriding objective of Punjab's landlords and the province's large number of Sufi *pirs* was the preservation of the traditional rural order and their own positions within it. Both appeared to be under threat not only from the dissolution of the colonial regime with which the *pirs* and the large landowners had sought accommodation, but also from the unitary and centralist drives of the Congress Party. By allowing the provinces considerable autonomy, the 1935 Government of India Act gave Muslim-majority provinces like Punjab, Bengal, and Sind, where the party was relatively weak, a stake in a weak centre. But as had become clear since the constitutional reform deliberations of the late 1920s, the Congress Party leadership was committed to the idea of a strong centre capable of inheriting the political and military authority of the British-Indian empire in its entirety, and without having to share any of it with the provinces. In contrast, the Muslim League, walking a tight rope between a loose federal arrangement involving the provinces merging into Pakistan and India and outright separatism, but rejecting a premature commitment to either arrangement, seemed a much better bet for the Punjabi elite; though even they would perhaps have balked, had they expected it, at the prospect of a division of their province between India and Pakistan. In the end, the strong section of the effective Congress leadership which had centralist and unitarist goals, had its way. This leadership, made up by the significant unity of Jawaharlal Nehru the impatient statist and socialistic modernizer with Sardar Patel the staunch defender of a unitary Hindu order, managed to marginalize Gandhi, now more than ever a man who had helped translate India's 'national' consciousness into effective political action, but who was unwilling to pay the price which the putative 'nation-state' demanded should be paid at its birth. The triumph of the unitarists within the Congress appears to have encouraged Jinnah and the Muslim League to press for a 'partition'.[61]

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[61]On this see Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*; and Jalal and Seal, 'Alternatives to Partition'; even Maulana Azad, respected in the Congress pantheon of heroes as a 'nationalist Muslim', publicly described the Congress party's effective repudiation of the Cabinet Mission plan for a federal arrangement, which paved the way for the establishment of Pakistan, as 'one of those unfortunate events that change the course of history'; see A.K. Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, Bombay, 1959, p. 154.

The terms in which the Congress Party's programme and propaganda were presented did not only alienate the Muslim community, but it also had the effect of confining the bulk of the support for it to the Hindu heartland of the United Provinces, Bihar, and parts of the Bombay Presidency including mainland Gujarat. Elsewhere, the party's presence was usually stronger in the cities and towns, and everywhere its leadership was seen to be dominated by members drawn from the upper castes.[62] There were important groups, such as the non-Brahmin communities in the Madras Presidency and the 'untouchables' under the leadership of Bhimrao Ambedkar, who were opposed to the Congress ideology because they saw it as an attempt to perpetuate the dominance of the upper castes. Gandhi, of course, tackled the political threat to Congress hegemony and the implicit threat to the Hindu order posed by Ambedkar and the so-called untouchable communities through the famous fast which culminated in the Poona Pact. The limitations of the non-Brahmin, anti-Congress movements were also exposed as they found themselves caught between the Congress movement and the colonial government, and several non-Brahmin leaders found it politically expedient to join the Congress Party, particularly during the last years of British rule.[63] In the event, it was not surprising that it was mainly through the arena of elite politics, rather than convincing popular mobilization, that the Congress managed seemingly to broaden its platform, though minus a majority of the Muslims. But this broadening notwithstanding, the party's nationalism remained flawed, since it drew its main strength from a narrow strata of north Indian society. Not only had the Congress Party's nationalism played the role of a midwife in the birth of Pakistan, it would also remain a source of unease to the country's religious and ethnic minorities.

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[62]David A. Washbrook, 'Caste, Class and Dominance in Modern Tamilnadu: Non-Brahminism, Dravidianism and Tamil Nationalism', and G. Ram Reddy, 'The Politics of Accumulation: Caste, Class and Dominance in Andhra Pradesh', both in Frankel and Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power*, for a bibliography on the different regions of India, see the essays in Frankel and Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power*.

[63]Marguerite R. Barnett, *The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India*, Princeton, 1976, pp. 56-74.

IV

The loss of Muslim support during the 1946 provincial elections and the looming certainty of Pakistan only made the Congress Party in the United Provinces aggressively insensitive towards the concerns of the Muslim community.[64] 'Nationalist Muslims' found their standing within the party diminished, with the province's Congressmen turning openly hostile to the idea of accommodating them in the party's committees. The province was racked by religious rioting through and after September 1946, with the most serious of them all, the Garh Mukteshwar riots of November 1946, claiming over 400 lives. For the most part the middle level Congress response to the riots was uncaring. Congress leaders at this level were inclined to minimize the death toll, and to blame the riots on the inability of Muslims to maintain good relations with their Hindu neighbours, or on the Noakhali disturbances. As a central Congress delegation comprising Mridula Sarabhai and Maj. Gen. Shahnawaz Khan acknowledged, local Congressmen had actually played an active role in the riots.[65]

Elsewhere in the province, the Congress government allowed those involved in the rioting to be let off lightly. One of them, Babo Ragho Das, a Congressman associated with the cow protection movement and responsible for the Dadri riots of September 1946, was released from detention to be made president of the Gorakhpur district unit of the party and a member of the United Provinces Congress Committee, and known communal rabble-rousers were taken into the folds of the Congress Party and honoured as freedom-fighters.

The UP Congress remained close to the Hindu Mahasabha during these years, and sympathetic to the latter's demand to reduce Muslim representation in the armed police and the home guards, and to reserve key government positions for Hindus. Repudiating the Congress Party's announced language policy of promoting the

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[64]Mukul Kesavan, 'Invoking a Majority: The Congress and the Muslims of the United Provinces, 1945-47', in P.C. Chatterji, ed., *Self-Images*, pp. 91-111; in the 1946 elections, the Congress Party received 1% of the urban, and 19% of the rural Muslim vote; the Muslim League got 71% and 62% respectively.
[65]Kesavan, 'Invoking a Majority', pp. 93-8.

use of Hindustani in both the Persian and the Nagari scripts, and although a decision had been deferred at the central level, the province's government legislated to make Hindi (written in the Nagari script) the sole official language of the provincial legislature. This move was intended to pre-empt a decision on the language question by the central Constituent Assembly: United Provinces being the largest Urdu-speaking province in the country, its legislators' rejection of Hindustani meant that the language would have little chance of being accepted as the 'national' language. The UP assembly's move was again justified by the province's middle-ranking Congress leadership in majoritarian terms.[66] The province's government also moved quickly to pass a bill providing for elections to village panchayats on the basis of combined electorates. Although the measure itself might seem unexceptionable given the party's attitude towards the principle of separate electorates, several Congress leaders saw this bill as a way of ensuring Hindu control over the province's villages.[67]

Nebulous at best as the Congress Party's vision of secular nationalism was, majoritarian nationalists within the party and outside it managed to make their presence felt during the framing of the constitution by the Constituent Assembly. The decision to make Hindi the national language merely formalized an initiative which had been set in motion in the United Provinces earlier.[68] The ban on cow slaughter was also included among the directive principles of state policy, although some Congressmen like Nehru believed such a step 'would appear as a concession to Hindu bigotry'.[69] 'Majoritarian nationalism' found a powerful protagonist within the Congress ranks in the form of Sardar Patel who became the Home Minister in the post-independence ministry. Patel was sympathetic to the ideology of the RSS. Impressed by the 'patriotism, motivation, and discipline' of its cadres, he managed

[66]Kesavan, 'Invoking a Majority', pp. 103-8.

[67]Kesavan, 'Invoking a Majority', pp. 100-2.

[68]On the language question in the Constituent Assembly, see Krishna Kumar, 'Hindu Revivalism and Education', pp. 187-9.

[69]S. Gopal, 'Nehru and the Minorities', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 1988, pp. 2463-6.

to persuade the party's Working Committee to adopt, in Nehru's absence, a resolution which would encourage them to join the party while still retaining their memberships of the Hindu chauvinistic organization.[70]

Although majoritarian tendencies at the 'grassroots' did make life a little uncomfortable for the more secular sections of the Congress leadership, the two segments continued, as in the 1930s, to share some common prescriptions concerning the minorities. They saw eye to eye on the need for a uniform civil code, which was now included among the directive principles of state policy. The Congress Party also spoke as one on the subject of separate electorates and representation for the religious minorities. But in the hands of Sardar Patel this issue became one which represented, particularly when set in the immediate context of pre-independence politics and the partition, another opportunity for majoritarian nationalism to establish its triumph over alternative, potentially more accommodative versions of nationalism, and over a Muslim minority which had lost the bulk of its numbers and its political leadership to the new state of Pakistan.[71] Addressing the minorities sub-committee of the advisory committee of the Constituent Assembly meeting to discuss the issue of reservations, Patel is said to have spoken in the following words:

> *You* perhaps think that there will be some third power who will use its influence to put the minority against the majority

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[70]Prakash C. Upadhyaya, 'The Politics of Indian Secularism', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1992, pp. 826-7; according to a popular middle-class Hindu nationalistic stereotype, Nehru is derisively regarded as a 'dreamer' and a 'visionary', while Patel, often referred to as the 'indomitable Sardar', was the 'iron man' of 'action'; the shift in the popular, middle-class evaluations of the two politicians partly reflects the growing yearning which this section feels for simple and authoritarian solutions to the crises of Indian nationalism; it is not also accidental that the *Sangh parivar*, in particular the RSS, refers to Patel in glowing terms and invokes him in their campaigns and propaganda material.

[71]On the abolition of separate electorates and representation for the religious minorities, see Omar Khalidi, 'Muslims in Indian Political Process: Group Goals and Alternative Strategies', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Jan. 2-9, 1993, pp. 44-5; it is significant that the strongest support for the continuation of separate electorates came from southern Indian Muslim representatives whose communities had been relatively less affected than those in the north by migrations to Pakistan.

> and compel the majority to take one or two ministers according to the proportion of the population. It is a wrong idea. That conception in *your* mind which has worked for many years must be washed off altogether. *For the future of a minority it is best to trust the majority.* .... Trust *us* and see what happens. Why are you afraid? *Make friends with others and create a change in the atmosphere.* You will then get more than your quota, *if you really feel for the country in the same manner as other people.*[72]

Conflicts within the Congress Party over what ideas like nationalism and secularism meant in practice, and over the attitude of the Indian state towards the majority community and the religious minorities were never far from the surface. They erupted at critical points such as during the passage through Parliament of a bill to amend Hindu marriage and inheritance laws, or after Nehru's political standing was gravely weakened following the Sino-Indian war of 1962. These conflicts were also palpable in the Congress Party's handling of the language agitations, in particular the *Punjabi Suba* agitation of the 1950s.

Yet, at the same time, a number of factors acted to deflect the strivings of majoritarian nationalism seemingly to the margins of the Indian political spectrum. Patel's death towards the end of 1950 helped mute debates within the party over the practical interpretation of categories like nationalism and secularism, and enabled Nehru and the more genuinely secular elements within the party to put their stamp on policy. At the same time, three other factors appear to have been critical: firstly, the considerable,

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[72]Quoted in Omar Khalidi, 'Muslims in Indian Political Process', p. 45; emphases supplied; apart from the 'us-them' language, note the strong similarities between Patel's language and that of the present day BJP leadership; the theme of a Hindu community generous in forgiveness if only the Muslims, rather than looking to external sources of support, made amends for their historical wrongs, is common to both; likewise Muslims were expected to prove their patriotism to the Hindu majority, and upon them lay the onus of creating an atmosphere conducive to their well-being; similar attitudes also prevail among Catholics in the Irish Republic; see Graham Walker, 'Irish Nationalism and the Uses of History', *Past and Present*, 1990, no. 126, pp. 203-14.

but little noticed, employment mobility and political space which the departure of the British from India and the administrative Muslim elites from U.P. and Bihar entailed for this region's Hindu upper-caste elites; secondly, unitarianism being common to both strains of Indian nationalism, the success of the ideology of a strong, centralized state embodying the nation, and giving organized political expression to it; and thirdly, the role of this state in the sphere of the economy, because of which it could emerge as the largest employer in the organized sector and the biggest single avenue for mobility for the educated middle classes, the bulk of whom belonged to the Hindu upper castes.

In general, an 'over-developed state' with a relatively independent bureaucracy has been regarded as a major characteristic of post-colonial societies.[73] Yet, caught in social conflicts stemming primarily from disputes over the distribution of power and patronage, the state in several of these societies has also, all too easily, been riven asunder by contending groups. In India too, the overwhelming role of the state has meant that some existing and emerging cleavages within society could, when they became sharp enough, pose a grave challenge directly to its integrity. Secondly, far from being decisively engaged and defeated, majoritarian nationalism in India has been able to preserve itself as a *structural* feature of the system, cloaked in passivity, as long as avenues for rapid employment mobility existed or the unitarian political order was not under any palpable threat, by the rhetoric of building a strong, independent, self-reliant nation, but reappearing, once these avenues ceased or the centralization of power at the centre was challenged, as an attractive alternative to any meaningful attempt to reckon and deal with the deep cleavages within Indian society.

V

The political economy of Indian development, in particular the

[73]Hamza Alavi, 'The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh', *New Left Review*, 1972, pp. 59-80.

role of the state, has been the subject of much study and debate. In general, there has been some unanimity on the issue of the independence of the state and its institutions *vis-a-vis* the dominant classes, with the bureaucracy in particular being regarded as a class on par with the other dominant propertied classes, but whose strategic role is greater because it mediates between the various classes, and between the latter and the state.[74] Moreover, caught in the enlightenment rhetoric of nationalism, and having to take recourse to the state to telescope both the economic and social processes of modernization in a few decades, the Indian elites have, by and large, tended to privilege the nation and the state over its people. Not accidentally, the state has been the major source of employment and mobility, most notably of all for the Hindu upper-caste elites.

During the last thirty years, the public sector has expanded greatly. It accounted for about 26.5% of the gross domestic product in 1990-1, as against some 10% in 1960-1. Over roughly the same period, public sector employment has risen from about seven million to more than 18 million, its share of total employment in the organized sector having gone up from about 58% in 1961 to 71% by the end of the 1980s.[75] Moreover, more than half of those employed in the public sector hold white-collar jobs.[76]

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[74]P. Bardhan, *The Political Economy of Development in India*, Delhi, 1984; 'The Third Dominant Class', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 1989; Baldev Raj Nayyar, *India's Mixed Economy: The Role of Ideology and Interests in Development*, Bombay, 1989; O. Törnquist, *What is Wrong with Marxism? On Capitalists and State in India and Indonesia*, Delhi, 1989; for a brief survey, see J.D. Pedersen, 'State, Bureaucracy and Change in India', *Journal of Development Studies*, 1992, pp. 616-39.

[75]Government of India, Ministry of Planning, Department of Statistics, Central Statistical Organization, *National Accounts Statistics, 1992*, New Delhi, 1993, p. 75; employment data from Government of India, Department of Industrial Development, Office of the Economic Adviser, *Handbook of Industrial Statistics, 1989*, New Delhi, 1990, pp. 203-4; the 1961 data is from Pedersen, 'State, Bureaucracy and Change'; employment in the organized sector accounts for nearly a quarter of all wage employment, and the latter for nearly 40% of the total work-force.

[76]Pedersen, 'State, Bureaucracy and Change', pp. 621-3.

Reliable data on the religious and caste composition of India's government employees, particularly those employed by state governments, local bodies, and quasi-government undertakings is hard to come by. Official sources do not report data on the representation of individual communities other than the 'scheduled castes' and 'scheduled tribes' who are entitled to statutory quotas. One has therefore to rely upon private studies and reports of official commissions and committees appointed to look into the grievances of the 'backward classes' and the minorities;[77] and the methods adopted by these studies have necessarily been rather ad hoc and controversial. Nevertheless the conclusion is inescapable that the bulk of the better paid jobs at the higher levels of government are held by those belonging to the upper castes among the Hindus (about 8% of the total population according to some estimates), and that public sector employment has been a major source of mobility for these sections.

Of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers serving in 1985 who were identifiable as 'Hindus', Brahmins, Kayasths, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas (including Marwaris) between them accounted for nearly 70% of the over 3,200 appointments. Members of the intermediate castes held a mere 66 appointments. Two-thirds of the latter were held by those hailing from Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka which have had a history of 'backward class' movements, or states like West Bengal where caste oppression was not particularly severe. Clearly, members of the intermediate castes in the Hindu-Hindi heartland region of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Haryana have not done outstandingly well, accounting as they do for only about one per cent of the appointments from these states.[78]

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[77]Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *Report of the Backward Classes Commission*, New Delhi, 1980; Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, High Power Panel on Minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Weaker Sections, *Report on Minorities*, New Delhi, 1983.

[78]Santosh Goyal, 'Social Background of Officers in the Indian Administrative Service', app. II in Frankel and Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power*, pp. 429-32; the caste affiliations of over 28% of the IAS officers identified as 'Hindus' could not be ascertained.

The position of the intermediate castes in other areas of public sector employment, as Table 1 below shows, is only slightly better:

	Class 1	Class 2	Classes 3&4	All classes
Total no. of employees	174026	912925	484687	1571638
SCs/STs	5.68%	18.18%	24.4%	18.72%
OBCs	4.69%	10.63%	18.98%	12.55%

Table 1: Representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in Central Government Services[79]

Nor is the position of the Muslims (some 11% of the population) very much better. In 1971 they accounted for less than two per cent of those employed in the central government's secretariat in Delhi; they held about two per cent of the appointments in the IAS in 1985, and about three per cent in the Indian Police Service in 1983.[80] According to the survey conducted by the High Powered Panel on Minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Weaker Sections, members of minority

[79]Source: *statement no. 1, app. vii*, in Government of India, *Report of the Backward Classes Commission*, New Delhi, 1980, part 1, vol. 2; the employees covered include those of ministries and departments of the Government of India, autonomous bodies attached to the government and subordinate bodies, and public sector undertakings; according to the commission, the 'backward classes' make up nearly 52% of the Indian population; there is a statutory 22.5% quota for SCs and STs in central government employment. Unfortunately, similar data on employment in the state governments and their undertakings, etc. is not available, but the initiatives taken in recent years by several state governments to reserve jobs for the 'other backward classes' suggest that these communities felt 'under-represented' in the public services.

[80]Figures for employment in the central secretariat and appointments to the Indian Police Service are from Mushirul Hasan, 'In Search of Integration and Identity: Indian Muslims since Independence', *Economic and Political Weekly*, November, 1988, pp. 2471-4; figures for appointments to the IAS are from Goyal, 'Social Background', p. 429; bias being greater at this level, it is likely that Muslim representation in the lower ranks of public employment would be even smaller; in the central secretariat certainly, as Mushirul Hasan, p. 2473, shows, the proportion of Muslim employees falls in the lower ranks.

religious groups (Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, and Parsees who together comprise nearly a fifth of the total population) accounted for about 9% of central government employment and about 16% of the employment in central public sector undertakings.[81]

There can thus be no doubt that the direct employment effects of a major role for the state in Indian society have, in general, been such as to ensure greater job mobility for members of the Hindu upper castes than for other sections of the population. But the available data does not allow us to judge whether or not upper-caste Hindu domination of public sector jobs has declined over time. Besides, except in so far as successive governments have failed to invest adequately in elementary and secondary education, the charge that the *system* allows or encourages discrimination against those who do not belong to Hindu, upper-caste communities, particularly in the northern Indian states, may not be easy to sustain. Moreover, there is merit in the argument that civil service employment should not be viewed as a form of public sector intervention with distributional objectives; and that even when regarded in that light, the former has to be set against the impact of other forms of state intervention (or non-intervention) with more explicitly distributional aims. One may also validly argue that the demand for preferential access for intermediate caste elites to civil service employment originates in a notion of the latter as a source of power or patronage which militates against the true role of civil servants in modern society.

The above arguments are valid in their own contexts. Yet it may be worth pausing to consider that intermediate caste elites, in particular, *perceive* the system to have functioned in such a way as disproportionately to benefit upper-caste elites, and that the ideology of liberal, overtly non-sectarian nationalism seems unacceptable even to those who might otherwise be said to have done well under its regime. Above all, the political response of India's upper-caste leaders to the challenge which the intermediate caste elites have posed to their domination of public sector

[81]The estimates are for sample districts with minority population proportions well above the national average; see *Report on Minorities*, pp. 58-66, 78-82.

employment gives the latter a significance which is impossible to ignore. The nature of this political response also raises important questions about the practice of unitarian nationalism in India.

VI

On the face of it, India's political leadership has tried implicitly to deflect the thrust of majoritarian nationalism by replacing religion with territory as the basis of nationalism. But in an overwhelmingly religious society in which even the most clear-sighted leaders have found it impossible to distinguish romanticism from history and the latter from mythology, this distinction is often not clear-cut. Further, if the idea of India is suffused with religious and mythical meanings, so is the territory it covers. Indeed, in the minds of her bureaucratic and political elites, the sanctity of India's borders derives not from their immediate past history including that of the consolidation of the British Indian empire, but from mythology. In 1959, for example, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Government of India argued, in the course of rejecting the Chinese government's contention that the borders between the two countries were arbitrarily drawn by the colonial authorities, that India's boundaries had been part of her 'culture and tradition for the past two thousand years or so'. A White Paper prepared by the Foreign Ministry invoked support from the Vishnu Purana, the Rig Veda, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Ramayana* for its view that the country to the south of the Himalayas and north of the ocean was called Bharat. Thus the 'Bharat of the Brahmanical ideology' was not only 'made congruent', as we saw above, with the 'India of the West's imagination', but also with the actual boundaries established at the end of Britain's nineteenth century conquest of the subcontinent.[82]

In practice as well, territorial nationalism in the Indian context is often indistinguishable from religious nationalism. The presence of Islamic states in the neighbourhood was bound to give a religious edge to territorial nationalism. Similarly, the presence of a substantial Hindu or Muslim minority community in some of

[82]Embree, *Imagining India*, p. 16.

India's border states has meant that religious sectarian slogans and ideas have always implicitly characterized electoral mobilization and the integrationist politics of centrist and right-wing nationalist political parties in these states.

Since the early 1980s, the distinction between territorial and religious nationalism has become even more blurred. To a great extent, this blurring accompanied the response of India's unitarian political and bureaucratic elites to the twin challenges they faced since the late 1960s.

The first of these challenges was the collapse of the political-organizational basis of centrist nationalist politics in India. The inability of the Congress Party to suitably accommodate the secular demands of the upwardly mobile peasantry belonging to the intermediate castes who were consolidating their political presence in large parts of India eroded the party's earlier domination of the country's politics. In the Hindi heartland states, the party's position came under challenge from parties representing the interests of these newly mobile sections. In Tamil Nadu and Punjab, and later in Andhra Pradesh, the challenge came from regional parties whose base also lay with the middle and rich peasantry, while in West Bengal, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led a Left Front coalition to power in 1977.[83]

Mrs. Gandhi's personal predilections combined with the Congress Party's inability to address this challenge adequately at the level of organization. With the latter virtually ceasing to exist and the interdependence between the party and the government a thing of the past, national power came to lack a firm institutional base independent of the government.[84] Mrs. Gandhi's characteristic response to the challenge which the rise of regional parties posed to her party's position and her personal position within it was to 'nationalize' issues on which elections to Parliament were fought, hoping thereby to create a 'wave' which would override the relative autonomy of the local structures through which electoral

[83]See Frankel on Bihar, Zoya Hasan on Uttar Pradesh, David Washbrook on Tamil Nadu, Ram Reddy on Andhra Pradesh, Paul Wallace on Punjab, and Atul Kohli on West Bengal in Frankel and Rao, eds., *Dominance and State Power*.
[84]Paul Brass, 'National Power and Local Politics in India: A Twenty-year Perspective', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1984, pp. 89-118.

mobilization took place in India. Although local networks of influence such as those based on land, caste, kinship groups, lineage, etc., did not cease to exist, increasingly these were being articulated in the process of vertical affiliations either in support of, or in opposition to Indira Gandhi and the party she led. Mrs. Gandhi's emphatic victory in the 1971 elections which she fought on the slogan of '*Garibi Hatao*', and which helped her for the first time to appeal to the voters over the heads of their traditional leadership and thereby to overcome the looming fragmentation of India's party political system, represented an early success of this strategy.[85]

By the time of the 1979-80 elections which saw Mrs. Gandhi regain power after nearly three years in the opposition, the fragmentation had become real. The 1977 elections saw the intermediate caste elites of the Hindi heartland and regional elites from Punjab and Tamil Nadu share power for the first time at the centre. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu, intermediate caste leaders or regional parties also came to power with comfortable majorities. Although the C.P.I.(M.)-led Left Front which came to power in West Bengal in the 1977 elections was more overtly 'national' in outlook, the compulsions of political survival in an environment dominated by a powerful central government forced it to make common cause with regional parties on a number of issues.

As Indira Gandhi was well aware, rather than a united all-India party organized in the mirror-image of the Congress, the immediate challenge to her personal dominance and that of her party was likely to come from regional and left-wing parties in alliance with politicians representing the peasant castes of the Hindi heartland states. Further, this alliance had been able to propel itself to power with the support of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (the progenitor of the present day Bharatiya Janata Party) which had significant pockets of influence in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan,

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[85]It is not a coincidence that during the Emergency (1975-7) some leaders of the Congress Party actively campaigned in favour of switching over to a presidential form of government; such a system would have led to elections being more sharply focused on 'national' issues, and helped divide or disorient more local or provincial bases of power.

Delhi, the Jammu region of Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab; and which though possessing a unitarian Hindu upper-caste perspective, had been compelled by the exigencies of India's electoral politics to throw its weight behind the broad alliance of political parties representing the intermediate castes and the regional parties.

By the late 1970s, the political programme of a section of the anti-Congress coalition had also evolved sufficiently to reveal the latter's ability to threaten Hindu upper-caste dominance of the government and its unitarian basis. The most controversial initiative taken by the ruling Janata Party's intermediate caste leadership in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in the teeth of opposition from the upper castes represented by the opposition Congress Party and the former Jana Sangh component within the newly-formed ruling Janata Party, was the decision to implement the reports of their respective backward class commissions providing for job and educational reservations for members of the intermediate castes.[86] But not content with securing their positions at the state level and establishing horizontal alliances, leaders of the intermediate castes also began assiduously to address the task of converting their political strength into systemic clout at the centre. The appointment of a backward classes commission (Mandal Commission) by the Janata Party government brought the issue of job reservations in the central government, and threats to upper-caste mobility, to the fore.

The second challenge to Mrs. Gandhi, the Congress Party, and her unitarian platform came from parties with strong regional bases of support. From the late 1970s, the Left Front government in West Bengal, the Akali Dal in Punjab, and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) in Tamil Nadu began to campaign for a redistribution of power between the centre and the state governments.[87] In particular,

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[86]For a caste-based analysis of successive governments in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, see Zoya Hasan, 'Patterns of Resilience and Change', pp. 170-88, and Frankel, 'Caste, Land and Dominance in Bihar', pp. 99-119.

[87]There are two views on whether the 1960s and the 1970s saw a greater centralization of power in Delhi's hands. While the centralization argument is well known, the contrary view, of an evolving pluralism, has hardly been put forward with any seriousness. An exception in this respect is Paul Brass, 'Pluralism, Regionalism, and Decentralizing Tendencies in Contemporary Indian Politics', in A. Jeyratnam Wilson and Dennis Dalton, eds., *The States of South Asia: Problems of National Integration*, New Delhi, 1982, pp. 223-64.

they sought a renegotiation of centre-state financial relations, and limits on the powers of the central government to dismiss popularly elected state governments.

Mrs. Gandhi chose not to face either of these two challenges directly. Instead, she focused on the secular agitation launched by the Akali Dal demanding the long-promised inclusion of the Union Territory of Chandigarh in the state of Punjab and a greater share of river waters for the state, and succeeded in giving it a religious colour. In general, since the 1950s, the Congress Party's pre-eminence in Punjab had come to depend on its ability to split the Akali Dal. In the 1950s, and till the mid-1960s, this tactic had succeeded handsomely. But the alliance between the Akali Dal and the Jana Sangh, which briefly held office in the state in the late 1960s and again in the late 1970s, meant that the Congress hopes of staying in power came to rest upon splitting the Akali vote in such a way as also to consolidate and capture the 'Hindu vote'. If effected successfully, such a capture would help expose the ideological fragility of the anti-Congress alliance of the left parties, regional elites, middle-peasant parties, and the Hindu, right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party. By exposing the vacillatory character of the latter's upper-caste support base, the strategy would also have implications well beyond the narrow confines of Punjab. And by the late 1970s the Congress Party leadership had picked an obscure fire-spouting religious preacher, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, to achieve this for them.

Much has been written about the role which the Congress Party, particularly Giani Zail Singh and Sanjay Gandhi, played in helping to create the monster which Bhindranwale eventually became.[88] But while the Congress Party's manipulation of

[88]There are a number of surveys dealing with different aspects of the Punjab crisis, but a surprising degree of unanimity regarding the political machinations of the Congress Party leadership; the following account is based on Robin Jeffrey, *What's Happening to India? Punjab, Ethnic Conflict, Mrs. Gandhi's Death and the Test for Federalism*, London, 1986; Richard G. Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making*, Berkeley, 1985; Rajiv Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith*; J.S. Grewal, *The Sikhs of the Punjab*; New Cambridge History of India, II.3, Cambridge, 1990; Amarjit Kaur, Shekhar Gupta, J.S. Aurora, *et al.*, *The Punjab Story*, New Delhi, 1984; Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle*, London, 1985; Dalip Singh,

Bhindranwale took place within the context of Punjab's politics, it also gave the party a very useful weapon with which to fight the gathering internal threats to the unitarian, centralized, upper-caste dominated order of which it was the principal champion.

The Congress leadership's successful efforts to use the Akali agitation to defeat the wider challenge to its dominance represents perhaps the most cynical display of *realpolitik* in modern India. Firstly, Indira Gandhi refused seriously to address any of the secular demands raised by the Akali Dal. Several rounds of talks held between the Akali leadership and representatives of the central government during 1980-84 proved abortive, largely because the Akali agitation was a potential asset which the Congress Party was not about to let go.[89] Simultaneously, it encouraged the growth of a militant-religious dimension to the Akali Dal's agitation. This was accomplished on the one hand by conceding some religious-sectarian demands, not formally part of the Akali agitation but raised by the extremist fringe of the movement, to amend Article 25 of the Indian constitution to enshrine the religious distinctiveness of the Sikhs, ban the sale of tobacco near the Golden Temple, etc.; and on the other by boosting the prestige and stature of Bhindranwale and other extremists within the Sikh religious leadership. As extremism gained ground, the Congress Party and its supporters, with help

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Dynamics of Punjab Politics, New Delhi, 1981; Avtar Singh Malhotra, *Save Punjab, Save India*, New Delhi, 1984; Kuldip Nayar and Khushwant Singh, *Tragedy of Punjab: Operation Blue Star and After*, New Delhi, 1984; Paul Brass, 'The Punjab Crisis and the Unity of India' and 'Socioeconomic Aspects of the Punjab Crisis', both in Paul Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, New Delhi, 1991; Sucha Singh Gill and K.C. Singhal, 'The Punjab Problem: Its Historical Roots', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 1984; Gopal Singh, 'Socio-Economic Basis of the Punjab Crisis', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 1984; Dipankar Gupta, 'The Communalizing of Punjab: 1980-1985', *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 1985, pp. 1185-90.

[89]On one occasion (February 1984), an anti-Sikh riot in the Congress-ruled state of Haryana helped break up negotiations between an Akali delegation and the central government; the fact that Congress activists took part in the riots and that the state government did nothing to control it supports the widely-held view that the riot was *staged* to prevent a possible settlement; see, more generally, Tully and Jacob, *Amritsar*, pp. 73-83, 89-91.

from a largely uncritical media, succeeded in portraying the Akali agitation as a religious-secessionist movement for the creation of a Sikh theocratic state of Khalistan.[90] The 'manner in which the Centre reacted to ... Akali demands, which were initially secular, ... mnemonically revived tradition as an ideological rationale for activism';[91] and from looking to the government's demonology to define their goals and objectives for them, the extremists soon graduated to setting their own agenda.

As extremism gained ground and the moderates, abandoning earlier postures, began talking the language of the militants, the central government could point to the justice and correctness of its initial characterization of the Akali movement. And with the religious extremists in Punjab 'posing a threat to the country's unity and integrity' and the unresolved problem in Kashmir also rearing its head, Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress leadership could play the ethnic/religious card in the guise of upholding secularism and 'national unity'.[92] Territorial nationalism and religious nationalism, if they were ever distinct, merged; religious consciousness and 'nation-state consciousness' were once again co-terminous in the Congress agenda, and the 'unity' of India had seemingly come to depend on the unity of the Hindus behind Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress Party.[93]

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[90]The central government's demonology about 'bloodthirsty Sikhs' was so successful that even army officers heading predominantly Sikh units succumbed to it; as a result, immediately after the army's storming of the Golden Temple in June 1984 ('Operation Bluestar'), Hindu army officers heading these units deserted their posts without carrying out routine unifying practices such as attending the weekly gurudwara or holding *durbars* to explain the operation; see Gupta, 'The Communalizing of Punjab', p. 1189.

[91]Dipankar Gupta, 'The Communalizing of Punjab', pp. 1187-8.

[92]Mrs. Gandhi also used the mass conversion to Islam of nearly a thousand members of the 'scheduled castes' in a small town called Meenakshipuram (Tamil Nadu), to mobilize Hindu opinion; see Engineer, *Politics of Confrontation*, p. xiv.

[93]Dipankar Gupta, 'Communalism and Fundamentalism: Some Notes on the Nature of Ethnic Politics in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number 1991, pp. 573-82; the Congress Party's drive towards sectarian nationalist mobilization may also have been due partly to the the fact that an assertive new generation of Muslims was coming into public life independent of the Congress; the events of the Emergency and its aftermath may also have had the effect of shifting the base of the non-Congress Muslim leadership from southern India to Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

Thus the 'Hindu card' which Mrs. Gandhi played with such devastating effect during the 1982-3 state elections in Jammu and Kashmir and the local elections in Delhi was not an accidental or one-off tactic. It was a carefully considered and rehearsed tactic which gave her both a 'national' and a 'nationalistic' platform during the last five years of her life, and enabled her son to lead the Congress to victory in the 1984 elections to Parliament. It also succeeded in temporarily seeing off the threat to India's unitarian order from the regions, and the challenge to upper-caste dominance from the middle peasants of the Hindi heartland states. The fall in the Bharatiya Janata Party's representation to a mere two seats in Parliament after the 1984 elections illustrated just how adroitly the Congress had walked away with the former's clothes. As the Congress Party underlined the identity of nationalist and Hindu religious mobilization, the BJP learnt to its cost that religious mobilization succeeded best when it was combined with nationalism. Thanks to the mobilizations of the 1980s, the intertwining of religion and nationalism, never far from the surface, returned openly as a dominant feature of Indian politics.

The Congress Party could not, even if it wished to, easily undo the kind of sectarian Hindu mobilization which it had sought to effect between 1980 and 1985. At the same time, the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi by her bodyguards highlighted the high costs of the gamesmanship which had been the stuff of the party's politics during the preceding years. Moreover, since 1977, northern Indian Muslims had turned away from it and were beginning to develop an independent political leadership. It was vital to arrest this erosion. Caught between contradictory pulls and pressures, the party's central leadership, now without the tactical acumen of Mrs. Gandhi to guide it, attempted to defuse the Punjab crisis by signing an agreement with a section of the moderate Akali leadership.[94] At the same time, in another display of its readiness to make concessions to the minority religious leadership,

[94]But its fear of losing the 'Hindu vote' outside Punjab led the Congress Party to go back on its commitments under the Rajiv-Longowal accord for signing which the latter paid with his life; the accord broke down following the dismissal of the elected Akali government in 1987, ostensibly because of its failure to curb terrorism, to coincide with elections to the assembly in the neighbouring Hindu-dominated state of Haryana.

the Congress Party sought to placate Muslim clerics by passing a constitutional amendment to overturn a Supreme Court ruling upholding the right of divorced Muslim women to claim maintenance from their husbands, a ruling which according to the clerics struck at the root of Muslim personal law. And thirdly, to sustain its efforts at Hindu religious mobilization, Rajiv Gandhi's government threw open for worship the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, which a section of the town's Hindu religious leadership claimed was built on the ruins of a temple at the precise spot where Ram was supposedly born, and which had been closed to the public since 1949 after some idols were forcibly installed within it.

Notwithstanding these gestures and despite inaugurating its campaign from Ayodhya with the promise of a *Ramrajya*, the Congress Party lost the 1989 elections. The election outcome was far from decisive, but it enabled the return to power of the alliance of intermediate caste and regional elites in the form of the Janata Dal-National Front, with support from the Bharatiya Janata Party which saw its parliamentary representation jump from a mere two seats in 1984 to nearly eighty seats in 1989, and the left parties. Within a year of assuming office, a section of the Janata Dal's intermediate caste leadership managed to use Prime Minister V.P. Singh's vulnerability to challenges from within his party to manoeuvre him to accept the recommendation of the Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) reserving jobs both at the central and state levels for members of the intermediate castes. Protests by upper-caste youth, with the backing of a large section of the print and the newly emerging video-news media, erupted in a big way.[95] As the situation in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir also seemed to get out of hand, history appeared to repeat itself. Only this time, the BJP, after bringing down V.P. Singh's government, managed to use the issue of a Ram temple at Ayodhya to catapult itself to the leadership of the upper-caste unitarist elite, and mobilize against the renewed challenge of the intermediate castes, and against the so-called 'appeasement of secessionists' by

[95]For an excellent account of the attitude of Delhi's English language press to the anti-Mandal agitation, see S. Muralidharan, 'Mandal, Mandir *aur* Masjid: "Hindu" Communalism and the Crisis of the State', in K.N. Panikkar, ed., *Communalism in India*, pp. 196-218.

the Janata Dal government.[96] The Congress Party, despite returning to power as a minority government in the 1991 elections, found to its cost that majoritarianism being a structural feature of India's political system with a pivotal role in its unitary apparatus, cannot as easily be manipulated or suppressed as the earlier genie it had let out, of Sikh religious extremism. More emphatically than the Congress Party, and with greater consequences for the future of the Indian republic, the BJP has succeeded in fusing nationalism with militant Hinduism, and if its invoking the language of the freedom struggle, in particular the Quit India movement, is any indication, looks set to claim the heritage of the unitarist nationalist platform which was so important a part of the Indian anti-colonial movement.

VII

Perhaps the most ominous social and political development in India in recent times is the rapid growth of aggressive Hindu chauvinism. To most appearances, this growth has been rather sudden, even unexpected. The BJP, the principal *political* expression of Hindu chauvinism, won a mere two seats in a house of nearly 550 members in the 1984 parliamentary elections, and it was not in power in any state. In the 1989 elections, however, the party's parliamentary representation shot up to nearly 80 seats, and to over 120 in 1991, by which time it had also come to power in several states of northern India. Although it lost all but one of these states in the mid-term elections held in 1993, the BJP's electoral fortunes have recently shown signs of revival, with the party having formed governments in the key western Indian states of Gujarat and Maharashtra. In the latter, it is a junior partner of the even more aggressive Shiv Sena which became notorious for its open involvement in the attacks on Muslims in Bombay in the early weeks of 1993.

Electoral gains are merely one sign of the rapid growth of aggressive Hindu chauvinism. By far the more ominous portent is

[96]See L.K. Advani's interview to the *Sunday Times of India*, 14 October 1990.

the relative success of the BJP, and more generally of the *Sangh parivar*, in defining the agenda and discourse of Indian nationalism and forcing other parts of the country's political spectrum to react to this agenda, and couch their responses in terms of its discourse. The most important reason for the inroads the Bharatiya Janata Party has made, particularly among the educated middle classes, is that it has managed to eliminate the thin distinction between majoritarian nationalism and the liberal, secular nationalism which has so far been part of the staple, modernizing, nation-building discourse of the Indian elite. Both models are alike in stressing the homogenizing effects of modernization, and in seeing it as a desirable outcome of the process. While the temple agitation focused attention on the religious basis of the *Sangh parivar's* homogenization outlook, its emphasis on *civil* issues such as the principle of equality of India's citizens, as individuals, in relation to the state and a common civil law has helped mobilize those sections of the middle classes, who even while being self-consciously 'Hindu' in their religious beliefs, are not easily moved by religious appeals. In this sense, each campaign complemented the other, and together they reinforced the BJP's claim to be *the* party of modern Indian nationalism. Although not all sections of the *Sangh parivar* share the BJP's liberal pretensions and members of the 'family' have mastered the art of speaking in several voices at once, important sections among India's middle classes have been seduced by the BJP's claim to have 'secularized' the religious demand to build a Ram temple at the site of the 16th century mosque. At the same time, to stress the essential 'moderateness' of its programme, the BJP has drawn upon a common assumption, which however is not shared by the more extreme sections of the *Hindutva* fraternity, that India's religious syncretic traditions would never permit the creation of a Hindu theocratic state.

It is an interesting paradox that while the BJP has appropriated the language of secularism from the other political parties, the latter have responded to the success of the BJP's multi-pronged initiative by moving some distance in the direction of its platform and by borrowing some of its nationalist vocabulary. This movement is most pronounced in the case of the ruling Congress Party's studied espousal of a so-called 'soft' *Hindutva*. Secular intellectuals

and India's influential communist parties too have begun to proffer and publicize versions of a 'purer' and 'truer' Hinduism closer to popular religion as they understand it.[97] In doing so, however, they seem merely to be occupying the ground which the BJP relinquished less than a decade ago. Moreover, it is moot whether the variety and the open-ended character of popular religion can survive the centralizing political mobilization which in recent years has become an essential part of the ideology of Indian nationalism.

More explicit recognition of the importance of the Hindu identity in contemporary Indian politics is only one reflection of the political bind in which India's left and secular parties and intelligentsia find themselves. The BJP/RSS's seemingly liberal line of argument on civil issues also poses them acute problems, because while being uneasy with group identities, they cannot see their way to overcoming them in the near future. Hence they are undecided whether particular forms of intervention defend legitimate group interests or, by accentuating sectarian identities, help their ideal of a liberal, secular, modern nation-state recede even further into the future. The deepening teleological tunnel has led to a schizoid approach which defends 'divisive' initiatives on short-term 'tactical' grounds of practical politics, but which is not clear about the longer term (or 'strategic') implications of such initiatives for their liberal vision. Secondly, in combating the BJP's mobilization on the issue of civil rights, they are forced to highlight the former's sectarian sub-text; and in doing so, and even when refuting stereotypes about Muslims which most middle-class Hindus hold, *they* are forced unavoidably to 'communalize' a seemingly liberal and 'secular' demand! Their ability thereafter to resist the *Sangh parivar's* overtly religious campaign is gravely hampered. So complete is majoritarian nationalism's liberal disguise for those who do not care to perceive it, that genuinely non-sectarian nationalists seem to have little room for manoeuvre. This poses a serious problem for the latter, one which moreover cannot be resolved purely on the basis of tactical adjustments to their positions

[97]S. Yechury, *Psuedo-secularism Exposed: Saffron Brigade's Myths and Reality*, Communist Party of India (Marxist) publication, New Delhi, 1993; also see C.P. Surendran, 'BJP Rule: What Kind of India will it be?', the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, March 1993.

without prejudicing the integrity of their non-sectarian outlook, or the distinctiveness of the latter from that of 'moderately' chauvinistic or hegemonistic elements within the Congress and the *Sangh parivar*. Indeed, the longer-run appeal of *Indian* nationalism for the country's religious, linguistic, and ethnic minorities, and other disadvantaged sections of her population may well come to depend upon the ability of genuinely non-sectarian nationalists in India, who comprise chiefly the left parties, to resolve these dilemmas, rescue the ideology of nationalism from the grip of national and religious chauvinists and strengthen its democratic content.