Indigenous Modernities: Nationalism and Communalism in Colonial India

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Abstract

In this paper, it is argued that colonial policies facilitated the development of *ethnicized* religious communities in South Asia and that, despite the secular credentials of its leadership, 'India' could not help but be imagined by its new citizens primarily in terms of its 'Hindu' ethno-religious traditions. As long as the nationalist leadership remained committed to a secular vision intelligible in western terms as the separation of religion and politics, nationalism would remain an elite phenomenon. The mass based political activism of Mahatma Gandhi, however, was based upon a mobilisation of the peasant masses through the use of 'Hindu' religious symbols. This problematized the relationship between Indian 'nationalism' and Hindu 'communalism' and created space for the articulation of first a Muslim and subsequently a Sikh 'national' identity.

Introduction

In *Orientalism,* Said claimed that Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that 'the Orientalist poet or scholar, *makes the Orient speak,* describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West' (Said 1978: 21- emphasis mine). The implication is that the indigenous voice of the 'oriental subject' is silenced by the power of Orientalism. Colonial discourse, however, did not reduce the Orient to silence but stimulated a search for indigenous *modernities:* a modernity which could *speak for* and on behalf of the colonized. In particular, colonial modernity elicited two responses from the indigenous middle classes, the new South Asian elites. One response took the form of an articulation

of an all-Indian national identity: an inclusive and secular nationalism that reflected the desire of westernized elites for the unfulfilled promises of the Enlightenment. This discourse initially took the form of an engagement with the Liberal legitimizing ideology of the *Raj* but reached its apogee during Nehru's leadership of the independence movement. The second response took the form of the articulation of particular ethno-religious identities at the expense of an inclusive, secular nationalism. This discourse, which has been dubbed 'communalism' in a South Asian context, may be seen as discursively produced by the colonial rule of difference. It will be argued, following Partha Chatterjee, that both these responses were derivative discourses in the sense that they articulated the essential *difference* of the indigenous community in a language intelligible to the West, utilizing a conceptual vocabulary derived largely from western historical experience and political thought.

For Chatterjee, nationalist thought appears to oppose the dominating implications of post-Enlightenment European thought at one level and yet, at the same time, seems to accept that domination at another (Chatterjee 1986:37). Nationalism takes issue not with modernity itself but with the *mode* in which modernity came to the colonies. It seeks not to abolish the main instruments of colonial governmentality but to *nationalize* them. Therefore, the capture of state power soon became the central nationalist demand, even though the nation was yet to be invented (Gellner 1983) or imagined (Anderson 1991). The insistent demand for a nation-state represented the urge to establish an *Indian* modernity: an indigenous modernity which differed from that of the West (Prakash 1999:201). This explains why, in the Indian case, 'state power was not seized in a single historical movement of revolution but through prolonged popular struggle on a moral, political and ideological level' (Chandra 1987:220). An Indian modernity took time to be forged in the crucible of the independence movement. As Bipin Chandra has written, 'the national movement was the process through which the Indian people *were formed into a nation* and a people…it was the existence of a common oppression by a common enemy and the struggle against it which provided important bonds uniting the Indian people' (Chandra 1984:210-emphasis mine).

Communalism, on the other hand, does not *always* explicitly and consistently seek state power. Indeed, the term 'communalism' has come to represent the antithesis of Indian nationalism; as exclusive as nationalism seeks to be inclusive, as violent as the nationalist movement was non-violent, as primitive and atavistic as nationalism was modern and as irrational as

nationalism is rational. For Bipin Chandra, it represents a form of 'false consciousness' (Chandra 1984), whilst for Partha Chatterjee it is a pathology of nationalism (Chatterjee 1986). However, it too may be seen, despite its seeming rejection of western secularity, as an indigenous variant of modernity. Communalism, in a South Asian context, primarily perceives society as constituted of a number of ethno-religious communities and may be defined as the 'consciousness which draws on a supposed religious identity and uses this as the basis for an ideology' (Thapar 1989:209). At the heart of the communalist demand, lies a belief in the *primordiality* of the ethno-religious community. Allegiance to the community is seen as more *real* than allegiance to the imagined community of the nation-state. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, the imagination of the ethno-religious community was only made possible by colonial modernity. Enumeration in particular facilitated the transformation of *local* into *national* political communities. Furthermore, indigenous religions were simplified or even *semitized* in order to make them intelligible to a wider national community. Communalism merely essentializes inter-communal differences along colonial lines. Consequently rather than contrasting the primordiality of communalism with the modernity of the nation, it is argued here that, both should be considered as *modern* responses to the questions asked of indigenous society by colonial modernity. For, as Gyanendra Pandey points out, nationalism and communalism arose together; the age of communalism was concurrent with the age of nationalism; they were part of the same discourse (Pandey 1990:236).

Indian Nationalism and Hindu Religious Revivalism

The origins of the Indian nationalist movement, as opposed to sporadic anti-colonial peasant insurgencies, lie in the colonial state. To a large extent, Indian nationalism in its early phases was the ideology of the indigenous bureaucracy of the *Raj*. The colonial state apparatus was the principal avenue for upward mobility and became the principal employer of a new, professional class of *anglicized* Indians fulfilling the role assigned to them by Macauley who had, in 1835, envisaged a 'class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.'[1] In the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was this class of interpreters who initiated and backed a nationalist movement

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1. Macauley' 1835 Minute on Colonial Education cited in Bhabha (1994:87).

which attempted to capture the state apparatus. The Anglicized elite class both competed and collaborated with the British in their search for power and privilege (Seal 1968). Established in 1885 by a group of middle-class, upper-caste lawyers, the Indian National Congress (INC) is largely credited with leading the 'freedom movement'. Initially, INC demands reflected the narrow interests of its membership and failed to mobilize the silent vernacular agrarian majority. Early Congress demands focused on increasing the representation of Indians in the higher echelons of the Indian Civil Service (ICS). To this end, the INC campaigned for both a greater induction of Indians into the ICS and the right to sit for ICS examinations in India rather than London. The capture of state power remained a distant goal as Macauley's 'interpreters' were initially content merely to have a say on what they would 'interpret' for their colonial masters rather than to govern themselves. Indeed, the early Congress leadership was staunchly loyalist. Sarankan Nair, in his Presidential address at the 1897 annual session of Congress, credited British rule with having 'cleared the way to progress' and having 'furnished us with the one element, English education, which was necessary to rouse us from the torpor of ages and bring about the religious, social and political regeneration which the country stands so much in need of.' Nair feared that the decline of British rule would bring 'anarchy, war and rapine' (Parekh 1989:50). Similarly, B.N. Dhar, Congress President a few years later, lauded the British for having brought 'peace, order and perfect security of life and property…to a degree never known to the old Roman Empire and even now not to be seen anywhere beyond the limits of the British Empire.' Dhar went further in pledging his allegiance to the Crown, stating:

> When I think of the dependencies ruled by other European powers…I thank God that I am a British subject, and feel no hesitation in saying that the government of India by England…is still the greatest gift of providence to my race. (D.N. Dhar in Parekh 1989:51)

The early nationalist logic was based upon taking the 'civilizing' ideals espoused by their colonizers at face value rather than critiquing the *content* of the civilizing mission. Early Indian nationalism was *imitative* in that its westernized proponents sought to prove to their colonial masters that they too could be trusted to modernize India along the lines drawn up by the British. However, the colonial subjects were not considered the equals of the coloniser. They were, to use Bhabha's terminology, *mimic men*. Able to understand the coloniser's discourse of

the universality of rights, they were nonetheless barred on the grounds of race from the exercise of the most basic right: the right to self-determination. Dadabhai Naraoji, an early Indian nationalist, tested the limits of the colonial discourse by successfully standing for election in Britain. Once elected, Naraoji found himself in the curious position of having to represent the interests of his almost exclusively white constituents in the London borough of Finsbury as well as choosing to represent those of Britain's colonial subjects in the subcontinent. The production of *mimic men* like Naraoaji, who along with Romesh Chandra Dutt helped formulate an economic rationale for Indian independence, became disturbing for the colonial authorities who found it difficult to counter the logic of their demands, namely that the system of 'home charges' was not an unwarranted 'drain' on India's wealth or to deny them their 'civilized' status. Bhabha has suggested that mimicry is at once 'resemblance and menace'. The *mimic man*, in so far as he is not entirely like the coloniser, constitutes only a partial representation of him: the coloniser sees a grotesquely displaced image of himself. Thus the familiar, transported to distant parts, becomes transformed. The imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented and the relation of power begins to vacillate (Bhabha 1994:85-93). Following Bhabha, Indian nationalism may be seen as a form of *mimicry* of Enlightenment ideals espoused by the colonial authorities. Although Indian nationalism was initially largely imitative of western nationalist movements, particularly the Italian *Risorgimento* of Mazzini[2], it could not help but be different if it was to be successful in a society in which the vast majority were unfamiliar with the language of western secular modernity.

Despite its unquestioned commitment to secularism under Jawarharlal Nehru, the fact that when freedom from British rule came it was accompanied by extreme ethno-religious conflict bordering on genocide suggests that a neat separation between communalism and nationalism is not possible. Beneath the secular veneer provided by the leadership, Congress remained wedded to a *Hinduized* national identity which made the articulation of first a Muslim and subsequently a Sikh national identity seemingly inevitable. Most South Asians viewed anti-colonialism through the prism of their respective religious tradition but since the colonial state's scheme of enumeration had transformed India into 'majority' and the 'minority' communities, it became easier for 'Hindu religious symbolisms and communitarian interests to be subsumed within the emerging

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2. Both Gandhi and Savarkar were influenced by Mazzini. Indeed, Savarkar translated Mazzini's political writings into Marathi whilst a student in London (Jaffrelot 1996:26).

discourse on the Indian nation' (Bose and Jalal 1998:123-4). This was especially the case once the principle of separate electorates and electoral seats had been conceded by the Indian Councils Act of 1909 under the 'Morley- Minto reforms'. The foundation of the INC followed on from a period of religious revivalism and social reform particularly in Bengal and, later, the Punjab.

The *Brahmo Samaj* in particular played a key role in formulating a sophisticated response to colonial modernity which was both indigenous *and* modern. Founded by Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) in Calcutta in 1828, the *Brahmo Samaj* was at the forefront of what may be termed the 'Bengal Renaissance' of the mid-nineteenth century. At the heart of the Bengal Renaissance lay an attempt to reform Hindu religious practice according to modern western sensibilities whilst at the same time contesting the legitimacy of colonial interventions in cultural or spiritual matters. Unlike the later INC, the *Brahmo Samaj* was never a 'nationalist' organization in the sense that it was not explicitly committed to ending colonial rule. Indeed, Rammohan Roy ruled out 'national independence' as 'an absolute goal', considering the 'civilized British' to be an improvement upon their 'tyrannical' Muslim predecessors. For Roy, colonial rule was not inhospitable to religious reform believing 'the greater our intercourse with European gentlemen, the greater will be our improvement in literary, social and political affairs' (Parekh 1989:48). Roy intended the *Brahmo Samaj* to be 'a synthesis of the European doctrines of the Enlightenment and the philosophic views of the *Upanishads'* (Parekh 1989:60). Thus, the *Brahmo Samaj* supported the modernization of Hindu society advocating monotheism, the abolition of *sati* and widow remarriage, female and English language education. After Ramrohan Roy's death, the *Brahmo Samaj* and with it the entire reform movement, split into two factions. These may be termed, following Bhikhu Parekh, 'critical modernists' and 'critical traditionalists.' Although both factions frequently advocated similar policies, their objectives were radically different: the former aimed to preserve what was *valuable* in Hindu civilization, whilst the latter were content to eliminate what was evil (Parekh 1989:64). Thus, 'critical modernists' such as Keshab Chandra Sen in seeking to 'Christianize' Hinduism (Bhatt 2001:23) implicitly accepted the superiority of European civilization whilst religious reformers led by Debendranath Tagore argued in favour merely rationalizing existing religious practice. This faction, known as the *Adi Brahmo Samaj,* sought to defend Hindu 'civil society' against encroachments upon it by the 'public sphere' of the colonial state.

Both 'critical modernist' and 'critical traditionalist' strands were evident in

the work of the key figure to emerge as part of this 'renaissance', Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya (1838-94) who profoundly affected the subsequent development of both secular and religious nationalism in India through his novels, religious and political writings. Partha Chatterjee has seen Bankim's thought as constituting a 'moment of departure' for Indian nationalism (Chatterjee 1986). For Chatterjee, the moment of departure lies in the encounter of a nationalist consciousness with the framework of knowledge created by post-Enlightenment rationalist thought, producing the awareness of an essential cultural difference between East and West. The West is characterised by its materiality, exemplified by science, technology and the never ending quest for progress whilst the East is characterised by poverty, subjection and spirituality. However, far from regarding spirituality as an impediment to progress, nationalist thought at the moment of departure asserts that the very superiority of its culture lies in its spirituality. Indigenous modernity lies in combining the superior material qualities of western cultures with the spiritual greatness of the East (Chatterjee 1986:50-1). Indeed, Bankim argued that the materiality of western culture *reinforced* indigenous spiritual values. Although Bankim admitted that 'it was true that there is no scientific proof of the existence of the Trinity[3]', he asserted that:

> it must be admitted that in comparison with Christianity, the religion followed by those great practitioners of science, the European peoples, the Hindu worship of the Trinity is far more natural and in accordance with scientific theories. The worship of the Trinity may not be founded in science, but it is not in opposition to it. On the other hand, Mill's arguments have shown conclusively that the Christian belief in an omnipotent, omniscient and all merciful-God is entirely contrary to scientific principles. The Hindu philosophies of *karma or maya* are far more consistent with science. (Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya [1875] in Chatterjee 1986: 68)

In other words, Bankim argued that indigenous spiritual values were more *modern* than those of the colonizer and that, by adopting western scientific techniques, indigenous civilization could once again surpass the achievements of the west. In his novel, *Anandamath,* 'English rule' was seen as necessary for the cultural regeneration of indigenous culture. It is unclear, however, what indigenous culture Bankim considered his own: 'Indian', Bengali or Hindu. His nationalist anthem, *Bande Mataram,* refers to a mother (*mata*) without specifying

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3. In this sense, the Trinity refers to the common Hindu conception of the Divine as *Brahma, Visnu* and *Mahesvara-* Creator, Preserver and Destroyer (Chatterjee 1986:67).

her identity and despite which is now widely considered to be Bengali, despite of its subsequent adoption of the 'Indian' national anthem by the INC. Certainly, Bankim's later works appeared to carry strong anti-Muslim overtones. According to Chatterjee, Bankim 'recognized in Islam a quest for power and glory, but he saw it as being completely devoid of spiritual or ethnical qualities, a complete antithesis to his ideal religion, irrational, bigoted, devious, sensual and immoral' (Chatterjee 1986:77). Although critical of those Hindu religious practices considered discriminatory, the spirituality celebrated in his later work was unmistakably a Hindu spirituality and the 'motherland' was conceived of in religious terms as a Hindu 'nation'.

Like the *Brahmo Samaj,* the *Arya Samaj,* which was particularly strong in the Punjab in the late nineteenth century, 'sought to include reformist postures on issues such as child marriage, widow remarriage, idolatry, travel overseas and caste – with a framework of the assertion of Hindu supremacy over other religious faiths' (Bose and Jalal 1998:111). Literally meaning the 'society of Aryans/Nobles', the *Arya Samaj* was founded by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-83) in Bombay in 1875 and Lahore in 1877. The *Arya* referred to 'the one who had knowledge and who worshipped *one* god and has accepted the Vedic religion' (Bhatt 2001: 16). The *Vedas* were conceived by Dayananda to represent the literal word of God revealed to the ancient Aryans. However, as Chetan Bhatt points out, the idea of revelation and the embodiment of the word of God in a text was alien to the Hindu tradition. The belief in the infallibility of sacred books, a singular already written truth and one organizational structure were seemingly borrowed from the 'semetic' religions (Bhatt 2001:18). The *Arya Samaj* espoused a *semitized* Hinduism one which rejected caste practice in the form of *jati* but upheld the ideals of the caste system, *varnashramadharma* ('the natural law of the four castes'). Thus, the *Arya Samaj* pursued a twin strategy of defending indigenous social hierarchy, reflecting the dominant role played by the higher castes, whilst stigmatising and emulating 'threatening others'. As Jaffrelot has pointed out, the defence of what is defined as Hindu identity implies a paradoxical *imitation* of an 'other' who is perceived to be threatening indigenous values and customs (Jaffrelot 1996:16). One such emulative strategy was the *shuddi* or conversion ritual. *Shuddi* was not part of the pre-modern Hindu tradition and may be seen as a major innovation of the *Samaj* who used it as a response to the demographic 'threat' from Christianity and Islam in the 1901 and 1911 Censuses. Initially *shuddi* was used by individuals belonging to higher castes who had suffered pollution from impure contact but rapidly it became

applied by *shuddi sabhas* (conversion councils) to the collective conversion of groups, including Sikhs, whose 'ancestors had originally been Hindus.' Since Hinduism lacked conversion techniques, this ritual was reinterpreted by the *Arya Samaj* as a means of countering Christian proselytism by imitating its conversion practices (Jaffrelot 1996:16).

The influence of Hindu revivalist movements was felt in the INC which sought to expand its support base by mobilizing sections of the peasantry. The adoption of symbols and imagery derived from regional Hindu traditions, in this case Maharashtran, by perhaps the most important of Congress's early leaders is here particularly instructive. Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) is widely credited with broadening support for Congress by rejecting the 'moderate' tendencies amongst the early Congress leaders who sought accommodation with colonial rulers. As leader of the 'extremist' faction of the INC, Tilak advocated direct action against the colonial authorities in order to achieve *swaraj*, or self-rule, and was imprisoned by the British on numerous occasions. Furthermore, Tilak played a key role in fostering Hindu-Muslim unity by opposing the 1905 Partition of Bengal along religious lines and, later, by entering into an alliance with the Muslim League through the Lucknow Pact of 1916. However, as Bhatt points out, Tilak also was important for the subsequent development of a Maharatti regional and Hindu nationalist politics by 'cultivating a Hindu primordialism based on early Orientalist precepts about Indian civilization and combining this with a reconfigured and politicized form of public, urban Hindu devotionalism, (Bhatt 2001:32) particularly through the symbolic use of the *God Ganapati* (Ganesh) and the seventeenth century leader of the Mahratta confederacy, Shivaji. In 1894, Tilak instigated a new public celebration of Ganesh which had traditionally been a favored deity primarily of his *Chitpavan* Brahmin community. Previously, the annual Ganesh celebration had been a private or family affair among Hindus who had traditionally attended the annual Muslim festival of *Muharram*. Thereafter, few Hindus attended *Muharram* as the Hindu community in Maharashtra and Gujarat were mobilized against British rule behind the symbol of Ganesh. Similarly, Tilak's use of the example of Shivaji's resistance against Mughal oppression to legitimize the use of violence against the colonizer had the perhaps unintended consequence of 'communalizing' anti-colonial nationalism. Shivaji, who killed Aurangzeb's general, Afzal Khan, before succumbing to the superior forces of the Mughals, was elevated to the status of both a regional and national hero. For those attending Shivaji celebrations, this implied an equation of Mughal rule with British colonialism: both were seen as repressive and fundamentally

alien to an India defined in exclusively Hindu terms. Certainly, Tilak himself envisaged the nation in Hindu terms believing religion to a fundamental element in nationality. According to Tilak, during Vedic times India had been a 'self-contained country', 'united as a great nation'. That unity had disappeared over the intervening millennia 'bringing great degradation and it becomes the duty of the leaders to revive that union' (Tilak [1919] in Bhatt 2001:36). Thus, Tilak drew upon the familiar themes of a golden age located in the Vedic era, decline and degeneration under Mughal rule and then cultural and spiritual regeneration under conditions of colonialism to mobilize the Hindu community behind the banner of anti-colonial nationalism.

These themes were taken up by his contemporary and fellow nationalist in the Punjab, Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928). Rai joined the *Arya Samaj* as a teenager in 1882 and became an influential figure before becoming a member of the INC committee in 1901. Shortly before joining the INC, he wrote an article for it which appeared in the *Hindusthan Review* in which he declared that 'Hindus are a nation in themselves because they represent a civilization all of their own' (Rai [1899] in Bhatt 2001:50). Rai rejected the modernist argument that Hindus had historically possessed no sense of nationality and situated the birth of the 'Hindu' or *arya* nation in the Vedic period. The Hindus were seen as a nation in that they shared 'a common name, a common ancestry, a common religion, a common language and a common future' (Bhatt 2001: 52). Hindu claims to nationhood thus appeared to rest upon an acceptance and internalization of the Orientalist depiction of India as a primordial, self-contained and timeless Hindu civilization. The status of Sikhs, Muslims and other religious minorities in a Hindu nation remained unclear.

The Development of 'Hindu' Nationalism

Although Rai remained a committed *Indian* nationalist and remained broadly within the Congress movement, other *Arya Samajists* sought to promote their goals through alternative institutional structures. *Hindu Sabhas* were established in early nineteenth Punjab to counter the efforts of minority religious groups, particularly Muslims and Sikhs (who as we shall see had established their own *sabhas*), to articulate their own sectarian interests to the colonial regime. Unlike the INC, these *sabhas*, like their Muslim and Sikh counterparts-the Muslim League and the *Singh Sabhas* respectively-initially attempted to promote their interests within a framework of complete loyalty to the Raj. The

formation and politicization of the *Hindu Sabhas* mark the moment of departure, in the Punjab at least, from the 'secular' anti-colonial nationalism of Congress to an explicitly Hindu *communal* or *Hindutva* identity. In 1913, the *Hindu Sabha* undertook to form a national organization which could 'safeguard the interests of the Hindu Community throughout India' and the following year, the first *Akhil Bharatiya* (All India) *Hindu Mahasabha* Conference was organized. The *Hindu Mahasabha* became the main organization for the articulation of a Hindu political identity in the colonial period and retained an uneasy relationship with the INC during the independence movement. In 1915, it defined its objective in the following terms:

a. To promote greater union and solidarity amongst all sections of the Hindu Community and to unite them more closely as parts of one organic whole.

b. To promote education among members of the Hindu Community.

c. To ameliorate and improve the conditions of all classes of the Hindu Community.

d. To protect and promote Hindu interests whenever and wherever it may be necessary.

e. To promote good feelings between the Hindus and other Communities in India and to act in a friendly way with them, and in loyal co-operation with the Government.

f. Generally to take steps for promoting religious, moral, educational, social and political interests of the community. (Bhatt 2001:60).

Central to the Hindu nationalist project is the concept of *Hindutva* which stood in sharp contrast to the secular nationalism of the INC. Associated with work of Vinayak Damodar ('Veer') Savarkar (1883-1966) who led the *Hindu Mahasabha* for seven consecutive years from 1937 to 1944, the term *Hindutva* refers to an *ethnicized* Hindu identity. 'Hindutva' refers not only to the religious aspect of the Hindu people but 'comprehends even their cultural, linguistic, social and political aspects as well' (Savarkar 1998:115). The Hindu community of the 'Hindus' is imagined as both religious *and* ethnic. Indeed, as Jaffrelot has pointed out, the Hindutva of Savarkar was conceived primarily as an ethnic community possessing a territory and sharing the same racial and cultural characteristics, three attributes which stemmed from the mythical (Orientalist) construction of a Vedic Golden Age (Jaffrelot 1996: 27). For Savarkar, the Hindus 'are not only a nation but a *jati* (race), a born brotherhood' (Savarkar 1923:89). The use of the word jati as race is significant as, in the Brahmanical world view, *jatis* are hierarchically organised species which occupy different ranks in the universe in

conformity with *dharma*. In Savarkar's view, *all* Indians, including those such as the Sikhs professing other religions, are considered part of the Hindu *jati* with the exception of Muslims and Christians who are seen to reject their common Indic culture:

> Every person is a Hindu who regards…this land from the Indus to the seas, as his fatherland as well as his holyland – i.e., the land of the origin of his religion, the cradle of his faith. (Savarkar 1998:115).

Thus, on the one hand, religious traditions indigenous to India which either questioned or rejected Hindu belief and practice such as Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism were inducted into Hinduism and their claims to separate status denied or ignored. On the other, Muslim and Christians were regarded as 'foreigners, since 'Hindustan'[4] is not to them a holyland…[T]heir holyland is far off in Arabia or Palestine' (Savarkar 1923:113). The Indian Muslims in particular were singled out as the threatening 'Other' against which Savarkar sought to construct his concept of Hindutva. On the whole, Savarkar, considered the Indian Muslims 'more inclined to identify themselves and their interests with Muslims outside of India than Hindus who live next door, like the Jews in Germany' (Savarkar 1998:117). Thus, although *ethnically* of Hindu origin, Indian Muslims and Christians ceased to be part of the Hindu *jati* on religious grounds.

For Savarkar, caste inequality within the Hindu jati did not qualify the primordiality of the Hindu jati for in spite of 'a thousand and one differences' the Hindus are 'bound by such religious, cultural, historical, racial, linguistic and other affinities…as to stand out as a definitely homogenous people' (Savarkar 1998:117) in comparison with other nationalities (including the Indian Muslim). Indeed, Savarkar's hostility towards Islam and other ethno-religious minorities (and ambivalence towards Sikhism) was coupled with a defence of the hegemony of the higher castes on racial grounds. Caste inequality was defended on the grounds that the blood running through the veins of the upper-castes is in a sense 'purer', in the sense that it has not been polluted by racial miscegenation. For Savarkar, 'all the caste system has done is to regulate its noble blood on lines believed…by our saintly law-givers and kings to contribute most to fertilise all that was barren and poor, without famishing all that was flourishing and nobly endowed' (1923:86). As Bhatt correctly points out, this was akin to the anti-

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4. Hindustan literally refers to the 'land of the Hindus'.

egalitarian theories of hierarchical nobility and racial eminence that flourished in Europe during the nineteenth century (Bhatt 2001:96). By conflating the terms *jati* and race, Savarkar implied that the primary difference between castes was *racial*. This racialization of both ethno-religious and caste difference is in keeping both with Orientalist reconstructions of Hinduism as a Brahmanical ideology and imitative of contemporary western theories of ethnic nationalism (Jaffrelot 1996:32) which in turn borrowed heavily from the symbolism and imagery of an imagined Hindu tradition.[5]

'Back to the Future': Mahatma Gandhi and the Rejection of Colonial Modernity

Savarkar developed his exclusivist, ethnically-defined concept of Hindutva in opposition to Gandhi's inclusive anti-colonial nationalism. However, like Savarkar, Mohandas Karamchand ('Mahatma') Gandhi (1869-1948) too articulated a nationalism defined primarily in Hindu terms. Unlike Savarkar, Gandhi retained the belief in the centrality of religion (not 'race') and the religious community in Indian life. His identity, and consequently the identity of the mass movement for Indian independence which he led, was grounded in the Hindu tradition although his commitment to multiculturalism and inter-religious dialogue can not be doubted. As Jawaharlal Nehru commented, Gandhi was 'essentially a man of religion, a Hindu to the inner-most depths of his being' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 362). Most of the central categories of Gandhi's political philosophy such as *ahisma, satya* and *moksha* were derived from traditional Hindu thought and remained intelligible to a predominantly Hindu audience although he redefined and established new relations between them in the light of his borrowings from other religious traditions.

In *Hind Swaraj* (1909),[6] Gandhi's critique of modern western civilization and his plea for a return to traditional village life was based upon a belief in both the ahistoricity and superiority of an Indian civilization understood implicitly as a Hindu civilization. For Gandhi, Hindu civilization was defined by its

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5. The most notable example of the imitativeness of western ethnic nationalism is the appropriation of the *svastika* by the Nazi party in Germany in the 1920s and 1930s. The history of the *svastika* goes back to the fourth millennium BC where it occurs on the seals and impressions from Northwest India and central Asia. It is not, however, specifically a Hindu symbol as it is used by a variety of religious groups in a variety of ways (Thapar 1989:216).

6. *Hind Swaraj* was initially published in Gujarati but an English translation was published soon afterwards in Johannesburg in 1910 (Chatterjee 1986:85).

epistemological pluralism; its ability to syncretically borrow from, and engage in dialogue with, other civilizations without comprising its central core principles. This had enabled it to withstand the three 'mighty assaults' it had faced in its history, namely by Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Islam in particular had become 'Indianized' (i.e. Hinduized) and had shed its initially alien and aggressive features as a result of its adoption by some sections of the native population who had carried the pluralist spirit to the new religion. Thus, it was Hinduism which had given Islam its distinctive regional flavour and, in 'Akbar', its greatest and most tolerant ruler.

For Gandhi, modern civilization – as opposed to Christianity which he found altogether more rewarding – with its stress upon irreligiousity and materialism was to blame for the present predicament of India. Although modern civilization was not an 'incurable disease', India was 'groaning under the monster's terrible weight,' its 'deadly effect' being to convince people to 'come under its scorching flames believing it to be all good' whilst 'in reality [they]derive little advantage from the world' (Gandhi [1910]1998:172-5). The British, even more afflicted by the 'disease' of civilization had not 'taken' but had been 'given' India by a people who had become 'emasculated and cowardly' (Gandhi[1910]1998:175). Dismissing Parliament as a 'sterile woman' and a 'prostitute'[7] Gandhi's utopia was not a secular, constitutional democracy as favoured by Congress modernists but *Ramrajya*, an enlightened patriarchy in which economic production was arranged through the *varna* system in such a way as to ensure reciprocity (Chatterjee 1986:92).

Indeed, Gandhi's refusal to condemn the institution of caste, despite its 'imperfections', and his idealization of the *varna* system as expounded in the *Bhagavad Gita* led the 'untouchable' leader Dr Ambedkar to christen 'Gandhism' the 'doom of the untouchables' (Ambedkar [1945] 1998:141-8). For Ambedkar, Gandhism was an upper caste indigenous romanticism and despite its rejection of the corrupting ideals of western civilization, it too was derivative of western discourses. Gandhism, according to Ambedkar, was 'merely repeating the views of Rousseau, Ruskin, Tolstoy, and their school' (Ambedkar [1945] 1998: 146). Certainly, Gandhi's critique of modern civilization owed much, as he himself acknowledges, to the work of western critics of modernity. In *Hind Swaraj*, he cites the work of 'a great English writer', Edward Carpenter's *Civilization: Its*

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7. Gandhi likened Parliament to a sterile woman because it could not act out of its own accord; and a prostitute because it was 'under the control of ministers who change from time to time' (Gandhi [1910]1998:167).

Causes and Cure, as having greatly influenced his ideas about the 'nature of civilization' (Gandhi [1910] 1998:169). Tolstoy was another other influence. Indeed, Gandhi's understanding of *ahisma* (non-violence) as a moral imperative was influenced by the latter's belief in the duty of passive resistance to state repression. Gandhi wrote that he knew of 'no one in India and elsewhere who has had as profound an understanding of the nature of non-violence as Tolstoy had' nor who had tried to 'follow it as sincerely as he did' (Parekh 1989:115).

However, Gandhi's political philosophy was not directly derivative of western romanticism since, unlike romanticism, it was not conceived at all within the thematic bounds of post-Enlightenment thought (Chatterjee 1986:99). Indeed, Gandhi, as Chatterjee has pointed out, stood *outside* of ('western') modernity and was unconcerned with the conflicting demands of individual freedom and moral universalism, or of history and progress. Gandhi, however, was *not* a traditionalist or nativist. He did not seek to reject modernity in favour of a return to the pre-colonial past. Gandhi was principally concerned with the creation of a national political movement which could, on the one hand, operate within the institutional processes set up and directed by a colonial state, and on the other, reject those processes once independence was achieved. For Gandhi, *purna swaraj*, or complete independence, entailed not just freedom from direct colonial rule but from its modes of thought and apparatuses of organization and control; from the state, civil society and capitalism. The imitative modernity of non-colonised, non-western states such as Japan[8] was to be avoided. Alien institutions produced parrots who repeated what they were taught and did not generate organic changes. What was needed was *atmashuddi*, national 'moral' regeneration, the exercise of moral leadership by an indigenous elite not seduced by the materiality of the West. 'Imitation' was to be eschewed in favour of a creative 'adaptation' of many elements of modern civilization to suit the needs of the age.

Gandhi's central concern, like that of the religious reformers before him, was to reinterpret the central principles of the Hindu tradition in the light of the needs of the modern age (Parekh 1989:22). The *shastras* drew a distinction between *santanadharma* (eternal principles) and *yugadharma* (historically specific principles). Gandhi's concern was with reforming the latter in the light of the former and he saw himself as a *yugapurusha*, a moral legislator or law giver (Parekh 1989:18,83). For Gandhi, every Indian had a duty in the modern

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8. Gandhi 'reminded' his readers in *Hind Swaraj* that it was 'the British flag which is waving in Japan and not the Japanese' (Gandhi [1910]1998:174).

age to become politically involved and help to generate the country. Political activity could no longer be avoided but was a necessity if 'India' was to regain her freedom. Indeed, political action was the only available path to liberation not only from British rule but also from the great cycle of birth and rebirth. For Gandhi:

> Every age is known to have its predominant mode of spiritual effort best suited for the attainment of *moksha*. Whenever the religious spirit is on the decline, it is revived through such an effort in tune with the times. In this age, our degradation reveals itself through our political condition…Everyone had realised that popular awakening could be brought about only through political activity. If such an activity was spiritualised, it could show the path of *moksha*. (Gandhi in Parekh 1989:91-2)

This example shows how much he remained *within* yet moved away from the Hindu religious tradition. On the one hand, he shared the central Vedic premise that *moksha* is the desired goal of all human activity. On the other hand, he *socializes* the means of achieving the desired end. Far from being an *individual* activity, the union of man with Brahman could only be brought about through *collective* mobilization against British rule and the 'modern' materialistic civilization it had imposed upon India. Gandhi's redefinition of the traditional negative concept of *ahisma* as 'active love', or the active promotion of human well being, is another example of his simultaneous commitment to, yet departure from, traditional Hindu ethics. Literally, *ahisma* meant the absence of violence; humans should refrain from causing harm or destruction to other living beings. Logically, as Gandhi himself acknowledged, this involved a withdrawal from all forms of worldly involvement and the cultivation of an attitude of total detachment as most forms of human activity involved some form of coercion or violence to either humans or other species. *Ahisma* thus was traditionally seen as the use of minimum possible violence. However, Gandhi, as we have seen, regarded worldly involvement in the form of political activity to be necessary for national liberation and ultimately the attainment of *moksha*. Withdrawal from the world could not lead to *moksha*, only active engagement with it could do so. This led Gandhi to attempt to give *ahisma* a more active, social, and explicitly *political* meaning. *Ahisma*, for Gandhi, should not be a 'passive spirituality that spends itself in idle meditation' but 'an active thing which will carry war into the enemy's camp' (Parekh 1989:114). He continued:

> Our non-violence is an unworldly thing. We see its utmost limit in refraining somehow from destroying bugs, mosquitoes and fleas, or from killing birds and animals. We do not care if these creatures suffer, nor even if we partly contribute to their suffering. On the contrary, we think it is a heinous sin if anyone releases or helps in releasing a creature that suffers. I have already written and explained that this is not non-violence. Non-violence means an ocean of compassion. (Gandhi in Parekh 1989:115)

Thus, Gandhi, too, may be seen as a critical *modernist* in the sense that he sought to reinterpret Hindu religious traditions in order to make them both conducive to anti-colonial activity and intelligible to the vernacular masses. It was on the basis of his ability to 'imagine' an Indian nation which could be understood, although interpreted in different ways, by the rural majority through the manipulation of religious concepts and symbols,[9] that Gandhi was able to open up the historical possibility by which the largest popular element of the nation – the peasantry – could be appropriated by the nationalist movement (Chatterjee 1986: 214). Gandhi, in Nehru's words, broke the 'barriers between the small westernized group at the top and the masses' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 363). However, despite its historical effectiveness, Gandhi's political philosophy did *not*, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, provide the ideological basis for including the *whole* people within the political nation (Chatterjee 1986:110). Indeed, Aloysius has argued that the conscious or unconscious rhetoric of moral reform, search for truth, critique of western civilization and restitution of traditional ways of life, drove away a substantial portion of the Muslim masses along with their leaders, antagonized the representatives and members of the depressed classes, and finally managed to persuade the rest of the rural masses to give up their own weakly articulated and unorganized anti-caste/landlord agenda in favour of the elite agenda of apparent anti-imperialism (Aloysius 1997:221). The guiding principles of *satyagraha*[10] and *ahimsa*, although they were integral elements of Jainist and Buddhist philosophy and could be understood by a Sikh audience, were principally derived from Hindu traditions. The Muslim and Sikh *qaums* remained outside of the Gandhian nation and were brought into it through a series of tactical alliances, particularly through Gandhi's support for the Ali

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9. Shahid Amin in his study of the reporting of Gandhi's visit to Gorakhpur district, Eastern UP in 1921-2 in the local press, concludes that the 'appreciation of his message derived from popular Hindu beliefs and practices and the material culture of the peasantry' (Amin [1983] 1988:335).

10. Gandhi conceived of *Satyagraha* as 'non-violent warfare'.

brothers' *Khilafat*[11] movement and the Gurudwara Reform movement. 'India' remained, as it had done at the turn of the century, '"Hindu" + "Muslim"+ "Sikh"+ "Christian"'(Pandey 1990: 231). All that had changed was that Gandhi had found a way of subordinating communal differences to the greater goal of achieving independence from the British.

Jawaharlal Nehru's Discovery of India

It was up to Jawaharlal Nehru, therefore, to 'discover' India on the eve of independence from the British. India needed to be (re)invented or imagined in such a way that *all* communities, whether ethnic, religious or caste-based, could feel a part of her. At the same time, she needed to imagined in such a way that her claims to sovereign statehood could be accepted by an embryonic post-colonial international community of secular, modern states. In his *Discovery of India* (1945), written during his imprisonment during the Second World War, Nehru chose to do this by approaching India as an outsider, adopting the gaze of a 'friendly westerner' or perhaps even one of her colonial masters:

> To some extent I came to her via the West and looked at her as a friendly westerner might have done. I was eager and anxious to change her outlook and appearance and give her the garb of modernity. And yet doubts arose within me. Did I know India? – I who presumed to scrap so much of her past heritage. (Nehru [1945] 2003: 50)

This passage clearly illustrates the dilemmas which India's rulers faced. On the one hand, they could seek to transform her ancient traditions and often barbaric' customs which seemed to be impediments to her modernity. These traditions and customs had, on the other hand, withstood the test of time. Thus while the present 'was an odd mixture of mediaevalism, appalling poverty and misery and a somewhat superficial modernism of the middle classes' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 50), there was still much that thrilled and astonished Nehru. It was, in Nehru's view, an 'astonishing thought' that 'any culture or civilization should have this continuity for five or six thousand years or more' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 50). Nehru acknowledged that though 'outwardly there was diversity and infinite variety' amongst Indians, 'everywhere there was that tremendous impress of oneness,

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11. For further reading on the Khilafat movement see Gail Minault, 1982. *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India.* New York: University of Columbia Press.

which has held all of us together for ages past, whatever political fate or misfortune had befallen us.' The unity of India was for Nehru, 'no longer merely an intellectual conception' but an overpowering 'emotional experience' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 59). This emotional attachment to 'India' was especially felt by those in the countryside, who lacked the 'sophisticated' outlook of their urban counterparts. Wherever Nehru went he was greeted by cries of *Bharat Mata ki Jai* ('Victory to Mother India'). Challenging them to define 'this *Bharat Mata,* this Mother India, whose victory they wanted', Nehru elicited a response from 'a vigorous Jat[12] wedded to the soil from immemorial generations'. The Jat would reply that *Bharat Mati* referred to the *dharti,* the 'good earth of India'. Nehru responded:

> What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in the whole of India. And so question and answer went on, till they would ask me patiently to tell them about it. I would endeavour to do so and explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and the rivers of India and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread all over this vast land. *Bharat Mata,* Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this *Bharat Mata,* I told them, you are in a manner yourselves *Bharat Mata,* and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery. (Nehru [1945] 2003: 60-1)

Leaving aside the elitism of Nehru's response and condescending attitude to those whom he claimed to represent, we can see in Nehru's definition of India as essentially her 'people' a commitment to popular sovereignty and the democratic foundation of Indian nationalism. Nehru's nationalism was inclusive of all those who resided within the territory of 'India'. These borders, however, had been drawn by the colonial powers. Nehru, therefore, had to go further and explain just why the borders of the Indian 'nation' were coterminous with the boundaries of the colonial state. He did this by referring to the historical unity of India. Claiming that 'some kind of a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization', Nehru considered that unity 'not conceived as something imposed from outside' but 'something deeper and, within its fold, the widest

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12. A *Jat* is a farmer or a member of an agricultural caste in northern India.

tolerance of belief and custom was practiced and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 62). Thus, despite the obvious regional diversity of all those, from the Pathans in the North to the Tamils in the South, who had historically lived within the boundaries of colonial India, all bore the 'distinguishing mark of India' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 61). But what was this distinguishing mark, this dynamic and living national heritage?

Rather than reducing the complexity of South Asian culture to that of a primordial, Hindu civilization, Nehru attempted to weave a rich cultural mosaic upon which he hoped a secular, inclusive, Indian state could be built. At the end of his long journey, Nehru had discovered that India was 'a geographic and cultural entity, a cultural unity amongst diversity, a bundle of contradictions held together by invisible threads' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 562). The hundred and eighty years of British rule in India, far from being constitutive of her national identity, 'were just one of her unhappy interludes in her long story' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 52). Before the coming of the British, the Hindu and Muslim masses were 'hardly distinguishable from each other' and 'the old aristocracy had developed common ways and standards' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 342). With the British gone, Indians would once again share a common 'national' culture.

The answer to India's backwardness lay in modernization. India, Nehru felt, 'must lessen its religiosity and turn to science' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 520). Religion, despite the comfort it had brought to people, had 'tried to imprison truth in set forms and dogmas' and thus 'checked the tendency to change and progress inherent in human society' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 511). This was as true for Islam as it was for Hinduism:

> The day-to-day religion of the orthodox Hindu is more concerned with what to eat and what not to eat, who to eat with and from whom to keep away, than with spiritual values. The rules and regulations of the kitchen dominate his social life. The Moslem is fortunately free from these inhibitions, but he has his own narrow codes and ceremonials, a routine which he vigorously follows, forgetting the lesson of brotherhood which his religion taught him. (Nehru [1945] 2003: 511)

Indeed, Nehru concluded that the Muslim's view of life was 'perhaps *even more* limited and sterile than the Hindu view' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 511–italics mine). India must, in Nehru's words, 'break with the dead wood of the past and not allow it to dominate the present' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 509). Science offered a way forward since it 'opened up innumerable avenues for the growth of knowledge and

added to the power of man to such an extent that for the first time it was possible to conceive that man could triumph over and shape his physical environment' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 511). In achieving mastery over nature with the application of modern scientific techniques to the economy, Indians would cast off their narrow outlooks and act as a people. The appalling poverty and rural misery that India was faced with at present were attributed to colonial *policies* not with the instruments of governmentality they had introduced. Nehru argued against Gandhi, that there was nothing quintessentially *western* about modernity; modernity was universal. The state, although an instrument of oppression and exploitation under colonial rule, would behave differently once independence had been achieved. It would become a vehicle for national liberation and rejuvenation, bringing tangible, material rewards for the 'sons of the soil'. The state was a means of achieving nationality, 'a modern framework for people of diverse faiths to live together' (Prakash 1999:207). However, by tying the legitimacy of the new national state to its ability to meet the needs of its citizens, Nehru created opportunities for challenges, by 'communal' organizations, to the state's authority in times of economic decline or hardship.

Communalism was, for Nehru, 'a narrow group mentality basing itself on a religious community but in reality concerned with political power and patronage for the interested group' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 382). The principal communal organizations in India were the Muslim League and its 'Hindu counterpart, the Hindu Mahasabha'. These organizations, although standing for Indian independence, were 'more interested in claiming protection and special privileges for their respective groups' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 392). Communalism was seen (correctly) by Nehru as having been greatly facilitated by British policies of divide and rule. After the crushing of the Mutiny in 1857, British policy was 'inclined to be pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim, except in the Punjab where Muslims took more easily to western education than elsewhere' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 342). This led to a period of introspection for the Muslim upper-classes whilst new Hindu middle-classes emerged to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by colonial modernity. Following the growth of nationalism amongst the Hindu middle-classes, British policy became 'definitely pro-Moslem, or rather in favour of those elements among the Moslems who were opposed to the national movement' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 346). In part, this was a response to the loyalism of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and his efforts to instil in Muslims the benefits of western education through the Aligarh College. 'Under a succession of English principals, closely associated with government circles', Nehru accused it of having 'fostered

separatist tendencies and an anti-nationalist and anti-Congress outlook' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 348). The root cause of communalism was, for Nehru, economic and had nothing to do with religious difference. The historical origins of the historical development of Muslim separatism lay in the 'difference of a generation or more in the development of the Hindu and Moslem middle class' that had produced 'a psychology of fear among the Moslems'. Pakistan, Nehru unsurprisingly wrote, was 'of course no solution' to Muslim backwardness and was 'likely to strengthen the hold of feudal elements for some time longer and delay the economic progress of Muslims' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 346). As for his former colleague and chief rival, M.A. Jinnah cut a 'lone figure' in the Muslim League, 'keeping apart from his closest co-workers, widely but distantly respected, more feared than liked.' Although he was the undisputed leader of India's Muslims, 'he could only keep them together by becoming himself a prisoner to their reactionary ideologies' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 389). Why, Nehru asked, had Jinnah claimed that India consisted of two nations, Hindu and Muslim, 'for if nationality was based upon religion, there were many nations in India' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 392)? Furthermore, Jinnah's preferred solution, partition, would not 'solve the problem of the "two nations", for they were all over the place' since 'these two nations existed in varying proportions in most of the villages of India' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 392). Nehru realized that by conceding the right to self-determination to the Muslim majority in West Punjab, the Sikhs would 'split up unfairly against their will and [be] placed into two different states' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 528). Yet, ultimately partition proved to be a lesser evil in Nehru's mind than a loose federal, quasi-consociational structure with a weakened centre and institutionalised representation for South Asia's ethno-religious minorities.

Part of the reason for this was because Nehru needed a strong, central state in order to realise his idea of India as a sovereign, modern nation. Nehru was aware that the India he envisaged and sought to represent was yet to be born. 'Possibly', he postulated, 'the essential characteristic of national consciousness is a sense of belonging together and of together facing the rest of mankind'. 'How far this was present in India as a whole', he frankly admitted, 'was a debateable point' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 392). Nehru seemed to accept the possibility of an India comprising of many nationalities – the very premise upon which Jinnah's argument was based – when he conceded that 'India developed in the past as a multi-national state and gradually acquired a national consciousness'. However, Nehru chose not to specify what this national consciousness entailed beyond 'a passionate reaction among many in favour of the unity of India' (Nehru [1945]

2003: 392). It is argued here that the nation imagined by Nehru's Congress, although secular and inclusive of all ethno-religious minorities, could not *help but be imagined* in terms of India's Hindu traditions, particularly after partition. How else was it possible to claim that India was characterized by a fundamental essential unity? Even her 'natural' borders that surrounded the subcontinent and marked it off from the rest of Asia can not explain why, in Nehru's words, 'an Indian from any part of the country would have felt more or less at home in any other part, but a stranger and an alien in any other country' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 60). The view that religious tolerance was an essential characteristic of 'Indian' culture was appropriated from Orientalist perceptions of Hindu civilization as a coherent, self-contained universe able to absorb 'alien' invasions and tolerate diversity without compromising its core values or doctrines. Thus, Mughal rule, which initially was characterized by conquest and plunder gives way to the tolerance and syncretism of Akbar who becomes, in the eyes of the Nehru 'the great representative of the *old* Indian ideal of a synthesis of differing elements and their fusion into a common nationality' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 147– emphasis mine). Nehru thus perhaps unintentionally minimizes the contribution of Islam to the forging of a common Indian culture whilst at the same time holding the Muslim Akbar to be its greatest representative. If the indigenous ideal which Akbar embodies is *old*, then it remains to be seen what *new* element the Mughals brought with them. Indeed, Nehru even claimed that 'the old Turkish and other races who inhabited Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia', from whom the Mughals were descended, were, before the advent of Islam, 'largely Buddhists and earlier still, during the period of the Epics, *Hindus*' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 61– emphasis mine). Although historically this may well have been correct, it seems an unnecessary point for a secular modernist to make. If Indian nationalism was to be inclusive of all religious minorities and ethnic groups, it made little difference what religion the descendants of the Mughals used to profess. But for Nehru it clearly mattered enough for him to note that, although 'changes of religion made a difference' it 'could not change entirely the mental backgrounds which the people of those areas had developed' (Nehru [1945] 2003: 61). Nehru thus claimed the Mughals to have been 'Indian' rather than 'foreign rulers' on the grounds that they shared the same Hindu 'mental background' as their subjects.

The attention paid to India's former Mughal rulers had another function. By focussing on the contribution of South Asia's rulers to the construction of an Indian nation, Nehru adopted the same statist perspective introduced and promoted by the British. Official colonial documents and historiography credited

the colonial state with bringing unity and modern institutions to the Indian subcontinent. Nationalist historiography adopted the same techniques whilst reducing the diverse histories of localities, ethnic, religious, linguistic, caste and cultural communities to that of the state. Just as, in the colonial account, the state alone 'could establish order out of chaos, reduce the religious and other passions of Indians to "civilized proportions", and carry India into "modernity"', so, too, in the nationalist account, the Indian state would perform 'the role of maintaining Indian unity' (Pandey 1990:252-3). It would take a new Akbar to realize the newly desired unity of India, and the state would be the major instrument with which to accomplish the 'delayed nationalisation of society': the articulation of a diverse and highly unequal people into what Balibar terms a 'fictive ethnicity' (Balibar 1991:92).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the development of Indian nationalism coincided with and took sustenance from the development of a Hindu ethno-religious identity. Whilst the nationalist leadership under Nehru remained committed to a secular vision, the mass based political activism of Mahatma Gandhi in particular was based upon a mobilization of religious symbols and sentiment throughout the villages of northern India. This makes a simple, clear cut distinction between on the one hand a modern, secular nationalism and a traditional Hindu civilization on the other hand difficult for Indian nationalism itself contained within it a strong Hindu cultural component. This component, however, was not primordial but itself appropriated from Orientalist depictions of Hindu civilization. Therefore, both nationalism and communalism may be seen as *modern*, derivative but indigenous responses to the questions asked of South Asian society by colonial rule. Those accused of being 'communalists' are as 'modern' in their education, in their lifestyles, and certainly in their political techniques as those secular nationalists who identify themselves with programs of change and modernization in society (Embree 1990:41).While nationalists sought to construct an Indian modernity inclusive of all ethno-religious minorities on the basis of the mobilization of the majority community, communalists envisaged the Indian nation as exclusively based upon a primordial, Hindu *ethnie*. Created by a resolution of the *Hindu Mahasabha* in 1932, the *Rashtriya Swayamamsevak Sangh* (RSS) provides the institutional infrastructure for the articulation of this communal Hindu nationalist ideology today, just as the Indian National Congress

(INC) remains, in theory at least, committed to the Nehruvian vision of a secular, sovereign state.

It is necessary also to point out the similar caste and class basis of both nationalism and communalism in India. Both may be seen as predominately high caste, middle class movements and this is reflected in the backgrounds of the secular and religious nationalist figures discussed above. According to Aloysius, the nationalist 'class' was composed of the disparate and traditionally dominant classes and communities united by a common desire to preserve their traditional dominance over the lower caste masses on the one hand and to enlarge the area of dominance in the new political society on the other. The national-secular ideology of the Indian National Congress was 'neither a replacement of nor antagonistic to, the old Brahmanic sacral ideology of ascriptive superiority' (Aloysius 1997:221). The origins of both secular Indian nationalism and Hindu communalism or religious nationalism lie in the growth and development of an upper caste 'Hindu' middle class in the nineteenth century and in its attempt to hegemonize itself as the nationalist class. As Romila Thapar has pointed out, the need for postulating a Hindu community became a requirement for political mobilization when representation by religious community became a key to power and control over economic resources.

> Deriving largely from the Orientalist construction of Hinduism, emergent national consciousness appropriated this definition of Hinduism as well as what it regarded as the heritage of the Hindu culture. Hindu identity was defined by those who were part of this national consciousness and drew on their own idealized image of themselves resulting in an upper-caste, *brahmana* dominated identity. (Thapar 1989:229).

Thapar concludes that whilst the representatives of the majority community tended to define national aspirations, the minority communities in varying degrees were viewed as disrupting society by their refusal to conform (Thapar 1989:229). In post-colonial India, the majority ethno-religious community continues both to define the nation and stigmatize ethno-religious minorities, such as Muslims and Sikhs, as disruptive. As long as the dominant nationalist discourse draws up notions of ethno-religious majoritarianism and minoritarianism there can be no clear separation between 'nationalism' and 'communalism.'

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