Nation, Reason and Religion
India’s Independence in International Perspective

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Throughout the entire course of the history of Indian anti-colonialism, religion as faith within the limits of morality, if not the limits of reason, had rarely impeded the cause of national unity and may in fact have assisted its realisation at key moments of struggle. The variegated symbols of religion as culture had enthused nationalists of many hues and colours but had seldom embittered relations between religious communities until they were flautened to boast the power of majoritarian triumphalism. The conceits of unitary nationalism may well have caused a deeper sense of alienation among those defined as minorities than the attachment to diverse religions. The territorial claims of a minority-turned-nation helped further confusion on the furious contest over sovereignty in the dying days of the raj. Having failed to share sovereignty in the manner of their pre-colonial forbears, late-colonial nationalist worshippers of the centralised state ended up dividing the land. Surely godless nationalism linked to the colonial categories of religious majorities and minorities has much to answer for.

“A PRIZE I got for good work at school”, Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography, “was one of GM Trevelyan’s Garibaldi books. This fascinated me, and soon I obtained the other two volumes of the series and studied the whole Garibaldi story in them carefully. Visions of similar deeds in India came before me, of a gallant fight for freedom, and in my mind India and Italy got strangely mixed together.” To the young Nehru “Harrow seemed a rather small and restricted place for these ideas”. So it was that at the beginning of October 1907, inspired by the first of Trevelyan’s Garibaldi trilogy, he arrived at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he felt “lived up to the billing of an undergraduate with a great deal of freedom”. When freedom came to India at the famous midnight hour of August 14-15, 1947 Trevelyan, then Master of Trinity College, “rejoiced”. He had remained, his biographer David Cannadine tells us, “equivocal and uncertain about the British Empire, which he always thought a far more formidable instrument of aggression and domination than any of Italy’s colonising endeavours, which seemed small-scale by comparison.”

Nehru’s Cambridge years, which coincided almost exactly with the Garibaldi phase of Trevelyan’s life in history, represented the climactic moment of triumphant Liberalism in the domestic politics of Britain. In Europe these were the last days of liberal nationalism before Italy launched on its imperialist expedition in 1911 and the nation-states of the continent as a whole moved recklessly towards the precipice of total war. The high tide of liberalism did not, however, reach the shores of Britain’s colonies where this was a period of political denial and repression. India was “showing fight” for the first time since the revolt of 1857 and was “seething with unrest and trouble”. News reached Indian students in Cambridge of swadeshi and boycott of the activities and imprisonment of Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose. “Almost without exception”, Nehru recalled, “we were Tilakites or Extremists, as the new party was called in India”. Yet looking back from the 1930s he also believed that in social terms “the Indian national renewal in 1907 was definitely reactionary”. “Inevitably”, Nehru commented gloomily, “a new nationalism in India, as elsewhere in the east, was a religious nationalism”. After graduating from Cambridge, he visited Ireland in the summer of 1910 where he was “attracted” by “the early beginnings of Sinn Fein”. He neglected to note in Britain and Ireland that a religious tinge to nationalism was not a monopoly of the east. At the end of the day the nationalist leaderships in both India and Ireland, quite as much as their departing colonial masters, failed to negotiate a satisfactory solution to the problem of religious difference. If there was cause to rejoice at the end of the raj in India, the celebrations were certainly marred by a tragic partition ostensibly along religious lines which took an unacceptable toll in human life and suffering.

Church and State in Europe and India

The political failure at the moment of formal decolonisation has been matched by a certain intellectual failure in the post-colonial period to unravel the complex weave of nation, reason and religion in historical analyses. Decades of secular, rationalist discomfort with assessing the role of religion in modern political philosophy and practice have given way in more recent years to cultural critiques of modernity and one of its key signs - nationalism - which tend to valorise an historical notion of indigenous religion while denouncing the cunning of universal reason. In an essay entitled “Radical Histories and the Question of Enlightenment Rationalism”, Dipesh Chakrabarty has berated secular and Marxist historians for their lack of imagination in addressing the question of religiously informed identities in modern south Asia. “Scientific rationalism”, he contends, “or the spirit of scientific enquiry, was introduced into colonial India from the very beginning as an antidote to (Indian) religion, particularly Hinduism...”. The opposition between reason and emotion, “characteristic of our colonial hyper-rationalism”, is seen to have “generally afflicted” the attempt by historians to “understand the place of the ‘religious’ in Indian public and political life”. That may well be so, but is there any reason to believe, if it is permissible to use such a turn of the phrase, that hyper-rationalism was characteristic of modernity under colonial conditions?

One of the key empirical premises of Benedict Anderson’s theory in Imagined Communities is that “in Western Europe the 18th century mark[ed] not only the dawn of the age of nationalism but the dusk of religious modes of thought”.

“it is a common error”, Trevelyan had
observed in his *English Social History*, “to regard the 18th century in England as irrereligious”. Religion continued to be in his view “an imposing fabric" of British history in the 19th century until the Darwinian revolution made its full impact. The views of Trevelyan's great uncle Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay probably covered the full spectrum of opinion among the British ruling classes in the mid-19th century on the place of religion in public life. Gladstone had argued a powerful case in his book *The State in Its Relations with the Church* published in 1839 that propagation of religious truth should be of unbelievers among ruling classes. of stopping short of persecution since a conceived principle could not have Darwinian revolution made its full impact. Religion continued to be in whatever not to deal with Bengal as she the British empire in India. Indian intellectuals often had an awareness that modern rational knowledge from its very inception was deeply implicated in

**RATIONAL REFORM, RELIGIOUS REVIVAL AND INTIMATIONS OF AN ANTI-COLONIAL MODERNITY**

“Somehow, from the very beginning”, writes Partha Chatterjee, “we have made a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledges and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would we be taken seriously as its producers. It is for this reason that we have tried, over a hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become the creators of our own modernity”. As an example of the rejection of uncritical imitation of English modernity he quotes the following passage from Rajnarayan Basu's *1873 tract*. shovel *Kaloar E Kal* (Those Days and These Days):

Two Bengali gentlemen were once dining at Wilson's hotel. One of them was especially addicted to beef. He asked the waiter, “Do you have veal?” The waiter replied, “I'm afraid, sir.” The gentleman asked again, “Do you have beef steak?” The waiter replied, “Not that either, sir.” The gentleman asked again, “Do you have ox tongue?” The waiter replied, “Not that either, sir.” The gentleman asked again, “Do you have calf’s foot jelly?” The waiter replied, “Not that either, sir.”

Chatterjee goes on to argue that, while “Western modernity” in the voice of Immanuel Kant looked for the definition of modernity “in the difference posed by the present...as the site of one’s escape from the past”, it is precisely the present from which the colonised intellectual in search of a national modernity had to escape to find solace in an imagined past. What remains underplayed in this argument is that Raj Narayan Basu’s ruminations on modernity were contested by his contemporaneons, not least by his close friend and frequent correspondent, the poet, Michael Madhusudan Datta. The category ‘we’ contained a wide range of internal variation which made certain that ‘our’ modernity was never a monolith.
modern regimes of power, that never negated the possibility of selective appropriation and effective resistance within these fields of power. To put it in another way, I would contend that colonised intellectuals sought alternative routes of escape from the oppressive present, not all of which lay through creating a 'mayajal' or web of illusions about our past and denouncing their modernity.

What is needed here is a dynamic and historicised conception of religion that might enable us to consider how the place of the 'religious' in Indian public and political life changed in the course of India's colonial history. There is a certain static quality to Dipesh Chakrabarty's invocation of age-old Indian religion set under siege by the modern forces of scientific rationalism. Partha Chatterjee conceives of the 'idea that Indian nationalism is synonymous with 'Hindu nationalism' is not the vestige of some pre-modern religious conception but an entirely modern, rationalist and historicist idea'.11 But he explains away the apparent contradiction between this rationalist idea and the religiously inspired emotional attachment to the nation by resort to an unsatisfactory dichotomy between the material and spiritual domains that he reads into anti-colonial nationalism.12 In facing up to the fundamental dilemma of having to simultaneously resist colonial power and appropriate elements from modern European knowledge, colonised intellectuals of the late 19th and early 20th century harnessed reason and religion in multifarious ways to the cause of the nation.

Religious sensibility could in the late 19th century be perfectly compatible with a rational frame of mind, just as social reform was carried upon practical reason almost invariably sought divine sanction of some kind. Speaking at the Eleventh Social Conference in Amravati in 1897 Mahadev Govind Ranade scored a debating point against his 'revivalist' critics:

When my revivalist friend presses his argument upon me, he has to seek recourse in some subterfuge which really furnishes no reply to the question - what shall we revive? Shall we revive the old habits of our people when the most sacred of our caste indulged in all the abominations as we now understand them of animal food and drink which exhausted every section of our country's Zoology and Botany? The men and the Gods of those old days ate and drank forbidden things to excess in a way no revivalist will now venture to recommend.13

What Chatterjee presents as Rajnayava Basu's critique of English modernity appears in Ranade as a critique of ancient Indian tradition. Even more fascinating is Ranade's exposition of reason in the service of reform. In 'Our Modernity' Partha Chatterjee offers us this reading of Kant's essay on Aufklärung:

According to Kant, to be enlightened is to become mature, reach adulthood, to stop being dependent on the authority of others, to become free and assume responsibility for one's own actions. When man is not enlightened, he does not employ his own powers of reasoning but rather accepts the guardianship of others and does as he is told.14

What lay at "the root of our helplessness", Ranade declared, was "the sense that we are always intended to remain children, to be subject to outside control, and never to rise to the dignity of self-control by making our conscience and our reason the supreme, if not the sole, guide to our conduct... We are children, nound, but the children of God, and not of man, and the voice of God is the only voice [to] which we are bound to listen... With too many of us, a thing is true or false, righteous or sinful, simply because somebody in the past has said that it is so... Now the new idea which should take up the place of this helplessness and dependence is not the idea of a rebellious overthrow of all authority, but that of freedom responsible to the voice of God in us".15 Seven years later in a 1904 article entitled 'Reform or Revival' Lala Lajpat Rai sought to argue that, while the reformers wanted reform on 'rational' lines, the revivalists wanted reform on 'national' lines. Attempting to turn Ranade's argument on its head, Lajpat Rai wrote:

Connect a revivalist, arguing in the same strain, ask the reformers into what they wish to reform us?... Whether they want to reform us into Sunday drinkers of brandy and promiscuous eaters of beef? In short, whether they want to revolutionise our society by an outlandish imitation of European customs and manners and an unbridled adoption of European vice?16

By this time Ranade was dead and he could not reply that there need be no necessary contradiction between the rational and the national.

Yet it must be emphasised that the first radical intellectual challenge to moderate nationalism had been remarkably discriminating, judicious and balanced in its attitude to European modernity. As Aurobindo Ghose put it in his sixth essay 'New Lamps for Old' published on December 4, 1893:

We are to have what the west can give us, because what the west can give us is just the thing and the only thing that will rescue us from our present appalling condition of intellectual and moral decay, but we are not to take it haphazard and in a lump; rather we shall find it expedient to select the very best that is thought and known in Europe, and to import even that with the changes and reservations which our diverse conditions may be found to dictate. Otherwise instead of a simple acculturating influence, we shall have chaos annexed to chaos, the vices and calamities of the west superimposed on the vices and calamities of the east.17

Aurobindo Ghose called the Congress un-national in 1893 not because of its imitation of the west or its inability to attract Muslims in sufficient numbers, but because it did not reach out to the working classes. "The proletariat among us is sunk in ignorance and overwhelmed with distress. But with that distressed and ignorant proletariat, - now that the middle class is proved deficient in sincerity, power and judgment, - with that proletariat resides... our sole assurance of hope, our sole chance in the future." He even saw some hope in the communal conflicts over Hindi-Urdu and cow slaughter in the early 1890s. "A few more taxes, a few more rash interferences of government, a few more stages of starvation, and the turbulence that is now religious will become social. I am speaking to that class... called the thinking portion of the Indian community: Well, let these thinking gentlemen carry their thoughtful intellects a hundred years back. Let them recall what causes led from the religious madness of St Bartholomew to the social madness of the Reign of Terror".18

Did the version of Indian nationalism authored by Tilak and Aurobindo get marooned in the world of religious madness that failed to make the grade to social madness? On the key questions of relations between the overarching Indian nation on the one hand and religious communities and linguistic regions on the other, anti-colonial thought and politics of the Swadeshi era left contradictory legacies. The anti-colonialism of both Hindus and Muslims was influenced in this period by their religious sensibilities. But since the colonial state's scheme of enumeration had transformed one into the 'majority' and the other into the 'minority' community, it became easier for Hindu religious symbolisms and communitarian interests to be subsumed within the emerging discourse on the Indian nation. If the Irish nation in 1905 was, as D P Moran insisted, "de facto a Catholic nation",19 the writings and speeches of most swadeshi nationalists certainly left...
Although Chatterjee provides some Muslims or Islam.22 Yet the classic Gandhi contains not one reference to religious community. Gandhi's espousal of the cause of minority were already beginning to pose problems for a unified Indian nationalism, as yet there appeared to be little contradiction between Bengali or Tamil linguistic communities or 'nations' on the one hand and a broader diffuse Indian 'nation' on the other. Few, if any, of the nationalist ideologues were thinking at this stage of the acquisition of power in a centralised nation-state. India's two most celebrated poet-philosophers - Rabindranath Tagore and Mohammad Iqbal - whose Bengali and Urdu poetry celebrated patriotic sentiment, were both during the first two decades of this century impassioned critics of the western model of the territorial nation-state.21

**Gandhi's Reason and Hindu-Muslim Unity**

It required Gandhi's genius to fuse the love for a territorial homeland with the extra-territorial loyalty of religion in the mass nationalistic movement of 1920. Without detracting from his distinctive qualities, the Mahatma's reason needs to be rescued by historians from the mystical haze created by latter-day cultural critics flying the banner of indigenous authenticity. It is sometimes too easily supposed, as Partha Chatterjee does, that Gandhi's thought did not accept the conceptual frameworks or the modes of reasoning and inference adopted by the 'nationalists of his day' and "emphatically reject[ed] their rationalism, scientism and historicism". Although Chatterjee provides some brilliant insights into Gandhi's critique of the western concept of civil society in Hind Swaraj, his extended discussion of Gandhi contains not one reference to Muslims or Islam.22 Yet the classic 'moment of manoeuvre' in the history of Indian nationalism, if ever there was one, came with Gandhi's espousal of the cause of the Khilafat which not only paved the way for his rise to power but enabled him to achieve a quite spectacular success in popular mobilisation cutting across lines of religious community.

Urged by CF Andrews to publicly clarify his position on the Khilafat, Gandhi wrote in Young India on July 21, 1920:

> I should clear the ground by stating that I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. I tolerate unreasonable religious sentiment when it is not immoral. I hold the Khilafat claim to be both just and reasonable and therefore it derives greater force because it has behind it the religious sentiment of the Muslim world. Gandhi could 'conceive the possibility of a blind and fanatical religious sentiment existing in opposition to pure justice'. Under those circumstances he would "resist the former and fight for the latter". But since the Indian Muslims had an issue that was first of all reasonable and just and on top of that supported by scriptural authority, "then for the Hindus not to support them to the utmost would be a cowardly breach of brotherhood and they would forfeit all claim to consideration from their Mahomedan countrymen."

The crux of Gandhi's case was Lloyd George's 'broken pledge', the pledge to respect the immunity of the holy places in Arabia and Mesopotamia and of Jeddah and not to deprive Turkey of its capital or of its lands in Asia Minor and Thrace. In the event, Smyrna and Thrace had been taken away 'dishonestly', mandates had been established in Syria and Mesopotamia 'unscrupulously' and a British nominee had been set up in the Hejaz "under the protection of British guns". Gandhi believed "the spirit of Islam" to be "essentially republican in the truer sense of the term" which would not stand in the way of Arab and Armenian independence from Turkey if the Arabs and Armenians so wished. On this point he endorsed Mohamed Ali's call for a mixed, independent commission of Indian Muslims, Hindus and Europeans "to investigate the real wish of the Armenians and the Arabs and then to come to a modus vivendi whereby the claims of the nationality and those of Islam may be adjusted and satisfied." The "most thorny part of the question", Gandhi recognised, was Palestine. Promises had been made by the British to the Zionists. But Palestine was "not a stake in the war", and so maintained that by "no canon of ethics or war" could Palestine be given to the Jews "as a result of the war". The Khilafat question was to Gandhi "an imperial question of the first magnitude" which he wanted Hindus to realise overshadowed the Montagu-Chelmsford "Reforms and everything else." If the Muslim claim were unjust apart from the scriptures, there may have been cause for hesitation, but an intrinsically just claim backed by scriptural authority was irresistible.

Gandhi could not have been more fottrighting in acknowledging the extra-territorial nature of the Muslim sentiment: Let Hindus not be frightened by Pan-Islamism. It is not - it need not be - anti-Indian or anti-Hindu. Mussalmans must wish well to every Mussalman state, and even assist any such state, if it is undeservedly in peril. And Hindus, if they are true friends of Mussalman cannot but share the latter's feelings. We must, therefore, co-operate with our Mussalman brethren in their attempt to save the Turkish empire in Europe from extinction.50

Closer to home, Gandhi supported the proposal of 'Brother Shaukat Ali' that there should be three national cries - 'Allaho Akbar', 'Bande Mataram' or 'Bharat Mataki Jai' and 'Hindu-Mussalman Jai'. Gandhi called upon all Hindus and Muslims to join in the first cry "in reverence and pray that Hindu 'Hindus' may not fight shy of Arabic words, when their meaning is not only totally inoffensive but even ennobling". He preferred 'Bande Mataram' to 'Bharat Mataki Jai', as "it would be a graceful recognition of the intellectual and emotional superiority of Bengal". And since India was nothing without "the union of the Hindu and the Muslim heart"; Hindu-Mussalman Jai was a cry never to be forgotten.31

Gandhi appeared to have devised the perfect formula for harnessing the emotive power of nationalism in the linguistic regions and forging Hindu-Muslim unity based on a respectful attitude towards the fact of religiously informed cultural difference in an anti-colonial movement on an all-India scale. Gandhi was not using religious means for political ends; nation and religion were precious ends in themselves, religion perhaps even more so than nation. For both Maulana Mohamed Ali and him, he asserted, the Khilafat was the "central fact", with the Maulana because it was "his religion" and "with me because, in laying down my life for the Khilafat, I ensure the safety of the cow, that is my religion, from the Mussalman knife". "Both hold Swaraj equally dear", he added, "because only by Swaraj is the safety of our respective faiths possible."32

The entire movement of non-cooperation was in this view "a struggle between religion and irreligion" because the motive behind every crime perpetrated by a Europe, nominally Christian but beset by Satan, was "not religious or spiritual, but grossly..."
material” while the Hindus and Muslims had “religion and honour as their motive”.33

There were at least two points of weakness in the Mahatma’s grand scheme of Hindu-Muslim unity in his non-violent holy war. First, as in his staunch defence of the caste system, Gandhi clung dogmatically to social closure along lines of religious community when it came to inter-dining and inter-marriage. "If brothers and sisters can live on the friendliest footing without ever thinking of marrying each other", he wrote, "I can see no difficulty in my daughter regarding every Mahomedan as a brother and vice versa".34 Gandhi changed his views later in life and attended only inter-caste and inter-community marriages, but his attitude had caused hurt if not offence, despite his claim that the All brothers “scrupulously respected his bigotry, if [his] self-denial may be so named”.35 The second weakness stemmed from his determination not to countenance the possibility of any legitimate class dimension in Muslim subsahem resistance to Hindu economic power. When the Mappilla rebellion broke out in the summer of 1921, he saw it as fanaticism pure and simple for which ‘cultured Mussalmans’ were sorry.36 The response to the ‘Moplah madness’ was cited by him as proof of Hindu-Muslim solidarity. “As members of a family”, he assured himself, “we shall sometimes fight, but we shall always have leaders who will compose our differences and keep us under check”. Besides, “in the face of possibilities of such madness in future”, he asked, what was “the alternative to Hindu-Muslim unity? A perpetuation of slavery?”37 Even when in December 1921 Lord Reading had ‘flung the face of possibilities of such madness at’ the All-India Congress Committee, one frequent subject of argument between the two was “the Almighty”. The Maulana liked to refer to God in Congress resolutions by way of thanksgiving and when Nehru protested he was shouted at for his irreligion. But Mohamed Ali forgave his younger colleague, believing him to be “fundamentally religious” in spite of his “superficial behaviour”. ‘Perhaps’, Nehru mused, “it depends on what is meant by religion and religious”.41

Mohamed Ali’s stirring call for a federation of faiths notwithstanding, the Coconada Congress failed to ratify C R Das’ Bengal Pact for an all-India power-sharing arrangement between Hindus and Muslims. As Das’s political disciple Subhas Chandra Bose noted ruefully, it was “rejected on the alleged ground that it showed partiality for the Moslems and violated the principles of Nationalism”. It was adopted by a large majority at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Sirajganj in May 1924 overcoming the opposition of “some reactionary Hindus”.42 But at the all-India level the Punjab line articulated by Lala Lajpat Rai had won out over the Bengal line advocated by C R Das. When Das died in 1925, Subhas Bose, who deplored the absence of ‘cultural intimacy’ between India’s two great religious communities, wrote from Mandalay prison:

I do not think that among the Hindu leaders of India, Islam had a greater friend than in the Deobandhu...Hinduism was extremely dear to his heart; he could even lay down his life for his religion, but at the same time he was absolutely free from dogmatism of any kind. That explains how it was possible for him to love Islam.43

The mid-1920s, most contemporary observers and historians agree, were a period of Hindu-Muslim strife. Nehru utilizes the chapter in his autobiography dealing with this phase of riots ‘Communalism Rampant’ in which he concludes: “Surely religion and the spirit of religion have much to answer for. What killing they have been.44 This Nehruvian misdiagnosis of the cause of Hindu-Muslim disharmony was to have large implications for the history of Indian anti-colonial nationalism in the last two decades of the British raj. As the discourse of mainstream Indian nationalism turned more strident in its insistence on singularity, a sense of unease among those condemned to ‘minority’ status at the all-India level led them to call for safeguards and eventually...
to couche their own demands in the language of nationalism. What infuriated Mohammed Ali Jinnah in early 1938 was Nehru's statement reported in the press: "I have examined this so-called communal question through the telescope, and if there is nothing, what can you see."

Paradoxically, it was precisely this myopic vision of non-communal nationalism towards the Muslim question which enabled the politics of religiously based Hindu identity to occupy comfortable spaces within the regional outfits of the Indian National Congress. The "moral conception of Gandhian politics", it has been suggested, was in this period incompatible with "the realities of power within a bourgeois constitutional order". But Gandhi had not only "ascended to the political compulsions of bourgeois politics", as Partha Chatterjee sees it, but had succumbed from the mid-1920s to the political compulsions of Hindu majoritarianism in the United Provinces and Hindu majoritarianism in the Punjab. By the time Gandhi rediscovered the imperative of Hindu-Muslim accommodation in the mid-1940s he had already ceded too much political ground to the forces of unitary nationalism and Hindu majoritarianism which were bound in a tense but symbiotic relationship.

The colonial rules of representation in the formal arenas of politics based on religious enumeration were undoubtedly tailor-made for communal rivalry. But there was also a significant shift in nationalist ideology on the issue of religious difference which made certain that the Muslim masses were never enthused in the same way by the civil disobedience and Quit India movements of the 1930s and 1940s as they had been in the years of non-cooperation and Khilafat. At the height of the 1942 movement Leonard Woolf wrote in his preface to Mulk Raj Anand's Letters on India: The nationalism of the Irish — largely due to British imperialism — has started an insoluble Ulster problem in which religion and nationalism have intertwined to produce inexcusable harm. You and the Congress Party are beginning to treat the Muslims and Jinnahas Mr de Valera treated Ulster. You may succeed in deceiving Tom Brown on this point, but do you really wish to turn Jinnah into an Indian Lord Craigavon? For that is what you will certainly do.

The transformation of the would-be Charles Parnell of Indian politics to an unlikely James Craig — such was the measure of success of inclusionary nationalism of the Congress variety.

**Blood Brothers in a War of Liberation**

Yet during the second world war there was a movement, led by another Cambridge man and avid admirer of Garibaldi, which sought to forge unity in anti-colonial politics based on respect for and accommodation of religious difference. In his speech as Congress president in 1938 Subhas Bose had warned against accepting colonial constitutional devices designed to divide and deflect the anti-colonial movement, but felt that "the policy of divide and rule" was "by no means an unmixed blessing for the ruling power". He could see Britain getting "caught in the meshes of her own political dualism" resulting from divisive policies, whether in India, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq or Ireland.

After war broke out in 1939 he likened the Congress proposal of a "Constituent Assembly under the aegis of an Imperialist government" to the Irish Convention of Lloyd George. During 1940 as Britain suffered reverses in the "war between rival imperialisms" and the Muslim League passed its Lahore resolution Bose noted that the problem of "fighting British imperialism" was likely to give way to the more pressing problem of "internal unity and consolidation", which, in order to succeed, would have to include unity between the Congress and the Muslim League on a joint Hindu-Muslim demand for a provisional national government.

Between 1943 and 1945 Subhas Bose made a very deliberate effort to build unity among India's religious communities in the movement he led in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, the man who became the seniormost field commander in Bose's Indian National Army had early in his career been the victim of exactly the sort of bias that stoked communal animosity. In 1931 Mohammed Zaman Kiani had faced a choice — either to go to the Olympic hockey trials being held in Calcutta or to appear in the examination for admission into the new Military Academy at Dehra Dun. He passed the examination but the medical officer ruled him out from being admitted to the first term of the Academy. The medical officer was a Hindu and the next man to be selected was a Sikh. This enraged all the Muslims of the battalion who believed "the whole thing had been manoeuvred with a communal bias". Fortunately Zaman was later selected and joined the Academy in its second term that started after six months. "I little did I then realise", writes Kiani in his memoirs, "that in time to come, in a revolutionary movement...I would be one of the strongest advocates of inter-communal unity and harmony for the purpose of fighting against the foreign rule of our country".

In 1943 Kiani was the top Muslim officer flanking Subhas Chandra Bose at a "national demonstration" and fund-raiser at the Chettiar temple in Singapore. Bose had refused to set foot in the temple unless his colleagues belonging to all castes and communities could come with him.

"When we came to the temple", Bose's closest political aide Abid Hasan, a Hyderabadi Muslim, has written, "I found it filled to capacity with the uniforms of the INA officers and men and the black caps of the South Indian Muslims glaringly evident". When Hasam, a civilian, volunteered to go to the war front, he found himself in an army which had altered all the rules of Britain's Indian Army as these had applied to religious and linguistic communities, caste and gender. And yes, they dined together before they went into battle together. 'No one had asked us', he writes, "to cease to be a Tamilian or Dogra, Punjabi Muslim or Bengal Brahmin, a Sikh or an Adivasi. We were all that and perhaps much more than before, but these matters became personal affairs'.

When their Netaji came to see the retiring men from Imphal at Mandalay, the "Sikhs oilled their beards, the Punjabi Muslims, Dogras and Rajputs twirled their moustaches and we the indiscriminates put on as good a face as we could manage".

Faced with military defeat, there could be two sources of solace — one was rational analogy with the Irish example, the other, was religious faith drawn from India's own history. "It is a strange phenomenon in history", Subhas Bose said in a speech on May 21, 1943, "that while the British could easily crush the Irish rebellion of 1916 at a time when they were engaged in a life and death struggle, they had to acknowledge defeat at the hands of the same Irish revolutionaries after they (the British) emerged victorious from the world war".

But he had already observed in his reply of November 2, 1943 to a message of felicitations from de Valera upon the proclamation of a provisional government in Singapore that British imperialism had "brought about the partition of Ireland in the past and if British Imperialism were to survive this war, a similar fate would be in store for India".

In an attempt to forestall such a fate the INA's march to Delhi had commenced with a ceremonial parade on September 28, 1943 at the tomb of the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar in Burma. At the ceremony Subhas Bose handed over a 'nazar' of two and a half lakh rupees to the Burmese government "as a very
small token of...love and admiration for Burma.

Accepting the gift the Burmese leader Ba Maw said: "We Burmans also attach a great deal of importance to certain sacred spots, to certain victory-bearing earth as in Shwebo."

Once the march to Delhi had been halted at Imphal, the defeated warriors and their leader gathered once more at Bahadur Shah's tomb on July 11, 1944. On that sombre occasion Subhas Chandra Bose closed his speech with a couplet composed by Bahadur Shah after the collapse of the 1857 revolt:

Ghazion ma bu ahegi jab talak iman ki
Takht London tak chalegi, tegh Hindustan ki.

(So long as Ghazis are imbued with the spirit of faith
The sword of Hindustan will reach London's throne.)

FROM UNION OF HEARTS TO AMPUTATION OF LIMBS

Whether due to a British error in national decision-making or in answer to the prayers offered at Bahadur Shah's tomb, India's anti-imperialists were given a last opportunity to reach an honourable settlement of the problem of religious difference when three Punjabi officers of the INA—a Hindu, a Muslim and a Sikh—were put on public trial at the Red Fort for waging war against the king-emperor. The venue was the same as on the occasion of the historic trial of Bahadur Shah, so was the sentence—deportation for life. But on this occasion the sentence could not be carried out and the Red Fort the three officers were released almost immediately by the commander-in-chief Claude Auchinleck under intense public pressure.

Yet the union of hearts in the winter of 1945-46 could not prevent the amputation of limbs in the summer of 1947.

The all-important question as to why at the end of the day the Punjab pushed the subcontinent towards partition rather than union has been addressed more fully by Ayesha Jalal. What needs emphasizing in conclusion today is that division was not a foregone conclusion until the moment of the actual wielding of the partitioner's axe. The principle of Ausgleich was alive in the cabinet mission's proposal of a three-tiered federal structure for India in 1946 as it had been in the ideas for a council of Ireland in 1920 and perhaps even as late as the James Craig-Michael Collins pact of March 1922 and also in the plans for a binational state in Palestine in 1948. What made partition—a decision born of short-term expediency—into such a long-term feature of the political landscapes of both India and Ireland was that in order to ensure rule by religiously defined majorities the provinces of Punjab and Bengal and the province of Ulster had to be divided by totting up numbers in districts and counties.

The spirit of religion had little to do with these temporal sins. Throughout the entire course of the history of Indian anti-colonialism, religion as faith within the limits of morality, if not the limits of reason, had rarely impeded the cause of national unity and may in fact have assisted its realisation at key moments of struggle. The variegated symbols of religion as culture had enthused nationalists of many hues and colours but had seldom embittered relations between religious communities until they were flaunted to boost the power of majoritarian triumphalism. The conceits of unitary nationalism may well have caused a deeper sense of alienation among those defined as minorities than the attachments to diverse religions. The territorial claims of a minority turned nation heaped further confusion on the furious contest over sovereignty in the dying days of the raj. Having failed to share sovereignty in the manner of their pre-colonial forbears, late-colonial nationalist worshippers of the centralised state ended up dividing the land. Surely Godless nationalism linked to the colonial categories of religious majorities and minorities has much to answer for. What a killer it has been!

I can do no better then close with a few lines of a poem that the 'great sentinel' Rabindranath Tagore, a jealous guardian of reason against unreason, printed in his little book on nationalism in 1917. It was an English rendering of a Bengali poem he had composed on the last day of the last century:

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the West and the whirrwind of hatred. The naked passion of Love of Nations, in its drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.

Keep watch, India...Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the freedom of the soul, Build God's throne daily upon the amale barreness of your poverty And know that what is huge is not great and pride is not everlasting.

Notes

[12] Ibid, ibid, p 190.
[15] Ranade (ed), Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Hon'ble Mr Justice M G Ranade, pp 193-94.
[18] Ibid, pp 108-09.
The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, announces a new biannual journal, *Indian Social Science Review* (ISSR), to be launched in 1999 in collaboration with SAGE Publications Indian Private Ltd. The principal objective is to bring multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to bear upon the study of social, economic, and political problems of contemporary concern. It is proposed to publish articles of a general nature as well as those focused on particular themes. There will also be a book review section. To ensure high standards, only refereed material will be included in the journal.

The ISSR will be edited by a board consisting of Professor T.N. Madan (Social Anthropology) as Editor-in-Chief and Professors Amiya K. Bagchi (Economic History), Sabayasachi Bhattacharya (History), Ashish Bose (Demography), Suma Chitnis (Education), Sudhir Kakkar (Psychology), Kuldip Mathur (Political Science), Deepak Nayyar (Economics), T.K. Oommen (Sociology) and Dr. K.V. Sundaram (Geography), as members.

Among the themes that will be addressed in the first few issues of the ISSR are (a) the emergence and erosion of institutions, (b) centre and periphery in economic and political development, (c) aspects of violence in society, (d) civil society.

The ISSR invites papers (in duplicate) on the above themes as well as articles of a general nature that follow the interdisciplinary approach. The lengths of papers should be between 5000 and 8000 words. Shorter communications and research notes may also be considered.

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