MAKING INDIA
HINDU
Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India
edited by
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An uncharacteristic narrative closure for Bankim who had always been intensely concerned about historicity, with problems of political bias and partisanship vitiating historical truth. All his familiar concerns are blown away with a few puffs of smoke, with rumors recounted by two ignorant and rather uninterested men who dismiss all history as ultimately unknowable, as equally uncertain versions, and, finally, as supremely irrelevant to the likes of them. What exactly is involved in this major departure?

One can only speculate at several levels. It can denote a final failure of hope in the heroic, redemptive exercise, in the possibility of nation building. It may be a criticism of the Hindu masses who have forever stayed away at decisive moments in wars, have never identified themselves with the nation. It can, on the other hand, indicate a recognition of the autonomy of the imaginative domain. The Brechtian alienation device, the underlining of the fictional nature of the work by talking about "novels and fictions" may point to the constructedness of all writings, historical and fictional. Or is it, after a long gap and after many changes, a return to the theme of Samya, which, in the meantime, had been overtaken by dreams of Hindu glory? Does it question the materiality of notions like political freedom and nationhood in the context of the everlasting peasant problem and ground the failure of the nation in the disjunction between the two?

Bankim thus formulates and fills out a violent Hindu agenda and immediately proceeds to deconstruct it. He powerfully projects religious militancy as a resolution to the problem of colonization. He has an equally powerful certainty about its untenable future. It is inevitable, then, that he has to simultaneously underscore the agenda in intensely heightened colors, to proclaim its message with a brutal stridency that nearly reaches a breaking point in the last novel, and immediately counterfeit to it an alienation device that drags the shining vision of Hindu triumph into the realms of idle rumor and gossip.
proceeding hand in glove with the Congress and left-wing formations in a
concerted endeavor to undermine Indian/Hindu culture and civilization.

The reading of what Muslims are and the vain hope of how they ought
to have been is echoed with unfailing regularity. Equally familiar are images
of India's Muslims was just as important as the framework adopted
for themselves an alien culture, if not origin, and being
others? I am inclined to believe that this was so, though
the critical issue is how the colonial government fostered the growth of
such ideas and helped sections of the Muslim intelligentsia to etch a
certain image of themselves. I also believe that the etching of "nationalistic"
images of India's Muslims was just as important as the framework adopted
by the Raj to define and categorize "Indian Muslim society.

There are any number of scholarly studies, Edward Said's Orientalisum
(1978) included, replete with instances of Islam's representation as a hos­
tile and aggressive force, of Muslim societies being caricatured as rigid,
authoritarian, and uncritical (Daniel 1980, Al-Azmeh 1999). Quite a few
British writers in India, some occupying government positions, perpetu­
at a repertoire of such images, construing Indian Islam as an emblem
of repulsive otherness, "the faith of a body of savage marauders and con­
querors, who swept over the land ... in a series of cruel raids, bring­
ing rapine and destruction in their train" (Crooke 1897, 1975, 259-59).
The sultans of Delhi and their Ottoman counterparts in Constantinople
suffered much the same fate at the hands of leading nineteenth-century
writers. Projected as the great iconoclasts, they were considered tokens of
evil and scapegoats for issues with which they had no connection. Bishop
Heber, who stayed in India from 1823 to 1826, wanted Hindus to be con­
tantly reminded "that we did not conquer them, but found them con­
quered, that their previous rulers were as much strangers to their blood
and to their religion as we are, and that they were notoriously far more
oppressive masters than we have ever shown ourselves" (Laird 1971, 64).
Valentine Chirol, in charge of the foreign department of the Times (Lon­
don) from 1908 to 1912, observed that "with the monumental wreckage
of those early Mohamedan dynasties, steeped in treachery and bloodshed,
the plain of Delhi is still strewed" (Chirol 1921, 5).

Travelers, missionaries, administrators, and ethnographers transposed
the same imagery to Victorian India.1 According to their images, Islam
was static and dogmatic. Its adherents were conservative, haughtily con­
tempts of things "modern," and too much under the influence of an
obscure system of education (Low 1907, 281). The Earl of Ronaldshay
(1923, 235) opined that, "a candid Muhammadan would probably admit
that the most powerful factors in keeping the majority of Moslems aloof
from the educational movement of the day were pride of race, a mem­
ory of bygone superiority, religious fears, and a not unnatural attachm­
cent to the learning of Islam." Major General Stockley Warren, who retired in
1885, reminisced in these terms on his reaction to a Muslim "cooie" who
would not have brandy for medicinal purposes: "These men I presume
we shall ultimately civilise, make them Christians and drunks, and lead
them to liberty" (IOL Warren Papers). The civil servant E. C. Bayley told
the viceroy Northbrook in 1864 that the standard of "Muslim morality"
was not pitched very high, and that the "corruptions" in their manners
and social habits preceded their contact with the Europeans (IOL 1871a,
1873b). A "community" steeped in religious obscurantism was prone to
construing their feelings in hostile acts" (Fuller 1888, 41, 124; also Fuller 1913; Low
1927, 281; Steel 1905, 160).

Owen, Fuller, and others, though by no means all the British func­
tionaries, believed that Islam in the subcontinent was indelibly stamped by

1. See Daniel 1960, 206-85; Greenberger 1909; Hardy 1973, 1-12, 83-91; Robinson 1974,
164-73; Pandey 1990b; Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993; M. K. Anderson 1990; Powell
1991; Carroll 1980, 122-40; Jones 1981, 83-85; and Manuel, T. Sarkar, Fox, and S. Sarkar in
this volume.
its early history, particularly by its original social carriers, and that Islamic values, inherently hostile to the West, caused Muslim antipathy toward and estrangement from the government. The call to wreak a special vengeance upon Muslims in the wake of the "Wahabi movement" and the 1857 war in north India manifested how things "Islamic" were constructed, located, categorized, and connected in nineteenth-century British India (Q. Ahmad 1994; T. Metcalf 1990, 298–302).

Another common belief with serious political implications was that the British presence irked Muslims on account of the latter's close identification with the erstwhile ruling classes. They preserved in their blood the pride of a conquering race and cherished hopes of reestablishing their rule (Butler 1932, 15; Garrat 1939, 172). "Most Indian Muslims," commented one writer, "cherished in their hearts some memory of the days when their fathers were the masters of India, and they believe, rightly or wrongly, that if ever the English power were shaken they would regain their old dominance" (Low 1907, 281). Evidence in support of such contentions was thin and almost wholly drawn from the Mughal ruling classes and their dependents. Most Muslims had no cause to be enthused by the glory of the Mughal era or to mourn its end. The fact that a Shah Waliullah or a Mirza Ghalib bemoaned its decline should not be treated lightly, but it should also not be construed as a generalized or undifferentiated "Muslim response." Similarly, it was patent that for Harcourt Butler, governor of the United Provinces (1918–20) during the high noon of British imperialism, to raise the specter of a Muslim "conspiracy" to overthrow the British with the aid of their "virile" coreligionists in India and overseas (Butler 1921, 140–41, and 1931, 38).

Some Muslims at the turn of the century nursed such illusions. There were, likewise, isolated instances of elites or their interlocutors seeking an external Muslim imperium for help in reconsolidating their local or regional authority. In 1759, Shah Waliullah turned to Ahmad Shah Durani (Abdali) to rescue India for Islam; later, Saiyyid Ahman of Rae Bareli (t876–93) corresponded with Central Asian rulers to recognize his khilafat (Hardy 1972, 54, 58). In general, however, British officials would have known from their long experience of administering areas with sizable Muslim populations that most Muslims were prepared to make the colonial government work and to seek adjustments within and gains benefits from colonial administrative and bureaucratic structures. Yet colonial mentalities stuck to inherited frameworks and bandied about a series of generalities about Muslims. Conjuring the image of a belligerent community with extraterritorial legitimized government policies that were designed to tame and humble supposedly recalcitrant Muslims. "The world is full of groups relying on their connection with some dominant 'race' elsewhere," commented G. T. Garrat. "The claim is natural enough, but the English, in accepting this picture of the Moslems as a race apart, seem to have been misled by a writer of genius (Rudyard Kipling), who had, however, a journalist's flair for the picturesque, and who always saw the Peninsula in terms of Punjab" (Garrat 1929, 173).

The generalities extended, especially after 1857, to an appraisal of Indian Islam, the structure of the Muslim "community," and the nature of its interaction with the Hindus. Some Englishmen found it easy to get on with the Muslims at a social level—as opposed to "the Hindu, with his glib tongue, his pliant brain and back, his fantastic social rites, and his incomprehensible religion" (Low 1907, 281)—and found it easy to comprehend the essentials of their faith, "built on Jewish foundations and devoid of the crudities and subtleties of Brahminism" (IOL 1939). But most were ill-informed and crude in their exposition. The belief was common, for example, that Islam south of the Himalayas remained, to all intents and purposes, the same as in other parts of the world, and that its adherents were a well-knit religious entity, acting as a monolith and keeping the desert faith pure in the land of "idolaters" (Fuller 1910, 125; Titus 1925, 53; C. H. Hill 1911, 210). Muslims were, for this reason, endowed with "cultural coherence," a real sense of unity transcending considerations of race, language, region, and "an essential community of thought and point of view that on occasion is able to speak with authority through its representative bodies" (Whitehead 1924; Garrat 1939, 172). "The solidarity of Islam was a hard fact against which it was futile to run one's head" (Lawrence 1956, 119; Holderness 1911, 127). The governor of Bengal, the province where most Muslims lived in British India, illustrated the strength of the call of Islam—a call which rings insistently in the ears of the devout Muslims, whether of India or elsewhere, drowning the call of country and all else. He put forward the official view, unchanged for nearly a century, that the ethnic pageant which passes across one's vision as one travels over India is made up of many tableaux. There is one such tableau which at once arrests attention because of the many points of contrast which it provides with the rest of the procession. . . . It is a tableau in which we see represented a religion, a civilization and culture, and an outlook differing profoundly in all material respects from those of Hin dunism. (Ronaldshay 1924, 214)

Such a view hardly conformed to reality. Islam in its Persian-Arabic entity failed to make much sense to the masses. That is why its "cultural
mediators" were constrained to make the Islamic traditions more meaningful to the converts in syncretic and symbolic forms (A. Roy 1983, 249). In the process, the pristine purity of dogmas and tenets, which the Farazis in Bengal and the mujahidins in the northwest tried in vain to restore, was tailored to suit the spiritual and material urges of the people. Local customs and heterodox traditions, which were repugnant to Muslim orthodoxy, found a place in the corpus of beliefs and religious practices. This was reflected in the diversity of religiocultural practices, and also in the variety of political and economic experiences. The medieval sultans may have wanted to erect a uniform religiocultural system and impose religious authority from "great" or "middle" traditions, but geographic distances and particularistic localism inhibited them. In the end, the "Islamic little tradition" developed, with its roots firmly anchored in Indian soil, autonomously from centralized political control (Darling 1979, 21-29). The itinerant preachers may have imposed their will sporadically in certain pockets, as indeed they did in rural Bengal, but their impact was transient.

British civil servants—from Crooke to Malcolm Darling—knew that this was so. Charles Alfred Elliot reported from Unnao, close to Lucknow, in UP, that there was a strong tendency among Muslims to assimilate in all externals with their Hindu neighbors. He found them wearing dhotis and using Ram Ram as the mode of salutation ( Elliot 1892, 28). Fuller, likewise, wrote on Hindu influences among Muslims: in purely agricultural districts, he commented, the people not only understood each other's systems, but the systems often seem to overlap. "Hindus and Muslims cheerfully attended each other's festivals and sang each other's songs (Fuller 1910, 130-31; E. J. Thompson 1930, 234). Lytton, Bengal's governor in the 1920s, commented on how the rank and file of the communities in the province got on well with each other in all daily business of life (Lytton 1942, 172; Garratt 1929, 175-76, 181). O. M. Martin, having served in Bengal province from 1915 to 1926, emphatically stated that Hindu-Muslim mutual dependence and friendship were an old and cherished tradition (Martin n.d.). But such knowledge and understanding were neither reflected in concrete political decisions nor translated into constitutional decrees. In the constitutional plans, which broadly reflected the colonial assumptions about Indian society, the Mapilla Muslim appeared indistinguishable from Kipling's sturdy Pathan; the Urdu-speaking landed elite of Awadh was no different from the Tamil-speaking Muslim merchant; E. M. Forster's Cambridge buddy Syed Rosa Masood was cast in the same mold as a karkhandar (artisan) in Delhi's old city; Shias and Sunnis, Bohras and Khojas, the Bareilvis and the Deobandis were all part of the pan-Indian Islam; even though politically, as Bishop Heber noted from long experience in central India, the Bohras were "agreeing far better with Jains and Rajpoets than their Sunnite rivals" (Laird 1971, 282).

It is true that conventional wisdom about Muslims and established theories about their role in the 1857 revolt were questioned by the likes of George Campbell, second-in-command to James Outram after the capture of Lucknow (Outram 1893, 397ff.), W. W. Hunter, the Bengal civilian (Hunter 1871), and W. S. Blunt, an old-fashioned patriot shocked by the vulgarity of new imperialism (Kabbani 1986, 96-97). But according to the viceroy, Lord Dufferin (1884-88), the followers of Islam were still "a nation of 20 million, with their monotheism, their iconoclastic fanaticism, their animal sacrifices, their social equality and their remembrance of the days when, enthroned at Delhi, they reigned supreme from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin" (Hardy 1972, 1). A decade after Dufferin wrote this, Anthony Macdunnell, lieutenant governor (1895-1901) of the United Provinces, treated Muslims with the same degree of suspicion and hostility. He found that theological seminaries, such as the Nadwat at-ulama, in Lucknow, promoted disaffection and sedition. Adding credence to wild notions about Pan-Islamism and its pervasive appeal the world over, he believed that Muslims were loyal to the Ottoman khilaf (M. Hasan 1991, 53-54; Robinson 1974, 133-34). What Macdunnell failed to grasp was that Pan-Islamic sensibilities were heightened not by Muslim publicists but by the colonial government to bolster its imperial concerns in the Balkans, and that there were any number of influential Muslims who denied the Turkish sultan's claim to be a khilaf. Political rights, Syed Ahmad Khan said, "were more important than religious traditions, and so long as the Muslims lived freely under British rule they would remain good subjects" (Robinson 1974, 132; Hardy 1972, 178). He agreed with Maulvi Zakaulah that the Muslims should not look to foreign countries for guidance, since "for a thousand years, our own religion of Islam had been intimately bound up with India; and in India, Islam has won some of its greatest triumphs, for its own popular form of civilization" (Schimmel 1980, 197). Syed Mehdi Ali (Nawab Mohsinul Mulk), Syed Ahmad's close friend and principal of the Aligarh college, made clear that Turkey's sultan could not exercise any of the powers and prerogatives of the khilaf over India's Muslims, who were in no way bound by their religion to obey him.

Though British functionaries continued to perpetuate the myth of the pervasive influence of Pan-Islamism, overseas writers visiting India, in-
cluding the Turkish author Halide Edib, thought differently. She insisted that Muslim allegiance to England during World War I
demolished a strong historical myth—it showed that political Pan-Islamism was a mere bogey. The attachment of the Indian Muslim to the interests of his country was a greater reality than his solidarity with Muslims outside India. It may be useful for Western powers with Muslim colonies to realize that there is a distinct sense of nationhood separate from their religious life. The Indian Muslim would resent an Afghan-Muslim domination and fight it; the Arab-Muslim would resent a Muslim-Turkish domination and fight it as much as he would any non-Muslim domination, if he ever got his independence. (Edib 1937, 117-18; emphasis added)

The direction and flow of “Muslim politics,” guided first by Syed Ahmad and later by the All-India Muslim League, went toward compromise and accommodation with the government. New generations grew up for whom foreign rule was an unchanging fact of life, whether they liked it or not. Most modern and traditionally educated Muslims, for whom the Farangi or the Bareli adventures were faint memories, sensed that they could no longer live in a stable and self-sufficient system of inherited culture. They recognized the need to change attitudes and generate the strength to survive in a world dominated by colonialism (M. Hasan 1993a; Hardy 1972, 94-115). The ulama (Islamic learned men), many of whom were harshly treated as archenemies of the British, made it clear after 1857 that adjustment with rather than repudiation of the Raj was their main plank. Abdul Hay (1848-86), a prominent alim (scholar) of Lucknow’s theological seminary in Firangi Mahal, considered the acceptance of British presence and learning of English to be lawful as long as no harm to Islam resulted (B. D. Mercat 1982, 279; Hardy 1972, 14).


In his view on Pan-Islamism, Anthony Macdonnell was out of tune with the approved official line, which had grudgingly veered around to two sets of convictions. One was based on the bizarre belief that the Muslims had to be won over because they were so terrible and fear-inspiring (IOL 1930). The other rested on pragmatic imperial considerations. How could so many Muslims, some of whom wielded power and influence in certain areas, be alienated for so long? They had to be enlisted “as allies and auxiliaries” (Lyall in Robinson 1974, 170), courted to thwart nationalist aspirations, and encouraged to counter rabble-rousers in the Indian National Congress. Viceroy Lord Northbrook (1872-76) was told by the colonial office to remove any “just cause of [Muslim] complaint, because, in the event of any action against Russia, our allies must be the Mohammedans of Central Asia, Afghanistan, and of Russia” (IOL 1974). Viceroy Lord Mayo’s note of June 26, 1871, on Muslim education indicated a change in imperial policy in this direction (Hardy 1972, 90); and Mayo’s successor, Northbrook, received kudos for “doing great good in directing attention to the long and grievously neglected subject of Muslim education” (IOL 1874). After the 1857 difficulties with Muslim policy in India, Mayo began to fill the cup of reconciliation, Northbrook held it out (Hardy 1972, 91).

The Simla Deputation of October 1906—masterminded by the All-India college principal W. A. J. Archbold—paved the way for establishing the Muslim League. It was seen, for this reason, as a decisive break with the silent policy of the earlier decades. The colonial government reforms of 1909, enacted to defuse the Congress demand for a greater share in administration and decision-making, was a calculated masterstroke: it discarded the notion and jettisoned the prospect of sectarian nationalism. It established separate electorates for Muslims, along with reservations and weightages, and thus gave birth to a religiopolitical community, sections of which began to see themselves in the colonial image of being unified, cohesive, and segregated from the Hindus. Separate electorates put a formal seal of approval on the institutionalized conception of Muslim political identity and contributed to the forging of communitarian identities that were, both in conception and articulation, profoundly divisive and inherently conflict-oriented. An otherwise diverse "community" was thus homogenized, like a "caste" or a "tribe," in order to be suitably accommodated within political schemes and bureaucratic designs. The self-styled Muslim leaders could thus stake their claims to be representatives of an "objectively" defined community and contend with others for government patronage, employment, and political assignments. In this way, the ideological contours of the future Pakistan were delineated by British opinion and policymakers long before Mohammad Ali Jinnah burst upon the political scene with his demand for a Muslim nation.

The same process extended to the formation of caste-cluster consciousness and caste politics. By viewing caste categories as units of patronage and prescription, the government forced a predictable response; those
a number of moment in history must have no one but a Muslim Leaguer could represent the "Muslim from Maul: a and communalists, prevented from attending the Round Table Conferences their political isolation. More than secular, territorial nationalism and undermined their moral authority. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) projected the same colonial assumptions. The Act of 1915 held out the prospect of a divided nation and implicitly endorsed the hitherto easy notion of an incoherent Muslim nation. Indeed, if the British were to incline overmuch toward the Muslim League in the early 1940s, it was in part because their own political framework left them with little choice except to depend on Muslim League leaders. They had, after all, laid the foundations of a state-support realm enabling influential Muslims to define their "community" on their own terms and to extract statutory concessions and guarantees almost at will. The structures of governance offered them much greater space for articulating and representing sectional interests.

The Muslims in the Indian National Congress were put in an awkward position. The official, colonial definition of a "community" ran contrary to secular, territorial nationalism and undermined their moral authority. They were greatly constrained and unable to operate from a position of strength, because their conception of nationhood had no place in the constitutional blueprint. The overall thrust of British policies, especially after 1919, led to their political isolation. A man of Dr. M. M. Ansari's stature was virtually prevented from attending the Round Table Conferences in London. Rank communalism, on the other hand, were fed, greeted with broad smiles, and welcomed with open arms (M. Hasan 1987). Congress Muslims like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad did not figure on the colonial agenda. They were "the wrecking horse," just because Jinnah, whose own status was far from assuaged, insisted on their exclusion from the Simla conference and from the interim government (Mansergh 1972, 1:629; M. Hasan 1993, 93-94). Jinnah's plea, which did not go unheeded in official quarters, was that no one but a Muslim League could represent the "Muslim interests." This moment in history must have been relished by the surviving architects of the 1905, 1914, and 1915 constitutions.

In the final analysis, the British bequeathed the Indian republic a truncated nation, a distorted perspective, a series of blurred images, and a number of vague and undifferentiated categories, most of which need to be challenged, contested, and refuted vigorously and consistently. If the history of the intercommunity relations is to be rewritten, it has to steer clear of colonial paradigms and be freed from the stranglehold of an intellectual tradition, orientalist or otherwise (Breckenridge and van der Veer 1993). Likewise, the individual and collective experiences of Muslims, which were by no means the same thing, need to be located in the subcontinent's history. They need to be viewed afresh, not in the light of abstract and arbitrary categories, but on the strength of irrefutable evidence of their complex but long-standing, day-to-day interactions with various groups and communities.

II

A good number of educated Muslims in the last quarter of the nineteenth century longed for an "objective" assessment of their history and sociology and a rigorously argued repudiation of certain popular notions about their co-religionists. Who could they turn to? Not the theologians or the formal body of ulama, many of whom explicitly challenged the ideological tenets of the modern age. They were no doubt trained to debate and defend matters of faith but were ill-equipped, on account of their limited concerns, training, and religious orientation, to match orientalist scholarship. The intervention of scholars based in Aligarh, Delhi, Patna, and Calcutta was far more impressive and in tune with Western intellectual pursuits. The Aligarh college, for one, was a visible embodiment of the victory of forces of progress. New schools of research, interpretation, and reconstruction of "Muslim thought" developed in this sleepy town in western UP. It was here that movements of reform were consummated. A typically Aligarh version of reformed Islam, based on nineteenth-century liberalism and humanism, grew up in opposition both to the orthodox stream and to the popular syncretism of the masses. But the intellectual energy released by the pioneering endeavors of Syed Ahmed, Shibli Nomani, Altaf Husain Hall, Maulvi Zakullah, and the "First Generation" of students lost momentum once the reformist trends became more and more intertwined with political controversies. The ambition of an average student, drawn from the landed class and the upper crust of the bourgeoisie, was government service. His pride was soothed, thanks to early Pan-Islamic stirrings, by his being reminded that he was a unit in the great democracy of Islam, and in witness of this brotherhood, he jauntily wore the Turkish...
Or question the Muslim elite's highly exaggerated and romanticized assessment of its historic role and destiny? Did they attempt to refute colonial stereotypes and set right the image of a static "community," sunk in torpid medievalism, insulated from the winds of change, influenced by the dikta of the mullahs, tied to the Islamic community, susceptible to Pan-Islamic influences, and organized, despite internal differentiations, on a pan-Indian basis?

Sections of the intelligentsia, creatively engaged in generating national consciousness across the board, had to set their own agenda within the parameters of their own framework. They were expected to redefine the terms of the debate not so much on Muslims or on Indian Islam but on intercommunity relations. They were required to harness their intellectual resources in order to demonstrate that the Muslims, both in their historical and contemporary settings, were part of and not separate from the Indian reality and that the colonial stereotypes, often reinforced by Muslim elite perceptions, were constructed on false premises. This was a necessary precondition for establishing their all-India credentials, as also to hasten the process of nation-building with Muslims as co-partners. They had to contend, moreover, with a problem summed up by Gulshan and Chandra, two fictional characters in Firoz Khan Noon's novel Scented Dust (1942), and to bridge the gulf separating the followers of Islam and Hinduism. "Do not carry away the idea," Gulshan told Chandra,

that I think ill of you for your ignorance, because there are thousands of us Hindus, men and women, who are as ignorant of the great Muslim religion and its philosophy as you are of ours. You will meet millions amongst us, who know no more about Islam than that it introduced into India loose trousers and a spouted pot for ablutions. There are also millions amongst us who know no more about the Hindu culture than what is represented by langars (buffalo shop) and dal-rut (lentil and bread/vegetarian diet). It is only the tractable, fiery and short-tempered who speak evil of other people's religions. (Noon 1941, 293)

III

There are numerous tracts and treatises on Hindu-Muslim intermingling, on social and cultural fusion, and on the commonality of intercommunity interests. There was, likewise, an enlightened conception of state and society grounded in the values of tolerance, syncretism, and fraternal living. One can also discern a wide range of liberal, eclectic, and radical
The Myth of Unity

Most accounts, with their focus on the Muslim ruling elites, their military exploits and glittering durbars, ignored the subtle fusion of “little traditions” at the Sufi shrines particularly and in the rural hinterland generally. Islam had no Max Müller to detail how its dogmas and rituals were gradually incorporated into regional and local belief structures and rituals; how Muslims, most converted to Muhammad’s religion at different points of time and for different reasons, were integrated with the rest of the population through a tangible and clearly identifiable historical process. Islam was mistakenly viewed as part of the “great tradition”—codified, rigid, unchanging, insular, and close to external influences. Its followers, whether converted or not, were cast in a specifically Muslim-Islamic mold. Regardless of economic status, caste, language, or regional affinity, their identity was understood, defined, and described in strictly textual terms.

K. M. Panikkar, otherwise identified with the liberal stream, commented that “the organization of Islam in India was . . . frankly communal, and its outlook was governed by the single fact of ensuring to the Islamic nation in India its independence and authority.” Muslims constituted a society everywhere and were much more than a religious minority. Their culture and way of life was different from the Hindus and other communities around them. “Unlike the Christians who, though they profess a different religion, are not in their way of life different from the Hindus, the Muslims, whether in the South of Kerala or in Kashmir, represent a culture of their own” (K. M. Panikkar 1963, 55, 60).

The militancy of Islam and its inflexible doctrinal structure was a theme in and a major component of the Aryan Samaj movement. Its founder, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, was a relentless critic of Islam and his celebrated text, Satyaarth Prakash, was the chief source of inspiration for anti-Islamic polemics. “The Quoran, the Quoramic God and the Muslims,” according to him, “are full of bigotry and ignorance” (Jordens 1978, 268). Pandit Lekh Ram, Swami Sharaddhanand, and Lala Lajpat Rai carried forward the polemics of the swami. They subjected the Quran to severe criticism, depicted Muhammad as a man of dubious sexual ethics, and interpreted Islam as a religion sanctifying war and the slaughter of nonbelievers (Jones 1976, 145, 150; Llewellyn 1995, 104–5). “When I considered how devoted a Muslim is to his religion,” wrote Lajpat Rai, whose father turned Muslim for a while, “how he regards the propagation of Islam as a bounden duty and how he believes that the highest reward is attached to converting a man to Islam, I can well imagine what great pressure must my father’s Muslim friends have brought to bear upon him . . . and how often
they must have tried to induce him to become a Mussalman openly” (V. C. Joshi 1965, 14). Such views correspond to the oft-repeated colonial axiom that orthodoxy rather than heterodoxy had a more direct and profound impact on the Muslims, and that they were deeply committed to fulfilling their Islamic obligations. What distinguished them from others was their crusading zeal, their inclination to wage jihad against nonbelievers, and their abiding commitment to the spreading of their faith.

Invoking the past lent tenue such to a reconstruction. Major literary writers, though by no means all, did so by contrasting the glory of pre-medieval India with the oppressive character of “Muslim dynasties.” Quite a few Marathi writers were, thus, concerned with the overall degradation of Hindus and the pernicious influence of Islam on their social customs. Gopal Ganesha Agarkar (1856–95), Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823–92) and Vishnushastri Chilunkar (1850–82) thought that Muslims were bullies and fanatics, because violence and aggression was the essence of their civilization. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the fiery politician-writer, sought to build a Maratha identity through a conscious choice of historical figures and symbols that evoked memories of Muslim oppression and exploitation. His essentialist endeavors to define Muslims through constant comparisons of the most militant Hindu tap Narain Kisorilal Goswami (1855–1965) wrote, “The wounds in our heart” (V. C. Joshi 1965, 14). Such views correspond to the oft-repeated colorual tradition of the picture of Muslims as evil and polluted sacred places.

Noted Hindi writers like Bharatendu Harichandra (1830–68), Pratap Narain Misra (1856–94), Radha Charan Goswami (1859–1923), and Kisorilal Goswami (1866–1932) portrayed medieval rule as a chronicle of rape and abduction of Hindu women, the slaughter of sacred cows, and the defilement of temples. Bharatendu referred to the “wounds in our heart” that were kept fresh by the sight of Aurangzeb’s mosque that stood beside the sacred Vishwanath temple in Varanasi (S. Chandra 1990, 18–93). Two closely related themes figure in his and some of his contemporaries work: the downtrodden, long-suffering Hindu, and the dominant, oppressive Muslim. In his play Nirdesh, Muslim characters display cruelty, cowardice, treachery, bigotry, and debauchery, while Hindus, though sometimes portrayed as meek and submissive, demonstrate courage, honor, and fidelity (R. King 1990, 187, 191; also Y. Malik 1990; McGregor 1991).

Kisorilal, following some notable British historians, described the novel Tara (1902) the depraved conditions at the court of Shabjahan in Agra: intrigues, scenes of illicit love, murder among Muslims (Gaikwad 1978, 27). Misra and Radha Charan chastised Muslims as the “abominably impure mlechhas” and damned them as rank outsiders. They denounced the medieval rulers—those mad elephants—who “trampled to destruction the flourishing lotus-garden of India,” and they lamented that Muslims slaughtered cows with impunity and prevented Hindu religious processes from being conducted (S. Chandra 1993).

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94), who looked upon medieval India as a period of bondage, interpreted the Hindu chief’s resistance to the Mughals as a form of national resistance. Muslim rule, he considered, brought neither material nor spiritual improvement to India. He saw in Islam a quest for power and glory, devoid of spiritual and ethical qualities, irrational, bigoted, devious, sensual, and immoral, and a complete antithesis of his “ideal” religion (T. Sarkar, above; P. Chatterjee 1986, 77; Raychaudhuri 1988, 185–86; and for a different interpretation, S. K. Das 1984). Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya (1827–94), for one, questioned this version and described it as a mischievous fabrication of British historians. In his view, the sultans of Delhi aided the process of unification and contributed significantly to the emergence of an inchoate consciousness of community among Indians. He emphasized the common ties that bound Muslims with the rest of the population. He pointed out that Islam in the subcontinent was quite different from Islam elsewhere both in doctrine and in internal social practices (Kaviraj n.d.[b]; Raychaudhuri 1988, 41–49). Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848–1909), who wrote a major denunciation of British economic policies and was the inspiration behind the rise of economic nationalism, avoided the familiar portrayal of Muslims as incorrectly wicked and bloodthirsty. In The Lake of Flowers, an English translation of the Bengali text, Romesh Chandra avoided, generally, the more or less brazen confrontation of Hindus and Muslims and the attendant display of an anti-Muslim bias that provided the staple for his historical novels (S. Chandra 1990, 18); nevertheless, the picture of Muslims as alien emerges strongly in his novels and fiction. Muslims were not quite “one of us,” but were enemies of “our” country and religion (S. Chandra 1990).

The Bengali intelligentsia of Nirad C. Chaudhuri’s generation read and absorbed the spirit of such writings. “Nothing was more natural for us,” commented Chaudhuri, “than to feel about the Muslims in the way we did.” They were told, even before they could read, that the Muslims had ruled and oppressed the Hindus, spread their religion with the Quran in one hand and a sword in the other, abducted Hindu women, destroyed temples, and polluted sacred places. “As we grew older we read about the
wars of the Rajputs, the Marathas, and the Sikhs against Muslims, and of the intolerance and oppression of Aurangzeb" (N. C. Chaudhuri 1987, 226).

Bengali thinkers and reformers, according to Nirad Chaudhuri, based their lifework on the formula of a synthesis of Hindu and European currents. Islamic trends and "Muslim sensitivities" did not touch the arc of their consciousness. They stood outside as an "external minority". If they wanted to enter the Bengali cultural world, they could do so "only after giving up all their Islamic values and traditions." In this way, the new Indian/Bengali culture of the nineteenth century built a perimeter of its own and put specifically Muslim influences and aspirations beyond the pale (N. C. Chaudhuri 1951, 226–27).

Nirad Chaudhuri was no different. Though a self-proclaimed liberal humanist, he nursed an arrogant contempt for and deep-seated hostility toward the Muslims in Calcutta, where he spent most of his life (N. C. Chaudhuri 1951, 228). It was just the same in Kishoreganj, now Bangladesh. "We became conscious of a new kind of hatred for the Muslims," during the Swadeshi Movement. A cold dislike for them "settled down in our heart, putting an end to all real intimacy of relationship" (1951, 232). He rejoiced at Italy's attack on Tripoli in 1911. He was pleased—"so that the Muslims would be taught a lesson"—when Turkey joined the German side at the end of 1914 (N. C. Chaudhuri 1987, 37). "Strongly anti-Muslim in 1920" owing to the khilafat upsurge, Chaudhuri was uneasy with the "menacing assertiveness" of the Bengali Muslims and "repelled" by the thought of living in a province where Muslims would be a dominant social and cultural entity (N. C. Chaudhuri 1987, 466). His verdict: Muslims constituted a society of their own with a distinctive culture and could not be absorbed into a unified nation. For this reason, "no historical argument was too false or too foolish to be trotted out by the Hindus to contest the demand of the Indian Muslims to have their own way of life" (1987, 38, 330). Chaudhuri declared, "When I see the gigantic catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord of these days I am not surprised, because we as children held the tiny mustard in our hands and sowed it very diligently. In fact, this conflict was implicit in the very unfolding of our history, and could hardly be avoided" (1951, 225).

The following description, which must not be conveniently dismissed as an illustration of Nirad Chaudhuri's "eccentricity," sharply reflects the images of Muslims and the contempt with which they were referred to by the sections of the Bengali bhadralok.

One day I saw a procession of Muslim divines trooping into Sarat Babu's house. I was quite familiar with the modern Muslim dress, but had no idea that these learned Muslims wore different clothes. They did, for they had green gowns on and big turbans on their heads. . . . We, the educated and urban Bengalis . . . did not even imagine that such persons existed in Bengal. I with my knowledge of Islamic painting could only assume when I saw them that they were crude incarnations of the Muslim divines I had seen portrayed in Persian or Mughal miniatures . . . Their faces were grave, and even stern. One face struck me very forcibly. It was pinched and peevish, but of an incredible ferocity: The eyes were large, black, and burning, and in that emaciated face they looked even blacker and larger. . . . He looked like an ill-dressed Robespierre, the sea-green Insurrectable. Sarat Babu's house was not only crowded for the occasion with these survivals of Islam, but even reeked of them. (N. C. Chaudhuri 1987, 466)

Such representations of Muslims did not augur well for the nationalist agenda of welding various communities, along with castes, regions, and linguistic units, into a unified nation. The rise of the Congress movement, in particular, imposed serious demands on its leaders to define the contours of multiculturalism and religious pluralism so as to keep intact the fragile social fabric that was being steadily undermined by British policies, as well as by the Hindu-Muslim revitalization campaigns. Otherwise, the laudable Congress agenda of creating a composite nationality on liberal and secular values was bound to run into serious difficulties. Nehru rightly emphasized that "only by thinking in terms of a different political framework—and even more so a different social framework—can we build up a stable foundation for joint action" (Nehru 1936, 137).

IV

Nehru's perspective was influenced by his cosmopolitan family background, his education in England, his social and cultural ambience in Allahabad, his long-standing friendship and political camaraderie with influential Congress Muslims, including M. A. Ansari, Maulana Azad, Syed Mahmud, Khaliquzzaman, Tassaduq Ahmad Khan Sherwani, and Abdul Majid Khwaja. He was a product of, and his sensibilities were influenced by, the cultural norms and intellectual ambiance of the Urdu-speaking elites of the Indo-Gangetic belt. He read history at Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge, and was in close touch with Fabian socialists in London. Such interactions widened his intellectual horizon and enriched his appreciation of political and social transformative processes around the
globe. He could thus place in perspective the rapid changes, some of a revolutionary nature, taking place in Muslim countries like Egypt, Turkey, and Iran. Discussions with Azad and other Muslim scholars helped him understand Indian Islam and medieval Indian history better. In *The Discovery of India* (1946), he analyzed late-nineteenth-century reformist currents among Muslims, appreciated Syed Ahmad Khan's bold initiatives, commented on the nationalist stir among the young Muslim intelligentsia of north India, noted the "sensation" created by Azad—"this very youthful writer and journalist"—and assessed Iqbal's impact on the younger generation of Muslims (Nehru 1946, 297-305).

More than anything else, Nehru was aware that the social, educational, and economic backwardness of most Muslims was not because of any innate failing, but because of historical and sociological factors (Nehru 1946, 340). He knew, so he said, more about their hunger and poverty than those who talked in terms of percentages and seats in councils. He was, so he claimed, in greater touch with them than most Muslim leaders. How could he then accept the Muslim League's pretentious claims? How could he recognize Jinnah as the "sole spokesman" (Jalal 1985)? The League leadership at the top deliberately sought refuge in the name of religion to avoid discussing problems of the common man.

A simple fact that eluded most of Nehru's comrades was that Indian society was at no stage structured around religious solidarities or polarized along "communal" lines. Nehru's exceptionally eclectic mind grasped this reality. He believed that intercommunity contests, and as when they occurred, were counterpoised to the quiet, commonplace routines in which communities intermingled. Cross-community linkages rather than religious ties influenced the direction in which patronage, authority, and economic relations flowed into everyday life. Consequently, it was both possible and desirable to reinforce traditional linkages through "mass contact" and a radical socioeconomic blueprint. It was, moreover, feasible to blunt the impact of communalism by reducing class disparities, creating opportunities for upward mobility, and making the masses aware of their mutual interdependence, their shared historical experiences, and their common concerns, interests, and destiny.

This was the impulse behind Nehru's brainchild, the Muslim Mass Contact Campaign, launched in March 1937 (M. Hasan 1988). The idea was to approach the Muslims not as a collective fraternity but as a segment of an otherwise impoverished population. The principal motivation was to convince them that they did not constitute a "nation," and that their fortunes were not tied to their Muslim brethren per se, but with fellow artisans, peasants, and workers in other communities. Nehru dialogued with Jinnah on these lines, questioned the rationale of "Muslim nationalism" in a society traditionally anchored in cultural and religious pluralism, and criticized the construct of a "Muslim identity" in religious terms. He tried in vain to delink issues of proportion and percentages of seats with the more basic and fundamental contradictions between nationalism and colonialism. He expected Jinnah to draw his constituency into this just and legitimate struggle as co-citizens and not as a preferential religiopolitical "community." The two-nation idea made no sense; it was not more than a reversion to some medieval theory.

Why only two? I do not know, for if nationality was based on religion, then there were many nations in India. Of two brothers one may be a Hindu, another a Moslem; they would belong to two different nations. These two nations existed in varying proportions in most of the villages in India. They were nations which had no boundaries; they overlapped. A Bengali Moslem and a Bengali Hindu, living together, speaking the same language and having much the same traditions and customs belonged to a different nation. (Nehru 1946, 341-42)

There was much ambiguity and fuzziness in nationalist thinking about the corporate identity of the Muslims. Nehru removed some of it. He made clear: "when we enter the political plane, the solidarity is national, not communal; when we enter the economic plane the solidarity is economic" (Gopal 1972, 8:203). In what way, he asked, were the interests of the Muslim peasant different from those of the Hindu peasant? Or those of a Muslim laborer from those of his Hindu prototype? The ties that bound people were common economic interest and, in the case of a subject country especially, a common national interest (Gopal 1972, 8:212). If the country began to think and act on these lines, the "myth" of communalism would disappear along with the pseudoreligious mentality (Gopal 1972, 8:135). Communalism was not the power it was made out to be; it was a mere creation of educated classes in search of office and employment. The "communal question" was essentially one of the protection of interests. Religion was just a useful stalking-horse for this purpose. (Gopal 1972, 8:111). "The real conflict," according to Nehru, "had nothing to do with religion, though religion often masked the issue, but was essentially between those who stood for a nationalist—democratic—socially revolu-
tionary policy and those who were concerned with preserving the relics of a feudal regime. In a crisis, the latter inevitably depend upon foreign support which is interested in preserving the status quo” (1946, 344).

The basic premise of Nehru's argument was valid. There was nothing wrong in arguing that religious solidarity should not be the basis for political activism or that religious symbols of disunity should be shunned in Congress mobilization campaigns. The alternative strategy, worked out by Tilak and Maharashtra or the Swadeshi leaders in Bengal, had created fissures in the liberation struggle, alienated Muslims in these regions, and weakened the intellectual underpinnings of secular nationalism. Though Nehru was not the only fervent champion of secular nationalism, he can safely be credited for raising the standard of debate on the subject. He did so not on the strength of abstract principles of Western democracy, which is a commonly leveled charge against him, but in relation to his perception of and insights into wider social and political processes. There is no reason to believe that his perceptions were flawed or to find fault in his vision. There is no reason to doubt his motives or intentions.

Nehru's ideas ran contrary to Jinnah's two-nation theory, just as they were at variance with the protagonists of a Hindu nation. Some of his own colleagues in the Congress, who relied on the colonial government's intellectual resources, were equally averse to and uncomfortable with his "pro-Muslim" proclivities. They were haunted by the specter of Pan-Islamism, even though the rallying symbol—the khalifat—had disappeared in 1922. They insisted that the fortunes of the Islamic world counted far more with Muslims than did their country's political regeneration. They harped on Muslims' aggressive instincts and the militancy of their faith. They agreed that Muslims were, after all, a separate religious and political entity to the Lucknow Pact (December 1916) and similar accords on the assumption that Muslims were, after all, a separate religious and political entity. Some of their peers and the ulema required detailed investigation, not just as models of "Islamic conduct" or as interpreters of the Shariat but also as leaders of its master institution,” in the words of Clifford Geertz. In this context, the part played by the itinerant preachers and the ulema requires detailed investigation, not just as models of Islamic revivalism, to consider why the idea of a singular community appeared in Muslim writings, to explore how Islamic ideas molded elite perceptions, and to analyze why Islamic symbols of disunity were sometimes preferred to Indian historical symbols of unity (Brass 1974). We need to acquaint ourselves more fully with the Muslim educational system, the "Hindu" intelligentsia. I agree with Aijaz Ahmad, whose own writings have clarified several methodological issues, that sections of the Muslim intelligentsia have made their own history at least as much as others have made it for them—that they have not made it very well is a concern that should engage social scientists (see A. Ahmad 1992, and the rather uncharitable critique in "Public Culture, September 1993.

It is therefore important to examine the depth, vigor, and variety of Muslim revivalism, to consider why the idea of a singular community appears in Muslim writings, to explore how Islamic ideas molded elite perceptions, and to analyze why Islamic symbols of disunity were sometimes preferred to Indian historical symbols of unity (Brass 1974). We need to acquaint ourselves more fully with the Muslim educational system, the "master institution," in the words of Clifford Geertz, in the perpetuation of an Islamic tradition, and in the creation of an Islamic vision (Geertz 1965, 93; B. D. Metcalf 1982). In this context, the part played by the itinerant preachers and the ulama required detailed investigation, not just as models of "Islamic conduct" or as interpreters of the Shariat but also as leaders of a political "community" in the making. We need to delineate, just as Syed Ahmad, Hali, Iqbal, and Azad did, the implications of their social conservatism in a society that was rapidly changing under colonial rule, and also the consequences of their resistance to innovation and change and their suppression of dissent and interpretation (fitnah). The issue, which some-
times escapes notice in some writings on Muslims in Western scholarship, is of considerable significance to the citizens of South Asia generally and to Muslim communities in particular.

Finally, it is necessary to deconstruct the language of minorityism and uncover the motives of those who practiced modern-day politics in the name of the *millat* they purported to represent, but whose main aim was to wield political power and to use Islam and communitarian solidarity as a shield to cover their designs. The general implication of this idea was summed up by Chandra in her conversation with her lifelong friend Gulshan. "You see, my dear," she said, "a man will use any old argument to achieve his object in all walks of life, and this communal discord is a very useful and good stick with which our men-folk can beat the old India goat—her political progress." Troubled by the communal cleavage, she remarked angrily: "This Hindu-Muslim discord only exists because it pays our men-folk to keep it going" (Noon 1941, 282).

What we ideally need is a triangular narrative in which the Muslim is not a privileged victim but as much an actor as the others. The main thrust of this discussion is to identify points of convergence between the colonial and nationalist discourses and to argue that, despite different sorts of constraints, it was still possible for fervent advocates of an Indian nationhood to undermine the ideological underpinnings of Hindu majoritarianism and Muslim nationalism. There was surely a wide range of available options. If one were to evolve, in the spirit of Ghalib's quintessential message (Russell 1982, 71), as an independent/autonomous discourse, this would have entailed discarding the communal categories created by the Raj and also ignoring the Muslim elite's own perception of its role and destiny in history. There were, objectively speaking, profound historical and sociological reasons for doing so. The fact that this was not done in a concerted and systematic manner weakened the cause of, and the case for, secular nationalism.

*My creed is oneness, my belief is abandonment of rituals. Let all communities dissolve and constitute a faith.*

— *Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib (1797–1869)*

**PART 3**

**COMMUNITY AND CONFLICT**