

## HINDU/MUSLIM/INDIAN

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So long as the hostility to one central government for India, which is the ideology underlying Pakistan persists, the ghost of Pakistan will be there, casting its ominous shadow upon the political future of India.

Dr. Ambedkar  
*Pakistan or Partition of India*, vii

If the Muslims in India are a separate nation, then, of course, India is not a nation.

Ibid., 12

Happy nations are all alike; every unhappy nation is unhappy in its own way. So it is that the unhappiness represented by the Indian Muslim is peculiar in that it constitutes a historical burden which is as heavy as the nation itself. The ghost of Pakistan is not simply the spirit of Muslim guilt; it is also a spectre which, by transforming all subsequent struggle into the struggle for "another Pakistan," ends up making Indian history into a series of variations upon the theme of partition as original sin. It is not mere coincidence, then, that Sikh Khalistan should be a synonym for Muslim Pakistan (they both mean "Land of the Pure"), because in the history that the Indian state obsessively re-enacts, the Muslim separatist is nothing more than the original sign of its failure. The Muslim, in other words, represents a fundamental anxiety of nationalism itself: of the nation as something unachieved. And as such, every Muslim becomes, at a certain level, the symbol of na-

tional frustration and insecurity. This is how he or she enters into the history of independent India.

My use here of terms such as guilt, obsession, anxiety, frustration, and insecurity does not imply the actual existence of “neuroses” within Indian politics. Nor do I conceive of groups as individuals to be psychoanalyzed. Rather, I use these terms referring to rhetorical states or tropes created in and imputed by political discourse. In other words I am employing psychoanalytic language to *represent* a situation (the “communal” or “Muslim” problem) which is *experienced* medically or neurotically in a way that naturalizes (or un-naturalizes) political problems as illnesses which have to be excised: difficulties which are not amenable to discussion because they are not rational in the first place. And this language of disease underscores the derivative discourse of “secular” Indian nationalism in that its (communal) difficulties are viewed as unnatural departures from a universal/European ideal. Therefore the Muslim problem is created as the Asiatic *failure* of nationalism’s enlightenment project — a failure which entails the very possibility of nationalist coercion. It is this sense of (potential) failure, which I think results from what Partha Chatterjee calls an unresolved contradiction between the (post)colonial nation’s enlightenment project and its nativist consciousness of difference, that structures Indian nationalism’s narrative *around* the problem of communalism.<sup>1</sup>

Now if it is the case that (post)colonial Indian nationalism is invented as a problematic around the figure of the Muslim/communal as problem — the Muslim as original sin — then this nationalism cannot be analyzed ontologically, according to its positive or substantive being, but only in terms of the excluded difference (communalism) upon which such a positivity is predicated. Indeed, ontological studies of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson’s result in positivities which have meaning only by eliding difference altogether.<sup>2</sup> Anderson’s idea of “modular nationalism,” for example, is itself nationalist in its concern with the nation’s “origin” in an enlightenment project which renders difference unnatural and so merely a sign of failure. This kind of ontological analysis participates in nationalist discourse because it refuses to see difference as constitutive of the nation.

<sup>1</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso: 1983.

If an ontological reading of the nation cannot take difference into account, deconstructive readings which do so face other problems. Homi Bhabha's essays, for instance, are valuable for their attention to the margins — the silences and contradictions — of national narratives, as is his concentration on the "performative" construction of the nation over a historicism that shuts out slippage, play, and ambivalence by its totalizing narrative of a necessity that is in fact allied to the "pedagogic" narrative of nationalism.<sup>3</sup> But Bhabha's emphasis on the social (as) text, whether or not it accounts for the "perplexity" of lived experience, ends up aestheticizing this narrative and its discontents precisely by refusing to go beyond its "performance." The possibilities opened up by a deconstruction of the performative narrative of nationalism remain the sites of aesthetic valorization unless they are "historicized" by being tied to a continuist narrative of violence and victimization that links the victims of nationalism, located on the terrain of difference, to a collective identity with historical depth: a history that has meaning, of course, only in terms of the nation, but that is able to stand up to its continuist narrative, and in doing so, also to justify the suffering of its other/earlier victims both by holding the nation *historically* accountable for it, and by giving it meaning in a teleology of struggle. Indeed the violence that the nation directs against difference can only be comprehended historically — anything else would itself be an act of violence and forgetting. But the history of suffering has to be liberated from nationalist narrative in a way which does not simply replace one history by another, which does not 'nationalize' the history of difference by totalizing it. Instead this narrative must fracture the totality or economy of history itself by interrupting it as a *record* of difference.

And so I am attempting in this essay not to write a history of Indian nationalism, nor even a history of its "other," but to interrupt its narrative with a history of difference: the difference which nationalism simultaneously creates and excludes, the difference which makes nationalism possible in the first place. By taking apart the category "communal," then, we might arrive at a nation, interrupted in its ontological narrative, as the other face of difference.

What is communalism? The term is a colonial one, both historically and ideologically, because it presumes the existence of primordial and irrational

<sup>3</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, (editor). *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

hatreds which call for government by a modern, rational, third party. Communalism, in other words, translates into limitations to political representation and denies “secular” nationalism altogether. This was the way in which it was employed as a concept both by the colonial state and, later, by the Muslim League’s rejection first of a single Indian electorate, and then of a single Indian state. While the Indian National Congress strenuously denied this view, independent India inherited the concept of communalism and continued to use it, but in a marginalized form — which is to say that although communalism could no longer constitute a denial of nationalism, it did remain an “extremist” threat to the nation, one which became, in fact, an important excuse for the state’s suspension of civil liberties (curfew, censorship, martial law, etc.).

Now dividing the ideally unitary nation (as opposed to the disparate colonial empire) into a dominant secularism and a marginal communalism allows for a different kind of politics by those who are placed in the latter category. While no one admits to being communal, then, groups such as the Bharatiya Janta Party (Indian People’s Party), the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (National Volunteer Society), and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Congress) all deny the dominance of secularism, which they accuse of being Westernized, divisive, elitist, and a failure. Instead they claim to represent the *true nation*; and any proof of the validity of this argument (primarily in the form of the increasingly common “communal riot”) forces the state into an increasingly unrealistic denunciation of unscrupulous agitators and foreign hands — for the “people” cannot be wrong in a representative system. The colonial state too, of course, refused to consider its population seditious, but this was obviously not so much for reasons of democratic legitimacy as because such a notion posed a threat to the very idea of (moral) governance.

Hindu nationalism presents in the most stark fashion the classic social-contract opposition of democracy and ethics, or representation and justice. That is to say, does a democratic government simply represent the demands of its populace — no matter how unpleasant in theory and orchestrated in practice? Or does it lay itself open to charges of elitism and illegitimacy in doing otherwise? Whereas the “secular” state, however, cannot answer this question and simply obfuscates it, the Hindu nationalists opt for the former choice, which they justify by an equally classic form of fascism: the morally overriding claim of nativism or national authenticity. There is nothing pri-

mordial or traditional, therefore, about this politics; neither is it colonial, but born of democracy and independence.

Why Hindu nationalism, then? I do not think the usual explanations of simple political opportunism or the search for authenticity in an alienating modernity are convincing enough, given the great diversity of its support. And yet the argument which claims that Hindu nationalism variously empowers different segments of society (the most popular being “disenchanted youth”) is incapable of dealing with it as a relatively cohesive ideology. No doubt Hindu nationalist organizations do provide means of political empowerment, but the loyalty this kind of nativism commands, whether it be aggressive or passive, constant or sporadic, exceeds explanations of a purely material nature. In fact such explanations fall back into what one may call a colonial mode of reasoning by denying (moral) thought to other people and so condemning them to an irrationality which can only be ruled.

Ideologically, I think, Hindu nationalism has emerged as the only mode of resistance to the “secular” state — indeed as the only credible, organized form of alternative politics in a country where the ruling elite has appropriated secular nationalism so completely as to allow no room for dispute in its terms. Even the Left collapses into secular-nationalist attitudes when faced with a “communalism” it is incapable of understanding or dealing with apart from a largely irrelevant rhetoric of class conflict. Secular nationalism itself, in other words, has become a kind of state “fundamentalism,” a sort of self-legitimizing mode of coercion that ends up generating its own nemesis in the “communalism” it demonizes. It is interesting to note that this is not true of Pakistan’s Islamic nationalism. Whereas the Pakistani state has never been able to control its own ideology and has regularly to face challenges put in the mouths of its own founding fathers (God, His Prophet, Iqbal, and Jinnah), then, the Indian or Congress state has permitted no serious opposition in the name of Gandhi or Nehru — to the extent that the only choice left for resistance is iconoclasm: the increasingly frequent sacrilege of secular-nationalist icons. Last spring, for instance, the “volk” who had been bussed in to New Delhi to demonstrate for the “secular” Bahujan Samaj (Popular Society) Party got tired of their minders and vandalized Gandhi’s cremation site, extinguishing its eternal flame. Then in the summer, Bal Thackeray, leader of the Maharashtra-Hindu Shiv Sena (Shivaji’s Army) Party, praised the Mahatma’s assassin to no public outcry. Eminent secular-nationalists such as the industrialist J. R. D. Tata had then to scramble to invent this missing outcry by calling together a well-publicized meeting of

equally eminent and like-minded personages to exorcise the “communalists.” Praising Gandhi’s killer, after all, threatens Indian nationalism in a way that police actions, military atrocities, caste wars, and minority bashing do not; certainly these latter never call forth such assembled denunciation.

We might say, then, that the popularity of Hindu nationalism today marks the fragmentation of secular-nationalist hegemony. Confessional nationalism, after all, which historically has been the great “other” of Indian nationalism, provides the logical challenge to a hegemony that had staked its claim to legitimacy on a populist secularism. In this sense Hindu nationalism today is merely another avatar of the Muslim nationalism that founded Pakistan: the ghost of Pakistan haunts the Indian state not only in the threat of other partitions (Panjab, Kashmir, Assam), but also in the threat to a coercively homogeneous *Indian* nationalism itself. There is nothing ironic or paradoxical, therefore, in the Hindu nationalists’ regular choice of Pakistan as an illustration of and justification for Hindutva — the Hindu nation. And this signals a fundamental shift in political discourse: for if the history invoked by the first national movement as a justification for its existence was pre-British and colonial, that invoked by the Hindu parties has to do with the postcolonial failure of the old nationalism with partition and its results, a failure which has become the great new referent of modern Indian politics. But even when the Hindu nationalists do refer to the “glorious past” so beloved of the secular, their use of history is far more sophisticated than that sponsored by the state. A case in point is provided by the controversy over the status of a mosque in Ayodhya which the Hindu parties claim was built over a temple marking the birthplace of Rama. While the secularists were painstakingly attempting to prove historically the falseness of this “communal” allegation, L. K. Advani, a leader of the BJP, issued a statement asserting that historical truth was not the issue here, not only because Hinduism was unconcerned with such vulgar certainties, but also because the real issue was simply the will of the Hindu nation to (re)construct a temple. History, in other words, only provided symbols for the expression of national will. Can the truth-history of the old nationalism stand up to this cynical history of the new?

If Hindu nationalism presents today the only viable alternative politics in India, a politics which is still fluid enough to allow for a certain freedom of expression, violence provides perhaps the greatest mode of this expression. Violence in this sense is the only form of political action which is theoretic-

cally free of the state or possessed completely by its agents. It is the only form of politics which confronts the state with an independent identity through an independent *fait accompli* that historically has carried the resonance of populism and primordiality. In this way we may call it *terrorist*. But we must be careful here, because the rapid parliamentarization and so legitimization of Hindu nationalism has broken down, to some extent, the radical character of this terrorism. Indeed Hindu nationalist violence, while it was probably never spontaneous, single-minded, or unorchestrated, seems to be mutating increasingly and obviously into the kind of planned act with which certain elements of the state are complicitous. Its acceptability marks, as it were, the state's hesitant transition from a discredited "secularist" ideology to a new nationalism with a new scapegoat: no longer the communalist but the minority. And it is this new legitimacy of the Hindu nationalist, I think, that has made possible the BJP's recent "secularization" or mainstreaming — for this indicates not so much a lowering of anti-Muslim feeling or violence as a rapprochement with the governing establishment that correlates Hinduism and secularism, leaving Muslims to bear the burden of the communal. Indeed the Muslim would exist as a sign of national failure and remain a focus of attack even were there no Hindu nationalist parties, because the real problem is not religiosity but the politics of nationalism itself. An ominous sign of this appeared a few years ago during the Shah Bano case — when a Muslim divorcée's suit against her husband, who refused to pay alimony by invoking Muslim personal law, became a *cause célèbre* in which secular and Hindu nationalists banded together to attack the principle of communal personal law itself, calling instead for a uniform civil code. A case which could have been resolved within the bounds of personal law, then, was made into the rallying point for a coercive nationalism directed explicitly against minority groups. Given this, the Muslim community came together in a united front against a national civil code, and Shah Bano dropped her suit, all of which did nothing more than confirm the Muslim's status as saboteur of the nation.

If, however, the "free" expression of Hindu nationalism is directed at the secular state, why is it Muslims who are attacked? According to the Hindu nationalists, because they allow themselves to be used as vote-banks by the established parties, who evade the imperative of Hindu populism by playing up the issue of minority rights. In other words, Muslims constitute only the site of struggle between two forms of nationalism. Of course from the "colonialist" viewpoint of the Indian state, communalism is simply an ir-

rational conflict which it has no part in and has only to arbitrate. And this rejection of responsibility in a way simply confirms the Hindu nationalist charge, for the state does exploit Muslims in refusing to see communalism as a conflict in which it is a participant. For both kinds of nationalism, therefore, anti-Muslim politics merely constitute the stereotyped media of a different battle altogether — a battle which can be controlled and legitimized only by being displaced onto Muslim bodies.

While Islam, then, does represent the nation's failure, Muslims as such are not the objects of Hindu nationalism because they are not *addressed* by it. In the colonial period there was at least a kind of dialogue between Hindu and Muslim groups: Islam was addressed intellectually as an opponent by organizations such as the Arya Samaj (Aryan Society). Today, on the other hand, Islam is not worth thinking about — it no longer signifies a “virile” moment in the history of (Indian) civilization, as much of colonial scholarship had it. This lack of dialogue, which is indicated by a deep and practically universal ignorance of what Muslims believe and do, does not mean, however, that Muslims are ignored as thinking beings. Indeed their supposed subversion of the nationalist project is a source of deep anxiety, to the extent that they are urgently required to validate this project by their assent. Ironically, therefore, the very Muslim autonomy that the nation constructs in order to legitimize its coercion becomes a point of insecurity that puts its own hegemony in doubt. It is primarily in this sense that alleged Muslim sympathies toward Pakistan are spoken of: not so much political treachery as a *resistance* to nationalism. In other words, Muslim “support” for Pakistan during India-Pakistan wars, or, more importantly, during India-Pakistan cricket matches, cannot be seen as a rational political choice, for this would give rise to the issue of self-determination and so the Indian nation's total failure; instead it has to be conceived of as a kind of recalcitrant irrationalism. The Muslim problem is an internal problem of the nation's hegemony — or rather it signifies the deep anxiety of this nationalist hegemony.

Apart from the desire for Muslim assent and acknowledgment, it no longer matters what a Muslim does or thinks: an essentialized identity is simply imposed on her or him. And this essentialized identity has to be affirmed again and again in order to void the Muslim of all personality apart from Muslimness. So at a film in Delhi last February, the appearance of the hero's name, Salman Khan, on the screen, provoked shouts of “Musalman (i.e., Muslim) Khan” from the audience and general merriment. The fright-



ening thing about such a display, of course, is that it came from an ostensibly sympathetic, well-disposed group of people. Similarly, government television advertisements promoting secularism tend to represent “good” Muslims who are as essentialized and voided of personality as the “bad” Muslims of the Hindu nationalist. In one particular commercial, for example, a Westernized, secular, Hindu father and son exploring some ruins encounter a gentle old Muslim man who, in sharp contrast to them, is stigmatized by the symbols of his faith: cap, beard, rosary, the mark of prostration on his forehead. This “typically” archaic, idealized “good” Muslim *does not exist*, which is to say he transforms all real Muslims, all Muslims who are not part of historical romance, into ‘bad’ Muslims.

But it is women who provide perhaps the most complex images of the Muslim. The Muslim woman appears in film and literature as a figure of romance (usually in the role of either courtesan or veiled innocence): an archaic-exotic representative of the *seductiveness* of Muslim culture. Indeed she is the primary medium through which the generally *historical* romance of the Muslim is made manifest. This attraction, however, is by no means benign; indeed it frequently elicits pleasure in the shape of a rape fantasy. So in the May 1992 issue of *Stardust*, a popular Bombay film magazine, an incident in which the (Muslim) starlet Farah was terrorized by Hindu nationalists is reported as a fantasy of violation. The actress, apparently, was performing in Kolhapur when she was threatened in her dressing room by gunmen who accused her of mouthing “anti-national” sentiments in Dubai and forced her to “confess” this crime before her audience. This event *Stardust* constructs as a narrative in which the seductive *power* of the Muslim (woman) is broken in a pleasurable act of compulsion where Muslimhood is forced to speak its name as treason:

She was trembling with fear. Her hands were shivering uncontrollably and her brow was knitted with beads of sweat. Her palms were moist and her mouth suddenly gone dry. Even the words she had to utter to save her life lost their way, coming out in a barely audible mumble....It was the normally fearless Farah — fiery Farah herself — whose iron will had been bent, her courageous front shattered to smithereens — at gunpoint!...“Okay, okay! I said it!” she cried....The ‘threatener’ had become the ‘threatened’ for once.

In this and other passages on “Farah’s frazzled, almost hysterical frame of mind,” rape is plotted like a film sequence and consumed as a commodity of popular culture. Farah literally “acts out” a role possible only for Muslim

(or Sikh/Dalit/tribal) women, a scene which aestheticizes violence as the surmounting or exorcizing of a dangerous Muslim "attraction." Violence here has its own erotic — whose climax arrives at Farah's confession to "all Indians." In the rush of this pleasure, however, the actress's pathetic defense is ignored: "Even I'm an Indian after all."

It is important to note that caricatures of the Muslim are connected to nationalism in such a way that the non-Indian Muslim generally enjoys a different image. In the surge of anti-American feeling produced in India by Operation Desert Storm, for instance, the Urdu press stressed the war's Islamic aspects and implications, while the rest of the media sympathized with the Iraqi people without letting their Muslim identity get in the way. And during the last election campaign, L. K. Advani, leader of the BJP and former refugee from Karachi, informed emigrant Sindhi Hindus in the Bombay suburb of Ulhasnagar that he had met Benazir Bhutto, whom he called a daughter of the Sindhi people. This statement regarding a Pakistani leader was received with cheers. What all of this means, in effect, is that the Muslim is problematic only as Indian — because she or he has become nothing more than a symbol of the nation's failure. Thus Bal Thackeray, head of the Shiv Sena, pronounced some months ago that he was not against the Muslims *of* India but only the Muslims *in* India. And so it was that at a seminar on gender and communalism at Delhi University last winter, a "politically correct" speaker, in a "slip of the tongue," drew a distinction between Indian and Muslim. Muslims have become problematic precisely as a minority ("one of our minorities," as it was usually put to me) whose status within the Indian or Hindu nation is unclear.

Muslim images of the Hindu, while similarly stereotyped, are not so much flat essences as icons invested with such a power that they have to be handled ritually. Many Muslims, for example, even in private conversation, refer to Hindus only indirectly, using terms like "them" or the initial "H." This taboo on naming, I think, is due not only to fear, but also to the fact that for the Muslim, knowledge of the Hindu is something vitally important, as important as life itself, and not some throw-away cliché. As such it possesses a certain occult value which has to be hedged by ritual and taboo. There are, of course, other kinds of Hindu caricatures as well, one of the most popular being the old image of the Hindu as effeminate vegetarian. I have heard this stereotype invoked by Muslims who lived every day with the fear that their lives might be taken by a Hindu; but I stopped seeing this as a paradox once I realized the image's fundamentally *pathetic* character.

Given present conditions, Muslims are forced to retain the shreds of pride and dignity in exactly such an unrealistic manner. They are reduced to a process of trying to convince themselves that they retain the colonial epithet of “martial race,” an identity which has now been appropriated by Hindus, who had suffered the humiliation of effeminacy during the Raj. So when a young Muslim professional in Ahmedabad told me that Muslims invited retaliation by their aggressiveness and intransigence, I did not think that he had naively accepted the views of the majority; I realized, rather, that he could maintain a positive Muslim identity only by empowering his community with such “bad” agency — for if there was no “bad” agency there was no “good” solution. But when this young man went on to recommend that the call to prayer be eliminated because it constituted a statement of Muslim aggression, I came to see, in addition, that this claim of agency could lead to a situation where victims blame themselves for their own victimization. It is precisely the “feminization” of the Muslim as victim that results in such reactions — reactions which are, in fact, deliberately encouraged. So there exists a large sign in the courtyard of Delhi’s Jamia Masjid in which the mosque *as woman* recounts her harassment by Indian troops during Mrs. Gandhi’s period of emergency rule (when the mosque’s bazaar was destroyed), and her molestation by the state ever since. Muslim men are then urged to assert their masculinity and protect the mosque. As woman, of course, the mosque (and by extension the whole Muslim community) retains an identity only as victim and sign: a sign which prevents Muslim speech by “speaking for” her. There is no doubt in my mind that this sign indicates, in certain quarters, a growing cult of Muslim manhood that is prompted by the threat of Hindu nationalist “virility” but exercised, probably, mostly on Muslim women.

Muslim attempts to claim agency, “neurotic” though they may be, necessarily arise from the essentialized identity imposed on them by nationalists of all stripes. Now an identity over which the group itself has no control is not “communal” but “racial.” The Muslim community is increasingly a *racial* community — one which exists in spite of Muslims rather than because of them. It is the rigid shell within which alone can Muslims construct any kind of self-image. Muslims, of course, might also feel racially about Hindus, but I would not call this *racism*, because such a feeling generally cannot translate into wide-ranging discrimination, which is what I take “racism” (as opposed to “prejudice,” for example) to imply. The term “communalism,” then, because it denies its relationship to nationalism, and

suggests a false equivalence of conflictual power, should be abandoned in favor, perhaps, of “racism” and “prejudice” — terms which tie Indians to an international language of oppression, pairing them with supporters of apartheid in South Africa or the Ku Klux Klan in America. Of course this form of “racism” has little in common with genetic theory (although this is not completely absent), but it certainly does privilege the body, exclusive of alienable beliefs or practices, as the mark of difference. So not only does Muslimhood inhere in people, it also *must* be inscribed on their bodies as physical features and apart from the idea of a moral or *national* community, in the form of veils, caps, beards, marks of prostration, etc. in order to be instantly identifiable. I was often told that I did not “look” Muslim, and realized that this made certain people nervous — because they weren’t able to place me “racially.” Unlike the deracialized “good” Muslim who was welcomed into the ranks of secular nationalism, therefore, the Muslim today, whether bad or good, is increasingly someone who can be immediately identified “racially” — by appearance as stigma alone rather than by any difference which could become the basis of a moral community and so of self-determination. And this anxiety to fix Muslimhood on the body takes on a somewhat Nazi tone when, during pogroms, the identity of men who deny their Muslimhood is determined by checking if they have been circumcised. Racism is when life hangs upon a foreskin.<sup>4</sup>

A Muslim might be as bigoted and violent as a Hindu, but as a member of an impoverished and demoralized *race*, we have to consider him or her a victim in the larger sense. This victimhood may be elaborated as follows: first, there has been no autonomous Muslim leadership or organized politics since the colonial period. The reason for this is simple: the state has systematically crushed every attempt at organization and infiltrated Muslim institutions with informers. Indeed, I didn’t know whether to feel flattered or frightened when I found *myself* being followed by two detectives after conducting some research at a Muslim library in Bombay last year. Now since one can be a Muslim leader only within an established party, it is not surprising that none of these powerless, token Muslims have obtained any

<sup>4</sup> My use of ‘racism’ here is entirely polemical, which is to say I regard it primarily as a good way to break down the ‘peculiarity’ of the term ‘communalism’ (which always implies the existence of minorities as problematic), and only secondarily as an accurate description of Hindu chauvinism. Indeed as an analytical category, the word ‘race’ here — as elsewhere and everywhere — can only stand as a problem: but always as a *problem which will not go away*.

kind of popular Muslim support. Faced with this, the government and the press regularly lament the absence of true Muslim leadership — by which they mean “representative Muslims” in the colonial sense, obsequious men of influence — and scramble to find “leaders” whom they can deal with. Muslims, in the meantime, flock to anyone who seems to possess power, without necessarily agreeing with her or his politics. One such leader, for example, is Imam Bukhari, the head of Delhi’s Jamia Masjid (not traditionally a very important position politically), who has been designated a “representative Muslim” by the state and so enjoys a certain degree of support, even though the Urdu press is very critical of him and “Muslim leaders” in general (such as Sayyid Shahabuddin of the Janata Dal or Arif Muhammad Khan of the Congress). Insofar as it exists, therefore, organized Muslim politics in India is fragmented and *ad hoc*. There has been talk lately of a grand coalition of India’s oppressed minorities, but given the fact that very few of them have any kind of political organization or leadership, it is difficult to imagine how such a coalition could do anything more constructive than calling for demonstrations of protest. Given this lack of organized politics, Muslims are pressed into a vague romanticization of their “glorious” past, into a cult of masculinity, and into a kind of pan-Islamism that is really a rather pathetic attempt to retain their dignity. Thus their attitude towards Pakistan: which is not normally viewed as a place of refuge, which is not normally spoken of in treasonous terms, but which constitutes, by its very existence, a special focus of pride for many Indian Muslims. So during the Gulf war, when pro-Saddam feeling was high, a Delhi Urdu newspaper, *Nai Duniyā* (New World), carried on its front page a portrait of the Iraqi president at prayer surrounded by daggers representing the allied forces — including other Muslim countries but excluding Pakistan.

The lack of an autonomous Muslim politics leads to the second aspect of their victimhood: widespread paranoia — or a “siege mentality,” as the Indian press would have it. This paranoia, let us be clear, is not simply fear of something *to come*, it is a form of violence in itself, whose most frightening aspect is that it has become normalized and is not treated as the persecution it is. One of the more common expressions of Muslim paranoia is a dissimulation of identity. Affluent Muslim housewives in Bombay conceal their religious identity when out shopping or promenading; their husbands use Hindu names to obtain business licenses or in their general dealings with the bureaucracy. In Delhi I knew a Muslim cook from Bijnore who had changed his name to Ashok to avoid trouble, and who would surreptitiously

send me signals of a secret complicity. And while I disliked this “partisanship of the oppressed” because it forced me into a history and identity that were not mine, I simultaneously felt guilty for resisting assimilation. And this made me feel worse. Eventually I found myself regularly denying my Muslimhood and changing my name in order to be comfortable socially and secure politically. I must stress that there is nothing extraordinary in these precautions: for while my dissimulation was generally a personal effort to retain individuality and maintain my lines of communication with non-Muslims, I was also nearly lynched in Ahmedabad station by saffron-clad young men off to Ayodhya to destroy a mosque — and this only because I happened to be carrying a book of Urdu poetry. A Hindu friend of mine suffered a similar experience upon emerging from the “Muslim” Khuda Bakhsh library in Patna. Such incidents, which form the staple of Muslim conversation, are ignored by everyone else. July last, for instance, a seventeen-year-old Muslim boy was picked up by the Bombay police on no charge and beaten to death in jail. There was a sit-in at the police station later, and because the incident occurred during the election campaign, a couple of candidates took an interest; but the affair was soon swept under the rug. Most worrying, however, was the fact that while the Urdu dailies covered the story in detail, it was hardly mentioned in the rest of the media, local or national.

Those Muslims who stress their identity by way of beards, caps, and veils are certainly courageous, but they have at the same time cut themselves off from wider society and resigned themselves, I think, to lives within their own ghettos. And this parochialism is not merely spatial or experiential, but psychological as well. Last winter, for example, I met a Muslim woman from Saharanpur at the Pakistani High Commission in Delhi. Like dozens of compatriots from the country, she was camped out on the consular grounds waiting for a visitor’s pass. This was during Operation Desert Storm, which had raised a whole slew of anti-imperialist demonstrations in India, and so naturally enough every conversation turned to Saddam Hussein. The woman began, then, by praising the Iraqi leader as the only Muslim hero in these dark times. Knowing that with the exception of the Shia, Saddam Hussein enjoyed an almost universal popularity among Indian Muslims (to the extent that Urdu publishers held back scheduled works in order to produce posters and biographies of him), I did not disagree. What she said next, however, shook me out of the complacent analysis I was making about a pan-Muslim or Third World suspicion of the

West and its adventures in their territories: how many Hindus, the woman asked, has Saddam killed? When I answered none, and pointed out that his career consisted of killing other Muslims, she seemed shocked and unable to understand a scenario in which Muslims could fight anyone but Hindus. The woman from Saharanpur lived in a mental ghetto; because she could not think outside of Hindu-Muslim strife her whole being was trapped in the nightmare of the Indian nation.

Muslim fear leads me to the third aspect of victimhood I want to stress: a narrowing of options in all areas. By this I do not mean a set of exclusions imposed directly from the outside — such as the system of apartheid which crowds Delhi's Muslims into either the old city or the Nizamuddin locality, and confines most of Bombay's Muslim population to the neighborhoods off Muhammad Ali Road, Bandra, and Mahim. These divisions are neither "natural" nor entirely class based; they are a deliberate ghettoization resulting from the refusal of housing societies and localities to accept Muslims (or, for that matter, Dalits, Christians, Sikhs, etc.). In Ahmedabad, for example, I heard of a Muslim man who could get accommodation only under false pretenses, and who was evicted by his landlord the moment his true identity was discovered. In the same city, certain well-to-do Muslims tried to escape the riots which regularly affect Muslim neighborhoods by moving into prosperous non-Muslim areas. During the riots last year, their homes were the only ones attacked in these localities — by their own Westernized, educated, and secular neighbors. No, this kind of exclusion is bad enough, but the limitations I am referring to occur within the Muslim community itself.

Across the country, Muslim lives are sundered into dichotomies which permit no thought outside their confines. During the recent elections, for instance, there was a widespread fear that if the Muslim vote were to be split as it had been before, Hindu nationalists might attain more power in the possible absence of a traditional party with an overwhelming majority. This fear, which was hammered home by the Congress Party and certain sections of the press, effectively reduced Muslim political options to a single entirely negative dualism: either Congress or Hindu nationalism. Similarly, Muslim "fundamentalist" groups play upon their co-religionists' "siege mentality" in order to suppress all differences within the Muslim community, condemning these as dangerous. One is either a fundamentalist or a traitor to Islam. In Bombay, non-Muslims and foreigners are regularly assured by many Sunnis intent on presenting a united front that there exist no Shias in the city

— while in fact Shias, who are generally gathered into tightly knit, prosperous trading communities, constitute a significant percentage of Bombay's Muslim population and so excite dislike among certain of their Sunni neighbors. What these examples demonstrate is that the current "racist" climate in India not only allows puritans to propagate an Islamic absolutism which squashes difference, it also stifles intellectual and political dialogue altogether. What remains is a frozen Manichaeism in which one term — the Muslim — is defined entirely by another — the Hindu.

Were Indian politics not tragic, they would surely be farcical. Leaders and journalists continue to masturbate their nationalism with worn-out colonial categories such as communalism. And the image they fix on during this onanistic exercise is historical. Political thought in India is obsessed with the (national) past, and can do nothing more than replay this history over and over again. The Indian nation, after all, was built, as Ambedkar pointed out, on the myth of a historical failure, and overcoming this failure — or this myth — has been the legitimizing task of nationalism ever since. But Hindu nationalism, in dismissing the legitimacy of secularism and so the healing power of its coercion, not only wrecks the old nationalism, but in addition recommends another, based, ironically, on the Pakistani model. Such is the power of history.

And yet this history (of Partition and its massacres), although it is constantly invoked, is never really contemplated. It is, in other words, an event only as confirmation for some national truism, not something problematic in its own right, not something with broader historical implications. This might explain its surprising lack of literary or artistic coverage. In effect partition is an essentialized, Hindu and Muslim and Sikh event, not a properly historical or even human one. As such it is naturalized, within the (pre)history of the nation-state, as an expression of primordial communalism. Furthermore it is uncommemorated because, as an event appropriated as the (pre)history of the nation-state, it can neither stand as an entity apart from it, nor upstage the simultaneous event of its freedom. Thus Delhi's Purana Qila (Old Fort), which today has been transformed into a kind of historical park frequented by lovers, bears no sign of its past as the only refuge for tens of thousands of Muslims whom the state was unable otherwise to protect in its own capital during the pogroms following independence.

Insofar as partition is problematized at all, it is done so as a "horror" which cannot be grasped by narrative, or as a "mindless cycle of violence."



And this simply removes the event from normality and history both by withholding rational agency from its participants, and by separating it from one's own narrative reason. It is the nation's disclaiming of responsibility for its own actions — its de-historicization of the event into something uniquely elemental. And so even the "anguish" felt over partition, the anguish that at once absolves one of all responsibility for it and denies one's complicity in it, the anguish that takes its lead from Gandhi himself, even this anguish boils down to a sentimental regret over the nation's division (wrought by others), and to a ridiculous rhetoric of "if only we could love each other." Indian anguish, then, seems primarily to be a national rather than a human emotion, one concerning the country's loss and not the particular losses of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs — which are lessened in the process. For Pakistan, on the other hand, Partition constitutes the prehistory of its victory, and is thus dealt with, apparently, less in terms of a national than a human loss.<sup>5</sup>

All this does not mean that the events of Partition were not traumatic individually, or that this trauma is suppressed or appropriated by the nation-state, only that it occurs not as horror or anguish, but in the very banality of survival narratives: for instance in the short stories of Sa'adat Hasan Manto. Horror and anguish, as Hannah Arendt has pointed out, are not "natural" but created *ex post facto* by a particular kind of remembering. The commemoration of an atrocity, therefore, together with the emotion it gives rise to, is a political act and not merely a psychological one. Perhaps this explains the real lack of horror or anguish in the Indian subcontinent at what was in fact genocide: because in South Asia genocide is written as the history of the nation-state and commemorated only as such — which is to say only as the travails of freedom. Whereas for Europe, therefore, the Nazi holocausts might signify a failure of history or progress, for India the holocaust of Partition is simply absorbed into the very teleology of history as an atavism. Whereas for Europe holocaust might be problematized as the failure of modernism or enlightenment, for India holocaust is problematized only in terms of a particular failure of the nation-state, and not of nationalism (not to mention modernity or enlightenment) in general.

After Rajiv Gandhi's assassination last year, large billboards appeared in Bombay supposedly depicting his identity papers — papers in which the space for "religion" was filled in with "Indian." The coerciveness of secular

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is the result of a discussion with Rizwan Ahmad.

nationalism is made quite obvious here: its abdication of responsibility in and for “communalism” by displacing it onto the autonomous primordially of others; its use of “Indian” nationalism *against* other forms of polity or identity; and its displacement of Mr. Gandhi’s murder from a politics of the state’s own making (India’s involvement in Sri Lanka) to the stereotyped rhetoric of a pre-national religiosity. Everything has to be communal. This attitude, of course, both *entails* a vision of the Muslim as nationalism’s saboteur, and *creates* a “Hindu” opposition that works entirely within the logic of the old nationalism — in fact as the cure for nationalism’s woes. The problem here, then, is not religion, nor even its colonial history, but (Indian) nationalism itself. Given the fact that the nation is not likely to wither away, however, what is needed is a less paranoid version of it — a nation that does not validate itself by raising fears of foreign hands, multinational conspiracies, and treacherous minorities.

Indian Muslims are scapegoats in a clash of nationalisms; they are the ones who bear the nation’s burden of guilt and failure. What can they do in such a situation? Autonomous political organizations are vital, but are they possible in a country which lives in fear of “another Pakistan”? Perhaps not. But then is it also possible to continue to rely on the state’s increasingly desultory protection? Is it desirable? There is a slogan used by Hindu nationalists: *jāo Pākistān yā kabristān* (go to Pakistan or go to the grave). Since neither of these prospects seems particularly attractive, the only option left is to organize. How this is to be done is another matter — certainly fighting Muslim absolutists and trying to open channels of communication with non-Muslims (even Hindu nationalists) is part of it. But the first step is surely to wrench oneself free from the seductive rhetoric of Indian nationalism, a rhetoric which, in eliciting a Muslim discourse of apology and denial, simply perpetuates their victimhood.

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