A Many-Cornered Thing: The Role of Heritage in Indian Nation-Building

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India is a large and extremely diverse multination state that is constantly faced with the challenge of maintaining its unity. In the past two decades the Hindu nationalist movement has become a significant factor in Indian politics, and has systematically leveraged heritage to create communal tensions. This has resulted in short-term political gain, but is also tied to longer-term goals of establishing a homogenously Hindu state in South Asia. This article argues that instead of being in decline, this movement is actually progressively expanding, and that the case of Ayodhya is only one part of a much larger programme in which heritage academics play a significant role, and that their collective actions will be pivotal to the future stability of the country.

Introduction

There is an assumption behind most nationalist theories of India that as a concept it is indivisible, and that while highly diverse it is nonetheless comprised of sufficient unifying factors to naturally function as an autonomous whole (Prakash 1992, p. 360). This is also the view of Amartya Sen, who stresses a long history of tolerance of diversity, leading to a naturally secular state (Sen 2005, p. 17). Time and again throughout the world's history, however, the divergent will of various ethnic groups has proved unstoppable. This was recognized by Rabindranath Tagore, who in 1917 described the greatest challenge for India as being:

> . . . the problem of the world in miniature. India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle . . . India . . . being naturally many, yet adventitiously one, has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity. A true unity is like a round globe; it rolls on, carrying its burden easily. But diversity is a many-cornered thing which has to be dragged and pushed with full force. (Tagore 1917, p. 124)

It is too narrow a view to say that the Indian state is able to achieve stability principally through a secular approach, with which it is able to define and

maintain the idea of a single nation and from which it then derives its legitimacy. In reality, as noted by Tagore, much 'dragging and pushing' of various elements of the population is required in order to achieve this. While stemming mainly from Europe in the early twentieth century, the ideas of Hannah Arendt provide a useful lens with which to view and interpret the mechanism of nation-building in India.

According to Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, mechanisms inherent to the nation-state ensure that national minorities not fitting its strict and coherent vision of 'the nation' are effectively relegated to a 'stateless' condition (Arendt 1951, p. 290, Butler and Spivak 2007, p. 31). Such minorities enter what Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, terms the private as opposed to the public world; they are effectively neither able to participate in the politics of the state, nor to fully receive protection from it (Arendt 1958, p. 221). This is essentially an alternative strategy to pure secularism, which enables the state to manage a very diverse population by making it politically less so. I contend that in the case of India, while a serious attempt at a secular state has been made on the surface, Arendt's ideas more closely describe the actual mechanisms that the state has effectively deployed to this end since independence. This is, however, a delicate situation, as Arendt recognized in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*:

> The great danger arising from the existence of people forced to live outside the common world is that they are thrown back, in the midst of civilisation, on their natural givenness, on their mere differentiation. (Arendt 1951, p. 302)

In cases where a majority religious identity comes to dominate government and the pretence of secularism is dropped (as is progressively happening), this could mean that stateless communities would come to view themselves as separate nations along ethnoreligious lines. None of the possible outcomes of such situations, for example repression, expulsion or secession, are likely to occur non-violently, or without affecting the stability of both the state and those neighbouring it. Over time, any change to the approach that India and groups within it take to secular governance and nation-building may well have an impact upon its ability to maintain order among its national minority groups, and ultimately upon its very integrity.

I would like to advance the argument that the use and interpretation of heritage plays a highly significant role in this process, and will thus directly help to determine the future form of the Indian nation-state. To do this, this article looks at how concepts of an Indian nation have arisen, and at the state of Indian nationalism today. This is followed by a review of how heritage academics (archaeologists and historians) have been involved with nationalist theories and movements and what their impact has been. Importantly, this review draws together a range of recent events that have not been clearly linked in other studies. Looking then to the future, the potential for Indian archaeology to counter right-wing nationalism is assessed, along with the potential internal and international consequences if it does not choose this path.

Nationalism and Heritage

The concept of India as a single territory goes back possibly as far as the third century BC, with the Maurya Empire (Kulke and Rothermund 2004, p. 61). Since then, many other kingdoms and empires have occupied a large part of the same area, including the Chalukyas, the Vijayanagara Empire, the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal Empire. Despite being territorially unified under the British, the Government of India Act 1935 created separate electorates based on religion, creating the conditions for the rise of sectarian nationalism and eventually leading to partition in 1947, a policy aptly described as 'divide and leave' (Thakur 1993, p. 647).

The India that emerged from partition fits Kymlicka's terminology of a 'multination state' made up of 'national minorities', which he defines as '...the coexistence within a given state of more than one nation, where "nation" means a historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture' (Kymlicka 1995, p. 11). As Kymlicka points out, such states can only survive if each national minority both has an allegiance to the greater political community of the multination state, and, at the very least, they '...view themselves for some purposes as a single people' (Kymlicka 1995, p. 13). These were the questions being asked of the new citizens of India in 1947.

As when Massimo D'Azeglio in 1861 had said that 'We have made Italy. Now we must make the Italians' (Beales and Biagni 1971, p. 3), so the new generation of Indian leaders were now faced with the same challenge. Writing of his youth in 1946, Jawaharal Nehru explained that the middle class he belonged to were very much the product of the British system and its views, which they now sought to challenge:

> New forces arose that drove us to the masses in the villages, and for the first time, a new and different India rose up before the young intellectuals who had almost forgotten its existence, or attached little importance to it. It was a disturbing site, not only because of its stark misery and the magnitude of its problems, but because it began to upset some of our values and conclusions. So began for us the discovery of India as it was...(Nehru 1946, p. 50)

Describing the conclusions he came to about Indian identity, he wrote that:

> I was also fully aware of the diversities and diversions of Indian life, of classes, castes, religions, races, different degrees of cultural development. Yet I think that a country with a long cultural background and a common outlook on life develops a spirit that is peculiar to it and that is impressed upon all its children, however much they may differ among themselves. (Nehru 1946, p. 52)

Serving as India's first prime minister from 1947–64, Nehru pursued a vision of a secular Indian state that would not be bound by class stratification (Sen 2005, p. 204). In order to achieve this, religion was explicitly excluded as an organizational factor, and there was to be no one official national language,

despite the dominance of Hindi. The Indian states were reorganized according to language in 1963, which Brass has described as the 'most successful and balanced nationality policy which has been pursued in either India or the Soviet Union' (Brass 1991, p. 314).

Following Nehru's death, it was during the three terms that Indira Gandhi served as prime minister between 1966 and 1984 that sectarian nationalism once more began to take hold in India. Indira Gandhi pursued interventionist policies designed to eliminate state governments run by rival parties, often appealing to voters on the basis of religious issues. This was one of the causes of an increase in sectarian violence and the rise of secessionist movements in Assam, Kashmir, Mizoram, Nagaland and the Punjab (Brass 1991, p. 318). Eventually this became her downfall, and she was assassinated in retaliation for putting down a Sikh separatist movement in the Punjab that she had helped to create.

In particular, her concessions to conservative Muslim demands had the effect of strengthening right-wing Hindu claims that despite government pretences of secularism, Muslims were receiving preferential treatment. The main party to benefit from this was the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which went from only two seats in the Lok Sabha (lower house of the parliament) in 1984 to 85 seats in 1989. The BHP is the political party of the Hindu nationalist movement, also referred to as Hindutva or the Sangh Parivar. Other organizations that fit under this umbrella are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Council of Hindus, VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Self-Help Association, RSS).

These policies were largely continued by Rajiv Gandhi, culminating in the Shao Bano case in 1987, in which the government amended the constitution to specifically deny Muslim women rights to maintenance support following divorce, which until then had been granted to all other Indian women. This was seen as 'a watershed event' by the BJP, which galvanized popular Hindu sentiment against what was perceived as Muslim fanaticism (Ludden 2005, p. 225).

Thus, by the start of the 1990s the policies of India's government had drifted some way from those of secularism and equality under Nehru. With the VHP and BHP on the rise, a coordinated programme of right-wing Hindu policies and propaganda was ready to be deployed, in which nationalist claims to heritage have played a significant role.

India has been known for its archaeological heritage since the earliest days of the discipline, with Palaeolithic artefacts having been discovered as early as 1863 in Chennai (Chakrabarti 2006, p. 1). Numerous travellers and British officials had reported on the archaeological richness of India, but it was however the discovery of the Indus civilization by Pandit Daya Ram Sanhi in 1920 that first made a major difference to Indian perceptions of their own past in national terms:

> . . . the discovery of the Indus civilization made India a respected member of the small number of lands that gave birth to true civilized life. In India, at least, the discipline of archaeology has served the country well, allowing it to take its rightful place as one of the oldest and most interesting regions of human endeavour. (Paddayya 1995, p. 143)

With partition in 1947 the main Indus sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro became part of Pakistan, so Indian archaeologists' attention was quickly focussed on finding further examples of the civilization within their new borders in order not to lose this distinction. At the same time, Indian historians began to write their own works, which naturally tended to be anti-colonial in nature, with the aim of refuting British claims that India had always been a diverse collection of ethnic groups that could only be governed as a whole by outsiders, and that any evidence of a highly developed civilization was the result of external influences. In order to portray the past as more indigenous, homogenous and independent, the new historians sought to show that it originated with an essentially Hindu culture. They continued to work with the periods defined by the British, emphasizing that the Indian nation had begun with a golden age of Hinduism, and then later been oppressed and exploited by the Muslims and the British. While this began as an anti-colonial stance, it was also to become a great support for Hindu nationalists, and as Prakash (1992, p. 360) points out, this perspective '... had and continues to have deadly implications for a multiethnic country such as India'.

From independence onwards the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and a growing number of Indian university archaeology departments have produced a large body of excellent, scientifically balanced work that has greatly enriched our knowledge of the highly diverse, common history and prehistory of South Asia, a point that will be taken up again later in this article. At the same time however, various actors with more narrow nationalist aims have taken a much more selective and exclusive approach. While they are a minority, their voices are often heard the loudest because their well-publicized claims are aimed to coincide with major political or communal issues of the day, and being highly emotive, they often create 'facts' that go unscrutinized by the wider public, what Prakash has termed 'worlding the Third World' (1992, p. 382).

As often follows the gaining of independence, the first targets were the immediately departed British, with many prominent colonial monuments being demolished (Rao 1994, p. 154). Another symbol of an earlier colonial period, the Somanatha temple in Gujarat had been destroyed in the eleventh century in a raid by the Muslim Mahmud of Ghazni. In 1951 its ruins were cleared despite the protests of historians and archaeologists, and a new temple was built as a statement of freedom from foreign rule. This was a nationalist project, undertaken in order to celebrate the founding of a new and predominantly Hindu state, and for this reason it was strongly opposed by Nehru:

> While it is easy to understand a certain measure of public support in this venture, we have to remember that we must not do anything that comes in the way of our State being secular ... There, are, unfortunately, many communal tendencies at work in India today and we have to be on our guard against them. It is important that Governments should keep the secular and non-communal ideal always before them. (quoted in Thapar 2004, pp. 189–190)

Despite Nehru's opposition, the communal focus on the past began to grow, with the main antagonist being the Hindutva movement. A central facet of Hindu

nationalism is to portray India as culturally homogenous (i.e. Hindu), whereby anyone or anything that does not fit this definition is cast as illegitimate and inferior. Many strategies involving heritage have been employed to achieve this, including attempting to claim the earliest occupation of the sub-continent, attacking 'illegitimate' heritage sites and defending Hindu ones, misrepresenting the history of cultural interaction, and attempting to misinform the public through the media and school textbooks. We will look at each of these approaches in turn, both in terms of how they have been achieved, and what impact they have had on the stability of the Indian nation-state.

The most well known example of nationalist heritage destruction in India is that of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, but this has been a major catalyst for similar events in other parts of India as well, and examples will be given from Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Ayodhya is a town in the Faizabad district of Uttar Pradesh, with a population of around 75,000. Although identified today with the mythical city of the same name in the great epic poem the Ramayana, research has shown that the modern Ayodhya was given its name in the fifth century by the Gupta king Skanda Gupta, in order to gain political prestige (Gopal *et al*. 1990, p. 77). Since around the middle of the nineteenth century, a belief had begun to spread among some Hindus that the Babri Masjid (mosque) in Ayodhya had been built on top of a temple to the god Rama, on the very spot of his birth. In 1949 a group of local Hindus broke into the mosque and deposited Hindu idols, at which point the local magistrate had the mosque locked and made unavailable for worship. The situation remained tense but mostly uneventful for the next 30 years.

During this time, several archaeological investigations of Ayodhya and the surrounding area were made, including one in the 1970s by the eminent archaeologist B.B. Lal very near to the Babri Masjid, which uncovered little more than what appeared to be a section of a fortification (Lal 1976−77, p. 52), rousing little interest. This is significant, as Lal was dedicated to searching for evidence of the Ramayana epic, and as such would not simply ignore the potential discovery of one of its major locations.

By the 1980s the uneasy tension that had prevailed at the site was finally ignited by the communal tensions being stirred up by Indira Gandhi's administration, and in 1984 a movement known as the Ram Janmabhumi (Birthplace of Rama) campaign was started, with the aim of claiming the site for Hindus. This was supported by the VHP and the RSS, and received a major boost when the BJP decided to actively support it in order to broaden their popularity. The decision to politicize the association of the mosque with Rama is not a random one. As Pollock (1993, p. 282) has noted, the Ramayana is a text that involves significant 'demonization of the other', and is therefore very suitable for stirring up communal tensions. This is something that the BJP has actively played upon, even producing travelling theatrical productions in which the BJP as Rama fights against rival parties in the form of the menacing and immoral Ravanna (Gillan 2003, p. 385). In 1985 the campaign began to demand that the mosque be demolished and a new temple to Rama be built in its place.

As Lal's earlier excavations of the site had provided no evidence to support the temple claims, the VHP archaeologists proceeded to manufacture it. Suddenly, in a right-wing Hindu magazine, Lal remembered having discovered what he considered to be burnt brick pillar bases during the excavations, though he had not considered this worth publishing at the time. These were now taken as evidence that a columned temple had once stood on the site. Later independent analysis of photographs of the trench in which Lal claimed to have found the pillar bases found that they were actually the remains of various walls of different, non-contemporaneous structural phases, and could not have been load-bearing structures (Mandal 2003). Despite this, Lal had made the following statement at a conference in 1988:

> It is abundantly clear there did exist a twelfth-century temple at the site, which was destroyed and some parts incorporated in the body of the Babri Masjid. (Lal 2001, p. 119)

Despite his adamant position, other than one photograph, Lal has never made the notebooks and sketches of his excavation available to other scholars so that his interpretation could be tested (Sharma 2001, p. 132), and has not come forward and testified in court at any point. Instead, he later wrote that the evidence was 'so eloquent that no further comments are necessary' (Lal 2008, p. 68). It is difficult to accept Lal's explanation of events and not come to the conclusion that the structural elements he had previously thought insignificant suddenly became temple foundations only in order to manufacture support for the nationalists' cause.

By 1990 the situation had become so hotly contested that the national government set up a commission of enquiry to determine once and for all whether a Hindu temple had ever been demolished in Ayodhya to build the mosque. To answer this question authoritatively, a subcommittee was formed of historians and archaeologists, half nominated by the VHP and half by the Muslim Babri Masjid Action Committee or BMAC (Rao 2006, p. 82).

In February 1992 the BJP decided that it had waited long enough, and by including the rebuilding of the supposed Hindu temple in its election manifesto, and with a BJP government now also in control of Uttar Pradesh, the fate of the Babri Masjid was effectively sealed. By July 1991 land had been acquired around the mosque, and preparation of the surrounding area for construction began. In June of 1992, these levelling activities led to the discovery by VHP workmen of a large pit filled with stone sculptures three metres below the surface, which were claimed to have come from a Hindu temple (Sharma *et al.* 1992, p. 1), and an area of walls and brick floors, claimed to be from a very large structure pre-dating Islamic occupation, which had clearly been demolished (Sharma *et al.* 1992, p. 11), almost too perfectly proving the temple destruction theory. The big problem with these new discoveries was that they were not excavated by archaeologists, so their stratigraphic and cultural contexts were not recorded, they were never properly documented and many of the objects have never

actually been seen by anyone else. Independently analysing the information available on the stone sculptures, Mandal concluded that they could not be dated to the period of the postulated temple because their stratigraphic locations were not recorded, and the wide range of weathering patterns on the various objects indicated that they actually came from a range of locations and periods (Mandal 2003, p. 45).

The final meeting of VHP and BMAC historians and archaeologists took place on 5 December 1992. Against a background of over 100,000 VHP *kar sevaks* (holy volunteers) converging on Ayodhya, BMAC protested that this made the meeting pointless, and it broke up because relations between the two sides had become too hostile (Rao 2006, p. 99). On 6 December the *kar sevaks*, ignoring security forces, stormed the Masjid and within hours it had been totally demolished and Hindu idols were placed on the site (Rao 2006, p. 156), an event that sparked off communal violence in which over 2,000 people were killed.

In the days following the demolition, the national press reported that large stone objects and other remains indicative of a Hindu temple had been recovered from below the mosque, as though these were archaeological fact. As Ratnagar has commented (2003, p. 70): '. . . they have gone so far as to claim that an act of mob violence and the destruction of a five-century old structure amount to a valid retrieval of archaeological evidence!'

In 2002, the ASI was instructed by a High Court order to investigate the site once more, in order to definitively answer the question of whether a temple had once been demolished below the mosque. The site was then excavated by the ASI over a six-month period in 2003. Independent observers of the excavations reported that correct archaeological standards and procedures were not followed (Mandal and Ratnagar 2007, p. 29). In the end, the report concluded only that a 'huge structure' had been located, which had been dated to the eleventh–twelfth century, and indirectly insinuated that this was a temple. Once again, independent analysis of the excavation report and methods concluded that there was no logic in this conclusion, and that there was no evidence of demolition in the sixteenth century, 'but of vandalism in the twentieth century' (Mandal and Ratnagar 2007, pp. 129–131). Essentially, the ASI report was seen as a whitewash aimed at supporting Hindutva claims behind a pretence of scientific objectivity: 'The rhetoric of finding proof through archaeology offers means of foreclosing dissent by invoking the authority of performing "science"' (Guha 2005, p. 422). By allowing events to get to the stage where the mosque was destroyed, and then by allowing the ASI to produce a heavily biased report, the Indian government clearly no longer stood so firmly behind Nehru's 'secular and non-communal ideal'.

Because events surrounding the Ayodhya demolition were so explosive and had so much news coverage, outside of India one could be forgiven for believing it to be a unique, if disturbing, occurrence. This is not the case however, and other Indian heritage sites have in turn become the targets of right-wing nationalism, following the lead of events in Ayodhya.

Since its founding in 1964, the VHP had created a long list of sites (mostly mosques) in India that they believed had either been built over Hindu temples (Brass 1995, p. 241), or were offensive to Hindus in some other way. Hindu nationalists also worked to prepare the public by deliberately misrepresenting the number of cases where Hindu temples had been destroyed in order for mosques to be built in the past. B.B. Lal has written of 'hundreds of examples, all over the country' (Lal 2008, p. 66), while Goel lists over 2,000 Muslim monuments that he claims 'stand on the site and/or are built from materials of deliberately demolished Hindu temples' (Goel 1990, p. 62), as a result of 'large scale destruction' by 'Islamised invaders' (Goel 1990, p. vii). The numbers have been further inflated to 30,000 temples in the political rhetoric of VHP leader Pravin Togadia (Mahaprashasta 2009). These assertations have been refuted by Eaton, who shows that temple destruction was very seldom for religious purposes but was rather a facet of statebuilding, whereby it was part of the process of erasing the authority of a defeated Hindu ruler, and was also practiced in Hindu–Hindu conflict (Eaton 2000, pp. 104–107). He is only able to identify 80 known cases of temple desecration between 1192 and 1760 (Eaton 2000, pp. 128–131).

This is essentially a process of deliberately planting fake historical facts and memories in the minds of the public, and unfortunately the Hindutva message has been repeated much more frequently than it has been refuted in the media. A result of this is that many kar sevaks have pledged to reclaim thousands of sites (Bayley 1993, p. 12); all that is needed is for the right degree of communal tension to exist and any of the sites on the VHP list could fall victim.

This is what happened in Gujarat on 27 February 2002 when a large group of VHP kar sevaks were returning by train from Ayodhya where they had been continuing to agitate for a temple to be built on the now levelled site. There had been a series of communal clashes between the kar sevaks and Muslims as they travelled through the town of Godhra, and a rumour spread that they had kidnapped two Muslim women, causing the emergency brake on the train to be pulled. A mob of angry Muslims attacked the carriage that the activists were riding in and it was set alight—within an hour 59 people from the train were dead (Swami 2002). Over the next month, communal violence flared in the state, with an official death toll of 850, unofficially estimated to be as high as 2000 (Human Rights Watch 2002, p. 4).

During this period of communal violence religious and cultural heritage sites were also systematically targeted, with 298 dargahs, 205 mosques, 17 temples and three churches being either damaged or destroyed within two months (Pandey 2002). This was a carefully planned and well-resourced operation:

> The famous 500-year-old masjid in Isanpur, which was an ASI monument, was destroyed with the help of cranes and bulldozers. The famous Urdu Poet Wali Gujarati's dargah was also razed to the ground at Shahibaug in Ahmedabad. While a hanuman [a Hindu god] shrine was built over its debris initially, all that was removed overnight and the plot was [paved] and merged with the adjoining road. (Chenoy et al. 2002)

These are not the only nationalist events related to heritage that have occurred in Gujarat since Ayodhya. The state has had a BJP government since 1995, and the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, is notorious for stirring up communal conflict. In such a climate, right-wing nationalism continues to be directed at heritage, with even an important World Heritage Site under threat. Located in ever-volatile Godhra, Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park received World Heritage status in 2004. An important aspect of the site is that it contains a mixture of Hindu and Muslim elements, and as an early Islamic, pre-Mughal city it exhibits a unique blend and transition between the two traditions (UNESCO 2004, p. 28). Almost all of the Muslim families living at Champaner left following the 2002 riots (Sreenivas 2004), and the Gujarat government upset the Islamic Relief Committee in 2004 by producing brochures for the annual Navratri festival which listed all of the monuments in the park other than the Muslim shrines (Sreenivas 2004). The state government is attempting to promote the multicultural nature of the region in a belated attempt to look good despite its complicity in the 2002 riots, but such omissions still occur and, especially, syncretic places of worship are ignored, as these contradict the Hindutva notion of a natural state of conflict between the religions. The situation has also been greatly exacerbated by a local BJP politician. Complaining that the site showcases more Muslim monuments than Hindu ones, and leveraging community dissatisfaction with building restrictions, he has begun agitating to have World Heritage status removed from the site (Khan 2007), a move that is feared would lead to a loss of protection for the site, and the eventual destruction of the Muslim sections of it (Abdi 2007). At the same time, in nearby Vadodara the authorities have recently displayed open disregard for Muslim heritage during road construction by destroying part of a medieval Muslim graveyard containing the grave of a prominent Sufi, on the grounds that it was 'encroaching on public land' (Westcoat 2007, p. 59).

Even highly prominent politicians in Gujarat have been active in asserting a Hindu ownership of the past. For example, in 2003, while he was state Minister for Science and Technology, Murli Manohar Joshi claimed evidence of a 9,500-year-old Hindu civilization had been discovered in the Gulf of Cambay (Venkatesh and Radhakrishna 2003). So far his discovery has only received support from Graham Hancock and received no further attention, but it demonstrates the nationalist leaning of Modi's government.

Karnataka is another state in which the methods of leveraging heritage as a communal issue used at Ayodhya have been redeployed. In this case, a Sufi shrine in the Western Ghats, the Guru Dattatreya Baba Budangiri Swamy dargah, is already being compared to the Babri Masjid in the media. Although controlled by Muslims, the shrine is syncretic in nature and is also used by Hindu worshippers of an incarnation of Shiva known as Dattatreya who have been peaceably allowed joint access to the shrine for their rituals for centuries. The VHP has been campaigning to 'liberate' the shrine for several years, and in 2003 the BJP ominously became involved, with local party leaders going so far as to publicly

state that they intended to turn the issue into 'another Ayodhya', and vowing to 'repeat Gujarat' (Srikanth 2003).

The strategy employed at Ayodhya has been carefully replicated here, with Hindutva propaganda attempting to win over the media and popular opinion. As in Ayodhya, where the Babri Masjid came to be known more popularly as 'Ramjanambhoomi', so the shrine's historical Muslim name of 'Bababudangiri' is being replaced with the Hindu 'Dattareya Peeta' (Taneja 2006). In order to further stoke local tensions, *kar sevaks* have been brought in from across the country for rallies, with one annually timed to coincide provocatively with the 6 December demolition of the Babri Masjid (Srikanth 2003). The political nature of the movement is more than apparent in the way that things flare up most in the run-up to elections, and while Karnataka is currently between these things seem relatively quiet. Many expect things to come to a head eventually though: 'The silence is eerie, however, and with a BJP government in power, pregnant' (Srinivasaraju 2009). The first signs of this happening may be recent moves by the BJP to renovate the site according to Hindu requirements, in full contravention of a Supreme Court order (Sayeed 2009).

Activists in Maharashtra have also sought to follow the Ayodhya model, as during the lead up to an election campaign in the town of Pratapgarh in 2004. Targeting the tomb of the seventeenth-century Muslim general Afzal Khan, the VHP organized a protest against buildings being built around the site by the Muslim charitable trust that manages the site. With *kar sevaks* brought in from other areas, around 1,200 protesters marched towards the site, encouraged by inflammatory rhetoric, with one local BJP leader for example being quoted as saying '…Why is the government supporting a trust which looks after an enemy's tomb?' (Katakam 2004). The protest turned violent when finally stopped by police and in the end 250 people were arrested. While the official aim was to remove 'illegal' structures around the tomb, there can be little doubt as to what would have happened without police intervention, as stated by one VHP member: '…We would have done it with our own hands, like Babri Masjid, what did we have then in our hands?' (Menon 2004).

Despite the fact that the above events in Gujarat, Karnataka and Maharashtra all represent a clear continuation of Hindutva tactics deployed in Ayodhya, it has in recent years become common to hear that the right-wing threat posed by the BJP and Hindutva has been greatly lessened for the foreseeable future. This is largely based on the fact that, once in power, the BJP adopted more centrist policies, for example by withdrawing its calls for the building of a temple at Ayodhya. The fact that it then also lost the federal elections in 2004 was seen as demonstrating a change of heart by the electorate following the Gujarat riots, which would force the party to maintain a more moderate stance if it were to stand a chance of re-election in the future. All indicators, however, point towards this move to the centre as being a matter of temporary expediency only, and that in fact the right-wing agenda is still being pursued with determination and mounting momentum.

The issues which led to the BJP being voted out of power have not been resolved by that action. Most obviously, those responsible for the destruction of the Babri Masjid, for the ensuing violence and for the later Gujarat riots have never been brought to justice, and there are thus large numbers of right-wing sympathizers who know through experience that they can take the law into their own hands without the threat of punishment, and can be called upon again in future. The real effects of the BJP's time in power can be expected to continue for a long time to come, as during this period the influence of Hindutva became deeply embedded in many state institutions. Thus, while the BJP itself appears on the back foot, the RSS itself has actually been expanding due to this foundation (*Times of India* 2009a). The continued trajectory of the Sang Parivar has been demonstrated by elements within it being linked to recent terrorist attacks, such as those in Goa in 2009.

In the meantime, Hindutva politics, currently deemed inexpedient for the BJP, are being expressed outside of it. For example, the former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Kalyan Singh (who was head of the state government when the Ayodhya demolition took place), has recently started his own right-wing party, 'that will espouse the ideology of Hindutva, cultural nationalism, social justice, social harmony and development' (*Indian Express* 2009). The BJP itself has in turn continued to stir communal tensions when absolutely necessary to keep things on track, such as by briefly promoting the Ayodhya temple project in the hopes of influencing the recent Allahabad High Court verdict.

The greatest evidence that the ideology of Hindutva has become internalized by the state is the way that the Ayodhya case has been handled. Determining final responsibility for the events at Ayodhya was assigned to a commission, which then took 17 years (including 48 extensions) to produce a report that was finally submitted to the government in June of 2009 (*Times of India* 2009b). This was followed by a judgement of the Allahabad High Court in September of 2010, which determined that the site should be divided into three parts among Hindus, the Nirmohl Akhara Hindu sect and Muslims. The judges accepted the ASI report, completely ignoring all evidence to the contrary that had been submitted by independent parties:

> The disputed structure was constructed on the site of the old structure after demolition of the same. The Archaeological Survey of India has proved that the structure was a massive Hindu religious structure. (Sharma 2010)

They also accepted the Hindutva view that the site is the birthplace of Ram:

> The area covered under the central dome of the disputed structure is the birthplace of Lord Rama as per faith and belief of Hindus. (Agarwal 2010)

While the above ruling is certain to be taken to the Supreme Court by one or more of the parties, it is already certain to have wide-reaching consequences. Writing in 2003, Kesavan predicted that were such a verdict to be delivered, then 'imperceptibly, India would become another country' (Kesavan 2003, p. 67), and

this may turn out to be an understatement. A legal precedent has now been set by which the religious beliefs of one community have been seen as sufficient in order to claim land from another group. The result of this will surely be a massive increase in the number of claims being made by Hindu groups throughout India. It will also greatly embolden Hindu nationalists overall, as was shown by immediate demands being made by the BJP that the Muslims relinquish their one-third share of the Ayodhya site.

In parallel to these events at major sites, the philosophy of Hindutva has also been systematically promoted within academia, with many scholars advancing nationalist theories arguing for indigenous origins of Hindu culture. At the centre of these theories is the Aryan race issue, where it is not so much the case that '...nothing less than the origin of Indian civilization is at stake' (Danino 2003, p. 21), but that nothing less than the ownership of Indian civilization is. The idea of an 'Aryan' heritage in India goes back to the research of Max Müller, who had proposed a homeland in Central Asia for the Aryans, who then spread to Europe and South Asia in two separate migrations, and introduced Vedic or Hindu culture to India (Müller 1883). In part, this theory has a strong attraction for Hindu nationalists, as claiming Hindu and Aryan culture to be the same thing effectively separates Hindus from all other people in India. The idea that the Aryans were invaders however is strongly refuted, as this would reduce the strength of claims to indigeneity, placing Hindus in the same category as Muslims and Christians as immigrants. The preferred version of the Aryan theory improves Hindu self-esteem and legitimizes the social status of upper-caste Hindus, and it also installs Hindus as 'the inheritors of the land since the beginning of History' (Thapar 2000, p. 15), and all others as alien. At the extreme, in the same way that Nazi treatment of the Jews was 'theoretically excused' through creating the distinction of Aryans and Semites, so now the mistreatment and exclusion of other groups in India—e.g. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians and tribal peoples—is also excused (Thapar 1996, p. 10).

One strategy employed in establishing this position is to identify Hindus with the earliest known advanced culture in India, the Indus civilization, which is best known for the sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. By claiming continuity of a Vedic culture from the Indus civilization to modern Hinduism, essentially a 'foundational myth' (Guha 2005, p. 418), any share of this prestige is denied to other groups in India. Archaeologists have become involved in this in a number of ways. Often this involves making a wide range of comparisons of what is known of Indus culture to aspects of modern Hindu culture, seeking similarities such as methods of farming, arts and crafts and household items, and using examples from vastly different geographical locations and timescales to make arguments which are both tenuous yet at the same time difficult to refute (Guha 2005, p. 415). The theories ignore the fact that even without full continuity these aspects of culture are naturally diffusive and would have been picked up by neighbouring groups through trade and intermingling anyway. The fact that many of the tribal cultures in India as well as those of neighbouring regions seem to

have retained aspects of Indus-like material culture with greater fidelity is conveniently ignored (Thapar 1996, p. 21).

Many methods have been used in attempts to prove the Vedic character of the Indus civilization. These have included attempting to demonstrate the presence of horses in the latter by Jha and Rajaram (2000), later demonstrated to have been achieved through computer manipulation of images on Indus seals (Witzel and Farmer 2000, p. 6). Well over a thousand publications on the Indus symbols have been published (Possehl 1996, p. 76), along with over 50 decipherment attempts (Misra 1992, p. 12), most of which aim to prove that the symbols represent Sanskrit language. This is despite solid linguistic and archaeological work demonstrating late Vedic did not appear until two millennia after the height of the Indus civilization, and that the symbol system is more likely 'a relatively simple system of religious-political signs that could be reinterpreted in any language' (Farmer *et al*. 2004, p. 45). B.B. Lal has in turn tried to make up for the lack of physical evidence for written language by arguing that two small pieces of terracotta with no markings on them are highly likely to be writing tablets, based on a comparison with the wooden *takhıs* used until recently in Indian schools (Lal 2002, p. 135).

Hindutva scholars have also aimed to prove that the Saraswati river, mentioned throughout the Rigveda, was in fact located in India., with B.B. Lal making the case, based on two verses of the epic poem, that it must actually have flowed through India and right past the famous Indus civilization site of Mohenjo-daro on its way out to the Arabian Sea (Lal 2002, p. 15). Once again Lal is willing to overstate the importance of weak evidence, in this case by claiming that the Rigveda is a source of incontrovertible evidence, and he defends the position by labelling any who disagree as (anti-Hindu) bigots: **'Can we afford to ignore the categorical evidence provided by these two adjacent verses? Surely not, unless we blindfold ourselves under a spell of bigotry'** (Lal 2002, p. 11; the bold type is Lal's). The theory nevertheless gained official sanction under a BJP-led government in 2003 with the creation of the Saraswati Heritage Project, which was given a huge budget and placed under the ASI (Guha 2005, p. 418). However, once the BJP was out of power the new government carried out a review of the ASI's work, and in 2006 the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture reported that the ASI had failed to follow correct processes in choosing sites for excavation. Pointing out that the project was extremely pro-Hindu, they stated regret that so many resources had so far been used '... just to excavate a mythological river whereas, several other monuments/heritage sites of national importance are languishing due to acute shortage of funds', and the budget for the project was subsequently slashed (Chhibber 2006). Similarly to many commentators on Ayodhya, the committee expressed serious concern that right-wing considerations had led members of the ASI to compromise the scientific integrity of the project:

> The ASI is the custodian of the rich cultural heritage and as such its role to safeguard the cultural fabric of the country is of crucial national importance.

> Therefore, the committee reiterates that before undertaking any excavation of any such mythological projects like the Saraswati Heritage Project, the ASI should make proper scientific and technical appraisal and no extraneous factors should go into the decision-making. (Chhibber 2006)

Tellingly, the number of works thus seeking to prove an indigenous origin for Hindu culture has grown in parallel to the BJP and the Ayodhya movement, openly seeking to reinforce a popular political paradigm, rather than through any direct relation to newly discovered evidence.

In addition to the academic world, the Hindutva perspective is also being pushed within the Indian education system. While the BJP was in power between 1998 and 2004, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) produced new history textbooks for schools that contained 'appropriate rewritings', and deleted many sections from earlier ones. Similarly, the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) was 'overhauled' and given a new agenda and staff in line with nationalist priorities (Sen 2005, p. 63). A major aspect of this was once again the focus on Hindu cultural continuity—the Indus civilization was renamed the 'Indus-Saraswati Civilization' in textbooks, and developments in mathematics, philosophy and science were given much earlier, Vedic origins:

> Such untruths have been the staple diet upon which the cadre of the Sangh Parivar has been brought up. But then, to introduce such false statements into the school curriculum is indeed a dangerous proposition. The havoc that indifferent scholarship combining with a distorting ideology could cause in school education is all too apparent. (*The Hindu* 2002)

Most of these changes were reversed when the BJP lost its majority in the national elections, and the new NCERT textbooks have for the most part been highly regarded. There have been some cases where the same issues continue however, such as the class 11 textbook *Ancient India* by Makkhan Lal, which still contained over 137 historically incorrect assertions and errors (Habib *et al.* 2003, pp. 27−57). The Hindu bias in the curriculum also continues in BJP-ruled states such as Himachal Pradesh, where, for example, a chapter on the Muslim painter M.F. Husain (who had controversially portrayed Hindu goddesses in the nude) has been removed from textbooks (Phull 2010).

When Hindu nationalist content was removed from the national school programme, other ways to influence children's education were sought. For example, the BJP had increased the amount of Sanskrit and Vedic literature taught in schools, which was then reduced again once they lost power in favour of a more multicultural curriculum. The response of Hindutva was to establish Sanskrit summer camps. In a *Washington Post* article, an interview with a 19-year-old camp attendee confirmed the success of the scheme: '. . . when I study Sanskrit, I learn who I am. It is my identity' (Lakshmi 2008).

The aim of shaping education to conform to Hindutva ideology is not being limited to India. During a review of textbooks to be used in Californian sixth grade

classes in 2006, several US organizations, including the Hindu Education Foundation, demanded changes to sections of the textbooks that did not show Hinduism in a positive light, or that discussed theories of an Aryan migration into India rather than cultural continuity of Vedic culture (Baldauf 2006). The situation went to court, with the Hindutva claims eventually being thrown out in June of 2009 (Walsh 2009). Several expatriate organizations have also become extremely vigilant in defending conservative Hindu interests in the United Kingdom. M.F. Hussain was again the target when the two groups known as the Hindu Forum of Britiain and Hindu Human Rights forced an exhibition of his works in London to close in 2006, with protests that threatened to turn violent. This followed a 2005 campaign that forced the Royal Mail to withdraw a Christmas stamp featuring a Hindu family, which was claimed to be culturally insensitive (Zavos 2008).

As can be seen from the examples listed above, an overall aim of Hindu nationalism is to create a large body of literature that emphasizes the continuity of Hindu culture in India from the earliest times, and denigrates the contribution of other cultures. It is as if once this body of work is in place, it will be possible to simply ignore the work and claims to the contrary of mainstream heritage academics. This is something that Possehl (1996, p. 168) has noted in regard to decipherment research on the Indus symbol system, where while not all, but much of the work is following a nationalist agenda: '…researchers barrel ahead in their own directions, showing little evidence that they can, or even care to, draw on the work of their colleagues'. Thapar (2000, p. 16) has commented on the same thing: 'Dogmatic assertions with no space for alternative ideas often arise from a sense of inferiority and the fear of debate. Hence the determination to prevent the publication of volumes on history which do not conform to Hindutva ideology.' Often researchers who work within frameworks and models that are established within their disciplines, and with the consensus of international colleagues, are described as neo-colonialists, elitists, hypocrites, right-wing Christians, bigots and extremists, without seriously attempting to rebut their academic arguments. This can also turn violent, as in January of 2004 when protests against a book by US academic James Laine on the eighteenth-century Hindu ruler Shivaji ended with the storming of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune. Hindu activists ransacked the archives, destroying and damaging hundreds of rare manuscripts in retaliation for the institute having allowed Laine to conduct research there, forcing Oxford University Press to withdraw the book from the Indian market (Suroor 2004) and the Maharashtra state government to ban it completely, until the Supreme Court finally lifted the ban in 2010 (*Times of India* 2010).

There is considerable concern within mainstream Indian archaeology about the activities of these fringe nationalist researchers, who often come from unrelated backgrounds and yet publish prolifically on archaeological and historical 'facts' that back up Hindu nationalist agendas. This was summarized by D.P. Agarwal in his address to a major Indian archaeology conference at the start of the new millennium:

> I would like to express my fears about the neophyte archaeologists. With these newly converted friends of Indian archaeology, it does not need any enemies. Their over-zealous but misinformed efforts are not only befuddling the issues, but are diverting the efforts in the wrong directions. (Agarwal 2000, p. 15)

Discussing the divisions in the discipline over Ayodhya, Paddayya highlights one possible outcome of this problem:

> India's past and its students, instead of serving as a source of enlightenment for society, have become a burden on it. It is not unreasonable that the ordinary citizen has now started expressing doubts about the relevance of both to society. (Paddayya 1995, p. 141)

While many do not believe that archaeology, history and the sciences can ever offset the 'irrational anger' and 'wrath of the people' when stirred by communal politics as in the case of Ayodhya (Rao 1994, p. 161), the potential of the situation to seriously escalate should not be forgotten. This was well described by Kymlicka in *Multicultural Citizenship*:

> . . . the fear is that group-differentiated rights will undermine the sense of shared civic identity that holds a liberal society together. These rights will be a source of disunity that could lead to the dissolution of the country, or, less drastically, to a reduced willingness to make the mutual sacrifices and accommodations necessary for a functioning democracy. (Kymlicka 1995, p. 173)

This is the ultimate danger posed by the Hindutva movement and its attempts to appropriate the Indian past, that in their attempts to create a unified Hindu nation-state, they may in fact eventually bring about the collapse of an already fragile and fractious arrangement.

Both local and international heritage academics have not only the ability but also a vital responsibility to redress the misrepresentation of the past for political means in India. Research carried out with the aim of gaining a clear understanding of the highly diverse and interwoven roles that all groups living in South Asia have played as part of their common history has the potential to offset right-wing nationalist misinformation, and to assist in creating a higher level of cohesion between the various national minorities of the Indian nation-state. There are many areas in which there is great potential for this to be achieved.

The prehistory of South Asia is as yet relatively poorly understood compared to other parts of the world (Chakrabarti 2006, p. 474). By filling in the details, archaeologists have the opportunity to emphasize what is (at least until now) uncontestedly common to the heritage of everyone in the region, and to uncover the important role that it has played alongside neighbouring regions in the history of humankind overall. The potential for the study of Middle Pleistocene hominins is greater in India than anywhere else in the Old World (Dennel 2009, p. 336), and research into the Siwalik region as a possible migratory corridor for *Homo erectus* could provide pivotal evidence regarding the competing 'Out of Africa' and multiregional development models in human evolutionary studies (Chakrabarti

2006, p. 477). India also offers an ability to look more deeply into prehistory than many other regions. The site of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh, for example, possesses petroglyphs dating back three times further than any discovered elsewhere in the world (Chakrabarti 2006, p. 478), and this uniqueness combined with a rich ethnographic record of hunter gatherer societies (Dennel 2009, p. 336) means that there is enormous potential to gain much greater insight into human societies from the paleolithic onwards. In the words of Kennedy, a long-term researcher in South Asian paleoanthropology: '. . . we are at the threshold of an exciting era in the history of science as India takes its rightful place in our understanding of human evolution' (Kennedy 2005, p. 40).

As can be seen from the section earlier in this article, the way in which evidence of the Indus civilization is interpreted is key to whether it can be co-opted by the Hindu right. While it is going to be extremely important to continue rebutting unfounded claims made by right-wing researchers, it will also be crucial to continue with investigations that unravel the true nature of this ancient culture. Intriguingly, there are indications from current research that the Indus civilization, covering an enormous geographic area, may actually have incorpo-rated multiple national minorities and languages, and yet still managed to maintain its unity and cohesiveness over a very long period of time (Farmer *et al*. 2004, pp. 44–45). The potential contributions of this to building a modern Indian national identity based on unity in diversity are obvious. Taking a more multidisciplinary approach to Indus research would not only greatly increase the range of information available to answer the larger questions (Shinde *et al*. 2006, p. 71), but it would also help to refute the claims of some right-wing nationalist researchers that the archaeological approach is too narrow and dogmatic.

It is also important that the syncretic history of many Indian sites be brought to the attention of students and the public, emphasizing the fact that Hinduism, Islam and other religions have not only existed peacefully together but have even shared their very places of worship, completely in opposition to the concept of periods of singular usage broken by violent transitions promoted by Hindutva. This is not only essential for well-known sites such as Sri Guru Dattatreya Bababudan Swamy Dargah, Champaner and the Babri Masjid, but the simple fact that India has a very large number of syncretic shrines (Burman 1996) can help to counter the argument of intolerance and destruction. Where incorrect claims are made about historical temple desecration, these need to be systematically refuted.

There are also very many other sites of great importance in India across all ages, which need to be better publicized, preserved and managed. The early historic city of Sisupalgarh in Orissa is a good example of this, as it is an example of an as yet poorly understood culture that possessed a high level of social organization and economic development (Mohanty and Smith 2008, p. 11). It is by excavating such sites that the diversity of India's common past comes to light, and they have the potential to take the public's interest because they are both monumental and accessible. An interview with the BBC illustrates this well,

where after noting that it may have supported up to 25,000 inhabitants, the excavation co-leader was quoted as saying: 'The significance of this ancient city becomes clear when one bears in mind the fact that the population of classical Athens was barely 10,000' (Sahu 2008). By placing the magnitude of the Indian past into context, it should not be hard to encourage public interest in its richness and diversity. Unfortunately, in this case due to a lack of funds and a preference by the ASI to focus on other areas of Indian heritage, what would be the highly visible remains of a city that would qualify for World Heritage status are covered over at the end of each excavation season.

It is similarly important that regions of India that are currently under-studied in Indian archaeology receive more attention. Often these areas share borders with other countries and are more culturally varied, so they can add a lot to knowledge of migration, trade and diversity. Examples are the Assam region in the north-east, with its proximity to South-East Asia (Hazarika 2006), and Jammu and Kashmir and Himalchal Pradesh in the north-west, close to Middle Asia where researchers '...expect an avalanche of new research to change our view of mankind's first attempt at civilisation' (Lawler 2007, p. 590). It is only by studying the migrations and interactions between the various regions that a complete picture of the past can be arrived at, in contrast to the more indigenous models favoured by Hindu nationalists. Ratnagar (2004) has also stressed that elements of cultural anthropology and ethnic archaeology are missing from courses offered in Indian archaeology departments, something which would better equip students for understanding ancient and non-Hindu sites, while Bernbeck and Pollock (1996, p. S141) have argued that it is important to demonstrate the way that both membership of communities and their identities have changed over time, in order to refute the idea that they are unchanging and that it is possible to equate a modern population directly with a past one. New perspectives and methodologies are in fact developing within Indian archaeology and history that have the potential to subvert the dominant research paradigms and agendas. The employment of indigenous epistemological transitions has been urged (Paddayya 1995), and the rise of subaltern studies promises to be more inclusive of minorities and interpretations of their pasts. According to Prakash, discussing the journal of the same name, the '...critical force of Subaltern Studies lies in its disruption of such enduring colonialist and nationalist essentializations as the unitary Indic civilization and the nation' (Prakash 1992, p. 373).

Finally and most importantly, archaeologists and historians need to become as actively involved in education as possible, both of schoolchildren and the public. Not only do they need to work hard to combat the attempts at misinformation from right-wing nationalists, they also need to try to improve public knowledge of the past, as well as their understanding of how archaeology, history and science work, so that they can judge the information being presented to them in the media. There are excellent programmes already underway in this regard, such as that run by the Sharma Children's Museum near Chennai, which teaches children 'introductory archaeology, associated sciences and ethnoarchaeology,

the story of human evolution, cultural phases in India from the Palaeolithic to the Iron Age' as well as the archaeology of the local region (Pappu 2000, p. 485). Equipped with knowledge such as this, as opposed to that which is learnt in the Hindutva-organized Sanskrit camps, these children can face the future with both an appreciation for the diversity of their own country, and an objective toolkit for interpreting issues of identity and communalism. This is extremely encouraging, and is exactly the kind of development that Paddayya has stressed as most necessary in reference to the 1992 events at Ayodhya:

> . . . a more mature response requires that, instead of bewailing this legacy of British scholarship, Indians take concrete steps to educate society about the past. Precious little has been done over the last forty-five years. The result is the indiscriminate use of the past by interested groups for their own ends . . . A non-partisan understanding of the past on the part of the ordinary citizen, and his / her ability to appreciate the universality of human culture . . . are the best insurance against any abuse of the past. (Paddayya 1995, pp. 141–142)

This has also been identified by Sen as being the single most important way to counter Hindutva:

> The deepest weakness of contemporary Hindu politics lies, however, in its reliance on ignorance at different levels—from exploiting credulity in order to promote militant obscurantism to misrepresenting India's past in order to foster factional nationalism and communal fascism. The weakest link in the sectarian chain is this basic dependence on both simple and sophisticated ignorance. That is where a confrontation is particularly overdue. (Sen 1993, p. 22)

Consequences and Conclusion

The potential consequences of a continued rise of the Hindu right in India, with a parallel leveraging of heritage to create identity based conflicts, should not be underestimated, and archaeologists and historians can play a vital role by nullifying this strategy. Following the Allahabad High Court verdict in favour of the nationalists, a proliferation of demands that heritage sites all over India be turned over to Hindu control can be expected, but as in the cases outlined in this article, the human cost of the decision is not yet known.

While Hindu nationalism seeks to portray India as culturally homogenous, it is at the same time highly divisive. It is possible that it could over time lead to an India so fractured that the state would no longer be able sustain the process of governing described by Arendt, and would either have to concede a greater political role to more minorities, removing them from their stateless condition and facing ever greater challenges in governing, or be faced with secession movements in which they remove themselves. Greater autonomy for any of these groups is likely in turn to lead to increased calls for a separate Hindu state. An alternative would be, in opposition to Hindu nationalism, to take a non-sectarian approach to nation-building with an emphasis on common strands of identity that

would encourage minorities to remain within the state. In both cases, as seen in the preceding sections, the use of heritage plays a highly significant role.

One year before the Babri Masjid demolition, Brass described both India and the USSR as '...confronted by crises of national unity, including the expression of explicit secessionist demands from several ethnic and nationality groups...' (Brass 1991, p. 301). The USSR collapsed later that year, and since then it can be argued that the continuing rise of right-wing nationalism in India has led to even greater internal turmoil and instability. As a coherent opposition to Hindu nationalism is yet to materialize and present an alternative identity and a vision of an inclusive identity, this can be expected to continue.

According to Singh, the first half of the twenty-first century is likely to see India facing major difficulties due to a necessary reorganization of its federal structure. This is in part due to significant changes in population distribution, where some states are coming to have very large populations but proportionally fewer seats in parliament, and because of concerns about the financial and administrative viability of some recently created states, and also the continuing unresolved special status of both Kashmir and Nagaland. This is seen as necessary, as the alternative of '...endless fragmentation of the Indian nation-state is not a solution but part of the problem of ungovernability and international instability' (Singh 2007, pp. 246–247). In order to mitigate the risks involved in this challenge, India will need to work to avoid the alienation of minorities by addressing their concerns and attempting to establish a more inclusive national identity.

Moves towards regional autonomy or secession would have serious consequences for the entire South Asian region, especially as India is currently surrounded by politically unstable and authoritarian states. Any granting of autonomy in India could spark independence movements in neighbouring states as well, such as Bhutan and Nepal, which both have significant minority populations (Misra 2004), and change to the sovereignty of Kashmir would aggravate relations with Pakistan. Internal disorder would also make it difficult for India to respond to international conflict situations, as evidenced by its recent reluctance to aid Sri Lanka in 2000 when its forces were already stretched with dealing with problems in Kashmir and its north-east states (Devotta 2003).

India's relations with both of its Muslim neighbours, Pakistan and Bangladesh, are currently highly strained, and there is a danger that a Hindu nationalist government pursuing anti-Muslim policies would cause these relations to deteriorate still further. Pakistan is widely seen as the largest threat to security in the region, both due to its support for militant Islam and its internal fragility, compounded by the fact that it is a nuclear power (Vicziany and Weigold 2003, p. 81). Should India not work towards lessening tensions and increasing trust this situation is not likely to improve, especially as both India and Pakistan are likely to come into conflict over developing interests in Central Asia, which are already leading them into an increasingly long-term and aggressively competitive involvement in Afghanistan (Pant 2010). The internal stability of Pakistan would also be impacted, as increased Hindu nationalism in India is likely to encourage

both an increase in militancy among civilian groups and the strengthening of the position of the military itself, which has hardly proven itself a factor in promoting stable democracy. In a situation of decreased trust, the consequences of another 'strategic surprise' such as the 2008 attacks on Mumbai could be much more severe.

There is also the danger that, as has occurred in other countries, a nationalist government in India might adopt an expansionist agenda. The 'India Shining' campaign of 2004 clearly indicated the BJP's desire to both ally itself with business and to project a more powerful international identity (Wyatt 2005). Hindu nationalism has a history of international ambition that began with the Greater India Society, founded in Calcutta in the 1920s, and sought to demonstrate that Hindu civilization had both greatly influenced and to a degree colonized other parts of Asia. This included cultural claims to a wide swathe of territory, from Central Asia to the Pacific, including Tibet, Cambodia, Singapore, Burma, Java, Bali, Vietnam, Ceylon and even Japan (Bayley 2004, p. 713). Their work is now being picked up by Hindutva scholars, who lobby for increased engagement with these countries and those which have large immigrant Hindu populations such as Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines (Mitra 2003, p. 411). According to Grant:

> Hindu nationalists view their nation as possessing the greatest claim to indigeneity for an area ... of the Earth's surface roughly equivalent to the official state claim of modern India. This includes the disputed areas of Kashmir, Ladakh, and Arunachal Pradesh. Nearby areas—including those claimed by Pakistan and Bangladesh (as well as perhaps Sri Lanka, Tibet and Nepal) are understood to be at their root part of this claim. (Grant 2005, p. 332)

As this article has argued, heritage is central to the pressing of this claim and it is clear that archaeologists and historians have a chance to play a very important role in determining the future of the Indian state, and of other states in the region. With Hindu nationalism posing a serious threat to stability and not showing signs of decline, it is vital to establish an effective opposition to it within these disciplines. This needs to not only include the production of well-balanced research, but must also carefully refute nationalist misinformation, and above all focus on public education. There is a tendency to underestimate the danger posed by the right, but it is only by determined and concerted action that this danger can be negated.

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Notes on Contributor

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