

MUSLIM IDENTITY AND SEPARATISM IN INDIA: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF M. A. ANSARI

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I

This paper arises out of dissatisfaction with wholly instrumentalist explanations of Muslim separatism in India, views which have their critics but which generally prevail nowadays, reinforced by no less an influence than that of Michel Foucault.¹ The problem is the fundamental one of what constitutes a group, and in particular of whether or not there can be objective harmonization, 'orchestration sans chef d'orchestre qui confère régularité', within any set of people.² At an empirical level, in regard to Indian Muslims, the debate has three main elements: what was the nature of communalism, how far Muslim separatism was a process, and whether its development was a sufficient explanation for the partition of 1947. To the extent that Muslims *became* separatist, they obviously might have been diverted into other attitudes, and to that extent is it important to identify events which encouraged or errors which prevented that diversion.

On this occasion the discussion will begin as a review of *A nationalist conscience*, Mushirul Hasan's study of M. A. Ansari,³ and then move on to some of the issues suggested by Ansari's life and Hasan's treatment of it. The book provides an important corrective, in its emphasis and viewpoint, to the tendency to attribute the partition in India to a consistent and inevitable conflict between increasingly irreconcilable forces. The study extends and rounds out earlier work;⁴ it brings to life the alternative symbolized by Ansari, and thus casts into relief the occasions when Hindu-Muslim agreement and a common front against the British seemed possible, as in 1919-22 and 1935. The book exhibits the familiarity and maturity of understanding resulting from such an intense and long-term project of research. It is a timely contribution too, as intercommunal tensions once again mount in South Asia, and voices are heard suggesting that the secular constitution of India is inappropriate to the essential character of its people. The book's implicit thesis is that separatism did indeed evolve, with clear stages from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century; that its opponents were unable to arrest its advance; and that Ansari is significant for exemplifying these two points. Hasan thus illustrates an alternative to communalism offered during the struggles against British rule; it was an

¹ The influence is also that of Derrida, as from *Writing and difference* or *Positions* (tr. A. Bass; London, 1978 and 1981), but specifically is from Foucault's opposition between power and the 'great fantasy of a social body constituted of the universality of wills'; *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings* (ed. C. Gordon; Brighton, 1980), 55. A somewhat fuller discussion of these points will be published separately, and was also offered when a version of parts of this essay, centred on the trial of Maulvi Ahmadullah in 1865, was presented to the eleventh European Conference of Modern South Asian Studies in Amsterdam in 1990; I am grateful to Peter van der Veen for that opportunity, to Jürgen Lütt as discussant, and to other panel members for their comments.

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique . . .* (Paris, 1972), 180.

³ *A nationalist conscience: M. A. Ansari, the Congress and the Raj* (New Delhi, Manohar, 1987; pp. xvii, 277, Rs. 200). Detailed references to this book will not be given; note that an appendix at pp. 137-44 reprints the National Pact of 1924 (mentioned below), with one page out of order.

⁴ On *Nationalism and communal politics in India 1916-1928* (Delhi, 1979) and *Mohamed Ali: ideology and politics* (Delhi, 1982); see also 'In search of integration and identity: Indian Muslims since independence', *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter *EPW*), Special Number, November 1988.

alternative which failed. The question is whether or not it could have succeeded.

The story, for this book, begins in a world of Islamic piety, which is contrasted with the 'political' world entered by Ansari. So too Indian Islam supposedly moved from religious to constitutional concerns, from worship to agitation. Ansari's pan-Islamic interests, and his tour of Turkey, did not contradict his growing Indian nationalism in the period before the First World War. Like Muzharul Haq he claimed to be both an Indian and a Muslim;⁵ with the 'Young Party' of the United Provinces, he was, as James Meston put it in 1913, being drawn into a united nationalist camp. In 1920 Ansari doubted the efficacy of *satyagraha* but supported Gandhi as an agent of Hindu-Muslim unity. Thereafter, drawing away from many of his fellow Muslims, he sponsored a number of efforts to achieve that objective, culminating in the Nationalist Muslim Party which Hasan sees as a last chance for unity. In its most conciliatory and secular stand (in 1931) it described communal safeguards as a negation of a free and united India, and placed social justice before community interests. Ansari gave a great boost to these tendencies, especially as Congress President in 1927-28, and in his repeated service as one of the Congress General Secretaries. At various times his efforts were assisted by Hakim Ajmal Khan, Ali Imam, Deobandis such as Husain Ahmad Madani, and other allies from further afield (especially Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and a few Bengalis).

Hasan shows that Ansari threw in his lot with the Congress because he disliked communalism, favoured 'modernism', and believed the state could be religiously neutral. His heyday coincided with many other attempts to head off communalism, attempts which ended in general failure despite some instances of success. Coming from various points of view, the efforts were designed to ensure that Indian politics would be secular, even class-based. Muslims of Ansari's group went so far as to denounce separate electorates for Muslims; in doing so (one might argue), they were not only improving on the work of Motilal Nehru's All-Parties Conference of 1928, but also echoing the sentiments of the Montagu-Chelmsford report, to the effect that separate electorates militated against political progress and the establishment of a modern citizenry in India.⁶ Most Muslims disagreed with Ansari on this point; the ideological and religious divide among the intelligentsia was especially well illustrated in the late 1920s, in the aftermath of Ansari's Congress presidency and the fate of the Nehru Report. According to Hasan's account, then, what occurred from the 1920s among Indian Muslims was a retreat from Indian nationalism, and a quickening slide from communalism towards separatism.

If we are to see Muslim separatism first and foremost as a rival to *Indian* nationalism, as a religious identity preferred to a secular one, then its success, and Ansari's failure, might be attributed to changes in political environment. Hasan only hints at this argument, but it is explicit in literature with which he is clearly familiar. Some of the changes made a search for followers more and more necessary: no longer were leaders accepted as 'spokesmen' or 'interpreters' on the grounds of talent and influence; rather they had to be leaders of

⁵ See Government of India, Home Department Political B Proceedings, nos. 44-5, March 1913, National Archives of India, New Delhi. The point is discussed briefly in P. G. Robb, *The emergence of British policy towards Indian politics* (New Delhi, forthcoming), ch. iii.

⁶ Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms, Cd. 9109 (1918), especially pp. 185-8. The Report's paragraph headings on communal electorates are instructive, as follows: 'They are opposed to the teaching of history', 'They perpetuate class divisions' (that is, the 'partisan' and not the 'citizen'), and 'They stereotype existing relations'.

men, backed by fund-raising, organization, votes or agitation.⁷ Religious issues were undoubtedly used by politicians to generate support; a Muslim cause obviously delivered a Muslim constituency. Ansari was a special case in rejecting this path to popularity, but then he was a man cut off from his roots in the United Provinces by secularism and residence in Delhi. He had no following, in the way the Ali brothers had. He stood out not only against communalism, but against changes in the nature of politics and politicians. Generally, as Hasan shows, in the 1920s leaders moved away from espousing élite interests towards appealing to corporate identity, using increasingly emotive and populist rhetoric to define and discipline their supporters.

The government's role clearly has to be considered too. Over a very long period the British encouraged communal and persecuted class-based parties. But the motto for one chapter in this book is a Home Department memorandum of 1920 which made the rather interesting suggestion (traceable to an earlier report by H. C. Beadon, Commissioner of Delhi) that the British imported political agitation into north-west India (and hence among Muslim élites?) when they transferred their capital to Delhi. Hasan does not take the point further, but many such specific political decisions were obviously important to Muslims, and above all they were affected differentially by the new constitutions being considered. For want of both imagination and nerve, the British introduced the forms which they already knew. They wooed peasants and landlords and princes, but produced lawyers' reform bills. They sought Muslim support, but introduced ever-wider suffrage.

Hasan criticizes Ansari once or twice for failing to grapple with the 'socio-economic roots of communalism'. Given that riots occurred between the economically deprived of different communities, it is not clear what this means. It might be argued, instead, that by concentrating on propaganda and conciliatory organizations in the 1920s, Ansari showed an awareness of the role of ideas, emotion and leadership in channelling socio-economic grievances into communal violence. Riots and agitation did occur on 'class' issues, and Hasan remarks how 'Khilafat', 'swaraj' and 'Gandhi' could all be symbols of the better world hoped for by the oppressed. But such concord tended to be quickly followed by communal divisions, sometimes in the course of a single outbreak or movement.⁸ The displacement of economic solidarity by Islamic sentiment paralleled the equation or replacement of socio-economic by nationalist goals;⁹ indeed, the latter contributed to the former by reducing the element of class loyalty in politics from a different direction. Moreover similar changes brought into the 'public' arenas (those visible to the British and defined as 'politics'), people whose interests were more strictly 'religious' but who thought they now had to mobilize and take a view on state policy—to build a university at Aligarh, to protect a mosque at Kanpur, or to protest at peace terms in regard to Turkey. The ulama thus came into politics; in this case Ansari was an instrument of change.

One can see why religious men came to be involved in the politics of the street and the council, as they had been in the politics of court, market and land:

⁷ See for example Francis Robinson, 'Professional politicians in Muslim politics 1911–1923', in B. N. Pandey (ed.), *Leadership in South Asia* (New Delhi, 1977).

⁸ On such mid-riot changes see Majid H. Siddiqi, 'History and society in a popular rebellion: Mewat 1920–33', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28, 3, 1986, and Suranjan Das, 'Towards an understanding of communal violence in twentieth century Bengal', *EPW*, 27 August 1989.

⁹ See Gyanendra Pandey, *The ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1926–34: a study in imperfect mobilisation* (Delhi, 1978), and Sumit Sarkar, 'The conditions and nature of subaltern militancy', in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern studies*, III (Delhi, 1984).

indeed, the idea that their involvement was new depends on a narrow definition of politics. But, in considering the items described by Hasan, and the position of Ansari, one must also ask why there had to be Muslim politicians, as opposed to Muslims who were in politics. In Hasan's version of events, as in Ansari's life, this underlying issue is presented but not resolved. The intercommunal outbreaks of the 1920s emerge from nowhere or are blamed on 'extremists'. As the latter is a stereotype of Muslims familiar from British records, and indeed from the long history of Western observations upon Islam, it is hardly surprising that Hasan prefers the former. And, though the usual explanations must also lie behind this account, these two possibilities—either a void or some Muslim identity—do seem to be the main explanations on offer. Hasan would have it, in effect, that Muslim separatism was created anew out of circumstances and propaganda. Writing of the Khilafat campaign, he disputes an alleged suggestion that Hindu-Muslim unity proved ephemeral because Muslims joined in agitation only on religious grounds. Referring specifically to the alliance and subsequent disaffection between ulama and politicians, he suggests both that Muslims were not united politically 'in the absence of a religious cause', and that otherwise the political 'utility' of Islam was 'limited'. This is a teasing paradox, and explains less about the situation in India than it reveals of the secular preferences of the writer. Another way of putting it would be to say that most Muslims were united in being drawn into politics only by a religious cause: the implications are very different, namely, that large numbers of Muslims were first drawn into anti-British agitation on religious (not nationalist or socio-economic) issues, and that this experience—a conflation of Islam with the nation for purposes of mobilization—lay behind separatist politics.

There might indeed be 'utility' in banishing 'religion' altogether from 'politics'; Ravinder Kumar hopes as much in his thoughtful preface to this book. But it is not clear how the banishment can be achieved. Confusingly, Kumar proposes an assault on the virus of communalism, and a refusal to be drawn into dialogue along religious lines. Ansari faced exactly the same dilemma. Hence he succumbed at times to arguments of a communal kind. His Indian National Pact of 1924, for example, though generally repudiated, still showed up fundamental differences between Hindus and Muslims in regard to the political rights of minorities. For Ansari at this stage, separate representation continued to imply a principle to be extended; for Lajpat Rai it was an expedient to be abandoned as soon as possible. Ansari's ideas moved on, but even so it is plain, if we adopt one of Ravinder Kumar's yardsticks, that he was an agent of the very process he opposed. His career in seeking Muslim and Hindu unity under a Congress umbrella was almost entirely counter-productive, because the notion of Islam as a political community, a distinct interest, was inevitably reinforced by any negotiations or compromise which counted on religion to identify a political minority. Ansari's efforts contained a contradiction at their heart, in that he sought a communal grouping of secular nationalists. He represented a Muslim point of view, making religion a badge of identity as surely political as that of the Congress socialists. Even the Muslim Nationalist Party contained this flaw: it was not secular in inspiration, and did not merge indistinguishably in Congress. Ansari thought he reconciled Islamic sentiment with life-long Indian nationalism, but still he was a Muslim in politics. His groups called themselves 'Muslim', and put forward Muslim political interests. The reason was of course that they were addressing *Muslims* rather than *Indians*. The most telling point of Hasan's book may be that even Ansari, the most 'nationalist' of men, was still a 'nationalist Muslim'.

It follows that, while political and constitutional change account for many

elements in Ansari's failure, it is not the whole story. In Hasan's account, while the 'political' Muslim is shown to have been created, the 'religious' Muslim is taken for granted, lost in—and only appropriate to—that world of Islamic piety from which Ansari and Muslim politics *emerged*. This leaves much unresolved.¹⁰ At the least, it leaves uncertain how Ansari should be judged, and even whether he was important. He was unable to turn many of the Indian Muslims away from a predominantly religious political identity; did he make political errors against more skilful opponents, or was his task impossible? Were not religious politics being created among Muslims, because religion already defined Ansari's 'own community'? One does not need to suggest—this essay does not—that communalism 'happened' only to Muslims, or that they alone were somehow 'responsible' for the partition, in order to ask in this way what was crucial in making a *Muslim* politician. It might have been changes of mind, as with the Ali brothers or Jinnah, or in the nature of politics. But in either case one could attribute it to a need to consider the audience, and hence to the fact that the élite and the masses (now being wooed) were always interested in questions from an Islamic perspective. But then one has come up squarely against 'identity', or even 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' character. After all religion was intensely political, and on many and various issues—jobs, language, education, the constitution—distinctively 'Muslim' views were enunciated in India throughout British rule and before it also.

Muslim identity has been much studied, can only be touched upon here, and yet must be confronted, in order, as it were, to interpret Ansari's efforts and thus to answer the larger question of the relative importance of various causes of Muslim separatism. Any monolithic underpinnings of identity which were implicit for Ansari himself potentially contradicted his general political stance, as they do that of Hasan. The difficulty which is raised in this book is thus not its picture of Muslims divided, which fits well with such notions as the 'imagined' community;¹¹ the very diversity suggests a potential for Ansari's efforts, and helps rather than hinders the idea that separatism evolved. Rather the difficulty is that which faces critics of Orientalism, and even bedevils revisionist histories from below,¹² that is to say: are there *any* objective identities? The difficulty is with what C. A. Bayly has called the 'pre-history' of communalism,¹³ or with ascertaining, in effect, the origin and content of the category 'Muslim' in India. The very question may be considered inadmissible, and yet all analysis depends on a degree of 'licensed essentialism', that is, on generalization. More difficult still, we must confront in this case, specifically, some of the discredited British assumptions about India and Islam. These issues, the wider context of Muslim separatism and identity, will be considered in the remainder of this discussion.

¹⁰ Bipan Chandra similarly, in a valuable but extremely instrumentalist essay, leaves some tantalizing contradictions in his main argument: that communalism was not a popular movement *except in riots*, and that it had 'hardly any religion in it' though 'communal consciousness' existed and religion was 'a large part of the life of a pre-capitalist people'; *Communalism in Modern India* (Delhi, 1981). Such an approach was challenged by Gyan Pandey in a review article, 'Liberalism and the study of Indian history', *EPW*, 15 October 1983, and an alternative was already on offer in Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India* (Cambridge, 1972).

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London, 1983).

¹² See not so much Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), as Ronald Inden, 'Orientalist constructions of India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 3, 1986. See also Gyanendra Pandey, 'The colonial construction of "communalism"', in Guha, *Subaltern studies*, vi (Delhi, 1989).

¹³ C. A. Bayly, 'The pre-history of "communalism"? Religious conflict in India 1700–1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 1, 1985.

II

In the usual account, then, of the development of Muslim separatism in India the reasonable assumption is that Muslims had a choice of political identity, and chose in many cases to adopt one based on religion. As a result a new, predominantly religious kind of politics was created, for which the rulers, the leaders, the people or the times were responsible. And though the result was the opposite of that expected from modernization, yet the reaction to modernity was still very much among the causes of the development. Such reasoning assumes that a practical and conceptual divide between politics and religion was achievable in India, but somehow thwarted during British rule—perhaps, paradoxically, because of the special reactions of ‘Muslims’ to the forces for change. In these terms, points raised by Ansari’s career can be re-assessed in more detail.

First, the views and strategies of Muslims may be briefly summarized.¹⁴ In the late nineteenth century, there was by and large an accommodation to ‘neutral’ British rule, which was deemed able to protect Muslim interests. The decision was marked by well-known *fatwa*, such as that of various North Indian maulvis in July 1870, to the effect that India was *dar al-Islam* because of the protection afforded by the British to religious observances. Yet many pressures were experienced during the period, not least from the changing character of the Muslims themselves, in their leadership, attitudes to religion, their status, wealth and education, and above all from their having to face the challenge of ‘modern’ knowledge; the reactions paralleled (with less composure) those to infidel rule. The Aligarh movement represented a decision to make an accommodation, while the Urdu poetry of Altaf Husain Hali similarly coupled pride in the Muslim ‘nation’ with a suggestion that the first principle of Islam was openness to knowledge rather than strict adherence to law. In these uneasy socio-political and intellectual contexts, the Caliphate, Turkey, and the wider Muslim world seemed to offer the security of power and territory, and a satisfying brotherhood based on people and not land or sovereignty. Despite qualms such as those expressed by Saiyid Ahmad Khan, empire loyalty and pan-Islamism were thus complementary rather than incompatible. The strategy depended upon a definition of the nation as community, and as such would have been intelligible, for example, to Saiyid Ahmad Bareilly. In majority areas, too, identification with co-religionists began to give a spurious credibility to various claims put forward by burgeoning but aggrieved Muslim élites.¹⁵ Elsewhere better-placed Muslim minorities had to play the numbers game more circumspectly, but generally adopted a ‘grandee’ position that also defined political interest in terms of religion. Saiyid Ahmad Khan in his attitude to the Indian National Congress, or the 1906 deputation which sought separate electorates from Minto, repudiated ‘democracy’ and claimed that Muslims’ interests and importance gave a measure of their proper representation.

During the early twentieth century, the compact with the British began to

¹⁴ There is a large literature on these subjects; particularly relevant to the present paper are David Lelyveld, *Aligarh's first generation: Muslim solidarity in British India* (Princeton, 1978), Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic revival in British India: Deoband 1860–1900* (Princeton, 1982), F. C. R. Robinson, *Separatism among Indian Muslims: the politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860–1923* (Cambridge, 1974), Rafiuddin Ahmed, *Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: a quest of identity* (Delhi, 1981), Gail Minault, *The Khilafat movement: religious symbolism and political mobilization in India* (Delhi, 1982), and Hardy, *Muslims*. A useful bibliography will be found in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Communal and pan-Islamic trends in colonial India* (New Delhi, 2nd ed. 1985).

¹⁵ In addition to the references cited in the preceding note, see Mohammed Shah, ‘The emergence of a Muslim “middle class” in Bengal: attitudes and rhetoric of communalism’, University of London Ph.D. 1990.

wear thin. The 1906 delegation, as much an expression of dissatisfaction as an attempt to re-forge an alliance, was followed by two or three decades in which significant groups of Muslims negotiated with Hindus over joint national programmes. This was an elaboration of the search for security within India while enjoying the sway of Islamic power elsewhere. Both separate electorates and pacts with the Congress were designed to preserve the interests of the community; indeed elements of this approach continued into the 1940s and in the idea that a Muslim-majority state in one part of India would protect Muslim minorities and culture in other parts. After 1918 the British generally implied that the principle of self-government had been conceded, and that its achievement waited chiefly upon the Indians' ability to settle their differences; this view (or pretence) was reflected not only in the repeated constitutional discussions at 'representative' meetings, but also off this stage in the activities among Indian politicians themselves. For Indian as well as British purposes, inter-party negotiations became the very stuff of politics: from 1916 to 1937 they may be said almost to have been more of a pre-occupation among nationalists than the struggle against the British. There were brief repudiations of this effort, as during the Congress ministries after 1937 (a factor in Muslim indignation then), but business as usual was resumed in the 1940s. Institutions too affect the manner in which power may be exercised: ¹⁶ the electoral politics introduced after 1919 favoured the intelligentsia, but also ties of caste and community whereby constituencies could be mobilized. Muslim leaders, employing religion to secure credibility and support, demanded all the more fiercely that they be excused the rigours of demography and a wide franchise. The twin, growing prospect of adult suffrage and independence was a chronic political shock.

However, the double crisis which initiated a change in Muslim strategies had already occurred with the Turkish peace terms and the promise of Indian self-government in the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms. The British then seemed unreliable, and, for all the short-term alliances and the continued attempts at agreement, Congress goals became increasingly incompatible with the Muslim position, as distinct from the positions of Muslims. The confusion among Muslims from the mid-1920s to the late 1930s was a direct reaction to the unravelling of earlier tactics; indeed it was as if Muslim politics separated into constituent parts—into loyalist, pro-Congress, pan-Islamic, socialist and regional components. The case was worsened by Hindu-Muslim riots, but also by aspects of the long expansion in definitions or expectations of the state. Jinnah's '14 points' of April 1929 made clear what was only implicit in Muslim demands for preferential treatment (to restore imbalance in education, employment and representation), namely, that state neutrality was not enough and that state support was demanded: thus he repudiated the general and secular principles on which Motilal Nehru wanted to focus, and envisaged a state which *promoted* religious interests. By contrast, the Nehru report declared: 'There shall be no state religion . . . , nor shall the state either directly or indirectly endow any religion. . .'.¹⁷ A little later Iqbal's address to the Muslim League, rather before its time, provided an answer for the strategic dilemma of Muslim politics in his famous argument that a cultural identity required its own territorial and political base. This was hardly original, as it derived from ideas

¹⁶ See Anil Seal, 'Imperialism and nationalism in India' and other essays in *Modern Asian Studies*, 7, 3, 1973 (*Locality, Province and Nation*).

¹⁷ Jinnah's memorandum of March 1929 referred to 'adequate safeguards for the protection and promotion of Muslim education, languages, religion, personal law, and Muslim charitable institutions'. See C. H. Philips (ed.), *The evolution of India and Pakistan 1858 to 1947: select documents* (London, 1962), 228–37.

of nationality long familiar in Europe and already expressed in India over the partition and reunification of Bengal in 1905 and 1912, or more recently in the demand to separate Sind from Bombay. But Iqbal reinforced an association between the wish to preserve Islamic culture and language, and areas of majority Muslim population within India, and thus suggested an alternative source of Islamic power to replace the Indian Muslims' devotion to Turkey.¹⁸ By now it was almost axiomatic to identify languages and culture as Islamic, and as shared by or belonging to all Indian Muslims.¹⁹ But (with the exception of some earlier remarks about the advantages of the province of East Bengal) it was new to emphasize 'Muslim' territory within India. The next step, obviously, was the Lahore resolution of 1940, in effect demanding Pakistan. The process ended with a transfer of political weight to majority Muslim areas, where this strategy was more realistic. By the end the strong tendency was to argue that not belief but acceptance of the need for a Muslim state actually defined a 'true' Muslim. Thus the core of this familiar outline is how Muslims could think of themselves communally, as a people, and hence adopt pan-Islamism or seek alliances and guarantees within India, or could think in terms of place and thus become separatists. The sub-text is the extent to which such ideas were or became general among all Indian Muslims. The outline raises several points, relevant to Ansari, which can be further considered, in particular the role of secularism and of British attitudes.

At one level the Muslim strategies were, by definition, a struggle against the way of the future as it was imagined by English schooling, Anglo-Indian legislation, British observers, and Congress luminaries. Secular politics had been achieved in England over several hundreds of years; the ideal was part of a Eurocentric liberalism justifying the legal and administrative structures of the raj. It was, of course, an error to think that significant ideas or sectors could be kept out of politics: just as in England social philosophy or merchants played a part, despite Namier's findings, even in the eighteenth century,²⁰ so too did religion and holy men in twentieth-century India. But the British tradition—if not always the British in India—envisaged India's politics as necessarily progressing away from an old corruption (rather like the politics of gentry and placemen which Namier would portray in England), and towards a new rationality in the framework of law and the expression of 'legitimate' socio-economic interest. And the same conceptual divide between religion and politics, which permitted the political philosophies of the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries in Europe, also engendered Indian socialists and reformers, and their accusations that Muslim separatism was merely a device to maintain the dominance of the élites (and their British allies) against progressive forces. The consequences were far-reaching, including Jawaharlal Nehru's strictures on communalist politics in the late 1930s, and what he admitted to be a lack of religious imagination, in the face of mounting evidence that religion and politics were not distinct in India, that at best they were 'not yet' distinct. Would-be socialists and secular nationalists had to rely on the assumption that class-

¹⁸ Iqbal proposed a self-governing Muslim state in the north-west of India, arguing that 'The life of Islam as a cultural force in this living country very largely depends on its centralization in a specified territory'; the relevant passages are reproduced in *The evolution of India and Pakistan*, 239.

¹⁹ 'The Lingua Franca of India', in *Comrade*, 22 July 1912, argued that Urdu was not 'essentially' Muslim, but the 'vernacular' of Muslims, containing in its theological borrowings the 'consolation' of religion.

²⁰ For a discussion of some of this literature see J. V. Beckett's introduction and other essays in Clyve Jones (ed.), *Britain in the first age of party 1860-1750: essays presented to Geoffrey Holmes* (London, 1987). See also, on 'social cohesion', Ian R. Christie, *Stress and stability in late eighteenth century Britain: reflections on the British avoidance of revolution* (Oxford, 1984).

politics—materialist identities for a materialist society—would appear rapidly and inexorably, and that future parties would be pluralistic in religion. When coupled with the existence of ‘Congress Muslims’, this belief helped shape Congress strategies, for example after 1937 when the victorious party in the United Provinces offered Khaliqzaman and his colleagues, and then Muslims generally in the ‘mass-contacts’ campaign, a deal whereby they would merge themselves in the Congress; this may have been politically inept but it was intellectually consistent from the viewpoint of secular nationalism. The partition was accepted by secularists but only because they realized that if Indian independence were to await the exclusion of religion from politics, then the delay would be long indeed. The Congress could hardly hold out alongside die-hards who used Indian disunity to justify perpetuating British rule.²¹

On the other hand Congress single-mindedness (and partition) were encouraged by a belief that the end of British rule would itself help solve communal as well as socio-economic problems. Partly this idea was a political device—so that Indians would bury differences and unite in the struggle for independence—and partly it arose from conviction that foreign rule had caused India’s difficulties. Thus Congress sought secularism not only because it was modern but also because it was nationalist, and this too distracted attention from the autonomous growth of separatist sentiment. Of course a certain unity was achieved by such Congress policies (linking big business and peasants, the intelligentsia and the masses, and so on) and there were to be useful continuities in India as a result, in political ethos (such as government within the law), personal liberties, some civil service traditions, and the exclusion of the military from government. By contrast a social revolution might have generated as many allies of the raj as supporters of the Congress or the socialists.²² But this very success in mobilizing support helped identify Congress’s professed ideals with the interests of an Indian majority. Secular politics would prove unattainable, for all the undoubted sincerity of a Western-educated Indian such as Nehru, if they could not be embraced by those who saw themselves as a minority. And

²¹ See, for example, Jawaharlal Nehru, *An autobiography* (London, 1936; New Delhi 1962), chs. xix and lvi: ‘The real struggle to-day in India is not between Hindu culture and Muslim culture, but between these two and the conquering scientific culture of modern civilization’ (pp. 136–7)—and S. Gopal (ed.), *Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vols. 3 and 6, 8 and 10 (New Delhi, 1972–77): note, in *Tribune*, 27 November 1933, that to ‘lay stress on communal problems rather than national ones... is obviously anti-national’; in the *Bombay Chronicle*, 11 December 1933, that ‘Today in India there is absolutely no cultural or racial difference between the Muslim and Hindu masses’; and in the *Hindustan Times*, 12 January 1937, that ‘The realities of today are poverty and hunger and unemployment and the conflict between British imperialism and Indian nationalism. How are these to be considered communally?’ and so on. It will be seen that in seeking a ‘modern’ anti-imperialism he equated nationalism, social progress and the Congress, while associating reactionaries, élitist self-interest and the Muslim League. More important, perhaps, he interpreted culture and identity from a material point of view, and nationalism from a geographical one; he was pleased to admit that he was ‘totally unable to think along... communal lines’. Compare Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist thought and the colonial world: a derivative discourse?* (Delhi, 1986), ch. v.

²² The nature of Congress support is one of the most active questions of current debates, with contributions ranging from those of Bipan Chandra and his colleagues, as in *India’s struggle for independence* (New Delhi, 1988), to those in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern studies*, 1–VI (Delhi, 1982–9); see Mridula Mukherjee, ‘Peasant resistance and peasant consciousness in colonial India: “subalterns” and beyond’, *EPW*, 8 and 15 October 1988. On business support, contrast Aditya Mukherjee, ‘The Indian capitalist class’, in Sabyasachi Bhattacharya and Romila Thapar (ed.), *Situating Indian history* (Delhi, 1986), with Claude Markovits, *Indian business and nationalist politics 1931–39: the indigenous capitalist class and the rise of the Congress Party* (Cambridge, 1985). The tendency seems to be to think either that the alliance behind Congress was wholly predictable (being among nationalists) and beneficial, or that it was self-interested on the part of élites (quite ready to back the British if necessary) and thus responsible for retarding an Indian social and political revolution from below. The truth may lie in between. Issues of continuity are raised (with some exaggeration) by Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: the origins of an Asian democracy* (Oxford, 1985), and David C. Potter, *India’s political administrators, 1919–1983* (Oxford, 1986).

then any 'nationalist' Congress appeal was bound, as said, to drive out secular or class solidarities.²³

Even Gandhi, though wholly antagonistic to a modernizing, secular Congress ethos, did not undermine it, partly because of its nationalist gloss. He had helped mobilize Muslims, as Muslims, during the Khilafat campaign, but equally, in the 1940s, he doggedly insisted in the interests of non-communal politics that a non-League Muslim must be included among Muslim representatives (or a Muslim among Congress delegates) in the various transitional bodies under discussion; perhaps impolitic, and fatal to chances of agreement, this too rested on a principle of fundamental importance to the kind of India which Congress leaders sought. Secularism, as all-India nationalism, thus found a hidden place in Gandhi's thought, just as his religious and social tolerance paradoxically undermined his efforts against communalism. He was in many senses a nineteenth-century figure, more worried about sin than pain, a fact which showed in his attitude towards Islamic sentiment and, as well, in the support he offered to women in their 'traditional' role and character, or in regard to the socio-religious rather than the economic disabilities of the Harijans. Meanwhile the political relevance of religion, though reinforced for Gandhi, was disproved for many Congressmen by his campaigns at a remove from the nationalist struggle.²⁴

And once again, in regard to secularism, the character of British rule mattered too. But perhaps as much as the essentializing aspect of British perceptions, so often remarked upon, it was British *confusions* which increased the likelihood of conflict between distinct groups. Enlightenment thought was expressed in universal terms, but also recognized the power of difference, being tempered both by an inherited sense of rank and by a forthcoming romanticism. All Europeans in India agreed that order comprised civilization and rationality, but the effort at categorization, whether of men, states or plants, was an expression at once of unity and of hierarchy. Thus one finds a complex play of rival tendencies to include and exclude: for every Orientalist discovering Indo-European prehistories of language there was an Evangelical bringing light into Indian barbarity. The Brahmanic laws, too, appeared to set a rule to which

²³ A modification of Herschmann's concept of choices between 'exit' and 'voice' may be helpful here: Muslims who 'voiced' the collectivity of religion were more likely (but not bound) to 'exit' from other possible allegiances.

²⁴ Gandhi too envisaged improvements—not from 'modernization', which he rejected—but from advances in society and human nature, and this led him to mount no more than a partial attack on, and indeed a qualified defence of, such institutions and beliefs as caste, the duty of women to men, and so on. In 1921 he claimed that untouchability made 'swaraj impossible of attainment', but also that 'the spirit of kindness... is slowly but steadily gaining ground in the hearts of the masses'. Effectively, he called for tolerance (or personal 'truth') in place of social reform. See *The collected works of Mahatma Gandhi, passim*; the quotation is from vol. XIX (Ahmedabad, 1966), 571–2. Thus in the 1920s and 1930s his emphasis on spinning and the superior or softer moral qualities of women (for example, the view that 'women are more suitable than men' for work in *khadi* or temperance) may be seen to be directed at modifying the conduct of *men* and rather at perpetuating than at improving conditions for women; while his emphasis on the Harijans similarly seemed addressed at caste Hindus rather than at the practical suffering of untouchables (which *any* caste attitudes clearly increased), for all Gandhi's comments on equality of respect, bread labour and so on. A convenient presentation of these points—and evidence of their advocacy by Gandhians—is in R. K. Prabhu and U. R. Rao (ed.), *The mind of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad, 1945; 3rd ed. 1967), 107–11, 198–205 and 398–402; the above quotation on women is from a speech at Dandi, 13 April 1930, in N. R. Phatak, *Source material for a history of the freedom movement in India*, vol. III, part 3: *Mahatma Gandhi, 1929–31* (Bombay, 1969), 35. Similarly Gandhi's many speeches and writings about Muslims often seem directed at Hindus rather than at the felt worries among Muslims; he supported their outrage over the Khilafat issue rather than expressing them as his own. Note his Congress Presidential Address at Belgaum in 1924, arguing that communal disturbances were fomented by interested persons, that communities could live together only as friends and not under the coercion of the state, and that swaraj depended on unity and social justice; *ibid.* vol. II, part 2; 1922–9, 485–502.

there was no alternative, but may be supposed to have originated in a desire to standardize beliefs in a polyglot society, and not to have operated absolutely, in isolation from non-legal considerations; while the Muslim conquests specifically implied a conflict of jurisdictions, for example in regard to the property of converts or the taxation of non-believers; any certainties of Islam were diluted, too, by internal heterodoxies and exchange with Indian cultures. In the conflict of codes, then, the British were accelerators rather than initiators. They disturbed India with doctrines of sovereignty, order, and the citizen-state; but at the same time they generally pursued the expedient of indirect control through existing institutions—from family law to Bengal zamindars. Their system of courts and procedures sought a single, objective authority, generalized through all levels of society, and yet admitted rules specific to social categories, albeit monitored by state and statute. They concentrated ever more upon the imposition of hermetic concepts, for example of rights, castes, and gender; but helped define Indian reactions by adherence to contradictory interpretations and concepts of nationality which European experience and the encounter with Asia both reinforced. On citizenship (or subject-hood) and race in particular, they gave confused messages. They advocated the former to the extent of insisting upon undivided sovereignty, on citizenship by place of birth, of the notion of the ‘British’, and ultimately on ideas of representative government and liberty. They followed the latter to the extent of insisting upon the separate tribes and religions of India, recognizing this disunity in law and administration, and justifying despotism as its political legacy. The same gap was marked by Hindu–Muslim conflict and the secular-religious divide.

The ambiguities were compounded by the (still-continuing) British preference for subjects over citizens. Perhaps because constitutional tradition (the sovereign parliament) gelled with essentialist notions of race, the rulers repeatedly argued with communalists and against secular nationalists, that a divided India needed special political institutions. The idea was so often linked with others about slowing down advance or reserving powers as to be wholly discredited by the 1920s, but its influence was none the less profound. It was apparent when Minto received the famous deputation of 1906, when representative opinion was sought between 1917 and 1919 or at the Round Table conferences, and when the Muslim League was effectively given a constitutional veto in 1940. A different but complementary animus against secular politics appeared too in the Meerut Conspiracy Case, the banning of socialist literature and parties, and the alliance of the state on the whole (as its economic interference increased) with property-owners against labour, and with businesses against trade unions. Most of all, the British regarded communal organization as ‘natural’ in India, and class, along with nationalism, as artificial;²⁵ and thus justified the separatist veto. As far as the British were concerned—though the process neither started nor finished with them—the Muslim case was parallel to but more fundamental than many other recreations of interest groups, such as feudal princes, landlords, peasant proprietors, and even the *badmash* elements, the hooligans, of the bazaar. No doubt such British ideas also reinforced the separation of class and communal

²⁵ This point is discussed in Robb, *Emergence*, ch. iii. The one ‘class’ the British might seem to have accepted was that of ‘untouchables’; but they were defined not in economic but in ‘caste’ or ‘non-caste’ terms, as a community. For the foregoing see also Peter Robb, ‘Ideas in agrarian history; some observations on the British and nineteenth-century Bihar’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 1, 1990.

elements in riots and other expressions of grievance,²⁶ but the potent mix was of 'natural' identities with the nation-as-state. It could not of itself ensure that communal parties flourished, but its influence was felt particularly upon the rhetoric and the organizing principles of political groups. Indeed, the British portrayal, repeated obsessively by colonial British writers, constituted much of the provenance of persistent ideas about Muslim identity in India, however much they would nowadays be dismissed as 'Orientalist'.²⁷

Much of the confusion concerned the concept of race, which is notoriously ambiguous in origin and character. Naturally there is a long history of efforts at determining the relationship between race, religion and the state. In Islam, one finds from the earliest times concepts both of citizenship (where the state is defined by its subjects and its material base in territory and taxation) and of 'race' or community (common-ness of characteristics and behaviour, the *umma* of believers and their *adab*, the authority of morality and culture).²⁸ In practice, 'race' tends to overlap with or qualify citizenship, and all states face some degree of difficulty with these definitions. If the British were not really on the side of 'modern' politics (as Attlee called them),²⁹ this was partly, of course, as a result of their self-interest in Indian division or their fear of disorder, but also because they were themselves influenced by theories of race and nationality. The Muslim conversion to a nationalism of territory was one of the many consequences of the long pressure from British views on states, subjects and sovereignty. But the eventual partition of India was also an attempt to reconcile logical opposites: to express the division of 'race' in territory, that is, to equate the state-of-citizens with the state-of-community.

It is worth returning to the colonialist arguments because they hold the key to the assessment of Ansari's dilemma. For present purposes, the main point was that history and culture had not produced 'nations' in India. Sir Alfred Lyall wrote:

In Asia there is no scope for examining the growth of institutions or the development of civil polity or the forming of nations; the famous men are all either able tyrants (in the Greek sense) or successful men of war; the type of civilization is uniform and stationary; the spirit of nationality, where it exists, is in its most elementary stage; the people of the great kingdoms known to history are an immense mixed multitude, broken up into tribal or religious groups, and united under one leadership by force or accident.

Hence—and because (on the evidence of Bernier) there was also little compact between ruler and ruled, and little respect for property or law, on the part of the Mughals—British rule was made possible and acceptable in India, its theoretical

²⁶ One need look no further than the various movements described in the early chapters of Hardy, *Muslims*, but see also Sandria B. Freitag, *Collective action and community: public arenas and the emergence of communalism in North India* (Berkeley, 1989), ch. ii. For insights into the complexity of communal identity, however, see Nita Kumar, *The artisans of Banaras: popular culture and identity 1880–1986* (Princeton, 1988).

²⁷ See above, n. 12; and also Robb, 'Ideas in agrarian history'.

²⁸ See Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral conduct and authority: the place of adab in South Asian Islam* (Berkeley, 1984). See also K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: economy and civilisation of the Indian Ocean region from the rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1990), chs. ii and iii; ideas from chs. i and viii-x on long-term change are also taken up briefly below; my thanks to the author for letting me read this before publication. On race see also Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The view from afar* (tr. J. Neugroschel and P. Hoss, Oxford, 1985), preface and ch. i, and *From honey to ashes* (tr. J. and D. Weightman; New York, 1973), ch. xviii.

²⁹ For example, Attlee's speech of 4 June 1935, *Parliamentary Debates*, H.C., vol. 32, col. 1824–8, on the necessary role of the Congress in the creation of 'modern India', and on political division along economic lines, its being 'in the modern world the natural development'.

character refined by a British critique of *anciens régimes*.³⁰ More broadly, Valentine Chirol, in a book which became almost as indispensable in the 1920s and 1930s as Lyall's had been before the First World War, blamed an Indian 'failure' ever to achieve nationhood upon the divisiveness of caste, the personal rather than territorial basis of law, and the persistence of the village community, now decayed—that is (relying on R. K. Mookerji), on the allegedly remarkable separation between state and society in ancient India. Chirol accepted that Islam offered a more unifying spirit, and that there were racial affinities between the Hindus and the bulk of Indian Muslims; but he explained Mughal decline in terms of the passive resistance offered to Muslim rule by a resilient Hinduism, a religious and social antagonism which was enflamed by the 'fanaticism' of Aurangzeb, and fuelled by the impoverishment and suffering of the bulk of the people under an insouciant despotism. These differences stood in the way of an Indian nation.³¹

Reinforcing this view was the assertion that the plea for political advance in British India was confined to a small number of educated urban-dwellers. The myth of the Indian village played a special part, depending as it did on the supposed discontinuity between it and the town or the wider world: the 'indirect influence of towns' was found to be 'practically imperceptible some twenty or thirty miles from even a large city'. And in those villages dwelt an uneducated, intelligent, contented population of agriculturists. In such circumstances, it was said, 'a united India, with its various races, castes, and creeds, is impossible'; there is 'no such thing as an Indian nation'. Thus British rule served the masses as well as the minorities. These clichés come from yet another commentator, S. J. Thomson, in 1913. The title of his book—*The silent India*—was itself emblematic of British assumptions; and, also typically, its general thesis was impervious to actual descriptions: the self-sufficient village contained a temple, a trader, and a 'gentleman's house', the villagers went on annual pilgrimages and paid taxes, officials knew them well, and the state sought recruits from amongst them for the police and army, as earlier states had also.³² There was a selective myopia which saw only 'modern' connexions and transactions.

The continued currency of such interpretations into the twentieth century is important because there were definite repercussions from just the elements described. The unmistakable message was that India was no nation, was politically divided and weak, *because her culture was so strong*. Paradoxically, though they believed in a perennial Muslim nation, this was just the argument of the Muslim separatists, even of Hindu chauvinists. Another publicist for such views was Reginald Craddock, Home Member of the Government of India under Hardinge and Chelmsford. In *The dilemma in India* (1929) he raised questions of broad importance for Indian politics, claiming:

An Indian Nation, if such be possible, has to be created before it can exist. It never existed in the past, and it does not exist now. Do we flatter ourselves that we have created it? If so, it is sheer flattery. There is no word for 'Indian' in any vernacular tongue; there is not even any word for 'India'. Nor is there any reason why there should be an Indian Nation.

³⁰ Sir Alfred Lyall, *The rise and expansion of the British dominion in India* (London, 1894; fifth edition 1910; rpr. 1919), 2–3 and 41–7. The European dimension of views of India is currently being reasserted by Javed Majeed, as in his 'Orientalism, Utilitarianism and British India', read at SOAS on 7 June 1990.

³¹ Sir Valentine Chirol, *India* (London, 1925; 4th impression 1930), 1–55.

³² S. J. Thomson, *The silent India: being tales and sketches of the masses* (Edinburgh and London, 1913) v-viii and 1–34.

The only bond or union among the races to be found there is that they have for the last century and a half been governed in common by a Foreign Power.

By this account 'Indian' was the same kind of misnomer, applied by the English, as the term 'European' when applied to the English (as it was in India). According to Craddock, India was merely, like Europe, a subcontinent within the vast single continent of Europe and Asia, whose peoples had 'roamed over the whole' in prehistoric times. Down the centuries nationalities had become localized, until Europe and India, for example, each contained well over twenty separate countries, divided by race and language. India looked like one country only if seen from the outside, from ignorance or distance. Craddock went on to assert that:

the principle which underlies the difficulty of the democratic union of divergent races is surely plain. Race divisions differ from all other class distinctions. When political parties consist of different racial entities, one race will dominate the other in a democratic combination by reason of its numerical superiority.

By this argument religious differences should have been more tractable; but 'in India the differences of religion are accentuated and exacerbated, because they are also in considerable degree differences of race... there is absolutely no parallel elsewhere to the basic antagonism that divides Hindus and Mahomedans'—a feeling then being *enhanced* (he said) by economic and political jealousies. Both the argument and its extension to religion, it may be noticed, also arise out of the doctrine of the sovereign parliament and its adversarial practices; they would not have followed so obviously from a constitution based on republican citizenship and consensus or compromise.

As Craddock would have nothing to do with such generalizations as 'European', and also rejected any consideration of skin-colour as a basis for analysis, it is plain that by 'race' he meant 'national identity'. Such was the basis of his prejudice in the matter; it is a rhetorical device of great emotional power and practical consequences, as the evolving history of Europe and South Asia shows to this day. Judging from his account, Craddock did not think through the question of how far the Indo-European 'nations' had branched off from common forefathers, and how far they were continuing historical entities that had migrated over the regions before becoming settled in one place. His misleading conflation of 'race' with 'nation' or 'country' was intended to duck the issue; the term 'race' suggests something given, while avoiding any consideration of the original mechanism for separating out, say, the English from the French or the Bengalis from the Punjabis. It is interesting in this context that Craddock writes of the nation of England and not Britain. But obviously race, for a people as a whole over time, is by no means inviolate, unchanging or unambiguous, and, even if it were, no 'nation' is in reality composed of a single, exclusive race, on any objective criteria of ethnicity. Even in England the identity of the nation and indeed the characterization of the 'race' were clearly products of history, some of it recent and all of it continuing, and hence of institutions, ideas, and memories. Like all categories, those of race result, in short, from choices and generalization; just as we always have the question of what made or makes the 'English' a race, we can ask how far such pre-requisites or components exist among 'Indians'.³³

³³ Sir Reginald Craddock, *The dilemma in India* (London, 1929), 1–17 and *passim*. These ideas were predictable for many reasons: the experience of Italian and German unification or Greek, Irish

It is presumably unnecessary further to belabour the obvious connexion between these conclusions, and the ideas of Muslim community which influenced both British policy and Indian attitudes. If a quasi-ethnicity underlay Muslim politics, it thrived partly because the intellectual climate favoured it. Saiyid Ahmad Khan exactly anticipated Craddock when he wrote (in the *Pioneer* of 22 September 1893) that his study of J. S. Mill convinced him that representative government could only be applied where there was 'a tangible homogeneity . . . in . . . race, religion, social manners, customs, economic conditions, and political traditions of history'. This attitude is familiar as one explanation for the deepening of separatism among Muslim politicians. It is worth recording the extent to which it was commonplace.

And yet the unanimous rejection of such stereotypes by more recent writers leaves us in an anomalous position, the very one already described in Hasan's treatment of the life of Ansari. If communalism had to be created, and Muslim separatism developed, then our assumptions about the original condition of Muslims in India may be startlingly close to the old saws about lack of 'nationality' in Asia. With any primordialist theory, on the other hand, we will seem to be endorsing another aspect of the same discredited 'essentialism'. Either way, we need to face up to what it was that contemporary observers saw. Surely, for all the absurdities of the analysis, Saiyid Ahmad Khan and Craddock were right to diagnose fundamental differences between 'Muslims' and 'Hindus' as the basis (not the cause) of political discord. Today, we reject the expectation that all individuals in a group will conform, but not (in defiance of common sense) the very existence of norms short of a common humanity. Just as we readily find that diet—what the body takes in—may produce patterns of health and disease in particular populations, so we may agree that ideas and behaviour can be influenced for 'nations' as a whole by what the mind consumes. Thus people form distinct sub-sets, through experience, language and attitudes, and certain characteristics are associated with particular cultures or times. In regard to Indian Muslims, we have from British observers, amidst prejudice, considerable evidence of common identity, and from many recorded acts, too, clear confirmation that Muslims cared for religion. The portrait should not be dismissed merely because Europeans have tended to describe such fervour as peculiarly Islamic, or as illustrating irrationality and inferiority. Even the assertion that Muslims were 'fanatical', once shorn of this derogatory term, is a proper subject of investigation; it is not 'reductionist' to say so. Hence, though separatism was a process—feeling became better organized and more widespread—there is room for a qualified version of the 'two nations' theory: one still has to ask whether economic and religious interests had an equal chance of political viability among Muslims in India.

The choice which had to be made, in the twentieth century, was about which kinds of category would expand in function and become, as ultimately the idea

and Slav nationalism; the claims of social equity, by the later nineteenth century often thought achievable through collective restrictions on self-interest and not through Utilitarian individualism or the beneficent selfishness of the market, that is, through 'community', which raised anew the role of state interference and the relationship between state and people; and hence of course in a range of nineteenth-century thought, repeatedly discussed, not least in India. Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay noted, for example, that J. S. Mill disagreed with Comte on community and nationalism (see Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Europe reconsidered: perceptions of the west in nineteenth-century Bengal* (Delhi, 1988), especially pp. 84–5, 132–55 and 168–71); it would be rewarding to know still more of the dialogue between Western and Indian ideas on these and other matters, which produced the kinds of view represented by Craddock. Moreover, the debate continues. For a recent argument in favour of having a state divorced from ethnicity, but arising out of civil society, not ordering it, see D. L. Sheth, 'State, nation and ethnicity', *EPW*, 25 March 1989.

of community can, an idea of the nation. The British encouraged redefinitions; they encouraged the question—is a nation a place or a people? And, if it is a people, how was it determined—by race, by religion, by culture, by residence, by polity? In this case it was eventually defined at one level, as Pakistan, by border commissions significantly enough: its supposed basis in race and self-determination inevitably delivered Jinnah a truncated territory. But questions remained: was Pakistan the nation of the people within its borders or of the South Asian Muslims? Had the quarrels been about power, producing a state for Muslims, or about religion, producing a Muslim state? Similar confusions exist elsewhere, for example over the status of the Republic of Ireland, of Roman Catholicism, and of the peoples of the North; what exactly is the Irish nation? Such questions were not quite answered, for Pakistan, even by the secession of Bangladesh, which still left unclear whether the definition of a new state either required or prevented demands that the place be Islamic too. Were its laws to cover all it contained, not only the Muslims and not only, if one admitted such a finite category, matters of religion? Again in modern times one finds how there can be many different notions of states, citizenship and jurisdiction. There is historical precedent for attitudes towards the South Asian diaspora for example. The issues are as old as the citizenship of Rome, or as Islam itself; the manifestations as diverse as Palmerston's gunboats or Lord Hardinge's protest over the treatment of Indians in South Africa. They help explain, for example, the extra-territorial claims of India in respect of Indians (or Hindus?) who are nationals of other countries, claims which offer another interesting complication of national with ethnic identity, with regard to the meaning of 'Indian' today. The identification of the nation with the territorial state is to that extent not yet complete. In emotional terms it is not complete yet in Britain; it comes nearer in the United States with the emphasis in its laws of nationality on the place of birth. What, similarly, is the standing of Pakistan towards Indian Muslims? For India, the question was hardly closed by the incorporation of the Hindu-majority state of Hyderabad, given the existence of India's huge Muslim population and control over Muslim-majority Kashmir; a taxing confusion over the nature of the Indian state and identity remains, in the continued claims for territory on the part of identified communities, whether in the reorganization of the states of the Union or in such disputes as those over Sikh-majority Punjab. Like its close relation, self-determination, the territoriality of community (distinct from the lands of families or the place of Hindus) is relatively new in South Asia as a predominant idea; repercussions of the change are still being felt. The founders of modern India did not try to tackle the issue: they accepted the nationality of place, and tried to make it blind to religion. This made the union vulnerable when place and religion (or culture) coincided.

III

The re-definition of community during the movements for the partition of India, thus represented first a politicization of religious allegiance, and secondly, an incomplete association of that group with a territory. But the process in no way disproved the prior existence of a broader religious community. What happened was a widening of that community, though never to the extent of encompassing all South Asian Muslims in a single, uniform category. By 'community' we understand a sense of identity based on common belief and practices rather than on affinity or kinship, notional and real, but we recognize

that in practice the identity was held to approximate to that of race. The identity 'Muslim' became more and more exclusive, making difficult any alliances on the basis of, say, occupation—as among officials, landlords, merchants or 'peasants'—and thereby also tending to unite Muslims as an effective political interest. And the unfolding of Muslim separatism did not comprise the mere appearance of polarities, but their acceptance for a time as the overriding political allegiance for a majority among Muslims. It is easy to explain this as a growing orthodoxy and association on the basis of worship, preaching, teaching, and other communication, amidst the major changes experienced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But was the development of Muslim separatism *merely* a matter of propaganda and popular mobilization, an extension of the religio-political concerns of élites who remained locked into an Islamic world-view? The argument of this essay is that it was not. Rhetoric and mobilization matter, but they must rest upon shared experience.³⁴ Any popular appeal succeeds as a dialogue between leadership and the mass: of course there are elements of education and influence from top to bottom, but they cannot build except from areas of common ground. Thus it is (for all the known divisions of Muslims by language, class and distance) that importance must be accorded also to social and political linkages, aspects of shared culture, and British impact even in the earlier nineteenth century. Muslim communalism was sometimes thwarted, its demands and hold developed, but it rested on an old sense of identity, formed in comparison with Hindus, and honed further even in the very early stages of British rule. What are the consequences of this argument?

First it undermines modernization theories. The difficulty with them is not that changes in ideas, political systems, communications or production did not have their effect, but that linear progress on the model of European history does not necessarily occur. Rather, the ideational space which people occupy is defined by physical, cultural, political and economic boundaries. It is possible to draw in 'regions' according to agricultural staples, modes of production, periods of time, parameters of thought, and so on, implying that there may be many modes of change. In the case of India, one might consider developments based on an ancient diversification of agriculture and experience of market forces alongside subsistence goals, or the interdependence and gradual convergence between settled people and nomads (tribals, pastoralists, dacoits), in both cases operating within the constraints of cultures, polities, and economic systems. Of course as borders change, so the configuration and content of identities alter: steamships, printing presses and empires transform the physical and political barriers which determine the units into which it is possible for people to divide. In the same way, within the realm of ideas, Tapan Raychaudhuri, writing of Bengali reactions to Western influence, adopted the useful notion of possible or acceptable intellectual positions being affected by the extremes (the limits of what it is possible to conceive), as for example when the 'middle ground' of Hindu sensibility was moved by a Hindu chauvinism that traced all 'Western' knowledge and technology to 'Hindu' origins—moved, that is, even for those who regarded such claims as ridiculous.³⁵ But (as this example also illustrates) such influences do not ensure that change must occur in a particular direction. The distinctions which have to be made are between

³⁴ For this reason Ansari's case parallels the point made by Hardy that the Muslim League and the Jamiat al-Ulama-i-Hind, though divided over Pakistan, were equally pro-Muslim (*Muslims*, 239–55).

³⁵ Raychaudhuri, *Europe reconsidered*, 1–13 and *passim*.

inherent, articulated and imposed categories. The British certainly mapped out groups during the nineteenth century and inflicted their understandings upon Indian society. Many were adopted by Indians. Put another way, the widening and generalizing of communities in the present century depended on a shifting distinction between private and public, which were central in British rule in India though not necessarily even dichotomous in Indian eyes. Yet 'modern' economic and political developments co-existed with other processes of ancient origin which were also now accelerating, processes concerned with the evolution of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, geographical, and historical identities. (Many of the problems of this and other regions of the world concern the extent to which the coincidence of these so-called 'modern' and 'ancient' changes is imperfect, and to which the contradictions remain unresolved.) Thus it is that one can trace at least two parallel processes of change: a more precise and uniform definition of religious identity, and its increasing hegemony among putative communities. A Muslim (or a Hindu) could become more certain in his religion, and also religion could come to influence a wider range of his attitudes and connexions. In this development it was the category itself which evolved: it was articulated internally as well as imposed from outside. In other words, the process of Muslim separatism was concerned with harnessing and modifying identity, developing the 'common culture', and not with creating it.

A reassessment of modernization thus implies, secondly, a new understanding of movements in Muslim society and thought. Heterodoxy and syncretism among Indian Muslims have tended to be seen—though everyone knows the explanation to be false—as a decline from or an elaboration of an original orthodoxy, rather as in the evolutionary tree (branching out from a single primary life-form) which was favoured by palaeontologists fifty years ago. The correct model is the one now being adopted in evolutionary theory as well: namely, a large number of primary points of origin, some branching out, and others disappearing, with a tendency towards coalescence around a smaller range of successful forms. In different families, communities and regions, Muslim conversion took a multitude of shapes. Some people held to 'pure' beliefs, and generally élites attempted to advance 'orthodoxy' as they saw it, religion ever being one of the levers of social control. But most converts accepted Islam in a context of various local (proto-Hindu) beliefs and customs—the equivalent of a large number of points of origin. Parallels between *bhakti* and Sufism are obvious examples of this co-existence.³⁶ Then over time, in many cases, as political systems and communications permitted, followers of such diverse forms of Islam became increasingly aware of what were regarded in South Asia as the Islamic 'norms'; texts, laws, communal worship, and various

³⁶ On such links and parallels, see Susan Bayly, *Saints, goddesses and kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900* (Cambridge, 1989), 41, 85–6, 94–6, 123, and more broadly ch. iii (on a South Indian Islam in a Hindu context). This book raises a number of important general points—for example, about different chronologies of conversion, and the appeal of 'sacred energy' rather than egalitarian teaching, both of which link religion with politics. Note, at p. 463, that "'high" religion never acquired a dominance over the autonomy of local belief and worship in the south' even in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, despite the influence of the colonial state. Moreover orthodoxy was less insisted on than orthopraxis—any increase in the former seems to be attributed to leadership—and (p. 459) 'At no time in the immediate pre-colonial period was there a clear and unambiguous process at work by which boundaries between different south Indian groups or "communities" were being irrevocably hardened.... All the same, significant differences in identity did exist' (emphasis added). On palaeontology see Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful life: the Burgess Shale and the nature of history* (London, 1990) in comparison with, say, John Tyler Bonner, *The evolution of complexity by means of natural selection* (Princeton, 1988). This reference does not mean to suggest that Gould's final conclusion (if I understand it), that the forerunner of modern vertebrates survived *by chance*, can be applied to the evolution of Muslim separatism.

reformist movements were obviously important forces for coalescence. Conversely, some people who associated with Muslims and accepted elements of Islam, reverted over time to stricter Hindu praxis. Such trends were at first tidal, but in recent centuries they became more and more progressive: despite some ecumenical tendencies, the religious species have generally been ranged more sharply into separate families (or communities), reinforced by education, preaching, organization and power. In part there has been a stronger tendency towards (and possibility for) solidarity among all co-believers—something more often overridden in the past by political and cultural disparities, and alliances across religious divides. Any such movement built, however, on an initial choice among groups of being, say, ‘Muslim’, as opposed to ‘non-Muslim’: the content of the identity changed, but a sense of difference was its bedrock. By contrast, the other way of looking at syncretism and segmentation in India has been to suppose that they somehow dissolved differences locally, *and* prevented supra-local cohesion, as suggested by Lyall and Chirol and Craddock and their predecessors, but equally by accounts of Muslim separatism which take as their starting-point an alternative community of region or class in which religion was immaterial. ‘Many Muslims and Hindus’, wrote Francis Robinson, ‘had more in common with each other than with their co-religionists’.³⁷ This is true but inconclusive in regard to the question ‘why political alignments based on religion should have developed’: such identifications existed, but did not override the religious identities.

How then do we interpret ‘community’? As reality is plural—individual, yet defined in relation to others, to what each is not—it follows that the limits of categories must be at some point arbitrary. In practice, ‘community’, like any category, represents a number of gradations or variations around a core, and not something homogeneous within fixed borders. There is a strong probability that communities will overlap at the margins, or for smaller communities to be subsumed within larger. But there is also a tendency for any community to be equated with the whole and with norms (exemplified, for instance, in the Russian word *mir*)³⁸ and contrasted with outsiders and deviants, and thus to represent processes of inclusion and exclusion. What was the basis of such identities? Even in a diffuse and ambiguous category such as ‘Hindu’ or ‘caste’, where the terms themselves are most clearly imposed by Europeans, there is a certain sense in which the category must have existed without being named, as a recognizable body of either ideas or practice, and through their long transmission over time. We come to the crux of the matter. There was certainly a notion of ‘Hindu’, less embracing than that of ‘Man’, and yet more than a mere amalgam of local identities. It follows that the category ‘Muslim’ too must have contained some common denominators, a degree of self-consciousness, in being always perceived in South Asia (along with outcastes and tribals) as identifiably ‘other’, not ‘Hindu’, however eclectic its practice and belief. Wherein lies this ‘objective harmonization’? At any moment it comprises a continuously unfolding legacy of past instrumentalities and environments in the form of shared culture and collective memory.

Two further points may be made. First, groups differ in kind and function at different places or times. Thus one may presume an ebb and flow in the refinement of operative distinctions—regional or linguistic, between Brahman and Sudra, and so on—whereby a proto- or ur-category ‘Hindu’, say, would be confined in a particular space and time, while its content remained far from

³⁷ Robinson, *Separatism*, 33. Compare above n. 10.

³⁸ I owe to Maureen Perrie and Madhavan Palat this example of a word capable of meaning ‘community’, ‘world’ and ‘peace’.

fixed or general; awareness of its social and geographical limits also would have differed greatly from place to place, according to experience and knowledge (for example between a sea-trader of western or southern India and a peasant of the north). More than this, it may be (as so often claimed) that India is a special case in its plurality, and that, there, 'other-ness' has been notably internalized, as caste and community, which are as much incorporating as distinguishing in effect. There were and are regional divisions which correspond to geographical area, but in addition, differences have long had to coexist in the one place and within a single system, or at least in intermixed contiguity. Hence, in each area, there may be separate dwelling areas in villages or distinct occupations for different castes and communities, but until the advent of Pakistan, broad difference of this kind had seldom been expressed in a regional divide on a territorial basis; there was little attempt at apartheid, to ensure that the 'other' was 'somewhere else'. This degree of proximity of communities is quite unusual. It was experienced to some extent in early and medieval Britain, but not again until recent times. It may have made Indians inherently aware of difference, an awareness which Hindu and Muslim politicians could not help but exploit.

Secondly, and especially important, choices of identity (which are anyway not immutable) also need not be exclusive. But then, if each individual inevitably belongs to more than one group at a time, much of the argument against larger identities in early India falls down. Indians, Craddock concluded, 'may champion the East against the West, but no true Indian nationhood is involved in this championship'. Why not? The fact that the argument is tautological is betrayed by the need to slip in at the last moment a concept of 'true' nationhood, and then (when considering the Muslims) by the awkwardness of having to express the religious divide as being largely rooted in race. But surely it is only this insistence that race is exclusive, and this conflation of race, nation and community, which obscure the common experiences of Indian Islam (or of Hinduism) and their role in subsequent polarization.

IV

The argument then is first that there are always multiple levels or degrees of identity and 'other-ness', but also on the other hand that there may be recognitions of larger, competing categories, as in the Crusaders' Europe against Islam, or Indian Muslims against the Hindus. Secondly, at all levels, other identities help define one's own, and hence to a varying extent categories tend to be believed to be exclusive and monolithic. This is particularly true of the 'other', but also of the self. The balance between the levels of these overlapping identities, and their effectiveness, vary over time. The balance is a measure of the respective weight of relative and absolute values, and it is affected by political realities, because identities are matters of choice, for societies and sometimes individuals. One might compare Akbar's India with Aurangzeb's, or consider the efforts in the United States until very recently to incorporate many identities under one, English-using American way. Thus the story of Muslim communalism, and of this essay, is in the end one of comparing the strength and pervasiveness of religious and other identities.³⁹

³⁹ It is this emphasis on relative pervasiveness which makes the argument of this paper complementary to rather than contradictory of the very valuable studies appearing on peasant and low-caste consciousness, as by Shahid Amin, 'Gandhi as Mahatma' and Gautam Bhadra, 'The mentality of subalternity', in Guha, *Subaltern studies*, III and VI, or Gyan Prakash, 'Reproducing inequality: spirit cults and labor relations in colonial eastern India', *Modern Asian Studies*, 20, 2, (1986).

In contradiction of this relativist approach to ideology and identity, we still face that which Jacob Burckhardt rejected in the nineteenth century: a vulgar confidence—now renewed—in progress and the perfectability of man. The conclusions offered here are not teleological; they are merely reinforced by present-day perspectives on fundamentalist nationalism or religion which are far from encouraging.⁴⁰ Pessimistic at some parallel tendencies, Burckhardt expressed a preference for insight over facts, and for immaterial subjects (say, the nature of civilizations) for which 'facts' cannot be obtained, or would be inadequate. He wrote in his London diary, of art, that it 'never spared itself exertion, but the effort must alternate with inner reflection'. No weight of data could *prove* the nature of Muslim identity or British impact. But to reflect even on one small example may advance our appreciation of the ideas and possibilities which people faced. The purpose of the reflection, again according to Burckhardt, is to 'group' phenomena according to 'inner relations'. To remember this is not to accept his judgements, for example of Islam, though there may be something to be said, after the present discussion, for his view of the strength of the Prophet as a 'radical simplifier' and of the power of Islam as resting on its doctrines. Neither should one ignore Ranke's or Huizinga's challenge to this historical approach, and certainly not the severe limitations of generalized concepts and formulae. But some subjects can be approached only by analysis of 'inner relations' across a range of contextual factors, a method appropriate for producing small answers rather than grand theories.⁴¹

This essay has tried to distinguish the various elements which went into Muslim separatism in India, giving as much weight to continuities as to change, to the past as to the present, and to the people as a whole as to leadership alone. At a fundamental level, for Muslims, the means evolved but the end did not. It was endorsed by all Muslims in politics—not by a minority of politicians, notably Communists, who happened to be Muslim, but by all who, though otherwise very different, conceived of a distinct Muslim political interest: Indian Wahhabis and Saiyid Ahmad Khan; the Muslim League and the Deobandi ulama in the 1940s. From the later nineteenth century, though many leading Muslims endorsed modernization in a pragmatic response to what they perceived as British power, they demonstrated in doing so, paradoxically, that they did not believe in it. As seen even with Ansari, they consistently enunciated Muslim political interests, to which any acquiescence in infidel rule was subject. The social profile of many political organizations was somewhat similar; fledgling Communists, peasants-and-workers groups, and separatist religious parties often consisted to an equal degree of an intelligentsia in search of mass support. Moreover, both the leaders and the followers of such parties could overlap, in the way, for example, that supporters of Hindu parties such as Lajpat Rai or Malaviya moved in and out of the highest reaches of the Congress. Hence to explain allegiances and the ascendancy of one party over another, we needed after all to admit that people rallied to religion (or to nationalism) only when they already recognized themselves as belonging together in that camp. More than this, the resistance of one group to another,

⁴⁰ This essay does not take up the appropriateness of secularity for South Asia, which nowadays is questioned—see Subrata Mitra, 'The limits of accommodation: Nehru, religion and the state in India', *South Asia Research*, 9, 2, 1989—and if it had it would have concluded that secularism may be like democracy, the worst possibility except for all the others.

⁴¹ Alexander Dru (ed. and tr.) *The letters of Jacob Burckhardt* (London, 1955), 191 and *passim*; and also Burckhardt, *Judgements on history and historians* (tr. Harry Zohn with an introduction by H. R. Trevor-Roper; London, 1959), for example pp. 61–6; and see Carlo Antoni, *From history to sociology* (tr. Hayden V. White; London, 1962), ch. v.

whether in the nineteenth century or the twentieth, must be taken as indicating a 'critical mass' of stable identity: a people so overwhelmed by a challenge as to be assimilated or dispersed will not mount a response in reform or protection of themselves. It follows that there was already a 'Muslim' constituency to which separatists and secularists alike had to appeal.

A further paper will be needed to explore the origins of this constituency; the purpose here has been to insist upon its existence. It will be necessary to examine the continuing instruments of identity, in belief and practice, and in communications (education, print, roads), actual movements (pilgrimage, trade and so on), and brokerage (various agents for the transmission of ideas), all of which changed with time but continually contributed to the shared but fluid memories of the group. It will be necessary, too, to consider the early impact upon such community of British rule, the advent of which provoked reactions out of *difference* and helped harden the outlines of community. On the basis of such an understanding, the strength of twentieth-century communalism should then remind us not of missed chances for Indian unity, but of the political importance of ideas, for all the efforts to wish them away, in mechanistic, structural or materialist explanations. Craddock and a majority of more recent writers have been reluctant, it seems, to concede religion as a force in its own right, equal if not superior in strength to that of self-interest. The decline of Christianity and the rise of Western materialism thus infected apologists of the raj and 'modern' scholars alike. No doubt there is, as Foucault and his successors claim, a close relationship between power and perception. But this determinism does not provide a complete explanation for any historical process. Ideas are an independent variable. They appear in addition to consumerist aspirations in Eastern Europe today, and surround us in the renewed confrontation between Islam and the West. They linger in societies after their political backing is lost (or they arrive in advance), so that at any one time they also compete amongst themselves and with political realities.⁴²

⁴² Despite the acceptance of government and institutional influence in politics (above, n. 16), this aligns with Ranajit Guha ('Dominance without hegemony and its historiography', *Subaltern studies*, vi) in some of his criticism of Anil Seal and David Washbrook. But the two positions seem partly compatible. There is common culture, whatever the vitality of common elements within groups, only in a limited sense: ideas, as collective memory, form part of an environment in which all identity and behaviour are *contingent*, and even protest against such norms is often forced into the frame of what it opposes, thus reflecting or even perpetuating them: there is no anti-caste movement without caste, no counter-culture without dominant culture. But tracing an Indian (Hindu?) idiom—authority, subservience and protest and *danda*, *dharma*, *bhakti*—should not imply that forms or their content remained constant over time; they are continually reinterpreted or reinvented, and no single version (dominant, subordinate, Indian, British) should be regarded as particularly 'real'. Identities too have more than one origin and path of development, and are influenced by institutions as well as ideas. Guha admits (p. 255) that the recognition of belonging to 'one's own country' (a specialized identity) has to be *achieved*; it follows that anti-colonialism too can be understood in comparison with colonialism, whose forms and structures it may commandeer. Thus, as Guha suggests, Washbrook offers a false choice (opposed in the very concept of this paper, as in my original review of *The emergence of provincial politics*; Cambridge, 1976) when he claims that, in political history, 'contemporary processes' are more interesting than 'ideational antecedents' (even supposing they can be distinguished, or the former can exclude ideas). But thus Guha also makes a false dichotomy: between the Indian and the British history of India. There are more than two positions or schools. One may argue for characteristic or persistent 'Indian' views, but here Guha's position seems excessively essentialist and ahistorical. British and Indian history are at once distinct and continuous, and the elements of thought each culture has borrowed from the other are too complex merely to be cited as evidence of oppression. Guha rejects the 'appropriation' of Indian by British history (ever since James Mill), but, at least since Mill, demonstrably a *part of each is a 'portion' of the other*. This does not deny the value of Indian history for and by Indians—or Bengali(s), not at all the same!—see Ranajit Guha, *An Indian historiography of India: a nineteenth-century agenda and its implications* (Calcutta, 1988).