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Perception of Islam in Indian Nationalist Thought

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by

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Glossary

ahimsa	literally non-harming, absence of a desire to harm a living being, non-violence
bhakti	devotion, one of the most effective ways of knowing god
caliph	formerly (the title given to) a spiritual leader of Islam regarded as a successor of the Prophet Mohammed
dar ul Islam	the land of God, or the polity where Islam reigns supreme
dar ul harb	the land of infidels, the land or polity which should be subjugated by Islam
dharma	duty, implies sacred moral law in Hinduism
fakir	Muslim ascetic
haj	Muslim pilgrimage to the holy cities of Mecca and Medina
hartal	cessation of work as an expression of popular protest against the establishment
ijtihad	exerting oneself, the use of reasoning in Islamic law
jihad	Muslim holy war, a fervent crusade
jizya	religious tax imposed on non-Muslims by Muslim rulers in India
kafir	unbeliever, an infidel (offensive)
karma	action, law of moral retribution
karmayoga	self-less action
khilafat	anti-British agitation led by Gandhi in India after the Treaty of Sèvres, 1920
Mahabharata	Hindu epic on two feuding families Kauravas and Pandavas
mandir	Hindu temple
masjid	mosque

mlecchha	unclean, a derogatory Hindu interpretation of a Muslim (offensive)
Ramarajya	the state governed by Lord Ram, kingdom of god on earth
satya	truth, for Gandhi the basis of all life
satyagraha	insistence on truth, non-violent resistance
sharia	the body of Islamic religious law
shia	the branch of Islam, or a collective name for its adherent sects
sunnah	the traditional root of Muslim law, based on biographical stories about Mohammed, constituting a secondary source of revelation to that which is written down in the Quran
suddhi	the process of reconverting people back to Hindu faith
sunni	one of the two main branches of Islam, accepting the authority of the sunna
swadeshi	economic self-sufficiency
swaraj	self rule, individual or collective autonomy
ulema	Muslim theologian
untouchables	those not belonging to the four tier caste hierarchy in Hinduism: people so low as to be placed outside the pale of normal physical contact
Upanishads	Hindu sacred scriptures, concerned with the significance of soul
Veda	knowledge, any one of, or all four ancient holy books of the Aryans / Hindus
Vedanta	a system of Hindu philosophy based on the Vedas
yabana	refers to Greeks, but a Hindu derogatory term for Muslims

Introduction

Chapter I

The past matters to nations, for nationalism is itself a product of history (as well as folklore, traditions, common beliefs, experiences and aspirations).¹

- David Thomson

1.1. Introduction

Although Muslims have been in India for almost nine hundred years, and were a significant political force for nearly seven hundred years, it is a striking fact of Indian political life that the majority community of Hindus has had considerable difficulty coming to terms with them. Although this is not true of all Hindus it is true of a substantial majority of them. And although the feeling does not obtain with equal degree of intensity in all parts of India, it is certainly present in most. The public debate surrounding the destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the increasing communalist rhetoric in India during the last few decades all provide ample evidence of this. The Hindu difficulty in coming to terms with Muslims seems to be directed, first at the Muslim rule in India and secondly at Islam as a religion. This is *prima facie* most surprising.

Muslims were not the only community to rule over India. The British did the same and yet they do not seem to attract the same degree of hostility. In fact, there is hardly a period in Indian history when it has not been invaded by outsiders. True,

¹ David Thomson, *The Aims of History: Values of the Historical Attitude*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1969, p. 12.

Hindus resented this but over time they came to terms with the reality of foreign rule. The case of Muslim rule is quite different. Even nearly three hundred years after it ended it continues to arouse strong animosity. The Hindu response to Islam as a religion is equally puzzling. By and large Hindus have a good record of religious tolerance and they have come to terms with a vast variety of sects within their own fold as well as with other religions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and others. Buddhism in fact has been the most threatening religion for Hinduism and yet the Hindus had no difficulty coming to terms with it. The case of Islam therefore is puzzling. As a religion it does not seem to be very different from Judaism and Christianity, and yet it evokes sentiments that neither of the latter two does. My thesis is an attempt to make sense of this.

1.2. The Thesis

I suggest that part of the continuing resentment against both the Muslim rule and Islam has something to do with the development of Indian nationalist thought. Both these animosities form an integral part of that tradition. Indeed it is difficult to think of many major Indian nationalist leaders who did not in one form or another share both. In this thesis, I take four great nationalist writers and show this to be the case. All four in their own different ways are great champions of tolerance and inter-religious understanding and even synthesis. Vivekananda talks about the common principles of all religions and seeks to go beyond all conventional religions in his search for a transcendental religion. Gandhi is known for his religious tolerance. Although Nehru did not have much interest in religion he was a secular minded

person who respected all religions more or less equally. And even Savarkar whose record against Islam leaves much to be desired was basically an atheist and did not take religions too seriously.

Since Vivekananda, Gandhi, Nehru and Savarkar are the ablest theorists of Indian nationalism and represent different forms of Indian nationalist thought, I examine their ideas. I take each of these four writers and ask two questions. First, what did they think of Muslim rule? And second, what is their assessment of Islam? Not all four writers gave equal importance to these two questions. Some were more interested in one than in the other. However, none ignored these two questions altogether. My concern in exploring their answers is to examine how they all in their own different ways left behind a certain tradition which independent India inherited and partly explains the continuing unease both about Muslim rule and Islam.

Unlike other writers in this study Vivekananda did not focus his attention on Muslim rule but Islam. He was not a historian and thus did not engage in a detailed study of India's Muslim past. While making a comparison between both Islam and Hinduism and evaluating the former's record, Vivekananda painted a grim picture for the Hindus. Indeed he was apprehensive of a deep and intense future clash between Hindus and Muslims. He argued that Hindus could withstand any future onslaught by Muslims only if they consolidated themselves, by borrowing some of the ideas and practices of the latter. Though his plea for a union of the mind of *Vedanta* and body of Islam at one level transcended the boundaries of conventional Hinduism and Islam, it nonetheless aimed to curtail the influence of Islam. Inspired

by Vivekananda, the extremist nationalist discourse throughout the first two decades of twentieth century was fundamentally opposed to Islam. In fact, Gandhi, Nehru and Savarkar were all full of praise for Vivekananda for his message of Vedanta and unification of all the communities in the Hindu pantheon. For analytical convenience I characterise Vivekananda as a “religious reformer”.

Gandhi’s attitude to religion is well known. He considered his own and others’ religions sacred. He was a devout Hindu who emphasised such crucial principles as non-violence, tolerance, fellow-feeling and universal moral principles. Gandhi was aware of both pleasant and painful episodes of Indian history during Muslim rule. But he refrained from making any generalisation. For instance, he suggested that the atrocities and reprehensible exploits committed by Muslims against Hindus were a series of mindless acts committed by a section of the community or an individual. Again these senseless actions were undertaken by an individual or a group who were spiritually and morally undeveloped. The substance of his argument was that a community cannot and should not be made responsible for the atrocities committed by some of its members or an individual who happened to belong to it by an accident of birth. His perception of India under Muslim rule, therefore, can be interpreted as a mammoth effort to brush all unpleasant episodes under the carpet. Gandhi’s perception of continuous Hindu-Muslim synthesis is also suspect, for he tried to explain that synthesis not in neutral terms but in the framework of Hindu benevolence and inclusivism. Moreover, Gandhi’s overwhelming and overt Hindu view of life alienated Muslims. Indeed, some Muslims suspected Gandhi of Hinduising the Indian polity. As one critic puts it,

Gandhi 'frightened away Muslims' with his Hindu patronising attitude.² For the purpose of our discussion I identify Gandhi as a "religious synthesiser".

Unlike Vivekananda, Gandhi and Savarkar, Nehru was considerably less concerned with the religious dimension of Indian history during Muslim rule. Culture mattered to him more than religion. He considered religion and religious sentiments narrow, and religious conflicts petty. An enthusiastic historian, Nehru had, however, a selective view of history. He was conscious of the fact that Muslim rule in India was not entirely a benevolent one. He was also aware that gross atrocities were committed by Muslims against Hindus during this period. However, Nehru felt that in order to achieve the targeted goal of secularism - in the future Indian nation - these unpleasant episodes were best forgotten. Therefore, he deliberately ignored those disturbing events in India's Muslim past which were potentially damaging to Hindu-Muslim unity and secularism. Even on those occasions when he realised that Muslim rulers were blatantly atrocious he tried to balance it by citing similar examples of Hindu brutality. Though such arguments had a practical aspect they were too weak to build Hindu confidence in Muslims. Moreover, Nehru's secularist agenda is not entirely convincing. As we shall see, in the course of our discussion, he was not completely free of Hindu bias. I would therefore term him a "soft secularist", for the purpose of our discussion.

It is a commonly held assumption that Savarkar was an uncompromising Hindu nationalist. He has also been labeled a Hindu fascist intent on unleashing a

² For a stimulating discussion, see Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, pp. 34-70.

pogrom against the non-Hindu minorities of India. True, unlike other nationalist thinkers Savarkar regarded Hindu-Muslim synthesis in the religious and cultural realm as an impossible undertaking and any prospect of their peaceful cohabitation in future as unreal. However, Savarkar developed this attitude at a much later stage in his career, i.e. in the 1930s, when Muslim demand for a separate polity gained momentum. For example, while Savarkar's early works concerned strategies to overthrow British colonialism in India, he afterwards applied the same argument against the Muslims. At the beginning of his revolutionary political career Savarkar argued that the first wave of organised nationalists intent upon eliminating the British colonialism were from both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds. These nationalists not only forged a common coalition but were united by a shared vision. Savarkar's comrades-in-arms in his own formative combat against British colonialism were Christians, Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Sikhs.

The notion that Savarkar was prejudiced against all the non-Hindu religious communities is deeply flawed. His disparaging view of Muslims and Islam was largely a product of Muslim resurgence in the political process. The cultural environment of Maharashtra, which was anti-Muslim in nature, also contributed to Savarkar's discourse. Maharashtra constituted the political base of Hindu Mahasabha. In Maharashtra, Savarkar found a ready and receptive audience and this was one of the factors that facilitated his anti-Muslim discourse. Like other thinkers in this study, Savarkar too was apprehensive of Muslim political ambitions and designs. He suspected that Muslims would declare themselves the only legitimate successor of the British following the end of colonialism. This led him to engage in a

diatribe against Muslims and Islam from the Hindu Mahasabha platform, with the intended objective of unifying Hindus as a political force. Savarkar was an “informed Hindu chauvinist”. From the 1930s onwards, when the Muslim demand for a separate homeland gained momentum and the Muslims consolidated themselves as a major political force, Savarkar became desperate to curb their influence. Being the undisputed supreme leader of Hindu Mahasabha, and the most prominent ideologue of the Hindu right at the time, the onus was on Savarkar to counter this development. Therefore, owing to his own disparaging view of Muslim rule and his political alignment, Savarkar was naturally engaged in an anti-Muslim discourse. In Savarkar’s view, the easiest and the best possible option available to the nation to curb separatism was to strengthen the position of the majority community. By making a selective use of the history of Muslim rule in India and by highlighting its negative side he tried to forge a common political bond between the Hindus.

Savarkar was a keen strategic nationalist who devoted considerable energy and attention to the role of ethno-religious politics in the process of nation-building at a time when Muslims were rapidly moving towards the formation of a separate nation. Savarkar’s belief that Hindus were the original inhabitants of India and therefore its sole legitimate custodians was threatened by the Muslim political aspiration. Savarkar was also incensed by the fact that though Hindus constituted the majority they were accorded the worst kind of treatment under Muslim rule which was also foreign in origin. He feared a similar hegemony by Muslims in the future political process of India and called upon the majority Hindus to stand on guard. Furthermore, Savarkar’s reading of the history of Muslim rule in India, which was

informed by both British historiography and the selective oral historical memory, led him to believe that Muslims cannot be trusted, and that their aggressive religion cannot fit into the broader Indian way of life.

Though as a non-Congress political leader Savarkar was marginalised his message had an all India appeal.³ The rise of Hindu nationalism has affected the whole nation and there is a renewed interest in the history of Muslim rule and place of Islam in India. While many Indians venture to make sense of the history of Muslim rule and the place of Islam in the overall social, religious, cultural and political process of the country Savarkar's discourse appears crucial. Incidentally, the contemporary Hindu nationalist thinking is almost in tandem with Savarkar's arguments on Muslim rule and Islam and has borrowed heavily from his discourse. The above mentioned factors have made it imperative that we undertake a study of Savarkar's discourse in order to assess the problem from all possible angles.

1.3. The genealogy of the “them” and “us”: Social cleavages between Hindus and Muslims

Having shown that all these four writers took a rather dim view of Muslim rule and felt uneasy in different degrees with Islam as a religion, I ask the obvious question as to why they did so. As for their low assessment of Muslim rule one important part of the answer consists in the way in which British historians wrote about that period. The British obviously had an interest in legitimising their rule, and that involved suggesting that their rule was better than that of the Muslims and that in fact they

³ Although the political atmosphere in the years preceding independence was dominated by the Congress party, Savarkar's Hindu Mahasabha was also taken seriously throughout the country.

were in some sense the liberators of the Hindus. Apart from this political motivation there was also a deeper assumption which British historians shared. Many of them were products of the liberal tradition and approached India's past in broadly the same framework as they did their own. Just as they had concluded that European history started wonderfully well with the Greeks and Romans and then passed through the dark Catholic Ages and eventually threw up the renaissance marking the beginning of modernity, they approached India with similar assumptions. Many of them admired classical Hindu civilisation and considered it in many ways comparable to classical Greek civilisation. Muslim rule was seen to parallel the dark Catholic Ages and that obviously shaped their interpretation of whom the Muslims were and what they did.

Both their unarticulated ideological assumptions and their political bias shaped the thought of many a British historian and led to a tradition of thought in which Muslim rule was systematically represented as dark and tyrannical. Some thought that it was at least a little better than the traditional Hindu rule, but even they were convinced that on the whole it was brutal and oppressive and represented a period of darkness. This interpretation of the Muslim past became quite fashionable in India. It was championed by the ablest historians and was propagated through text books, schools and universities. Indian leaders could have easily questioned this as some were tempted to do. They realised that the British had an interest in representing Muslim rule in a certain way and were naturally suspicious of the standard interpretation. However they encountered the obvious difficulty. Traditionally Hindu writers had not thought of history as a significant discipline and

therefore there was very few impartial historical accounts of Muslim rule provided by Hindu historians. There were all kinds of folk memories and legends, but they were not enough to provide a systematic understanding of Muslim rule which Hindu nationalist leaders could have used to counter the influence of the competing British interpretation.

I therefore suggest that British historiography and the absence of checks coming from within Hindu historiography are partly responsible for the Hindu nationalist view of Muslim rule. Although this is an important explanation it is not however the only one. Traditional historical memories of the Hindus passed on from generation to generation tended to contain stories of early Muslim atrocities and therefore by and large represented the Muslim rule in a dark light. In other words, the British historiography fitted in with certain selective portions of Hindu historical memories. If the historical memories had been quite different then British historiography would not have acquired this degree of hold. Since the traditional Hindu understanding of Muslim rule was hostile the British interpretation seemed to reinforce what the Hindus thought they had always known.

So far as the Hindu assessment of Islam as a religion is concerned the story is more complex. The question here was not of trying to understand a period long dead but rather to understand the religion that was a part of their daily social and political reality. Many lower caste Hindus thought rather well of Islam, especially its ideas of equality and community. The reactions amongst the high caste Hindus were more ambiguous. Some were drawn by parts of it but most were disappointed by its lack of

systematic theology, its militancy and intolerance. Among the higher castes in particular, the attitude to Islam was coloured by the way in which Islam impinged upon their interests. If one looks at the four writers under consideration, one can see a wide variety of responses to Islam as a religion. Vivekananda thought well of some aspects of Islam but not of others and overall he thought that it was a much inferior religion to Hinduism. Gandhi had very little to say about Islam as a religion but was simply concerned to show that Hinduism was much more catholic, universal and tolerant and hence by implication superior to Islam. Savarkar's attitude was broadly similar. Nehru was much more appreciative of Islam as a religion and its great values. However he too thought that Islam was marked by intolerance, militancy and violence.

One crucial fact that one needs to bear in mind is that although these writers maintained a broadly similar disparaging outlook towards the history of Muslim rule and Islam they sometimes arrived at this conclusion independently of each other. Even the audience they targeted to disseminate their ideas of Hindu-Muslim unity or the seeming incompatibility of Hinduism and Islam differed greatly from each other. Since the period they dominated can roughly be divided in a chronological order, one would expect that some of them were at least influenced by their predecessors' ideas. An exploration of these writers works reveals that though there existed such intellectual borrowing or dependence it was not very profound. Instead, these writers pursued the question of Muslim rule and the place of Islam in India in their own set frameworks. Their quest for an answer to the above question, of course, was influenced by several different factors. A study of their writings as a whole is a major

exercise in understanding why the history of Muslim rule mattered to them, why they maintained a disparaging view of it, and limited extent to which they tried to come to terms with it. An assessment and interrogation of their discourse might also help us comprehend the continuing uneasy Hindu-Muslim relationship at the present day.

Furthermore, even though there was a consensus among the nationalist thinkers that Muslim rule was bad and Islam incompatible with the majority religion and way of life, they were also aware of the fact that they could not simply ignore Muslims. Confronted by these realities, their concern for the future of India led these thinkers to look for commonalities between Hindus and Muslims in the hope of establishing a future working relationship between the two communities. However, both Hindus and Muslims were difficult partners in this project. Both Vivekananda and Gandhi highlighted the common metaphysical beliefs and moral principles prevalent in Hinduism and Islam. But this exercise in bridge-building was acceptable only to the Hindus. By contrast, such spiritual amalgamation was entirely opposed by Muslims as their religion forbade any dilution of the original principles. Nehru was aware that the past is not an epilogue in India. He also believed, however, that the past is not always painful. Assessing the history of Muslim rule he identified areas such as customs, language, food, music and culture that allowed a corresponding common way of life between Hindus and Muslims. This common ground he thought could be best used to construct a broad-based set of principles that would govern the future Hindu-Muslim relationship. However, Hindus who had desecrated memorial sites and clung to a bitter and selective oral memory were not convinced by this cultural synthesis argument. Muslims on their part feared that this emphasis on

synthesis would deny them their rightful place in history. It was also flawed in the sense that the arguments for synthesis in the final analysis appeared to be designed to overwhelm non-Hindus with a Hindu-oriented cultural ethos and religious inclusivism. Like Nehru and Gandhi, Savarkar also searched for an answer to the 'Muslim question' in India. He, however, abandoned the 'myth making project' of Gandhi and Nehru. Since partition changed the religious profile of India very little Savarkar came to terms with the fact that Hindus and Muslims are condemned to live together. Savarkar's solution to this problem, however, was far from sensible. He hastily bundled all Muslims into the category of converts from Hinduism, and demanded that they reconvert to Hinduism to show their allegiance to their 'Fatherland'.

Thanks to all this independent India inherited a very complex historical legacy. Most people shared a very dim view of Indian history and many were antipathetic to Islam as a religion and tended to dismiss it as intolerant, fanatical and backward. So long as these two attitudes persist India will remain incapable of developing a spirit of common citizenship amongst Hindus and Muslims. Hindus will continue to be haunted by very powerful historical memories and will not be able to come to terms with seven hundred years of their history. They will also remain deeply suspicious of Islam and will not be able to accord it the kind of respect a secular state ought to give. In my conclusion, therefore, I briefly suggest that unless the Hindus are able to come to terms with Muslim rule and take a more fair-minded view of it, and unless, secondly, they learn to enter into a dialogue with Islam and

appreciate both its strengths and weaknesses as well as those of their own religion, independent India has no future.

My concern in this thesis, however, is not to suggest what line of action independent India should follow, or to explore in any detail why a large body of Hindus have thought poorly of Muslim rule and Islam. My interest is primarily historical. I intend to explore what four major writers thought about the two questions that are central to my thesis viz. their assessment of Muslim rule and their assessment of Islam as a religion. This historical part forms my central concern. Although I suggest some explanation as to why these four and other writers took the views they did, the explanatory part is sketchy and tentative and requires further exploration.

1.4. The chapter scheme

The first chapter is the introduction. Chapter 2 examines Vivekananda's assessment of Islam. Perhaps Vivekananda was one of the earliest nationalist thinkers who made a penetrating inquiry into the nature and character of Islam and pondered whether Hindus or Indians could learn anything from it. Given the widespread appeal of Vivekananda, his reading of the history of Islam was crucial in influencing the mass perception. This chapter also explores how Vivekananda, who had a generally low opinion of Islam, used some of its principles in his conception of the *Vedantic* religion. It explores, finally how this religious concoction ultimately undermined Islam as a religion.

By the time Gandhi arrived on the Indian political scene from South Africa, Hindu-Muslim relations were in a very delicate position. Gandhi's arrival also coincided with Hindu-Muslim rivalry in the political power sharing arrangement. As a good strategist, Gandhi tried to forge an Hindu-Muslim alliance against the British, but soon realised its limitations owing to the deep-seated division between the two communities. Chapter 3 assesses how far Gandhi came to terms with Islam and highlights the nature and character of his theory of Hindu-Muslim unity. It also probes why that theory failed to convince both Hindus and Muslims.

Although often regarded as a quintessential secular nationalist, an examination of Nehru's writings reveals tensions and unease in his attitude towards Islam. Chapter 4 reevaluates Nehru's arguments on cultural synthesis during Muslim rule and his perception of Islam. A probing inquiry into Nehru's writings and an interrogation of his discourse points to the fact that he was not entirely comfortable with Islam. Though Nehru made a conscious effort to dissociate himself from the prevalent atmosphere that was overwhelmingly anti-Muslim he found himself caught up in it nevertheless. Indeed, his greatest contribution to the modern Indian nation i.e. secularism, I argue, also suffered as a result of all these factors.

In the years preceding Indian independence Savarkar stands out as an isolated figure speaking the language of a recalcitrant Hindu nationalist who would neither allow the partition nor grant equality to Muslims. Chapter 5 analyses Savarkar's virulent discourse against Muslim rule and Islam, the nature and character of the

Hindu Right and his conception of *Hindutva*. An assessment of Savarkar's perception of these three concepts provides an in-depth understanding of the contemporary Hindu attitude towards their Muslim counterparts.

The starting point of Chapter 6 is the assessment of the British interpretation of Muslim rule in India. The writings of Alexander Dow, James Mill, Mountstuart Elphinstone, Henry Elliot and John Dowson dominated both the British and Indian assessment of India's Muslim past. These historians nonetheless belonged or subscribed to different strands of British intellectual thought. This chapter explores the nature of their interpretations of Muslim rule and Islam and the probable colonial motives. It analyses the impact of these historians' construction of history on the colonial imagination and tries to determine whether the continuing and conflicting Hindu-Muslim relationship is entirely a colonial creation.

The final chapter (Chapter 7) seeks to bring together the leading themes and argument of this thesis. I briefly argue that a structurally biased legacy has affected the Hindu-Muslim relationship in post-independent India. I end by highlighting the role of many public and political institutions, and tentatively suggest how their intervention could promote better understanding between Hindus and Muslims.

Chapter II

Muslim rule and Islam in Vivekananda's narrative

I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible with *Vedanta* brain and Islam body.

- *Swami Vivekananda*

2.1. Introduction

The nationalist narrative on Indian history was not only confined to Muslim rule but delved on Islam as well. While a great majority of thinkers tried to seek out answers on Hindu-Muslim interaction in the socio-economic and political sphere during Muslim rule, a few others concentrated their attention on the theological basis of Islam and Hinduism. They were seeking answers to two related questions viz. the declining appeal of Hinduism among its followers and Hindu conversion to Islam. Though in their discourse these thinkers accepted the fact that Islam made inroads in non-Islamic societies in an overtly forceful manner, they nonetheless recognised that a section of the community often embraced it voluntarily. Since religion was the basis of conflict in India it was pertinent that they analyse and assess the fundamental principles of Hinduism and Islam to locate their conflict potential.

Besides, they suggested that any appraisal of Muslim rule is incomplete without addressing the religion of the rulers i.e. Islam. In other words, they relied

heavily on religion to explain the record of Muslim rule in India. Another significant interpretation made by the above nationalist thinkers was the recognition of the 'other' in two separate realms i.e. religion and politics. Furthermore, in their opinion, any attempt to synthesise the two communities should proceed from religion. It is the common and complimentary elements between various religions that helps develop a sense of mutual understanding. Equally important is the fact that any deviation from this complimentary aspect could be a source of great friction among those communities who firmly believe in the fundamentals of their religions. The main votaries of this approach were Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Pandit Madan Mohan Malavya and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. These thinkers went on to ask whether Islam and Hinduism contained any such shared understanding. They were influenced both by the British historiography on Muslim rule and the inherited oral tradition (Chapter 6). Since both British historiography and oral narrative portrayed a grim picture of Hindu-Muslim interaction, these thinkers wondered if it was due to religion and crucially, if bridges could be built between these two communities by assembling common points of departure. Needless to say this mode of interpretation had far reaching implications. By invoking the fundamentals of Hinduism and Islam and by way of a comparative analysis they either contributed towards a permanent interaction between the followers of these religions or helped seal any such possibility. Their assessment of Islam as a religion also meant their enquiry into the place of this religion in the future Indian nation. Similarly, their character sketch of Islam to a large extent determined the nature of Hindu response to Islam.

Among these thinkers Vivekananda was the ablest and provided a conscious and in-depth analysis of Hinduism and Islam. Vivekananda did not dispute either the colonial interpretation or the oral tradition that highlighted the subjection of Hindus under Muslim rule and the misery of the subjected community. However, he associated the fall of Hindus with that of Hinduism and the triumph of Muslims with that of Islam. He was intent on probing the factors that contributed to the fall of Hindus/Hinduism and the rise of Muslims/Islam. Also, like many contemporary nationalist theorists Vivekananda was of the opinion that nationalism is built on several key factors. These are spiritualism, sense of belonging, a sense of history, and intense self-pride as a community or nation. Besides, nationalism of a community or people according to Vivekananda is expressed mainly on the basis of their hold over a fixed territory, hold over political power, and their belief in a common religion. Religion however, he supposed, is the most potent of these three elements since it possessed the power to invoke undisputed allegiance. Vivekananda wondered why in spite of their territorial, spiritual and historical endowments Hindus did not exhibit a corresponding nationalist spirit or nationalism. To find answer to this question Vivekananda not only interrogated the Hindu spiritual and political faculty but made a searching enquiry as to whether Islam and Muslim rule had anything to do with this low moral. If the answer to this was affirmative he also searched for ways by which Hindus could gain their confidence as against Islam.

In Vivekananda's opinion both Islam and Muslim rule were invariably interlinked. He was also aware that there was very little one could do to alter the history of Muslim rule in India. The end of Muslim rule in Vivekananda's view did

not necessarily mean the decline of Muslim hegemony. Inspired by a strong, egalitarian and monolithic religious ideal the adherents of Islam would always pose a challenge to non-Muslims, considered Vivekananda. He also recognised the fact that though both Hindus and Muslims share very little in common in the metaphysical and cultural level and are incompatible, they would nonetheless share a future where they would be forced to live together. Thus Vivekananda was more concerned with the future Hindu-Muslim relationship than their past interaction. His discourse on Islam or Muslims, therefore, aimed at acquainting the Hindus with the former. The intent objective of this exercise was to familiarise Hindus on those aspects that was responsible for their downfall in the hands of Muslims and to educate them how they could withstand any possible future Islamic domination. True there exists a vast body of literature that succinctly highlights Vivekananda's contribution towards the creation of a new Hindu identity. However, that Vivekananda was equally responsible for the making of an image of Islam and consequently Muslims in India is rarely touched upon. Since Vivekananda described the weakness or strength of Hindus in relation to the 'other', it automatically helped create the formation of an identity of the 'other'.

While assessing history of Muslim rule and analysing the dynamics of Islam, Vivekananda was intent on exploring whether any conclusion can be drawn for the future India. In Vivekananda's view Hindus have a natural claim on the future Indian nation. However this prospect could never be materialised unless Hindus consolidated themselves and their religion in the light of the organising principles of Islam. Thus, it would appear, though Vivekananda had a negative attitude towards

Muslim rule and Islam, he nonetheless considered it crucial in the formation of future Hindu religious and political identity or self.

Vivekananda's narrative is crucial in the sense that his studies of Hinduism and Islam resulted in the production of a working ideology that helps establish dominance of *Vedantic* Hinduism over Islam and consequently Hindus over Muslims. In fact, his vision of future India was one of the most articulate that assured the triumph of *Vedantic* Hinduism. Given the fact that Vivekananda's teaching enjoys a widespread appeal in present day India, it will be an error not to assess his philosophical and historical interpretation of Islam in this thesis.

The aim of this chapter, as its title indicates, is to assess Vivekananda's views on Islam and Hinduism in a comparative framework and his contribution towards pluralism in India. Vivekananda was primarily a religious reformer and thinker. Hence the interpretation of his writings has mostly been in the religious realm. However, his ideas on religion had a much larger scope. Among other things, his religious ideology aimed at establishing a religio-political community, equivalent to a state, nation and even extending up to the formation of an united universal polity. He was of the opinion that religion is the basis of any polity. In the context of India, he envisioned a polity where *Vedantic* Hinduism would be the ideal. The obvious difficulty in this arrangement concerns the role of Islam or the fate of Muslims. The relevant question to ask here is why Vivekananda viewed Islam the way he did. Second, what were the determinants that shaped Vivekananda's attitude to this religion and its followers? Third, what possible role did he assign to this religion and

the religious community at large in his construction? In my analysis I have shown how Vivekananda tackled the Islamic question. The first section of the chapter outlines Vivekananda's views on Hinduism and Hindus. The second section evaluates Vivekananda's overall reaction to Islam. The third section highlights Vivekananda conceiving a new religio-political ideal based on *Vedanta* and Islam. Lastly, in the conclusion, I assess his attitude to Islam and its overall impact on the Hindu majority and the outcome.

2. 2. Vivekananda's analysis of Hinduism

In the nineteenth century Hindu reformist movement in India, Vivekananda occupies a central position. In a chronological order, he was last in the line of reformers to appear and made his exit early. However short-lived his physical life may be, his philosophy was extremely profound. Like his predecessors and contemporaries Vivekananda was greatly disturbed by the prevailing disunity in Hindu society and the misery of Hindus that accompanied it. As was the practice among the reformers of that era, he took it as his personal mission to salvage Hinduism and the Hindus from this supposed chaos.

Any movement or process, be it political or religious comes into being or attains an identity when it is contrasted against the 'other.' Simultaneously, the success or failure of this movement or process depends on the exact identification of the 'other.' Unfortunately in the religio-political realm the 'other' is invariably identified as the 'enemy'. Imagining the 'other' as the 'enemy' serves two purposes.

First, it unifies a fragmented community whose basis rests on race, religion, common ethnic root and language. Second, once this objective of unification is achieved the newly united community keeps alive the image of the 'other' in order to maintain its status quo and in some cases for an outward growth.

Perhaps Vivekananda was the only ideologue of nineteenth century Hindu reformist movement who fully understood and used this subtle paradigm for religious and political objectives. The Hindu society of his time was in a state of turmoil confronted by a multitude of maladies. Some of these were internal, but the rest external. According to Vivekananda, while practices like casteism and the prevalence of different sects within the broad framework of Hinduism, prevented this religion from assuming a collective and well-defined identity, seven hundred years of Islamic rule followed by Christian colonisation had its share in weakening and disintegrating Hindu society.

To Vivekananda, the consolidation of Hinduism from this general state of confusion required radical reorganisation which would ultimately shape the character of its followers. This new organisational framework in the first place, aimed at uniting the Hindus. Next, it intended to encompass people from other faiths. We may describe this organising principle of Vivekananda as *Vedanta*. Vivekananda's *Vedanta* contained both religious and political objectives. In the case of religion, Vivekananda used *Vedanta* as an unifying force to bring Hindus together. In the realm of politics he identified *Vedanta* as the basis for India's nationhood. Furthermore, as a religio-political force *Vedanta* aimed at checking the growth of

non-Hindu religions and their influence in India's political process. Though not fanatic, it did aim at eliminating the power and influence of non-Hindu forces through gradual neutralisation. If these were the primary objectives of *Vedanta*, its ultimate aim was to reinstate Hindu dominance in the form of benevolent hegemony over the entire Indian sub-continent.

The uniqueness of Vivekananda, compared to his predecessors and contemporaries is that firstly, he was the only reformer to emphasise Hindu regeneration in both the religious and political future of India. Secondly, he crystallised the essence of Hindu interest and located the exact identity of the 'other' as the enemy. And his prescription for the recovery of Hindu glory was radical. The Hindus, he stated, in order to regain their lost status, should look within and outside. He attacked Hindu polytheism as an instrument of Hindu decay and attributed Hindu powerlessness, even to defend themselves, to the lack of solidarity. Hinduism, to survive, he argued, should not only eliminate its caste rigidity but also allow people from other faiths to embrace it.

These novel ideas that Vivekananda tried to infuse into Hinduism were the outcome of his reflection on Islam¹ and to some extent on Christianity. Of these two religions Islam intrigued Vivekananda the most. Vivekananda's association with Islam combined both aversion and admiration. He analysed both the spiritual and political dimensions of Islam and concluded that both were interlinked and

¹ In his entire discourse Vivekananda never used the term Islam or Muslims. The followers of this religion to him were Mohammedans and the religion itself was Mohammedanism. This cannot be regarded as an omission because Vivekananda was using these two terms whose origins were rooted in India. However for the sake of convenience I would use Islam and Muslims in place of the original Mohammedanism and Mohammedans while interpreting Vivekananda's discourse.

inseparable. To put it slightly differently, in Vivekananda's assessment the history of Muslim political expansion was sanctioned by Islam and carried on its name. His aversion to Islam arose from seven hundred years of Islamic rule² during which Hindus were reduced to a subjugated and inferior community. Conversely, Vivekananda's admiration for Islam, though cautious, centred around the principles of unity existing in that religion since its inception. He also noticed a negative symbiotic relationship between the two religions. For example, all those age-old principles which Hinduism discarded or derided were almost invariably present in Islam. And, if, Hinduism did not entertain these principles, fearing social disunity, Islam used them as positive and progressive ideals.³

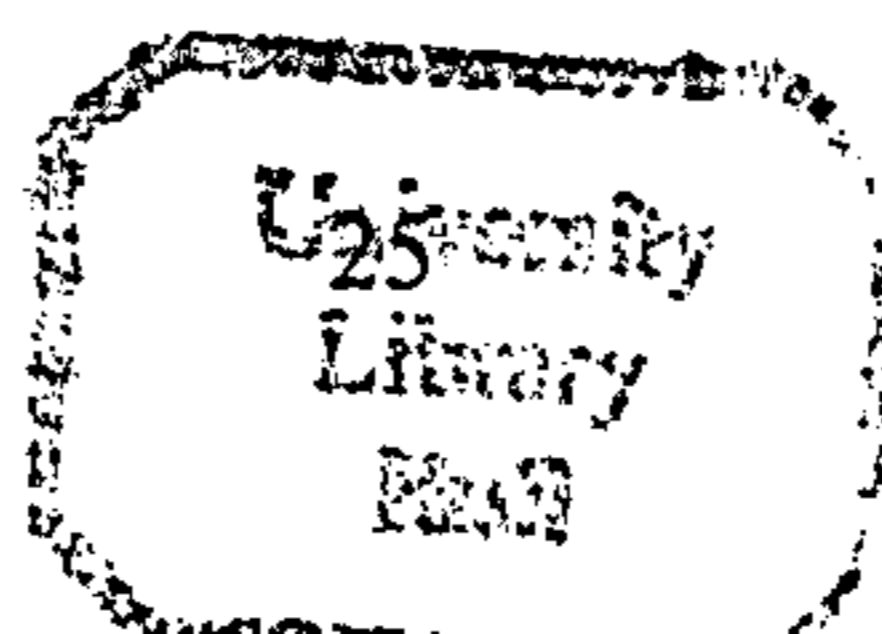
In more concrete terms, Vivekananda found the answer to Hindu disunity in Islam. He argued, those very factors which made Hinduism unpopular and rigid, helped make inroads for Islamic expansion in India.

Islam came as a message to the masses... The first message was equality... There is one religion love. No more question of race, colour (or) anything else. Join it ! That practical quality carried the day... The great message was perfectly simple. Believe in One God. The creator of heaven and earth. Their (Muslims) temples are like Protestant churches... no music, no painting, no pictures. A pulpit in the corner; on that lies the *Quran*.⁴

² Five hundred years after the invasion from the north-west the Muslim rule in India was finally consolidated in the year 1206 A.D. following Qutab-ud-din-Aibak's proclamation as Sultanate of Delhi. The Islamic rule formally came to an end in 1857 A.D. when the British deposed Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last Mughal Emperor from the seat of Delhi after suppressing the Sepoy Mutiny.

³ To elucidate this argument we can take the example of the Islamic view of monotheism versus Hindu polytheism, the Hindu emphasis on caste system versus the fundamental equality among all the Muslims of the world or in the community of *umma*, Hindu detestation of violence as against the use of violence in Islam, Hindu non-proselytisation versus forced and voluntary Islamic conversion and so on.

⁴ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (cited as *C.W.S.V.* from hereafter), Pithoragarh: Advaita Ashram, 1972, vol. I, p. 483.



To Vivekananda the rise of Islam from one of the most recent⁵ to a major world religion, emanated from its simple and non-complex principles. As the quotation above suggests, matters like practical equality, monotheism, simplicity in worship and most importantly the adoption of one religious text, the *Quran*, lent Islam the power to augment and expand. In contrast, Hinduism remained subjugated, did not flourish and faced disintegration owing to the absence of these very qualities. While assessing Islam, it should be remembered that Vivekananda was ascertaining what specific aspects and differences caused Hinduism to decline and Islam to ascend.

What were Vivekananda's specific intentions while he was comparing and contrasting both Hinduism and Islam? How did he view Islam as a religion? Did his interpretation of Islam *vis-à-vis* Hinduism have any impact on India's religio-political process? Was Vivekananda an anti-Islamists or a pro-Hindu? These are some of the questions addressed in the following analysis.

2. 3. Comparative study of Hinduism and Islam

...Every step forward (for Islam) was made with sword-the *Quran* in the one hand and the sword in the other: "Take the *Quran* or you must die; there is no alternative!" for six hundred years nothing could resist the Muslims.⁶

⁵ Islam as an organised religion came into being on *circa* 632 A.D. Compared to other world religions Vivekananda considered Islam to be a new faith lacking in many ways the rigours and subtleties of its predecessors.

⁶ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 370.

What was Vivekananda trying to emphasise by giving this dimension of Islam in the historical process as against its earlier, milder version? To any observer, such a statement would seem disparaging, one-dimensional, partly incorrect and shallow. Vivekananda was aware of these shortcomings in his analysis.⁷ Nevertheless, he chose to depict Islam in this manner so as to provide a lesson to Hindus. It was a lesson aimed at acquainting Indians with the general history of Islam and the Hindu history in particular. The lesson to be learnt from this common historical experience was the weakness and strength of Islam. Another analogy which Vivekananda was making here was his description of Islam as the 'other' for its supposed territorial extension into new lands. By depicting Islam as the 'other' or the 'outsider' Vivekananda was pointing out the strength and the weakness of the insider. To put it in more concrete terms, through its conquest Islam not only exposed its own strengths and weaknesses but also allowed the conquered communities to assess their own identity. In our analysis, if Hindus were the vanquished and the Muslims the victors, Vivekananda urged the former to learn the techniques and tactics of the latter. This he considered would help avoid further conquest and ultimately conquer the conqueror i.e. Hindus would overpower Muslims.

Interesting in Vivekananda's assessment of Islam is that, for every positive aspect of Islam he found an exact negative reflection in Hinduism, and *vice versa*. He was not explicit as to which of the two contained the maximum amount of positive qualities and their negative equivalents. One thing is clear, however, while

⁷ C.W.S.V., vol. III, p. 294.

interpreting Islam, he was doing so with the perceived intention of giving Hinduism the well-grounded and unambiguous practical framework of the latter. The survival and resurgence of Hinduism according to Vivekananda depended on certain corrections. These corrections in his view could only come from the methodological framework of Islam.

To any observer the adaptation of qualities from one religion, for the survival and progress of another, would appear doubtful and unfathomable. Equally incomprehensible, would seem Vivekananda's emphasis on inculcating certain Islamic practices for the survival of Hinduism whose principles stood diametrically opposed to it. Vivekananda was aware of these difficulties, so he treaded a path which projected Islam on a completely different level. Instead of adhering to the strict religious connotation to describe Islam or Hinduism, he saw the two religions in the context of a power relationship. Islam to him contained and exhibited power whereas Hinduism lacked it. It was the corporate identity which lent power to the larger body or order of Islam. Vivekananda considered Islam to be the only religion with a corporate identity. It helped Islam to encompass a multitude of people with diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic and cultural background in a spirit of oneness. The *Quran* to him was a great leveller of dissent and disunion. Equipped by this corporate identity Islam could take its religion from one end of the world to the other.⁸ Analysing this Vivekananda also noticed the covert ideology within the body of Islam. He termed this ideology as Mohammedanism. The brotherhood of Islam according to Vivekananda was the main facet of this 'ism'. "Islam makes its

⁸ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. IV, p. 126.

followers all equal - so, that, you see, is the peculiar excellence of Mohammedanism.”⁹

Vivekananda was convinced that the success of any religio-political order is tied to a common corporate identity like the brotherhood of Islam. Hinduism according to him gave in to all sorts of aggression because it lacked a common bond. If Hinduism was unpopular among a section of the Hindu society and did not find much audience outside, it was primarily due to its rigidity. If Islam steamrolled differences, Hinduism clung to it both passionately and blindly. It was while describing this aspect of Islam that Vivekananda came close to emulating certain Islamic practices.¹⁰

To Vivekananda, another important aspect that unified Islam was the subtle blend of religion and politics. He admired the Islamic polity for passing ordinances that confirmed with the Islamic ideal. He respected this practice, because the Islamic polity (the organs and officials of the government) venerated the priestly class as the vanguards of society.¹¹ Though Vivekananda was not a political ideologue in the strict sense of the term, he nevertheless understood the underlying strength of a religio-political combination. He bemoaned the absence of such a practice in the Hindu political process and structure of his time.¹²

⁹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 371.

¹⁰ Borrowing this concept from Islam Vivekananda tried to forge a common identity for Hindus. His address to the audience at Parliament of World Religions, Chicago 1893 which began with the words, “Sisters and brothers of America...”, it may be argued was an effort in this direction. Afterwards he made it a standard term to address his disciples and made it sort of compulsory for his followers to address each other as brothers and sisters. For a complete text of the address, see *C.W.S.V.*, vol. I, p. 3.

¹¹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. V, p. 533.

¹² Romila Thapar mentions the alliance between the priest (priestly class) and the divine king who were interlocked in a mutual interdependence for the successful governance of the state. *A History of India*, vol. I, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975, p. 126. Similarly, Bhikhu Parekh emphasises this

Vivekananda asked Hindus one fundamental question i.e. how could a nation of thirty million individuals remain subjugated to the whims, passions, and tyrannies of a handful of foreigners. In his assessment, the political strength of Muslim rule, in fact, emanated from Islam as a religion. Besides by making a comparative analysis of many eastern religions and Islam he found that while the former were subject to many outside forces the latter withstood any such challenge and even retaliated against those trying to make inroads into it and in the process conquered new territories. His intention, while describing this aspect of Islam was to acquaint the Hindus with the usefulness of such practice. The inclusion of religion in politics he considered as bringing in social and political cohesion - as exemplified in the case of Islam. The prevalence of such cohesion brings in an unitary spirit among the masses. In the final analysis, this cohesion or unitary spirit allows that particular community to expand and establish an universal order; such as the Islamic notion of *umma* or the world Islamic community.

So far, it is not clear what exactly Vivekananda was trying to say when pointing at Islam for every religio-political riddle. It may appear he was imitating certain Islamic ideals or practices to sharpen his notion of a perfect religion or statehood. The truth, however, is not limited to this. Vivekananda was not imitating but exposing himself and his thought to Islam¹³ in order to build a case for Hindus

practice. Unlike Thapar, he however, terms it as the alliance between Kshatriyas (warriors) and the Brahmans (priests) for establishing a peaceful religio-political order. 'Hindu Tradition of Political Thought', in *Political Thought in Modern India*, Thomas Pantham and Karl Deutsch (eds.), New Delhi: Sage, 1986, p. 23.

¹³ I mean to say Vivekananda acquainted himself with Islamic ideology and sought to understand the working of the religion and its political face.

and Hinduism. He recognised Islam in terms of the ‘other as the enemy.’ As we would ascertain in course of this analysis Islam to Vivekananda, contained more negative than positive qualities. But instead of a total rejection of Islam for its overweighing negativity Vivekananda tried to inculcate whatever positive qualities it contained for formulating *Vedantic* Hinduism.

2.4. Vivekananda’s notion of India’s past

In the strict sense of the term, Vivekananda was not an historian or political theorist. India, for him, meant the land primarily inhabited by the *Vedantic* Hindus. His interpretation in this regard was quasi-religious. With hindsight we may argue, Vivekananda re-wrote the history of India and the Hindus living in it. To put it differently, he familiarised the Indians with their past, asked them to look at the present and urged them to take lessons from the past and present for the future. In his narration of the past we come across three phases of Hindu society and polity. We may characterise these phases as those of period of Harmony (pre-*Vedic* i.e. 1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.), the period of Oppression (11th century A.D. to 1857 A.D.), and the period of Disunity, beginning from 1857 A.D.

Vivekananda praises the first of these phases in Indian history for its unique *Vedic* harmony. He refers to this phase with nostalgia for the religious tolerance¹⁴

¹⁴ The two main religions which evolved during this phase as a reaction to Brahminical supremacy were Buddhism and Jainism. They nevertheless existed in harmony with Hinduism in an atmosphere of perfect harmony and lack of animosity.

and the undivided religio-political geography of India.¹⁵ The second phase in his rubric, the period of Oppression, according to Vivekananda, was the darkest phase in Indian history. In this phase, Hindu culture and polity lost its identity on being subjected to Islamic conquest. He noticed the end of the decaying phase following the establishment of British hegemony¹⁶ in 1857 A.D. But he regarded this phase as the period of gloom as the Hindus wandered in uncertainty lacking any particular identity. This last phase, according to Vivekananda, contained both hope and complete darkness for Hindus. He imagined a brilliant future for Hindus if only they could organise themselves. In the event of a failure he foresaw a permanent eclipse closing in over the entire Hindu society.

In other words, religious decline of a community, people or race eventually leads to their political decline and subjugation. Therefore, he associated the minority Muslim rule in India and Hindu subjugation to it as a reflection of the latter's spiritual decline. But most importantly Vivekananda did not view such political and religious decline as an inevitable historical process. Hindus in this context, according to Vivekananda, cannot accept their political and religious subjugation as part of historical reality, but work towards the recovery of their faith. Once this spiritual regeneration has taken place the concerned community shall be able to consolidate its political power. The history of Muslim rule in India in Vivekananda's assessment then is only an aberration, made possible by the overall spiritual decline of the Hindus. This analysis of Vivekananda throws up several important questions. First, if

¹⁵ India between 1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D. roughly extended from Gandhara (Kabul, Afghanistan) in the north to Sri Lanka in the south. For details, see Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, vol. I, map 4, pp. 116-7.

¹⁶ Vivekananda equated British rule with the subjugation of Hindus by Christianity and considered it as another religious purge.

we accept that the Muslim rule was an aberration then what happens to their political stake in the future Indian nation. Second, what sort of treatment be accorded to Islam as a religion once Hinduism has regained its lost position? Third and finally, how would Muslims conduct their religion and their way of life following the re-establishment of the supremacy *Vedantic* Hindus? These three key questions are again dependent on another fundamental query i.e. who is a Hindu or who is a Muslim?

To Vivekananda, the term Hindu is ambiguous. For it includes not only Hindus proper, but Muslims, Christians, Jains and others who live in India.¹⁷ Hence to avoid confusion and ambiguity he allowed only those the right to call themselves Hindu who followed the *Vedas* or submitted to the supreme authority of the *Vedas*.¹⁸ Next, he described the fine-featured Hindus¹⁹ whose identity with the advent of Islam in India was deplored as a dark-skinned native.²⁰ As to the nature of the Hindus, Vivekananda refers to them as infinite beings. Without any limitation, but at the same time intense and assertive depending on time and situation.²¹ The majority of people during this phase were the *Vedantists*. They ruled according to the principles of the *Vedas* and India enjoyed two thousand years of uninterrupted peace, tranquillity and prosperity.

However this state was ruptured by the arrival of Muslims on India's Western frontier around eleventh century A.D. The Muslims conquered India through deceit,

¹⁷ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, p. 118.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 118 & 228.

¹⁹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. V, p. 446.

²⁰ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VII, pp. 357-8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

violence and wild savagery. In Vivekananda's conception, the arrival of Muslims in India and their seven hundred years of uninterrupted rule, was the most unfortunate part of Indian history. It was during this period that India lost all its magnificent ideals and glories, being persecuted by an alien, inhospitable, violent, forceful, and static culture. To give weight to the argument that a state of darkness emerged with the arrival of Muslims in India, Vivekananda also compared it to the Islamic conquest of Europe and elsewhere.²² Vivekananda's reaction to the Islamic conquest was that of collective anger, of all the civilisations and people who were subjugated by Islam's religious and political order.

Such was the intensity of Vivekananda's hatred for Islam that he divided the Indo-European ethnic stocks into Aryans and non-Aryans (Mongols-Tartars).²³ In his equation of Aryan and non-Aryans the former contained all the civic and humane qualities while the latter remained savages, barbarians and a race low in intellect.²⁴ He admitted, the majority of Muslims in Eurasia to be of Aryan race. He however argued that these people were being led by non-Aryan savages under the leadership of *khalifa*, emperor, sultans, kings, and the nobility.

Vivekananda saw the conquest of India by Islam not only in religio-political terms but in a broad cultural context too. On matters relating to the Islamic conquest of India one may raise the point that the people, the country and the civilisation were

²² Vivekananda was full of sympathy for the Byzantium Empire at Constantinople which fell in the hands of Muslim Turks in 1453 A.D. and the civilisation was ruined completely. *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VII, p. 395. He also referred to the conquest and elimination of Persian civilisation in the face of advancing Islamic army who swept over it in eighth century A.D. *C.W.S.V.*, vol. V, p. 508.

²³ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VII, p. 395.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 395-6.

subjugated by several earlier invasions starting with the Aryans from 2000 B.C., followed by Greeks, Sakas and Kushanas. Interestingly, these invaders did not incur the anger of Vivekananda and were not interpreted in a disparaging manner. In fact, he admired these outsiders for respecting the *Vedic* principles of peaceful cohabitation.²⁵ By peaceful cohabitation he meant the acceptance of the existing order by the outsider. Being outsiders these groups had their own cultural and religious traits but they never tried to impose them upon their political subjects through force. They did not exterminate the native population or their culture and religion, but admitted and adhered to their principles along with their own and became a part of the whole by sharing and contributing.

Islam in contrast, was condemned by Vivekananda for establishing its own cultural hegemony at the expense of Hindu or the *Vedic* civilisation of India. Vivekananda also isolated Islam as the 'enemy' because it ignored the prevailing religio-cultural order of India which no other outside force had tried to tamper with. Prior to the arrival of Islam, India remained the land where all sects lived in peace, unity and perfect harmony. But the Muslims disturbed that arrangement by leaving a trail of murder and slaughter.²⁶

Vivekananda's discomfiture with Islam also emanated from an inherent feeling of Hindu superiority. This superiority of Hinduism according to Vivekananda was owing to its ability to withstand challenges. He was deeply disturbed by the fact that although Hinduism could neutralise various invading communities and faiths in

²⁵ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 482.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 190.

the past it could not do so in its encounter with Islam. This neutralising aspect of Hinduism could also be interpreted as strength which resulted in the conquest of outsiders. In the historical process bar Islam Hinduism could withstand any challenge coming from within or outside. Similarly, if Hindus failed in the political front they employed their religion that exuded an all encompassing and all embracing universalistic ideal in the form of religion and culture which the outsider 'other' could not resist. If Greeks, Sakas and Kushanas constituted the group of outside invaders they were subsequently conquered by Hinduism. The Buddhists and Jains who constituted the rebel insiders also encountered a similar fate.

Vivekananda was particularly enamoured of this unseen conquering strength of Hinduism. But he could not comprehend why in spite of this strength Hinduism was subjugated by Islam. The loss of Hindu power to neutralise the 'other', to Vivekananda, was due both to prevailing astuteness²⁷ of Hindus and to Islamic treachery. Islam made inroads in India through treachery. The failure to understand this negative design of Islam resulted in Hindu subjugation.

The *Kshatriya* repelled the Islamic invasion initially but never treated the Muslim attackers with contempt. They did not want to conquer the invaders territory! *In contrast*, the Islamic conquerors treated the Hindu kings differently, and when they got them, they destroyed them without remorse.²⁸

It is likely that Vivekananda considered the very essence of Hinduism, the all encompassing catholicity, to be its greatest weakness in the wake of Islamic invasion.

²⁷ By astuteness he meant the lack of positive militancy in Hinduism. The implication was also toward the loss of religion-propelled political motivation.

²⁸ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. IV, pp. 93-4.

India fell a victim to Islam because its backbone and the very bed-rock of national life was peaceful spiritualism.²⁹ Though not outdated, this quality, Vivekananda felt, was inadequate. Islam he regarded as a force which did not respect this spiritualism. Hence, he required Hinduism to equip itself with the same armoury that Islam was using, to prevent it from being conquered fully.

It is true Vivekananda blamed the non-Aryan Mongols³⁰ to be the perpetrators of savagery and violence. Yet, he made a distinction between the Mongols of the non-Islamic period and Mongols after their conversion to Islam. According to this argument, “before their (Mongols) conversion to Islam they used to imbibe the learning and culture of the countries they conquered,” *and thus were acting as carriers of civilisation.* “But ever since *they adopted Islam*, they have only the instinct of war left in them; they have not got the least vestige of learning and culture; of the countries that have come under their sway gradually have their civilisation extinguished.”³¹

Here one needs to bear in mind the change of tone in Vivekananda: from calling a race as original barbarians to that of ‘metamorphosed barbarians’ following an ideological conversion. The argument also illustrates how degeneration took place in a race’s attitude once it came in contact with Islam. Vivekananda’s emphasis here is not so much to do with a particular race but with an ideology. He was at pains to describe how even the basic human qualities like respect for the ‘other’ was

²⁹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, p. 148.

³⁰ The Tibeto-Mongoloid stock.

³¹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VII, p. 394, italics mine.

extinguished once those very beings came in contact with the ideals and ideological practices of Islam.

2.5. Vivekananda's interpretation of Islam

A notable feature of Vivekananda's attitude toward Islam is his dual perspective on Mohammed, the founder of the religion. Though sympathetic to Mohammed, Vivekananda showed his antipathy when it came to the religion propagated by him. Besides, though not negative, Vivekananda's depiction of Mohammed's character was not entirely positive. He placed Mohammed in the category of other great world-teachers like Buddha, Jesus Christ or Mahavira. At the same time, however, in a comparative framework he allowed Mohammed the lowest niche. To Vivekananda, Mohammed appeared as an ordinary and simple person who was bestowed with a rare divine spark toward his middle age. Furthermore, his emphasis on Mohammed's worldly lust (prior to the divine revelation and after), relegated this personality into the levels of insignificance.

Mohammed (as) a young man... did not (seem to) care much for religion. He was inclined to make money. He was considered a nice young man and very handsome. There was a rich widow. She fell in love with this young man, and they married... Seeing Christians preaching politics in the name of Jesus, seeing the Persians preaching dualism, Mohammed said, after *the revelation*, "Our God is one God. He is the Lord of all that exists. There is no comparison between Him and any other."³²

His narration of Mohammed's life following the divine revelation continued:

³² *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 481-2, italics mine.

God is God. There is no philosophy, no complicated code of ethics... "Our God is one without a second, and Mohammed is the Prophet."... Mohammed began to preach it in the streets of Mecca... They (*the Meccans*) started to persecute, him and he fled to the city of Medina. He began to fight and the whole race became united. (Mohammed / Islam) deluged the world in the name of the Lord.³³

The foremost feature of this narration is the portrayal of Mohammed's life and Islam in a non-exclusive manner. Vivekananda never described the life and philosophy of any other religious teachers with such apathy and bluntness. Hence the question that begs an explanation is, why he was giving such a specified account of Mohammed and Islam? And for whose consumption? Equally intriguing is Vivekananda's attack on some of the basic ideas within Islam. For instance, the validity of the claim; "Our God is one God. He is the Lord of all that exists". The rationality behind Islam's repudiation of any code of ethics, and most importantly, the fight of Islam against its opponents till they were deluged, are some of the questions manifested by Vivekananda while describing Mohammed's life and works.

This polemic or slandered narration of Mohammed and his work was of course directed towards an audience. These audiences were mostly Indians already converted to Islam and those contemplating a change of faith from Hinduism. It would be improper and wrong to argue that Vivekananda, through his account of Mohammed, was trying to discredit Islam. Vivekananda was not a fanatic or fundamentalist religious ideologue but a rational thinker. He was a defender of his faith which he pursued by examining the falsities, hypocrisies, negations and contradictions involved in a similar faith or belief system.

³³ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 482.

A religious fanatic or fundamentalist always views every 'religion' other than his own as the enemy. Vivekananda however remained free of such mental prejudices and blockages. For him every religion was different and maintained an autonomous identity. Hence, Christianity can not be equated to Hinduism or Buddhism to Islam. But one thing is clear, however: in his hierarchical division of religions, Hinduism remained at the top and Islam at the bottom. The allocation of status or position was made on the basis of a particular religion's clarity of thought, rationality and age (maturity). Since Islam according to Vivekananda was a religion of recent origin,³⁴ partly rational but overtly violent and tyrannical, and intolerant compared to other religions it remained at the bottom of this hierarchy. Although he accorded such a low status to Islam he also remarked that it is the followers of different religions who make up what their religion is. For instance, although Vivekananda was appreciative of many aspects of Christianity, he thought it is no better than Islam owing to its record of tyranny, barbarism and fanaticism carried on its name by its followers in the new world during the age of discovery.

Though he expressed a poor opinion of Mohammed as a religious teacher or prophet Vivekananda nevertheless recognised one of his supreme messages i.e. the message of equality.³⁵ If Vivekananda recognised the principle of undifferentiated uniformity based on Islamic brotherhood, why did he view Islam with antipathy? After wrestling with such contradictions in Vivekananda's thought one may argue, Vivekananda's uneasiness with Islam could have been due to the methods and

³⁴ Compared to Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism and Judaism.

³⁵ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. I, p. 483.

policies adopted by Mohammed and his followers for political and religious expansion. He criticised Islam for its prescription of forcible imposition of its principles. Since he considered that acceptance of any principle or philosophy should always be voluntary, it is natural that he expressed his low opinion of Islam. Furthermore, the sacredness and supremacy of any principle is established only when it is introduced in an un-coerced manner. He despised Islam for not recognising this supreme truth. A true religion, in Vivekananda's conception, is one which on the one hand recognises equality, fellow-feeling and amity between its own members and on the other treats those outside it in the same spirit. Although Islam contains such ideals it is expressed only among the followers of this religion. Since it does not exhibit these qualities towards those who do not belong to it Islam is not a true religion. Vivekananda also regarded Islam as an ideology owing to the presence of both spiritual and political principles in it. While being used as an ideology for religious and political expansion Islam was the crudest, barbaric, violent, tyrannical and intolerant. A true religion, in Vivekananda's assessment, need not be so fierce in its approach. Islam means submission to truth. But a religion that sanctions violence to propagate its brand of truth cannot be a true religion.

Some Mohammedans are crudest in this respect (*in matters relating to the propagation and establishment of their ideology*) and most sectarian. Their watchword is; "There is one God and Mohammed is his Prophet." Everything beyond that not only is bad, but must be destroyed forthwith; at a moment's notice, every man or woman who does not exactly believe in that must be killed; everything that does not belong to this worship must be immediately broken; every book that teaches anything else must be burnt.³⁶

³⁶ C.W.S.V., vol. IV, p. 126, italics mine.

Analysing the passage above we encounter two sets of arguments. The first of these is the original tenets of Mohammed as enumerated in the *Quran*, which is the ideal or ideology. The other one is the method used to propagate this ideology, which we may term as political practice. If Vivekananda opposed anything in Islam it was the political or ideological practice. It appears, Vivekananda considered Islam as a combination of two separate forces. Whereas the ideal was rational in this arrangement, the ideological practice was irrational. In Vivekananda's view Islam since its inception has been led by this irrationality, manifested in the form of ideological practice.

Since it gave in to the dominance by an irrational and violent ideological practice the true and exact meaning of Islam as an ideal was permanently lost. Though sympathetic to the loss Vivekananda nevertheless reserved utmost antipathy for its metamorphosed state when both the ideal and ideological practice became synonymous. He considered the religious and political success of Islam as inherently wrong because the means used for the achievement of this objective was not proper. Hence the logical supposition would be that the territories and people over whom Islam had its sway, were unjustly held.

Vivekananda was at a loss while evaluating the fate of those people and societies who were politically and religiously subjugated by Islam. He was particularly incensed by Islam's subjugation of India.

When Muslims first came to India, what a great number of Hindus were here; but mark how they have dwindled down! Every day they will become less and less till they wholly disappear. Let them disappear, but with them will disappear the marvellous ideas, of which with all their defects and all their misrepresentations they still stand as representatives. And with them will disappear this marvellous *Advaita*, the crest-jewel of all spiritual thought. Therefore arise, awake, with your hands stretched out to protect the spirituality of the world.³⁷

Who were Vivekananda's audience in this apocalyptic vision? Bhikhu Parekh argues 'history is organised public memory, and nationalism presupposes a culture in which memory enjoys epistemological dignity'. In the context of India, he continues, there was not much emphasis on this "organised public memory."³⁸ In Vivekananda, however, we notice a significant departure. If we accept Parekh's views on "public memory", it is exactly what Vivekananda was trying to infuse into Hindu psyche. He was convinced that by reviving Hindu interest in public memory one could regenerate their confidence in themselves.

Vivekananda felt that Hindus preferred not to remember a section of their past as it was too bitter. He, however, expected them to recall it as lessons for encountering Islam in future. Any action or reaction against Islamic rule was glorified in Vivekananda's account. Sikhism for instance, though it emerged as a separate religion from Hinduism, Vivekananda approved of. He admired the Sikhs for rising up against Islamic power and religion in India. His description of Guru Govind Singh, the last Guru of the Sikhs, as 'a creative genius' centred around the latter's religio-political exploits against the Mughal empire.³⁹ Equally strong was his

³⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 432.

³⁸ Bhikhu Parekh, 'Ethnocentricity of the Nationalist Discourse', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. I, Part I, March 1995, p. 40.

³⁹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, p. 432.

praise for the Marathas, who repelled the Mughal power from gaining a foothold in the south and south-west India.

His was a constant attempt to infuse the instances of Hindu glory and chivalry into those parts where Islam was in dominance and the Hindus constituted the oppressed lot. In his religio-political map of India, the country was divided in two. Whereas he associated the North with Islamic dominance, the South to him was a fortress of Hindu resistance. While doing so, he tried to popularise the glories of the South⁴⁰ and asked the Northern Hindus to emulate their ways for overthrowing the power of Islam. The heroism he found in the Marathas led by Shivaji and Guru Govind Singh, in the case of Sikhs,⁴¹ was a tribute to Hindu power. In both these instances violence was used to curb Islam and its influence.

As noticed earlier, Vivekananda opposed the use of violence in matters of religious and political extension. But he twisted it in the context of Sikhs and Marathas, arguing violence is permissible if the intention of its user is the protection of self and communal interest. He opposed aggression but not non-resistance.⁴² For non-resistance was not a virtue but a vice since it resulted in the decay and disintegration of a society, people and their religion. The principle of resistance and non-resistance was also contextual. Considering that Islam did not respect the

⁴⁰ "The Muslims tried for centuries to subjugate the South, but can scarcely be said to have got even a strong foothold; and when the strong and united empire of the Mughals was very near completing its conquest, the hills and plateau's of the South poured in their bands of fighting peasant horsemen, determined to die for the religion which Ramdas preached Tuka sang; and in short time the gigantic empire of the Mughals was only a name." *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VI, p. 165.

⁴¹ S. C. Sengupta, *Swami Vivekananda and Indian Nationalism*, Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad, 1984, p. 71.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 70.

supreme ideal enshrined in the principle of non-resistance, he saw no reason why Hindus should adhere to it.

Non-resistance in other words meant servitude. Hindu servitude under Islamic dominance in Vivekananda's opinion was a product of the policy of non-resistance. Vivekananda's clarion call to his disciples, a quote from the *Veda*; "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached," was intended to disengage Hindus from this servitude induced by non-resistance. He regarded non-resistance as a form of slavery. The end of non-resistance in his agenda would help bring back the lost glory. Addressing an audience in 1897 at Lahore, he said, "And slaves must become great masters. So give up being slaves".⁴³ He associated this slavery to the acceptance of Islamic culture, language and most importantly the admittance of the Islamic law.⁴⁴

On another plane, Vivekananda felt the lack of Hindu resistance to Islam stemmed from the former's fatalistic attitude. This fatalism of the Hindus was the source of inertia. If the Hindus did not resist the Islamic invasion or accepted the dominance of the Muslims it was partly because of their belief in the heliotropic myth. According to this, every event or arrangement has its rise, growth and decay cycle.⁴⁵ If there was no organised opposition to Islam or Islamic rule in India, it was partly due to the Hindu belief that Islam would have its own decay as a part of the historical cycle. It is not clear whether Vivekananda believed in this principle. However, he made it clear there would be no respite from slavery and domination if

⁴³ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VII, pp. 130-1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 62.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 71.

the Hindus waited for the cycle actually to take place. By then, he feared, there would be no such thing called Hindu. In another of his statistics he argued: “When the Muslims first came to India we (Hindus) are said, on the authority of Ferishta, the oldest Islamic historian, to have been six hundred millions. Now we are about two hundred millions.”⁴⁶

In his assessment, the political strength of Muslim rule in fact emanated from Islam, as a religion. Similarly, he highlighted that Christian missionaries in India fearing retaliation rarely approached Muslims for conversion.⁴⁷ By contrast Hindus were the easy targets. In other words, he associated the political subjugation of Hindus under Muslim rule, their conversion to Islam, and abuse of Hinduism were all manifestation of their lack of spiritual unity, physical strength and deep inertia. According to Vivekananda, physical weakness was one of the principal causes of India’s miseries.⁴⁸ This not only bred incompetence but made them inactive. But this he thought could be dispelled when they are sufficiently spiritually awakened. Therefore he required Indians (in this context Hindus) to express their faith in a common and unifying spiritual principle which could not only bring an end to their religious and political subjugation but promise further expansion. “Up India, and conquer the world with your spirituality.”⁴⁹ While prescribing the solution to spiritual and political subjugation of Hindus, Vivekananda was also apprehensive of dissent and opposition. And he required Hindus to respond with utmost determination and curb such tendencies at all cost.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. V, p. 233.

⁴⁷ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, pp. 211-2.

⁴⁸ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 241.

⁴⁹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, p. 277.

Did Vivekananda succeed in awakening the Hindus from their lethargy? Vivekananda was going back and forth into Indian history with the clear intention of instilling a sprit of militancy among the Hindus. By acquainting Hindus with their past and highlighting the role of Islam in the decline of India Vivekananda aimed at dispelling the collective Hindu lethargy. In retrospect, we can argue, Vivekananda forced the Hindus to feel ashamed of their past inaction leading to the ruination of Hindu society and culture. He grieved the demise of India's sacred past⁵⁰ following its persecution by Islam and asked the Indians to join him in singing the eulogy.

Assertiveness always entails conflict potential. And Vivekananda asked Indians to assert themselves. "...The first sign of the revival of national life (is) expansion."⁵¹ Although in this context Vivekananda did not specify the nature of this expansion it was obviously the spiritual expansion. Since Vivekananda associated spiritualism with both political and religious assertiveness it had far-reaching implications. Admittedly, any effort by Indians to resurrect their religion, culture and identity would certainly have taken place at the expense of Islam. Vivekananda saw this danger, but nevertheless continued harping on their collective psyche to instil the spirit of nationalism in them. As we shall see afterwards, since the basis of this nationalism was *Vedantic* spiritualism (an overwhelming Hindu ideal), it threatened the culture, identity and spiritual affiliation of many non-Hindu Indians.

⁵⁰ The *Quran* and its code of laws, he remarked, have taken the place of *Dharma Shastras* of Manu and others. Whereas Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Hindus, has been pushed off the board to make room for Arabic and Persian.

⁵¹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VIII, p. 272.

The overarching concern of Vivekananda was to forge an unitary spirit among the Hindus. Among the multitude of difficulties in attaining this unity, the character of the Hindus was one. The Hindus, in Vivekananda's view, were not only fatalistic, disintegrated and disillusioned but weak too. His discourses on *Karma Yoga* was primarily a recipe to ward off weakness from the body-politic of the Hindus. In his words, "There is only one sin. That is weakness."⁵² His obsession with physical strength was so intense he often praised Satan, "the soul that never weakens, faces everything and determines to die game."⁵³ And, he prescribed, the Hindus should indoctrinate themselves with the spirit of Satan if that brought them strength.

The question remains why did he require the Hindus to strengthen themselves to such a proportion? From the surface it appears Vivekananda emphasised strength to counter many social evils existing within the Hindu society. Though this is a valid argument, one may add, there was another objective in Vivekananda's call for Hindu assertion. If social evils constituted the internal aspect of Hindu misery there also existed an externally induced misery. Vivekananda's Hindu or *Vedantist* as he would define him was required to strengthen himself against both these evils.

While analysing the strength and weakness of the Hindu, Vivekananda arrived at the conclusion that the Hindu lacked both in the physical and spiritual realm. He considered that the establishment of a supreme and perfect identity depended on an equal amount of spiritual and physical empowerment. For their

⁵² "The sign of life is strength and growth. The sign of death is weakness. Whatever is weak avoid. It is death. there is salvation only for the brave. *C.W.S.V.*, vol. I, p. 479.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 479.

spiritual empowerment he taught the Hindus to have a superior attitude in matters relating to their religion.

The simplicity and equality in Islam definitely had posed an alternative to a section of Hindu society that accepted this religion, considering it superior to their original faith.⁵⁴ Partly due to the caste hierarchy within Hinduism and partly due to Islam's claim as a religion that recognised absolute equality a large number of Hindus had converted to Islam. This was especially true of the lower castes. Vivekananda was very much disturbed by the proselytising strength of Islam and its effect on Hindus. If Hindus did not reorient themselves to the idea of equality he was sure Hinduism itself would disappear within no time. And one of the central features of Vivekananda's conception of *Vedanta* was the formation of a community where there will be no *Brahmin* or *Shudra*. Moreover Vivekananda also felt that the conception of a new religious ideal based on equality is not enough to check the advance of Islamic proselytisation. To curb the Islamic proselytisation of Hindus, he marked the former as hierarchical and divided as the latter. He was intent on acquainting potential converts to Islam that it is not a non-hierarchical religion after all. In other words, although Vivekananda accepted the reason behind Hindu conversion to Islam he went on to demolish the claim of Islamic non-sectarianism. If Islam portrayed itself as a superior religion for its supposed equality, Vivekananda tried to negate it by exposing the duplicity involved in this claim. In fact, in

⁵⁴ One of the social evils that made inroads for Islam was the Hindu caste system. Caste division, Vivekananda pointed out, was the second most important vehicle of Islamic proselytisation, next to the conversion by sword. "Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammedans? It is nonsense to say they were converted by sword. It was to gain their liberty... from zamindars and from the... priest, and as a consequence you find in Bengal there are more Muslims than Hindus among cultivators because there were so many zamindars there. *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VIII, p. 330.

Vivekananda's view the opposition and antagonism existing between different sects within Islam was more pronounced.⁵⁵

Similarly, Vivekananda argued that although theoretically Islam abhorred ritualism, idolatry and image worship⁵⁶ in practice all these aspects were present within it. Vivekananda described Islam as a bundle of contradictions. If Islam did not believe in any kind of idol worship, he questioned the very rationale behind the veneration of thousands and thousands of saints or *pirs*.⁵⁷ In other words, though Islam presented itself as an egalitarian, monotheistic, unambiguous and all-embracing religion the truth was far from it. It was as diverse, strict and hierarchical as any other polytheistic faith.

The Muslim who thinks that every ritual, every form of image, or ceremony used by a non-Muslim is sinful does not think so when he comes to his own shrine Cabba (Mecca). Every religious Muslim wherever he prays, must imagine that he is standing before the Cabba. When he makes a pilgrimage (*Haj*) there he must kiss the black stone in the wall of the shrine. Then there is the well of *Zim Zim*. Muslims believe that whoever draws a little water out of that well will have his sins pardoned.⁵⁸

Equally blatant was Vivekananda's attack on Islamic brotherhood. Though he praised Islam for mooting this beautiful concept he nevertheless questioned the

⁵⁵ The antagonism and suspicion between Shi'ias and Sunnis. *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VI, p. 469. Also see, *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 363. Another aspect of sectarianism in Islam which Vivekananda was trying to explain but did not elaborate was the caste hierarchy existing between the original Muslims and the lower caste converts. Perhaps India is the only place where one can find caste division among the Muslims. For example, the Syed's of India, the priestly class, do not intermarry or interact with Jolahas, the supposed untouchable converts.

⁵⁶ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, pp. 38-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. IV, p. 121. Also see, *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VI, p. 60, where Vivekananda details the image worship in Islam. Arguing that only two centuries after the death of the Prophet Mohammed saint worship gained prominence in Islam in the form of worshipping skins, hair, toes, nails teeth etc., of saints and that of the Mohammed.

⁵⁸ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 39.

duplicity attached to it. Why should a non-Muslim not be considered a part of the brotherhood? “Muslims” he argued, “talk of universal brotherhood, but what comes out of that in reality? Why is it that anybody who is not a Muslim will not be admitted into Brotherhood? Islam, instead of trying to rectify the contradiction involved in it, would rather seek to slit the throat of the non-Muslim who voiced this concern.”⁵⁹

Vivekananda was a Hindu reformist with a difference. Unlike his predecessors⁶⁰ he not only looked into the ills within Hindu society but located similar contradictions inherent in Islam. Vivekananda’s approach to reformation was multi-pronged. The loss of Hindu faith had as much to do with Hindu dogmatism as was Islam’s duplicity. If Islam stood against Hindu dogmatism and posed as a superior alternative, its claims were dubious. Vivekananda repudiated Islam’s claims of non-dogmatism, an aspect which had wooed many socially oppressed Hindus to embrace Islam. Hence he invalidated the Islamic proselytisation and sought to take back the converts into the Hindu fold. While making a value analysis of the two religions he positioned Hinduism at a far higher echelon than Islam. The inherent logic in his analysis was simple: any one who is embracing Islam to gain a superior identity is wrong in his assumptions.

Apology was another weapon which Vivekananda used to weaken the hold of Islam over the converted community. He blamed Hindus for forcing a section of the society to abandon the faith and expressed his apology for this deed. Nevertheless he

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 380.

⁶⁰ Ramananda, Tukaram, Kabir etc.

made the converts aware there is space in a reformed Hinduism to accommodate and settle their grievances. He made no qualms about his real intentions - to bring a complete spiritual unity among the Hindus. He accepted the role of a reformer which his followers attributed to him. The spirit of reformation had lost its charm and strength by the time Vivekananda made his entry into the centre-stage of Hindu religious arena. Hindus towards the end of nineteenth century were not entirely enthusiastic to any idea of reformation. Because, instead of forging an unity these movements ended up starting sects of their own⁶¹ or were considered inadequate lacking a wider audience.⁶²

To a majority of Hindus (mostly those belonging to lower castes) Hinduism had become a decaying, powerless and corrupt religion. Hence they had started suspecting the viability and earnestness of any reformer and his movement which claimed it would free Hindu society from these evils. These Hindus, though belonging to the folds of so-called Hinduism because of their birth, were in truth in a no-man's land, always prepared to cross into the folds of Islam. Vivekananda accepted the inadequacies of the reformist movements of the past. He, however, indicated that the efforts to evolve an equal Hindu society through reformation were stalled owing to Islam.

Their (the Hindu social and religious reformers') effort was for the most part spent in checking the rapid conquest of Islam among the masses, and they had very little left to give birth to new thought and aspirations. Though evidently successful in their purpose of

⁶¹ One can cite the example of Sikhism. It was a movement that started from within Hinduism but afterwards it dissociated itself from Hinduism. Though the Hindus argue that the Sikhs are a part of the Hindu fold the latter have refused to entertain any such claim.

⁶² Instead of bringing cohesion the movements started by Chaitanya (in Bengal and Orissa) or Kabir (Uttar Pradesh) further added sectarianism to the already fragmented and threatened Hindu society.

keeping the masses within the fold of the old religion, and tempering the fanaticism of the Muslims, they were mere apologists struggling to obtain permission to live.⁶³

Vivekananda's approach to reformation was multi-pronged. The first and immediate objective of it was to stall the spread of Islam. In the second place, it aimed at creating a common bond among the Hindus. Third, it sought to evolve an ideology which would generate spiritual as well as physical dynamism among the Hindus. The fourth and the last objective of this reformation was to conceive a nation whose inhabitants would follow the first three objectives.⁶⁴ All these objectives of Vivekananda directly or indirectly aimed at countering Islam. At the same time, the framework of Vivekananda's reformation drew inspiration from Islam or was loosely based on the model of Islam. As separate entities these objectives seemed very humble. However, put together they constituted the steps towards the realisation of a theocracy.

The first objective of Vivekananda's reform was to curb the tide of Islam. Vivekananda attributed the caste division and the economic oppression that accompanied it to be the second most important factor in the spread of Islam. Hence he called for reform in caste hierarchy. It is apt to remember here that Vivekananda did not call for the abolition of the caste system but insisted on what sociologist would call 'caste mobility', whereby a man from the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy can take up the position of one at the top. Vivekananda's intention here was not to do away with the caste system completely but to allow everyone the right

⁶³ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. VI, p. 166.

⁶⁴ This obviously raises the question as to what happens to those non-Hindus who wish to retain their own faith and do not conform to the new religious framework.

and opportunity to adopt the vocation according to his or her own preference and ability. He disregarded the conventional superiority of *Brahmins* arguing, “any man whether he be a *Shudra*⁶⁵ or *Chandala*⁶⁶ can expound philosophy even to a *Brahmin*. The truth can be learnt from the lowest individual, no matter to what caste or creed he belongs.”⁶⁷

I would like to term this approach of Vivekananda as the Middle Path or the Third Way. His emphasis on a *Shudra* or *Chandala* preaching truth to the *Brahmin* did not really eliminate the caste division. Any demand for the elimination of caste division would have resulted in further fragmentation of Hinduism.⁶⁸ Vivekananda wanted to avoid this danger and at the same time he sought a way to empower the voiceless to assert themselves in a society that kept them subordinate, or did not allow them to have the feeling of belonging. By advocating the right of every Hindu to take any vocation he or she preferred, according to his or her ability, he scored a major victory against Islam. For instance, though Islam allowed the untouchable

⁶⁵ The people at the bottom of the four tier caste division.

⁶⁶ The scavengers, untouchables or those outside the caste hierarchy but are Hindus nevertheless.

⁶⁷ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. V, p. 209. In spite of his high fire-brand rhetoric and simplified version of Hinduism, Vivekananda was not able to erase the role of Brahmin or the priest from his conception. So he twisted the principles of the caste system in such a way that they created a state of castelessness with the position of the priests intact. He would defend his theory arguing “caste is the plan we want to follow. What caste really is not one in a million understands. There is no country in the world without social division. In India from caste we reach the point where there is no cast. Caste is based throughout on that principle. The plan in India is to make everybody a Brahmin, the Brahmin being the ideal of humanity.” *C.W.S.V.*, vol. V, p. 214. There is no literature available as to why Vivekananda insisted on the preservation of the priestly caste. However, one may argue, he wanted to retain this institution to sanction the ideals of a polity. If we refer to Vivekananda’s admiration for the intermediary between Allah and the Mullah the riddle appears less incomprehensible.

⁶⁸ For example, social reformers like Dayananda Saraswati and Ram Mohun Roy, who called for abolition of the caste system for an unified version of Hinduism only created further sub-division among the Hindus. Their equivalents of casteless society came be known as Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaja. And the followers of this principle, instead being termed Hindus came to be known in terms of their sect as Arya Samajist or Brahma Samajist. By contrast neither Vivekananda nor the followers of his interpreted ideal have any such sectarian identity attributed to them.

Hindus to come into its fold it did not allow them the right to the priestly class which we discussed earlier.

On the second objective of uniting the Indians with a common bond Vivekananda considered religion to be that common thread. He defined Hindu attitude to religion in terms of spiritual servitude and spiritual independence. Though the Hindus treasured spiritual independence more than social or political independence,⁶⁹ with the advent of Islam they lost that along with the other two proud possessions. Even though Vivekananda was uniting the Hindus on the basis of the ancient faith of the land i.e. *Vedantic* Hinduism there was no central theme in this diverse religion which would appeal to everyone. Hinduism lacked coherent unity and meant different things to different people. This aspect of Hinduism made it perpetually vulnerable. People who belonged to this faith could not defend their religion because of the non-existence of a central theme. To Vivekananda, the missing link in Hinduism was the absence of a generally accepted central scripture. All the major religions of the world, be it Buddhism, Christianity or Islam, sustained and progressed by deriving their strength from a commonly accepted scripture.⁷⁰

The absence of such a device, if we borrow the term from the world of mechanics, rendered Hinduism weak, its people servile and its survival always in jeopardy. The unification of Hindus in this regard presupposed the emergence of a central scripture. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, though popular among Hindus, were not a viable alternative. Or in other words, they were more like fables than a

⁶⁹ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. V, pp. 458-9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. VIII, p. 217.

body of guided principles. Hence Vivekananda chose the *Vedanta* to form that universal and unifying bond.

Any living or non-living matter or substance according to Vivekananda is composed of two diametrically opposite characters. He did not crystallise the nature of these characters in the Nietzschean terminology of good and evil but referred to them as body and spirit. Co-related to the human-self these characteristics constitute the brute physical strength and rationality. Furthermore, these diametrically opposed qualities reside in two different parts of the body. Whereas mind is the locus of the rational self, the body contains the physical force. To Vivekananda, these qualities are nothing but the two faces of power. Almost all the races in the world have these characteristics though in varying degrees. The sanction to this power comes either through religion, ethics or culture. And these are the determinants which formulate and emphasise the kind of power its followers or adherents should possess or contain. Simultaneously, the success or failure of a race, religion or culture ultimately depends on the nature of power it entertains. According to Vivekananda that race, religion, culture or civilisation is perfect which entertains both physical and rational power to an equal degree. He concluded however, that none of the world religions had struck the right balance. Whereas some give too much importance to physical force others⁷¹ bring misery to themselves for their extreme attachment to rationality. Islam, Vivekananda argued is the manifestation of physical power, with little or no emphasis on mind. Christianity had a semblance of this harmony but as soon as crudeness crept into it, it was degraded to something no better than Islam.⁷² If Islam

⁷¹ Such as Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism

⁷² *C.W.S.V.*, vol. II, p. 353.

and Christianity lacked this perfection owing to their emphasis on physical or bodily power,⁷³ Hinduism lacked it all along because of its extreme emphasis on mind or rational power.

2.6. *Vedantic* Hinduism and alienation of Muslims

Spiritual strength or power of the mind alone, Vivekananda argued, cannot provide the basis for a religion and consequently nationalism. Conversely, physical prowess or rule by the body for the preservation or extension of a race or religion's interest cannot be justified. To narrow our argument to Islam and Hinduism, both the religions were polar opposites for their emphasis either on body or mind. Islam, Vivekananda considered, was successful in expanding but expanded for all the wrong ideals. At the same time, Hinduism, because of its adherence to rationality or power of the mind, shrank for the lack of physical ability to defend its ideal. Vivekananda's ideal man or religion constituted an equal proportion of both the qualities. Hence he aimed at a successful fusion between the physical power of Islam and the unique rational strength of Hinduism. He called this process the "body of Islam and mind of *Vedanta*."⁷⁴ Understandably such a combination was also conducive to the promotion of spirit of nationalism.

Vivekananda believed that the nation is a product of given sociological conditions such as, language, race or religion.⁷⁵ In the context of India, the problems

⁷³ Forced conversion, political and religious expansion through sword, intolerance toward other faiths and one dimensional thought that they are indeed the perfect beings are some of the pointers which indicates; Christianity and Islam rely too much on body.

⁷⁴ Letter of Swami Vivekananda dated 10 June 1898.

⁷⁵ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, p.286.

of nation-building, according to him were more complex as it combined many opposite and conflicting characteristics. As a rule, the imagination and subsequent emergence of a nation squarely depend on a common characteristic, a characteristic that could rise above the differences and contradictions existing within a given society. Vivekananda's India, however, did not have a common language, pure racial stock, a common ethnicity, an unified political structure or common historical experience.⁷⁶ In this myriad of differences, Vivekananda located a common ground which could unite entire India and pave the way for greater interaction between regions and its inhabitants. Religion was the basis of this commonality. As a binding factor, Vivekananda regarded it as an unparalleled force capable of uniting and resolving all the differences.

The one common ground (*in the formation of a nation*) that we have is our sacred tradition, our religion. That is the only common ground, and upon that we shall have to build. In Europe, political ideas form the national unity. In Asia religious ideals form the national unity. The unity is religion, therefore it is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India. There must be the recognition of one religion throughout the length and breadth of this land.⁷⁷

One may regard Vivekananda's hesitancy in adopting a particular religion in its concrete form, from fear of being attacked as a religious zealot.

Our religion should be not in the sense of one religion held among the Christians or the Muslims or the Buddhists. We know that our religion has certain common grounds, common to all our sects, however varying their conclusions may be, however different their claims may be. So there are common grounds; and within their

⁷⁶ Both North and South India had different histories. While North was fully exposed to the outsiders, South remained insular till the arrival of Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama. Ethnically, too, both were different. The language of the South did not owe its origin to Sanskrit, as was the case with almost all North Indian languages.

⁷⁷ *C.W.S.V.*, vol. III, p. 287.

limitations this religion of ours admits of a marvellous variation; an infinite amount of liberty to think and live our own lives.⁷⁸

As in an individual life so in a nation's life. The foundation of a successful and enduring nation in Vivekananda's opinion is based on the principles of common moral, spiritual and metaphysical values and beliefs. In other words, a community or communities of people cannot develop the spirit of nationalism and feel united unless they share a set of principles and consider it dear to them. The very existence of a nation therefore depends on a set of principles to which every individual affirms his or her allegiance and abides by its rules and regulations and strives to defend them. Some of these values resides in the society and just needs to be polished and in some case they need to be chiselled out and developed for coherent articulation.

In Vivekananda's opinion, *Vedantic* ideas of spiritual solidarity and fellow feeling was second to none. It did not manifest in a particular God who could be named or identified but was based on his unseen strength and love. The polyform *Vedanta*, claimed Vivekananda, would be so flexible as to allow a Buddhist, a Christian and a Muslim to co-exist together in perfect harmony. And most crucially scriptural *Vedanta* was non-sectarian. This allowed believers of all religions an easy access to *Vedantic* ideals. The *Vedas* or this *Vedantic* religion, Vivekananda argued, can be used to bring together not only the divided Hindus and Muslims in India but it also can play an equally important role in uniting the whole humanity. Furthermore Vivekananda assumed that since *Vedanta* emulated certain Islamic principles such as its emphasis on physical force it will be favourably received by Muslims.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 287.

Theoretically Vivekananda's *Vedanta* was unique. It truly aimed at establishing a spiritual solidarity among various communities of people. Or, as some critics have remarked, it helped nurture the idea of pan-Indianism. By borrowing and blending together Hindu and Muslim moral, ethical, theological, spiritual and physical ideals Vivekananda tried to create the ultimate unity among Indians. While this project was sensible it nonetheless had many fundamental flaws and was prone to criticism by minorities and especially Muslims. Though this proposition was methodologically correct it had two key shortcomings. First, Vivekananda was wrong to assume that the original principles of Islam can be subject to such spiritual concoction. Second, it favoured Hindus over Muslims and was biased.

Although theoretically viable, Vivekananda's framework of 'mind of *Vedanta* and body of Islam' suffers from several practical problems. First, Vivekananda was arbitrarily detaching some key Islamic principles and attaching them to Hindu tradition. Second, he failed to appreciate the fact that these religions were based on centuries old practices and principles and deeply rooted in particular philosophical traditions and cannot be subject to a simple process 'addition and subtraction'. Third, if indeed his recommendations were to be taken seriously the inevitable question would be how would Muslims respond to such an arrangement. True, Vivekananda's conception of *Vedantic* ideal matched with some Islamic beliefs. However, since their religion demands that Muslims should consider Islam as the final word of God, and refrain from any further reinterpretation, it foreclosed Vivekananda's recommendations striking any roots among Muslims. Vivekananda's *Vedanta*

alienated Muslims by claiming it to be the universal religion. To elaborate this point a little further, the regulatory principles of Islam is the belief in monotheism and acceptance that Islam is the only 'true' religion. If that is so how could Muslims be Muslims and at the same time *Vedantists*? Fifth, if Muslims find this project unconvincing what would be the Hindu response to it? The answer to this could be that even though Vivekananda's *Vedanta* involved a lot of 'addition and subtraction', the inclusivism inherent in Hinduism did not pose any radical hindrance and on the contrary was advantageous to the disunited Hindus. On balance, this concoction not only allowed Hindus the benefit of spiritual unity but infused in them a fighting spirit that was borrowed from Islam.

Vivekananda argued that this new spiritual amalgam would be the binding framework in future India. But he failed to appreciate that a section of Indians i.e. Muslims may find his project objectionable. If indeed Hindus followed the recommendations made by Vivekananda it transformed them into a community spiritually and physically far more powerful than their Muslim counterparts. This posed the danger of Hindu chauvinism and affected the unity of India. The unity of Islam which Vivekananda suggested Hindus to embrace did not bring them any closer to Islam. On the other hand it created two united communities and increased their conflict potential. One might also ask if Vivekananda recognised several positive features in Islam viz., monotheism, central scripture, belief in one supreme God, spiritual unity, and physical strength why should *Vedanta* be given precedence over Islam? To put it slightly differently, why should someone embrace the untested *Vedantic* ideal in the place of a vibrant and dynamic religion as Islam?

Vivekananda also believed that *Vedanta* is the true religion and all other religions are manifestations of it: “Lord Krishna has said so: I am in every religion as the thread through a string of pearls.”⁷⁹ This raises four obvious questions i.e. which one is the true religion Islam or *Vedantic* Hinduism. Second, if *Vedanta* is indeed the original and universal religion why should it reinforce itself among the believers? Third, if *Vedanta* is universal why should it demand allegiance to it through conversion of mind? Fourth, if *Vedanta* is universal why aim for a spiritual conquest of the world?

Furthermore, Vivekananda’s *Vedanta* was highly ambiguous. It had different implications for Hindus and Muslims. At one level it tried to counter Islam by adopting some of its core values and emerged much more superior than Islam. At another it taught its followers to respect all religions. While one group of critics have argued that Vivekananda’s *Vedanta* Hinduised Islam others thought his project Islamised Hinduism. But the fact remains that on the whole Vivekananda was uncomfortable with Islam and was apprehensive of its future role. In this regard, his discourse on “body of Islam and mind of *Vedanta*” invariably helped consolidate Hindu identity and made them extremely assertive.

It might appear since Vivekananda was emphasising “the body of Islam” and emulating some of its ideals, he would be sympathetic to that religion. On the contrary, Vivekananda was using Islam only as a tool for the preservation, promotion

⁷⁹ C.W.S.V., vol. III, p. 18.

and consolidation of Hindus and Hinduism. He asserted, Hindus were victims of Islam as they lacked the latter's physical and spiritual determination and brute force. For all practical purposes Hindus and Hinduism could have put up a defence had these two adopted some of the key principles of Islam, argued Vivekananda. Equally importantly, if Islam contained more positive aspects than Hinduism why did he not allow Hindus to accept it as a superior religion and sanction their eventual conversion. But Vivekananda endorsed only a partial borrowing from Islam. A total emulation feared Vivekananda could weaken Hindu confidence in themselves and their religion. If they are made to believe that their culture, tradition and religion are all inferior and flawed compared to Islam that will mean the complete ruination of Hindu way of life and Hinduism. Therefore, Vivekananda sought to infuse Hinduism with only an appropriate amount of physical power of Islam, that would help protect its interest and not hinder the flourishing of the rational self. Another extension of "body of Islam and mind of *Vedanta*" principle is that the former should always remain subservient to the latter. Physical force in this sense is a good servant but a bad master. Hence, particular care should be taken to prevent the servant from taking the role of master as happened in the case of Islam.

Another logical development in this argument is that if Islam represented "the body", Hinduism resided "in the mind". If mind should have the dominance over body, Islam in this conception was given a subservient role. One may point out that Islam not only contained physical valour or prowess but had a well-defined and corresponding ideology. But Vivekananda, while incorporating the "body of Islam" seems to have disregarded or underestimated its power of the mind. With all fairness

we may argue, the brute force and barbarism identified in Islam (in its political and religious conquests), is only one facet of this religion. Islam cherished certain values. However contradictory and ambiguous it may be, millions who were not converted to it by force accepted the religion because of these values.

As argued earlier in the analysis, Vivekananda expressed his admiration for some of these values like monotheism, lack of ritualism, emphasis on a central scripture and most importantly the ideas of brotherhood. The “body of Islam” ignored all these qualities and eliminated any claims of Islamic greatness. If Islam was great or had any true ideals it existed only during the time of Mohammed. “Think of the good Mohammed did to the world, and think of the great evil that has been done through his fanaticism.”⁸⁰ Vivekananda appear to be making a clear distinction between the original and antiquated Islam *vis-à-vis* Islam in the historical process. While he was appreciative of the former he was very critical of the latter. In other words, the original ideals of Islam got degenerated in the historical process and was irrecoverable. Thus what was left of this religion was the enduring legacy of physical force. Though this aspect was the source of all evil it had some merit if incorporated in moderation.

⁸⁰ C.W.S.V., vol. I, p. 184.

2.7. Conclusion

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in this analysis is to depict an exact picture of Vivekananda's views on Islam. To assume that he was opposed to Muslim rule and Islamic conquest of India and hence was anti-Muslim would be an incorrect appraisal. Equally slippery is the argument that Vivekananda was sympathetic to Islam, for he borrowed so much from it.

Like many Hindu writers Vivekananda had an ambiguous approach to Islam. At one level he dismissed this religion and had a disparaging attitude towards its followers. On another he highlighted the positive aspects of this religion. This complex characterisation of Islam was a product of Vivekananda's assessment of both Hinduism and Islam in a comparative framework. Vivekananda was convinced that both Islam and Muslim rule were responsible for the decline of Hinduism and Hindu way of life in India. Although he accepted this historical reality he nonetheless asked some searching questions such as: Why Hinduism that successfully withstood many challenges posed against it from within and outside was defeated when it encountered Islam. Similarly, why Islam escaped conquest by other religions or collectively never yielded to subservience. But most important of all how a small band of Muslims in India could keep a huge population under its control for more than seven hundred years. And why the majority Hindus remained subservient to it. While seeking answers to these key questions Vivekananda came across some of its practical, robust and unifying principles which allowed Islam an advantage over other religions and Muslims over non-Muslims.

Vivekananda used Muslim rule and Islam to interrogate his own society. Although he made these two factors responsible for the decline of Hinduism he also recognised the fact that the Hindus are also to be blamed for their own degradation and downfall. Islam was the mirror in which Vivekananda captured the image of the cowardice, caste divided, parochial and fractional Hindus and their equally loathsome ideas of no-touchism (untouchability), pollution and purity. In this context, he did not necessarily regard Islam superior because it was not affected by such internal division as was the case with Hinduism or Hindu society. He was merely familiarising Hindus with their contemptuous practices that contributed to they themselves being slaves of Muslim rule and Islam. Islam served as a questionnaire for the self-assessment of Hindus. Vivekananda hoped by acquainting the Hindus with Islam he could help the former consolidate in a much more egalitarian manner. This exercise while helped Hindus to consolidate themselves also made them weary of Islam and Muslims.

In spite of its success, Islam according to Vivekananda was anti-modern. Islam opposed forces of change as it considered such a measure would clash with its traditional spirit. It opposed change, fearing the disintegration of its original identity. Vivekananda challenged the rationality behind accepting everything in the *Quran* as words of God. To him Islam was dynamic as long as taking new converts and territories by sword was concerned. It was static and intolerant before agents of modernity and modernising elements. The slavishness to traditionalism was the root cause of Islamic intolerance and fanaticism. Hence, it was insular rather than

cosmopolitan. Its unity reflected in its sectarianism. He was convinced that historical Islam was responsible for many untold suffering among non-Muslim communities and thus had nothing to contribute. And yet, Islam in its pure form had something to offer.

Vivekananda had a hostile view of Muslim rule but thought well of some aspects of Islam. But again his appreciation of Islam was partial. He recognised the advantages of spiritual solidarity among Muslims and their obedience to their religion but he detested their blind conformity to it. Their obedience to God or Almighty, Vivekananda observed, is based on fear. It is fear of reward and retribution in afterlife that determines a Muslim's relationship with his religion. As a result, a Muslim is bereft of any rational understanding and exhibits very little or no respect for modern ideas and values. The failure to keep pace with modernism and lack of appreciation for its dynamics affects the overall character of a Muslim. He ends up being resistant to change and exhibits extreme fanaticism.

Vivekananda recognised that monotheism, equality, universal Islamic brotherhood, a central and commonly accepted scripture, intense dedication of its followers towards the religion, and its overall dynamism were some of the most admirable qualities of Islam and deserved respect. But unfortunately since these very qualities were responsible for sanctioning untold suffering among non-Muslims Vivekananda was critical of Islam. In Vivekananda's assessment these qualities were of supreme significance both to Muslims and non-Muslims. On the one hand the application and belief in these principles brought great glory to Muslims. And on the

other hand these very principles proved disastrous while used against non-Muslims. Vivekananda was of the opinion that Islam should be condemned by all possible means for its conquests that established a master-slave relationship. But to dismiss Islam altogether shall be a grave error. In other words, by using the very principles of Islam a subject community or a community that has been wronged by it can retaliate and gain advantage over it. Given the record of Islam and Muslim rule in India Vivekananda's assessment of these two might appear Machiavellian. This analysis shows that Vivekananda's admiration for Islam was 'purpose oriented'. He merely used Islam as a model to consolidate Hindu society and his own brand of *Vedantic* Hinduism. Far from uniting Hindus and Muslims this discourse only reinforced the Hindu negative attitude towards Muslim rule and Islam and alienated Muslims.

Vivekananda argued that Hindu encounter with Islam and Muslim rule made the former passive and fatalistic. To Vivekananda, this passivity or inertia was not a peaceful and free state but that of servitude. Analysing the political and religious zeal of Islam embodied in the principles of *umma* or Islamic world community, Vivekananda felt that the passivity in Hindu attitude would end in its complete annihilation by pan-Islamism. But at the same time, he used Islam to unite Hindus. By highlighting its principles of equality, monotheism, universal brotherhood he tried to dispel the no-touchism existing within Hinduism. This emulation did not Islamise Hinduism or create a solidarity among Hinduism and Islam but on the contrary allowed Hinduism additional advantages to combat the intramural and extramural challenges. For Vivekananda, Islam was a model whose structural framework could be used to counter Islam itself. His conception of "mind of

Vedanta and body of Islam” is the best example in this direction. Vivekananda opposed Islam but in the end became a part of Islam’s vision.

We have to conquer the world. That we have to! India must conquer the world and nothing less than that is my ideal. It may be very big, it may astonish many of you, but it is so. We must conquer the world or die. There is no other alternative. The sign of life is expansion; we must go out, expand, show life, or degrade, fester and die. There is no other alternative. Take either of these, either live or die.⁸¹

The conquest which Vivekananda repeatedly emphasised was a spiritual conquest: the march of *Vedantic* truth or ideal. But it was conquest of a different kind. Muslims too aimed at a global propagation of Islamic spiritual ideals. The bringing together of this global spiritual community subsequently found manifestation in *Dar-ul-Islam* or a global religio-political community. Perhaps Vivekananda was conceiving a similar Hindu ideal. No doubt, Vivekananda’s *Vedanta* taught Hindus to take pride in themselves and made them conscious of their identity. But it also sowed seeds of religious intolerance. Influenced by its ideals a section of Hindu society has assumed the role of religious-warriors fighting a religious war against Muslims. In a nutshell, Vivekananda’s conception of *Vedanta* made sense but was biased. Its content was Hinduism and thus alienated Muslims.

True, Vivekananda had an extremely low view of Muslim rule. Also, he did not appreciate Islam in unaffected terms. However he did not discount the fact that Muslims or Islam shall have a significant presence in the future Indian nation. This reckoning affected Vivekananda’s discourse on Muslim rule and Islam considerably.

⁸¹ *The Selections from the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 299.

It might appear that he aimed to counter Islam in several different ways. He hoped that by reforming Hinduism one can stop the inflow of Hindu lower-caste converts to Islam. This was made possible by reconstructing Hinduism on the model of Islam. And *Vedanta* was a product of that reconstruction. Besides, Vivekananda believed that although Islam was incompatible it could be integrated into the Indian society and way of life through *Vedanta*. *Vedanta* with its idea of universalism would allow Muslims to go on with their way of life and at the same time keep them as a part of the larger system. Vivekananda also tried to reconstruct the notion of Indianness through *Vedanta*. The core values of *Vedanta*, he argued, are reflections of the highest ideals of various religions. At the same time, however, it remained above any narrow sectarianism. This aspect of *Vedanta*, Vivekananda hoped, could facilitate greater understanding among various communities.

In Vivekananda's opinion this new spiritual amalgam would be the binding framework in future India. But he failed to appreciate that a section of Indians i.e. Muslims may find his project objectionable. If indeed Hindus followed the recommendations made by Vivekananda, it transformed them into a community spiritually and physically far more powerful than their Muslim counterparts. This posed the danger of Hindu chauvinism and affected the unity of India. Though the project was methodologically correct it nonetheless aimed to swamp Muslims with an overtly Hindu ideal. Furthermore, since Vivekananda consolidated Hindus according to the principles of "body of Islam and mind of *Vedanta*", it gave them an upper hand to manage any dissent emanating from their Muslim counterparts.

It can also be contended that Vivekananda tried to blend the ideals of Hinduism and Islam. However, the burdens of history and seemingly contradictory nature of both religions and his own inheritance produced an ideology which was overtly Hindu in nature. Vivekananda's interpretation considerably affected the Hindu perception of his own self and that of the Muslim rule and Islam. Like Vivekananda, Gandhi too dealt on the same subjects and had a similar inheritance. But Gandhi was aware of Vivekananda's shortcomings and was more careful. While Gandhi appreciated the idea of a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam, he did not proceed to merge the concerned religions together to create a new one. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, like Vivekananda, Gandhi also could not come to terms with an absolute equality either between these two religions or their followers.

Chapter III

Hindu-Muslim unity and Gandhi

Standing on the borderline that divides the life from the life beyond, I warn my country against the pest of Gandhism. It will mean not only Muslim rule over the entire country but the extinction of Hinduism itself.¹

- *Nathuram Godse*

3.1. Introduction

Gandhi subscribed to some of the arguments put forward by Vivekananda on the downfall of Hindus and Hinduism. He agreed with Vivekananda that the caste factor was instrumental in pushing a large section of Hindus to embrace Islam which espoused equality and brotherhood. Again, like Vivekananda, Gandhi recognised the importance of religion and expected that it can be a source of positive strength in the nation-building process. Most importantly, both Vivekananda and Gandhi agreed that Muslim rule and Islam were synonymous and the assessment of the former is incomplete without taking on board the latter. Yet, while there is a great deal in common between the two unlike Vivekananda, Gandhi did not necessarily believe in the creation of a race of superior Hindus. True, like Vivekananda, Gandhi admitted that Hinduism can be a lot richer if it adopts and imbibes some aspects of Islam. But this was in no way intended to fortress Hinduism against Islam.

The colonial interpretation of history and the oral tradition which had a bearing on Vivekananda's discourse also conditioned Gandhi's own narrative on

¹ Nathuram Godse on 'Why I Killed Gandhi?' in Robert Payne, *Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, London: Bodley Head, 1969, p. 640.

socio-cultural and religious history of India. This inescapable inheritance constrained him in his effort to plug the gap of Hindu-Muslim divide. Nonetheless he tried to sanitise it by providing a complacent rendering of the events and occasions. And this became the bedrock of his Hindu-Muslim synthesis thesis. As we shall see, there were several obvious shortcomings in his argument and thus could not wholly convince Hindus or Muslims.

Despite the vast amount of critical literature on Gandhi, there has yet been no coherent analysis of his views on Islam. Going by his non-sectarian attitude, scholars and students alike have often suggested that Gandhi was sympathetic to Islam. To some Gandhi was even pro-Muslim - a contention which led to his assassination. During his life time Gandhi described himself as “a better Muslim than most Muslims”. At the same time, however, he maintained that he was first and foremost a Hindu above everything else. He zealously guarded his own religion while bearing no ill will towards other faiths. A complex persona as he was, he made the religio-political fabric of India more complex by trying to infuse the two main religions of the land: Hinduism and Islam.

Generations of scholars have argued that Gandhi envisaged a unified India where religious harmony would be the basis of the nation's ideology. What they failed to recognize was that the harmony which Gandhi visualised was basically a Hindu concept. Though Gandhi, like Hinduism, laid emphasis on 'inclusivism' the end result was the gradual elimination of 'the other'. In a way, both Abrahamic 'faiths' and Hinduism aimed at the elimination of 'the other' using entirely opposite means. What made Gandhi's Hinduism different from other faiths was that unlike the

others it did not reject them. This non-rejection in itself was a move towards the phasing out or the neutralization of 'the other'. In other words, Gandhi had a disparaging attitude towards Muslim rule and was not entirely comfortable with Islam. Yet, he was conscious of the fact that Islam shall have a major presence in independent India. To counter Islam in his vision of future India Gandhi tried to soften it by bringing it closer to Hinduism.

In the following pages it will be argued that Gandhi's unified India was indeed a march towards the establishment of Hindu dominance. This dominance we should remember was not religious but cultural and civilisational. Gandhi's refusal to regard Muslims as separate entities tended to negate the latter's separate political identity. To put it slightly differently, although Gandhi recognised the presence of Islam and Muslims in India he did not recognise their claim to the nation's political past. However, as we will see, Gandhi himself is to be blamed for raising separatist aspirations among Indian Muslims. He unwittingly laid the foundations of it as early as the 1920s by preparing the blue-print for the Khilafat agitation and leading it afterwards.²

3.2. The religious identity of Gandhi

It is a very strange thing that almost all the professors of great religions of the world claim me as their own. The Jains mistake me for a Jain. Scores of Buddhist friends have taken me for a Buddhist. Hundreds of Christian friends still consider that I am Christian and ... Many of my Musalman friends consider that, although I do not

² Gandhi realised his mistakes in awakening Muslim political aspirations that contributed in flaring up nation-wide riots. Reflecting on it he would write afterwards: "Have I not been instrumental in bringing into being the vast energy of the people? I must find the remedy if the energy proved self-destructive.... Have I erred, have I been impatient have I compromised with evil?" Ved Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1977, p. 157.

call myself a Musalman, to all intents and purposes, I am one of them... still something within tells me that for all that deep veneration I show to these several religions, I am all the more a Hindu none the less for it.³

Gandhi was both a religious and political leader. Though he advocated a policy of secularism for the state he did not separate religion from politics. He laid a great deal of emphasis on ethics and morality in politics, and religion, he hoped, would be the source of ethics and morality. Only Hinduism provided a framework for a fine balance between religion and politics leaving no space for religious zealotry. Through Hinduism he tried to reach out to other religions and sects. It is doubtful whether he could have done so had he belonged to another religious faith. Gandhi, thus, successfully used his Hindu background for achieving his political ends.

Gandhi's rise to power itself was a manifestation of regenerated Hinduism. India's struggle for independence was in fact a struggle by the majority community the Hindus, to reinforce their identity. Yet it is interesting to note that he allowed concessions to co-religionists at the cost of Hinduism. At the same time he should be given credit for uniting the divided and disunited Hindus of the sub-continent into a single religio-political entity sharing a common background and aspiration. What Gandhi would achieve for Hindus during his thirty year contribution to India's struggle for independence, no other in the whole history of Hindu civilisation achieved.

³ Speech at Buddha's Birth Anniversary, delivered at the Buddha Vihara, sponsored by the Mahabodhi Society. For details, see *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (cited hereafter as *C.W.M.G.*), vol. 27, no. 23, pp. 61-2.

Gandhi's refusal to embrace any other religion was based on a Hindu spirit of inclusivism. This inclusivism allowed him to experiment and dabble, and also admire the essence and practices of other religions while keeping his own religious identity intact.⁴ He took pride in his own religion while accepting the claims of another. While doing so he subtly made his own religion and religious beliefs exclusive, whereby, others were forced to imbibe and follow its ideals and spirit. In his own words:

Believing as I do in the influence of heredity, being born in a Hindu family, I have remained Hindu. I should reject it, if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me in as much as it gives the votary the largest scope for self expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables its followers of that faith not merely to respect all other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in other faiths."⁵

This was one of the prime reasons why Muslims felt alienated at one point during India's struggle for independence. Though most of the advocates of a separate homeland for Muslims, including Jinnah,⁶ admired Gandhi's faith in promoting equality between various religions, they could not trust the continuation of a similar spirit by the majority of Hindus. Gandhi made it clear that the India of his dreams did not have to embrace one singular religion i.e. wholly Hindu, wholly Christian, or

⁴ "He (Gandhi) proudly proclaimed himself to be a Hindu. Born a Hindu, he found in the tradition of his fathers all the resources he needed for religious vision and growth; for him it had the particular merit that it was tolerant and able to accept new insights from other sources. Indeed, his study of the scriptures of other traditions had deepened and broadened his own understanding and experience of being a Hindu." Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, London: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 116.

⁵ V.V. Ramana Murthi, (Selected and Edited), *Gandhi: Essential Writings*, New Delhi: Gandhi Peace Foundation, 1970, p. 123.

wholly Islamic but it had to be wholly tolerant, with its religions working side by side with one another.⁷ Though this principle suited well the ideals of Hinduism it did not find a similar response in other religions chiefly Islam.⁸

Again, Gandhi's emphasis on religious toleration was not a complete all-India Hindu phenomenon. His language was more a product of the religious topography in which he grew up and earned a living till his mid-life career. From his mother, Gandhi inherited a profoundly religious temper and his search for God was often at war with his search for earthly power and dominion.⁹ The family of Gandhi's mother, Putli Bai belonged to the Pranami sect, followers of the Gujrati saint Mahamati Prannath (1618-1694), who taught equal respect for Hindu and Muslim beliefs while synthesizing the two.¹⁰

Also, Porbunder, in the Kathiawar region of Gujrat had a long tradition of interaction with Islam at every level of society including politics. Gandhi's early life in Porbunder state was integrally dominated both by the Arabs and Pathans who settled there under the regime of the Nawab of Junagadh-of which Porbunder was a part.¹¹ For centuries the people of Kathiawar had been ruled by Muslim princes and their Hindu advisers. Here Hindus and Muslims lived side by side, tolerant of each

⁶ Publicly Jinnah spoke of Gandhi as "one of the greatest men produced by the Hindu community," but in private he also "acknowledged how great was the loss for the Muslims." Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 183.

⁷ *Young India*, 22 December 1927.

⁸ The *Quran* made it clear that Islam can not live side by side with any other religion. It asked its faithful to fight for the spread of Islam until Islam is established as a universal religion embracing the entire humanity.

⁹ Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, n. 1, p.15.

¹⁰ Robert C. Lester, 'Towards Unity with Diversity: Gandhi on Equal Respect for All Religions', *Gandhi Marg*, vol. 15, no. 2, July-September 1995, p. 175.

For details on Pranami sect, see P. Krishnamurty Iyer, *The Divine Message of Lord Prannath*, New Delhi: Prannath Mission, 1965.

others foibles, speaking a common language, Gujrati, and a melange of Arabic, Persian and Hindi words.¹² His father's religious open-mindedness provided Gandhi with a role model.¹³ Interestingly, Gandhi's boyhood idol was a Muslim friend Sheikh Mehtab. In him, Gandhi saw the physical power of Islam, which cultivated in him a respect for its masculinity.¹⁴

During his student days in the Middle Temple in 1889 Gandhi was closely associated with an Islamic Students' Organization called *Anjuman Islamia*. It is not clear why Gandhi joined this front given he embraced a progressive British life style and outlook during this period. However, one possible explanation could be his sense of gratitude to the Muslims. It is pertinent to recall that 'Gandhi went to Britain to study Law with the financial assistance of a Saurastrian Muslim merchant prince who had extensive business in London as well as in South Africa. Incidentally his host in London too was a Muslim.'¹⁵ The sense of obligation is one of the most revered ethical values in the Indian tradition. Perhaps Gandhi was bound by a sense of obligation to the Muslims in matters relating to his academic and financial career. This obligation, he thought he could fulfill by (a) associating himself wholeheartedly with their cause (b) promoting their interest (c) and assisting them at their time of need. What could have been Gandhi's attitude to Muslims had there been no such contribution from the latter is extremely difficult to assess'. However, this much is clear, that these contributions indeed coloured his vision. Throughout his life he

¹¹ Ashutosh Lahiry, *Gandhi in Indian Politics*, Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1976, p. 4.

¹² Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, n. 1, p. 23.

¹³ "He (my father) had, besides, Musalman and Parsi friends, who would talk to him about their own faiths, and he would listen to them always with respect, and often with interest." M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1966, p. 24.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Ashe, *Gandhi: A Study in Revolution*, London: Heinemann, 1968, pp. 10-11.

maintained a sympathetic attitude towards Muslims despite incidents of Muslim intolerance and injustice.¹⁶

Another factor which was responsible for Gandhi's attitude towards Islam was his caste background. His ancestors belonged to the community of Banias or grocers.¹⁷ Unlike the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, the Banias had escaped large scale persecution by Islam when it made inroads into India. Both Brahmins and Kshatriyas harboured animosity for Muslims and Islam as they had lost their political and religious power following the advent of this new religion. There was little friction between Banias and Muslims as the latter did not usurp their area of interest or societal position. Banias as a community lost none of their privileges under Islamic rule. By contrast, this community continued to prosper and expand, oblivious to the religious and political condition of India. Preservation of business interests mattered more to this community than anything else. Hence their assessment of Indian history was quite different to their Brahmin and Kshatriya counterparts. An assessment of Gandhi's caste background becomes all the more important in this context. His failure to fully comprehend the dynamics of the Hindu-Muslim divide was very much a product of his caste background. It is interesting to note that Savarkar who came from a Brahmin background had an entirely different attitude towards Muslims. Since his community had lost most during the Muslim rule it was more critical of Muslim rule and Islam compared to Banias, the caste to which Gandhi belonged.

¹⁵ Lahiry, *Gandhi in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.*, n. 11, p. 4.

¹⁶ The killing of innocent Hindus in the North West Frontier Province and in the Malabar coast during the Moplah rebellion. These two incidents are discussed at length under the section of *Gandhi, Muslims and the Khilafat*.

¹⁷ Gandhi, *An Autobiography or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p.1.

3. 3. The South African experience

I went to South Africa in charge of a case for Muslim friends of my brother. I went to South Africa to earn my living, but I soon put service first. I became a 'coolie' barrister in order to serve my labourers and friends there and I really served Hindus through Muslims whose employee I was. Hindu-Muslim unity was part of my being.¹⁸

Gandhi spent most of his formative years in Natal, South Africa. This was the first political arena where he experimented with his ideas on communal unity in a limited way. The political atmosphere and the people living in it also contributed immensely towards his views on Hindu-Muslim unity and division. After a few years of idleness following his return from England Gandhi got his first break, as a barrister, in South Africa where he had gone to fight a litigation of a Muslim businessman named Abdullah Seth. Natal in 1893, the year of Gandhi's arrival, was a true melting pot. It had then a population of about 400,000 Zulus, and about 40,000 Europeans as against 60,000 indentured, 10,000 ex-indentured and 10,000 free Indians.¹⁹ The Indians in South Africa prior to the arrival of Gandhi were a divided lot. They came from all over the Indian sub-continent professing different faiths and belonging to many religions. The most powerful and influential amongst them were Gujratis mostly engaged in business. These were mainly Muslims, Parsis and Hindus.

Gandhi had little difficulty in integrating with this community as they spoke the same language and shared a common geographical and cultural affinity.

¹⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1963, p. 3.

However, there was a great divide among the Indians there on the question of religion. Recognizing this fact Gandhi wrote, "I had realized early enough in South Africa that there was no genuine friendship between the Hindus and the Musalmans. I never missed a single opportunity to remove obstacles in the way of unity."²⁰

His efforts were not in vain. He succeeded in achieving some amount of interaction between Hindus and Muslims in South Africa. This was possible largely because he drew attention to the common enemy in the colonial administration. Gandhi, a brilliant strategist, was aware of the dangers of religious prejudice in a multi-religious community and yet he freely dabbled in Hinduism and Islam to create a front against the racist regime. His political speeches in South Africa were fiery, often containing passages from various scriptures. So much so, after September 1907, Gandhi invoked the name *Khuda-Ishvar* to lead the Indian opposition movement against the government.²¹ However, there were many odds involved in promoting a truly Indian spirit among the diaspora.

As a contemporary critic of Gandhi has put it:

Throughout his African years there were signs that some Indians thought he was too aligned with Muslim associates and their particular interests. When Gokhale's visit was being planned communalism reared its head, as a Hindu group attached to a temple in Durban planned a specifically Hindu address to the great Indian visitor rather than co-operate in one from the whole Indian community.²²

¹⁹ Dhanjay Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1973, pp. 30-31.

²⁰ Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p.141.

²¹ Maureen Swan, *Gandhi: The South African Experience*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985, p. 147.

²² Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 49.

Gandhi during his South African years expressed a remarkably close affinity towards Islam. Reflecting on it afterwards he would observe: 'Indeed I had put forth the claim in South Africa to be a good Muslim simultaneously with being a good member of the other religions of the world.'²³ This included Gandhi maintaining a ritual fast during the Muslim holy month of Ramazan, and insisting that his fellow inhabitants of Tolstoy Farm do the same.²⁴ This was perhaps because he was overwhelmed by the hospitality extended to him by his employers and other Gujrati Muslims. The Muslim community's fellow-feeling for Gandhi extended even towards the non-observance of *purdah* by Muslim women when he was in their household.²⁵

However, this congenial attitude of Muslims towards Gandhi was short-lived. He courted their anger when he started interpreting Islam in the context of India. Gandhi maintained that spread of Islam in India was possible through voluntary and involuntary conversion and the majority of the converts came from the lower class.²⁶ This opinion of Islam caused a stir among Muslims and there were several letters of protest to him from the community. Replying to them, Gandhi said that all the facts stated by him were drawn from history, and he observed: "That Islam was spread by force is a historical fact."²⁷

²³ *Harijan*, 3 March 1947, p. 59.

²⁴ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, pp. 49-50.

²⁵ *Harijan*, 24 November 1946.

²⁶ Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 88.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

As the protest continued, Gandhi took recourse in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Hunter's *History of India* to validate his opinion and support his assertion that these were merely historical facts.²⁸ This measure however did not pacify the Muslims and for one whole year the Young Men's Mohammedan Society continued to criticise him. In June 1905 Gandhi apologized to the aggrieved Muslims and remarked he did not want to prolong the controversy. Still it did not pacify their anger. Upon which in April 1906, Gandhi reiterated his apology and sorrowfully appealed to the Muslims to forgive him if he had committed an error in what he had said.²⁹

This was the only direct confrontation which Gandhi had with the Muslims in South Africa. Analysing it Dhananjay Keer, one of Gandhi's biographers writes: "It seems that Gandhi had learnt one of the most important lessons of his life, and in future he took the utmost care never to wound the susceptibilities of the Muslims. This experience was so unpleasant and controversial he did not even refer to this in his autobiography."³⁰ We notice a kind of veiled dissatisfaction against the Muslims occurring in Gandhi's attitude following this controversy. Gandhi henceforth became extremely careful in his remarks. He also took it as a personal challenge to bridge the gap between himself and the Muslim community.

The measures he took to achieve this were many.³¹ However, two of the most important steps which stand out and require mentioning are: his assessment of Indian history, and a policy of appeasement as far as Muslims were concerned. Personally

²⁸ C.W.M.G., vol. IV, p. 469.

²⁹ C.W.M.G., vol. V, p. 299.

Gandhi did see a distinction between Hindus and Muslims. But he felt this distinction could be mitigated. The policy of mitigation of this difference found prominence in his approach of appeasement and selective use of history. He saw nothing wrong in following these two approaches as he considered Indian Muslims as mostly converts from the Hindu fold. Moreover, his somewhat effusive attitude while interacting with Muslims was a posture of the Hindu magnanimity translated into forgiveness.

3. 4. Gandhi and history

On his return from South Africa, in many speeches and documents Gandhi made selective use of Indian history: dealing only with those periods marked by a certain ruler's compassion to his non-Islamic subjects and were palatable to the Hindus.³²

The prominent nationalist discourse on Indian history prior to Gandhi defined the period of Islamic conquest and rule with discomfiture. Whereas liberal Hindus held Muslim rule responsible for *their* downfall and eventual degeneration, for others it represented the 'dark age'. An era in Indian history during which Hindus underwent forcible conversion, sustained persecution, political domination and

³⁰ Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 88.

³¹ Having a Muslim doctor as his friend and companion, living in Muslim quarters during riots etc.

³² Gandhi's assessment of seven hundred years of Muslim rule was confined to only one personality—that of Emperor Akbar. "Akbar's successors lost the splendor of the Mughal Empire of his time because they lost, one by one, Akbar's qualities of character. Jehangir lost one, Shahjehan one more, Aurangzeb more still and his successors lost almost all." One wonders what Gandhi meant by splendors of Mughal Empire and what were Akbar's qualities which his predecessors lacked. Akbar, if he was famous for anything, was renowned for his secular policies that aimed at giving equal respect to Hindus. Hence, it would seem Gandhi was bemoaning the loss of this Islamic attitude. Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I, *Civilisation, Politics and Religion*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, p. 306.

cultural humiliation.³³ The colonial experience and its version of Indian history, discussed in Chapter 6, contributed immensely towards shaping the nationalist view in this matter. In other words, the theory of degeneration of Hindus with the advent of Islam was first systematically developed by the British, and Hindus were its unwitting consumers. Hindu leaders did not venture into a systematic and searching analysis of the cause of their downfall and degeneration, because they felt convinced that Islamic rule was mainly responsible for it. Some held this opinion without restraint. Others were more discreet and knew that, since they had to find ways of working with Muslims, they should avoid raking up old historical feuds and memories.³⁴

Gandhi's view in this matter is interesting. He was in agreement with other Hindu leaders as far as Hindu degeneration was concerned. He made the argument more clear by pointing out that the British rule was a consequence of India's degenerate state.³⁵ The question remains how he viewed the degeneration taking place. If we follow his argument that there was an atmosphere of chaos and general decay prior to the arrival of British, then someone must be held responsible for that state of being. Gandhi's predecessors and many of his contemporaries unhesitatingly blamed the Muslim rule for this. He however was more cautious and avoided

³³ "The tendency to blame Muslim rule is evident in most Hindu leaders, including Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Gupta, Narmada Shankar, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Gokhale, Ranade, Tilak, Vivekananda and Aurobindo. For most of them, Muslim rulers, with the solitary exception of Akbar, had been tyrannical, oppressive, discriminatory, intolerant and contemptuous of Hindu beliefs and practices. They forcibly converted Hindus, destroyed their temples, insulted their religion, raped their women, plundered their property and wantonly shed their blood." Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1987, p.42.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-9.

subscribing to any such view. Nonetheless the Islamic period of Indian history remained a gray area for him.

Gandhi's predicament was how to avoid mentioning the Islamic atrocities committed on Hindus. On this matter he encountered both British historiography and oral tradition that colluded in depicting Muslim rule and Islam in a certain way (as analysed in Chapter 6). Although from a nationalist perspective he was in a position to ignore the British depiction of Muslim history of India he could not take such liberty with the oral tradition. Faced with this formidable obstacle and the contentious nature of that particular part of Indian history he tried to avoid the Muslim question altogether. The net result of this was almost trivial. As we shall see during the course of this discussion, the man who always argued that he understood Muslims better than anyone else did the gravest disservice by ignoring their presence. Of the trifurcated Indian cultural physiognomy and the civilisations that contributed to it, Gandhi knew the Hindu and the British but ignored the Islamic.³⁶ Bhikhu Parekh explains this tendency very succinctly. According to him, "Indian history", for Gandhi, "began with the arrival of the Aryans and continued for several thousand years, during which it developed a rich Hindu culture. The Muslim and British periods were largely aberrations made possible by Hindu decadence, and significant because of their revitalising influence on Hinduism. The Muslims in this civilisational set up were basically converted Hindus whose religion was but an icing on their essentially Hindu cultural cake."³⁷

³⁶ Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989, p. 188.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

In the 1940s during the quit-India agitation Jinnah blamed Gandhi for masterminding a Hindu nation in which Muslims would be at the mercy of Hindus. That allegation would not seem far-fetched if we assess Gandhi's analysis of history. For Gandhi, Muslims of India, are not a separate nation.³⁸ Their clamour for nationhood would seem as absurd as a Chinese or British Muslim claiming separate nationhood purely on the basis of religion. The basis of the Indian nation and national identity for Gandhi was civilisational. Civilisation also, to him, was always plural: made possible by an interplay between various linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic factors. Gandhi called this interplay a synthesis.

Furthermore, unlike Vivekananda, Gandhi argued that nationality had nothing to do with religion or language, and was entirely a matter of culture, which Muslims, being 'simply converts from Hinduism' shared in common with Hindus.³⁹ This assumption not only denied the Muslims their religious identity but cultural identity as well. Hindus in this regard were the supremacists because along with their religion they enjoyed the privilege of having their own culture which Muslims shared. In other words this meant; "since the Hindus were the creators, historical carriers and guardians of Indian civilisation and enjoyed an overwhelming numerical pre-dominance, they were to constitute the cultural basis of the Indian state. All Indians, Hindus as well as others, were to be its equal citizens, but the former were to set its moral and cultural tone. The unity of the Hindus was to be the basis of the unity of the Indian state."⁴⁰

³⁸ M. K. Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, n. 18, pp. 296-7.

³⁹ Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, *op. cit.*, n. 36, p. 186.

⁴⁰ Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, *op. cit.*, n. 33, p. 66.

The Islamic perception of Indian history was diametrically opposed to that of Gandhi's. It is true that the Muslims took India as their homeland after their conquest but they never considered themselves a part of its culture or civilisation. They imposed their own religion upon the existing one, promoted their own culture, followed a distinct way of life and always considered themselves as 'the other' meaning different from the Hindus. The Muslims had their own historians, their proud traditions, their sense of bonding which the numerically powerful Hindus lacked.⁴¹

Moreover, they subscribed to a distinct culture which encompassed architecture, music, language, art and crafts, food habits and dress. There was no such thing called 'tolerance' during this period which Gandhi took pains to describe. The majority community had to put up with all kinds of changes because the Muslims were at the helm of affairs, in areas such as, making laws, distributing justice and defining the nature of social interaction. There were two categories of people who adopted this Islamic culture. First, the lower class converts who were denied equality within Hinduism and the other being a minuscule minority of Hindus who worked for their Muslim masters. Hence Gandhi is incorrect on two counts. First, his apparent ambivalent attitude towards the Islamic culture in India. Second, his arguments on plurality were flawed because there was no substantial interaction between the two communities. The degeneration which Gandhi described took place prior to the arrival of British and was largely a product of Islamic suppression. This forced the Hindus or the majority of Indians into becoming an 'inward looking' race.

Critics have argued that Gandhi was secular while dealing with matters that were Islamic. This also meant he did not have any vehemence or grudge against the Muslims. But one can always argue the opposite. Gandhi's language was not always secular. As discussed in chapter 6, operating at a mass level Gandhi's interpretation was conditioned by the general narrative that regarded Muslims as the 'other' and the Muslim rule a dark period in history. However, he conveniently cloaked this inner feeling by sitting on the fence. For example, he acted as a mouthpiece for both the communities and allowed himself to be treated as a channel of grievance. In these instances, the content of the matter, language and expression was his own but it appeared as if he was only quoting what had already been said by a community. This approach allowed him to express what he really felt without the danger of getting branded as pro-Hindu or pro-Muslim.

This can be demonstrated by the following passage:

The Hindus fear the Muslims because they (the Hindus) say that the Muslims, wherever they have held power, have treated them with great harshness, and contend that, though they were a majority, they are non-plussed by a handful of Muslim invaders, that the danger of repetition of the experience is ever present before the Hindus, and that, in spite of the sincerity of the leading Muslims, the Muslim masses are bound to make common cause with any Muslim adventurer.⁴²

Here the question arises about whether Gandhi shared this feeling of the majority of Hindus? Or was he merely acting as a neutral spokesman? If we make an

⁴¹ Ashe, *Gandhi: A Study in Revolution*, *op. cit.*, n. 14, pp. 18-9.

⁴² Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, n. 18, pp. 111-2.

effort to read between the lines it would be evident that Gandhi clearly shared the anguish along with the majority community.

There were times when Gandhi was forced to give vent to his dissatisfaction against the Muslims. But the manner in which he did it is significant. He, for example, derided the Muslims for all that was wrong but was quick to point out that Muslims could only do so because of Hindu follies. The passage below is a fascinating example of this cultivated ambiguity.

The Muslims take less interest (in the internal political life and advancement of the country)... because they do not yet regard India as their home of which they must feel proud. Many regard themselves, quite wrongly, I think, as belonging to a race of conquerors. We Hindus are in a measure to blame for this aloofness on the part of the Muslims. We have not set out to win their hearts. The causes for this unfortunate state of things are historical and were, in their origin, inevitable. The blame of the Hindus, therefore, can be felt only *now*. The consciousness, being of recent growth, is naturally not universal and the physical fear of the Musalmans in a vast number of cases makes it constitutionally difficult for the Hindus to adopt the blame and proceed to win the Muslim heart.⁴³

In Bhikhu Parekh's opinion, "although Gandhi did not denigrate Muslim rule, he too had great difficulty integrating it in his interpretation of Indian history. With the exception of Akbar he saw little to admire in Muslim rule."⁴⁴ Gandhi also understood the dynamics of majoritarian politics *vis a vis* Muslims once the country achieved its independence. Hence he tried to turn the Hindu anguish into self criticism. His was an appeal to Hindu conscience to maintain a benevolent attitude in matters relating to Islam. Occasionally Gandhi too spoke in realistic terms.

⁴³ *Young India*, 2 April 1925 (in reply to a question by a Muslim lawyer).

When the power has been generated and time has come for the establishment of independence, the Muslims and all other minorities will have to be placated. If they are not, there must inevitably be civil war. But I live in the hope that, if we succeed in generating the power, our differences and distrust will vanish. These are due to our weakness. When we have the power from within, we shall shed our weakness.⁴⁵

Gandhi's insistence on allowing the minorities (mostly Muslims), to have their say in power sharing was not due to any great regard for that community or those communities. As an apostle of non-violence he foresaw only bloodshed if the Muslims were not given indisproportionate role in the maintenance, distribution and enforcement of power. For he argued, "if Muslims want anything - no matter what it is - no power on earth can prevent them from having it. For, the condition of refusal will be to fight. Supposing Muslims ask for something which non-Muslims do not want to give or could not give it means a fight."⁴⁶ Gandhi too wrestled with the idea of one community pushing the other to the corner and eliminating it eventually. But this he regarded an impossibility as early as 1924. To him, "for the Hindus to expect Islam to be driven out of India is as idle a dream as it would be for the Muslims to have only Islam of their imagination rule the world."⁴⁷ Gandhi recognised the fact that Hindus and Muslims are condemned to live together. And Islam shall be a major player in future India.

However, he took satisfaction in the fact that even if Muslims become the ruling or governing community they can not perpetrate their earlier methods, because

⁴⁴ Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy, op. cit.*, n. 36, p. 188.

⁴⁵ *Young India*, 24 April 1930; part of a nine-point statement issued by Gandhi "as so much misrepresentation is being made about my attitude on the communal question."

⁴⁶ *Harijan*, 24 May 1942.

under a free government the real power would be held by the people.⁴⁸ The hidden meaning of 'people' here is the majority community i.e., the Hindus. So, it appears, Gandhi appreciated the Hindu fear of Islamic purge if the latter was allowed to govern the country. But unlike the radical and extremist Hindus he dismissed the possibility of such a purge.

3.5. Islam in Gandhi's perception

The more I study that wonderful faith (Islam), the more convinced I become that the glory of Islam is due not to the sword but to the sufferings, the renunciation, and the nobility of its early Caliphs. Islam decayed when its followers, mistaking the evil for good, dangled the sword in the face of man, and lost sight of the godliness, the humility, and the austerity of its founder and his disciples. But I am not, at the present moment, concerned with showing that the basis of Islam, as of all religions, is not violence but suffering, not the taking of life but giving it.⁴⁹

As highlighted in Chapter 1, Gandhi was not only concerned with Muslim rule but Islam as well. He had a unique approach to both Muslims and Islam. However, his interpretation of Islam cannot be studied in isolation. He spared no effort in relating it to the general Indian situation and the Hindus and Hinduism in particular. As a result of this, he always succeeded in giving an ambiguous meaning to it which tempered the harsh side of Islam depending on his political and personal requirements. No doubt such an interpretation was expected of him, taking into consideration his repeated and avowed emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity. However, there were occasions, when Gandhi deviated from his self imposed 'role' as a propagator and arbitrator of the peaceful side of Islam and did mention the cruelty

⁴⁷ *Young India*, 25 September 1924.

⁴⁸ *Young India*, 24 April 1930.

and harshness associated with it. These were instances when one got a glimpse of the Mahatma's discomfiture with this religion. This also undermines the proposition that the Mahatma was a pro-Muslim or that he considered Muslims as the equals of Hindus.

His attitude to this religion too underwent a gradual change. There were times when Gandhi held Islam above other religions, there were occasions when he distrusted Muslims and there came a time when he only expected the maintenance of their *status quo* in a multi-religious society. In South Africa Gandhi cared more for Muslims. During Khilafat he promoted the interest of Muslims above others. And when partition became imminent and Muslims turned their back towards Hindu-Muslim unity he developed a kind of veiled dissatisfaction against the community.

If Gandhi treated Islam and Muslims in a particular way it was because he recognised their political significance. Gandhi's predecessors and the extremists of his time either ignored or failed to appreciate the role of Muslims in Indian politics. In their conception Muslims did not matter or could be dealt with because of the sheer numerical strength of the Hindus. Here, Gandhi was a visionary, in the sense that, he understood the dynamics of Islamic participation in the future of India. He was well aware that the presence of seventy million Muslims⁵⁰ could not be ignored. Personally he disliked the prominence of Islam in future Indian politics, but he felt the best way to avoid a conflict was to recognize their worth.

⁴⁹ Ramana Murti, *Gandhi: Essential Writings, op. cit.*, n. 5, p. 151.

⁵⁰ This is the figure of Muslims in the 1920s when Gandhi launched his Khilafat movement.

Gandhi had a mixed regard for Islam as a religion. This involved both criticism and praise. For Islam, according to him, lost its originality when its propagators exchanged the Prophet's compassion for the sword. He had absolutely no illusion as far as the spread of Islam in India was concerned. To quote him "the key-note of Islam was its leveling spirit. It offered equality to all that came within its pale....when, therefore about 900 years after Christ, his followers descended upon India, Hinduism stood dazed. It seemed to carry everything before it. The doctrine of equality could not but appeal to the masses, who were caste-ridden. To this inherent strength was also added the power of the sword."⁵¹ The main concern of Gandhi in Islam was its unadulterated belief in the oneness of God, a practical application of the truth of the brotherhood and the idea of toleration.⁵² He regarded the Prophet Mohammed's persecution by the non-believers of Mecca as an example of the former's suffering. This suffering raised Gandhi's estimation of the Prophet.⁵³

The history of Islam, if it betrays aberrations from the moral height, had many a brilliant page. In its glorious days it was not intolerant. It commanded the admiration of the world. When the West was sunk in darkness, a bright star rose in the Eastern firmament and gave light and comfort to a groaning world.⁵⁴

Gandhi was convinced that Islam in its present form was in degeneration. For example, its prevalent idea of brotherhood meant the application of the theory to only those who were nominally within the Islamic fold.⁵⁵ Moreover, there was not a trace of liberalism, for which it was famous when it was first established. "Islam in the days of Harun-al-Rashid and Mamun was the most tolerant amongst the world's

⁵¹ M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1938, pp. 38-40.

⁵² *Young India*, 21 August 1924.

⁵³ Payne, *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*, *op. cit.*, n. 1, p. 159.

⁵⁴ *Young India*, 29 May 1924.

religions. But there was a reaction against the liberalism of the teachers of their times. The reactionaries had many learned, able and influential men amongst them, and they very nearly overwhelmed the liberal and tolerant teachers and philosophers of Islam. We in India are still suffering from the effect of reaction. But I have not a shadow of doubt that Islam has sufficient power in itself to become purged of illiberalism and intolerance.”⁵⁶

What did Gandhi mean by the end of the liberal tradition in Islam? And what was he intending to highlight when he remarked: ‘We in India are still suffering from the effect of the revolt against liberalism in Islam’? The answers could be as follows. First, the glory of Islam and its ascendance was due to its prevalent idea of toleration. Second, the rise of illiberalism manifested in its later larger propagators degenerated Islam. Third, illiberal Islam promoted by a new breed of intolerant teachers and philosophers in the form of political expansion and religious persecution wreaked havoc among humanity. Fourth, Indians too were victims of this intransigence and continue to suffer because of the lack of tolerance. Last, having shred Islam into pieces he softly rebukes the Islamists that they may not be that rigid and ignorant so as to continue with illiberalism and intolerance which have been the root cause of all evils for a long time in many societies.

Gandhi’s perception of Islam, then, can be illustrated in the following manner:

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 March 1929.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 September 1924.

<u>Good</u>	<u>Bad</u>	<u>Could be good</u>
Basic Principles of Islam	Its intolerance following expansion	Return to its founding ethos

Gandhi's prescription for the recovery of original Islamic ideals for Muslims is indeed fascinating. "Muslims have an ordeal to pass through. There can be no doubt that they are too free with the knife and the pistol. The sword is no emblem of Islam. But Islam was born in an environment where the sword was, and still remains, the supreme law. The message of Jesus has proved ineffective because the environment was unready to receive it. So with the message of the Prophet. The sword is yet too much in evidence among the Muslims. It must be sheathed if Islam is what it means - peace. It will be a calamity for them and the world. For, ours is, after all, a world problem. Reliance upon the sword is wholly inconsistent with reliance upon God."⁵⁷

On this occasion, Gandhi clearly made two strong points. First, Islam in India is completely different from the Islam in its place of birth. Second, Islam can prove harmonious only if it practices what it stands for i.e. peace. The other sub-clauses which emerge from the statement are the following. Islam is a foreign religion. The requirements of its adherents are different depending on topography and societal set up. Indian Muslims are different from their counterparts in Arabia. Hence there can not be a singular approach to their religion for both of them. The most significant example in this regard is the use of violence. The Sword which is the emblem of

⁵⁷ *Young India*, 30 December 1926; in an obituary on Swami Shradhdhanand's assassination by a Muslim fanatic, Abdul Rashid.

violence, may be permitted in the context of Arabia but it can not be tolerated in India.

One ought to remember here that though Gandhi freely associated violence with Islam he refrained from calling it a violent religion.⁵⁸ He said “I do regard Islam to be a religion of peace in the same sense as Christianity, Hinduism and Buddhism are. No doubt there are differences in degree, but the object of these religions is peace.”⁵⁹ There are indeed passages in the *Quran* that enjoin violence but these are occasional.⁶⁰ Furthermore, he clarified his position regarding his description of Muslims as a people too free with the sword, that the blame does not fall on the *Quran* but the environment in which they had consolidated their faith. He takes the argument to its logical conclusion when he quotes the Prophet’s military expeditions and similar incidents. These acts of the Prophet, Gandhi argued, should not become examples for the Muslims the world over.⁶¹ Those were necessities which needed that kind of intervention. But the Muslims would do a great harm to themselves and others if they took these examples in a literal sense and ignored the inner dynamics

⁵⁸ “I claim to have studied the life of the Prophet and the *Quran* as a detached student of religions. And I have come to the conclusion that the teaching of the *Quran* is essentially in favour of non-violence. Non-violence is better than violence, it is said in the *Quran*. Non-violence is enjoined as a duty; violence is permitted as a necessity.” *Harijan*, 13 July 1940.

⁵⁹ Gandhi, *The Way to communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, n. 18, p. 52.

⁶⁰ “Fight those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day, nor forbid that which Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, nor follow the Religion of truth, out of those who have been given the Book, until they pay the tax in acknowledgment of their defeat (*wahum saghir un*). “Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but be not aggressive. Surely Allah loves not aggressors”(2:190). “And kill them whenever you find them, and drive them out from where they drove you out, and persecution is worse than slaughter. And fight not with them at the Sacred Mosque until they fight with you in it, so if they fight you (in it), slay them. Such is the recompense of disbelievers” (2:191) All the references are from N. J. Dawood (translated), *The Quran*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.

⁶¹ *Harijan*, 11 November 1939; in reply to a correspondent -an “M.A. of Aligarh”- who had referred to Islam and the Prophet allowing the use of force on certain occasions. The Prophet had met force with force at Badr. The correspondent had also quoted a statement reported to have been made in court by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, “I do not agree with Mahatma Gandhi that use of force should not be allowed in any case. Because I am a Muslim I believe that the use of force is allowed on the

of the use of violence.⁶² The greatness of the Prophet according to Gandhi came from the former's relentless struggle to find truth through non-violent means.

It was not the sword that won a place for Islam in those days in the scheme of life. It was the rigid simplicity, the utter self-effacement of the Prophet, the unscrupulous regard for pledges, his intense devotion to his friends and followers, his intrepidity, his fearlessness, his absolute trust in God and his own mission. These and not the sword carried everything before them and surmounted every obstacle.⁶³

But Muslims in his opinion always seemed to confuse the Prophet's military exploits for religious expansion as the basis of this greatness. For he argued "I must refuse to sit in judgment on what the Prophet did. I must base my conduct on what the great teachers of the earth said, not on what they did. Prophethood came not from the wielding of the sword, it came from years of wrestling with god to know the truth. Erase these precious years of the great life and you will have robbed the Prophet of his Prophethood. It is these years of his life which made Muhammad a prophet."⁶⁴

At the same time, however, he disagrees with the claims of absoluteness of the Prophet. "I do not regard any human being absolutely perfect, be he a prophet or

particular occasions specified by Islam. Against the non-Muslim Government, Islam prescribes only sword, protracted battle and the cutting of throats."

⁶² "What is the place of violence in Islam? Is Islam a non-violent religion, then? The answer, to be honest and to be truthful to life, is both yes and no. Islam does not advocate violence but does not shun it altogether. Life is full of contradictions and these contradictions do reflect themselves in what we can call a contextual theology, if it wishes to be true to life. The *Quran* does not advocate mere abstract theological and metaphysical doctrines. The *Quranic* theology does not neglect the concrete socio-political context. All scriptures, on close scrutiny, would be found to contain contextual contradictions. And the *Quran* is no exception to that. In fact, the scriptures provide both normative as well as contextual answers. Normatively speaking, the *Quran* opposes violence but permits it contextually." Asghar Ali Engineer, "Sources of Non-violence in Islam", *Gandhi Marg*, April-June 1992, p. 101

⁶³ M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*. For details see, Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986, pp. 185-6.

an *Avatar*, it is unnecessary for me to be able to explain to the censor's satisfaction every detail of Prophet's life."⁶⁵

In Gandhi's view, then, apart from occasional deviations the scriptural Islam was peaceful but all the Muslim exploits and adventures that exploited only sections of the scripture were gave the latter an un-Islamic character. If we follow this argument all the political expansions and religious conversions that took place in later days, were un-Islamic and hence impermissible. The whole history of Islam- except for those short periods when there was an air of liberalism-in Gandhi's view could be regarded as an age which Islamists should not be proud of.

In isolating the spirit of Islam to the *Quran*, Gandhi even subjected this source to scrutiny and criticism. Though he accepted the universal principles of scriptures he insisted on their revision with the passing of time. Moreover, he insisted that some things are universally accepted as errors. And no religious community can defend it on the basis of its sanctification by scripture. Gandhi was making this point while deriding a stoning to death incident of a non-believer in Kabul by Muslims. On this particular incident he courted the wide-spread anger of the Muslims. The passage below captures the Muslim mood to Gandhi's trespassing into their religious practices.

I have read with feelings of mingled amazement and pain your pronouncement, in *Young India* of the 26th instant, on stoning incidents in Kabul. You say that 'this particular form of penalty cannot be defended on the mere ground of its mention in the *Quran*'. You, moreover declare that 'every formula of every religion has in this

⁶⁴ *Harijan*, 13 July 1940.

⁶⁵ Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, n. 65, p. 186.

age of reason to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for universal assent.' Finally you maintain that error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world.

I have always paid unstinted homage to your greatness and have all along looked upon you as one of the few men who are making modern history; but I would be failing in my duty as a Muslim if I refrained from pointing out to you that by challenging the right of the *Quran* to regulate the life of its followers in its own way you have shaken the belief of millions of your Muslim admirers in your capacity to lead them. You are at perfect liberty to express your opinion one way or the other as to whether renegades can be stoned to death under the law of Islam. But to hold that even if the *Quran* supported such form of penalty, it should be condemned outright as an error, is a form of reasoning which cannot appeal to the Muslims.

Error is after all a relative term and Muslims have their own way of interpreting it. To them *Quran* is an unalterable law which transcends the ever changing policies and expediencies of puny humanity. Would to God that to your multifarious activities as leader of India you had not added the rather delicate task of adversely criticizing the teaching of the Holy *Quran*.⁶⁶

Perhaps Gandhi was aware of the territory in which he was treading. In reflecting on this and on other similar controversies which he had generated, he remarked, "I do not propose to enter into any long argument about the interpretation of the *Quran*. Being a non-Muslim I am at a disadvantage. If I began an argument, the natural retort would be: "How can you a non-Muslim, interpret Muslim scriptures?" It would serve no purpose to answer back that. I have the same reverence for Islam and the other faiths as I have for my own."⁶⁷

Another grievance which Gandhi identified was the lack of Muslim respect for other religions. Muslims according to him were so rigid in their religious approach that they failed to entertain the fact that other religions could be equally good and inspired. This was more true in the case of Muslim-Hindu interaction. In

⁶⁶ A letter to Gandhi by Maulana Zafar Ali Khan written by him in his capacity as President of the Punjab Khilafat Committee. Reprinted by Gandhi under the title "My Crime," in *Young India*, 5 March 1925. For a fuller version of the article see, Raghavan Iyer, *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. I, *op. cit.*, n. 65, pp. 477-9.

this relationship, whereas the latter exhibited a tremendous sense of accommodation the former failed to appreciate or respond to it. Speaking on this he mentions:

I have found not the slightest difficulty in Hindu circles about evoking reverence for the *Quran* and the Prophet. But I have found difficulty in Islamic circles about evoking the same reverence for the *Vedas* or the incarnation.⁶⁸

The average Muslim according to him would not appreciate the fact that ‘the other’, i.e. the Hindu, accepts the Islamic claim to divinity and would expect the same from his co-religionist for his beliefs. The ever-responsive Hindus even had songs and hymns paying tribute to Islam.⁶⁹ But unfortunately when it came to Muslims repaying the obligation, in terms of acceptance of ‘the others’ identity, they hesitated to do so. This is where Gandhi demolishes the claim of the exclusive divinity of Islam. Truth, according to him, is the exclusive property of no single scripture.⁷⁰ Moreover, if the *Quran* is revealed, so are the other scriptures; like the Bible, the Granth Saheb, the Vedas and the Zend Avesta. For Gandhi, then, another drawback inherent in Islam is its adherence to a sense of ‘higher than others’ and ‘truer than others’ attitude.

Muslims, for him, cannot forbid or deride any kind of religious beliefs or way of worship. This insistence involved both the personal and public realm of religion. Making a case in defence of his own beliefs he reiterated: “ I have no more than once read the *Quran*. My religion enables me, obliges me to imbibe all that is good in all the great religions of the earth. This does not mean that I must accept the

⁶⁷ Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, n. 18, p. 52.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

⁷⁰ *Young India*, 25 September 1924.

interpretation of the prophet of Islam or any other prophet.”⁷¹ Next he focused his attention on the faith of the non-Muslim others. He puts forth this argument brilliantly not by bringing Islam to the fore, but by relating it to any intolerance towards idol worshippers.

I claim to be a *Sanatani* Hindu, though I am not an idolater in the accepted sense. But I cannot despise those who worship idols. The idol worshippers see God in the stone image, God is omnipresent. If it is wrong to seek God in a stone, how is it right to seek Him in a book called the Gita, the Granth Saheb or the *Quran*. Is not that idol worship?⁷²

Gandhi grieved when communal violence took the form of Muslims desecrating Hindu temples, places of worship and the images therein. He felt that the veneration towards these images had its proper place in religious devotion, provided that the ‘idols’ in them were used as an aid to contemplation and worship rather than being worshipped for themselves as physical objects or kept as window-dressing. Far more idolatrous in his view were those who blindly worshipped a holy book rather than using it with reason, or those who fanatically refused to see that people outside their own tradition had genuine faith and models of worship.⁷³ This form of ‘idolatry,’ in his view ‘is more deadly for being more fine and evasive than the tangible and gross form of worship that identifies the Deity with a little bit of stone or golden image.’⁷⁴ It is immensely important to bear in mind that Gandhi was both liberal and harsh in his praise and criticism of Islam. However, if we weigh his criticisms and praise for this faith his criticism would far outweigh his praise. Hence,

⁷¹ Ramana Murti, *Gandhi : Essential Writings, op. cit.*, n. 5, p. 80.

⁷² *Harijan*, 25 January 1948; speech at prayer meeting, New Delhi, 18 January 1948.

⁷³ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope, op. cit.*, n. 4, pp. 197-8.

⁷⁴ *C.W.M.G.*, vol. 25, p. 46.

it would be logically incorrect to argue that Gandhi was pro-Muslim or he cared more for Islam.

3. 6. Gandhi, Khilafat and Muslims

The Caliphate or Khilafat, was not much of interest to him in itself. Indeed, he gave far too little consideration to such details as the rights of the Arabs. But his mind was fixed on Muslims of India. The intended treaty was a betrayal, a blow at their religion. Here was a major moral issue, genuine and not contrived, on which Hindus could make common cause with Muslims.⁷⁵

Gandhi returned from South Africa to India in 1915. Between 1915 and 1919 he led a series of agitations⁷⁶ called *Satyagrahas* with some success in mobilising the masses. However, the event which catapulted him to centre-stage of Indian politics and made him the unquestionable leader of India was the Khilafat movement of 1919. A clever - though failed - maneuver to unite Hindus and Muslims on an external and pan-Islamic cause coincided with his rise to power. The point central to this analysis is; Gandhi miscalculated, misjudged and misused the issue. Blinded by the initial euphoria to his call he kept on committing a series of blunders which instead of cementing the two communities created deep divisions between Hindus and Muslims. The movement was a failure as Gandhi sought to establish his unhindered political dominance through Khilafat. His misuse of an external cause indeed laid the foundation for a separate homeland for Muslims.

⁷⁵ Ashe, *Gandhi: A Study in Revolution*, *op. cit.*, n. 14, p. 202.

⁷⁶ The most important being the Champaran, Kaira and Ahmedabad *Satyagrahas* or non-violent agitations

After the First World War, the ruler of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the Caliph was stripped of his title by the victorious powers which included Britain. The Indian Muslims in this context were faced with a deep dilemma as they were torn between divided and conflicting loyalties. On one plane, their religious identity demanded loyalty to the Caliph who was the Muslims' supreme religious and political leader but under their political masters the British, they had fought against the Caliph. Or to put it another way, doctrinally it was difficult for the Muslims to combine their faith with obedience to infidel masters.⁷⁷ Hence the Khilafat movement aimed at the restoration of the temporal and spiritual power of the Caliph.

Gandhi took up the Muslim demand without giving adequate attention to long-term consequences, its significance and conditions in Turkey, the remnant of the Ottoman Turkish Empire. Addressing a meeting of Muslims in Bombay on September 18, 1919 he declared that Khilafat "was the question among questions and on the right solution to it depended the future peace of India."⁷⁸

Next turning to the Hindus Gandhi declared:

If twenty-two crores of the Hindus intelligently plead for the Muslims in the Khilafat issue, I believe they would for ever win the vote of eight crores of Muslims... The Khilafat issue was a splendid opportunity as much as a grave problem before the people of India. It was a splendid opportunity, because if the Muslims used wisdom in solving the problem their moral power would increase and India would come to enjoy a moral empire. Hindu-Muslim unity would increase, both Hindus and Muslims would grow stronger, their moral level would rise and the English would stop looking down

⁷⁷ Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the later Nineteenth Century*, New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1989, p. 208.

⁷⁸ Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 302.

upon them as an inferior race... Friendship is possible only between equals; even we consider ourselves as their inferiors. And therefore, we Hindus and Muslims, should solve this problem and ensure that the three become equals.⁷⁹

Such was the vigour of Muslim mobilisation over the issue and Gandhi's forcible insistence on Hindu participation in it that the Khilafat indeed became one of the most powerful mass movements. On the Khilafat issue Gandhi played on the emotions of both communities. He insisted that "the Hindus should show that they were one with Muslims in their sorrow and thus put a sacred seal on the Hindu-Muslim bond. If the Khilafat disappeared, Islam would lose its vitality. This the Muslims would not tolerate."⁸⁰ The Muslims of the Khilafat Committee were eager to attract Hindu support. This was made possible by Gandhi. Overwhelmed by Hindu co-operation for an Islamic cause they wanted to give back something. In their eagerness they over reached themselves and proposed as a *quid pro quo*, to stop the killing of the cows.⁸¹

Gandhi may have projected the issue otherwise but from the very beginning Khilafat was a marriage of convenience. There were many in the Congress camp and outside who cautioned Gandhi of the dangers involved in this issue due to its communal basis. But he would not budge an inch in his resolve. Prominent secular Muslims like Jinnah and Umar Sobani "tried to win Gandhi over to their side and save him from the thoughtlessness of encouraging the religious fanaticism of the communal leaders, the Ali Brothers, the Moulavis, the Ulemas and their equally

⁷⁹ Quoted in, S. R. Bakshi, *Gandhi and Khilafat*, New Delhi: Gitanjali, 1985, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 302.

⁸¹ Ashe, *A Study in Revolution*, *op. cit.*, n. 14, p. 202.

ignorant and superstitious Muslim followers.”⁸² But the reward Jinnah got for his advice was his dislodgment from the Home Rule League.

Another Congress stalwart Tilak argued for the national movement to be kept away entirely from any contamination with issues theological or foreign. On the larger question of Swaraj he sought Muslim co-operation by offering them special privileges. Moreover, he strictly forbid “the introduction of theology in the nations politics”⁸³ Aurobindo Ghose, the Hindu spiritual nationalist was more perceptive in this regard. According to him “the recognition of the communal principle at Lucknow made the Muslims permanently a separate political entity in India and the Khilafat affair made that separate political entity of the Muslims an organized separated political power. He opined that the attempt at bringing Muslims into the national struggle by joining the Khilafat movement was on the wrong lines.”⁸⁴

No doubt Gandhi’s avowed goal was to create a sense of national unity among Hindus and Muslims, but his experiments only galvanised separate communal identities. In assessing the situation, a significant number of Hindu leaders felt that Muslims had received a dangerous awakening through the coalescence of the Khilafat and non-co-operation movement. This provoked a counter response in urging Hindus to take measures of self defense against Muslim communalism.⁸⁵

⁸² Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, pp. 316-7.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

⁸⁴ Sisir Kumar Mitra, *The Liberator Sri Aurobindo- India And the World*; For details, see Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 312.

⁸⁵ Khilafat coincided with the establishment and sudden rise to prominence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha, RSS. For a good discussion, see Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1885-1947*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989, p. 236. For an excellent study on the RSS’ rise to power, see W. Andersen and S. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, p. 34.

“Many Muslim leaders who had been in the forefront of the Khilafat movement had also second thoughts and felt that they had too readily joined hands with the Congress in fighting for a new order in which the position of the Muslim community was not likely to be particularly secure.”⁸⁶ As a result, while Gandhi was preaching that Hindu-Muslim unity was essential to gaining Swaraj the Muslim leaders of the Khilafat were saying: “Islam first and everything else afterwards.”⁸⁷

Gandhi's first blunder was in wrongly committing the nation to an alien theological issue. Instead of rectifying this mistake he extended his support to all other issues which were subsequently incorporated into the movement. Three incidents reflect Gandhi's immaturity in dealing with Hindu-Muslim question and other larger political parameters. They are: the invasion of India by Afghanistan's Emir to overthrow the British, the sanctification of violence committed by Muslims and the callous attitude shown towards the Hindu victims of the Moplah rebellion.

In a conference called *Majlis-ul-Ulema* at Erode in Madras Presidency on 2 April 1921, Mohammad Ali, (one of Gandhi's trusted lieutenants of the Khilafat movement), said that if the Emir of Afghanistan invaded India, it would be the duty of Indian Muslims to assist him. The other Khilafat leaders who were present in this conference were Maulana Azad, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Shaukat Ali.⁸⁸ Gandhi's reaction to this was; “I have not read Maulana Mohammed Ali's speech. But whether or not, I would, in a sense, certainly assist the Emir of Afghanistan if he waged war

⁸⁶ Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 157.

⁸⁷ Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 388.

⁸⁸ Keer, p. 388. Besides, Shaukat Ali, issued a *fatwa* or an Islamic injunction, enjoining the Muslim section of the Indian army to refuse to fight against the Emir of Afghanistan Sultan Amanulla, as a matter of religious obligation. Lahiry, *Gandhi in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.*, n. 11, pp. 10-11.

against the British Government, that is to say I would openly tell my countrymen that it would be a crime to help a Government which had lost the confidence of the nation to remain in office.”⁸⁹

Critics have argued Gandhi’s shocking support for an open plot of conspiracy and invasion reflected his all-consuming eagerness to win over the Muslims.⁹⁰ But his myopia certainly created a sense of helplessness among the Hindus. To some Gandhi’s statement announced an impending catastrophe. Lala Lajpat Rai, for example, expressed his exasperation that “I am not afraid of seven crores of Muslims but I think, the seven crores in India, plus the armed hordes of Afghanistan, Central Asia, Arabia, Mesopotamia and Turkey will be irresistible. Are we then doomed?”⁹¹ These fears were not far fetched. “Gandhi’s assurance that the Hindus need not necessarily lose their religion on account of Afghan rule implied the possibility of the invasion.”⁹²

Assessing the event twenty years later B. R. Ambedkar commented; “It needs no saying that the project of an invasion of India was the most dangerous project and every sane Indian would dissociate himself from so mad a project. What part Gandhi played in this project it is not possible to discover. But he did not certainly dissociate himself from it. On the contrary his misguided zeal for Swaraj and his obsession of

⁸⁹ *Young India*, 4 May 1921. It may be mentioned that persons like C. F. Andrews and Sir Srinivas Shastri, both of whom Gandhi held in high regard, warned him against the danger he was inviting on India by launching such a mass movement. Upon this Gandhi clarified his position in the same pages of *Young India* of 18 May 1921 saying that, “I do not believe, the Afghans to be so foolish as to invade India on the strength of my article. But I see that it is capable of bearing the interpretation put upon it by Mr Andrews. I therefore hasten to inform all whom it may concern that not only do I not want to invite the Afghans or anybody else to come to our assistance but I am anxious for them not to come to our assistance.”

⁹⁰ Lahiry, *Gandhi in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.*, n. 11, p. 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Hindu-Muslim unity as the only means of achieving it led him to support the project.”⁹³ Gandhi seemed to be behaving like a person in a trance during this period. When Afghan Emir’s proposed invasion did not come off some Muslim leaders of Khilafat made an attempt to make the Crown Prince of Hyderabad Caliph of Islam and Hyderabad, and re-establish as the Headquarters of the World of Islam. Upon this Gandhi immediately joined the bandwagon by stating “If the Nizam of Hyderabad became the Emperor of India, it will still be a hundred percent Swaraj.”⁹⁴

The second folly of Gandhi in Khilafat was his lukewarm support for violence. Overjoyed by the success of Khilafat Day observed on 19 March 1920, an event which brought the country to a stand still Gandhi issued a veiled threat to the Government. The threat meant that the “Muslims reserved to themselves the right in the event of the failure of the non-cooperation cum non-violent movement to resort to all such methods as might be enjoined by the Islamic scripture.”⁹⁵ In other words, Gandhi effectively sanctioned Muslims the use of force to achieve their goal. After years of agitation during which the government flatly refused to entertain Khilafatists’ demands, Muslim anger and frustration turned against the Hindus. This resulted in wide-scale riots all over the country from the North West Frontier Province to the Malabar Coast.

The riot which stands out in the annals of India history in terms of brutality and savagery was that of the Moplah rebellion. The rebellion had its origin in Gandhi’s call for non-cooperation during the Khilafat campaign. For years the

⁹² Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 391.

⁹³ B. R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Pakistan*, 1941, pp. 150-51.

Moplah Muslims of Malabar Coast, Madras Presidency had been nurturing a sneaking grudge against the government and their Hindu landlords.⁹⁶ The rhetoric of violence by some Muslim Khilafatist leaders boosted the fanaticism of the Moplahs and sparked off the rebellion.⁹⁷ So they rose in revolt on August 20, 1921. This rebellion was 'directed against the Hindus, and a blood-thirsty and blood-curdling campaign of terror, murder, arson, rapine, loot and incendiarism resulted. Under this Khilafat Raj the violation of Hindu women, forced conversion, desecration of temples, destruction of railways, courts and communications stalked the land.'⁹⁸ In terms of its cruelty, ferocity and recklessness it was one of the worst communal riots in this century. The Hindu victims of Moplah were given the option of "Islam or death." When the rebellion finally stopped in February 1922 the casualties and conversions ran into thousands.⁹⁹

Gandhi's response to this is both intriguing and absurd. The arguments which he provided were juxtaposed with liberal opinion among the Congress. Whereas the liberals said that the Moplahs rendered a distinct disservice to the sacred cause of Islam and Swaraj, Gandhi stated "the Moplahs are among the bravest in the land. They are god-fearing. Their bravery must be transformed into purest gold."¹⁰⁰ Why

⁹⁴ Lahiry, *Gandhi in Indian Politics*, *op. cit.*, n. 11, p. 13.

⁹⁵ Keer, *Mahatma Gandhi: Political Saint and Unarmed Prophet*, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 314.

⁹⁶ For a detailed account on Moplah rebellion, see C. J. Baker and D. A. Washbrook, *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940*, Delhi: Macmillan India, 1975, pp. 98-149. A contemporary account prepared for the government by a senior official in the intelligence department is by P.C. Bamford, *Histories of Non-co-operation and Khilafat Movements*, Delhi: Deep Publications, 1974.

⁹⁷ Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, pp. 164-5.

⁹⁸ Indian Statutory Commission, vol. IV, p. 99.

⁹⁹ B.R. Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Pakistan*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁰ *Young India*, 8 September 1921.

Gandhi held such a view has been subject to various interpretations.¹⁰¹ At one extreme, Keer describes Gandhi as suffering from an inferiority complex *vis a vis* Muslims, that went back to his association with Sheikh Mehtab in his formative years. "It was the reflection of Gandhi's own mind, the mind that had been unconsciously struggling against the cowardice in himself since his boyhood."¹⁰²

However, with hindsight we can argue Gandhi had to come out with such a statement for practical and political reasons. He was walking a political tight-rope. He needed the Ali Brothers to mobilise the Muslim masses in order to retain sufficient all-India power, and retain a profitable ally and a dangerous opponent to the doubting Hindu politicians.¹⁰³ In some sense he was a prisoner of this alliance. He was afraid his condemnation of the Moplah atrocity would result in the end of Hindu-Muslim unity. This was a risk he probably could not have taken. A point which is most crucial to our argument is that whereas Gandhi was confident of carrying Hindu support with him he was incapable of having the same confidence in the Muslims. In the core of his heart he knew Muslims would never empower a non-Muslim to take over their affairs. So he had to resort to the Ali Brothers and other Muslim leaders to reach out to them.

Although Gandhi did not condemn the atrocities committed by the Moplahs against the Hindus he glorified the sacrifice of the latter. In the pages of *Young India* he wrote: "I was delighted to be told that there were Hindus who did prefer the

¹⁰¹ Many mercilessly criticized Gandhi for his lenient and exonerating attitude to the Moplah atrocities. The editor of *Modern Review* described Hindu-Muslim unity as a camouflage. Later Gandhi said that the Moplah revolt was a test for Hindus and Muslims. Keer, *op. cit.*, n. 19, p. 402.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 402.

Moplah hatchet to forced conversion. If these have died without anger or malice, they have died as truest Hindus because they were truest among Indians and men.”¹⁰⁴

The real meaning which he conveyed through this glorification was the superiority of Hinduism and Hindus. If he refrained from condemning the Muslims for their atrocities that does not mean he approved of it or remained neutral over the matter. His non-condemnation of the Moplah violence was an invitation to Muslims elsewhere to make themselves responsible for it. His non-condemnation was also meant as an appeal to the Muslim conscience. His views on forced Islamic conversion spoke for him: “I do not know a single writer on Islam who defends the use of force in the proselytizing process. The influence exerted in our times are far more subtle than that of the sword.”¹⁰⁵

It is difficult to comprehend what Gandhi meant by ‘our times’. If he was emphasizing his own age it is easy to understand the absence of violence in proselytizing Islam. However, the history of Islam since its inception to the fall of the Ottoman Turkish Empire was a history of forced conversion. Hence the question which automatically arises is; how Gandhi viewed this? According to Gandhi:

There is nothing in the *Quran* to warrant the use of force for conversion. The holy book says in the clearest language possible. ‘There is no compulsion in religion.’ The Prophet’s whole life is a repudiation of compulsion in religion. No Muslim, to my knowledge, has ever approved of compulsion. Islam would cease to be a world religion if it were to rely upon force for its propagation.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi's Rise to Power, Indian Politics 1915-1922*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 331.

¹⁰⁴ *Young India*, 26 January 1922.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1920.

¹⁰⁶ *Young India*, 29 September 1921.

Whether Muslims approved of this rendition of Gandhi, is not of interest to us. But what is important is that Gandhi's shrewd manipulation was a compelling challenge to Islamists to disapprove of their own history. In another front, Gandhi's opinion on conversion was not in tandem with Hindu chauvinists. But he was in unison with them in matters of 're-conversion.' Interestingly even though Hindu chauvinists and Gandhi aimed at achieving the same goal Gandhi escapes our criticism for being a fundamentalist because of his interpretation of 're-conversion.' This subtlety can be summed up as follows: Hindu chauvinist organisations like the Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS and others insisted on reconversion of Muslims back to Hinduism to prevent the depletion of their religion. Gandhi on the other hand took a more pragmatic approach so as to prevent it being a permanent scar on the Hindu psyche. For he said, "Yes, (unless those who have been converted are brought back to the Hindu fold quickly, the cleavage between the Hindus and the Muslims may become permanent). I admit the force of the argument. Many had returned. But all must."¹⁰⁷

Another area where extremist Hindus and Gandhi were in agreement was the conversion of lower caste Hindus to Islam. Here again both opposed the conversion but on two entirely different grounds. For example while Hindu fundamentalists saw it as a loss of Hindu strength and tried to prevent it Gandhi argued on the sensibility of conversion. Gandhi questioned the inherent logic behind the schedule caste conversion. "Why do you try to convert the waifs and strays and the untouchables. Better follow me. If those poor people embrace Islam, they will not do so because

they understand the beauty of Islam, but for other reasons. Islam will not be a whit richer for them.”¹⁰⁸

Winding up our discussion on Khilafat we arrive at the following conclusions. First, Gandhi was not concerned about the rights of Muslims associated with Caliphate. His support to it was clearly an attempt at political opportunism. Second, the basis of Khilafat was bargaining. Third, Gandhi himself was confused about his matrix of Hindu-Muslim unity during Khilafat. Last, Gandhi's perception of Muslims took a negative turn after Khilafat.

Gandhi's support for Khilafat was clearly an attempt in political opportunism.¹⁰⁹ Having recently arrived in the centre-stage of Indian politics he wanted to make an impact. Any kind of nation-wide impact when both Indians and the Raj *sic* Empire were recuperating from the strains of the First World War, required an equally strong and potent issue. Khilafat in this regard was a perfectly timed issue. Gandhi's use of Khilafat speaks of political maneuverability too. Through Khilafat he successfully demonstrated how an obscure external incident or controversy can be used for gaining utmost political mileage at home.

¹⁰⁷ *Harijan*, 12 January 1947.

¹⁰⁸ *Young India*, 23 October 1924. Gandhi made this statement which had its origin in a conversation with Khwaja Hassan Nizami, a prominent Muslim religious leader and one of the stalwarts of the Khilafat movement.

¹⁰⁹ Defending Gandhi B.R. Nanda writes: “His support to the Khilafat movement in 1920 did not stem from a momentary impulse, or a tactical calculation. He had his own reasons. However, when there was a reaction in the wake of the withdrawal of civil disobedience and the abolition of the institution of the Khilafat by Turkey, Gandhi became the target of criticism from all quarters. The British charged him with opportunism; Hindus blamed him for having unwittingly sharpened the religious consciousness of Muslim community; Muslims gave him no thanks for his pains.” B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi, Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism*, Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 389.

Khilafat also brought to the fore the hypocrisy of Indian Muslims and their equally hypocrite counterpart Hindus. In terms of Indian Muslims reaction to Khilafat it can be compared to the second-wave of Islamic resurgence after the great revolt of 1857. The banality of Indian Muslims support for Khilafat emerges from the fact they never in their thousand year history in India looked at Ottoman Sultan for their religious or political sustenance. In a way Indian Muslims were insulated from their Islamic counterparts in West Asia. Also since the Caliphate itself was controversial¹¹⁰ for centuries since the death of the Prophet it had become more of an established non-issue for Indian Muslims.

The basis of the Khilafat movement was bargaining. In it Hindus bargained with Muslims and vice versa. It was an *entente* created to ward off an external enemy. Since Hindus and Muslims co-operated on a *quid pro quo* basis Gandhi's arguments on peaceful cohabitation or co-existence between both the communities in a future post-Khilafat set up, appear ambiguous and controversial. No doubt Gandhi sought to dissociate himself from all notion of a *quid pro quo*¹¹¹ yet, he "continued to speak in the language of reciprocity, asserting that a gesture of good will on the part of Hindus over Khilafat was destined to procure a reciprocal response on the part of the Muslims."¹¹²

I do not know of a single instance in history of a great sacrifice by the Hindus having gone unrewarded. What was done before now

¹¹⁰ Two groups fighting over Caliphate.

¹¹¹ Gandhi refused to speak from the same platform where the topic concerned was both cow protection and Khilafat.

¹¹² The argument provided by Marie Thérèse O'Toole, in 'Secularising the Sacred Cow', a paper presented in the Department of Politics, University of Hull, 12 December 1996.

was a kind of bargaining. There is no place whatever for bargaining in our dealings today.¹¹³

Interestingly, Gandhi's appeal to orthodox Hindus to support Khilafat was framed in terms of cow protection. His insistence on orthodox political participation awarded the latter the benefit of protection of cow. "The Hindu participation in the Khilafat is the greatest and the best movement for cow-protection. I have therefore called Khilafat our *Kamadhuk*."¹¹⁴ For the third argument concerning Gandhi's confusion over Hindu-Muslim unity we can relate it to his follies over approving on an external Islamic institutions intervention to achieve Swaraj. It is indeed difficult to comprehend how Gandhi tried to achieve Hindu-Muslim unity by subjecting the majority to an external minority rule.

Lastly, in the aftermath of Khilafat Gandhi grew disillusioned with promoting the Islamic cause. This happened following his realisation as to how different Muslims are in their outlook from the rest of the Indians. His disparaging attitude towards Muslims and Islam became even more pronounced following the failure of Khilafat and Gandhi returned to his Hindu background. Gandhi's language and mode of struggle became more Hinduised in all the post-Khilafat agitations. The section on Gandhi and Symbolism is an analysis of this new development in Gandhi's character and mode of action.

¹¹³ *C.W.M.G.*, vol. 19, pp. 304-5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. 20, p. 192.

3.7. Symbolism, Gandhi and Muslims

Minorities need affirmation as a legitimate and valued part of society. If they are resented, if the dominant definition of national identity excludes them, or if government, media and official state ceremonies do not reflect their presence they remain peripheral to the wider society, in it but not it.¹¹⁵

One of the lesser known aspects of Gandhi's philosophy is his use of symbolism.¹¹⁶ This symbolism included his vision of legendary political utopias,¹¹⁷ use of religious terms for sanctifying and disseminating non-violent political agitation,¹¹⁸ and the promotion of secular hymns based on a melange of religious terms¹¹⁹ from various religions. Why Gandhi used these terms is well known. Sometimes their application meant to achieve a greater degree of outcome. On some other occasions he used them to popularise the motive behind a certain action.¹²⁰

At the outset it should be mentioned that Gandhi was aware of the power of symbolism. He acknowledged how divisive some names or symbols could be. For instance when a proposal was made to Indianise his Phoenix settlement in South

¹¹⁵ Bhikhu Parekh, 'United Colours of Equality', *New statesman and Society*, 13 December 1996, pp. 18-9.

¹¹⁶ "Gandhi's politics were of course fully secular and his basic appeal to the people was made on economic, political and moral grounds, and never on religious grounds. He really catered to the new secular national consciousness. Still, his political thought was couched in the language of religiosity. He often employed Hindu terms and symbols." Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1987, p. 146.

¹¹⁷ His vision of *Rama Rajya* or the Kingdom of God Upon Earth.

¹¹⁸ *Khilafat* or the *Satyagraha* to restore the seat of Calipah from Christian-Western domination.

¹¹⁹ The most famous hymn for Gandhi's evening prayers meetings being, "*Raghupati Raghava Rajaram, Patitapan Sitaram; Ishwar-Allah tere naam, Sab ko sanmati de Bhagwan.*" Note the use of terms to describe the omnipotent and omnipresent God in various religions.

¹²⁰ The Phoenix Settlement and Tolstoy Farm the two communes set up by Gandhi in South Africa brings us close to this argument. To Gandhi both Tolstoy and Phoenix being non-Hindu and non-Muslim represented the secular spirit. There too was another dimension to his choosing these names. The term Phoenix was borrowed from ancient Egyptian mythology and was used in this context to show the racist South African government that the vanquished can recover and gain its old self. In the case of Tolstoy Farm it meant the ideals Tolstoy stood for and insisted upon.

Africa he opposed to this move.¹²¹ “It seems quite appropriate that the name of Phoenix should be that and nothing else. What was needed was “a common word over which the question of Hindu or Muslim will not arise. The word *math* or *ashram* has particularly Hindu connotation and therefore may not be used.”¹²² Why Gandhi abandoned this attitude is vital to our argument. India too posed similar problems with its two dominant and divisive communities Hindus and Muslims vying for power. Why did not Gandhi coin and promote purely secular symbols in the Indian context is our main concern in this section.

Our study of symbols in the context of Islam is crucial. The arguments which I am going to make in this regard are the following: First, Gandhi’s symbolism had an inherently Hindu bias. Second, this promoted the cause of a Hindu nation and culture. The third point is a combined outcome of the first two, i.e. Gandhi’s symbolism instead of reaffirming Hindu-Muslim unity created divisions and gave much impetus to the creation of an Islamic nation-state.

The Dandi March or Salt Satyagraha is one vital incident which was loaded with this kind of symbolism. Gandhi’s march to the coastal sea-side village of Dandi to manufacture salt was a symbol of political protest against the British rule. But the manner in which it was done was full of religious symbolism aligning itself with Hinduism. The pointers in this discussion are; (a) Gandhi termed his march as *yatra* or spiritual pilgrimage (b) He insisted this aimed at freeing Mother India (c) His attire included wearing the *tilak* on the forehead (c) The procession marched along

¹²¹ Peter, Brock, *The Mahatma and Mother India, Essays on Gandhi’s Non-violence and Nationalism*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1983, p. 109.

singing mostly *bhajans* or Hindu religious hymns (d) Nearing the village Dandi he called it “my Haridwar”; one of the four sacred places of pilgrimage for Hindus.

This is how Mahadev Desai, one of the oldest and closest associates of Gandhi observed the latter's manner of departure. He felt many in the crowd were:

remembering the Lord Rama on his way to the Ranvati forest bidding farewell to Ayodhya, the seat of his kingdom... I beheld in Gandhiji an ideal Vaishnav, Lord Rama on his way to conquer Sri Lanka. But more than this I am reminded of Lord Buddha's Great March to attain divine wisdom. Buddha embarked on his march bidding farewell to the world, cutting through the darkness, inspired by the mission of relieving the grief-stricken and downtrodden.... What would one say about this march except that it was just like Buddha's great march of renunciation?¹²³

Not surprisingly there was only a token presence of Muslims in this march. The Civil Disobedience movement which accompanied the march created far less enthusiasm among the Muslims. For example in Muslim majority areas such as Bengal and the Punjab civil-disobedience was much weakened by Muslim abstention. Interestingly, among the all India figure of 29,000 only 1,000 Muslims were in gaol.

With hindsight it may be argued that far from creating a united front, the Salt Satyagraha alienated Muslims who were beginning to feel the growing dominance of Hindus demonstrated through such symbolism. The two major criticisms which Dennis Dalton, levels at Gandhi regarding the Salt Satyagraha relate to its implications to Islam and the economy. According to him an overbearing Hindu style

¹²² C.W.M.G., vol. 10, p. 69.

¹²³ Mahadev Desai, *The Great March*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan, 1930.

of thought and action in this venture alienated Muslims.¹²⁴ Feeling the pulse of this symbolic act much in advance, M. A. Ansari, a close confidant and friend of Gandhi, had pleaded with him not to undertake the march as it did not gel with the Muslim way of thought.¹²⁵ Moreover, by late 1929, three months before the Dandi March, the Muslim Conference Executive Board had decided not to support the Congress/Gandhi civil disobedience movement and restated this at the time of the Salt Satyagraha.¹²⁶ Ten years earlier the same Muslim leader Shaukat Ali, whom Gandhi had called his “brother” and with whom he had toured the country to garner support for Khilafat, now denounced him and his movement. Shaukat Ali, urged Muslims to boycott the Satyagraha as it could lead only to the substitution of Hindu for British rule.¹²⁷

In one of his regular contributions to *Young India* on the day of the Dandi March Gandhi refuted Shaukat Ali’s “grave charge” that his movement “is a movement not for *Swaraj* but *Hinduraj*,” meaning not a march towards self rule but a rule by the Hindus against Muslims. He emphasised the inclusive spirit of the march hoping:

Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jews etc., will join it. Surely all are equally interested in securing repeal of the salt tax. Do not all need and use salt equally. This is the one tax which is no respecter of persons. Civil disobedience is a process of developing internal strength and therefore an organic growth. Resistance to the salt tax can hurt no single communal religious interest.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Dennis Dalton, *Mahatma Gandhi: Nonviolent Power in Action*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 121.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹²⁶ Judith M. Brown, *Gandhi and Civil Disobedience*, p. 86.

¹²⁷ Bipan Chandra, *India’s Struggle for Independence, 1857-1947*, Delhi: Viking, 1992, pp. 282-3.

¹²⁸ *C.W.M.G.*, vol. 43, pp. 55-7.

The salt was not the issue, however. The issue involved was the show of strength of the Indians as a single organic unit aiming at an organic growth. But the symbolism betrayed the secular organic unit into a unitary religious character represented by the Hindus.

In the nationalist ferment Gandhi's symbolism played a dual role. In the beginning, when Gandhi joined the nationalist struggle his symbolism appeared harmless to the Muslims and stood for weapons against British Raj. Afterwards, when the movement for the creation of a separate Muslim homeland gained momentum the same symbolisms were reinterpreted to reinforce a separate Islamic identity. In the new trifurcated battle between Congress, Muslim League and the British the last two identified the symbolism with their enemy. Whereas for the British it meant the end of their governance the Muslims feared the emergence of Hindu dominance. The Muslim League at this juncture continuously exploited the themes of Gandhi's use of words such as 'swaraj' (self government), 'sarvodaya' (uplift of all), 'ahimsa' (non violence), and 'satyagraha' (insistence upon truth) to portray the Hindu overtones in the future political process of India. These exploits estranged Muslims from the nationalist struggle.¹²⁹

Defending Gandhi's symbolism Nanda further argues: "The fact is that these expressions when used by Gandhi had little religious significance. They were derived from Sanskrit but since most of the Indian languages were derived from Sanskrit, this made them more easily intelligible to the masses. The English translation of these words, or a purely legal or constitution terminology may have sounded more

‘modern’ and ‘secular’, but it would have passed over the heads of all but a tiny urbanized English-educated minority.”¹³⁰ Nanda also insists that the symbols used by Gandhi in his political campaigns had ceased to be exclusively Hindu symbols. These were mostly saintly idioms whose content had changed and had become trans-religious in their application and use.¹³¹

Parekh too shares the common platform with Nanda when he argues that Gandhi’s use of certain terminologies and symbols were not intended to convey Hindu supremacy. On the contrary he conceived and used them mainly to reach out to the diverse masses of India. Since these people were geographically and linguistically divided the need of the hour was to conceive something in which they could find their own reflection. Hence their use was confined more to suitability than anything else.

But no one captures this theme better than Judith Brown. She, for one, refrains from identifying this symbolism with innocence. She rather defines it as a method of manipulation. Moreover, instead of getting bogged down by the conventional opinion which upheld the unitary spirit of symbolism, she picks up the argument in terms of harm done to the secular fabric of nationalist movement. She goes on to argue:

Gandhi’s powerful manipulation of symbol in the national cause had its grave drawbacks: chief among them was the growing disquiet of many Muslims at the Hindu tenor of Congress policies as it broadened its appeal; as Gandhi, a Hindu Mahatma became its leader, preaching in revivalist tones the coming of a new kingdom

¹²⁹ B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi and His Critics*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 74.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

of God on earth when swaraj was attained. Increasingly for Muslims such a vision meant the coming of Ram rather than Allah and in concrete terms the dominance of Ram's devotees the Hindu majority.¹³²

It is pertinent to ask why Gandhi, the benefactor of Muslims,¹³³ did not envision a political conception combining some Islamic ideal? In the euphoria during the struggle against British the masses were prepared to accept anything that had the sanctification of Gandhi. Gandhi was well aware of his reputation and power and could have intervened accordingly. But he preferred not to do so. This omission did not arise from his naiveté, as some critics would like to see it. Instead, Gandhi's use of these symbols with an inherent Hindu bias was deliberate.

Another pointer in this direction which has escaped critics' attention is the time frame. In the 1920s Gandhi did dabble in Islamic idioms. The towering example of this is the Khilafat. As a symbol it was inherently Islamic, it promoted the cause of Muslims, it reinforced a sense of Islamic nationalism and most importantly worked as a fixture between Hindus and Muslims because of Gandhi's insistence and intervention. The question however is why did not Gandhi coin similar phrases in the years succeeding the Khilafat agitation? The answer is - he had witnessed the political clamor of Muslims during Khilafat and that scared him. The apostle of Hindu-Muslim unity had realised that the political aspirations of Muslims was enormous and could mean the country returning to their stronghold. He sincerely wished to avoid it after Khilafat and unwittingly promoted idioms that came to represent the vision of the majority community the Hindus.

¹³² Brown, *Gandhi: Prisoner of Hope*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 386.

¹³³ The view held by the Hindu Mahasabha leaders and its members.

3.8. Gandhi, Jinnah and the Islamic nation

I find no parallel in history for a body of converts and their descendants claiming to be a nation apart from the parent stock. If India was one nation before the advent of Islam, it must remain one in spite of a change of the faith of a very large body of their children.¹³⁴

Gandhi's theories on nation and nationalism were often complex. Like Edmund Burke,¹³⁵ he emphasised the organic growth of the nation. And like Burke too, he always remained committed to the 'principle of diversity' as the means by which social unity could be developed and strengthened instead of destroyed. If Burke reserved his admiration for the mixed constitution created by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 in England, Gandhi drew sustenance for his theory from the secular policies crafted and introduced during the reign of Akbar.

However, there were many other contours in his theory which found reflection in the extremist arguments on nation and nationalism in late nineteenth and early twentieth century France. Like Barres, for example, Gandhi located the unity of India in a 'mystical conception of the nation, which remains the same beneath the surface of all its different historical forms, and constitutes the spiritual reservoir from which the individual draws (by 'sensibility' rather than by reason) his moral, religious and cultural sustenance.'¹³⁶ For Gandhi reinforced this belief by arguing that: "My experience of all India tells me that the Hindus and the Muslims know how

¹³⁴ Gandhi's reply to Jinnah's letter dated 16 September 1944. For a fuller version of this letter see, Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah: The Creator of Pakistan*, London: John Murray, 1964, pp. 149-51.

¹³⁵ For a detailed discussion on Burke's ideas on nation and nation state see, Noël O' Sullivan, *Conservatism*, London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1976, p. 36.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

to live at peace among themselves. I decline to believe that people have said good-bye to their sense so as to make it impossible to live at peace with each other, as they had done for generations.”¹³⁷ Furthermore, like Mauras, another thinker of the French conservative tradition, the identity of Gandhi’s nation rested on spiritual truth. Mauras regarded this spiritual truth as ultimately a secular body of knowledge, derived from an empirical study of the conditions of social existence. The nature of Gandhi’s spiritual truth too rested on the secular body of knowledge but there was no empirical study of the condition of the society prior to the arrival of the British or during the Islamic rule.

The inherent flaw in Gandhi’s theory was his failure to appreciate the dynamics of the Hindu-Muslim divide. To Gandhi the social fabric of pre-British Islamic India was based on toleration. The making of Indian culture was a product of the contribution made by many faiths and races.¹³⁸ And most importantly there was a spiritual unity among all Indians.

To the French conservatives spiritual unity was prerequisite to the political order, social justice and a vigorous cultural life.¹³⁹ Without spiritual unity none of these were possible to achieve. Interestingly, Gandhi does not provide any clue as to the nature of politics, social justice and cultural life during the Islamic rule. His only reference to this period is isolated to Akbar who is often regarded as a non-Muslim by orthodox Muslims for his extremely secular policies and liberal views on religion. If Gandhi sought spiritual unity he skipped the centuries of Muslim rule and located

¹³⁷ *Harijan*, 16 March 1947.

¹³⁸ *Harijan*, 9 May 1936.

it in the pre-Islamic Hindu period. Even if Gandhi talked about a synthesis arising out of interaction between various faiths, races, languages and culture, to him, this was made possible by the inclusivism of the Hindus. So, if there existed a spiritual unity during the Muslim rule the credit goes to Hindus for promoting it.

Not surprisingly Gandhi's vision of an ideal nation was *Rama Rajya*. A political conception where equality would prevail but Hindus would be the distributor of this equality and guardians of its spiritual unity. No doubt Gandhi differed greatly from the French ideologues but he was united with them on one count i.e. the claim that spiritual unity is the basis of political order.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the creator of Pakistan too believed in a spiritual unity but he did not want the Hindus to be its purveyor. Also, Jinnah's contribution in this regard lay in identifying not one but two strands of spiritual unity existing in India.¹⁴⁰ "He insisted in a way no other Muslim leader had done before that India was and had always been a bi-national state consisting of the two equal and unassimilable

¹³⁹ O' Sullivan, *Conservatism, op. cit.*, n. 135 p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ As opposed to Gandhi Jinnah openly admitted that the Muslims are the outside "other" having an "exclusive" identity which did not converge on the conception of Hindu spiritual unity. Replying to Gandhi's plead for one single nation Jinnah on September 17, 1944 wrote: "... Musalmans came to India as conquerors, traders, preachers and brought with them their own culture and civilization and founded mighty Empire and built a great civilization. They reformed and remodeled the sub-continent of India. Today the Muslims of India represent the largest compact body of Muslim population in any single part of the world. We are a nation, with our distinctive culture and civilization, language and literature, art and architecture, names and nomenclature, sense of value and proportion, laws and moral codes, customs and history and traditions, aptitudes and ambitions. In short we have our own distinctive outlook on life and of life. By all canons of International Law are we are a nation." Quoted in S. Devas, *Gandhiji and Some of His Thoughts*, Madras: The Good Pastor Press, 1949, p. 269, for an abridged version of this letter and further comments by Jinnah see, Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan, op. cit.*, n. 136, pp. 148-52

nations of Hindus and Muslims.”¹⁴¹ This was something which was unthinkable to Gandhi. For he argued;

Why is India not one nation? Was it not during, say, the Mughal period? Is India composed of two nations? If it is, why only two? Are not Christians a third, Parsis a fourth, and so on? Are the Muslims of China a nation separate from the other Chinese? Are the Muslims of England a different nation from the other English. How are the Muslims of the Punjab different from the Hindus and Sikhs? Are they not all Punjabis, drinking the same water, breathing the same air and deriving sustenance from the same soil? What is there to prevent them from following their respective religious practices?¹⁴²

While focusing on the larger question of Islamic identity Gandhi asks:

Are the Muslims all the world over a separate nation? Or are the Muslims of India only to be a separate nation distinct from the others? Is India to be vivisected into two parts, one Muslim and the other non-Muslim? And what is to happen to the handful of Muslims living in the numerous villages where the population is predominantly Hindu, and conversely to the Hindus in areas where they are dominated by the Muslims?¹⁴³

Islamic nationalism as we know of today, if associated with Gandhi's argument would fail him. Islam demands its adherents to form a single political unity or *Dar ul Islam*. So his drive towards the Hindus and Muslims living together in a single political entity was an improbable task to achieve. His appeal to the heart and soul of Hindus and Muslims to have faith in a common nationality did not convince any of the two. As J. B. Kriplani, one of Gandhi's closest admirers and opponent mentions: "I have been with Gandhiji for the last thirty years... Why then am I not

¹⁴¹ Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy, op. cit.*, n. 36, p. 175.

¹⁴² Ramana Murti, *Gandhi: Essential Writings, op. cit.*, n. 5, pp. 80-1.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

with him (now)? It is because I feel that he has yet found no way of tackling the problem of Hindu-Muslim violence on a mass basis.”¹⁴⁴ Gandhi’s theories on Hindu-Muslim unity, then, never took off apart from its moralist and individualist orientation. Which other method would have worked is beyond the purview of this discussion. But we can safely argue Gandhi surely did not have any practical solution to this malaise.

Added to this are critics who have even gone to the extent of squarely blaming Gandhi for promoting a non-secularist agenda which ultimately forced the Muslims to form their own homeland. Ainslie T. Embree maintains that when Gandhi asserted that “my Hinduism includes all that I know is best in Islam it had the wholly unintended effect of alienating Muslims”.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, analysing the mind of Jinnah the father of Islamic nationalism in the sub-continent Ashish Nandy writes, “Jinnah’s main fear, the fear which made him leave the Congress camp, was that the Gandhian movement would create a culture of politics in which, under the guise of Gandhian ‘secularism’ a Hindu culture would discomfit both the Indian secularist and the Indian Muslim.”¹⁴⁶

Gandhi’s appeal to the Hindu community for calm regarding the wrongs done by the Muslims is a brilliant exposition of this. The undercurrents of this appeal meant that the Hindus are the guardians of the national psyche. Since they were the guardians it was their sacred duty and responsibility to show a greater degree of

¹⁴⁴ Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 171.

¹⁴⁵ Ainslie T. Embree, *Imagining India: Essays on Indian History*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 170-1.

¹⁴⁶ Ashish Nandy, ‘An Anti-Secularist Manifesto’, in John Hick, Lamont and Hempel (eds.), *Gandhi’s Significance Today*, London: Macmillan, 1989, pp. 253-4.

tolerance and fellow-feeling. In this conception the Hindus were the ones in the driver's seat and Muslims were only the passengers of this vehicle of national unity and identity. Furthermore, his relentless compassion towards Muslims and asking the Hindus to do the same did grave injury to that community. Gandhi reduced them to a mass of spoon-feeders who were unsure about their identity until Jinnah arrived in the centre-stage of the nationalist agitation and challenged Gandhi's intentions. Jinnah's fears were not unfounded if he regarded Gandhi not as a vanguard of Islamic identity (as Gandhi wished to be called) but Hindu identity. Gandhi's idea of Hindu-Muslim toleration seemed visionary and impractical to Jinnah, especially since the former constantly referred to independent India as the Hindu *Rama Rajya* or Rama's kingdom.¹⁴⁷ Taking the clue from Gandhi, Jinnah argued:

... can you (Gandhi) not appreciate our point of view that we claim the right of self-determination as a nation and not as a territorial unit, and that we are entitled to exercise our inherent right as a Muslim nation, which is our birth right? ... The right of self-determination, which we claim, postulates that we are a nation, and as such it would be self-determination of the Muslims and they alone are entitled to exercise that right.¹⁴⁸

Jinnah like Gandhi was initially content to plead for Hindu-Muslim equality within a single state.¹⁴⁹ However, he was quick to grasp the odds involved which reduced the Muslims to second-class citizens. Hence he corrected himself and became a votary of Muslim separatism. Jinnah in this regard was like those countless Hindu Mahasabha supporters who demanded a separate Hindu state. Gandhi was an enemy to both because he did not agree to allow a clear compartmentalisation of

¹⁴⁷ Mehta, *Gandhi and His Apostles*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 168.

¹⁴⁸ Jinnah's letter to Gandhi dated 15 August 1944. For details, see Parekh, *op. cit.*, n. 36, p. 180.

¹⁴⁹ Parekh, *op. cit.*, n. 36, p. 175.

either community on the basis of religion. It would be incorrect to argue that Gandhi was tacitly involved in the promotion of Hindu hegemony. But one thing is clear he was not prepared to give Muslims unquestionable and untainted equality. The man who was prepared to invite a Muslim ruler to attack India during Khilafat became an enemy of Islamic resurgence when partition became inevitable. For in the 1940s Gandhi urged:

I am also a reader of the *Quran* like them (the Musalmans), I will tell them that the *Quran* makes no distinction between Hindus and Muslims. But if they feel that they should have Heaven without the Hindus, I will not grudge it to them.¹⁵⁰

Gandhi's failure to keep the Muslims in a common political configuration also made him a practical politician towards the end of his life. He gradually understood the absurdity of his theory of a common identity. Having failed to keep all the Muslims under the umbrella of a Hindu majority he now turned his attention to create better Muslims out of all those who remained in India after partition. Robert Payne, one of Gandhi's biographers brings it to the fore by a brilliant comparison between two opposite personalities; that of Gandhi and Patel. For he points out:

Patel thought all the Muslims on Indian territory were potential traitors. If war broke out between Pakistan and India, he believed that Muslims would rise up in their hundreds of thousands to destroy India. Gandhi was convinced that if the Muslims in India were well treated, they would be loyal servants of India.¹⁵¹

The apostle of *ahimsa* and Hindu-Muslim unity dabbled in *real politik* when war broke out between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. In this event he actually

¹⁵⁰ Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, n. 18, p. 57.

¹⁵¹ Payne, *op. cit.*, n. 1, p. 550.

discussed the military situation with Mountbatten and Nehru. In the prayer meeting following that, he commented that the issue was in the hands of the God and he would not shed a tear if all the Indian soldiers were wiped out, for they were sacrificing themselves for India.¹⁵² This involvement once and for all demolished the accusation that Gandhi was a fifth columnist, a slave of Jinnah, and 'Muhammad Gandhi.'¹⁵³

Contrary to popular belief Gandhi's attitude towards Pakistan was unsympathetic. He may have agreed to the reparation of a significant amount of money from India to Pakistan but that did not make him a friend of Muslims of Pakistan. He suspected that Pakistani Muslims could not take care of its minorities as India..¹⁵⁴ Since there were wide-spread riots in Pakistan in the days preceding independence this obviously suggested that the Muslims in Pakistan were incapable of protecting the minorities. Likewise, one may ask whether Gandhi held a similar view for Hindus who also had a part to play in the riots that hit India.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 553.

¹⁵³ See, *Harijan*, 27 April 1947 for these and similar accusations against Gandhi.

¹⁵⁴ "Pakistan is proud of being the biggest Islamic power in the world. But they (the Pakistanis) cannot be proud of themselves unless they ensure justice to every single Hindu and Sikh in that state." Gandhi, *The Way to Communal Harmony*, *op. cit.*, n. 18, p. 345.

3.9. Conclusion

The main conclusion to emerge from our examination of the Gandhian quest for Hindu-Muslim unity has a paradoxical character: it is that what began as an endeavour to unite the two communities ultimately resulted in their division. An interplay of many complex and often contradictory issues prevented the Hindus and Muslims from living together in one nation, as wished by Gandhi. In this regard, it is also impossible to blame any single party or individual for keeping the two communities divided. A combination of factors ultimately resulted in the creation of two nations; one purely on the basis of Islam. However, one cannot wholly ignore the role played by some individuals which contributed towards the formation of a certain character among Hindus and Muslims. Gandhi, for our example, was one such individual whose contribution lay in identity building. An assessment of his role on the basis of his perception of Islam shows that though he intended the Hindus and Muslims to live together, his overbearing Hindu attitude became a hindrance in this regard.

Gandhi's perception of Islam can be best explained in terms of a birth-growth and decay cycle coinciding with three different phases of his life. This was his childhood, life as a barrister in South Africa and the life as a political activist in India. Gandhi's life long passion was bringing equality between Hindus and Muslims. This striving had its origin in Gandhi's upbringing. Later it was reinforced in the religious climate in which he grew up and subsequently made a living. Arriving in India from South Africa after the First World War, Gandhi's conviction about Hindu-Muslim unity and equality got much impetus after his initial success

with the Khilafat campaign. The decaying phase in Gandhi's perception of Islam was the years succeeding Khilafat. After Khilafat, Gandhi grew disillusioned with promoting Islamic causes. It is true that he was sincere to the last for Hindu-Muslim unity but we notice a gradual erosion in his faith in Muslim's attitude. In other words, though Gandhi respected the religious identity of Muslims, he was no longer prepared to accept their dominance in Indian politics.

The apparently paradoxical character in Gandhi's theory is traceable in his views on history (which combined his ideas on civilisation), his use of symbolism and most importantly his arguments regarding an Indian nation-state.

The images, the symbols, the manifestoes which Gandhi coined and promoted from post-Khilafat days appeared in Hindu packaging. How he succeeded in doing so without hurting the feeling of non-Hindus is engaging. The nature of Hindu secularism interestingly is not to demonize 'the other' but respect 'the other' while maintaining its own supremacy. In Gandhi we notice the supreme perfection of this Hindu ideal. By adhering to this principle he effortlessly moved between Hindus and Muslims without giving rise to much dissension from either. But when he associated these very principles in politics a number of non-Hindus found a flaw which they associated with the ascendance of Hindu supremacy.

Did Gandhi really intend to promote Hindu hegemony? The answer to this could be ambiguous. Gandhi certainly did not want the Hindu hegemony of the Mahasabha variety. At the same time he had difficulty in accepting Muslims as rulers over India's majority community. His solution was peaceful cohabitation where the rights and interests of the minority would be safeguarded by the majority. Though for all practical purposes this intention appeared sane and civilised, it carried the germs of the majority dictating their terms. Unfortunately, Muslims recognised this danger in Gandhi's symbolism as we discussed earlier.

Although Gandhi's arguments on Hindu-Muslim unity had considerable merit they also had its limitations, the most relevant to our discussion being their essentially Hindu orientation. The blame falls on Gandhi for not allowing the Muslims the identity which was due to them. His call for Hindu-Muslim brotherhood, instead of allowing an identity to Muslims, deprived them of it. The central thesis of Gandhi's argument on Hindu-Muslim equality was based on Muslim's Hindu past. This is something which was unacceptable to Muslims and their later day votary Jinnah. Gandhi prevented the Muslims from having a mirror reflection of their own. Instead he gave them a silhouetted image, lurking behind which was the image of the Hindu.

Gandhi had a disparaging attitude towards both Muslim rule and Islam in the historical process. Yet he was certain that Islam shall have a key role in the future Indian nation. Therefore he suggested that although Islam is incompatible one has to

find ways to accommodate it in India or else given its past record any denial would only end in further bloodshed between Hindus and Muslims. To accommodate Islam, at one level Gandhi was engaged in promoting the myth of a synthetic past. At another level he was slowly pushing the idea of common national values. These values were mostly Hindu in nature and since Gandhi considered all Indian Muslims converts he saw no reason why they should not abide by it. With hindsight we can point out Gandhi was severely handicapped in giving the Muslims their share in India's civilisational set up. His lack of appreciation for *and* ignorance of India's Islamic past unintentionally made him a promoter of a civilisation whose architects were primarily Hindus. Since Muslims found little in common in this conception they were naturally alienated. Hence the blame goes as much to Gandhi as others for distancing the Muslims from India's mainstream.

Gandhi's effort to draw their (Hindu-Muslim) experiences together into a coherent chronicle of mutuality was considerably weakened owing to the twin inheritance such as colonial interpretation and indigenous narrative on the Muslim rule as we shall see in Chapter 6. While trying to avoid the contentious colonial narrative Gandhi stuck to a level of generality. But he encountered the same antipathy towards Islam and Muslim rule in the mass perception. Gandhi was not a historian, therefore his skills at promoting a synthesised past was severely restricted. By contrast, Nehru, both a thinker and historian was acutely aware of the inherent problems associated with the Gandhian approach. Thus he engaged himself in writing Indian history where Islam as a religion featured less compared to Islamic culture. Unlike Vivekananda and Gandhi who approached the Hindu-Muslim

question from a religious angle, Nehru, as we shall see in the next chapter, used culture to define any past mutuality and future bond between Hindus and Muslims.

Chapter IV

Nehru and secular Indian history

So far, for over 300 years, Islam had come peacefully as a religion and taken its place among the many religions of India without trouble or conflict. The new approach (Mahmud's attack) produced powerful psychological reactions among the people and filled them with bitterness. There was no objection to a new religion, but there was strong objection to anything which forcibly interfered with and upset their way of life.

- *Jawaharlal Nehru*

4. 1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters we found that both Vivekananda and Gandhi devoted as much attention to Islam as to Muslim rule. Both agreed that Muslim rule was not independent of Islam and the two should be analysed simultaneously. Besides, in their perception, religion is a fundamental reality in India and cannot be excluded from any assessment concerning the country's past. Furthermore, they strongly believed that religion shall have a continuing appeal in the Indian context and devoted their attention in comparing and contrasting Hinduism and Islam. Such exercise in their opinion would reveal the future conflict potential and chances of genuine reconciliation or compromise between Hindus and Muslims. Interestingly, though the British historiography as discussed in Chapter 6, was partly responsible for their assessment of Muslim rule, the same cannot be said of their analysis of Islam. The indigenous perception and the non-British oral narrative of Muslims and

Islam as the 'other' came to dominate the thinking of Vivekananda and Gandhi. Though they exercised some autonomous choice it is hard to gauge how much influence the indigenous narrative had in their depiction of Islam.

Nehru who grew up in a multicultural household and had all the advantages of an expensive rational western education thought very little of religion. He was appreciative of the cultural side of human existence and perceived things accordingly. It was his firm opinion that it is culture that binds people together. Lack of appreciation in culture, he believed, can leave a community or communities undeveloped and people will turn to such contentious issues as religion. Thus Nehru was sceptical of the approach of Vivekananda and Gandhi. In addition, Nehru was aware of the burden of British historiography and the indigenous oral narrative that portrayed the history of Muslim rule in a low light. Therefore, unlike Vivekananda and Gandhi he actually engaged himself in writing Indian history in such a manner which could reorient Hindu and Muslim attitude towards each other.

Jawaharlal Nehru is acknowledged as the foremost advocate of modern Indian secularism. As a secular, nationalist historian and politician his view on Hindus and Muslims, critics have argued, were balanced. Of all the nationalist thinkers and politicians Nehru was the most pragmatic. On the question of Hindus and Muslims he was absolutely certain that under no circumstances could Hindus exclude Muslims from the larger socio-economic, religious and political process of India. He was conscious of this fact from the time he joined the nationalist movement. Although Nehru's writings overwhelmingly affirm his non-partisan attitude towards both Hindus and Muslims it also reveals his discomfort with the

Muslims. Nehru had nothing much to say about Islam. As our analysis shall show, Nehru was uncomfortable with several aspects of Muslim rule. Yet, he was aware that the manner of its interpretation can considerably affect the nation-building process. Therefore, his narration involved the depiction of Muslim rule in a favourable light so as to create the myth of Hindu-Muslim unity. In his assessment, Hindus and Muslims during India's Islamic past survived and flourished side by side in a sometimes uneasy harmony, creating a continuous synthesis. Nehru's secularism was a product of this synthesised view of the past. And this synthesised past, in Nehru's opinion, shall be the guiding principle in their future relationship. A study of Nehru's attitude to Hindus and Muslims would reveal the fact that the synthesis upon which he rested his secularism was largely nebulous. As a result, the national culture of India which he substituted for religion had predominantly a Hindu bias, rather than a balanced mixture of the two religions - Hinduism and Islam. It favoured Hindus over Muslims and created further alienation of the latter.

4. 2. Nehru and history

Our understanding of Nehru's attitude towards Islam is linked to his interpretation of history. If history is a political discipline capable of contributing to the growth of a people's sense of nationhood and patriotism,¹ credit goes to Nehru for promoting it. The larger part of Nehru's outlook was that of an historian. This outlook contributed to his ability to adopt lessons from history for rational political manoeuvres. Moreover, Nehru was not a conventional historian providing details and assembling facts. His interpretation of history had a central purpose i.e. to make it palatable and

acceptable to both Hindus and Muslims. In a sense, he was passionately secular while interpreting history. K. M. Panikkar a contemporary historian elucidates Nehru's approach to this subject not as a professional historian but as a humanist.

Before Nehru's intervention:

The Hindus as a whole thought of India as a sacred land, centre of civilisation, religion, philosophy etc., which had unfortunately fallen on evil days, first by Muslim conquests and later by establishment of British power. The Muslims thought of the country as a land which they once ruled and which still provided a living testimony to their civilisation. Nehru's contribution to Indian history was that in his search to discover India he came across the Indian people and wrote the first outline of their history not as a professional historian but as a humanist.²

How successful was Nehru in his approach to history is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, one thing is clear, namely, Nehru urged Indians not to see their past purely in terms of religion. He refuted the claims of those religionists who tried to usurp any particular period of history as *their* age of glory or decline. Simultaneously, while arguing on the preponderance of culture over religion he urged all the religionists to desist from the temptation of associating cultural glory to that of religious glory. In other words, Nehru considered it absurd to attribute the success and achievement of a particular period of history or a people to that of religion such as Hindu glory or Islamic glory.

For Nehru, then, the success or failure of a people depended on its united efforts and the absence of conflicting groups, sects and races. Unlike some historians

¹ Bhikhu Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform*, New Delhi: Sage, 1989, p. 254.

² K. M. Panikkar, 'Nehru as a Historian', in Rafiq Zakaria (ed.), *A Study of Nehru*, Bombay: Times of India Publications, 1959, p. 405.

Nehru did not accuse any particular faith or system of belief for an unpleasant episode or age in history. He blamed fanatical individuals or groups for the social and religious evils. This novel approach of Nehru to India's past helped establish two principles. Firstly, it kept the secular image of the society, polity and religion intact. Secondly, it prevented attempts to bundle up the insane acts of a person or group of persons and attribute them to a race or religious community. In the context of Islam it was an individual Muslim or group of Muslims who were the embodiment of evil and "enemy other", not the whole faith.

Another contextual query which crops up here is how did Nehru define the clash between Hindus and Muslims in the twentieth century? First, unlike the leaders of these religious groups, Nehru viewed this conflict not in terms of religion but of culture. Second, this cultural schism was not between two communities but between two cultures and the conquering scientific culture of modern civilisation.³ Both cultural and religious intolerance between these two communities, he would argue, is largely a result of their blind reverence for the past, which is bad.⁴ Also the enemy here is not the "outside other" but the accuser and the accusing community itself. It is pertinent to note here that Nehru welcomed the arrival of Islamic polity, culture and religion to India in the same way as he did with modernising western culture of the twentieth century.

³ B. R. Nanda, *Gokhale, Gandhi and Nehru: Studies in Indian Nationalism*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 133.

⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund / Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 515.

4.3. Nehru's assessment of Muslim rule

The Muslims who came to India from outside brought no new technique or political or economic structure. In spite of a religious brotherhood of Islam, they were class bound and feudal in outlook. In techniques and the methods of production and industrial organisation, they were inferior to what prevailed then in India. Thus their influence on the economic life of India and the social structure was very little. Thus life continued as of old and all the people, Hindu or Muslim or other, fitted into it.⁵

Nehru's description of the advent of Islam in India as "came to India" rather than the general British interpretation of "Islamic invasion of India" as discussed in Chapter 6, it might appear is deliberate. Nehru was intent on reducing the negative image of Islam created by the British interpretation and prevalent in the oral tradition by using a language that was much more soft and reconciliatory. Important too is his emphasis on Islam's limited contribution to the socio-economic and political structure of India. Such an analysis attempted to demolish two historic "truths" or "myths". To Hindus the "truth" was Islam came to India through the sword. Its arrival was violent and it perpetrated barbarism, carnage, persecution and brought demise to the overall Hindu culture. The Muslims did not deny the Hindu version of violence perpetrated by Islam and the subjugation of the Indian way of life. At the same time they entertained a feeling of superiority and took pride as the progenitors of the establishment of Islamic culture in India. To Nehru, the Hindu "truth" depicting Islam was exaggerated. Simultaneously, he refuted the Muslims claims of cultural, political, economic and religious superiority in India as a "myth."

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

The truth, according to Nehru, was that long before the arrival of Islam or Muslims a decline had set in, in Indian or Hindu society. An inner weakness had seized India even before the first Islamic invasion,⁶ which many regard as a watershed in Indian history in terms of overall religious and cultural demise. At a time when Arab culture and civilisation was in its ascendancy, India was drying up losing her creative genius and vitality of the past.⁷ This was largely a product of an exclusiveness which gripped the Indians and kept them aloof, wrapped up in their conceits.⁸ While explaining this decay, Nehru asserted, “a civilisation decays much more from inner failure than from an external attack. Indian civilisation, by the time the Muslim invasion took place, had already failed owing to the existing social evils. It failed because in a sense it had worked itself out and had nothing more to offer in a changing world and the people who represented it deteriorated in quality and could not support or retain the earlier glory.”⁹

So the first premise of Nehru’s assessment of Islam was that the cultural decline of India was not a product of Islamic invasion. It is true that when Islam came to India in the form of political conquest, it brought conflict, but it had a twofold effect. On the one hand it encouraged the Hindu society to become more closed and shrink still further within its shell, as is the case with any subjected people or community. On the other, Islam brought a breath of fresh air to the decaying atmosphere.¹⁰ And this had a certain rejuvenating effect. Though the social

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 264. The periodic Afghan and Turkish invasion of India that started in 10th century A.D.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁰ Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980, p. 227.

structure remained close as ever, the coming of Islam affected and influenced the art and architecture, painting and music and other areas of social structure.

Compared to other areas of the world where Muslims had intervened, Islam's impact on India was less penetrating, gradual and limited. This crucial aspect was largely ignored by the British historiography as we shall see in Chapter 6, owing to various colonial considerations. Nehru made this significant observation by arguing that Islam, though it came to India as a conquering force, in the ultimate analysis it was overcome by the conquered. By accepting Muslims and at the same time maintaining their own identity, the Hindus created a situation where Islam could not be victorious. As a consequence, the new religion and the accompanying religious system were Indianised. In Nehru's terminology it was synthesis,¹¹ because neither the conqueror nor the conquered repatriated their original identity but nevertheless learned to exist as equals in a larger whole.

But the question remains as to how Nehru reconciled the generally believed aggressive and violent image of Islam and the accompanying Hindu grievances into an acceptable idiom? To Nehru, the image of Islam in India was not uni-dimensional (as the Hindus tend to believe and the indigenous oral narrative maintained), but three-dimensional. The first image of Islam was as a religion proper. Second, it represented a political force. Third and last, it was a vehicle of cultural plurality. Most importantly, though Islam had these three dimensions its propagation and usage depended on the practising or professing race. For example Islam as a religion was adhered to by many races, and while some tried to focus on all the three facets

(religious, political and cultural) in a new conquered territory, some did not. As we shall see in course of discussion Nehru had both admiration, sympathy and antipathy for various racial stocks who sought to promote Islam. He admired those who tried to expose all the three facets of this religion and detested the attempts of those whose only ambition was to promote a singular aspect of it, and that, too, through force.

The earliest contact between Hindus and Muslims, Nehru points, out was on a religio-cultural plane. From *circa* 703-1092 A.D., both the communities had a healthy and frequent intercourse in India's western coast. The Islamic missionaries who came to this part of India were welcomed and allowed to build their mosques and spread their faith. Though both religions existed side by side for almost four hundred years there never was any religious conflict between the two communities. Nehru explains it in terms of old Indian tradition of tolerance which allowed religious plurality.¹²

There was also an intellectual exchange between Muslim Arabs and Hindu India during this period, for many Sanskrit books on mathematics and astronomy were translated into Arabic, and Arab students came in large numbers to the northern university of Takshila to study medicine.¹³ So, Nehru concluded that the first interaction between Islam and Hinduism was peaceful. The interaction also established the fact that as a religion Islam originally was not violent, gory or perilous. The 'gory image' of Islam was a later development. Islam's association with this image was owing to the combination of a number of factors. First, its

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹² Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 229.

increasing use as a religious force for political purposes; its forceful expansion for political consolidation; and the distortion of its main tenets by savage, barbarian races, who understood Islam little but nevertheless found it a convenient tool to perpetuate their savagery, greed and intolerance.

The first Islamic invasion of India, to Nehru, was economic in nature. Their initial economic success through invasion led the Muslims to seek religious and political gains. Nehru accepted the Hindu belief of Sultan Mahmud's carnage in India, which was the first systematic Islamic invasion of the country. However, he was reluctant to associate Mahmud with Islam. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni to Nehru was not a man of religion: he was first and foremost a soldier and his faith was that of a conqueror. It was an unfortunate coincidence that he was a Muslim.

What is significant is that Mahmud took recourse in religion to achieve his economic, military and political goals. Like many other conquerors he used and exploited the name of religion for his conquests. "India was to him just a place from which he could carry off treasure and materials to his homeland."¹⁴ In India he killed and subjugated Hindu "idolaters" with the help of an Islamic army and when there was an Islamic uprising against him in central Asia he used a Hindu army led by a Hindu general called Tilak to put down the rebellion.¹⁵ The portrayal of Mahmud's character also sought to correct Hindu "truth" and the Islamic "myth".¹⁶

¹³ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1949, p. 154.

¹⁴ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 235.

¹⁵ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 209.

¹⁶ Sultan Mahmud's irreligiousity, Nehru tell us, is also reflected on his threats against the Islamic rulers of Sindh who escaped his wrath by paying tributes and accepting his suzerainty. More importantly, Mahmud even threatened the supreme spiritual-political head of Islam the *Caliph* of Baghdad with death and demanded Samarqand from him. Hence, if the Muslims look upon him and

The endemic Islamic barbarism and cruelty against the Hindus that continued in the hands of successive Slave Sultans following Mahmud's invasion had no pure religious motivation whatsoever, argued Nehru.

Religion is always brought in to explain these acts of cruelty, but it is not correct. Sometimes religion was used as a pretext. But the real causes were political or social. The people from Central Asia (*Mahmud and his successors*) were fierce and merciless even in their homelands and long before they were converted to Islam. Having conquered a new country, they knew only one way of keeping it under control - the way of terror.¹⁷

The tone and substance of this argument purports to stress that violence, barbarity and carnage are related more to ethno-racial factors and style of governance than to religion. Nehru's avowed objective seems to be dissociating all forms of aggression, religious zealotry and fanaticism from Islam. We notice a certain degree of unanimity between Vivekananda and Nehru in considering Islam as an ideology or an ideological practice. However they differed in the qualities they attributed to Islam.

As we discussed in Chapter 2, unlike Vivekananda, Nehru did not blame Islam as an ideology promoting religious zealotry, barbarism and violence. These traits, Nehru argued, are primarily related to a race, people and ethnic groups. And he insisted there is always a danger of confusing the two. The Central Asian ethnic groups like Mongols, Tartars and Turks were barbarians long before their conversion to Islam. If they resorted to acts of barbarism after their adherence to Islam the latter

cannot be made responsible. To validate this line of argument Nehru chose Chengiz Khan as the example. This historic figure, Nehru tells us, who is often associated with a monster and called “scourge of God” was not a Muslim. Among those who suffered most of Chengiz’s savagery were the Muslims of Persia and Arabia.¹⁸

Islam no doubt benefited most, one could argue, when a section of Chengiz’s clan was converted to Islam, for, they combined the zeal of both political and religious expansion. Again, to Nehru, this was an accident of history. Nehru’s race theory and religion gains further ground when he analyses Mongols, Semite Arabs and Indo-Aryan Persians in a comparative perspective. If, in later times, Islam came to be associated with the savage and barbaric Central Asian tribes it was unfortunate. Nehru refuted the general stereo-typed, abrasive and intransigent views of Islam by contrasting the Mongols (the later converts to Islam) with the Arabs (the original Semites who professed this religion), and together with the Muslims of Persia. Though all three racial groups were followers of a common ideology Islam, and were collectively known as Muslims their attitude differed significantly. For instance, both Arab and Persian Muslims were more humane, cultured and civilised than their Mongol, Central Asian counterparts. Islam, when it was the sole preserve of Arabs and Persians, argues Nehru, respected foreign cultures, religions, ways of life and societal structure. These races even came to accept some alien and foreign practices in the course of their conquests if those appeared superior to their own.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

Though Islam as a new force or ideal filled the Arabs with self confidence and dynamism,¹⁹ it also taught them restraint. In a way, the first propounders of Islam, the Arabs, were a tolerant race. Examples of religious toleration can be found in *Khalif Omar's* protection of religious plurality in the city of Jerusalem. When Islam was the domain of Arabs in both religious and political arena there existed pockets of Christian communities all over their political federation, from Syria to Egypt and in Spain.²⁰ According to Nehru, the Arabs of this period were even more tolerant than their Christian European counterparts.²¹

The Islamic Arabs, to Nehru, were cultural pluralists and cultural synthesisers. They had a multi-faceted cultural identity which combined the old Indo-Aryan tradition of Persia, with the old Hellenic culture and all the finer aspects of the territories which they conquered. In short, they were a race who were ever prepared to accept things that were superior without any inhibition. In other words, the Islamic Arab identity was not confined to the realm of religion alone but represented a multi-racial theme.²²

Thus Islamic Arabs were not intransigent and recalcitrant. So, Nehru cautions against the attitude to see Islam as an ideology demanding cultural and religious

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²⁰ "The survival of these Christian minorities in the Arab world is a tribute partly to the tolerance, partly to the sagacity, of the Muslim conquerors. It refutes in a practical manner, a fairly common belief that the Muslim invaders offered to the peoples they conquered the choice of Islam or the sword. This indeed, was the choice offered to the pagans of the Arabian Peninsula; but to the People of the Book (Christians and Jews) and to the Zoroastrians in Persia there was added the third alternative of retaining their faith and paying tribute to the *Caliph*. The Christians who declined conversion were even allowed to remain under the jurisdiction of their Churches, whose heads were therefore accorded a quasi-political status by the Muslim rulers under what came to be known as *Millet* (Sect) system." Edward Atiyah, *The Arabs*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955, p. 12.

²¹ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 149.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

unanimity. The combative and harsh dimension of Islam according to Nehru was a post-Arab or later development. The image of Islam was tarnished and misappropriated by Turks and Mongols who overpowered the Arabs. Under their domain the original meaning of Islam was distorted. The Turks and Mongols as a race were intolerant towards anyone who did not follow their way of life or accept their superiority and dominance. When these races' embraced Islam they expected the non-Turk and non-Mongols to follow their religious practices. Opposition to Islam was considered an opposition to their political authority and was crushed with utmost savagery. In this process Islam as an ideology or religious practice was thrust upon the subjected race. The long-term effect of this process however was that Islam came to be associated with the "enemy" or the "evil other."

Furthermore, the barbarity of Turko-Afghan or Turko-Mongol invaders in new conquered territories, Nehru observed, was a matter of "political" exigency. Apart from their genetic fierceness, these Muslim invaders never forgot that they were outsiders and as outsiders they were natural enemies of the people in the subject territory. Fears of backlash and rebellion often resulted in frightfulness. To reinstate political authority in the case of a rebellion these people resorted to massacres in order to suppress any voice of opposition. For Nehru, then, the earliest carnage of Muslim invaders and rulers in India was not a question of Muslim killing a Hindu because of his religion, but the question of an alien conqueror trying to break the spirit of the conquered.²³

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 208-9.

Another contentious aspect of Islam which infuriated Hindus most was the conversion to Islam. As we shall see, Nehru also radically redefined the notions of Islamic conversion in India. He did not quite agree with the theory of forced conversion to Islam in India. In the first place, Nehru observed, the conversion to Islam was not enjoined through sword alone as the popular Hindu view maintained. Secondly, since the impact of Islam was not entirely forceful its spread was gradual and slow in India. This was in marked contrast to several states that exhibited sudden religio-political changes with the advent of Islam. Fears of persecution no doubt initiated Hindu conversion to Islam. In addition, many changed their religion as Islam appealed to them and as, is the tradition in many cultures, people changed their faith (following Islam's political conquest) mostly to be on the winning side, because it guaranteed a safe and prosperous future. This was mostly the case with higher classes of the society who converted to Islam to hold on to power. However, the principal reason for conversion to Islam, Nehru argued, was economic. The imposition of religious tax called *jijiya* or *zezia* on non-Muslims by the early Afghan and Slave rulers forced a substantial number of the populace who were poor to embrace Islam.²⁴ Thus, in Nehru, we notice a kind of dispassionate and pragmatic approach in defining Hindu conversion to Islam.

Though Nehru provided a pragmatic basis to Islamic conversion he nevertheless strangely exhibited a kind of passionate Hindu sentiment. Apart from the initial armed resistance to Islam there was also a psychological reaction to it among the Hindus, Nehru pointed out. He defined this psychological reaction as "Hindu bitterness". Hindus or Indians (as he preferred to describe the people of the

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

country) as a religio-cultural race were peace-loving, who accepted and recognised the outsider without any vehemence if the latter's approach was non-violent and non-combative. Indians, in Nehru's view, never objected to any new religion let alone Islam.²⁵ However, under the patronage of invaders, Islam forcibly interfered with the Indian way of life and as a result Indians developed a psychological hatred against it.²⁶

The short-term or immediate effect of Islam's aggression was an exodus of north Indian Aryans to the south who carried their culture with them and remained insular.²⁷ However, the long-term effect of it was the erosion of the old Hindu or Indian tradition of tolerance. Furthermore, this aggression sowed the seeds for an internecine religious conflict among both the communities. This aggression too was responsible for Hindus developing a sense of nationalism that revolved around their faith or religion.

Even though Nehru provided a dispassionate historical account of the Islamic invasion and its impact, it would be wrong to argue that he did not have any preference in this matter. He too had a disparaging attitude towards the Muslim invaders along with Hindus. This is evident in the reading of certain sections of his *Glimpses of World History* and the *Discovery of India*. However, one can also argue

²⁵ "For hundreds of years, before Mahmud of Ghazni raided India, Muslim missionaries had wandered about India and had been welcomed. They came in peace and had some success. There was little if any ill feeling against Islam. Then came Mahmud with fire and sword, and the manner of his coming as a conqueror, and plunderer and killer injured the reputation of Islam in India more than anything else. And for a very long time these raids overshadowed Islam in India and made it difficult for people to consider it dispassionately as they might otherwise have done." Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op cit.*, n. 13, p. 181.

²⁶ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op cit.*, n. 4, p. 236.

²⁷ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op cit.*, n. 13, p. 209.

that he used this opportunity to make a case against the invaders rather than Islam in general. Islam, according to Nehru, was originally self-enquiring, rational and tolerant.²⁸ But, with the fall of Baghdad under Turkish domination its spirit of rationalism was distorted. In the hands of Turks, Tartars and Mongols, Islam became a rigid faith suited more to military conquests rather than the conquest of mind.²⁹ This attitude is almost similar to that of Gandhi who argued that it is only Islam of antiquity which has something to offer but not Islam in the historical process.

4.4. Nehru and the legacy of Islam

Having made a distinction between the nature of Islam and those professing it Nehru engaged himself in imagining the coming of Islam to India through its original followers - the Arabs. The hatred against Islam in Indian psyche and the denigration of Afghan and Slave rule, Nehru concedes, was because Islam did not come to India "proper." By this he meant Islam in its original and undiluted form. The Turko-Afghan race, as such, had no cultural grounding and hence had nothing to contribute in the new conquered territories. Since they had nothing to offer, a sense of inferiority seized them and they ventured to destroy all that was good in the subject territory out of sheer fury. But had the Arabs come to India with Islam in the early days, the rising Arab culture would have mixed with the old Indian culture and both would have reacted on each other with great consequences.³⁰ If Islamic contribution had two aspects: negative and positive, Nehru we can argue had no hesitation in

²⁸ "Fight for the sake of Allah those that fight against you, but do not attack them first. Allah does not love the aggressors." *Sura: 2:190*. N. J. Dawood, (tr.), *The Koran*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, p. 352.

²⁹ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 234.

³⁰ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 181.

viewing the arrival of Islam in India through Turko-Afghans as having a negative effect.

If at all there was any positive impact of Islam on India, it was in the inner world of self-enquiry and self-analysis. Confronted by a Turko-Afghan brand of Islam, the Hindus learned to look into the inner contours of their religion and society. Islam pointed out the ills that had crept into Hindu society. A section of Hindu society, Nehru points out, recognised the petrification of the Hindu order in terms of caste hierarchy, untouchability and exclusiveness. This recognition was possible owing to Islamic notions of theoretical³¹ equality and universal brotherhood.³²

Though the decaying Indian civilisation declined further with the advent of Islam, the former nevertheless managed to influence the latter and moulded it to its own ways, insisted Nehru. The limited absorption, assimilation and final cultural conquest of Islam in India resulted in the emergence of a pluralist atmosphere.³³ Nehru evidently concluded that this plurality gave rise to a synthesis whereby the outsiders gradually became a part of the mainstream.

Islam no longer remained stranger or newcomer to India. It became well established. The fierceness and cruelty of the early Afghan invaders and the Slave kings toned down, and the Muslim kings were as much Indians as the Hindus. They had no outside connections. Wars continued to take place between different states but the motives were political not religious. Sometimes a Muslim state employed Hindu troops and a Hindu state employed Muslim

³¹ "New Muslims in the early days of Islam were not accepted as equals by the Arab believers unless they were of Arab race, and this despite the theoretical equality of all the faithful insisted upon by the Prophet. One had to be an Arab as well as a Muslim to occupy the highest station of all." Edward Atiyah, *The Arabs, op. cit.*, n. 20, p. 13.

³² Nehru, *The Discovery of India, op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 265.

³³ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History, op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 157.

troops. Muslim kings often married Hindu women and Hindus were often employed as ministers and high officials by the Muslim kings. There was little feeling of conqueror and conquered or ruler and ruled. Indeed, most of the Muslims including some of the rulers were converts to Islam.³⁴

Nehru invites us to believe that this synthesis and the emergence of a cross-cultural identity was a product of inclusiveness of Indian culture and religion and the religious tolerance of Islam as enshrined in the *Quran*. However, we can object to this and argue that Islam and Muslims resorted to plurality as a practical necessity. India, for Islam, was not an uncharted territory. It contained a people and civilisation which was on a par with any other contemporary culture and civilisation. The establishment of a complete Islamic way of life would have meant the obliteration of the existing order. In terms of power and resource, Muslims were dwarfed by the immensity of India. Hence they willingly accepted plurality.

Though this plurality or synthesis was couched in practical necessity Nehru described it as a product of inclusiveness of Indian tradition. By doing so, as we shall see afterwards, he negated the chances of any particular non-Indian ideology or ideal to call itself supreme or unquestionable. Moreover, by emphasising this notion of plurality, Nehru also managed to Indianise every foreign ideal or practice. In its extreme form, Nehru's pluralism robbed the originality from every kind of alien ideal and indigenised it.

The second phase of Islamic history in India, according to Nehru's classification, was the Mughal era. Even though the Mughals were Muslims and

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

protectors and promoters of Islamic faith, Nehru desisted from calling their invasion of India Islamic. He argued it was as wrong and erroneous to call the Mughal invasion, Islamic as to term the British period in India, Christian.³⁵ Among the two invasions of India (the Turko-Afghan and Mughal), Nehru had an unreserved empathy for the latter. The prime reason for this was the Mughal attitude to regard India as their own land immediately after their arrival. "The Mughals were outsiders and strangers to India yet they fitted into the Indian structure with remarkable speed and thus commenced a plurality in terms of Indo-Mughal period."³⁶

Whether Nehru opposed or praised a particular period of Islamic history seems to have centred around the amount of cohabitation and interaction expressed in the given era. For instance, though the Mughal period is usually regarded as an era of synthesis, Nehru criticised and praised different Mughal rulers for their attachment to, and promotion of, cultural and religious plurality. A comparison between Babar, the founder of the Mughal empire, and Aurangzeb, the last great Mughal monarch, by Nehru reveals this attitude. Whereas Nehru praised Babar as being a non-sectarian ruler harbouring no religious bigotry or religious zealotry, he criticised Aurangzeb for not respecting the Hindus and their way of life.³⁷

It is often argued that Nehru had or maintained a dispassionate attitude towards Islamic rule and was pro-Muslim.³⁸ Nothing could be further from truth, however. Like every other non-Muslim Indian, Nehru deplored the reign of

³⁵ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 241.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

³⁷ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 319.

³⁸ Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 315.

Aurangzeb. Yet, unlike the general mass, he criticised it in a diplomatic and non-religious way.

Aurangzeb was a bigot, tolerating no religion but his own. Deliberately he laid down a policy of persecuting the followers of Hindu religion. Deliberately he reversed Akbar's policy of conciliation and synthesis. He reimposed *jizya* tax on Hindus; he excluded Hindus from office as far as possible, he destroyed Hindu temples by the thousand, and many a beautiful old building of the past was thus reduced to dust. *In short, Aurangzeb was an abominable Islamic monarch.*³⁹

Nehru attacked the lack of respect for plurality in Aurangzeb. Aurangzeb was condemned by Nehru as the former violated the preferred cultural framework of the latter. He shared the same anguish with Hindus against the reign of Aurangzeb but his reason for doing so was significantly different from others. But there is one difficulty, logically, Aurangzeb, as the supreme ruler of India had the right to impose his personal religion or faith on his subjects.⁴⁰ In the mediaeval age rulers often expected their subjects to follow his own religion and those who opposed it were often punished. This practice was followed in several Christian and Islamic kingdoms as there was no separation of religion from politics and very often there existed a state religion. Therefore, it is indeed hard to justify why a mediaeval or early modern ruler such as Aurangzeb should conform to the modern ideals of secularism and religious tolerance.

³⁹ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, pp. 313-9; emphasis in italics mine.

⁴⁰ "Muslims believe in the holistic nature of Islam in the sense of its being a way of life and not simply a religion (*dunya wa din*). Islam is believed to be all-encompassing and all-pervasive; 'secularism' is therefore considered by many to be a concept not only alien to, but also incompatible with Islam." Nazin Ayubi, *Political Islam*, London: Routledge, 1991, pp. 50-1.

Nehru's description of Akbar, the monarch who consolidated Mughal rule in India, is fascinating. In terms of spiritual magnanimity and benevolence Nehru equates Akbar with the emperor Asoka. Nehru lauded the reign of these two rulers because, though belonging to non-Hindu religions (Asoka was a Buddhist and Akbar a Muslim), they promoted and respected religious plurality. Or, in more concrete terms none of them tried to impose the minority religion over the majority.

Akbar was a wise despot, and he worked hard for the welfare of the Indian people. In a sense, he might be considered to be the father of Indian nationalism. At a time when there was little nationality in the country Akbar deliberately placed the ideal of a common Indian nationhood above the claims of separatist religions.⁴¹

Arguably, as far as Akbar's reign was concerned, both Hindus and Muslims held two diametrically opposite views. Nehru's views on Akbar in this regard may be considered as representative of the Hindus. Though Nehru appreciated Akbar's reign in terms of religious plurality and secularism the Muslims detested him for the same reason. The strict and orthodox Muslims had a veiled hatred against his policies on religion. At the time of nationalist struggle the Muslim League made a deliberate attempt to discredit Akbar when Congress tried to project his image among the Islamic community in India.⁴² Akbar's image appealed to Nehru almost for the exact opposite reason for which he detested Aurangzeb. It is pertinent to enquire, would Nehru have highlighted Akbar as the father of Indian nationalism had the latter been strict, tough and harsh in the domain of religion? One is not allowed

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴² "It is significant that Akbar, whom the Hindus especially admired, has not been approved of in recent years by some Muslims", wrote Nehru. "When the 400th anniversary of Akbar's birth was celebrated in India all classes of people, including many Muslims joined, but the Muslim League kept aloof because Akbar was a symbol of India's unity." Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, pp. 343-4.

to give in to imagination in academic discipline. However, if we make such a comparison keeping in mind the Hindu view of inclusiveness the implications of the above would be negative.

Akbar and his successors (including Jehangir and Shahjahan's) inter-marriage in the Hindu community, Nehru states as the beginning of the process of Indianisation and synthesis. This line of argument however can be contested. The taking of Hindu wives by Mughal monarchs were often politically motivated and had very little to do with the promotion of genuine pluralistic values leading to cultural synthesis. Though this trend was keenly espoused by Akbar, his successors, like Aurangzeb, clearly recognised the presence of a threat in it. A major manifestation of this threat was the dilution of original Islam. It is possible that Aurangzeb did not wish to see Islam follow the path of Buddhism and Jainism.⁴³ Besides, it could also be argued that the political considerations which motivated rulers like Akbar, Jehangir and Shahjahan to take Hindu wives had no appeal during Aurangzeb's rule. To put it simply, Aurangzeb did not appreciate the necessity of inter-religious marriage as an instrument of political consolidation.

Hindu nationalism gained ground when the basic minimum was trampled. Nehru traced the origin of Hindu nationalism to Shivaji,⁴⁴ but he desisted from pointing out openly that this was a product of Aurangzeb's refusal to Hinduise Islam

⁴³ Hinduism had neutralised these two religions which emerged in *circa* 5th century B.C. The birth of Bhakti movements of this period was an attempt to Hinduise Islam. From the outer periphery these movements seemed much like trading a middle path between Islam and Hinduism. What is interesting to observe is that, while original Islam opposed any such division, Hinduism accepted it. By recognising these splinter spiritual movements Hinduism ultimately scored a victory over Islam from whose fold came a large number of followers to the Bhakti movement.

⁴⁴ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 315.

or his own religious outlook. What Nehru called the policy of intolerance of Aurangzeb⁴⁵ was in fact the refusal of the latter to concede or conform to Hinduisation. Nehru's was a relentless effort to describe every period of Indian history following the advent of Islam as a product of Hindu-Muslim interaction resulting in the formation of a secular identity. This identity, he argued, helped establish a secular tradition. However, critics have pointed out that there never was a secular tradition in India and Nehru was very much aware of it.⁴⁶ Nehru's effort in this regard, one can argue, was directed to demolish the unquestionable monolithic Islamic identity in the country.

What made India great was her broad-mindedness. It was her conviction that truth is many-sided and of infinite variety. How can any man presume to say that he only has grasped the entire truth. If he is earnest in the search of truth, he may say that he saw a particular face of truth but how can he say that somebody else has not seen the truth, unless he follows a similar path.⁴⁷

Islam however did not conform to or respect this interpretation of truth. Truth according to Islam is one dimensional. The only unshakeable truth is the truth contained in the *Quran*.⁴⁸ Seen in this context, orthodox Islam refused to be a part of India's broadmindedness. The favourite term for Nehru to describe Muslims or Hindus who resisted this multi-faceted Indianness was, "communal". Nehru called them "communal" because they refused to dilute their original ideals. Logically, those Muslim rulers or Islamists who believed that there is only one dimension to truth, god-head, religion, polity and culture were right in their belief. Arguably, one

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁴⁶ Agehananda Bharati, 'Prospects of Secularism in India', in A.B. Shah (ed.), *Jawaharlal Nehru: A Critical Tribute*, Bombay: Manaktalas, 1965, p. 86.

⁴⁷ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, *op. cit.*, n.. 10, p. 595.

cannot force a religious community to change its views on religion and make it more market-friendly. Nehru interpreted, constructed and conceived Islamic history through a market-friendly approach.

It is true Islam underwent a massive change in India. But the metamorphosis was not total. Moreover, not all the Muslims, as Nehru tends to argue, preferred or accepted this transformation. The immensity of India's geography, varied culture and a generally tolerant attitude⁴⁹ prevented Islam percolate in its original form. Though limited, there existed a continuous effort to see Islam in its original form in both socio-cultural and religio-political planes, among a section of Muslims. The hidden agenda behind Nehru's approach to Islam was to restrict the Muslims from entertaining any such strict ideal. He argued:

What is called Muslim or medieval period was more or less confined to the top and did not vitally affect the essential continuity of Indian life. The invaders who came to India absorbed into India and part of her life. Their dynasties became Indian dynasties and there was a great deal of racial fusion by intermarriage. A deliberate attempt was made apart from a few examples not to interfere with the ways and customs of the people. They (the Islamic invaders) looked to India as their country and had no other affiliation. India continued to be an independent country.⁵⁰

Again Nehru's effort to provide a plural history of Islam in India appear deliberate. In order to substantiate our argument the following six points need further deliberation.

⁴⁸ E. H. Palmer (tr.), *The Quran*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928, p. xvi.

⁴⁹ As in war (both political and religious) it is easy to win a race that is fierce, proud and combative. These are the traits which we call masculinity in a people, race, culture and civilisation. Indian culture however did not emphasise on this masculinity. Majority of Indian's were not war-like, forceful and abrasive in their attitude but were soft in their overall attitude. We can argue that these traits are feminine or manifestations of a culture which is feminine.

First, the view that the invaders looked upon India as their country is inconsequential. In the sense that any race or people who settle down in a new territory would consider it as their own place or country. An analogy can be drawn here between the Islamic invaders and British colonialists. The Britishers who ruled India never considered it as their country solely, because of the fact that they never settled down. On the contrary Muslim invaders who stayed back regarded the land as their own country as though they were a part of its evolution.

Second, it is hard to comprehend what Nehru meant by “their (Muslim) dynasties became Indian dynasties.” These dynasties for all practical purposes remained Islamic dynasties first and foremost. There was no attempt whatsoever on the part of Slave rulers and the Mughals to change the name or identity of their dynasties to a Hindu or Indian title.

The third, controversial point which needs clarification relates to matters of sexuality. Nehru’s writings tend to glorify cases of inter-marriage during the Islamic period. The immediate implication of these facts seems to emphasise the degree of cordiality existing between Muslim rulers and Hindu subjects. If the contextuality of the above analysis is social, Nehru contradicts himself in another context, by adding a political dimension to Hindu-Muslim intermarriage. If there was any racial fusion through inter-marriage they were carried out for political purposes.⁵¹ It is an historical truism that the females of the conquered or subject races are usually taken

⁵⁰ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, pp. 237-8.

⁵¹ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 214.

as wives by the conquerors. Though Nehru was at pains to highlight the Hindu wives of Akbar, Shahjahan or Jahangir, he did not provide us with a single example where a Muslim woman was taken up as wife by a Hindu chieftain, nobleman or minister. Nehru's effort in this regard, we can argue, was to create a picture of social harmony and cohesion through inter-marriage. This however was far from the truth. The Islamic interaction with Hindus in matters of marriage was confined to the sexual⁵² and the political, but not the social realm.

Fourth, the argument on Muslim abstinence from interfering with the ways and customs of the people i.e. Hindus is also disputable. One needs to remember that the Muslim ruling community in India was numerically overwhelmed by the ruled. So, if the Muslim rulers abstained from interfering with the Indian way of life, it was a matter of political exigency.⁵³ Nehru asks his readers of Indian history to believe that there was no Islamic interference with the Hindu way of life as the former respected the latter. This however is far from the truth. From Mahmud onwards there were frequent attempts by Muslims to interfere with Indian (Hindu) way of life. The crude result or outcome of this was the destruction of Hindu places of worship, Hindu palaces and all monuments containing semblance of Hindu tradition and culture.⁵⁴

⁵² Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 218.

⁵³ We can validate the argument by citing the example of Kashmir. In one of the accidents of Indian history the ruler of this state happened to be a Hindu and the subjects overwhelmingly Islamic. The Dogra dynasty's acceptance of Islamic way of life for his subjects had no element of secularism or respect in it. Members of the dynasty were forced to recognise the Islamic faith of its people as a matter of political exigency.

⁵⁴ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op cit.*, n. 13, p. 212. For a detail study on Islamic carnage of Hindu monuments, see Arun Shourie, *Indian Controversies*, New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1993, pp. 401-10.

Moreover, if the Muslim rulers in particular and Muslims in general did not interfere with Indian ways of life it was largely due to a sense of superiority which the former harboured owing to their adherence of *Quranic* ideals. The Muslim nobility and the ruling class considered the masses as inferior or categories of people who should be avoided. In spite of the proliferation of their faith, Muslim rulers in India never considered the proselytised mass as equals. So we notice two varieties of Islam in the country: the one professed by the ruling community and the other by the converts (mostly Hindu untouchables).⁵⁵ The nobles, who considered themselves original Muslims, shunned Hindu customs and way of life. Their socio-religious attitude remained primarily exclusive and in culture essentially Islamic. The Hindu-Muslim plurality which Nehru traced in Islamic history of India existed only among the Hindu lower caste converts to Islam. Ignored equally by both communities, they had no choice but to blend elements of Hinduism (the livelihood or vocational practices attached to caste) and Islam (in terms of religious practices).

Fifth, debating Nehru's expression that "the Islamic invaders looked to India as their country and had no other affiliation" we arrive at two sets of explanation.

First, the invaders prior to their invasion were stateless or had no fixed political memory (boundary) of their own. Though India's fabulous wealth was a

⁵⁵ Nehru accepted this duality in Islamic community and termed it feudal as against the brotherhood of Islam. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India, op. cit.*, n. 4. p. 267. The stratification among Islamic community in India falls into two categories: that of Ashraf and non-Ashrafs. The Ashrafs or nobles are again divided into four categories. The first of these groups are the supposed descendants of Turko-Afghan immigrants of Saizid and Shaikh "Moon of the Pearl" roughly the equivalents of Kshatriyas to whose ranks small numbers of Rajput nobility were admitted. In the second broad group were Indian converts, divided into numerous groups based on their past Hindu caste categories. Richard Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree, op. cit.*, n. 52, p. 218. Also see, Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, London: Widenfeld & Nicolson, 1966, pp. 206-8.

prime motivating factor in invasion there too were other broad political considerations. Several invasions were aimed at securing a political identity for the invader; in the form of sultanate, kingdom, empire or state. The invaders, then, prior to their invasion were motivated to settle down in India if successful in their military campaigns. Invaders like Mahmud or Nadir Shah did not consider India as their own country because they already had a political identity of their own. From Iltutmish (the first Islamic ruler of India) to the Mughals all these invaders were stateless and were lacking a political identity prior to their arrival in India. Hence it is but natural that they took to India as their country.

Second, Nehru uses the term “non-affiliation” (or “no-affiliation”) to portray the insularity of Islamic dynasties in India. If affiliation means interaction with another political entity outside India the Islamic rulers had very few options. The question is even if they had intended an affiliation with whom would they have affiliated? Understandably, for Muslim rulers there was no need for political affiliation outside the country as India was vast enough to be referred to as an empire. What Nehru really tried to imply by “non-affiliation” was the absence of religious affiliation beyond India’s political boundaries. Political Islam, as we see it today, had a limited connotation in the mediaeval age. Though the seat of *Khalif* represented a sort of common unity among the Islamic communities or states the authority of *Khalifa* remained contested. The Muslims on their part were divided on the Turkish usurpation of *Khalifate*. Moreover, a deep-seated political distrust existed among different Muslim rulers of this period which forced them to remain

insular and indifferent in spite of the *Quranic* conception of *umma* or Islamic world community.⁵⁶

Sixth and lastly, it is not clear what Nehru meant by the continuance of India's independence even after the Islamic invasion and establishment of Muslim rule. As Lannoy explains: "Muslim conquest of India was essentially a *colonial* enterprise, tied moreover to the principle of conversion by the sword - a new feature in the pattern of foreign invasion. The sheer numbers and military might of Muslims who settled in India, and the fact that, even in the Mughal period, they still regarded themselves as *foreigners*, members of a sovereign state (an ideal implicit if rudimentary, in Islam from the days of the *Khaliphate*), made them adopt the stance of conquerors."⁵⁷

For the tangible effects of Hindu-Muslim interaction or synthesis Nehru highlighted the art and architecture of the Islamic period. He argued that Islamic art in India was in marked contrast to the decadent over-elaborate and repetitive Hindu art form, and that one needs to thank Islamic art for resuscitating its Hindu counterpart from an imminent decay.⁵⁸ Nehru's reference to the Indo-Islamic art and architecture (a product of the synthesis) as energetic and vibrant⁵⁹ is far from truth. Richard Lannoy in his seminal work on Indian civilisation and culture argues the opposite. Much of the Islamic or Indo-Islamic art, he points out, bears the impression

⁵⁶ Nadir Shah's attack on crumbling Mughal empire is a fascinating example in this direction.

⁵⁷ Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*, *op. cit.*, n. 52, p. 229.

⁵⁸ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 265.

⁵⁹ Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, *op. cit.*, n. 13, p. 209.

of a grim tyrant and foreboding conqueror. The forts, mausoleums and towers of victory testify to this ruthless military prowess⁶⁰ rather than any positive synthesis.

Their seven hundred years of common history was marked by mutual suspicion and hatred. During these centuries, while the Muslims tried relentlessly to maintain their hegemony Hindus silently waited for that moment when they could overthrow their conquerors. Pushed to the corner during the reign of Aurangzeb, a section of Hindus and Sikhs tried to reclaim their religious identity and political power. Nehru claimed that the Islamic rule was integrated in India but the majority community, the Hindus held a different opinion. Shivaji and the Marathas, the forerunners of modern Hindu nationalism considered Islamic rule as unjust and Muslim rulers as usurpers. Therefore there is considerable difficulty in accepting the argument that Hindus and Muslims were compatible with each other.

Just about the time Hindus were trying to undo the Muslim rule, came the British. So the movement to regain Hindu hegemony and power *vis a vis* Islam was postponed to a future date. Though limited in form we notice traces of Hindu revivalism in the early decades of this century. The purpose of extremists in the Congress, like Tilak, Malavya and Gokhale, was primarily to establish a Hindu state and not necessarily an anti-Islamic polity.

Though it was easy for Nehru to describe centuries of Muslim rule as an age of synthesis, his views were put to an acid taste while defining Islam and Muslims of

⁶⁰ For a good discussion, see Lannoy, 'Twilight of Gods' (Chapter V), *The Speaking Tree*, , *op. cit.*, n. 52.

his own era. So far he interpreted a history to which there were no living witnesses or defendants. Though the struggle against British rule was a mainstream one it had a strong Hindu flavour or dominance. There was no way Nehru could have altered or hidden this fact for promoting his arguments on synthesis.⁶¹ Muslims on their part feared an absorption by the dominant community. Understandably they were not prepared to go in for a synthesis because there never was a synthesis. For, from their own past experience, as a minority community, demanding allegiance from a majority, they could imagine what the future would be in a reverse process or reverse order.

None understood these nuances in Muslim psyche better than Nehru. Nehru, along with other congress leaders, asked the Indians to look back into history with pride so as to overthrow the British.⁶² But what happened in this history lesson is that instead of imagining a common identity both Hindus and Muslims found themselves in a closed arena fighting each other. This lesson also helped them identify their uncommon and divisive past. If, at all, the Hindus and Muslims prided themselves on their past they prided themselves only on un-synthesised episodes of history. For example, in the context of power and dominance while the Hindus considered this synthesis as repression Muslims looked up to this period for Islamic glory.

In short, the Muslim sense of history during the nationalist struggle took a negative turn as against Nehru's avowed secularism and Indianisation. Hindus too

⁶¹ Supporting this view Nehru wrote: "Indian nationalism was dominated by Hindus and had a Hinduised look. So a conflict arose in the Muslim mind; they accepted that nationalism trying to influence it in the direction of their choice; many sympathised with it and yet remained aloof and uncertain." *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, vol. 14, New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1982. p. 39.

⁶² Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, op. cit., n. 10, p. 8.

resented that part of Indian history which Nehru termed as a period of synthesis, upon the arrival of Muslims. Since his theories of Indianisation and synthesis did not find an audience he turned to the appeasement of both communities. For Hindu appeasement he pointed out:

The coming of Muslims brought a foreign element into India but they came in comparatively small numbers and they did not disturb the culture and the institutions of the country. These institutions were partly influenced by them but on the whole they adapted themselves to these.⁶³

However, as Francis Robinson argues, Muslims of British India did not see themselves in this politico-religious symbiosis.⁶⁴ Muslim leaders of North India in the late nineteenth century did not recognise a common destiny with the Hindus because they saw themselves in danger of losing their privileges as a dominant community.⁶⁵ For the purpose of our analysis we can argue, though Nehru was trying to portray a common identity none of the two communities was prepared to entertain this idea.

Another pointer in this historiography is that the Hindus did not entirely discredit Nehru's arguments on synthesis⁶⁶ because of the principles of majoritarianism. Hindus in pre-independent India were aware that any form of power-sharing would reflect their preponderance. In other words, it would be obligatory for the minority community (in this case Muslims) to accept the leadership

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Francis Robinson, 'Islam and Nationalism' in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (ed.), *Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p. 214.

⁶⁵ Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1975, p. 12.

⁶⁶ I mean to say that they accepted the leadership of Nehru both in pre and post-independent India.

and protection of the majority.⁶⁷ Again, in Robinson's opinion, wherever Muslims form a minority there frequently springs up a demand that Muslims should be organised as a separate political, community either as a separate nation-state or a state within a state.⁶⁸ While Nehru was trying hard to popularise a syncretic version of Indian history, Muslims chose to emphasise "a special sense of history" that was entirely incompatible with Nehru's. This in other words meant the Muslims disregarded the theory of synthesis.

Understandably, the Muslim aspiration of separatism was inspired largely by the Islamic resurgence movements in the near-East and West Asia. In terms of historical coincidence this period too was marked by an Islamic sense of the history of European colonialism. And the Muslims of this region were fuelled with scriptural inspiration and the ambition to establish an Islamic community as a result of this.

Nehru's syncretism, again, was restrictive. Fearing the spill over effect of the West Asian Muslim political aspirations on their counterparts in India, Nehru imposed his vision of a culturally plural India to curb any such aspiration from gaining ground. To Nehru, Muslims in India had only one identity which was identifiable with the Indian nation. He demanded that Muslims relinquish their notions of attachment to Arabia-the seat of Islam. If nationalism is a particular kind of determinism⁶⁹ Nehru required Indians to abide by it. Hindus accepted this

⁶⁷ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 110-5.

⁶⁸ Francis Robinson, "Islam and Nationalism", *op. cit.*, n. 86, p. 214.

⁶⁹ Maurice Barres, in J. S. McLelland (ed. & introduced), *The French Right from de Maistre to Maurras*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1970, p. 159.

determinism as they had a pre-conceived notion of the future. Muslims, who had a similar vision, opposed it as the future did not seem very promising for them.

Nehru stressed that in a multi-religious, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural country like India true nationalism can come through an ideological fusion between Hindus and Muslims. He also made it clear that this fusion would not necessarily mean extinction of any real culture but would help build a common national outlook.⁷⁰

In a country like India, which has many faiths and religions, no real nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity. Any narrower approach must necessarily exclude a section of the population and then nationalism itself will have a much more restricted meaning...In India we should have to consider Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism, Sikh nationalism and not Indian nationalism.⁷¹

This version of nationalism was acceptable to all except the economically advanced middle-class Muslims. Prior to partition all of Nehru's energy was spent on diffusing separatism from among these numerically insignificant but politically dominant groups.

Nehru's failure to stop the tide of separatism was inevitable. It was inevitable because his secular nationalism stood on the way of a *Quranic* polity combining both elements of religion and politics. Nehru's concept of nationalism did not reflect any alliance between the religious and the political but for Muslims such

⁷⁰ Dorothy Norman (ed.), *Jawaharlal Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, vol. I, London: Bodley Head, 1965, p. 328.

⁷¹ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, *op. cit.*, n. 10, p. 330.

a view was absurd and sacrilegious.⁷² Arguably, Nehru's secularism was powerless against the scriptural ideal of Islam. He could not convince the Muslim hard-liners that a Muslim theocracy is not only obsolete but impractical in the Indian context. Alternately, the Muslim hard-line response further affected Nehru's disposition to the Muslim rule and Islam.

Hence Nehru, who all along had emphasised the influence of Muslim culture in the overall Indian way of life suddenly, repudiated his own earlier arguments of Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis. He suggested that India's interaction with West Asia (which the Muslims regard as the bastion of Islam) existed long before the emergence of Islam. This interaction, in Nehru's opinion was civilisation and cultural with rarely any hint of religion in it. The Muslim attempt to give a religious dimension to it is preposterous. Moreover, Muslims cannot appropriate the civilisation of Arabs, Persians and others as their own as it was cosmopolitan in nature.

But what is this "Muslim culture?" Is it a kind of racial memory of the great deeds of the Arabs, Persians, Turks etc. Or language? Or art and music? Or customs? I do not remember anyone referring to present day Muslim Art or Muslim music. The two languages which have influenced Muslim thought in India are Arabic and Persian, especially the latter. But the influence of Persian has no element of religion about it. The Persian language and many Persian customs and traditions came to India in the course of

⁷² "The Muslims cannot divorce their religion from politics. In Islam religion and political beliefs are not separated from each other. Religion and politics are inseparably associated in the mind and thoughts of all Muslims....Their religion includes their politics and their politics are a part of their religion. The mosque not only constitutes a place of their worship but also the Assembly Hall....They are born into a system....Hence Hindu-Muslim unity or nationalism, signifying homogeneity between them in all non-religious matters, is unimaginable. The Islamic polity in which religion and politics are inseparably united requires perfect isolation for its development. The idea of a common state with heterogeneous membership is alien to Islam and can never be fruitful." A. Punjabi, *Confederacy of India*, pp. 88-9. Cited in Moin Shakir, 'Dynamics of Muslim Political Thought' in Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch (eds.), *Modern Indian Political Thought*, New Delhi: Sage, 1986, p.153. For an excellent definition of this also see, Haroon Khan Sherwani's 'The *Quranic State*', in *Studies in Muslim Political Thought and Tradition*, Philadelphia: Procupine Press, 1963, pp. 1-34.

thousand of years and impressed themselves powerfully all over north India. Persia was the France of the East - sending its language and culture to all its neighbours.⁷³

There are three strands in Nehru's view in the passage quoted above. First, for Nehru, the Persian and Arab influence on Indian culture had arrived in India long before Islam as a religion came into being. Second, owing to the coincidence of history, the same culture and language which influenced Indians was adopted by Muslims in a different age and under different circumstances, so it came to be associated with Islamic culture. Third, the Islamist or Muslim attempt to monopolise this facet of Indian culture by inappropriately labelling it Islamic is contemptible and wrong. If these three points are the main premise of an argument the conclusion should be: Islam never had any other identity in India other than religious. Hence Islamist or Muslim demand for a separate statehood is unacceptable because it clashed with the original Indian ideal of religious plurality in a cross-cultural framework.

Muslim separatism in India prior to the country's independence drew its sustenance from pan-Arabic Islamic culture. In Nehru, however, we find a deliberate attempt to curtail this tie. He corrected Muslims from imagining that the Arab civilisation was post-Islamic.⁷⁴ His arguments on culture and civilisation emphasised that Islamic culture and civilisation pre-dated Islamic religion. This in other words

⁷³ Dorothy Norman, *Jawaharlal Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, *op. cit.*, n. 70, pp. 303-4.

⁷⁴ "It is wrong to imagine that Arab civilisation suddenly rose out of oblivion and took shape after the advent of Islam. There has been a tendency on the part of Islamic scholars to decry the pre-Islamic past of the Arab people and to refer to it as *jahiliyat*, a kind of dark age of ignorance and superstition. Arab civilisation, like others had a long past intimately connected with the development of Semitic race. Pre-Islamic Arab civilisation grew up especially in Yemen. Arabic was a highly developed language at the time of the Prophet, with a mixture of Persian and even some Indian words. Like the

meant Islam as a religion was only a component in a broad civilisational framework. The other logical conclusion in this argument points to the insignificance of Islam. So, any attempt to appropriate culture and civilisation by Islam amounts to usurpation of a humanist ideal that is common to all irrespective of their colour, creed and religion. Here the Muslims are wrong in the sense that by describing Arab culture and civilisation as Islamic they restrict the “inclusivist” aspect of the former by the latter’s exclusivism which is narrow and parochial.

To go back to our earlier argument, if Islam in India had no other identity except religious, its claims to nationhood were equally dubious and unfounded. For Nehru argued:

The Muslim nation in India- a nation within a nation, but not even compact but vague, spread out; indeterminate. Politically the idea is absurd, economically it is fantastic; it is hardly worth considering. To talk of a “Muslim nation” therefore means that there is no nation at all but a religious bond; it means that no nation in the modern sense must be allowed to grow.⁷⁵

This raises two important issues. First, was it that Nehru failed to understand in the dynamics of religious nationalism? Second, was political determinism in principles of religion unheard of during his time? The answer to both these questions would be negative. Nehru was sufficiently aware of various versions of nationalism. But his primary aim seems to be not to give in to the tides of religious nationalism.

Phoenicians, the Arabs went far across the seas in search of trade. There was an Arab colony in China near Canton in pre-Islamic days.” Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 228.

⁷⁵ Dorothy Norman, *Jawaharlal Nehru: The First Sixty Years*, *op. cit.*, n. 70, p. 303.

Though there was a Muslim political presence in India for an uninterrupted seven hundred years Hindus never stopped thinking about the pre-Islamic era which they associated with the golden age. In other words, a deep nostalgia towards the pre-Islamic past prevented Hindus from coming to terms with new realities. If Hindus or Indians accepted any new realities the aim was not to promote a synthesis. If, at all, there was a synthesis it was possible because of the Hindu view of fatalism. This fatalism prevented Hindus from protesting, revolting and fighting against Islam *en masse*. It was a view which conditioned them to accept and live with some unpleasantness as a part of one large *karmic* cycle.⁷⁶

In Nehru, we see the completion of this *karmic* cycle. For though he refused to entertain any demands for Islamic nationhood its alternative was not wholly neutral in terms of religion. Nehru's original concept of the Indian nation bore strong similarities to India of pre-Islamic and *Vedic* times. The fundamental unity of India, he reiterated, was based on a unity of common faith and culture. India, i.e. Bharata the holy land of Hindus drew its sustenance from the recognition of certain symbols; such as the places of pilgrimage situated in four opposite corners of India, its rivers, mountains, folklores, rituals, traditions and legends.⁷⁷ The enduring strength and vitality of India that helped it withstand many a crises about which Nehru spoke, was essentially religious.

⁷⁶ The *karmic* cycle may be defined as a concept which emphasises on the *impermanence* of things; meaning no ideal is above truth. Islam in this context was not truth so it had a definite end.

⁷⁷ Sarvepalli Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, *op. cit.*, n. 10, p. 8.

Islamic nationalism or separatism, as we know, was mostly a Muslim upper-class movement. Nehru opposed and rejected their movement and demands on the ground that majority Indian Muslim opinion on a separate Islamic homeland was not entirely supportive of this idea. To add substance to his argument, he cited the case of poor, economically backward Muslims of United province and East Bengal whose way of life hardly differed from their Hindu neighbours or counterparts.⁷⁸

Though Nehru's views in this regard are theoretically correct one has to consider the status of these Muslims in their expression of nation and nationhood. These Muslims were mostly an alienated lot as far as Islam was concerned or were Muslims for the name's sake. Though theoretically Muslims, these people were mainly Hindu in their outlook and tradition (converts to Islam from the lower strata of Hindu society who accepted this religion for economic reasons), and their political aspiration too remained Hindu. Moreover, the Hindu memory of Muslim as the "enemy" did not include these toiling category. So, Nehru's projection of the views of this large majority, though theoretically correct, was nevertheless politically motivated. They were mainly used as pawns both by Nehru and the Muslim League. Whereas Nehru cited their example as pillars of India's unity and secularism (to defend his theory of secularism and synthesis) the Muslim League used them for the exact opposite purpose: to establish a nation on a non-secular basis.

⁷⁸ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 268.

The real “enemy” of the Indian nation then, to Nehru, was an elite Muslim minority. Unlike the majority of Hindus, Nehru’s anger against these separatists was not religious but political. He condemned them for political reasons and principles of power. He ridiculed the idea of Muslims regaining the seat of Delhi after the departure of the British. Such an arrangement, to him was incomprehensible and he described this idea as fantastic and non-sensical.⁷⁹ One may argue, if Nehru did not condemn Muslim rule why did he decry a new Islamic ascendance, an idea which some Muslims harboured?

Nehru’s reluctance to accept Hindus as Islam’s enemy, and vice versa, was due to his restricted encounter with Islam. As Geoffrey Tyson writes, “Nehrus⁸⁰ had many Muslim friends - mostly intellectuals - but it is to be doubted whether he ever understood the deep feeling of the Muslim masses as they watched the rise of Hindu influence while the British began progressively to demit office and responsibility.”⁸¹ In this new and alienating set-up if a section of Muslims upheld the past deeds of Islam to rejuvenate their kind, they were just and right in their efforts.

In fact one may criticise Nehru for restricting Muslims’ sense of history. If he visioned a composite culture for India (in terms of secularism) he did so for his own political purposes. Allegiance to secularism in this context is voluntary. If any religious community sought not to accept secularism they were right because their religion demanded it. If Nehru’s secularism meant peaceful cohabitation of many

⁷⁹ *National Herald*, 2 August 1956.

⁸⁰ Both Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru.

⁸¹ Geoffrey Tyson, *Nehru: The Years of Power*, London: Pall Mall Press, 1966, p. 78.

In fact one may criticise Nehru for restricting Muslims' sense of history. If he visioned a composite culture for India (in terms of secularism) he did so for his own political purposes. Allegiance to secularism in this context is voluntary. If any religious community sought not to accept secularism they were right because their religion demanded it. If Nehru's secularism meant peaceful cohabitation of many sects under one umbrella it was pro-Hindu in the sense that Hindus favoured such an arrangement whereas Islamists opposed it as it clashed with their scriptural ideal.

Bhikhu Parekh defines the major Indian religions such as; Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism as ethnic religions, meaning, these religions are integrally connected with specific communities.⁸² The related argument could be that since these are community-specific, logically they should have the right to preserve their communal identity. The immediate and extreme spectrum of this would vary from professing one's own religion to that of political autonomy as manifested in the creation of a separate political entity. Nehru's secularism, Parekh again points out, "meant exclusion of religion from political life."⁸³ Such a notion is alien to both Semitic and non-Semitic (Hindu) religions. However, Hindus did not oppose Nehru's secularism as they loosely associated it with religious inclusivism. For Muslims, however, it meant a restricted existence, a state in which they would be able to partially express their identity.

⁸² Bhikhu Parekh, 'Nehru and the National Philosophy of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 26, no. 1&2, January 5 - 12, 1991, p. 41.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

This argument can be stretched further by citing the case of the Turkish uprising in the 1920s. The uprising had a deep impact in India.⁸⁴ In the early days of this revolution its nature, content and future programme of action were unknown to Indian nationalist leaders. The Indian nationalists supported it for two reasons. First, while leaders like Gandhi supported it for its supposed anti-colonial and anti-European nature the Muslims on the other hand saw it as an Islamic uprising against *kafirs* or non-Muslims. It was the latter view which Nehru criticised vehemently.⁸⁵ From a secularist point of view, Nehru was correct in criticising the Muslims for giving religious colour to a non-religious struggle. Conversely it can be argued that by criticising the Muslims for drawing sustenance from similar uprisings where Islamists were the pall bearers, he denied them their very identity. Nehru's secularism in other words seem to be the fulfilment of this goal:

The problem for the individual and the nation is not to make themselves into what they want to be (an impossible task!) but to preserve in themselves what the centuries have predestined for them...⁸⁶

In the period during which Islam reigned supreme there was little equality guaranteed to Hindus. So, pre-destiny here means the continuance of the old system. But it was the continuance of the old system in a reverse order. The Muslims of India obviously were predestined to be a subject community as democracy and secularism meant rule by majority. The Hindus of course had no objection to such an

⁸⁴ The indigenised Indian version of it was known as *Khilafat Andolan* or the liberation movement to reinstate *Khalifa*.

⁸⁵ "Indian Muslims sought to desire some psychological satisfaction from Islam's past greatness, chiefly in other countries and the fact of the continuance of Turkey as an independent Muslim power." Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 344.

arrangement as it allowed them to repay old animosities. Nehru's secularism in this context then, largely implied benevolent authoritarianism.⁸⁷

4.5. Hindu-Muslim syncretism, secularism and cultural domination

In locating authoritative grounds for communal harmony, religious interplay and cultural plurality Nehru looked back into Indian tradition. Though there was a certain degree of synthesis in India's heritage it was not total and religion neutral. The past represented an overbearing Hindu or Islamic image depending on the period of history. The majority of Indians (in this case Hindus) were uncomfortable with that particular part of history during which Islam reigned supreme.

If Hindus and Muslims really had a peaceful and ideal past Nehru's account of synthesis appears superfluous. The Islamic period was marked by the absence of a real synthesis. Hence, Nehru painstakingly painted a picture of Hindu-Muslim synthesis. Also, though he tried to remain neutral and unbiased in his description of Indian history, there are occasions when one notices his angst (veiled anger?) against a particular Islamic event or episode. The very fact that Nehru was providing a basis for Hindu-Muslim unity forces us to believe he was uncomfortable with their past.

⁸⁶ Maurice Barres in J.S. Mc Lelland (edited & introduced), *The French Right from de Maistre to Maurras*, *op. cit.*, n. 69, p. 159.

⁸⁷ The Muslims regarded "Nehru with trust, affection and a species of awe. He was their friend all their lives and they could not think what it would be like to get along without him. They knew it perfectly well that he does not share their belief but they were aware that they would go to any length to protect their right and belief." Vincent Sheean, *Nehru: The Years of Power*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1960, p. 199.

Besides, Nehru's secularism was not non-religious but quasi-religious. Though critics have often argued that his secularism was a product of western-education and liberal upbringing there is another facet to it: his Brahminic-Hindu lineage. Nehru's secularism in content was a reflection of Hindu inclusivism. It is not Nehru that one should praise for India's secularism but Hindus in general. The diffused nature of Hindu heritage provided the basis for Nehru's secularism. He gave credence to Hindu inclusiveness only through his secularism. The pre-dominance of Hindu ideas and ideals on Nehru can also be traced in his political expositions. Pluralism (both cultural and religious), for example, are not Islamic concepts but essentially Hindu in nature. Nehru merely borrowed the concept from Hindu tradition for contemporary political usage. Interestingly, this was accepted by the general populace (Hindus) not because of Nehru's overbearing popularity but owing to their millennial attitude.

Also, as Lannoy puts it, "Nehru, whose policies had shallower roots in popular sentiment (by comparison with Gandhi), could never have been a national figurehead of secularism without the neutralisation of the Muslim by partition, while the remaining Muslim minority on Indian territory was relegated, in effect, to the status of an external caste."⁸⁸

Given the factors working behind Nehru's secularism the said ideal can be described as 'quasi-secularism'. It was secular because it respected other religions and faiths. At the same time it was 'quasi-secular' as it drew sustenance from a people whose religious beliefs were second nature to them. I do not intend to argue

whether the Hindu view in this regard was pre-modern or post-modern. Yet, I wish to point out that Nehru's secularism was not entirely western, rational and modern as many have argued. Nehru succeeded in promoting secularism in independent India because of Hindu generosity. If history is anything to go by, the Hindus with their seven hundred years of fractured past and bloody images of partition would not have had cared much for secularism. Nehru succeeded, however, in implanting quasi-secularism because of preponderance of Hindu (religious) support in this regard.⁸⁹

Nehru's secularism again falls into the "Hindu trap" when we analyse his views on Islamic culture and religion. Like most Hindus Nehru accepted Muslim religiosity, their customs, language, music, arts and architecture but not their cultural identity as a whole. The Hindu view of seeing Muslims purely in terms of religion in India also affected Nehru. For he respected Muslims' religious faith but in turn expected that they respect the culture of India. As argued before, in Nehru's view the culture of India was not Islamic but Indian. What he meant by Indian here is a plural culture with a dominant Hindu identity. Nehru described the ancient lores of the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* as the culture of the masses.⁹⁰ By culture of the masses he meant the culture of India. Since the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are primarily associated with Hindu faith an insistence on non-Hindus or Muslims following India's cultural pattern would amount to non-secularism. So, according to our earlier argument, Islam, in Nehru's hands then, was allowed limited exposition and limited

⁸⁸ Lannoy, *The Speaking Tree*, *op. cit.*, n. 52, p. 231.

⁸⁹ Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan too insisted on secularism after the division of India. In contrast, however, Pakistan declared itself Islamic. In terms of popularity Jinnah was more revered in Pakistan than Nehru in India. Yet, his views were not accepted or promoted because Islam, the majority religion, did not entertain any such ideal. For details, see Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1987, p. 179.

⁹⁰ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 67.

rights. His views on Islam were partial because he saw it only as religion-specific. By asking Indian Muslims not to see their religion in terms of culture he denied them part of their identity.

Furthermore, Nehru's India was a "Hindu state" so far as culture and civilisation was concerned. Indian civilisation or *Hindutva*, though it was common to all (according to Nehru), was basically the creation of Hindus. As shapers or creators of this civilisation, Nehru like Hindus, held the view that one has the right to decide what is good for all. This attitude did not actually reflect impartiality but parochialism. Cultural ethnocentrism is another derivative of the concept of *Hindutva*. Nehru's promotion of culture may be for all Indians but a large body of Hindus appropriated it as the preserve of Hinduism.

Nehru's 'quasi-secularism' runs into difficulty once more when he argues that "it is the prime responsibility of the Hindus to make the large number of Muslims in India feel at home and not be made to feel as second-class citizens existing on sufferance."⁹¹ A more practical definition of Nehru's secularism would have been to ask the Hindus to protect Muslims as a legal duty rather than moral responsibility. The responsibility of Hindus to protect Muslims, apart from its moral grounding, also depended on Hindu catholicity. If Nehru defended Islam he did so not only with a western, rational and secularist view but also with Hindu catholicity.

⁹¹ G. Parthasarathy and S. Gopal, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and India's quest for secular identity', Occasional Papers on History and Society, no. 42, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, p. 18.

Nehru shared the view of the majority Hindus that India is the motherland.⁹² Since in the majoritarian framework this conception is overtly religious in nature and Islam does not carry any such conception within it Muslims naturally had difficulty committing themselves fully to India. During Nehru's own time in the popular Hindu mind a sort of hero worship gained prominence. These heroes were invariably Congress leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Subhas Bose, and were also Hindus. Polychrome oleographs of all these personalities superimposed on the map of India depicting Mother India were a clear manifestation of a non-secular and Hindu ideal. Nehru's insistence on all Indians to regard India as motherland though had a nationalistic purpose conveyed a not-wholly secular message and was misunderstood.

It is true Nehru distanced himself from all organised religions but was nevertheless faintly religious in some of his attitudes. The religiosity of Nehru found expression only in a Durkhenian perspective i.e. when religion is transformed to symbolism.⁹³ For instance, the love and reverence which Nehru had for the Ganges⁹⁴, the sacred river of Hindus, and for the Himalayas⁹⁵ can only be explained in the Durkhenian idiom. Though Nehru warned his critics not to misinterpret his respect for certain symbols in religious terms, there is no other mode through which it can be explained.

⁹² Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 49.

⁹³ For a stimulating discussion, see Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary forms of Religious Life*, Joseph Ward Swain (trans.), New York: Free Press, 1965.

⁹⁴ The best known expression in religious symbolism concerns the river Ganges. In Nehru's words, "The Ganga is intimately linked up with tradition, mythology, art, culture and history. In order to understand Indian mythology and art the mythological origins of Ganga might be referred to, that is, Ganga falling on the matted head of Siva, the matted head apparently representing Himalayan mountains." *A letter to Edwina Thompson*, 7 April 1940.

⁹⁵ Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, *op. cit.*, n. 4, p. 51.

Once again, the adoption of these symbols for India's mainstream culture complicates the matter further. Even if we deduct religiosity from Nehru's symbolism there is no way we can restrict the overbearing Hindu bias in it. For example, among all the symbols that Nehru revered not a single one was Islamic.⁹⁶ One may argue that the absence of Islamic symbolism in Nehru was not by choice but was forced on him. It was forced because there was no Islamic representation which was accepted by the masses. If that is true, the emphasis of Nehru on Hindu-Muslim synthesis also appears invalid.

Nehru's stress on symbolism, to put it mildly, alienated Muslims. Symbols have both negative and positive potential. A symbol that appeals to all the communities, races and people in a state can have great positive significance. However, this is possible only when there is commonality or some common identifying factor or image in this symbolism. Since the symbols of Nehru were primarily religious in nature they automatically closed doors for Islam which abhorred such symbolism. If Hindus took pride in the Himalayas, the Ganges or the caves of Ajanta and Ellora the Muslims turned to the forts and mosques built by Islamic emperors, and to the glory of Islam in areas outside India. In Nehru, however, we notice a determined effort to restrict and curb any such symbolism associated with Islam's glory.

⁹⁶ The examples of these symbols are Amarnath, Mt Kailas, Ganges, Kumbha Mela, Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta caves, Himalaya, Sarnath, Namaskar, Bharata Mata, and so on. To this Nehru also added Asoka, Buddha, Akbar. Though these three personalities were non-Hindu their ideas were very much Hindu in the sense that they respected pluralism of the Hindu variety.

Since some Islamic symbolism were non-Indian in nature, theoretically they posed challenges to the fundamental unity of the nation and could be interpreted as centrifugal forces. Symbolism of the Hindus on the other hand reinforced the unity of the state. Here again we encounter Nehru's pragmatism in the whole issue. He promoted symbolism of Hindus as it guaranteed the unity of the country and was apprehensive of Muslim symbolism as it negated oneness. Though it had an inherent political objective, in the process Muslims learned to distrust Hindus and the Indian nation. "Nehru's statement of wanting to merge with India's earth perhaps meant secularity-if it was, it did not sound so-but its interpretation in India was not."⁹⁷

4.6. Conclusion

Like Vivekananda and Gandhi, Nehru's response to Muslim rule and Islam was ambiguous. He could not fully come to terms either with the Muslim rule or Islam and its inherent political ideals. An assessment of Nehru's analysis of these two reveals that although he was committed to the promotion of a composite future for Hindus and Muslims he was not entirely comfortable with the 'Muslim Question'. His arguments in favour of cultural nation also suffered as it leaned more towards Hindus than Muslims.

Nehru was conscious of the fact that both Hinduism and Islam as religions are incompatible. He was also aware that the history of Muslim rule was not a happy episode. Further, he recognised that India's Islamic past was a painful experience for

⁹⁷ Agehananda Bharati, 'Prospects of Secularism in India', *op. cit.*, n. 66, pp. 86-9.

many. In Nehru's view, even assuming that the past was painful and there exists an unbridgeable gap in the religious realm between Hindus and Muslims they still need to mend their differences. Truth about India's Muslim past was so bitter that Nehru feared it would generate a cycle of violence. Thus he either dismissed all the controversial aspects of it or consciously created a positive myth in his interpretation. Like Ernest Renan, he also favoured partial ignorance of history, if that helped in the creation of a stable and viable nation.

Both prior to the emergence of the idea of partition and after the idea attained a political reality, Nehru was certain that Hindus and Muslims would share a common nation. A successful nation required the emancipation of the citizenry from narrow sectarianism and parochialism. In addition, a notion of common sense of belonging was also essential to forge a sense of nationhood. Therefore, like Vivekananda although Nehru was not entirely comfortable with Muslim rule and Islam, he nonetheless searched for common grounds between Hindus and Muslims. If religion was that common ground for Vivekananda to develop a sense of Indianess, for Nehru it was culture. Thus he tried to take the heat out of Hindu animosity towards Muslims by highlighting Hindu-Muslim cultural consolidation in the past. And again, he neutralised the Islamic culture by describing it as non-religious. The alternative culture, he proposed, though had elements of both Hindu and Muslim practices, nonetheless had an overwhelming Hindu flavour. Thus it could not secure the required degree of Muslim commitment towards it.

An analysis of Nehru's writings, statements and speeches highlight his attempts to sanitise Indian history. Though history is factual it is always subject to

interpretation. One interprets and justifies history only when there is a motive attached to it. By all means, Nehru's account of Indian history could be called dispassionate. However, one should remember that Nehru was both an historian and politician. Hence his description of history contained an historian's pure and dispassionate account of facts and events as well as the passionate analysis of a politician. Nehru appears authentic in his approach because he skilfully combined both the aspects. Yet, Nehru as an historian had a purpose. In his narration of Indian history we come across both passion and self-interest. His passion to see India remain unified leads him to embrace an equally passionate account of the past in terms of Hindu-Muslim synthesis. His self-interest becomes evident when he rejects Muslim demands for an Islamic identity.

The extremist-nationalist argument that Muslims shall never fit in India was dismissed by Nehru. He was of the opinion that Muslims have as much claim in the future Indian nation as any other community. To him, Muslims and all other religious communities were Indians first and members of their respective religions afterwards. Therefore, he saw no contradiction in Muslims presence in India. Muslims of India, in Nehru's interpretation, constituted an inalienable part of the Indian nation and are not a part of the global Islamic community or *umma*. Thus, he strongly disapproved of any Indian Muslim expressing extra-territorial allegiance on the basis of his or her religion.

The insularity of Indian Muslims in Nehru's hands created a division within the Islamic community. Whereas Islam demanded the allegiance of all the Muslims world-over to a single religio-political community Nehru's attitude to religion

restricted it. Though there is not much basis to Jinnah's pre-independent claims that under Nehru / Congress rule the Muslims would encounter a Hindu Raj, certainly a section of Muslims were not happy with the way Nehru was constructing the image of Muslims. As a concluding remark, I would say Nehru's attitude towards Islam was everything but comfortable. But he did not want to give in to pessimism. All through his life and work he struggled to find a common idiom that could unite Hindus and Muslims. He tried to develop this idiom as much for others as for himself. He was aware his was an impossible task. Nevertheless he maintained a sustained and relentless effort in that prickly terrain.

Such moral, intellectual and political exercise was common to almost all the nationalist thinkers including Veer Savarkar. Though he belonged to an extreme Hindu right-wing front which maintained an explicit anti-Muslim agenda, Savarkar like his predecessors, counterparts and contemporaries like Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru respectively, tried to understand the 'Muslim Question' in a similar way. However, his cultural upbringing, immediate environment and political impatience led him to deny any Hindu-Muslim reconciliation in the Indian context which ironically he had espoused in a limited way earlier in life. Though they dealt on the same topic i.e. place of Muslims in India, so far as their discourse is concerned both Nehru and Savarkar emerge as polar opposite characters. In the next chapter I shall seek to answer why Savarkar's opposition to Muslim rule and Islam was total.

Chapter V

Savarkar and the basis of Hindu nationalism

The nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future. Equally true it is that a nation must develop its capacity not only for claiming a past but also for knowing how to use it for the furtherance of its future.¹

- *Vinayak Damodar Savarkar*

5.1. Introduction

Our analysis of Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru's discourse reveal the inner tension within these writers' assessment of Islam and Muslim rule. True, in our framework though we posed the same question we did not find identical response. The autonomous reaction to specific events, situations and ideas by these writers, therefore, can be explained in terms of their own exposure to the colonial intellectual ideas, religio-cultural moorings, targeted audience and the political vision. However, in spite of this there was a fundamental unanimity among these writers i.e. the 'Muslim Question' required assessment if not for anything else, for the future of India. As we noticed, none of these figures were wholly comfortable with Muslim rule and Islam. Neither were they in favour of exclusion of Muslims from the nation's cultural, religious and political process. Thus their own reading of history and vision led them to chart out different plans to deal with 'Muslim Question' that ranged from equality to assimilation.

¹ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Samagra Savarkar Vangmaya*, Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindu Sabha, 1987, vol. V, p. 1.

However, when we review the ideas of Savarkar against the thinkers mentioned above a contrasting picture emerges. As we shall analyse later, though in many respects Savarkar appears close to these nationalist leaders his reaction to the 'Muslim Question' put him in an entirely different category. The fundamental difference is that while Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru expressed their uneasiness with Muslim rule and Islam in an ambiguous manner Savarkar refrained from following suit. Savarkar's disparaging attitude to both the aspects was overt and total. Moreover, unlike other writers discussed earlier, Savarkar did not think that Islam has anything positive to contribute in the nation-building process. Yet, he did not discount it from the future Indian nation. Indeed, he was highly apprehensive of its impending role. However, the methods he suggested to deal with Islam were radical.

True, like other nationalists, Savarkar also emphasised on common values to create unity among Indians. But this common value was Hindu in orientation and Savarkar prescribed its forcible imposition on Muslims. Thus while in their response to Muslims Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru can be termed as assimilationist Savarkar owing to his uncompromising stand in the matter is categorised as exclusivist. However, to be fair to Savarkar, he was not consistent in his non-pluralistic approach to 'Muslim Question' in India. As we shall see in course of the following discussion, like his counterparts Savarkar too engaged himself in devising a Hindu-Muslim unitary language to curb British colonialism and to synthesise the political aspirations of the two communities. Unfortunately, the unfolding of separate

political demands by a section of Muslims forced Savarkar to turn against the whole community and their religion. Therefore, one can argue that although Savarkar was uncomfortable with Muslims, his discourse took an overtly anti-Muslim turn as the prospect of partition became ever more prominent. His virulent discourse against Muslims continued even in the post-independent India. He unhesitatingly attacked Indian Muslims as foreigners or crypto-Pakistanis and demanded that they reconvert themselves to show their allegiance to the Fatherland.

Early twentieth century nationalist thought in India was either territorial or cultural. While the secularists - in the Indian National Congress - promoted and fought for independence under the banner of territorial nationalism, the Muslim League tried to forge cultural nationalism based on Islamic identity. In addition to these two ideologies there existed a third strand of thought. This was the ideology of the Hindu right. By nature, it was rhetorical, insular, abrasive, protective, and highly organized. However, these were not the only reasons which made it unique. Its uniqueness rested on its concept of nationalism.

If the nationalism of the Congress was territorial and that of Muslim League was cultural the nationalism of the Hindu right was a combination of the two. Because of its ambitions of territorial integrity the Hindu right was secular like Congress. Since it promoted Hindu cultural homogeneity and aimed for its ultimate hegemony over all others, in content and character it was no different from fundamentalist outfits such as Muslim League. The chief exponent of this territorial-cultural nationalism was Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966).

One of the most important issues which confronted the nationalist thinkers and ultimately forced them to have a synthesised view of history was that of the question of identity. None of Savarkar's predecessors or contemporaries was successful in providing a correct definition of the people living in the geographical confines of the Indian sub-continent. Since the late nineteenth and the first half of twentieth century the British were the outsiders in India. Hence in the popular vision there existed two sets of identities viz. the British and the non-British. The concept of "otherness" was invariably attributed to the British colonialists in this period.

This study analyses Savarkar's assessment of the history of Muslim rule, the demarcation of identity among Indians, exclusion of Muslims and arguments on Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation), based on historical reality and religio-cultural tradition. Besides, I shall also assess the basis of Savarkar's anti-Islamic stand and assess its strengths and weaknesses. In the conclusion, I will highlight the fact that the majority of Hindus during the nationalist struggle understood Savarkar's anti-Islamic logic. But the tide of events and the political climate dominated by Gandhi (Indian National Congress), was such that the masses had little or no time for Savarkar's ideas. Crude and xenophobic as they may have appeared then, the same ideas and ideals are vociferously followed by a new generation of Hindus. Therein lies the importance of Savarkar.

Savarkar was the first systematic thinker, activist and ideologue to highlight the existence of multiple "otherness" in Indian polity. He "discovered nationalism

in his study of 'threatening others' and especially in his study of nationalist movements in Europe".² His nationalism, while primarily based on the western experiment (promoted by Mazzini and Garibaldi), aimed at providing an indigenous alternative model based on a new construction of history.³ To Savarkar the British were not the only "other". If they had an illegitimate claim over India's territory there were other groups who also usurped the country's political, cultural and religious space, engaging in a relentless pursuit to maintain their illegitimate hegemony. Therefore, though like the mainstream nationalism of the Indian National Congress, Savarkar's version of nationalism aimed at the decolonisation of India, nonetheless it went a step further, aiming for a religio-cultural amalgamation based on Hindu identity and ideals. Savarkar's version of nationalism aimed at achieving both territorial and cultural integrity. A cultural-territorial nationalism required the allegiance of a mass actively aware of their identity. Savarkar was the sculptor who chiseled out the images of every community living in India. However, he was not impartial in his masonry of identity building. Like the Hindu caste system, in his masonry Savarkar built up a niche for every community living in India in a perfect hierarchical order, the basis of which was culture, religion and tradition.

² Christophe Jaffrelote, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics 1925 to the 1990s*, London: Hurst & Co.1996, pp. 25-7.

³ "Savarkar's genealogical equation between the Hindu and the Indian, members of the Indian political community, were united by geographical origin, racial connection (rather ambiguously specified), and a shared culture based on Sanskritic languages and 'common laws and rites'. Those who shared these traits formed the core, 'majority' community. Those who did not - Muslims, who constituted a quarter of pre-Partition India's population, were relegated to awkward, secondary positions." Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1997, p. 161.

5.2. Savarkar and the interpretation of Indian history

Though trained as a lawyer, Savarkar was an able historian. However he was an historian with a difference. His pursuit of Indian history was passionate, unidirectional, result-oriented and often prejudiced. Unlike other nationalist ideologues, his history was aimed at a particular community or audience. Savarkar appealed to the Hindu community through history and historical reality and the prevalent exigency. He painstakingly constructed a history of India where Hindus, left alone, were a valorous race and suffered immeasurable indignity and persecution when others took charge of their affairs.⁴ Of all the outsiders who controlled India, for brief and long periods, it was the Muslims whom Savarkar criticized the most. Savarkar saw only the decline of the Indian nation and the loss of identity of its majority community, the Hindus, during the seven hundred years of uninterrupted Islamic rule. Hence his interpretation of history was more like an incitement to Hindus to rise up against Muslims in order to re-establish their supremacy.

Savarkar's views on history was shaped by his own background and the milieu in which he grew up and launched his political campaigns. He was born to a Chitpavan Brahmin⁵ family of Maharashtra who traced their ancestry to several Maratha leaders who valiantly fought against the Muslim sovereignty - from

⁴ Ian Buruma, however, provides another dimension to Savarkar's construction of Hindu history. According to him, Savarkar's identity building was based on fear - "fear that the 'weak', diverse, disunited Hindus, who lacked an ideology, a dogma, a Mecca or a universal church would be swamped by 'strong' Muslim and Christians." Ian Buruma, 'India: The Perils of Democracy', *The New York Review of Books*, vol. XLIV, 1997, no. 19, p. 17.

⁵ For an excellent introduction to the Chitpavan community, see P.N. Chopra (ed.), *Religion and Communities of India*, London: East-West Publications Ltd., 1982, pp. 49-52.

Aurangzeb onwards. Though there was a sizable presence of Muslims in Maharashtra, the province glorified itself for being the only region which was instrumental in bringing an end to Islamic supremacy in India. The Hindus and Muslims there lived with little or no interaction.

The history of Maharashtra was a cycle of glory and decline. Though the province was effectively under the control of Islamic rulers from Delhi and its non-Muslim populace subjugated, it also credited itself with Hindu war heroes, such as Vikramaditya and Chhtrapati Shivaji, who established Hindu sovereignty over the land in spite of considerable non-Hindu opposition. Savarkar was very much a product of this tumultuous experience. Like every Maratha Hindu he learned to hate the Muslims from birth.⁶ And apart from blaming Muslims for all the ills that existed in India he championed the idea of complete marginalisation of Muslims.

Unlike Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in communal harmony between Hindus and Muslims and tried the dissemination of this ideal, Savarkar equated and extended the history of Maharashtra to the whole sub-continent and only highlighted the communal disharmony. This disharmony consisted of Muslim atrocity on Hindus and the latter's continuous struggle to fight off the former's hegemony. Moreover he expected all Hindus to embrace this theory of Islamic purge.

⁶ In response to the Hindu-Muslim riots in the Azamgarh District of the United Province in June 1893, the boy Savarkar "led a batch of selected school-mates in a march upon the village mosque. The battalion of these boys showered stones upon it, shattered its windows and tiles and returned victorious." Dhananjay Keer, *Veer Savarkar*, Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966, p. 4.

A history which is based on insufficient historical records and is associated with legends often lacks the capacity to take deep roots and have an impact on the prevailing society. A large body of Savarkar's work was based on both indigenous oral tradition and British historiography. He weaved them together and promoted a version which corroborated with each other and amply suggested that Muslim rule was indeed vile and unpleasant. Since the memory of living under Islamic rule was often unpleasant, Hindus readily believed in the pre-Islamic glorious past which Savarkar espoused. Moreover, Savarkar found a ready audience for his version of Indian history as his sources were also academic and verifiable. For instance, it was difficult for Gandhi and Nehru to provide a solid basis to their version of Indian history which was largely based on imagination, narration and unqualified realities. If they talked about Hindu-Muslim unity it existed only in imagination. On the contrary, when Savarkar talked about Islamic carnage or the wrong doings of Muslim rulers there was evidence of it left in countless temples and buildings, forts and on the entire landscape of the sub-continent.⁷

Unlike Nehru's *Discovery of India* or *Glimpses of World History*, Savarkar's works contained details about his sources. He based his interpretation both on indigenous and British accounts of events. Bhikhu Parekh, a contemporary critic of Indian political thought, is of the opinion that the outlook of Savarkar, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru and most other nationalist activists and writers was largely coloured by the British interpretation of Indian history. Since the British harboured a sneaking antipathy towards the Muslims they promoted a loosely constructed

⁷ For a detailed account of human imagination of history, see Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

negative image of Islam in India. And Hindus, who had felt marginalised under Islamic rule, had no difficulty in accepting this interpretation. Had Savarkar entirely depended on British sources this may have been true. But he borrowed equally from indigenous writings which included such varied sources as Islamic court proceedings and privately kept Maratha war history records.⁸

As is the case with many hard line nationalists, Savarkar's writing tends to be as predictable as it is monochromatic i.e. it always finds fault in the other, that is, Islam, or Muslims in our case. Interestingly, by quoting both Islamic, Hindu and British sources Savarkar managed to portray a kind of picture of Islam that seemed irrefutable. For example, an account by a Muslim courtier of a certain Islamic war victory was interpreted and recorded by Hindus as Islamic carnage. The British historians provided a non-objective account. Savarkar, by piecing all the three sources together, succeeded in making his interpretation of history neutral as well as objective.

Why Savarkar targeted Muslims as the evil outsiders or evil others can be explained in geopolitical terms. For a millennia India was host to most of the world's major religions. Except toward Islam, the reaction to these 'migrant' religions or religious communities by Hindu nationalists bordered largely on indifference.⁹ Muslims were regarded uniquely because, unlike others, they claimed and usurped a

⁸ The most fitting example of this is two of Savarkar's historical accounts viz., *Hindu Pad Padshahi* which details the Maratha war missions, strategy and political consolidation. This work is largely based on indigenous Maratha writing which was local in nature and limited by a particular clientele. His other important work, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, is based on Islamic, indigenous Hindu and British writings.

⁹ T. K. Oommen, *Citizenship and National Identity*, New Delhi: Sage, 1997 p. 154.

territory which was always owned by Hindus in recorded history and living memory. As a Hindu nationalist Savarkar made it his mission to generate sufficient nation-wide discontent among Hindus in order to persuade them to dissociate themselves from their Islamic past and embrace a Hindu identity espoused as superior to that of Muslims. The long term objective of this type of identity building was the establishment of Hindu supremacy.

5.3. Savarkar and the definition of Hindu identity

When a religion is invoked as the basis of national identity those who do not belong to that religion are subjected to a process of ethnification. This means even those who are nationals i.e. those who identify with one or another national territory as their homeland and speak the language of that nation will be defined as outsiders.¹⁰

The main determinant of identity, in Savarkar's conception was religion.¹¹ He took religion to be the yardstick for the legitimisation of the communities living in India. Unlike other nationalist thinkers Savarkar did not believe in a multicultural or composite Indian identity. For him, religious identity was pre-determined. This was something like the Hindu caste system. It meant, for instance, that a Hindu born in India remained an Indian wherever he was in the world, whereas a Muslim would always remain an outsider in India, enjoying all the rights of a citizen, but having no stake in the nation's cultural matrix.

¹⁰ Oomen, *op. cit.*, n. 9, p. 41.

¹¹ Critics such as Jaffrelote and Keer, however, hold an entirely different view. According to Jaffrelote Savarkar's Hindutva rests on three pillars: geographical unity, racial features, and a common culture. Religion, though as a determinant plays a minor role. Jaffrelote, *op. cit.*, n. 2, pp. 26-7. Similarly Savarkar's biographer Dhananjay Keer describes him not as a believer but an ideologue. Keer, *op. cit.*, n. 6, p. 201 .

Savarkar defined a Hindu as “a person who regards this Land of Bharat Varsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land, that is, the cradle land of his religion.”¹²

The implications of this definition can be understood if we consider the presence of its three main elements, which are invoked for the construction and promotion of nationalism everywhere. These are: ethnicity, religion and territoriality. However, in Savarkar’s definition, the emphasis on religion and territoriality, firmly constructed around the concept of Holyland and Fatherland, is more profound and has wider implications.

The lack of a Fatherland meant illegitimacy and hence no societal recognition and reward. Savarkar’s territoriality argument was also sacred. By invoking the sacred *Vedas* to define the geographical congruity of India and the righteousness of the people residing in it, Savarkar provided both a racial and religious basis to justify the claims to land made by the first settlers of this territory. The demarcated zones of “Atak to Cuttack”, and from the “Himalayas to the Cape Camorin” have the most natural boundaries in the world (except for islands). Seen in the arguments of theorists of human territoriality,¹³ Savarkar’s intention would have been to form an united racial solidarity preserved within a well demarcated geographical congruity. Though this does not directly find manifestation in the concept of Fatherland it was

¹² V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu*, Poona: S.R. Date, 1942, p. i.

¹³ Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality: Its Theory and History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, pp. 21-6.

very much evident in Savarkar's definition of Hindutva.¹⁴ Hindutva could be defined as a way of life revolving around an overarching traditional Hindu cultural and religious practices with a strong sense of belongingness to the territorial confines of India and common aspirations. As a form of geographical classification, Hindutva divides all those living in the demarcated territory into two categories: those possessing Hindutva and those lacking it, in the second case, the Muslims - a classification akin to the Islamic conception of believers and non-believers. Also, in the case of Hindutva (in which the Fatherland is a pre-requisite), it also acts as a means of consolidating, legitimising and controlling the power within a given space.

By contrast, Motherland provides an all embracing inclusivist base for individual identity. In political terms, one can call a nation or state his motherland just by the fact of being born and brought up there, or through the process of naturalisation. The concept of Fatherland, allowed no such concession. Therefore, a German always remained a German, a Japanese always a Japanese and an Italian forever an Italian.

The concept of belonging to a Holyland, too, restricted others from associating with a land which was not "theirs" or claiming an identity from it. Holyland served as a corollary to the Fatherland. In Savarkar's conception both were territory-specific and should be held with reverence. Like a wheel within a wheel, the Holyland was the religious space within the territorial space. For those within this

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion on this see, Satish Deshpande, 'Communalising the Nation-Space: Notes on Spatial Strategies of Hindutva', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 30, no. 50, 16 December 1995, pp. 3221-2.

space there existed a formidable geographical boundary sealed and reinforced by a religious boundary. Hence those “outsiders” who came from the outer limits of its geography (beyond the Fatherland), could never experience or comprehend the feeling of being part of a Holyland belonging only to its “insiders”.¹⁵ Within these restrictions, Hindus, for example, could never be truly accepted in Mecca and Medina, nor could Muslims truly be at home in India, as it is not their Holyland. This definition, while substantiating Hindu identity, sought to alienate and exclude not only Muslims, but all non-Hindus. All followers of religions of non-Indian origin were forced to find other identities. Savarkar’s Hindu was a person who could identify himself / herself with both Fatherland and Holyland.

Japanese and Chinese, for example, do not and cannot regard themselves as fully identified with Hindus. Even though they regard India as their Holyland, the land which was the cradle of their religion. But they do not and cannot look upon India as their Fatherland too. They are our co-religionists but are not and cannot look upon India as their Fatherland too.¹⁶

To this, Oommen poses the question of the fate of the 12 million migratory Hindus settled overseas.¹⁷ He asks, “Would it be correct to say those Hindus who have settled outside the Indian sub-continent cease to be Hindus because they do not live in their ancestral homeland?”¹⁸ Savarkar takes a rather liberal stand on this. The members of Hindu diaspora have as much right to call India their Fatherland as the Indians. For they may have been citizens and subjects of a non-Indian overseas territory, but if their ancestors came from India as Hindus they cannot help

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3222.

¹⁶ V. D Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, Bombay: Lakshman Ganesh Khare, 1949., p. 5.

¹⁷ For details on Hindu overseas population, see P. C. Jain, ‘Indians Abroad: A Current Population Estimate,’ Bombay: *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 17, no. 4, 1989, pp. 299-304.

¹⁸ Oommen, *op. cit.*, n. 9, p. 155.

recognizing India as their *pitrubhu*, Fatherland, as well as *punyabhu*, or Holyland.¹⁹ Savarkar's ideas here are as divisive as the principles of Islam. If Islam demanded 'extra-territorial loyalties' from its adherents, so did Savarkar's Hindutva. This stand of Savarkar puts him in a rather ridiculous position. His suspicion of Indian Muslims loyalty to the Indian nation does not hold much ground when he expects the Hindu diaspora to look up to India. Arguably this makes the loyalty of the diasporic Hindu community suspect to their state of domicile.

Other religionists whose religion originated outside India but nonetheless were permanently settled in India and considered it their Fatherland, were not considered as Indians by Savarkar as India was not their *Punyabhu*, or Holyland. "For though Hindustan to (converts) is *Pitrubhu*, or Fatherland, as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a *Punyabhu*, or Holyland, too. Their Holyland is far off Arabia or Palestine. Their mythology and Godmen, ideas and heroes, are not the children of this soil. Consequently their names and their outlook smack of foreign origin. Their love is divided."²⁰ In Savarkar's conceptualization, the inextricable linkage between one's community of faith and one's country of residence is taken to be the essence or *prima facie* characteristic of a Hindu nation. This automatically paved the way for non-Hindu religions of Indian origin an equal share with Hindus.

Sikhs are Hindus in the sense of our definition of Hindutva and not in any religious sense whatever. Religiously they are Sikhs as Jains are Jains. Lingayats are Lingayats, Vaishnavas are Vaishnava; but all of us racially and nationally and culturally are a polity and a

¹⁹ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 97.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

people...We are Sikhs and Hindus and *Bharatiyas* (Indians). We are all three put together and none exclusively.²¹

He goes on:

Our Sikh brotherhood is certainly not a less important community than the Muslims' - in fact to us Hindus they are more important than any non-Hindu community in India.²²

Also:

The Sikhs along with us bewail the fall of Prithiviraj, share the fate of a conquered people, and suffer together as Hindus.²³

To T.K. Oommen there exists a clear and studied ambivalence and cultivated ambiguity in these definitions, in what is essentially a political project 'designed to avoid driving possible wedges and creating potential conflicts between religions of Indian origin.'²⁴

Still, in spite of its political underpinnings, the definition succeeds in the inclusion and exclusion of certain religions and those professing them. Savarkar's *Pitrubhu-Punyabhu*, or Fatherland-Holyland co-terminality serves as a double-edged weapon. It is inclusive as it includes all people professing religions of Indian origin, and exclusive because it excludes all followers of religions that did not prop up in the Indian socio-cultural and geographical milieu *viz.* the Abrahamic religions. Thus it served as a denominator in determining the alien *versus* native identity.

In this definitional demarcation, Christians, Jews and Muslims remained as aliens. Furthermore, this conception of Savarkar's sought to restrict Muslims from

²¹ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, pp. 102-3.

²² *Ibid.*, p.103.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²⁴ Oommen, *op. cit.*, n. 9, p. 152.

having a share and say in every aspect of Indian life more than their counterparts, Christians or Jews. Subsequent to the original definition of Holyland and Fatherland, Savarkar added many other explanatory clauses. These were made mostly to accommodate many non-Indian religious communities in the Indian culture and polity. But he made absolutely no concessions towards Muslims while revising and expanding the definition.

So far as other minorities in India are concerned, there cannot be much difficulty in arriving at an Indian national consolidation. The Parsis have ever been working shoulder to shoulder with the Hindus against the British domination. They are no fanatics. From the great Dadabhai Nowrojee to the renowned revolutionary lady Madam Kama, the Parsis have contributed their quota of true India patriots, nor have they ever displayed any but goodwill towards the Hindu nation which to them had proved a veritable savior of their race. Culturally too they are more akin to us.²⁵

About the other two religious minorities, the Christians and Jews, whose *punyabhu* or Holyland fell outside the geographical boundary of India, Savarkar remarked:

In a lesser degree the same thing could be said about Indian Christians. Although they have yet done but little to contribute any help to the national struggle yet they have not acted like a millstone round our neck. They are less fanatical and are more amenable to political reason than the Muslims. The Jews are few in number and not antagonistic to our national aspirations. All these minorities of our countrymen are sure to behave as honest and patriotic citizens in an Indian state.²⁶

His accommodating attitude towards other non-Muslim minorities came at the behest of India's independence. By allowing them a share in national

²⁵ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, pp. 24-5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5.

consolidation he built a combined front against the Muslims whereby every non-Muslim community would be forced to see Muslims as the alien “other”, and the enemy. Savarkar allowed this concession for non-Muslim minorities while assessing their contribution towards the Indian nation. Parsis, for example, according to Savarkar, are great patriots who fought against the British alongside Hindus and displayed respect for the Hindu nation. The contribution of Christians was minimal, but they never thwarted Hindu liberation efforts and were less fanatical in their religiosity. As for Jews, they were insignificant in number and did not oppose Hindu nationalist aspirations.

By recognizing the contributions of non-Hindu and non-Islamic communities, Savarkar succeeded indirectly in propagating the belief that Muslims were traitors whose patriotism was doubtful and who had no goodwill towards Hindus - rather they considered the latter enemies. Muslims were numerically powerful and in this alone they posed a threat to Hindu ideals on national consolidation. The unquestionable right of the Hindus to set and define the rules of national identity emanated from their being a racial, religious and national unit having settled in India from the very beginning. “Muslims are no race nor are the Christians. They are a religious unit, yet neither a racial nor a national. But we Hindus, if possible, are all the three put together and are under our ancient and common roof.”²⁷

For Savarkar then there existed two identities for all religious communities. The first, as we noticed, is religious, and the second political. The concept of

²⁷ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 111.

Hindutva constituted this *political* conception.²⁸ In terms of scope *Hindutva* included many other crucial key elements which form the basis of a community, a people, and a race's "overall identity". This can be understood better if we relate this "overall identity" to the national identity. For Savarkar a common ancestry, history, and religion form the basis of national identity. A homogenising language no doubt is a prerequisite for such a conception. Hence the essentials of *Hindutva* or Hindu identity could be the following: (a) bond of common blood (b) common civilization (c) common culture (d) common laws and rites.²⁹ Savarkar's theory of Hindu identity then is racial, linguistic, religious and territorial.

Savarkar emphasised all these characteristics in order to promote the privileged status of Hindus in the Indian nation. Whereby "others" (now only Muslims after the acceptations made for the rest of the non-Hindu minorities) could be forced to recognize their own alien identity and respect Hindu supremacy. We can best explain the manner in which the Muslims were castigated as outsiders if we take up and discuss the points separately.

First, providing the racial basis of Hindu identity, Savarkar pointed out that:

The Hindus are the citizens of the Indian state not merely because not only they are united by the bonds of the love they bear to a common motherland but also by the bonds of a common blood. They are not only a *rashtra* (nation) but also a *jati* (a racial group like a tribe). The word *jati*, derived from the root *jana* (people) to produce, means a brotherhood, a race determined by a common origin-possessing a common blood. All Hindus claim to have in

²⁸ Brian K. Smith for instance comments, 'Hindutva as opposed to "Hinduism" is a *political* term, and not a religious one'. 'Re-envisioning Hinduism and Evaluating the Hindutva Movement', *Religion*, vol. 26, no. 2, April, 1996, p. 122.

²⁹ For an exhaustive discussion on this point, see Savarkar, *Hindutva*, pp. 67-83.

their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers.³⁰

When anthropologists have divided India's ethnic composition into more than half a dozen racial groups one is inclined to question the claim of common blood between all Hindus. The most noticeable of this division being the North-South divide based on Aryan and Dravidian racial compositions. Savarkar avoids the potential conflict of fact and ideology by emphasizing a kind of melting pot, whereby a race is born out of the fusion of the groups concerned.

The race that is born of the fusion, which on the whole is a healthy one, because it is gradual, of the Aryans, Kolarians, Dravidians and all those of our ancestors, whose blood we as a race inherit, is rightly called neither an Aryan, nor Kolarian, nor Dravidian-but the Hindu race: that is, that people who live as children of a common holyland-the land that lies between the Sindhus.³¹

This poses the obvious question as to how Hindus of a common blood³² who convert to other religions, mainly Islam, are regarded. Savarkar unhesitatingly segregates them from the overall Hindu identity and sacrifices them to maintain purity.

The majority of the Indian Muslims may, if free from the prejudices born of ignorance, come to love our land as their Fatherland, as the patriotic and noble minded amongst them have always been doing. The story of their conversion, forcible in

³⁰ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 68, The translations in brackets are mine.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³² Another Hindu nationalist too was confronted by the same problem of the legitimacy and the illegitimacy of the "common blood" theory to determine a Hindu or Indian identity. M. S. Golwalkar was aware of the fact that Muslims of India, who were predominantly converted Hindus, shared the same "blood". Therefore, he used the concept of "race spirit", which is of utmost importance in determining the Indian national identity. Muslims, according to this concept, cannot claim equality with Hindus though they are of the same blood, because they lost the "race spirit" with their change of religion. For a detailed discussion, see especially Chapters II and III of M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1939, p. 39.

millions of cases, is too recent to make them forget, even if they like to do so, that they inherit Hindu blood in their veins. Though their original Hindu blood is almost unaffected by an alien adulteration, yet they cannot be called Hindus.³³

There is a tendency among critics (mostly secularists of the leftist tradition) to associate Savarkar's ideology to extreme forms of racism on the line of Fascism and Nazism. This view has become increasingly popular in recent years following the ascendance of the Hindu rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in India. These accusations are mostly based on the assumption that Savarkar wanted a racially pure Hindu community as he believed the Germans, Japanese, and Italians to have. No doubt Savarkar emphasised "common blood" as a binding factor in the creation of a Hindu social order. However, he did provide a space whereby "others" could also become Hindu and claim their indivisible rights to Hindutva. He in fact contested the idea of racial purity: "After all there is throughout this world, so far as man is concerned but a single race, the human race kept alive by one common blood, the human blood."³⁴ He even goes to the extent of calling upon all foreigners wanting to become Hindus to become so by intermarriage:

Any convert of non-Hindu parentage to Hindutva can be a Hindu, if *bona fide*, he or she adopts our land as his or her country and marries a Hindu, thus coming to love our country as a real Fatherland, and adopts our culture and thus adores our land as the *Punyabhū* (sacred land). The children of such a union as that would, other things being equal, be most emphatically Hindus.³⁵

³³ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 74.

³⁴ Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *My Transportation for Life*, Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1984, pp. 269-70.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

According to a contemporary critic, “this legacy, as well as the absence of a eugenic programme in Savarkar’s writings, suggest that his racism is not really of a biological kind but is one of domination”.³⁶ Doubtless, for Savarkar, the Muslims represented the “threatening other” whose presence sat ill at ease with the Hindu domination of geographical, cultural and physical space. But he never questioned their racial lineage. Savarkar did not map out plans for an ethnic cleansing like that of the Nazi *endlösung* (“final solution”) in order to establish Hindu domination. Though threatening, Savarkar’s ideology sought a gradual erosion of the presence and strength of Muslims. Hindus converted to Islam remained Hindus by blood (Savarkar called most Indian Muslims converts from Hinduism). What hindered them from claiming their right to Hindutva was their attitude. Therefore Islam, in Savarkar’s conception, was more a chosen way of life than a predetermined religion. He, therefore, expected the “others” to change their attitude in favour of Hinduism.

The first two essentials of the Hindutva formula, namely one nation and one race (*ek rashtra and ek jati*), were quite broad and included everyone in India irrespective of religion, race, caste or creed. Hence, Savarkar argues, a common Fatherland and a common blood cannot fulfill all the requirements of Hindutva.³⁷ To the requirements were added cultural heritage. This acted as a sieve to separate the stones from the grain.

³⁶ Jaffrelote, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 30.

³⁷ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 72.

Savarkar defined culture as *sanskriti*,³⁸ a Sanskrit term which included the overall aesthetic being of a people. Language, literature, music, poetry, etiquette, and mannerism formed parts of this culture. Hindutva therefore included the particular cultural expression of a people. Savarkar traced the linguistic origin of Hindu culture to Sanskrit and regarded all other cultural presence and their influence in India as alien.³⁹ This amply substantiates Savarkar's intention to exclude Islamic languages and Muslim culture. The status of those Indian languages whose origin was not Sanskrit remains unresolved. This also poses the question where did Dravidians of South India stand in this cultural basis of Hindutva.

Though Savarkar did a poor job of providing cultural criteria for Hindutva, he nevertheless put up a better show when he focused on its civilisational aspects. According to him, civilization was the "expression of the mind of man, the account of what man had made of matter".⁴⁰ Since man was a part of the nation, civilization was the story of a nation, of its thoughts, its actions and achievements; literary, artistic and architectural creations of its nationals in these and other fields. Hindutva then was a part of Hindu civilization. Hindus, no doubt, from Kashmir to Cape Camorin and Sind to Sylhet, shared various religio-cultural aspects including reverence for epics such as Ramayana and Mahabharata. Savarkar came to see the entire sub-continent as one indivisible whole, all its people taking pride in common glory and feeling remorse when any part of the sub-continent fell to external

³⁸ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 74.

³⁹ "As our history tells the story of action of our race so does our literature taken in its fullest sense tell the story of the thought of our race. Thought they say is indispensable from our common tongue the Sanskrit. Verily it is our mother tongue-the tongue in which the mothers of our race spoke and which has given birth to all our present thoughts." *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

aggression. Therefore, the civilization of the Hindus was an emotional bond between a diverse group of people who cherished a certain value that was unique.

Savarkar is partly correct in his interpretation of Hindu civilisational traits. But he is wrong in providing a uni-dimensional picture of it. The question remains, how can he ignore the civilization of the entire Muslim era? The seven hundred years of Islamic rule in India formed as much a part of its history as Hindu rule. The Islamic rulers no doubt provided the ink to paint the colour of this civilisation but the painters were both Hindus and Muslims. Savarkar's exclusion of Muslim contribution therefore remains unqualified, selective and parochial?

Finally, Hindutva provided common laws and rites. "Common institutions and a common law that sanctions, and sanctifies them, however they may differ in details, are nevertheless both the cause and effect of the basic unity of Hindu race."⁴¹ The wider implications of this concept was the negation of a composite jurisprudence that had evolved over centuries during Islamic rule. Savarkar constructed a juristic-legal identity of the Hindus which was traditional and yet modern, emotional yet rational, and superficial yet indomitable. To an ordinary Hindu, jurisprudence may have appeared trivial and superficial, but Savarkar's jurisprudence placed Hindus alongside Christian (Roman) and Islamic jurisprudence and hence logically allowed them to follow a legal system based on their religious inheritance.⁴²

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁴² The demand for a Hindu jurisprudence in India even by some of the country's foremost secularists came in 1985 when the Congress government led by Rajiv Gandhi tried to uphold Islamic law or *shari'a* in Shah Bano case. The secularists pointed to the absence of a secular-common jurisprudence for all Indians irrespective of caste, class and religion.

The identity of the Hindu then, was determined by his or her whole self being associating with all or each of the central principles of Hindutva. 'Hindu, then, is he who feels attachment to the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu as the land of his forefathers-as his Fatherland; who inherits the blood of the great race, and claims as his own, the Hindu *sanskriti*, the Hindu civilization, as represented in a common history, common heroes, a common literature, common art, a common law and a common jurisprudence, common fairs and festivals, rites and rituals ceremonies and sacraments.'⁴³

Savarkar's Hindutva is selectively inclusive. His definition of it has led critics to interpret his meaning in different ways. The interpretation which best fits our understanding of what Savarkar believed to be Hindu-Muslim identity is provided by James G. Lochtefeld, a contemporary scholar of Hindutva. According to him, 'Savarkar's definition of a Hindu is plastic enough to include everyone in a notoriously polyform tradition, but the condition that one regard India as the holy land largely excludes both Muslims and Christians. The definition equates Hindu identity and Indian nationalism, meaning that religious minorities are not only "aliens", but because of their "extraterritorial loyalties" (to holy lands in Arabia and Palestine) they are also potential traitors.'⁴⁴

⁴³ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 81.

⁴⁴ James G. Lochtefeld, 'New Wine, Old Skins: The Sangh Parivar and the Transformation of Hinduism', *Religion*, vol. 26, no. 2, April 1996, p, 103.

Savarkar's interpretation of identity is provocative and original. By defining Indians in terms of religion, Savarkar promoted inter-religious differences and rivalry. However, prejudiced it may be we can credit Savarkar for clearly identifying the difference between citizenship and national identity. In Savarkar's view, Hindus constituted the nation of India, whereas followers of non-Indian religions, having their Holy land elsewhere, constituted only part of the citizenship. In contemporary India we have both multi-national and mono-national states. Whereas countries like Germany have preferred to remain mono-national.⁴⁵

To criticize Savarkar for promoting a mono-national identity among Indians based on Hinduism would be as absurd as criticizing Italians and Germans for maintaining and pursuing their own form of identity based on a specific religion, language, culture and common bloodline. True, Savarkar's theory of Hindutva had limitations. But having said that, one cannot avoid appreciating the coherence of his arguments. His thesis on the nature of Indian society and polity based on history, culture, religion and a definable tradition is admirable.

The chief attraction of Savarkar's Hindutva was its emotional appeal, as is the case with all ideologies that stand on the claim that they can bring back to people a sense of who they are, what they have lost, and what they can achieve through a template of action. The foundations of this thesis appealed to the moral majority. On one level it was ethnocentric and on another it was multiethnic and multicultural. It

⁴⁵ The 1913 citizenship law of Germany, for example, bars the assimilation of non-Germans into the national mainstream unless they can lay claim to a German bloodline. See, the editorial in, *The Economist*, 9 January 1999, p. 16. For a wider discussion, see *Der Spiegel*, 13 January 1999, pp. 9-13.

was ethnocentric as it was meant to appeal to the moral majority.⁴⁶ It was multiethnic and multicultural as it allowed space to other communities, albeit according to the moral majority's will, not the prevailing socio-economic and political condition of the country.

5.4. Savarkar and the identity of the Indian Muslim

Both Hindu and Muslim communalists deny the Indianness of Indian Muslims and underline only their Muslimness, of course, for different reasons - the former to denigrate the Muslims and the later to denigrate India.⁴⁷

The Indian Muslims in their own motherland are deeply rooted in its rich history and respond meaningfully to its varied geography, but their bodies, on death, also become symbolically one with the mother earth of their homeland.⁴⁸

The image of the Muslim in almost all non-Islamic literature has been iniquitous and contemptible. The Indian nationalist discourse in this regard was hardly different. Though there was no large-scale vilification of the Muslim image during the freedom struggle, there was neither an attempt to portray them as equals of Hindus.⁴⁹ Muslims were easily singled out on the basis of their fundamental beliefs. It is the belief in religious monism, based on a single authoritative source and one god, that

⁴⁶ For an introduction to moral majority in contemporary polity see, Steve Bruce, 'The moral majority: The politics of fundamentalism in secular society', in Lionel Caplan (ed.), *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, London: Macmillan, 1987.

⁴⁷ Moonis Raza, 'Indian Muslims in Their Homeland', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 29, no. 39, pp. 2541.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2540.

⁴⁹ The significant exception to this of course is in Gandhi's vision. But he too had a limited and closed attitude towards Muslims. He always sought to see them in a particular way which could be termed as paternalistic. This, instead of creating a Hindu mirror image of Muslims, made them appear unequal (hence needing attention or forgiveness for their follies). This image of Muslims was responsible for Hindu chauvinism against Muslims. If the Hindus in the pre-independence period responded to Muslims with suspicion after independence, this attitude became more overt and the former unhesitatingly branded the latter as "permanent enemies".

kept the Muslims bound to a common identity. Another factor characterizing Muslims was their perception of themselves.

In a theoretical formulation we can point out that that if there existed a negative image of Muslims and Islam it was mostly due to that particular community's fundamentalist adherence to its religious ideologies. Akeel Bilgrami terms it as "surplus phenomenology of identity".⁵⁰ In it, Muslims are influenced by a sentiment or a form of nationalism which outlives its original purpose and transcends its historical function. In the process it trespasses on many other ideological boundaries and comes into conflict with them. The scriptural injunction of Islam to fight against and subjugate non-Islamists, when seen in this framework, was originally intended to consolidate a diverse population in the harsh desert of Arabia during Prophet Mohammed's time. Once that goal was achieved, Islamists, according to its critics like Savarkar, should have abandoned the trans-nationalist ideas in the *Quran*. Instead they remain committed to its principles and in the process make themselves enemies of all non-Muslims.

In the historical process there were numerous occasions when a kind of syncretism grew between Islam and other religions, cultures and people. However, the interpreters of the religion denounced any such fusion and suppressed any attempt in that direction. The hard-liners within Islam for example resisted all attempts at moderation, or *ijtihad* (re-interpretation of Islamic doctrine), and

⁵⁰ Akeel Bilgrami, 'What Is A Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity', in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *The Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, New Delhi: Viking, 1993, p.283.

continued to emphasize a *Shari'a* which was rigid, non-accommodative, and intolerant of every other ideal.⁵¹

Savarkar's perception of Islam and the image of Muslims which he promoted was very much a product of the way in which Muslims portrayed themselves. Interestingly, Savarkar provided an image of Islam which Islamic scriptures⁵² enjoined. If Savarkar termed Muslims as the "other" they themselves expected to be identified so. To Savarkar, and the Islamists, almost any particular event could serve as a reference point to highlight two diametrically opposing ideas.

Take for instance the period of Muslim rule in India. There were two sets of responses to it. The Muslims glorified it, the nationalist Hindus like Savarkar vilified it. One can also relate it to the popular adage, "one man's religion versus another man's vocation." It could be said that the vocation of the Muslim conquerors was to subjugate and rule (as written in the scripture), and that it became the religion of Hindu nationalists like Savarkar to oppose everything Islamic for the promotion of their own religion.

The psychology of Indian Muslims has invariably been to see themselves as conquerors (converts included), Savarkar from this point of view, would appear as any other conquered subject crying out for attention while documenting his conquerors' injustice. Throughout history the weapon of the weak, deprived,

⁵¹ For a discussion on traditional and moderate vision of Islam see, *Islam and Modernity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

⁵² By scriptures I intend to emphasize the three main sources of Islamic doctrine viz., *Quran*, *Hadith* and *Sunna*.

bereaved and the subjugated has always been the voice of resistance. In Savarkar we witness the culmination of Hindu anguish. His sharp, focused and unidimensional aggressive language against Muslims could be seen as an act of resistance. In an ideal situation Savarkar's diatribe against Islam would have been met by an equally persistent Islamic refutation, thereby allowing syncretism between the conqueror and the conquered's religion. Unfortunately, none of the contemporaries of Savarkar plunged into this sort of debate or discussion. The Islamic non-opposition (at the intellectual level) to Savarkar's language implied the acceptance of his arguments.

Moreover, Savarkar's conception of a Hindu *rashtra* (nation) made sense in the face of Islamists' endeavors to forge an Islamic polity in the as yet undivided India. Bhikhu Parekh is of the opinion that Hindu nationalists frightened the Muslims away during the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁵³ I would however argue the contrary. The establishment of the Muslim League preceded the establishment of any forum promoting and identifying the Hindu interest *alone*. And Hindu response or Savarkar's response to the idea of a united Hindu state only followed similar sentiments expressed by Muslims. The *Jamaat-i-Islami*, for example, emphasized the 'resacrilization of political life and the establishment of an Islamic state with the *Quran* and *Sunna* (the way of the Prophet) as its constitution and the *Shari'a* as its basic law'.⁵⁴

⁵³ Bhikhu Parekh, 'Ethnocentricity of Nationalist Discourse', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995, p. 39.

⁵⁴ Mumtaz Ahmad, 'Islamic Fundamentalism in South Asia: The Jamaat-i-Islami and the Tablighi Jamaat of South Asia', in Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 458.

Savarkar also made the future Hindu polity very exclusive. His demand for an united Hindu state coincided with the Islamists demand for an united Islamic state of their own. Apart from the contention between Hindus and Muslims over territory, Savarkar and the advocates of Pakistan agreed that they constituted two unassimilable groups. There is little or no documented evidence to refer to how Islamists reacted to Savarkar's ideas. Certainly there existed a symbiotic relationship between the two: both wanted the division of spoils. Savarkar, however, wanted to appropriate the majority of the spoil.⁵⁵

Savarkar's opposition to Muslims was also provoked by the position they held in the undivided Indian nation. He could not comprehend how, in spite of their past deeds, the Muslims could still occupy a significant position in the power structure and political space in India. He regarded the Muslims as a pampered lot who were being offered a disproportionately large share of national resources. The Muslim presence in bureaucracy, defence, and other important public sectors in undivided India certainly undermined any Hindu aspiration to dominate the power structure. Savarkar wanted a radical departure from it. He openly sought to restrict the role and position of Muslims in Indian politico-economic life. He was evidently confident of the results of this measure, for he argued, "Hinduise all politics and militarize Hindudom and the resurrection of our Hindu Nation is bound to follow it as certainly as the dawn follows the darkest hour of the night!"⁵⁶ Critics have pointed out that this approach of Savarkar's narrowed the dimensions of Hindu nationalism

⁵⁵ Savarkar insisting on the demarcation of Hindu Rashtra from the territory this (eastern) side of river Indus.

⁵⁶ V. D. Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, p. 20.

and virtually made it a one-point political programme - i.e. the realisation of the claims to superiority of Hindus.⁵⁷ Be that as it may be, ironically Savarkar's analysis and the remedies for restricting Muslim dominance in the politico-economic life was appropriated by the secular governments of post-independent India. Whereas in 1947 the Muslim presence in defence services was as high as 32 per cent, in the early 1990s it was merely 2 per cent.⁵⁸

To return to the original question of what formed Savarkar's perception of Islam. Why did he view Islam and Muslims as he did we must also ask whether Savarkar expected any change during his time or in the future whereby there would be room for Hindu-Muslim syncretism. It is important to bear in mind that Savarkar, while making a case against Islam, was only analysing its past deeds. But was he equally concerned with its present features and future potential?

5.5. Hindus and Muslims: The roots of antagonism

When the Muslims penetrated India the question of life and death began.⁵⁹

Savarkar's antagonism towards Muslims and Islam was based on three key factors. They were spiritual, historical, and socio-political.

⁵⁷ Prabha Dixit, 'The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism', in T. Pantham and K. Deutsch (ed.), *Political Thought in Modern India*, Sage: New Delhi, 1986, pp. 140-41.

⁵⁸ Moonis Raza, 'Indian Muslims in Their Homeland', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 29, no. 39, p. 2540.

⁵⁹ Savarkar, *Hindutva*, p. 42.

The first contention Savarkar had with Muslims was based on his view of Islamic spirituality *versus* Hindu spirituality which he likened as polytheistic *versus* monotheism, compassion *versus* violence, tolerance *versus* intolerance, and rational *versus* irrational. We shall discuss each of these in turn. First, it would not be out of place to mention that Savarkar was not particularly opposed to monotheism excepting when it restricted or violated all other forms of beliefs. Christianity, for example, preached monotheism, but Savarkar was not opposed to its spiritual basis because it did not violate other beliefs as Islam did. It was relatively easy for Savarkar to brand Islam as the epitome of evil for the destruction it had caused to Hindu religious institutions.⁶⁰

The monotheism *versus* polytheism debate translated into conflicting definition of the sacred *versus* the profane. What Muslims considered sacred (destruction of idolatry and all other forms of worship) was profane to Hindus. And what Hindus regarded sacred (idol worship or belief in more than one god) was profane to Muslims. Hence, there existed an unassimilable divide between the two religions. By highlighting this difference Savarkar precluded any interaction between the two religious groups and sought to build a pathological hatred among Hindus towards Muslims.

Savarkar focused on the religiously sanctioned use of violence by Muslims, versus the emphasis on compassion in Hinduism to make a case against Islam.

⁶⁰ For a detailed account of Muslim destruction of Hindu places of worship, see Sita Ram Goel, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them - The Islamic Evidence*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 1990 and Koenraad Elst, *Negationism in India*, New Delhi: Voice of India Publications, 1994. These publications, though not strictly academic, nevertheless document and highlight the Islamic purge against Hindu institutions, customs, and beliefs.

Almost all the religions of the world (including Christianity) encouraged compassion, tolerance and fellow feeling. Islam, by contrast, did not place much value on this ideal. Whereas Christianity preached *love thy neighbour* and Hinduism envisioned mankind as a family in the form of *basudhevyā kutumbakam*, Islam lacked these ideals. The ideals of *Dar ul Islam* (the world of Islam) and *Dar ul Harb* (the world of infidels) and the sacred duty of every Muslim to establish the former over the latter even if it amounts to the use of violent means is indeed sanctioned by the *Quran* and is a case in point in the comparative framework.

Furthermore, according to Savarkar, Islamic spiritualism, is insidious in its designs as it emphasises division rather than unification, destruction rather than construction and subjugation over freedom. It is vile as it divides the very earth into two states or two peoples politically marked out on the basis of religion: as *Dar-ul-Islam* and *Dar-ul-Harb*: the Islamic people and the enemy,⁶¹ who must be subjugated even if it requires the use of the sword.

Finally, since Islam offered little rational justification for its ideals and actions it also made little effort to compromise. Hence, Hindus according to Savarkar, were justified in considering Islam evil, and the followers of the religion untrustworthy.

⁶¹ "Their theology and the theoretical politics divide the human world into two groups only: The Muslim land and the enemy land." Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 59. Also, see Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, p. 149.

Hindus and Muslims in India were subject to the same problems faced by contesting communities elsewhere in the world. The issues that brought them into conflict with each other were mainly the right to land, exercise of politico-economic power, religion and the treatment of women. Since Islam was not an indigenous faith and its adherents were early invaders of India who later successfully consolidated their power, the scene was set for rivalry in the future. Savarkar's thesis of Hindu nationalism drew most of its strength from this rivalry. He took great pains to relate the "cause and effect" theory which made Hindu opposition to Muslims and Islamic rule inevitable. He put forward the argument that since Muslims usurped the territorial, political, economic, religious and sexual space⁶² of the Hindus (and other non-Muslim Indians), a permanent and unabridgeable division took place between the two communities. One of his later and more mature works, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History* (1963), is devoted to the analysis of the roots of rivalry. And he consistently argued (by providing historical details) that Muslims were solely responsible for generating issues of mutual hostility. I will discuss each of his main arguments regarding the roots of antagonism in turn.

First, Savarkar criticised the original invasion of India by Muslims. He was prepared to accept successive invasions if the invaders were primarily guided by profit motives. He opposed the manner in which Sind, and later, West Punjab were occupied by Muslims who were to claim their right to that territory. Subsequently, Delhi and all of north India fell into the hands of Muslim invaders who retained their contested claim over this new territory.

⁶² In terms of forcibly taking away the subjected people's women.

The second contention between Hindus and Muslims was political in nature. Savarkar resented the Muslim hold on political power. Though India was invaded several times prior to the arrival of the Muslims, none of the previously invading communities were successful in holding authority for long. The Greeks, Sakas, Huns and Kushanas all succeeded in establishing their suzerainty but it was short lived⁶³ and they were gradually assimilated into the Indian population. Muslims, on the other hand, stayed put, did not integrate into the mainstream,⁶⁴ and imposed their own brand of political structure, forcing Hindus to abide by it. The loss of freedom, Savarkar pointed out, was one of the prime factors leading to Hindu-Muslim division. Had there been complete harmony between Islamic political authority and its Hindu subjects there would not have been campaigns by the latter to topple the former. Savarkar's example of Maratha and Sikh uprisings against the Mogul empire,⁶⁵ and countless other local revolts, proved his point.

Third, Savarkar blamed the Muslims for the economic ruin of the Hindu community. There has yet been no systematic and comprehensive study of the economic history of India during Muslim rule. It is true that non-Muslims living under the Islamic regimes were obliged to pay higher taxes than their Muslim compatriots, but there is no evidence of Muslim rulers systematically plundering the wealth of their Hindu subjects or strictly limiting their economic options (a practice

⁶³ For details, see Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, Bombay: Veer savarkar Prakashan, 1985, Chapter II, pp. 60-87.

⁶⁴ Savarkar suggested that to Muslims India remained "only as a land of sojourn" while to Hindus it was a home. V.D. Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 50.

⁶⁵ Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, pp. 290-91 & *Hindu Pad Padshahi*, pp. 196-202.

which killed indigenous economic initiatives during British colonialism). The Hindu trading community prospered unhindered, oblivious to the influence of political authority. No doubt the Islamic regimes allowed the emergence of a Muslim elite who prospered at the expense of the masses. But there also existed a Hindu elite who exploited the masses in exactly the same way.

What is important is that all elite classes were hated equally by their Hindu and Muslim subjects. Furthermore, whatever might have been the nature of the Islamic political economy, it is a fact that a large part of the Muslim population (mainly lower caste Hindu converts) lived in abject poverty. Therefore, the idea that the Islamic economic structure was a major source of Hindu-Muslim antagonism makes a poor case. However, its role cannot be ignored altogether. Savarkar mentioned the illegitimacy of *jizia*, or religious tax, imposed on non-Muslims for prophesying their religion. This practice, which was carried on by most of the Muslim rulers excluding Akbar drove a wedge between the two communities. The Islamic regime imposed the religious tax in order to dissuade non-Muslims from following their own religions. Indeed, the cost of this imposition forced many Hindus to embrace Islam as Hinduism simply became proved too expensive.

Fourth, the strangulation of the religious space of the Hindus created the greatest antagonism between the two communities. Savarkar's assumption was mostly correct in this regard. Though by nature Hinduism is an inclusivist religion it never tolerated another faith to reign supreme over it. When Buddhism, for example, gained strength and posed as an alternative religion to Hinduism, the latter tried its

best to eliminate and neutralise it. As a result, though India was the birth-place of Buddhism, it almost vanished from the country's politico-cultural world. Islam too posed a similar threat. Since it was the religion of the ruling community, attempts at eliminating it were not easy and were unthinkable for some. Alternately, efforts at neutralising it and making it a part of the Hindu pantheon were largely unsuccessful. Having failed to either counter or incorporate Islam, Hindus resigned themselves to a smoldering hatred against the religion. The destruction of temples, artifacts bearing Hindu religious motifs and cultural monuments by the Muslims perpetuated that antagonism and hatred. As long as Islam reigned supreme, Hinduism was relegated to the private realms of its adherents. The end of Islamic hegemony allowed the Hindus to fight back. The campaigns against Islamic authority by the Marathas, Sikhs and others were not only political but also religious in nature. With the decline of Muslim power surfaced the suppressed Hindu anger; while Hindus fought to recover their lost religious space the Muslims struggled to protect and hold on to their ground.

Fifth, and finally, Savarkar characterised Muslims as sexual offenders.⁶⁶ He argued that they regularly violated Hindu women during their military and political rule. These offenses, apart from rape, included the kidnapping of non-Muslim women (both married and unmarried) and their murder upon protest. In Savarkar's opinion, Muslims did this openly, without remorse or regret, as they considered it a "religious duty".⁶⁷ Kidnapping, rape and other forms of sexual violence toward the

⁶⁶ In several of Savarkar's literary works, including *Kala Pani*, *Ushap* and *Mazi Janmathep*, there are plots highlighting Islamic sexual offences against Hindus. *Mazi Janmathep*, for example is the story of Malti, the young daughter of a Hindu widow living in Mathura who is kidnapped, tortured and raped by a Muslim ruffian until she is rescued by a Hindu.

⁶⁷ Savarkar, *Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History*, p. 290.

women of a subjected people by occupying force or regime is common to this day. Such practices no doubt, are used to crush the morale of subjugated communities and often result in the establishment of a deep-seated hatred among subjects towards their captors. However, a regime usually discontinues this practice once it is in full control of the territory and its inhabitants. But Savarkar held that even after the full consolidation of Muslim rule, these practices were never abandoned. He used this to exemplify how Muslims in India never regarded non-Muslims as their equals but always as mere subjects and second-class citizens.

From the time of Alexander the Great to that of Mahmud of Ghazni, and throughout seven hundred years of Muslim rule, the Hindu community in India was internally weak, divided in terms of clan, class, and sectarian identity. Often conspiring against one another, Hindus proved to be their own enemies. Taking account of this peculiarity, it could be said that India had made itself vulnerable to a Muslim invasion. Savarkar recognized this fact.

Strange to say - and not so strange - the extension of the Maratha power in the North gave rise to a deadly antipathy even in the hearts of some of the Hindu princes....They did not hesitate to ally themselves with their national enemies against the Marathas, and encouraged the disaffected Muslim elements to hatch up some great plot to get rid of the only Hindu power that could cope with all who aimed at the destruction of the Hindu faith and Hindu independence.⁶⁸

Savarkar's treatment of the Marathas as the rescuers of Hinduism and the society at large from Islamic hegemony and as the forebears of a great Hindu

⁶⁸ Savarkar, *Hindu Pad Padsahi*, pp. 91-2.

tradition posed problems. The appeal of the Marathas among their Hindu subjects was limited. Their prime objective was power. No wonder they were regarded as imperialists and were often resented by the Hindus who had experienced life under stifling Islamic rule. Savarkar was aware of these shortcomings and wanted to project a gentler, more attractive version of Maratha rule. He, being a Marathi, and Maharashtra being the hub of the Hindu resurgence movement, Savarkar's need to provide an alternative historiography was ever more important. Hence, he championed Maratha hegemony as Hindu hegemony over Muslims.

Their (Muslim) religious and theocratic traditions join hands in impressing upon their mind that Hindustan is not and cannot be a *Dar-ul-Islam*, their country which they may love until and unless the Hindus - the *kafars* - are either converted to a man to Islam or are reduced to helotage paying *jizia* to some would-be-Muslim sovereignty over this land.⁶⁹

Contemporary Muslims, in Savarkar's conception, exhibited all the symptoms of having a split personality. Islam demanded that its adherents oppose any form of non-Islamic polity, even if they should be living in that polity as full fledged citizens enjoying all rights and entitled to all manners of protection accorded to any other person in the said polity. "A Muslim is often....moved more by events in Palestine than what concerns India as a Nation, worries himself more about the well-being of the Arabs than the well-being of his Hindu neighbours and countrymen in India."⁷⁰ Assuming that Muslims pledged little or no allegiance to India, Savarkar concluded it was not wrong to exclude them from the Indian political process. He also suspected the allegiance of Indian Muslims because of their unwillingness to

⁶⁹ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, pp. 102-3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

call themselves Hindusthanees Muslims, instead of identifying with a distant Muslim community.⁷¹

It is difficult to say whether Muslims actually harboured any extra-territorial allegiance, but they certainly did not wish to live in a polity dominated by the Hindu majority. Savarkar was aware of this facet in the Muslim psyche but nevertheless wanted them relegated to a secondary position. Both Hindu and Islamic hard-liners aimed at achieving the same objective and both were aware of each other's intentions. Savarkar was of the opinion that it was not so much that the Muslims did not want to form a united Indian nation as that the Muslim concept of unity, the national unity of India, was based on the conversion of entire Hindu race into Islam, if need be by force, so that a true Indian nation could only be established on Islamic principles.⁷²

5.6. Muslims and their true intention

In the whole world, India is the best, India is ours, we are her nightingales; this is our garden.

Mohammed Iqbal, circa 1920.

⁷¹ "Muslims living in China, Hungary, Greece, Palestine, Poland etc., are known as Muslims of that particular country. Their identity is associated with that particular nation. Muslims of India too should have a similar notion and identify themselves as Hindusthanees Muslims. Instead they prefer to see themselves as Muslims related to Arabia and thus they should be rejected." Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 105.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 54, see his analysis of the Moplah Muslim uprising against Hindus and implications for the future India.

Muslims are we, the country is ours, the whole world is ours. China and Arabia are ours, India is ours. Under the shadow of swords we have grown up. The crescent scabbard is our national emblem.

*Mohammed Iqbal, circa 1930*⁷³

The quoted declarations above succinctly sum up the Muslim aspiration that Savarkar was at pains to describe. His assumption that Hindus were targets of Pan-Islamism⁷⁴ was amply supported by Iqbal. The turning away of great secular Muslim patriots of the nationalist movement to a purely Islamic polity is indeed quite a digression.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, from its earliest times there was a significant Muslim presence in the struggle against British colonialism. The theoretical question here is, if the Muslims participated in the said movement, what were their motivations, and what made them shift to a position which sided them with Indians? Dealing with this we arrive at two sets of answers. First, Islamic participation in the Indian nationalist struggle was a result of the Muslims' attempt to "re-establish" their identity, lost upon the arrival and subsequent usurpation of power by the British. Hence, when there was an attempt to overthrow the British regime, the Muslims marched alongside the rest. This march for Muslims was neither passionate nor eager. They simply participated as there was nothing else to do after their power had been so greatly eclipsed. However, as soon as the British showed signs of weakness, Muslims began to re-establish and re-invent their political, religious, economic and,

⁷³ The translated couplets are taken from Ved Mehta 'Coming Down', *India*, Granta 57, London: Granta, 1997, p. 148.

⁷⁴ Jaffrelote, *op. cit.*, n.2, p. 25.

⁷⁵ The main votaries of Pakistan such as Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Iqbal etc., originally advocated for an united independent India free of British colonialism. The burdens of the past and the impositions prescribed by the ideals of Islam later forced them to seek a separate and independent Islamic polity in Pakistan. For a rather stimulating discussion, see Rajmohan Gandhi, *Understanding the Muslim Mind*, New Delhi: Viking / Penguin, 1987.

most importantly, extra-territorial self. Hence, toward a goal of an Islamic India and, ultimately, a global Islamic entity.

Savarkar's difficulty in accepting a Muslim as a true patriot is biased. Asserting his stand, he developed some convenient historical arguments that fit very well with some of the basic principles of Islam. For, he pointed out: "Territorial patriotism is a word unknown to Muslims - nay is tabooed, unless in connection with a Muslim territory. Afghans can be patriot, for Afghanistan is a Muslim territory today. But an Indian Muslim, if he is a real Muslim - and they are intensely religious as a people - cannot faithfully bear loyalty to India as a country, as a nation, as a state, because it is today "an enemy land" and doubly lost for non-Muslims are in a majority here."⁷⁶

In providing this argument, Savarkar was not stating that Islam or the Islamic polity was evil but that all others were considered evil by Muslims. Therefore, the argument of Savarkar was that Muslims could not be a part of united India as they would be called upon by their religion to eliminate the non-Muslims in the polity. The logical conclusion of this argument would be that even if "others" approach Muslims with an outstretched hand of friendship, there would be every chance that their hand might be bitten.⁷⁷ An outstretched Hindu hand, in this situation, would be

⁷⁶ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 60.

⁷⁷ Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the creator of Pakistan, however, held to a differing interpretation of this argument. He asserted in 1941 that " ... a Muslim, when he was converted, granted that he was converted more than a thousand years ago, according to your Hindu religion and philosophy, he becomes an outcaste and he becomes a *mlechha* (untouchable) and the Hindus cease to have anything to do with him socially, religiously and culturally or in any other way. He, therefore, belongs to a different order, not only religious but social, and he has lived in that distinctly separate and antagonistic social order, religiously, socially and culturally." Mohammed Ali Jinnah, *Speeches and Writings*, vol. I, edited by Jamil-ud-din Ahmed, Lahore, 1960.

in the most danger. 'Of all the non-Muslims, the Hindus are looked upon as the most damned by Muslim theologians, for Christians and Jews are, after all, *kitabīs* (followers of the books or revelations), having their holy books partially in common. But Hindus are totally *kafirs* (unbelievers lacking not only any divine revelations but more importantly idolaters), as a consequence and their land, *Hindustan*, is pre-eminently an enemy land as long as it is not ruled by Muslims, or Hindus do not embrace Islam. This is the religious mentality of the Indian Muslims who still live and move and have their being in religiosity.'⁷⁸

Savarkar's use of the theological beliefs of Islam in the Indian context did not justify the expulsion of Muslims. Instead, it just complicated the problem. The choices available were unpalatable to both Muslims and non-Muslims. The establishment of a harmonious polity demanded that either all non-Muslims in India convert to Islam, or that Muslims shed their religiosity and religio-political priorities in favour of a non-Islamic secular polity. Either of these propositions were practically unachievable.

Though for the sake of scholarly convenience, Savarkar supported the conversion of the entire non-Islamic populace of India to Islam with the aim of establishing a stable polity, his priority was the transformation of the Muslim mindset. According to him, 'the Muslims, in general, and Indian Muslims in particular, had not as yet grown out of the historical stage of intense religiosity and the theological concept of the state.'⁷⁹ A successful and vibrant polity demanded

⁷⁸ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 60.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

compromise and moderation and Muslims possessed no such qualities. Since they lacked moderation and did not favour change Savarkar painted a rather grim prospect for India if the Muslims were allowed to have their say and way. Savarkar imagined a catastrophe for the non-Muslims status quo. "With 60 % of the jobs in the police and armed forces, Muslims are fully confident, wisely or unwisely, that in case the British are overpowered in some big World War, the Muslims, with the help of the non-Indian Muslim power bordering our country, may snatch the political sovereignty of India out of the British hands and re-establish a Muslim empire here."⁸⁰

Savarkar's fears of an onslaught of Muslims toward Hindus were not unfounded. In pre-independent undivided India Muslims constituted close to 35 % of the total population. Another 15 % of the populace belonged to other non-Hindu minorities such as Christians, Sikhs, Jews, Parsis and Buddhists. The remaining 50 % (as recent studies on Hindus have shown), were not necessarily Hindus: such peoples categorized as tribals, dalits and animists were mistakenly put into the category of Hindu. Those constituting the true Hindu community were caste-based groups numbering less than 30 % of the populace. When Savarkar spoke of the "threat" of Muslims he invariably had this 35 % in mind as his target audience. The Muslims, thanks to their religion, had developed superior communication skills

⁸⁰ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 62.

Savarkar summed up the Muslim contribution to the nationalist struggle like so: "The Muslims remained Muslims first, Muslims last and Indians never! They sat on the fence as long as the deluded Hindus kept struggling with the British. And as soon as the unarmed agitation carried on by the Congressite Hindus on the one hand, and the more dreadful and more effective life-and-death struggle carried on by the armed Hindu revolutionists outside the Congress on the other, brought sufficient pressure on the British government and compelled them to hand over some substantial political power to the Indians, the Muslims jumped down from the fence and claimed, We are also Indians, we must have our pound of flesh!" *Ibid.*, p. 53.

compared to the divided Hindus, and with their hold over the police and military front they could easily have overpowered any Hindu nationalist uprising. Savarkar was well aware of this fact. Hence, by branding the Muslims as the “other” and offering all non-Muslims a claim in India in exchange for their loyalty, he could aim at building a following among the broader non-Muslim community. Nothing could more unite a divided mass than the fear of the “other” wanting to turn on them. Since Islam had a violent past it was especially easy for Savarkar to build up a “theory of threat”. The sporadic riots involving Muslims that became increasingly common from the 1920s onwards fueled this theory.

Whereas the statistics employed by Savarkar were verifiable, his assessment of the Muslim psyche was not entirely accurate but was nevertheless convincing. Two decades prior to Indian independence (in the 1930s and 1940s) Muslims indeed had become a major force to be reckoned with. Savarkar’s proposed methods for dealing with this force were violent, defensive, and retaliatory. He was broadly constructing principles of “offensive diplomacy” in dealing with the Muslims and ‘Islamic Question’ during these two decades. ‘If the Muslims pass an Act, e.g. in Bengal, to reserve 60% of the jobs in the services for Muslims, our Hindu national ministries will at once get an Act passed in Hindu majority provinces to reserve 90% of the jobs for Hindus, even where we are only 80% of the population, as a retributory measure without making the least apology for it. (Only then we will be in a position to retaliate and bring the Muslims to their sense.)’⁸¹

⁸¹ Savarkar, *Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, p. 80. He similarly argues for the reservation of Hindu institutions for Hindus alone. This, Savarkar argues, is justified like the Parsi, Jewish, Muslim institutions, which are closed to Hindus. For details on this position, see V. D. Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, p. 64.

In Savarkar's view, Hindus had a right to take recourse in a retaliatory manner. For, 'Hindus are simply the original and obvious inhabitants of *Hindustan*, that is, India. The same Hindu people have built the life-values, ideals, and culture of this country, and, therefore, their nationhood is self-evident.'⁸² Furthermore, any claims made by disputants other than Hindus were void because 'Hindus were in undisputed and undisturbed possession of this land for over ten thousand years before the land was invaded by any foreign race.'⁸³ Savarkar respected both the Islamic theological and the orthodox Hindu claim to India. He arrived, however, at the conclusion that since Hindus were in the majority and had been India's original inhabitants, their right to the land should prevail. The foundation upon which rest the theories of Savarkar and other Hindu nationalists is the occupational rather than the religious conception of nationhood. It conveyed the message that, since the Hindus had been in India since the beginning, having a common composite culture and life-style, the land belonged to them.

Savarkar's model of a nation-state was unaccommodating and primarily anti-pluralist. It aimed at the unification of citizenship and nationality, by the elimination of any nationality other than that of the (Hindu) majority. As would befit any nationalist agenda, Savarkar also opposed any attempts to integrate Islamic elements into the socio-cultural and political fabric of India. He not only rallied for the banning of Urdu⁸⁴ from the nation's cultural milieu, but actively encouraged Hindus

⁸² D.R. Goyal, *R. S. S.*, Delhi: Radhakrishna, 1979, p. 40.

⁸³ M.S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, p. 49.

⁸⁴ For Savarkar's opposition to Urdu, now the official language of Pakistan, see *Historic Statements*, pp. 127, 172, 174-5.

to drive Muslims out of the areas where they were in the majority.⁸⁵ This stance of Savarkar's was brilliantly put forward by a fellow Hindu Sabhaite as follows:

The Hindus cannot take this country as jointly owned by those who either came running away from their countries and sought protection here, or those descendants of ex-Hindus, who, for the greed of power and money or fear, renounced their glorious faith and became converts, or those who are the descendants of those barbarous invaders who spoiled our very sacred land (and) demolished our sacred temples...The country cannot belong to them; if they are to live here, they must live here taking for granted Hindustan as the land of Hindu, of no-one else.⁸⁶

As I mentioned in the introduction, the nationalist struggle preceding independence contained two varieties of nationalism. First, a territorial concept of nationalism, upheld, popularised and fought for by the Indian National Congress. Second, a cultural nationalism based on language and religion, demanded by the Muslim League.⁸⁷ Whereas the Congress largely ignored the issue of cultural nationalism (and complicated the matter by giving into the demands of both Muslims and Hindus in favour of Urdu and Hindi respectively), the Muslim League sought to promote first, cultural, and, later, territorial nationalism. Savarkar's nationalism was a combination of the two concepts. He and his colleagues in the Hindu Mahasabha aimed at achieving both cultural and territorial supremacy. Hence, Savarkar was not an anti-Islamist *per se*, but a staunch uncompromising nationalist.

⁸⁵ The case in point is Savarkar's call to the Assamese to beat back Muslims from Assam. "Muslim trespassers old or new must be ejected to a man and no inch in Assam should be surrendered. It is by yielding inches in the past that the Hindus are challenged today to surrender the whole of Hindustan. Hindus of Assam are sons of those sires who beat back Aurangzeb's armies. Are they to yield today to these Muslim League rabble? Assam must continue as a valorous Hindu province discharging its ancient mission in defending and extending the eastern frontiers of Akhand Hindustan."

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, p. 195.

⁸⁶ Inder Prakash, *Where We Differ: The Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha*, New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthagar, 1942, p. 66.

⁸⁷ Prabha Dixit, 'The Ideology of the Hindu Right', in Thomas Pantham and Karl L. Deutsch (ed.), *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage, 1986, p. 131.

His opposition to the creation of Pakistan was a rather naive position. It not only highlights Savarkar's political immaturity but projects his lack of sensitivity to the dynamics of politics. It is not clear what Savarkar wanted to do with the 60 million Muslims whose lives might have been affected by his opposition to the creation of Pakistan. His repeated emphasis on *Akhanda Bharata* (undivided India) aimed simply at marginalisation of Muslims and Islamic identity and though he blamed Muslims for the country's ills, he had no specific agenda with which to deal with them.

Observing nationalist uprisings elsewhere in the world, we find two solutions which Savarkar could have found suitable to deal with the Muslims. First, the mass conversion of Muslims to or back to, Hinduism. Second, an ethnic cleansing or pogrom whereby the said population would be driven out of the country, or eliminated. Savarkar favoured the first alternative and greatly appreciated the practice of *suddhi* (conversion of Muslims to Hinduism).⁸⁸ However, this did not find much support among the Muslim masses and its implementation was rather cosmetic and posed serious threats of inter-communal violence. As for the second alternative, Savarkar would have found it extremely hard to convince the non-Muslims to support or participate in any Muslim pogrom. This was exemplified in the communal riots following the partition of India. The large-scale riots between

⁸⁸ Savarkar laments the failure of Hindus who managed to fight and take back territories which had fallen to Muslims but were then utterly negligent in reconverting the Muslims to Hinduism. "How regrettable it is that the Hindus, in spite of the Hindu rule, could conquer and crush Muslim thrones and crowns, but could not convert or even reclaim a few hundred Muslims back to Hinduism." Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Hindu Pad Padasahi*, p. 231.

Hindus and Muslims took place in the two frontier provinces of India where people harboured the memories of displacement. The Punjab in the West and Bengal in the East witnessed this gory episode. The rest of the country (even though there existed pockets of Muslims in Hindu-dominated areas and *vice versa*), remained largely unaffected.

Hence I conclude by saying that Savarkar's model of a Hindu nation-state was rather unimaginative, and the ideology concerning its achievement coarse. The crudeness of Savarkar's ideas reveals the limits of most forms of conservative nationalism. By employing rhetoric which focused on the Islamic threat, Savarkar succeeded in generating a Hindu upsurge, but he could not find a way of effectively channeling it into national mainstream politics. Ironically, his rhetoric on the supremacy of Hindus and Hindutva made sense only after the creation of Pakistan. Only then, with most of the Muslims living in a separate political territory, did his attack on Islam find an appeal. Separated by political boundaries, both Hindus and Muslims could identify each other in a clearer religious, cultural and political context, and then both communities fell victim to the corrupting logic of superior identity. Even if Savarkar overemphasized the polarity between Hindus and Muslims, his arguments contained some undeniable truths.

Bhikhu Parekh is of the opinion that 'a shared history is always an artificial creation or construction involving an anachronistic postulation of a continuing historical agent and a dubious retrospective teleology'. Most of the nationalist thinkers and politicians of India, bar Savarkar, appear to have taken a completely

opposite line to Parekh's. Whereas Savarkar's contemporaries glorified and spoke of the continuous harmony between Hindus and Muslims in almost every aspect of socio-cultural, religio-political and civil-military life, Savarkar demythified the concept and catalogued events contradicting this mutual and shared identity. The division of India is a testimony to this effect.

5.7. Savarkar and Hindu-Muslim unity

It may appear strange but Savarkar too considered the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity at one point. The only occasion in which Savarkar recognised an actuality of this unity was the great revolt of 1857, or the Sepoy Mutiny. He was so enamoured and captivated by this liberation effort against the British that he wrote an entire book about it, titled *The Indian War of Independence* in which he pieced together classified archival materials available in British libraries. There is a great contradiction in this work. In it, Savarkar, acknowledged a Hindu-Muslim cooperation...writing that the most notable feature of the 1857 revolt was the demonstration of the capacity and resilience of such diverse groups as 'Brahmin and Shudra, Hindus and Muslims to forget their petty quarrels and animosities for the sake of Hindustan'.⁸⁹ The book was written while Savarkar was a student of law in London and his major preoccupation was the end of British rule rather than the establishment of Hindu supremacy. In truth, Savarkar could not have undermined the contribution of the Muslim revolutionaries of 1857 who included Tatya Tope, Bahadur Shah Zafar, Moulvi Ahmed Shah, and Azimullah. It would indeed have

⁸⁹ V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthagar, 1986, pp. 436-7.

been impossible for any nationalist historian to ignore the Hindu-Muslim cooperation in this great war as it was too recent and still fresh in the nation's memory.

The issue presented a two-pronged dilemma for Savarkar. First, if he had recognized the Muslim contribution to the revolt unequivocally, his theory of Muslims as traitors would have seemed contradictory. Second, if he had to accept the Hindu-Muslim brotherhood during this revolt as something permanent, then his championing of safeguarding Hindu interest from Muslim encroachment would have become baseless. Hence, it can be said that he dealt with this historical truth rather tactfully.

As was apparent to Savarkar, the opposition to British government was so strong in 1857 that even religious teachers of both communities like Moulavis and Pandits spread the word of liberation traveling together from village to village, town to town and province to province.⁹⁰ Though there was a prevailing sense of Hindu-Muslim amity and unity in the 1857 revolt it did not push forward the idea of restoring Islamic rule. On the contrary, the broad goal of the revolt was to repel the British and afterward to the United States of India. Indeed, Muslim rule had already been routed by Hindu resurgence. In much clearer terms the 1857 war of independence paved the way for majoritarian rule. If that was so, how did Savarkar account for the popular restoration of Bahadur Shah Zafar to the Mogul throne as

⁹⁰ "No one individual, not one class alone had been moved deeply by seeing the sufferings of their country. Hindu and Muslim, Brahmin and Sudra, Kshatriya and Vaisya, Prince and pauper, men and women, Pandits and Moulvies, Sepoys and the police, townsmen and villagers, merchants and farmers, men of different religions, men of different castes, people following widely different professions-not able any longer to bear the slightest persecution of the Mother - brought about the avenging revolution in an incredibly short time. So universal was the agitation!" V. D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya, vol. V, p. 222.

Emperor of India on 11 May 1857 by both Muslims and Hindus? In Savarkar's opinion, this act was more symbolic than anything else. Moreover, he suggested, if the last Mughal Emperor was reinstated to the throne, by both Hindus and Muslims spoke, above all of Hindu generosity.⁹¹ For it would have been absurd for the Hindus to help re-establish Muslim rule which they themselves had been trying to uproot in the last three centuries preceding the 1857 revolt.⁹²

Hence the willingness, if strained of the Hindus to walk hand in hand with Muslims symbolised, paradoxically, the beginning of self determination for Hindus.⁹³ The restoration of the last Mogul to the throne sent out the following message.: 'that the long standing war between the Hindu and the Muslim had ended, that tyranny had ceased, and that the people of the soil were once more free to chose their own monarch. For, Bahadur Shah Zafar was raised by the free voice of the people, both Hindus and Muslims, civil and military, to be their Emperor and the head of the War of Independence. Therefore, on the 11th of May, this old venerable Bahadur Shah was not the old Mughal succeeding to the throne of Akbar or Aurangzeb-for that throne had already been smashed to pieces by the hammer of the Marathas-but he was the freely chosen monarch of a people battling for freedom against a foreign intruder.'⁹⁴

⁹¹ For details of this explanation see, V. D. Savarkar *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, in *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya*, vol. V, p. 59.

⁹² "The Mogul dynasty of old was not chosen by the people of the land. It was thrust upon India by sheer force, dignified by the name of conquest, and upheld by a powerful pack of alien adventurers and native self-seekers. It was not this throne that was restored to Bahadur Shah today. No, that would have been impossible... for then, it would have been in vain that blood of hundreds of Hindu martyrs had been shed in the three or four centuries preceding." *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p 59.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226. M.S. Golwalkar, a long-time leader of the Rashtriya Swyamsevak Sangh (RSS), a contemporary of Savarkar and a staunch advocate of the Hindu nation attributed the reinstatement of Bahadur Shah Zafar to the Mogul throne as "tactical error" of the Hindu leaders of the revolt. M. S.

Ultimately, Savarkar's paradoxical focus on the presence of Hindu-Muslim unity became unsupportable. The distancing of the Hindu and Muslim communities from each other, in fact, had only just begun in 1857. Assessing the *The Great War of Indian Independence 1857*, Suresh Sharma, an Indian nationalist theorist, suggests that although Savarkar highlighted the sense of unity between Hindus and Muslims, in the above work he was 'unable to perceive anything worthwhile either in Islam, or among the Muslims in India'⁹⁵ in the twentieth century. More importantly, they had become a 'threat more dangerous and insidious than even British rule'.⁹⁶ The translation of this psyche found resonance in Hindu withdrawal from the struggle of 1857 which largely determined the fate of the revolt.⁹⁷ This meant the acceptance of the continuation of British rule rather than return to atrocious native rule by Muslims.

Here it becomes clear how Savarkar's attitude was shaped by his time. While writing *The Indian War of Independence 1857*, Savarkar's image of the enemy was that of the British not Muslims. His companionship with Muslims while writing this book in London also was responsible for hints of Muslim amity towards Hindus in the work.⁹⁸ Moreover, 'Savarkar, like many European thinkers who used religion to

Golwalkar, *We, or Our Nationhood Defined*, Nagpur: Bharat Prakashan, 1939 (4th edn., 1949), p. 49.

⁹⁵ Suresh Sharma, *Savarkar's Quest for a Modern Hindu Consolidation*, p. 25. (An unpublished manuscript, kindly provided by Jyotirmay Sharma).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹⁷ For an exhaustive discussion, see Gyanendra Pandey, 'Which of Us are Hindus?' in Gyanendra Pandey (ed.), *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, New Delhi: Viking, 1993.

⁹⁸ Two of Savarkar's trusted friends in London, through whom Savarkar smuggled arms to India, were Muslims viz. Mirza Abbas and Sikandar Hyat Khan. These two and Asaf Ali Khan of Nabha were prominent members of Savarkar's anti-British platform, Abhinav Bharat Society, in London. Also, while in London, Savarkar espoused the cause of Islamic uprising in Morocco against Catholic Spanish colonialists. For a detailed account, see Keer, *op. cit.*, n. 6, pp. 32-50.

frame national identities, was not a pious man himself.’⁹⁹ One can also draw a parallel here between Savarkar and Jinnah on the basis of their ambiguity towards the “other” and their views on religion. Though an advocate of Islamic renewal, Jinnah’s trusted domestic help (driver-cook) was a Hindu who accompanied him to Pakistan after the division of India.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Savarkar records, in most honest terms, the help rendered him by a “Muslim convict” in Thane Jail. At a great personal risk this hardened criminal worked as an accomplice of Savarkar’s and volunteered to carry messages between Savarkar and his brother, who happened to be in the same prison.¹⁰¹

5.8. Conclusion

The ideology of Hindu nationalism was first codified in the 1920s in response to “what was perceived as a quite new and threatening level of Muslim organisation, preparedness and militancy.”¹⁰² True, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, M.S. Golwalkar, and Bipin Chandra Pal were some of the major theorists of Hindu nationalism. Yet, Savarkar’s discourse and activism surpassed every one of them. This study has argued that Savarkar was the father of the twentieth century Hindu nationalist movement. Although he was not successful in developing a coherent, consistent, viable framework to realise Hindu nationalist aspirations, most of his

⁹⁹ Ian Buruma, ‘India: The Perils of Democracy’, *The New York Review of Books*, vol. XLIV, Number 19, December 4, 1997, p. 17

¹⁰⁰ Hector Bolitho, *Jinnah: Creator of Pakistan*, London: John Murray, 1964.

¹⁰¹ For a full account of the above narration see, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *The Story of My Transportation for Life*, (translated from Marathi by V. Naik), Bombay: Sadbhakti, 1950, pp. 26-8.

¹⁰² G. Pandey, ‘Which of Us are Hindus?’ in G. Pandey (ed.), *Hindus and Others - The Question of Identity in India Today*, New Delhi: Viking, 1993, p. 244.

ideas on minority-majority relationships, state of the nation, and the socio-cultural fabric are liberally used by Hindu nationalists today.

Our understanding of Savarkar's perception of Muslims becomes far more crucial, because therein lies the key to understanding the Hindu perception of Muslims today. As an ideologue and spokesman of the interests of the majority Hindu, Savarkar put forward a vision which could "demolish the claims of national parity made by the Muslims, negate the territorial concept of nationhood made by the Indian National Congress, blunt the edge of the demands made by the depressed classes, and prevent further atomisation of Hindu community."¹⁰³ But, most important of all, Savarkar was guided by the same anxiety causing (mis)conceptions as his predecessors and contemporaries as to the future of the Hindus. One powerful idea in circulation then was a prediction about extinction of the Hindus as a religio-cultural group within the next 420 years.¹⁰⁴ I do not intend to assess the veracity of this scientific calculation but one can safely argue that prophecies like these were worrying indeed, and naturally necessitated the process of identity-building among a majority which was being relegated to the status of a minority. Like Swami Vivekananda, Dayanand Saraswati and Shradhananda, Savarkar was perplexed by the Hindu sense of inferiority and vulnerability in comparison to Muslims and Christians.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, Savarkar was against allowing India to become a

¹⁰³ Prabha Dixit, 'The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism', in Thomas Pantham & K. Deutsch (ed.), *Political Thought in Modern India*, New Delhi: Sage, 1986, p. 131.

¹⁰⁴ P. K. Datta, ' "Dying Hindus" - Production of Hindu Communal Common Sense in Early 20th Century Bengal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 June 1993, p. 1303. Datta, for example, cites the series of articles by U. N. Mukherjee in *Bengalee* circa 1909, which following the analysis of census data concluded that Hindus would disappear due to their steady decline in numbers in comparison to Muslims and Christians.

¹⁰⁵ Jaffrelot, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 24.

linguistic, religious or cultural melting pot. He intended a clear compartmentalisation of these three dimensions of identity. It is indeed debatable whether we can term this genuine and legitimate or extremist aspiration, for it was based on the yearning of the majority.

Savarkar located the greatest the threat to the Indian nation in the universalism of Islam. His insistence on the elimination of Islam from Indian frontiers, though bearing traces of chauvinism, had the aim of ensuring the people's right to their culture, religion and other socio-economic and political practices. Needless to say, seven hundred years of Islamic rule followed by the British colonial policy of appeasement toward Muslims, had gravely undermined Hindu interests. To top it all, the success of the nationalist uprising against the British was greatly in doubt. Savarkar's virulent attack against Islam and Muslims was a product of the "helplessness" felt by the Hindu community. His call for an undivided India *sans* Muslims did not gel with any brand of nationalism except perhaps supremacism. In reality, there may have been some amount of paranoia in Savarkar's fears that the entire land mass from north Africa to the Philippines would be absorbed into the world of Islam, but his emphasis on transforming India into a kind of fortress against the march of Islam may have been well justified.

Savarkar did not intend the Hindu nation to be imperialistic or to drive the Muslims out. What he insisted on was the re-initiation or conversion of Indian Muslims in India to their Hindu past. He wanted them to dig deep into their identity, regard their centuries of adventure with Islam as an aberration, and, most

importantly, recognize the falsity that existed within Islam. Such a call was largely unrealistic, of course. True, some Muslims turned back to the Hindu fold following Savarkar's logic but his argument failed at any deep penetration into the world of Indian Muslims.

Kala Pani, one of Savarkar's earlier utopian treatises on the resurrection of the Hindus as an homogenised whole has moved closer to actualisation. Though there still exist many divisions within Hindu society, when it comes to future confrontation with the Muslims, Hindus are now in possession of a much more unified identity. The intended theme of *Kala Pani* was to provide Hindus with a warning against possible Muslim attacks on Hindus which could lead to their annihilation. Though such a notion appears over-exaggerated, in recent years a great number of Hindus have come to regard Muslims as their sworn enemies. Also, the political projection in *Kala Pani* of Hindus uniting as a spirited and uncompromising whole is indeed amply employed in contemporary Hindu nationalist thought, aspiration, and political programme.

Lack of a viable strategy to neutralise the Muslims and the pressure of the Muslim League saw the division of India into two states. It was an event which could not have been obviated. Savarkar's continuous accusation of Muslims as traitors found an audience following the emergence of Pakistan. His statement "Pakistan as a standing menace to India"¹⁰⁶ was even accepted by secularists like Nehru. The sentiments expressed by him, that for "every aggressive step taken by Pakistan,

¹⁰⁶ Telegram to this effect sent by Savarkar to Nehru, August 1951. For details, see Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, *Historic Statements*, p. 235.

whether military or otherwise, must be met by prompt reprisals, military or otherwise, kind for kind, measure for measure”,¹⁰⁷ and the continuation of such a defensive policy by successive Indian governments testifies to Hindu animosity towards Pakistani Muslims and Islam continues to play a divisive role within India today. In spite of the division of India and the creation of Pakistan and Bangladesh as two Islamic states, India has not been able to shed its Islamic past: India still continues to hold the third-largest Muslim population in the world. Savarkar’s perception of Islam demands further exploration when we bear this final fact in mind.

¹⁰⁷ Savarkar’s telegram to this effect sent to N. C. Chatterjee, Member of Parliament on his election success to Lok Sabha (the lower house of Indian parliament), dated 28 December 1963. For a detailed discussion, see *Historic Statements*, pp. 242-3.

Chapter VI

British appraisal of Muslim rule and Islam and the nationalist imagination

In the course of piecemeal adjustment to various factors and exigencies of the Indian situation, the British government did strike on policies and actions calculated to sustain and accentuate the differences between Hindus and Muslims.

- *Beni Prasad*

6.1. Introduction

Religion is one of the principal causes of social conflict in India today. It is generally agreed that the ongoing discord between Hindus and Muslims can be attributed on the one hand to their religious difference and on the other to the history of Muslim rule. Any attempt to reconcile the overtly volatile divergence between Hindus and Muslims is marred by consistent and continuous mentioning of the atrocities committed by the Muslim rulers against their Hindu subjects. There is a scholarly agreement that the reluctance of India's majority Hindus to reconcile with their past is a result of Islam that characterised the Muslim rule, the overwhelming disparity between Hinduism and Islam, and a biased and oversimplified interpretation of this complex relationship by the British historiography. Truly, the past is used as prologue owing to the fact that the Muslims follow a religion that sanctioned the gross injustice against non-Muslims and the continuing apprehensions regarding the uncompromising nature of Islam and its followers. In fact, it is the actions of

particular religious communities in the historical past which are summoned to justify and perpetrate the conflict.¹ Though there is no bar against any community remembering its past, it is crucial to note how it remembers the past. By all accounts Hindus did not maintain any comprehensive and consistent written record of Muslim rule. The question to ask, therefore, would be what is the basis of their understanding of this particular period. Furthermore, if they seek out their past by using a yardstick of assessment and interpretation which is not their own, how correct are they in their positions?

That the British rule and the British historians' interpretation of Muslim rule in a certain way is responsible for the continuing inter-religious tension is a familiar argument of nationalist and secular historians of India. The theory of perpetual hostility between Hindus and Muslim was part of the coordinated colonial policy to "divide and rule" is the best explanation provided in this direction. But this does not satisfy our query as to: Why fifty years after independence India has failed to free itself from the British interpretation and there is a constant reference to it? Why is the continuing appeal of British assessment? Is it because it provides basis to some existing Hindu notions of their past? Can the British interpretation be the only source of this hostility? In this chapter I shall analyse the assessment of India's Islamic past by five British historians between 1780-1880. I have selected these historians keeping in view their contribution to the colonial policy and different periods they covered. The second section of this chapter assess the importance of British historiography and explains why it was accepted by the Indian leaders. It also throws

¹ The ongoing attack on Christian communities and missionaries by Hindu extremists is entirely of a different nature.

light on the oral historiographic tradition and how it colluded with the British interpretation Muslim rule. The conclusion that is drawn in this analysis is that the nationalist narrative on Muslim rule and Islam was a product of twin inheritance. At one level it is British interpretation of India's past and its dissemination among the elites and the educated that shaped nationalist imagination. But equally importantly, circumstance dependent reasons, folk sociology and tradition-bound oral narrative too contributed towards this construction.

One might raise a question here i.e. why should we blame British historiography or even the colonial policy of 'divide and rule' if oral narrative only confirmed British interpretation. Indeed, if Muslim rule was bad (as they were), one should thank the British for acquainting Indians of this aspect. However, in defence one could also argue that oral history is highly selective. Folk memory often records only traumas, atrocities, gross violation of rights and other such unfortunate events. Moreover, folk memory is habitually prejudiced if the subject community follows a contrasting and conflicting way of life and belief system compared to their rulers. These are complex historical realities and cannot be oversimplified just in terms of *negative* and *positive* relationship. While assessing and interpreting these situations historians are expected to be neutral and balanced. Such an approach, however, was not forthcoming among British historians. They ignored the fact that Muslim rule was a mixed bag. They took a negative view of it and over the years a discourse was built on it. In addition, such a selective interpretation was highly beneficial to the colonial administration. British administration not only freely used it but actively

encouraged such interpretation when threats of Hindu-Muslim coalition against it appeared imminent.

The challenges to a pluralist multicultural vision of India's past, therefore, came from two different directions. Since both the narratives complemented each other it was impossible for the nationalist thinkers not to have a disparaging attitude towards Muslim rule and Islam. This disparaging perception ultimately affected their discourse on Hindu-Muslim relationship. The most natural outcome of this, of course, was a half-hearted attempt by the concerned thinkers to sketch a synthesised past, that was open to both general skepticism and scholarly criticism.

6.2. Alexander Dow

Alexander Dow (1735-1798) was one of that earlier breed of British historians who realised the importance of understanding India's immediate past for the furtherance of the colonial trade and political interests. Any long term British economic and political interest in India, Dow believed, made it obligatory for the British to know India's past. The British sense of Indian history prior to Alexander Dow's arrival on the scene, was confined to the Mughal era. They looked upon the pre-Mughal Indo-Muslim history as aberrations or as isolated episodes in the history of Central Asian, Turkish and West Asian Arab expansion.² In his three volume *History of Hindoostan* (1768-72), Dow sought to rectify some of his predecessors' failings and treated the

² J. S. Grewal, *The Muslim Rule in India: The Assessment of British Historians*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 10.

whole Islamic adventure in India as one long episode albeit marred by occasional ruptures.

Dow was very much a part of the spirit of enlightenment sweeping over Europe at the time (mid-eighteenth century). In the context of the political, the spirit of enlightenment was the separation of religion and politics, constitutional monarchy, a limited state and individual liberty. Dow's treatment and interpretation of Muslim rule was largely influenced by this spirit. He despised the marriage of religion with politics and showered praise on secular administration. He derided the Asiatic absolute despotism and made Islam responsible for it.³ At the same time, Dow's reflections sprang from purely humanistic concepts. For example, the Turko-Afghan invasion of India from the time of Sultan Mahmud, Dow considered, was primarily due to the geographical region they belonged to and the psychological traces it left on them.⁴ A harsh climate, limited wealth and tribal hostility had much to do with the Turko-Afghan invasion of India and the ensuing carnage, pillage, looting and all other gory events that accompanied it. Still, Dow showed little or no appreciation of the political stamp the Turko-Afghans had left on India.

The same enlightened values which forced Dow to dismiss the Turko-Afghan rule was also responsible for his positive attitude towards the Mughals. He regarded all the great Mughals, bar Aurangzeb, to have expressed some amount of secularism

³ Alexander Dow, *The History of Hindoostan* vol. III (1772), pp. xiii -xx.

⁴ Grewal sums up Dow's interpretation of Turko-Afghan character rather well: "The expansion or recession of their Empire depended largely on the vigor or degeneration of the ruling princes. Their government reflected their native character: they were oppressive and tyrannical because of their pride and passions. Unrestrained by reason they indulged themselves in excessive pleasure amidst the wealth and luxury of Hindustan and political degeneration followed upon their excessive indulgence." Grewal, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 17.

and rational thinking. Though the rule of law and constitutional monarchy was dear to Dow and he considered these to be the best form of government, he nonetheless praised the absolute Mughals for maintaining political stability and allowing a reasonably good standard of life to their subjects. Dow did not discount the fact that Mughal era was marked by despotism, but he regarded it as enlightened and benevolent absolutism. Citing the example of Akbar, Dow would highlight the predominance of secular humanistic principles which could be achieved only through this despotism. The same enlightened and secular spirit that took the Mughals to new heights also brought them back to earth when they distanced themselves from it. Weak public character, low morale and, above all, a religious and communal view of politics, according to Dow, marked the decline and eventual fall of the Mughal empire.

The non-Muslims received very little attention in Dow's work on Muslim India. He was essentially concerned with the power structure and naturally ignored the masses. The Muslim rulers and ruling houses were again held up to the western enlightened way of life and governance in Dow's assessment. Thus the Afghans, thanks to their brutality and crude mannerism, were portrayed in low light compared to the Mughals. At a time, when the Mughal authority was in shambles, the British had not yet made their political entry and the Afghans were preparing for a take over of India, Dow was decidedly in favour of supplanting the Mughals with overt British intervention.

Dow's overall perception of Muslim rule in India was paradoxical. Those who conformed to his own enlightened attitude were praised and those who deviated from it were meted out harsh criticism. In that historical time when the British were seriously assessing the economic and political involvement of the East India company in India, Dow's interpretations were crucial. As one critic has pointed out, Dow's praise of the Mughals was partly due to 'his own imperialistic aspirations as a member of the British nation'.⁵ He regarded the golden age of the Mughals as at par with the contemporary British age. But turning to the contemporary political situation he suspected the capability of any native ruling house or community to provide an enlightened and benevolent rule which Britain could grant. The expansionist ambitions of fanatic Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali, dreaming of giving a 'third dynasty' of Emperors to Hindustan,⁶ had a strong bearing on Dow making calculated arguments in favour of British political expansion.

Dow emphasised that apart from a selected few, most Muslim rulers neglected and persecuted their subjects. By nature these rulers were cruel and recalcitrant and did not hesitate to use force against the subject community that happened to follow a different life style and religious belief compared to the ruling community. He was again preferential in his treatment of the history of Muslim rule. Since British were making slow overtures towards the last of the Mughals for trade and political concession Dow was unsympathetic and biased against all the non-Mughal Muslim rulers. The overall picture of Muslim rule that Dow painted was

⁵ Grewal, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 20.

⁶ Dow, *History of Hindustan*, vol. II, p. 382.

disparaging. Although Dow's account was not extensively referred to by the succeeding generation of British historians, his account nonetheless was instrumental in interpreting Indian history in terms of religion i.e. Muslim rule. It also established a tradition of portraying Muslim rule in low light.

6.3. James Mill

James Mill (1773-1836) occupies a crucial position in British historiography on India. Though not a pioneer or the first general historian of India, Mill was the first British historian to give 'a comprehensive treatment to Indian history as a whole',⁷ an effort that earned him the honour of being 'the first historian of India'.⁸ His avowed goal was to provide a complete history of India. The most widely revered nineteenth century British historian, Mill, not only analysed Indian civilisation but also assessed and interpreted its past in its entirety.

Mill's periodisation of Indian history is especially significant. He was the first British historian who clearly divided India's past into Hindu, Muslim and British periods. What is important is that almost a third of his work (approximately half of the narrative on pre-British period) is devoted to the Muslim conquest and rule. Mill was a rationalist and a utilitarian. But his academic pursuit had a purpose. To his critics this pursuit was crooked, to his admirers a benevolent exposition of truth. It is imperative to mention that to Mill the history of civilization was of far more importance than political history. 'His science of civilization was not simply a tool

⁷ Grewal, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 69.

⁸ Alexander Bain, *James Mill: A Biography*, New York: Harper & Row, 1967, p. 178.

for dissecting past civilizations; it was an instrument for change towards greater civilization in the future.’⁹ This led him to consign the Hindu civilization to pre-history¹⁰ (for its absurdities, myths and exaggerations), the Indo-Islamic civilisation to that of history and the British or European civilization to meta-history. Though Mill ascribed distinct civilisational traits to the Hindus, Muslims and British none could be understood fully without comparison with each other. This was more so in the case of Hindu and Muslim India. J. S. Grewal highlights this feature rather well:

Mill’s treatment of Muslim Indian history is quite inseparable from his discussion of Hindu civilization. Assuming the existence of two distinct societies in pre-British India, he instituted a formal comparison between all the aspects of the Hindu and Muslim civilizations in India; he compared the social structure, government, laws, economy, religion, philosophy, sciences and technology, literature and arts, morals and manners and historiography of the Indo-Muslims with those of the Hindus. Mill’s assessment of Muslim achievement was thus related to his assessment of Hindu civilization.¹¹

On matters relating to religion, Mill concluded, the superiority of Muslim faith was beyond doubt or dispute.¹² The Hindu laws and customs, too, Mill pointed out ‘could not originate in any other than one of the weakest conditions of the human intellect.’¹³ Whereas the Islamic law as introduced in India by the Muslim conquerors, though lacking, was indeed of very high standard of excellence. In the

⁹ Grewal, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 71.

¹⁰ For instance, Mill remarked: “By conversing with the Hindus of the present day, we, in some measure, converse with the Chaldeans and Babylonians of the time of Cyrus; with the Persians and Egyptians of the time of Alexander.” James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. II, p. 190. In a way Mill came to this grand conclusion that ‘civilized India belonged to the realm of legends and myths.’ James Mill, *The History of British India*, London: Cradock Baldwin and Paternoster-Row Joy, 1820, vol. II, pp. 136-45.

¹¹ Grewal, *op. cit.*, n. 2, pp. 69-70.

¹² Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, p. 720.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 710-11.

field of infrastructural development and scientific temperament the Hindu fared little better.¹⁴

Similarly, while making a character sketch of Hindus and Muslims Mill conferred the highest accolades on Muslims. The Hindu in Mill's classification held the position of a eunuch,¹⁵ whereas his counterpart, though a despot, exuded all the qualities of manliness.¹⁶ The Muslim superiority, according to Mill, was unquestioned for the simple fact that it upheld the principles of equality as against the caste-ridden Hinduism. In other words, in Mill's account and interpretation the Islamic rule was superior, better, necessary and, most importantly, native¹⁷ to India.

Whereas Mill's predecessors¹⁸ regarded the Muslim invasion and conquest of India as a result of internal degradation among Hindus marked by the absolutism of Brahmins and Kshatriyas, Mill denied any sophistication to Hindus altogether and saw the conquest as something inevitable. Hindus, to him, lived the life of backward

¹⁴ "In making roads and bridges, one of the most important of all the applications of human labour and skill, the Hindus before the invasion of Mahomedan appear to have gone very little beyond the state of the most barbarous nations." Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, p. 722.

¹⁵ "In the point of address and temper, the Mahomedan is less soft, less smooth and winning than the Hindu. In truth, the Hindu, like the eunuch excels in the qualities of a slave. The indolence, the security, the pride of the despot, political or domestic find less to hurt them in the obedience of the Hindu, than in that of almost any other portion of the species. The Mahomedans are profuse, when possessed of wealth, and devoted to pleasure; the Hindus are almost always penurious and ascetic." Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, pp. 720-1.

¹⁶ "There was in the manners of the Mahomedan conquerors of India, an activity, a manliness, an independence, which rendered it less easy for despotism to sink, among them, to that distrusting state of weak and profligate barbarism, which is the natural condition of government among such a passive people as the Hindus." *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 704.

¹⁷ See for instance, Mill's sanctification of the Mughal dynasty. "The Mughal government was to all the effects of interest, and hence of behaviour, not a foreign but a native government." *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 700.

¹⁸ These predecessors of James Mill include some seventeenth century British historians and evangelists working in India such Charles Grant, Henry Martyn, Henry Dundas, William Wilberforce, Hanna More etc. As I have mentioned earlier, Mill's work on India was primarily based on the accounts of some of these historians and evangelists.

savages whose subjugation by the advanced Muslims was necessary and inescapable. Moreover, unlike some of his predecessors who highlighted aspects of Hindu-Muslim interaction in the socio-cultural realm, Mill was skeptical of any such intercourse.

Addressing the question of civilisational superiority and inferiority Mill was guided by Gibbon.¹⁹ Gibbon in his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* constantly posed the superiority of the Christian civilisation over the Islamic civilisation. All other civilisations in Gibbon's view were negligible or those that existed only in antiquity. Mill made a similar judgment while analysing the Islamic, Hindu and Christian civilisations. Hindu civilisation, in Mill's view, was 'inferior' to both Islamic and Christian civilisation.²⁰ After this sweeping generalisation he ventured to find out whether Hindu civilisation received 'advancement' or 'depression' from the Muslims.

Since Mill assigned the middle strata of his civilisational pyramid to the Muslims, Hindus being at the bottom naturally found themselves wanting. Mill did not exactly address the question of Hindu 'advancement' or 'decline' following the arrival of Islam in India, but devoted a good deal of energy to pin-point the excellence or pre-eminence of this 'foreign' over the 'indigenous' culture. His utilitarian belief led him to ask the most fundamental of all questions i.e. whether the Islamic government in India provided the greatest happiness to the greatest number

¹⁹ Mill, vol. II, pp. 424-5. Mill does not actually mention Gibbon here. However, from his allusions and referrals to Gibbon it is understood and obvious that Mill was indeed paying respects to the former's classification and was in general agreement with him on this matter.

²⁰ In Mill's view Muslim's were far more superior compared to Hindus in all spheres of civilized social, economic, political, religious and cultural life. For details, see Mill, *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 425-8

or should the pre-Islamic Hindu rulers be given credit for it. In Mill's estimation, though Oriental despotism was common to both Hindu and Muslim governments, Muslims allowed far more 'diversity of form' in the working of the government than their Hindu predecessors. The Mughals, according to him, were forebears of the principle of happiness to the masses. Hence Islamic rule was better than the Hindu rule.²¹ Those who discredited Mughal rule as 'foreign' and were apathetic simply harboured 'a prejudice which reason disclaims'.²²

Mill's chief interest was in the study of civilisation. This prevented him from paying the required attention to the political history of Muslim India. The Hindu civilisation, to him, was incomprehensible, backward, irrational and consisted of antiquated visions and myths. Having dismissed it in such a manner he had little or no patience to explore its various dimension, let alone appreciate them. Because of this impatience and haste, as his biographer Hayman Wilson points out, 'the bow was bent too far in the opposite direction, and Mill tried to exalt the Muslims in order to disparage the Hindus'.²³

Mill's portrayal of Hindus in a low light, however, had far reaching consequences. On the one hand it created Hindu-Muslim divide. On the other, such interpretation forced Hindus to hate Muslims. Friedrich Max Mueller was not far from the truth when he described James Mill's *The History of British India* as responsible for some of the greatest misfortunes that had happened to India.²⁴ By all

²¹ Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. II, p. 428.

²² *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 428.

²³ See, A. Bain, *James Mill*, p. 177. Also, Hayman. H. Wilson's own work *History of British India* (1840 edn.), vol. II, p. 522.

²⁴ See, Max Mueller's *India, what it can teach us?* Lecture II.

accounts, James Mill's *History* was biased and at times dismissive towards certain sections of Indian society. Published in 1817 during the early days of British colonialism in India its purpose seems to have been the promotion of the notion of the benevolent superiority of the British.

By reducing the Hindus to a race of ignoble characters,²⁵ he sanctified Muslim rule and made Muslims appear superior. Simultaneously he put the Muslim rule in dock while comparing it with the Western or European civilisation.²⁶ In his construction of a framework in which the Hindus appear inferior, the Muslims superior and the British the uppermost, Mill seem to have struck a balance which would go a long way in preserving and promoting colonial rule.

To go back to our original interest i.e. the assessment and interpretation of Indian history, Mill divided it into various sections. According to Mill, the history of pre-British India can be defined in terms of religion or more significantly on the basis of ruling Islamic community and the subject Hindus. Hindus in this picture constituted a race of pathetic, ignorant and uncivilized beings with a flair for myths, legends and exaggerations. In contrast, Muslims were intelligent, civilised with an acute sense of fair play and superiority. They were the ones who rescued India from ignoble darkness and led it towards a superior nationhood where its achievements

²⁵ "The wildness and inconsistency of the Hindu statements evidently place them beyond the sober limits of truth and history; yet it has been imagined, if their literal acceptance must of necessity be renounced, that they at least contain poetical or figurative delineation of real events, which ought to be studied for the truths it may disclose. The labour and ingenuinity which have been bestowed upon this inquiry, unfortunately have not been attended with an adequate reward. No suppositions, however gratuitous, have sufficed to establish a consistent theory. Every explanation has failed. the Hindu legends still present a maze of unnatural fictions, in which a series of real events can by no artifice be traced." Mill, *The History of India*, vol. I, pp. 27-8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 709-10.

were marked in fields such as arts, literature, architecture, science, legal system and administrative reform.

Mill showed no discomfort with regard to Muslim atrocity against Hindus. In fact, on some occasions, his interpretation appears to be supporting Muslim invasion and carnage as that helped crush Hindu pride and vain glory.²⁷ Though Mill can be defended as a rationalist who had little or no regard for idol worship and myths, his usage of language and vocabulary in describing incidences of Muslim campaign against such practices might appear perverted. Moreover, he appears to have provided a positive vocabulary to describe Muslim campaign against Hindus and their way of life.²⁸ Subsequent British historiography, which will be analysed later, described the same incidents while maintaining a sympathetic attitude towards Hindus. Interestingly, this post-Millian historiography coincided with the phase when the Hindus asserted their majority position in the Indian polity and demanded a share in the power-play by virtue of their numerical strength.

Mill saw little or no interaction between Hindus and Muslims during Muslim rule. The absence of synthesis according to him was not because Hindus and

²⁷ Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni was enraged when he was informed of two of his border provinces engaged in idolatry of worshipping lions. On hearing this "the zeal of the religious sultan immediately took fire. Having speedily brought to reason the disrespectful provinces, he marched to Lahore, which he gave up to pillage." James Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, p. 533. Similarly, notice the use of language in describing Mahmud's Somnath expedition: "The twelfth expedition of the Ghazinan monarch was undertaken in the year 1024. He had heard not only of the great riches and supposed sanctity of the temple of Somnath, but of the presumption of its priests, who had boasted that other places had yielded to the power of Mahmud, by reason of their impiety; but if he dared to approach Somnath, he would assuredly meet the reward of his temerity." Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, pp. 533-4.

²⁸ For example, Mill's description of Sultan Mahmud's expedition to Gujrat to bring its people to subjugation and to destroy the myth surrounding the fabled Somnath temple of Hindus. *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 534.

Muslims hated each other, but solely due to the fact that Hindus had nothing to contribute or offer to the superior culture of the Muslims. No doubt Muslims depended on Hindus in their day-to-day administration, argues Mill. This dependence, however, was owing to the fact that Muslims in India were a minority ruling over a majority of Hindus. Hence they appointed certain Hindus to act as channels of administration,²⁹ a role similar to that of slave-leaders working for white landowners in the seventeenth century southern United States.

Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to point out that though an ardent rationalist Mill's interpretation had a profit motive.³⁰ His rendition of Muslim superiority over Hindus coincided with the East India company's struggle for consolidation of power in India. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, though the power and prestige of Islamic sovereignty over India was fragmented and in many cases questioned, Muslims nevertheless were still considered the spokesmen for the Indian government. Mill's intervention at this juncture seem to be aiming at creating a favourable atmosphere for the transfer of power from the fragmented Muslim gentry to the company. Therefore he paid little or no attention to the Hindus and ignored their position in this power-play.

²⁹ The only occasion when Mill makes a note of Hindu participation in the Muslim rule is in the field of revenue. This, he observed, is too lowly and unimportant to be held in high esteem. *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 719-20

³⁰ James Mill was actively associated with the East India Company's and was receiving regular salary from it. His services included that of formulation, projection and promotion of its policies. For a good discussion, see J. P. Guha's biographical note on James Mill in *The History of British India*, p. xii.

On a broader plain, one can argue, that James Mill's interpretation of Indian history created a sense of inferiority among the Hindus.³¹ His interpretation of Muslims as the forebears of a superior civilisation and carriers of superior human qualities did not create respect for Muslims among Hindus. On the contrary, it helped nurture hatred and animosity towards Muslims. Upper caste Hindus who considered they were unjustly treated by Muslims felt doubly humiliated by Mill's account. Mill's *History* gave a severe jolt to the Hindu sense of pride and superiority. It was painful for all those who had resisted centuries of Muslim oppression to encounter an interpretation which subjected them to further humiliation and condemnation. And as Romila Thapar has pointed out, Mill's *History* remained influential for Indian writers and nationalists precisely because 'it laid the foundation for a communal interpretation of Indian history and thus provided the historical justification for the two-nation theory. Furthermore, Mill's ridicule and condemnation of Hindus 'led a section of the Orientalists and later to Indian historians having to defend "Hindu civilisation" even if it meant over-glorifying the ancient past.'³²

Mill asked the most crucial of all questions: Whether the civilisation of the Hindus received 'advancement' or 'depression' following Muslim ascendancy over them?³³ and laid the foundation for future contention. Observing their myths, legends, and most importantly, antiquity ridiculed and reduced to the level of derision, Hindus took refuge in intense soul searching. To have been suppressed and

³¹ Considering the fact that Mill's three volume work was the standard prescribed text in colonial India and was avidly read by Indians this argument cannot be undermined.

³² Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and Writings of Indian History*, New Delhi: PPH, 1969, p. 4.

³³ Mill, *The History of British India*, vol. I, p. 697.

ruled by a minority is one thing, but being considered fortunate for this rule is quite another. Having paid greatest attention to Muslims, Mill no doubt was amply clear in his question as to the Hindu 'advancement' or 'depression' from Muslim rule. His interpretation of Hindu and Muslim history demanded that Hindus look up to the Muslims for their well-being and consider themselves fortunate for having been blessed by a superior people with a superior civilisation. Though Mill succeeded in his avowed goal of providing a safe ground for the company hegemony by placating the Muslims (by boosting their ego), he unknowingly sowed the seeds for future Hindu hegemony over both British and Muslims. The scathing criticism against Hindus in Mill's work affected the nationalist thought especially in the case of Vivekananda and Savarkar. His *History of India* was avidly read and referred to by Hindus. The call for consolidation of Hindu identity and to take pride in India's Hindu past by different nationalist thinkers, therefore, have had its roots in Mill's negative portrayal of the Hindus.

My stated argument that British historians were responsible for maintaining a negative attitude to Muslim rule and Islam may come under closer scrutiny in the context of Mill. What I suggest in Mill's interpretation is that although he was more disparaging towards Hindus; his narrative nonetheless highlighted the barbarity and atrocity of Muslim rule. Mill was judgmental in his interpretation and biased too. This affected Indian's understanding of Muslim rule. Also, Mill's interpretation helped Hindus identify the negative character of Muslim rule and Islam and from it they proceed to form their own judgment. Furthermore, Mill's self-satisfied

argument on the desecration of Hindu memorial sites by Muslims only confirmed the selective folk memory and was greatly damaging to Hindu-Muslim relationship.

6.4. Mountstuart Elphinstone

Though there were several other historical works on India during Mill's time, Mill remained the undisputed authority on India's past for the better half of the nineteenth century. In spite of its original and provocative character, however, the ascendancy of Mill's *History of India* was challenged within a decade of his death. The historian who replaced Mill and left an equally lasting legacy was Mountstuart Elphinstone. An employee in the Company's service, Elphinstone had a varied job experience in India. He started his career at the age of sixteen as a writer in the Company in 1795 and at the time of his resignation in 1827 he was serving as the Governor of Bombay. The nature of his job required him to learn the native languages, customs, culture and even develop interest in colonial and local politics. This in later years, after his retirement, would serve him well in writing the two volume *History of India* (1841). If the number of reprints and approbations are the benchmark of success or failure of a work, Elphinstone's *History of India* witnessed it far many more times than Mill's.³⁴ Elphinstone was not a historian by profession. Neither did he seek any profit from his writing: he had achieved all the worldly gains by the time he set out to write it.

³⁴ First published in 1841 (1250 copies) *The History of India* went into four editions during Elphinstone's lifetime alone. It was republished several more times soon after his death. Critics would hail it as the "best standard work" for over half-a-century. J. W. Kaye *Lives of Indian Officers* (London: 1904) vol. I, p. 440. To some others Elphinstone's history 'was the best history of India to appear in English'. D. Forbes *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952, p. 133.

In the realm of British historiography on India Elphinstone had a significant and lasting contribution and continues to have an appeal. Elphinstone's success in this regard could be attributed to several different factors. First, being a free-willed romantic he did not strictly adhere to any single school of British historiography on Muslim India. Elphinstone was a theist, and did not share the same temperament of evangelist historians or their attitude towards India. He also harboured a sneaking suspicion of the true intentions of Utilitarians. "The Evangelical movement left him unmoved; and the Utilitarians left him unconvinced."³⁵ In more certain terms, he was an enlightened intellectual largely free of dogmas, prejudices and lofty ideals and a prisoner of humane values and aesthetic motives. Second, his Indian history was a mirror image of his personal attitude to people, events and matters. Therefore, his perception of Muslim rule in India, which formed the bulk of his work, was mostly objectively neutral, balanced in its criticism and admiration. Third, since Elphinstone was generally objectively neutral the colonial administration chose to use it as the source book of history teaching in the Indian universities. Perhaps it is the third reason which accounts for Elphinstone's lasting legacy. The teaching of Elphinstone's *History of India*³⁶ coincided roughly with the birth and youth of the first generation of nationalist leaders. This work also provided much material for indigenous and vernacular writing on India's past.³⁷

³⁵ Grewal, *op.cit.*, n. 2, p. 164.

³⁶ Elphinstone's *History* remained the standard and most widely read British account of India well until the first decade of twentieth century. This was replaced in 1910 following the publication of Vincent A. Smith's *Oxford Students' History of India*, Oxford: OUP, 1910.

³⁷ See for instance, Partha Chatterjee's analysis of 19th century Bengali historiography, where he mentions the indigenous historian Tarinicharan's description of Islamic rule which bears almost verbatim resemblances to that of Elphinstone's account. Partha Chatterjee, 'Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of British Historiography in Bengal', in David Hardiman and David Arnold (eds.), *Subaltern Studies, VIII*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 35-7.

Mill was a victim of passion and prejudice in his treatment of a people and their culture, religion, society and polity. By contrast, it is only in some rare occasions that Elphinstone made an interpretation that was coloured. Moreover, this was more balanced and was often healthy. In a way, the mistakes committed by Mill helped Elphinstone avoid repeating them. Mill's shallow understanding of Hindus was too pronounced to ignore. Elphinstone was critical of it and sought to rectify this mistake in his own way.³⁸ He 'aimed at a clear and concise synopsis of India's past for the general reader'.³⁹ Though a general historian of the Islamic period, Elphinstone, for one, did not have much regard for pre-Mughal Islamic rule. For instance, while he devoted six volumes to the three hundred year Mughal rule, the four hundred year old history of pre-Mughal India were narrated just in two volumes.⁴⁰ Though short, his treatment and interpretation of pre-Mughal Islamic conquests and the eventual establishment of several different dynasties was never sketchy. His razor sharp analysis, for instance, established the fact that Qutub-ud-din Aibak (1206-90), the first slave ruler of Delhi established a true Indo-Muslim kingdom independent of any outside contact or connection.⁴¹

Compared to his predecessors and contemporaries Elphinstone was better suited and better equipped to provide an assessment of Islam in India. Soon after his

³⁸ Elphinstone was of the opinion that Mill in order to 'Benthamize' his project on India had given a harsh and negative image of Hindus, *Elphinstone's Journal*, 7 June 1841, quoted in, T. E. Colebrooke, *The Life of Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone*, vol. II, London: Trubner, 1884, p. 355.

³⁹ Grewal, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 135.

⁴⁰ These were also rather short: the first one, covering the Afghan marauders and rulers from Ghazni in the name of Ghaznavis and Ghors, had one hundred and thirty-one pages, and the second book, covering the rise of Slave dynasty till the ascendance of Mughals the throne of Delhi in 1526, had mere ninety-two pages.

⁴¹ Elphinstone, *The History of British India*, vol. II, pp. 1 & 605.

resignation from the Company administration in 1827, he went back to England by way of Persia, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Greece - the heart of Islam.⁴² This journey, which took almost two years, allowed Elphinstone the opportunity to observe other contemporary Islamic societies and helped enrich his understanding of the Islamic situation as a whole. In this regard, his predecessors and contemporaries were comparatively less privileged in assessing and providing an overall picture of Muslim rule in India. Evaluating the face of Islam in these countries, he would remark: "The Muslims seem to have converted all their subjects, and to have made no compromise with infidel communities". However, turning to India, Elphinstone would observe that the penetration of Islam is only knee-deep and 'at one time Muslims in India were turning infidels themselves'.⁴³ He attributed the slow progress of Islam and its comparatively mild and tolerant interface to the very passive nature and character of Hindu faith and the society.

Elphinstone did not see only confrontation between Hindus and Muslims upon the arrival of Islam but perceived a slow compromise at work. He condemned the religious bigotry of many rulers but also admired the trust some of these rulers bestowed on their Hindu generals or ministers. The earliest of the Muslim governments in India, the Arab government of Sind, was inter-racial and interreligious in nature and its policies were marked by prudence and conciliation: Qasim the Muslim ruler, for example, had Hindu princes in his war campaigns for the consolidation of his rule and even had a Hindu called Dahir, as the his prime

⁴² MSS. Eur. F. 88, Journal 25 February 1830 (Mountstuart Elphinstone Papers, London: Commonwealth Relations Office Library).

⁴³ Elphinstone to Erskine, quoted in , T. E. Colebrooke, *Life of the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinstone*, vol. II, London: Trubner, 1884, p. 348.

minister whom he appointed 'on the express ground that he would be best qualified to protect old rights, and to maintain established institutions'.⁴⁴ Similarly, though Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni had a fierce reputation for being the 'the greatest scourge of idolatry', a 'religious fanatic', a 'Hindu-hater' and a 'temple looter', he gets different treatment in Elphinstone. He, for one, suggests that in spite of his evil reputation his transactions 'were guided entirely by policy, without reference to religion': Mahmud employed Hindu princes in his government, Hindus in his army and even sent a Hindu general to quell a Muslim rebellion.⁴⁵

This Hindu-Muslim syncretism was at work throughout the Muslim rule in India. In Elphinstone's view, it is not only the Muslims who stretched their hands of friendship: Hindu rulers too employed Muslims in their government and defence services.⁴⁶ Evaluating the policies of Akbar in this analysis, Elphinstone suggests that Akbar's benevolent and secular policies were a continuation of similar practices prevalent in the Sultanate period preceding his reign. Nonetheless Akbar's deliberate attempt at Hindu-Muslim or foreign and native assimilation raised the Indian empire to 'the greatest luster that it ever enjoyed'.⁴⁷ The greatest of Mughal "Hindu-haters", Aurangzeb, too gets a sympathetic treatment in the hands of Elphinstone. 'Aurangzeb's political use of religion arose from a correct view of the feelings of the time',⁴⁸ he argues. Elphinstone also corrects the stereotyped picture of Aurangzeb as only a Hindu-hater. In his view, Aurangzeb's religious intolerance affected everyone who did not share his own faith. Being a Sunni, Aurangzeb hated the Shias and

⁴⁴ Elphinstone, *History of India*, vol. I, p. 509.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, pp. 585-6.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. II, pp. 182-3 & 191-6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 143.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 446; also, pp. 415-6 .

maintained a hostile attitude towards the Shia rulers and their kingdoms and turned the Sikhs into a 'military commonwealth' by killing their Gurus. But Elphinstone was unanimous with other British historians that the decline and fall of Mughal Empire or Muslim rule in India, was largely due to Aurangzeb's religious bigotry, his studied barbarity against Hindus and renunciation of the liberal state that was handed down to him from the time of Akbar.

Elphinstone has been criticized for his general lack of sympathy and sensitivity for Muslim India. He is also accused of having a 'concealed contempt' for all Islamic institutions in general and the Prophet Mohammed in particular.⁴⁹ True, Elphinstone maintained a disdainful attitude towards the image and character of the Prophet Mohammed: he called the Prophet 'false' for the latter's claims to divine revelation. Besides, Elphinstone questioned the very basis of Islam as a peaceful religion: he regarded the Prophet 'among the worst enemies of mankind' for his encouragement of intolerance and fanaticism towards the non-Muslims, responsible for the loss of countless lives and a general atmosphere of insecurity.⁵⁰

Elphinstone certainly was a severe critic of fanatical Islam but nonetheless a great admirer of its tolerant and multicultural face. Elphinstone's was a radical departure, so far as the treatment of Muslim rule in India by other historians was concerned. Whereas for these historians Muslim India exclusively meant the political campaigns, conquests and consolidation of Muslim rule, Elphinstone made an

⁴⁹ Abdur Rashid, 'The Treatment of History by Muslim Historians in Mughal Official and Biographical Works', *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, London: Macmillan, 1961, p. 140.

⁵⁰ Elphinstone, *History of India*, vol. I, p. 493.

appraisal of the entire Islamic contribution. Though he regarded Hindus and Muslims as members of two distinct cultures and civilizations he, nonetheless highlighted their effort and contribution towards the making of the Indian nation. Also, striking is the fact that Elphinstone dissociated the Muslims of India from the world of Islam. Perhaps it would not be far fetched to argue that indeed it was Elphinstone who was responsible for coining the term "Indian Muslims". This new character sketch of Muslims in India as "Indian Muslims" helped dissociate them from their overtly violent counterparts beyond India's western frontiers and their equally gory history of pillage, atrocity and conquests. In a way, Elphinstone tried to project Muslims as a part and parcel of the Indian nation. Since Elphinstone's interpretation Indianised Muslims and at the same time was sympathetic towards Hindus, it was liberally used by the colonial administration when it sought its own legitimation from these two communities.

The novelty of Elphinstone's interpretation concerns recognition of both the negative and positive aspects of Muslim rule in India. Contrary to some arguments Elphinstone was not sympathetic to Muslim rule but stressed its different dimensions. This mode of assessment was greatly in demand when some nationalists tried to establish a combined front against the British. Moderates like Gandhi and Nehru found Elphinstone's interpretation accessible when they used the language of Hindu-Muslim unity and various other forms of socio-cultural synthesis.⁵¹

⁵¹ Nehru liberally borrowed from Elphinstone while writing *The Discovery of India* and *Glimpses of World History*. Gandhi also occasionally made references to Elphinstone's interpretation.

Another interesting facet of Elphinstone's assessment is that he made a clear distinction between Muslim rule and Islam. Although he could comprehend Muslim rule he had difficulty highlighting any comparison between Islam and Hinduism. Elphinstone was a severe critic of Islam. His aversion to Islam embraced both criticisms labeled against its religious axioms as well as its founder Prophet Mohammed. True, Elphinstone recognised that Muslim rulers in India were far less violent compared to their West Asian counterparts. However, he considered that the same cannot be said of their religion. In other words, he found very little compatibility between the ideals of Islam with that of Hinduism. To put it slightly differently he recognised the conflict potential of Islam and was deeply apprehensive about the usage of original Islamic ideals by the Indian Muslims in the future political process. Elphinstone was not entirely disparaging in his interpretation of Muslim rule but certainly portrayed Islam in low light. While Elphinstone's interpretation highlighted the Hindu-Muslim interaction during Muslim rule it also cautiously suggested that their future interaction was in danger of rupture owing Islam.

6.5. Henry Elliot and John Dowson: The post-mutiny historiography

History is never only history *of*, it is history *for*.⁵²

After the great revolt of 1857 popularly known as the *Sepoy Mutiny* the power of administration of India passed from the Company to the British sovereign.

⁵² Hayden White ascribes this interpretation to Claude Lévi-Strauss. See, *Tropics of Discourse*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 104.

Henceforth the British were forced to take a direct and serious interest in India. This demanded the construction of an administration which would deter any future mishap having the potential to endanger the British in India. Keeping this threat perception in mind there was an all round revamp of British policy on India. The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was significant so far as its Hindu-Muslim interface or the alliance against the 'other' i.e. the British, was concerned. Furthermore, it introduced the British to the resurgence of the majority community (the Hindus), who until now were regarded as a race of negligible beings. Though the pre-1857 British historiography always recognized the fact that India was a bounded entity inhabited by two religiously defined communities, it never took the Hindus seriously in matters religious, political or military. It had come to assume that seven hundred years of uninterrupted Muslim rule had killed the Hindu spirit of independence and they had reconciled to being the subject community. However, after 1857 British historians came to terms with the independent political aspiration of the majority community. This required them to interpret Indian history keeping the majority community in mind. A visible shift took place after 1857 in the construction of Indian history when Muslims were pushed to the background and Hindus were brought to the front.

This new tradition, did not distort historical facts, but interpreted it in an entirely different manner. For instance, while Mill described the siege and eventual destruction of Somnath temple as a Muslim victory, the post-1857 historiography treated it as an act of gross violence and irrational aggression against Hindus and their way of life. Also as in that past British historians imagined Hindus as the

original inhabitants and Muslims rather as they, the British, imagined themselves: as foreigners, as imperial rulers, who arrived as successful conquerors. “Muslims served as a foil against which the British defined themselves. By saying that Muslims were oppressive, incompetent, lascivious, and given to self-indulgence, the post-1857 British historiography could define precisely what they imagined themselves to be, namely, enlightened, competent, disciplined, and judicious. At the same time, they imputed to Muslims certain qualities they admired, such as masculinity and vigor, in contrast to allegedly effeminate Hindus.”⁵³

Since their predecessors had already narrated the History of India there was nothing original or new for the post-1857 British historiographers to discover from India’s antiquity. Therefore, the main task, before them, following the mutiny, was to interpret the existing literature. A certain credit should be given to the historians of this period for their inventiveness. Highlighting the same historical narrative these historians tried to throw new lights on them, albeit with a purpose. H. M. Elliot and J. Dowson, for instance, busied themselves with the monumental post-mutiny work *The History of India as Told by its own Historians*.⁵⁴ It would indeed be a worthwhile exercise if we contemplate the title of this historical work before probing its content and character.

⁵³ Barbara D. Metcalf, ‘Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4, November 1995, pp. 953-4.

⁵⁴ This joint work was compiled by Henry Elliot, and edited and published by John Dowson after the former’s death. The main bulk of the work came from more than one hundred and fifty translated manuscripts of original Persian sources. And the massive eight volumes contained episodes from Indian history from the ninth to the eighteenth century.

The title throws up several different questions. First, the colonial governments' vigorous promotion of *The History of India as Told by its own Historians* forces one to ask what happened to the earlier historical works by British historians. Second, the title seem to be carrying within itself a sort of legitimacy which one is invited to believe the earlier works lacked. Third, what does History of India "As told by its own historians mean"?⁵⁵ Elliot and Dowson were British, so were Alexander Dow, Charles Grant, James Mill, Vans Kennedy, Mountstuart Elphinstone *et al.* Their source was invariably original Persian and Arab chronicles left behind by travelers, courtiers and rulers. Elliot and Dowson were treading on the same territory, like their predecessors and many contemporaries. What made Elliot and Dowson the legitimate historians of India's antiquity and hence its sole interpreter? Was not James Mill lauded by the same British as the "first historian of India"? Also crucial is the period undertaken by Elliot and Dowson in their work. The said eight volumes, covered the period from ninth to the eighteenth century, precisely the age of Muslim arrival and their subsequent rule over India. How could India's history be complete without the mention of its pre-Islamic past? All these questions lead us to one answer. After 1857 the nature of British historiography assumed a new character. For the first time the colonial administration felt the need to put its weight behind the majority community. This move not only legitimised the British hold over economic and political power (as I would analyse subsequently), but guaranteed an endemic strife between Hindus and Muslims while keeping them away from the *real* question of self-rule.

⁵⁵ William Wilson Hunter explains this as Elliot's reference to the Persian and Arab historiography on India, and argues that the latter assigned these chroniclers of India's past the title as its *own* historian. *The Indian Empire: Its Peoples, History, and Products*, London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1892, p. 324.

Some eight volumes of this work, published between 1867-77, did not unearth any new facts, figures or events left untouched by the earlier British historiography. Instead, it acquainted the majority community, with the impropriety and intolerance of the Muslims. As against the Millian glee over Muslim "intolerance", Elliot and Dowson engaged themselves in telling the same story with a *tilt* towards the Hindus and with a sympathetic tone. Their eight volume work "invited" the readers to selections purporting to show the "intolerance" of the Muslims, a story of "idols mutilated, temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them."⁵⁶ In other words, the negative portrayal of Islam became the norm and standard practice for the post-mutiny historians.

Elliot and Dowson, though basing their compilation on Persian chronicles of India, were highly critical of the lack of neutrality in these. They felt evidence of Islamic carnage has long been withheld by Persian chroniclers and historians who crowded the Muslim monarchs' courts. Also, even if, these chronicles contained Muslim misdeeds, the chroniclers refrained from portraying these in the required neutral light. The avowed mission of Elliot and Dowson here seems to be the exposition of the truth, and this explains their title *History of India as told by its own Historians*. Elliot and Dowson did not condemn the Muslim monarchs for their

⁵⁶ Quoted in, Barbara D. Metcalf, 'Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4, p. 954.

supposed barbarity but accused the chroniclers of failing to highlight it. In Henry Elliot's words:

In Indian Histories there is little which enables us to penetrate below the glittering surface, and observe the practical operation of a despotic Government... If, however, we turn our eyes to the present Muhammadan kingdoms of India, and examine the character of the princes,... we may fairly draw a parallel between ancient and modern times... we behold kings, even of our own creation, sunk in sloth and debauchery, and emulating the vices of a Caligula or a Commodus... Had the authors whom we are compelled to consult, portrayed their Caesars with the fidelity of Suetonius, instead of the more congenial sycophancy of Paterculus, we should not, as now, have to extort from unwilling witness, testimony to the truth of these assertions.⁵⁷

These historians ascribing themselves to the role of "guardians of truth" were clearly engaged in a mission to create a division between Hindus and Muslims.

The few glimpses we have, even among the short extracts in this single volume, of Hindus slain for disputing with Muhammadans, of general prohibitions against processions, worship, and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures, of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them, show us that this picture is not overcharged, and it is much to be regretted that we are left to draw it for ourselves from out of the mass of ordinary occurrences...⁵⁸

The point to bear in mind in Elliot and Dowson is the emphasis on interpretation. The earlier British historians, though given to representations occasionally marked by biases and prejudices, were not entirely malicious while rendering these accounts. In Elliot and Dowson, however, we encounter a sustained

⁵⁷ For details, see Henry M. Elliot's preface to *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, John Dowson (ed.), London: Trubner, 1867-77, pp. xv-xxvii.

⁵⁸ H.M. Elliot preface to *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Muhammadan Period*, pp. xxv-xxvii.

and concerted effort to highlight “the negative” aspect of Islamic rule. Furthermore, this portrayal was not for the consumption of the British, as was the case with the earlier works like that of Dow and Mill, but for the Indians. Elliot and Dowson and the colonial administration were acutely aware that this interpretation would put Hindus and Muslims at loggerheads while facilitating the continuation of unruffled British rule. The complicity of colonial administration in this “image building” extended all the way up to the Viceroy. Lord Dufferin in his character sketch of Muslims declared in 1888 that they are a people known for their ‘monotheism, iconoclastic fanaticism and animal sacrifices who harboured the memory of Muslim supremacy over India’.⁵⁹ According to a pre-independent Indian critic, as a result of Elliot’s and Dowson’s interpretation of historical memory:

A Hindu feels it is his duty to dislike those whom he has been taught to consider the enemies of his religion and his ancestors; the Muslim, lured into the false belief that he was once a member of a ruling race, feels insufferably wronged by being relegated to the status of a minority community. Fools both! Even if the Muslims eight centuries ago were as bad as they were painted, would there be any sense in holding the present generation responsible for their deeds? It is but an imaginative tie that joins the modern Hindu with Harshavardhana or Asoka, or the modern Muslim with Shihabuddin or Mahmud.⁶⁰

This may as well be a genuine lamentation, but one should not forget that the main purpose of Elliot and Dowson’s interpretation was to compel both the communities to interrogate their past. Elliot and Dowson were correct so far as their assessment of the future of the most important political community in India was

⁵⁹ For a detailed account see, Peter Hardy, *Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁰ Muhammad Habib, ‘An Introduction to the Study of Medieval India AD 1000-1400’ in K. A. Nizami (ed.), *Politics and Society During the Early Mediaeval Period: Collected Works of Professor Muhammad Habib*, New Delhi: Ajanta, 1974, pp. 3-32.

concerned. They were convinced it was the Hindus who would be the deciding power-players in the governance. And it is their voice which would matter most in the colonial administration compared to Muslims. Elliot and Dowson's appeasement of Hindus through a new historical consciousness was one of the techniques to buy legitimacy for British rule. However, this was not enough. Hence they devoted themselves to the deliberate comparison of Muslim with British rule. The sole purpose of this comparison was to highlight the pernicious effect of Muslim rule which automatically put the British in a favourable light.

Elliot and Dowson's lesson for Hindus here appears pretty simple. It expected the unquestionable Hindu acceptance of British rule, for the simple fact that the latter freed the former from centuries of Islamic oppression. "The justification of British rule in India went hand in hand with the belittling of the Muslim achievement in India."⁶¹ Furthermore, Elliot and Dowson aimed to provide a highly altruistic image of British rule in India: 'We have already, within half-a-century of our dominion, done more for the substantial benefit of the people, than our predecessors, in the country of their own adoption, were able to accomplish in more than ten times that period'. This achievement Elliot and Dowson regarded as a guaranteed indication of 'high destiny of British Rule'. The British were good because they did not interfere with the Hindu way of life; they did not go about raping their women, looting their property, vandalizing their places of worship, converting them through force, and most importantly did not keep them under subjection through perpetual fear of sword. In short, compared to Muslims, British represented a sane, civil,

⁶¹ Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, *op. cit.*, n. 2, p. 171.

peaceful and, above all, a benevolent ruling community. Hence the acceptance of British rule should not be a matter of dispute or create any confusion. Elliot and Dowson had no illusion so far as the way in which the Hindus interpreted the historical presentation.⁶²

Though not so contemptuous, most other historians of the post-mutiny era maintained a negative attitude towards the Muslims and their reign. This attitude, however, did not presuppose a favourable image of the Hindus. For many of these historians, Hindus were ignorant and Muslims crafty savages. H.G. Keene, one such historian of Muslim India remarked: 'I have not yet met with a Hindu who had one good quality, and honest Muslims do not exist'. What is important, is that these historians made a conscious effort to influence British to their own interpretation: 'Hindustan is a treacherous mistress, who slays with smiles all who rest upon her bosom with too much confidence.'⁶³ James Talboys Wheeler, another 'strategic historian' of post-Mutiny British India, almost made it his vocation to construct a past where Hindus and Muslims were in perpetual conflict and sustained religious collision. Wheeler reasoned the Hindu support of the 1857 uprising was the latter's appreciation of a section of Islamic India viz. the Mughal period bar Aurangzeb's reign. While castigating the Mughals Wheeler wrote: 'Mughal administration has been held up as a model for British imitation. In reality, it was a monstrous system of

⁶² "They will make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and equity of our rule... We should no longer hear bombastic Babus, enjoying under our Government the highest degree of personal liberty, and many more political privileges than were ever conceded to a conquered nation, rant about patriotism, and the degradation of their present position. If they would dive into any of the volumes mentioned herein, it would take these young Brutuses and Phocians a very short time to learn, that in the days of that dark period for whose return they sigh, even the bare utterance of their ridiculous fantasies would have been attended with silence and contempt, but with the severer discipline of molten lead or implement." Henry Elliot's preface to *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians: The Mohammadan Period*, vol. I, pp. xxvi-xxvii

⁶³ H.G. Keene, *The Turks in India*, London: Trubner, 1879, p. 45.

oppression and extortion'. And if the Mughals maintained a fair attitude towards their majority Hindu subjects it was primarily because they intended their support in their own political legitimacy and wealth creation. In short, 'the Mughals were the most grasping people under the sun. They lost nothing by not asking.'⁶⁴ The construction of this image was also intended for the majority community to assist in their assessment of British and Muslim administration. This contrast, it was supposed, would allow the majority community to appreciate the 'reign of law and order under the British' compared to 'the Islamic oppression and anarchy.'⁶⁵ This 'strategic interpretation' apart from legitimising colonial rule also ensured a future non-alliance between Hindus and Muslims which was so evident in 1857.

Portrayal of Muslim rule in such unfavourable light continued till the first quarter of the twentieth century. Even Vincent A. Smith, whose work on Islamic India surpassed that of Elphinstone in terms of new sources and analysis, was highly critical of Muslims. For example, Akbar, for Smith was a 'foreigner in India' and India was essentially Hindu on which Islam was a forced manifestation. Moreover, the multi-religious, multi-racial and multi-cultural character of parts of Islamic India was possible owing to Hindu generosity and the broadness of Hinduism. Muslims in Smith's interpretation were foreigners and were never an 'integral part of the Indian people'.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ James Talboys Wheeler, *History of India*, London: Hutchinson, 1876, p. 125, also see the preface for a detail of Wheeler's critique (prejudice).

⁶⁵ J.T. Wheeler, *Tales from Indian History*, London: Trubner, 1881, p. 266-7.

⁶⁶ See the concluding section of Vincent A. Smith's *Oxford History of India*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1920.

6.6. *Divide et impera*: United rule and divided history

One of the effects of this interpretation was to make a Muslim feel alien in his own land.

The spectacle of go ahead Hinduism, dreaming of self-government and playing with its ancient gods clad in the vesture of democracy, dazed the conservative Muslims... He felt as if he is being treated as an alien, as a meddlesome freak, who had wantonly interfered with the course of Indian history. Strange incidents were raked up from his long and eventful career, which he was called upon to justify... with the loss of empire he felt as if he were to lose his self respect as well. The "communal patriots" among the Hindus treated him as a prisoner in the dock and loudly complained of him as an impossible factor in the scheme of India's future.⁶⁷

Suffice to say, along with the colonial historiography, the colonial administration was also engaged in creating a negative image of Muslim rule with the intention of creating a divided history between Hindus and Muslims. Such a necessity was increasingly felt after the Great Indian Revolt of 1857. Caught unprepared by the strength of this mutiny that rose above caste, creed and religious identity, the British were to devise a policy which would put a permanent wedge between any future Hindu Muslim alliance. The post-mutiny Viceroy of India, Lord Elphinstone in 1858 unhesitatingly remarked, " '*Divide et impera*' was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours."⁶⁸ Though this view did not become part of the official British colonial policy, the successive Viceroys and the British administration tended not to disregard its essence and strength. Expressing a similar

⁶⁷ Mohammed Ali, *Selected Speeches and Writings*, edited by Afzal Iqbal, Lahore: Govt. Press, 1944.

⁶⁸ Quoted in, A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay: Asia Publishing Company, 1959, p. 363.

sentiment Charles Wood, Secretary of State for India, wrote to the Viceroy in 1862 that the discord among various Indian "races" was an element of strength to the British in India. Therefore, "a dissociating spirit" should be kept up, for "if India was to unite against us how long could we maintain ourselves".⁶⁹

Similarly in 1887, Cross, the Secretary of State, wrote to the Viceroy that "This division of religious feeling is greatly to our advantage."⁷⁰ Also, when Gandhi's Khilafat movement met an unsatisfactory end, Birkenhead, Secretary of State, communicated to the Viceroy in March 1925 to this effect: "I have placed my highest and most permanent hopes in the eternity of the communal situation."⁷¹ Also, revealed in the Cabinet papers of the Churchill era is a reference to the fact that "... he did not share the anxiety to encourage and promote unity between the Hindu and Muslim communities. He regarded the Hindu-Muslim feud as the bulwark of British rule in India."⁷² He felt if a unity were to be constructed or brought about between the two that would surely mean the united communities would join in showing the British the door. When some self-conscious British liberals disapproved of this practice, certain ex-colonial officials maintained that the British followed the policy of using the Muslims as a make-weight to curb the tides of Hindu nationalism.⁷³ Moreover it could also be argued that the British conceived the idea of Muslim League in 1906 to counter Hindus in Indian National Congress. Many nationalist

⁶⁹ Sarvepalli Gopal, *British Policy in India 1858-1905*, New Delhi: OUP, 1975, p. 36.

⁷⁰ Dufferin Papers, Reel 518. Quoted in Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1987, p. 244.

⁷¹ G. R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India*, Leiden: E J Brill, 1975, p. 173.

⁷² Quoted in R. J. Moore, *Churchill, Cripps and India 1939-1945*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 28.

⁷³ William Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, Lahore: Crescent, 1963 reprint from 1946 edition.

thinkers were convinced of this design. Rabindranath Tagore, for instance, feared “that Muslims could be used against Hindus is the really worrying fact.”⁷⁴

How important were these practices in shaping an anti-Islamic mindset among the nationalists? For nationalist historians like Bipan Chandra, this method helped the British to ‘check the politicization of the Indian people, to curb their consolidation and unification and to disrupt the process of Indian nation-in-the-making’.⁷⁵ There has yet been no significant study to assess the impact of the British categorisation of Hindus and Muslims as two distinctly divided and conflicting communities. Nationalist historiography points out that such policies were not falsification carried on out of perversity or malice, but a political instrument framed for broader political strategy.⁷⁶ Doubtless *divide et impera* consolidated British stronghold in India. While the informal continuation of this policy bore immediate and visible results its long term effects were often difficult to pin-point and hence were neglected. Nonetheless as C.G. Shah points out, though British policy of *divide et impera* did not aim at promoting Islamic nationalism, the latter pursued the language of this strategy “with a view to perpetuating its domination over India”.⁷⁷

6.7. The nationalist tradition

Secularist historians have taken great pains to describe the Hindu-Muslim unity during the Great War of Independence or Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and in the

⁷⁴ Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1980, p. 83.

⁷⁵ Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1987, pp. 245-6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁷⁷ C.G. Shah, *Marxism, Gandhism, Stalinism*, Bombay: Asia Publishing Company, 1963, p. 242.

subsequent phase. Interestingly the indigenous literature that made its mark following the event hardly bore traces of this unity. In fact the impact of *divide et impera* was so permeating that almost all aspects of Indian life were affected by it, including the national mood. For the brevity of the argument I would discuss only two such affected areas. The first is literature and the second the nature of nationalism.

In the literary arena most of the Hindi, Urdu and Bengali fiction often contained plots in which Muslims were always portrayed as barbaric, insidious, lecherous and treacherous. The most glaring example of this is the works of Bengali writer-revolutionary Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. His historical fictions such as *Anand Math* (1882) *Debi Choudhurani* (1884), and *Sitaram* (1887) contained plots and characters where Muslims were always assigned negative roles *vis-a-vis* the heroic protagonist, who as a rule was a Hindu. Again, Bankim was known for a highly historical thrust in his writing.⁷⁸ This construction easily seeped into the masses mind and received popular political recognition. What is more, whenever there was an attempt to evolve a mainstream unitary literature calling for consolidation against the British, the Muslims were ignored, left out or were entirely dropped. A case in point is the national song *Banga Amar*. Composed by D. L. Roy the song which aimed at unifying the Bengalis, did not even have a single word about Muslims even though the latter constituted more than half the Bengali populace.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Tanika Sarkar, 'Imagining Hindurashtra: The Hindu and the Muslim in Bankim Chandra's Writings', in David Ludden (ed.), *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996, p. 180.

⁷⁹ For an excellent discussion on *Banga Amar* controversy see, Mustafa Nurul Islam, *Bengal Muslim Public Opinion as Reflected in the Bengal Press 1901-1930*, Dacca: Kazi Press, 1973, pp. 113 & 123. For similar examples in the nineteenth century Hindi literature, see Sudhir Chandra, 'Communal

Popular literatures such as poetry, drama, historical fictions and short stories and their discussion in open forums greatly influenced the masses. But more importantly the teaching of history in the schools, colleges and universities and other recommended literatures complemented each other in their form, content and character. Lala Lajpat Rai, one of the nationalist leaders highlights this point in his autobiography, wherein he mentions that his early antipathy towards Muslims was formed largely due to *Waquat-i-Hind* a prescribed textbook in his school days.⁸⁰ Gandhi too subscribed to this view and argued Hindu-Muslim unity could not be attained unless there was a departure from the current version of teaching of history.⁸¹ Mohammed Ali in his foreword to the report of the *Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee* mentioned, 'unless people begin to see the past in a *truer perspective* it will be very difficult to build a sense of unity and mutual confidence among Hindus and Muslims'.⁸² But one is inclined to ask what this *true perspective* could be? Perhaps it would be apt to mention that the symbols of synthesisism like Akbar's reign though appreciated by Hindus was rarely respected by Muslims.

Another complexity which involves this theoretical framework is the Muslim perception of Indian history. It goes without saying that the British interpretation depicted Muslim rule and Islam in low light. However, there was no organised and sustained attempt by Indian Muslims to discredit the British interpretation.

Consciousness in Late 19th Century Hindi Literature', in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India*, New Delhi: Ajanta, 1981.

⁸⁰ Lala Lajpat Rai, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 77. Quoted in Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, p. 210.

⁸¹ Quoted in A. N. Vidyalankar, *National Integration and Teaching of History*, New Delhi (No Date) p. 3.

⁸² Mohammed Ali, *Selected Writings and Speeches*, p. 43.

Considering the fact that the British replaced Muslim rule this omission appears intriguing. Also, only some Muslims considered colonial rule vile. Again, this sentiment was expressed at a very later stage. In other words, they never actively tried to vilify the colonial version of Indian history, which promoted an overtly negative image of Muslims after a particular phase. In some instances, they even supported the non-synthetic character of Hindu-Muslim relationship. This attitude invariably pointed to one direction i.e. Muslim sense of incompatibility with Hindus.

Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the main advocate of Pakistan, addressing the students of Lahore in 1941, maintained: "Our demand (for a Muslim state) is not from Hindus because the Hindus never took the whole of India. It was the Muslims who took India and ruled for seven hundred years. It was the British who took India from the Muslims."⁸³ We notice the completion of the above sentiment a year later in 1942 when Jinnah asserted that if the British handed over the government of India to the Muslim League "they will be making full amends to the Muslims by restoring the government of India to them from whom they had taken it."⁸⁴ At other times Jinnah's tone was conciliatory but nonetheless stubborn. He introduced the nationalists to the fact that the history of Hindu-Muslim interaction spanning over twelve-hundred years did not produce any unity. Thus to seek it at such a later date would be imprudent.⁸⁵

⁸³ M. A. Jinnah, *Speeches and Writings*, edited by Jamil ud-din Ahmed, Lahore: Govt. Press, 1960 vol. I p. 229 (vol. II, 1964 edition).

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 404.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 161.

Other Muslim leaders were much cruder in interpreting Indian history. Z. A. Suleri, for example, argued that India could not belong to Hindus as they have remained Islamic subjects for over a thousand years.⁸⁶ Shaukat Ali, who for a while was engaged in Gandhi-led Khilafat movement, was by far more pronounced. For example, in 1929 he declared, "Hindus have been habituated to slavery and they would remain slaves."⁸⁷ Many neutral observers who did not take sides either with the coloniser or the colonised even recognised a prevalent sense of superiority among the Muslims compared to Hindus.⁸⁸ The Report prepared by the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee (a neutral body formed by the Indian National Congress in 1932) also confirmed the prevailing sense of unease among Hindus and Muslims towards each other in the lower stratum of society.⁸⁹ One has to remember that, unlike the Indian middle-class, this stratum was independent of any colonial historiography.

It is plausible that British historiography to a large extent influenced the Hindu attitude towards the Muslim and vice versa. But we can only accept this view with a major qualification. Indian society during the colonial era can be divided into

⁸⁶ Z. A. Suleri, *My Leader*, third edition 1946, p, 162.

⁸⁷ This statement of Shaukat Ali is quoted from Ram Gopal's *Indian Muslims: A Political History 1858-1947*, Bombay: Asia Publishing Company, 1959, pp. 206-7.

⁸⁸ Clifford Manshardt wrote in 1936: "The early hostility of the Hindu towards the Muslim has carried over to the present day. Though the Hindu out-numbers the Muslim in practically every province of India, he still seems to fear him. Recalling the days of Muslim domination, he is unwilling to run any risk of present-day Muslim political supremacy. The Muslim on the other hand remembers his glorious past and looks to the future. *The Hindu Muslim Problem in India*, London: Oxford, 1936, p. 33.

⁸⁹ The communalists who invariably occupied a crucial position among the uneducated mass came to regard the Muslim rulers "as zealous crusaders whose dominant motive was the spread of Islam and whose method for achieving this object was the destruction of temples and forcible conversions.... the Muslim writers deplore the want of true religious feeling in Muslim kings in permitting idolatry to persist in their dominion and the unbelievers to prosper, while the Hindu writers bewail the weakness of the religious sentiment in Hindu rulers and their want of patriotism in not combining effectively against a foreigner in defence of their religion and their country." *Reports of Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee*, published as *Roots of Communal Politics*, N. Gerald Barrier (ed.), New Delhi: Publications Division, 1976, p. 105.

two stratas or classes. The most important and powerful of these was the urbanised class who were a minuscule minority. The other stratum consisted of the rural masses who, though substantial in number, were less influential. Furthermore, these two classes had their own life styles, values and views about their past. Because of their intellectual prowess, wealth and connections to authorities of power, the self-important urbanised minority lived in the metropolis and the rest were relegated into the periphery. Though peripheral the uneducated masses had a different set of ideas and values which was quite independent of the colonial or the metropolitan influences. Interestingly, in this stratum we can trace the same levels of uneasiness towards Muslims as was prevalent among the metropolitan Hindus. It is this stratum which benefited or suffered mostly depending on the regime in power in the metropolis. And hence the popular beliefs and opinions were based on the sufferings and gains meted out by certain policies. Like the urban Hindus their rural counterparts could never feel at home with Muslims. The Muslims here, like their urban brethren, too treated Hindus with dishonour and regarded them as inferior.

Unlike the colonial discourse which, some scholars tend to argue, was responsible for Hindu-Muslim divide⁹⁰ the rural Indians perceived their past from their own experiences and collective memory.⁹¹ This collective memory was passed

⁹⁰ The main advocates of this argument are Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960, Allen J. Greenberg, *The British Image of India: A Study on the Literature of Imperialism, 1880-1960*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1969, Peter Hardy, *The Muslims of British India*, Cambridge: CUP, 1972, Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces Muslims, 1860-1923*, Cambridge: CUP, 1974. Gyan Pandey, *The Construction of Colonialism in Colonial North India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁹¹ 'Like the ancient Egyptians the Hindus had no sense of history prior to the arrival of the Muslims'. This important observation was made from the very beginning of Western encounter with India. See for instance, Rennel's *Memoir*, Introduction p. xi and Wilfred on *Egypt and the Nile*, Asiatic Research, vol. II, p. 296.

on from one generation to another. As these people lived in a fixed homestead for centuries and shared little in common with outsiders their memory remained largely unaffected. It would indeed be a gross exaggeration to accept that the colonial discourse overwhelmingly influenced the notions of the rural Indians on matters of religion and faith. As some rightist thinkers have pointed out, the fact that they escaped conversion to Islam was because some rulers needed non-Muslim subjects to pay religious tax crucial for the state revenue. Thus they allowed their subjects to continue with their own religion.

Oral history can find its representation in several different expressions such as, culture, tradition, religious practices and folklores. A brief assessment of these areas would reveal the fact that there existed a general sense of discomfort among Hindus towards Islam independent of British historiography. In some instances the record of Muslim atrocity was actually recorded. Perhaps the best preserved example of this is the *Madala Panji* in the Puri Jagannath temple. The temple, one of the four holiest shrines in the Hindu pantheon, was constantly under Muslim attack during the fourteenth and fifteenth Century. The then king of Puri had to flee with the idols of the temple twice to escape Islamic persecution. This incident is recorded in the temple's gadget. Every year the temple is visited by millions of Hindus from all over India. Interestingly, the *pandas* or the priests have perpetuated the story of Muslim atrocity over the centuries and through its devotees has spread the length and breadth of the country.

Similarly, the practice of *sati* or widow burning - an ancient Hindu cultural practice that remained dysfunctional for over a millennia - was revived following the Islamic invasion and for an entirely different reason. This practice reappeared again when Rani Padmini and her companions made their mass self-immolation following Allauddin Khilji's take over of Chittor Fort. Also, in the fort of Jodhpur one can see some dozen blood-stained palm imprints. "These tell the story of those noble women who performed *sati* after hearing the slaying of their beloved by the Muslims" is told by family of balladeers for centuries. Though modern day *sati* is highly distorted, it was indeed voluntary and a form of self-preservation by high-caste Rajput women who engaged in this practice to escape their defilement in the hands of Muslim conquerors. The north-Indian Hindu midnight marriage practice which continues to this day was in fact a measure against the 'Islamic sport of bride-catching'.⁹²

Mediaeval Hindu literature also recorded the history of Muslim atrocity. The last of the *puranas* actually mentions the coming of the *mlecchas* and *yavanas* (two pejorative terms for Muslims).⁹³ These chronicles made the *mlecchas* responsible for destruction of temples, defilement of sacred images and the large-scale slaughter of Brahmins. In some instances, *kali yug* or the age of destruction in the Hindu cosmological cycle is associated with the coming of *yavanas*. That Aurangzeb was a fanatic religious zealot and was responsible for wanton destruction of non-Islamic way of life finds resonance not only in the Hindu oral tradition but is actually recorded by the Sikh chroniclers whose leader Teg Bahadur himself was a victim of

⁹² Koenraad Elst, *Negationism in India*, New Delhi: Voice of India, 1993, p. 35. However, this is not true of Brahmin wedding practices.

⁹³ For an insightful discussion, see P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmashastras*, Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973.

Aurangzeb. Crucial too is the 'oral explanation' relating to the absence any major temple-site in the whole of North India. Some public monuments like Qutab Minar in Delhi and various mosques in Benares, Ayodhya and several other places with their clearly visible slabs and other building materials taken from temples perpetuates the Islamic intolerance to this day.⁹⁴

Furthermore, while Muslim rulers were consolidating their hold over Hindu subjects the latter were quietly attributing the former several defining characteristics. Like most other major religions Hinduism too has visions of two distinct forces of universe i.e. the world of righteousness and the world of evil. Hindus, again, have a tendency to describe their present day worldly existence and environment according to this other-worldly image mentioned above. The period of Muslim rule in this conception was defined as the world controlled by the evil. Acknowledging Muslim suppression of Hindus the latter described the former as *asuras* or evil monsters from the underworld. Similar parallels were drawn to outline Muslims character. The supposed violent temper, the non-vegetarian dietary habits and an excess carnal orientation suggested the *tamasika* nature of Muslims and put them in the category of *asuras*. These stereotypes that evolved in the oral tradition is even emphasised in the contemporary Hindu society. Importance of such representation in the construction of a particular Hindu attitude towards Islam and Muslim rule, therefore, can hardly be underestimated. A majority of nationalist thinkers were high caste

⁹⁴ Such instances are common to many nations and societies. The Grand Mosque in Istanbul is actually situated over Saint Sophia Church. In Cordoba, Spain many Moorish Islamic sites are converted to Churches. However, the contest to these sites is largely absent owing to the majority community's hold over a minority institution. By contrast, it is contentious in India as the minority community is seen still in charge of majority religious sites.

Hindus with a background that abhorred all *asurik* practices for which Muslims were infamous. The serious line of inquiry then concerns whether the perception of their own and that of the masses was affected or unaffected by such inherited assumptions.

6.8. Indigenous tradition and British interpretation correlation

It appears strange how an entire nation could easily embrace an interpretation of their past which was not offered by them but foreigners. India of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was far more advanced in terms of intellectual development and rational scientific consciousness compared to many other non-Western civilisations. To a certain degree, India was more advanced than Europe in the field of rational thinking. Now the question is, if Indians were sufficiently mature how could they unhesitatingly accept a part of their past that came down to them through the British?⁹⁵ Second, why was not there a single movement to castigate the distorted British interpretation of Indian history? In all, from eighteenth century onwards India witnessed countless movements of social reformation. Most of them were intellectually-inspired which later permeated the middle class and to some extent the grassroots level. True, some of these movements indirectly aimed at

⁹⁵ Subaltern historians like Partha Chatterjee, for instance, hold a different view. According to him, "the new Indian literati, while they enthusiastically embraced the modern rational principles of European historiography, did not accept the history of India as it was written by British historians." Partha Chatterjee, 'Claims on the Past: The Genealogy of Modern Historiography in Bengal' in David Hardiman and David Arnold (eds.) *Subaltern Studies VIII*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 17. This argument can be contested so far as, the content and character of indigenous production of history is concerned. On matters of Hindu-Muslim relationship, at least, both British and native historians were unanimous. Both projected the Muslims in low light, when it came to their methods of managing the non-Muslim subjects. Except, of course, the reign of solitary figures like Akbar, none of these two schools of historians saw anything good in Islamic rule. No doubt British interpretation of India's Islamic past underwent change from the time of their arrival as a trading company to their assuming of sovereignty over India. But throughout, they held on to the same portrayal of Muslims and Islamic rule, while attributing various characters to this community in different phases.

Hindu-Muslim unity.⁹⁶ By working towards this goal, I will argue, they unconsciously accepted a deeper division existing among them than was interpreted by the colonial or imperial history. If there was no disunity between the two communities as represented by the colonial historiography, there would not have been any need for reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. In other words, both Hindus and Muslims would have rejected the British interpretation in order to prevent their communities falling to the latter's fissionary doctrine. Surprisingly, there was no revolution, no condemnation or no uprising against the colonial interpretation of Hindu-Muslim past. Both communities accepted it as a matter of fact. There were no challenges to this colonial genealogy by Hindu, Muslim or secular indigenous scholars during British colonialism.

Why both communities and their intelligentsia accepted an alien interpretation of their past is not very hard to comprehend. In an oral tradition, where the emphasis was more on memorising the past, the absence of written evidence or documentation of the past can be understood. Though not entirely accurate, the oral narrative nonetheless provided influential picture of the nation and its inhabitants' past. In such a situation, the colonial interpretation of history (a) would appear superfluous (owing to the already existing oral historical narrative); (b) would be ignored for its superfluousness; (c) would be contested if the alien interpretation differed significantly from the indigenous oral tradition.

⁹⁶ See for instance, sixteenth century Marathi *Bhakti* poet Eknath's (1533-99) *Hindu-Turk Samvad*, cf. Eleanor Zelliott, 'A Medieval Encounter Between Hindu and Muslim: Eknath's Drama-Poem Hindu-Turk Samvad', in Fred W. Clothey (ed.), *Images of Man: Religious and Historical Process in South Asia*, Madras: New Era Publications, 1982, pp. 171-95.

None of these, however, happened in India. Instead, the colonial interpretation was readily accepted and gained approval. The crucial question to ask here is the reason for its acceptance. I would argue, the colonial interpretation legitimised what was already there in the oral traditional history. Since Indians' notions of their past was more a part of their historical memory its authentication always ended up in myth-making. In a way British historians rescued Indian historical memory and translated it from myths to facts with a rational scientific attitude. Though not entirely neutral or prejudicial, the colonial interpretation did put India's past in perspective. In content, character, and spirit it was not very different from what already existed in the oral history of Indians. However, the reason why it was not ignored and gained currency rests on the confirmation of some of the beliefs existing in the oral tradition by British interpretation and its subsequent legitimisation.⁹⁷ A large number of Indians showed little reluctance towards this new tradition owing to the unavailability of an alternative construction. Admittedly, the British version transmitted through text books and other forms made some Indians realise that they were being manipulated. However, they had no safeguards because they were incapable of providing an alternative interpretation. The alternative they had was the oral tradition which was selective and recorded only the negative aspects of Muslim rule and easily confirmed the British account.

Absence of denigration of India's Muslim past by Hindus in written form in pre-British era was as much due to the role played by oral tradition as to fears that

⁹⁷ Though overtly anti-Islamic the oral history nonetheless recognised some aspects of Hindu-Muslim synthesis as was the case with the cult of *Pir* (Muslim Sufi mystics revered by both Muslims and Hindus. But these *Pirs*, again, were local figures whose influence did not extend beyond a small town thus incapable of altering the dominant anti-Islamic belief among Hindus.

such chronicling would result in a whole-scale massacre by the Muslim rulers. For all its glories, Muslim India was as intolerant towards free-spirited beings, as mediaeval Europe. Moreover, Muslim rule was not only intolerant but severe to all those who were critical of it. This also affected the chronicling of the true nature of Muslim rule. Little wonder, apart from the court chronicles of the Muslim rulers, there hardly existed any written proof of the purge of Islamic monarchs against their Hindu subjects, or the general animosity between Hindus and Muslims.

Though not widely prevalent, there also existed a tradition of chronicling the rule of Hindu monarchs by court historians. The most striking example of this is the *Rajatarangini* of Kalahan, the twelfth-century court historian of Kashmir.⁹⁸ With the advent of Islam, Hindus largely refrained from chronicling their memoirs. This restraint, however, is comprehensible. In a subjected race such a chronicling would definitely be seen as acts of subversion and threatening the lives of the subjected. Every Muslim ruler of India had court chroniclers involved in the documentation of his rule. Indeed, the Mughals were the most serious in chronicling their rule. The four great Mughals: Akbar, Jehangir, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb had *namas* or treatises on their respective reigns. Elsewhere, the Muslim feudal lords known as nababs and the independent Muslim rulers in the South known as Nizams and Sultans had their own chroniclers. However, this account owing to its emphasis on Muslim rule and Islamic remained unacceptable to majority Hindus.

⁹⁸ The resumption of this tradition can be found in the reign of Shivaji, who crowned himself as a Hindu king while rebelling against Mughal rule (Aurangzeb). His court poet Bhusan, had a poetic composition documenting Shivaji's reign known as *Shivaji Bhusan* (written circa 1667-73). Cited in Vasudha Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Tradition*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 33.

British interpretation, in a sense, filled the centuries old vacuum that existed in the realm of India's past. Hindus largely accepted the British portrayal of Muslim era as it corroborated their own stories which existed in a different oral form. Muslims too made little protest because their partial interpretation was replaced by a full account by the British. In the new power equation, the chronicle of Muslim glory was translated as Muslim atrocity by the British. By translating Muslim court chronicles British also made both the communities aware the levels of their past interaction. The British no doubt allowed themselves the job of creating historical consciousness among Indians, but in doing so they had a purpose.

One might suggest that if oral memory was highly critical of Muslim rule and Islam then the British should not be accused of promoting a negative image of Muslim rule. Also, if oral tradition corroborated with the British rendition of Muslim rule, one should thank them for interpreting Indian history correctly. But we can defend our original argument of British complicity in promoting a disparaging image of Muslim rule and Islam in the following manner. First, folk memory or oral tradition is always highly selective. Second, as a rule it tends to record stories of traumas and other violent ruptures in the society more than it does to peaceful events. Therefore, it is natural that Hindu oral tradition maintained a low view of Muslim rule and Islam. The British, however, ignored this crucial factor and went about interpreting Indian history in a particular way. They reduced complex historical realities to a simple idiom of Hindu-Muslim conflict. That Muslim rule was a mixed bag was ignored in their interpretation. Thanks to oral tradition and biased British

interpretation over the years a negative discourse was built against Muslim rule and Islam.

6. 9. Conclusion

If, under colonial rule, Muslim rulers harked back to memories of former political dominance, Hindu leaders were not slow to use the memory of Muslim oppression, seen as uniformly suffered by all Hindus, to forge greater Hindu cohesion.⁹⁹ As Bipan Chandra puts it, both Muslim and Hindu nationalists and communalists embraced diametrically opposite, hostile positions highlighted from the British historiographic framework, premise and assumptions as it suited to their purpose¹⁰⁰ and fitted the prevailing situation. “Many Indian nationalist leaders found it useful, specifically, to accept the notion of an Indian Golden Age that ended with the presumed oppression of Muslim rule.”¹⁰¹

Though the historical thinking inherited from the British accounts for much of the Hindu-Muslim rivalry, there are several other supplementary factors which have come to dominate the present situation. The rupture of Indian society into two groups could be seen in the light of some contemporary interpretations like that of V. S. Naipaul. According to Naipaul the imperialism of the Arabic Islam demands a new allegiance from the converted. Islam, in other words, is used as an ethnic

⁹⁹ Dalmia, *The Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁰ Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, p. 212.

¹⁰¹ Barbara Metcalf, p. 954. For an insightful and detailed discussion, see Sudhir Chandra, *The Oppressive Present: Literature and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992.

identity and is superimposed over the national identity in various countries where Muslims are in a minority. Indeed, Muslims have found it hard to compromise between the expectation of their religion and that of their country of origin.¹⁰² The first casualty of this divided loyalty is the national mainstream identity. If this is true, can the Indian Muslims be asked to reposition their identity according to demands of Indian society which is overwhelmingly determined by the Hindu majority?

To borrow P. Nora's expression of *les lieux de memoire* (or the imagination of memorial sites), the current round of Hindu-Muslim rivalry in India is also associated with disputed sites.¹⁰³ The symbolism of Ayodhya and other such sites has created a sense of nationalism among the Hindus and the reverse among the Muslims (in the form of secessionism or rioting) when these are trampled by the former. The visual history present in many Muslim sites in India¹⁰⁴ acts as catalysts in dividing the two communities. The pertinent task, of course, is how to dispel this memory? Collectivisation and forcible elimination of these spurious memories and identity is unlikely to work as the experience in the Balkans, Russia and Central Asia show.

The nationalist school was exposed to all the three written, oral and symbolic-memorial tradition of history to varying degrees. Interestingly, elements such as geography, religio-cultural upbringing, prevalent social mood also influenced their dim view of Muslim rule and Islam. For instance, most of the pro-Hindu

¹⁰² Nico Kaptein, 'V. S. Naipaul's New Islamic Travelogue: The Believers Revisited' IAS Newsletter, no. 14, p. 11, Dec. 1997.

¹⁰³ This is by no means the only factor contributing to Hindu-Muslim rivalry.

¹⁰⁴ A controversial but nonetheless relevant publication that details the Islamic structures over Hindu sacred sites can be found in Sita Ram Goel, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them (The Islamic Evidence)*, New Delhi: Voice of India Publications, 1992.

nationalists during the first wave of Indian nationalist movement belonged to north India with a significant Islamic experience compared to that of the south. Similarly, the extremists within the Congress were upper caste Hindus with a tradition of resistance to non-Hindu cultures and religion. Unsurprisingly, they had a disparaging attitude towards Muslim rule and Islam. Also, they considered both Muslim and British rule as foreign in origin and as a result their discourse was directed as much against British as Muslims. The moderates, by contrast, recognised the importance of Muslim participation in the struggle against the British. Therefore, they could not fully agree with extremists' anti-Muslim position. Also, the moderates had a better understanding of the state-building process. But it would be hard to imagine that they did not share the historical thinking of the extremists or were not products of the oral, historical and symbolic-memorial tradition.

The four thinkers whom I discussed earlier though represented four different strands of Indian nationalist thought they nonetheless had a degree of commonality in their attitude towards Muslim rule and Islam. They were influenced by both British historiography and the selective oral memory. As mentioned earlier, British historians and British rule cannot be blamed entirely for painting a dark picture of Muslim India. Hindu folk sociology, oral memory and the indigenous tradition harboured centuries of hatred against Muslims. This received narrative was highly biased in the sense that oral memory was selective and in this case it remembered only the past Muslim atrocity and the associated trauma. Through a process of mere selection and omission startling contrasts had been made between the Hindu and Muslim period of Indian history in the oral memory which ended in highlighting a

highly prejudiced image of Muslim rule. Therefore, these agents were as much responsible for promoting a negative attitude among Hindus towards Muslims as were the British. Similarly, desecrated religious sites kept memories of Muslim vandalism, pillage, and persecution alive. This visual image was one of the powerful and potent mediums of prejudice.¹⁰⁵ These undeniable evidences present in the ravaged religious sites reinforced the bias against Muslims in the oral memory and folk sociology.

But this was only one side of the history of Muslim rule in India. There were areas such as music, architecture, arts, food and even religion where some substantial interaction took place between Hindus and Muslims. British historians interpreting India's past largely ignored these aspects of positive interaction. Some of them had a built-in bias against Hindus but mostly Muslims. This prejudice was again created by their immediate social environment, intellectual orientation and the colonial demand. Hence complex historical realities were reduced to simple generalisation. They went about interpreting Indian history in a particular way. Their own prejudice against Muslim rule and Islam found an easy audience among those who were guided by a selective folk memory. Consequently, over the years, a highly disparaging discourse on Muslim rule and Islam was constructed. Since Hindus and Muslims were bounded, coherent and contending communities they were easily affected by this interpretation.

¹⁰⁵ The dispute over Ayodhya mosque and its subsequent destruction by Hindu fanatics in 1992 confirms that visual image is crucial in fermenting Hindu-Muslim discontent.

The disparaging attitude of nationalist thinkers towards Muslim rule and Islam was influenced by the colonial interpretation. Nevertheless, equally importantly, their upbringing and inheritance, social surrounding, political atmosphere, own temperament, and belief in folk sociology affected their view of Muslim rule and Islam. These thinkers were conscious of the risks involved in subscribing to a biased view of history and were acutely aware of its consequences. However, their own Hindu background and inability to provide an alternative interpretation of history forced them to maintain such an attitude. They undoubtedly tried to fit in Muslims and Islam in their conception of future India. But in the process they Hinduised both Muslims and Islam and it further accentuated the conflict between Hindus and Muslims.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

To forget and - I will venture to say - to get one's history wrong, are essential elements in the making of a nation; and thus the advance of historical studies is often a danger to nationality.

- *Ernest Renan*

In earlier chapters I did two things. First, I analysed the writings of four nationalist writers with a view to exploring their assessments of seven hundred years of Muslim rule and their understanding of Islam. I argued that their assessment was largely negative and that their attitude to Islam covered a wide range of views ranging from a grudging appreciation of Islam to its downright dismissal. I then went on to suggest that part of the explanation for the former lies in British historiography and its broad coincidence with Hindu oral traditions. So far as the latter is concerned I suggested that the low assessment of Islam stemmed partly from the political fear of it, partly from the criteria which the Hindu writers employed in evaluating religions, and partly from sheer misunderstanding. And all this has profound implications for contemporary India.

In the main, Indian nationalist tradition had a structural bias. At its worst it was hostile to Muslim rule and Islam, and at its best ambivalent towards them. This legacy of the tradition still continues. In other words, independent India inherited a tradition which continues to affect the thinking of a substantial majority of Hindus and is expressed in the three following areas. First, in the disparaging attitude

towards Muslim rule and difficulty in coming to terms with it. Second, in the reluctance to accept Muslims as fellow-citizens. Third, in a general sense of fear of Islam. Independent India had to function within the world of ideas left behind by this legacy. The obvious inquiry, of course, is how did it cope?

In its search to find an alternative the Nehruvian state devised certain policies that could counter this legacy. First, it privatised religion. Second, it committed the state to remain above religion. Third, it guaranteed state neutrality over religion. Fourth, it concentrated only on common economic issues which could unite both Hindus and Muslims. This policy orientation worked for a while but could not change the overall attitude of Indians. The Nehruvian state's emphasis on the privatisation of religion was a failure. Religion could not be privatised for various reasons. For Hindus religion was a matter of social practice, expressed in such terms as caste, sub-caste and community. Therefore its privatisation was an incomprehensible proposition. Muslims had the same difficulty. Moreover, the commitment to economic and developmental issues could not be sustained. Once the economy was in decline people began to take a renewed interest in religion. Also, the mainstream culture of the state failed to involve all the communities equally as I discussed in the chapter on Nehru.

At this juncture, the majority began to organise itself. The rise of militant Islam in Pakistan, Iran and Kashmir also helped consolidate the Hindu consciousness. And the Nehruvian strategy began to unravel. But most importantly, there was no suitable alternative to fill the vacuum created by the collapse of the

Nehruvian strategy. Several different groups and parties with divergent ideological persuasions vied with each other to occupy it. This vacuum was filled by the Hindu communalism of the Jan Sangh and later the BJP, by radical and often militant secularism of the left parties and the communists, and by the *ad hoc* accommodation policies of the Congress. But none of these was wholly suitable for dealing with the problem. Therefore a radical rethinking is needed about the place of religious minorities in India, especially the Muslims.

I suggest that if India is to be a home for all its various minorities and to develop a genuine sense of common citizenship and common belonging, it must evolve an identity which all its citizens can equally share. This involves a broadly shared view of its history and also a broadly sympathetic appreciation of each other's religions, cultures and life styles. This would mean that the Muslim past in India needs to be reinterpreted. Much work is being done and increasingly there is appreciation that Muslim rule was not as bleak and tyrannical as had been thought by the four nationalist writers discussed earlier and many others. However this still continues to be disputed. Historians of course have a very important role to play and as truth about the past is discovered one likes to believe that Hindus and Muslims will be able to come to terms with it and accept their ownership of it.

Truth, however, is never the basis of any political society. Although truth is important we also need myths. As Ernest Renan said, 'nations are built partly on the knowledge of history and partly on ignorance of it'. Very often when a society is young and in the process of nation-building it needs to project certain images of its

past in order to inspire its people to work together. As they become more mature, they are able to see through the myth and face the reality as it was. As in individual life so in national life. Ideology plays an important part in shaping a society's self-understanding. How to combine the historical search for truth with the political need for some kind of myth making is an extremely complex problem. Some nations manage to integrate the two and they succeed in laying the foundation of a stable society.

Therefore, 'unless the past is to be interpreted with the benefit of hindsight and in the light of the present, it cannot be effectively interpreted at all'.¹ Given the central thesis of my dissertation one thing is clear: India is dominated by a certain tradition of thinking about its Muslim past and about Islam. The tradition has deep roots. It cannot therefore be easily countered. Countering it requires a self-conscious collective effort on the part of the Indian elite and the Indian masses. Unless the weight of that tradition is lifted Indians will not be able to confront their past and their present with the required degree of honesty.

In this context, the media, political parties, politicians, and educational institutions have a central role to play. These are the prime socialising agents in a democracy and are responsible for shaping and sharing the public mood, the national consciousness and even the national character. The reorientation of the Hindu attitude towards Muslims and *vice versa* is dependent to a large extent on the above

¹ David Thomson, *The Aims of History: Values of the Historical Attitude*, London: Thames and Hudson, p. 55.

mentioned agents. I shall briefly highlight their role and suggest how they could best intervene to create this new tradition.

Compared to those in many other developing societies, the Indian media are largely free of state control. Most Indian newspapers (both national and local) are ideologically oriented and often subscribe to the agendas of various political parties. Another feature of the Indian media is its approach to secularism. Secularism of the Indian media can be explained in terms of its anti-majoritarian or pro-minority approach. Instead of promoting positive criticism this orientation has only aggravated the inter-communal relationship. In a complex society like India this has far reaching consequences. For instance, the media that subscribe to the extreme right or left wing views of the political parties can hardly nurture a spirit of healthy interaction among different communities in the society. But if the media can remain above any political affiliation and confront issues in a more or less neutral manner they can certainly promote a better understanding among their readers and audience. The supervisory role of the Press Complaints Commission in preventing the malicious communal reportage in the newspapers is also crucial.

Political parties do not need to be ideologically neutral. However, their excessive dependence on a particular variety of ideology or a group of people can adversely affect communal relations. Some critics argue that the Congress party's dependence on the 'Muslim vote' and its 'policy of appeasement of Muslims' in the 1970s was largely responsible for the ascent of the right-wing Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Predictably, the rise of the BJP has accentuated the Hindu-

Muslim conflict. Abandonment of such parochialism among political parties is central not only to the emergence of broad-based consensual politics but to the promotion of a harmonious collective identity.

Equally importantly, politicians are responsible for shaping the national self-understanding. Their own understanding of history and its usage in the immediate political context can in turn determine the understanding of the people they represent. Unfortunately many politicians in India play on the fears and anxieties of one group of people or another, and often use them against each other for short term electoral and political gains. This has been extremely damaging to Hindu-Muslim relations in recent years. They must transcend this temporary self-interest. An enlightened and non-parochial approach on the part of the politicians is therefore crucial in promoting greater understanding and interaction among Indians.

Although secular values and ideals are taught in the educational institutions from school onwards, they do not always adequately influence the students' attitude. To a certain extent the current generation appears to be more deeply conscious of its communal identity than at any other period in post-independence India. This is partly because of the apparent contradiction between the synthetic representation of Indian history in the textbooks and an entirely opposite hostile Hindu-Muslim discourse that exists outside the educational institutions. In addition, "the country's fragmented educational system has hindered the emergence of a sense of common citizenship".² An honest and dispassionate representation of the history of Muslim rule in the text

² Bhikhu Parekh, 'India's Diversity', *Dissent*, Summer, 1996, p. 147.

books could dispel some anxieties about the past. Perhaps one way of safeguarding Indian society from this communal divide is to have a clear understanding of history but at the same time not attach too much importance to it as that would only be ill at ease with the present.

So far as Islam as a religion is concerned, there should be more emphasis on inter-faith dialogue in India. Certainly Islam and Hinduism have much in common. This was explored in detail by the reformers of the Bhakti movement. Sufism in Islam was deeply influenced by Hindu mysticism. This is not to suggest that attempts should be made to unify Hinduism and Islam or conceive a third alternative religion. The unease over Islam, to a great extent, is due to the lack of understanding among Hindus towards this religion and the dominance of several negative stereotypes. For a lasting as well as symbolic impact this dialogue could be initiated by the supreme religious leaders of both communities such as Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid and one of the four Shankaracharyas. This would be likely to trigger off a wide-spread internal debate and both Hindus and Muslims would use the occasion to inquire about the fundamentals of each others' religion and learn to appreciate some of its core values and common principles. This healthy inter-religious and historical evaluation could pave the way for a lasting peace among Hindus and Muslims and unite them for the common goal of nation-building. Therefore, the need to develop a synthetic past and inter-religious amity should be a priority in India.

These are tentative propositions and need to be fully worked out. However, the basic point is that building a state in which all communities feel at ease requires

concerted effort at all levels. The Indian nationalist movement was geared towards securing independence and while doing so it failed to pay adequate attention to national integration. Thus the onus is on the present generation of Indians to develop a common sense of belonging. However, belonging is reciprocal. A person cannot belong to a community or nation unless that community or nation belongs to that person. Very often India's minorities and especially the Muslims are accused of lacking allegiance to the nation. I do not wish to go into the veracity of this claim. But many misguided popular prejudice have worked against the development of a common sense of belonging. Insulting stereotypes, questions about their loyalty and an outright condemnation of their history have all contributed towards making Muslims feel as aliens in their own country. A Muslim can truly feel a part of the nation only when this legacy is countered.

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