Hindu Communalism

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Lesson: Hindu Communalism
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Introduction

Sometime after the 7th century, the newly wealthy Virasaivas (or Lingayats) of what is now called Karnataka, led the persecution of Jaina monks and destroyed Jaina images. Such incidents show that religious conflict is a long standing feature of our history. But the nature of these conflicts changed completely under colonialism. The transformation could not be observed immediately. Communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in the early years of British rule kept to a pattern of battles between people with different religious beliefs. These conflicts were normally temporary in nature. But colonialism provided a different context and over time this changed everything. Under colonial rule, religious conflicts became communalism, a nation-wide political and social ideology which believed that religious cultures or ways of life are in a state of permanent conflict.

There were several riots in the early 19th century, mainly in the area we know as Uttar Pradesh today. The first notable riot took place in Benares in 1809, followed by riots in many towns such as Moradabad, Kanpur and Allahabad in the next three decades. There was no common organization or ideology that encouraged or organized these clashes. What the towns experienced were common social changes. Small towns had been dominated by an Indo-Persian elite drawn from wealthy and influential sections of both Muslims and Hindus. Colonialism introduced the development of new markets and communications. Hindu merchants prospered in these conditions. Soon, like any newly rich group, they tried to acquire higher social status. They did this by engaging in public activities such as building temples, sponsoring processions or implementing the ritual ban on cow killing. These acts were resented by other groups who saw these as violating established relations between urban communities. At times, this resentment became so strong that it resulted in violent attacks on processions or on the customs of the other community. Matters were made worse because the traditional keepers of urban order were losing their authority. Earlier the Kazi (the marriage registrar) also acted as an arbitrator of local conflicts – while the Kotwal kept order. The British cut down the powers of these two institutions and weakened their ability to resolve local conflicts.

Value addition: did you know?
Native states and the rise of Hindu consciousness
Native rulers played an important role in spreading Hindu cultural traditions. This deepened the feeling that Hindus were completely separate from other communities. It is noteworthy that native rulers were important supporters of the Hindu Mahasabha (see below). Two significant stories are narrated here about Benares and Kashmir. Benares: Balwant Singh was an ordinary tax collector when he became Raja in 1740. By the end of the 18th century, his descendents began to promote the Ram tradition. An important

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way they did this was by sponsoring Ram Kathas in which passages from Tulsidas' Ram Charit Manas were recited. By emphasizing their Hinduness the Rajas emphasized their cultural independence from the Nawab of Awadh who was the dominant power in the region. The Ram story also idealized a hierarchical social order: rulers could use it to teach their subjects to be obedient. The patronage of Ram – that also included the building of temples, collection of manuscripts at the court and so on - became stronger as the British began to take over effective power over the region. Promotion of the Ram legend now served to compensate for the loss of real power. The introduction of printed books popularized the Ram story even further and its publication was promoted from the latter part of the 19th century by pro Hindi agitators such as Pandit Malaviya.

Kashmir:

When the Sikhs ruled Kashmir, the Dogras were only one among many chieftains. Gulab Singh, the Dogra leader, prospered under Ranjit Singh. He remained neutral during the Anglo Sikh War and was given perpetual possession of areas of present day Jammu and Kashmir in 1846 as a reward. It was the British historians who began to stress the Rajput lineage of the Dogras to break their alliance with the Sikhs. The British went to the extent of saying that the lineage of the Dogras came from time immemorial since a branch of the Rajputs had remained in the Punjab hills before the Muslims had entered India. Although the Dogra policies were not fully communal, it was clear that Hindus (who consisted mainly of small numbers of very influential Pandits while Muslims formed 95% of the population) were given a superior status. For instance, cow killing was not only banned but could attract a death penalty under Ranbir Singh, Gulab Singh's successor. Ranbir Singh (who became Maharaja in 1856) also made the encouragement of temple building and promotion of shrines into State policy and taxed Muslim cultivators for the purpose. Despite these policies, Kashmir (till recently) had little communal trouble. There was a culture of inter community mutuality between Hindus and Muslims called Kashmiriyat.

Source: Lutgendorf, Philip. 1989. Ram's story in Shiva's city: Public arenas and private patronage. In Sandria B. Freitag ed. *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Performance and Environment 1800-1980*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Rai, Mridu. 2004. *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam. Rights, and the History of Kashmir*. Delhi: Permanent Black.

Added to such social changes was a deepening sense of Hinduism as a political culture. Literature and drama provided an important source of Hindu cultural consciousness. In Bengal, a whole series of playwrights, novelists and poets were influenced by the works of colonial historians and anthropologists. The latter painted Muslim rulers in a very negative way – probably to show that British rule had come as a liberation and boon for Indians! Creative writers used these colonial sources to write plots which featured the Muslim oppression of Hindu princes and kingdoms. The Padmini legend which featured Alauddin as a militaristic Muslim ruler oppressing brave but tragic Hindu antagonists especially their women, became a popular story. It was used by writers in many literatures of India in the 19th century. Literary activity helped the growth of a Hindu nationalism – implicitly against Muslims – among the middle class.

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ALA-UD-DIN KHILJI

A tall, bear of a man, this dreaded Afghan sultan and ruthless invader descends from the royal line of Temur and the great Genghis Khan himself. He is a wily commander who habitually uses treachery and diplomacy as his big weapons with utter disregard for fair play. More of a 'dreaded' commander than sensitive strategist, he prefers instilling fear in his men simply as a tool for motivation. An ambitious man, he has an uncompromising greed for land and more territory and considers all riches, including women, simply as 'conquests'. The chink in his grand armor is his seemingly vain superiority and an utter disrespect for all adversaries.

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PADMINI

Padmini a legendary beauty, is the epitome of Indian woman-hood and a personification of honor and valor. Her shy and demure persona notwithstanding, the strong ideals and inner strength can leave many both impressed and inspired by her. Blessed with breathtaking looks, she also imbibes qualities of a caring, strong, and sacrificing individual. Her beauty is the source of dismay for many spurned suitors, while she herself longs to be recognized as the strong individual behind those dazzling looks. Her royalty by birth, a sheltered upbringing, and inculcation of humble and honorable ideals may have prepared her for most things but not for the trials and tribulations that come with being the sole queen of a proud and much sought after land.
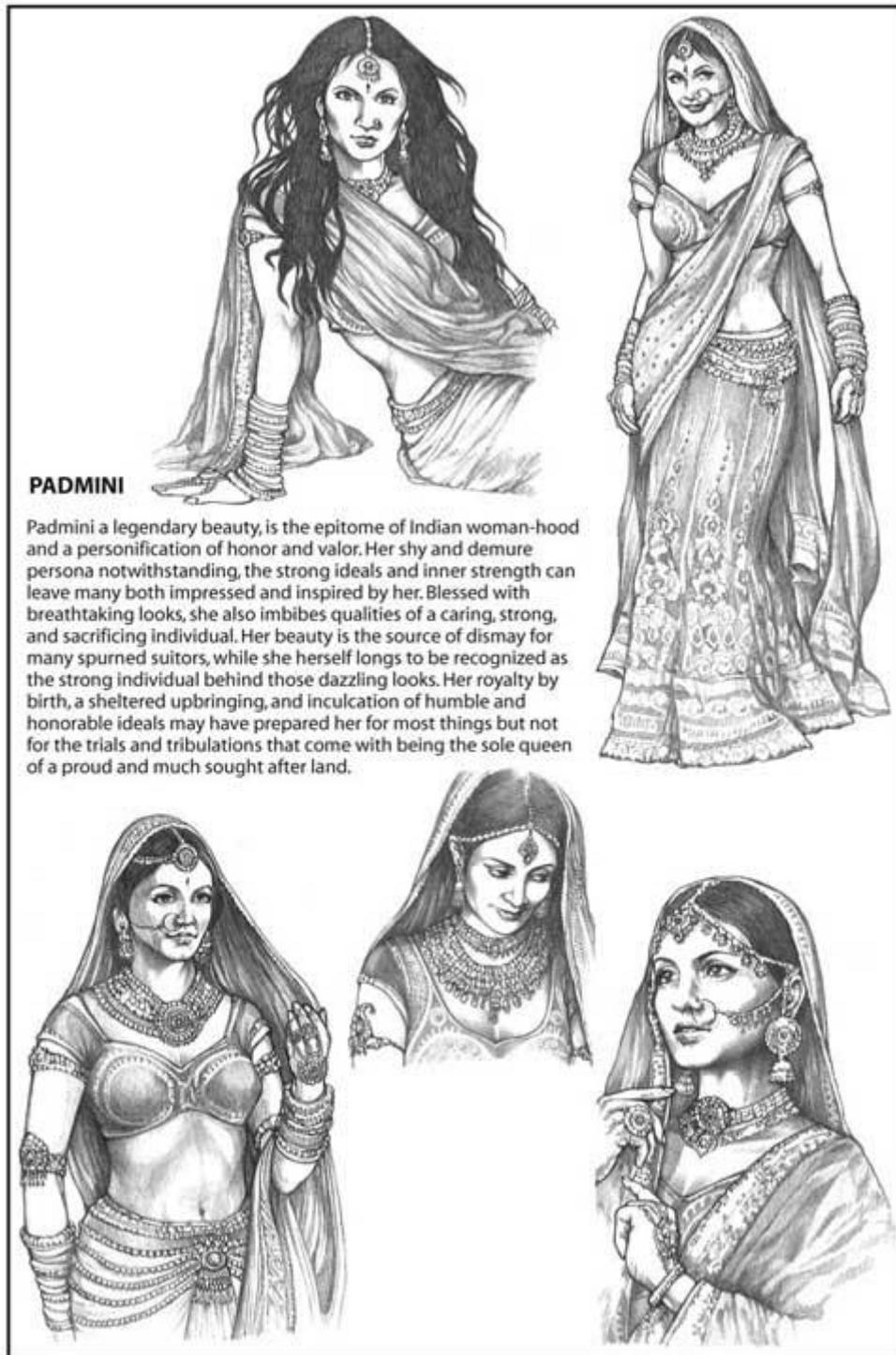
Figure 11.2.1: Contemporary images and descriptions of Alauddin and Padmini showing the influence of early stereotypes

Source: graphicnovel360.com/

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Value addition: did you know?
The politics of the 'Aryans'
When they became the rulers of the country, the English brought scholars who would give them knowledge about India. The Indologists, as these scholars were known, popularized the idea that Indian civilization began with the Aryans. Earlier accounts of the past such as the Puranas made no mention of them. Drawing on the Vedas, the Indologists identified Aryans as a group that came from outside India. They spoke a shared language and belonged to the same race. Max Mueller, a German Indologist, argued that Aryans had originated in Central Asia and that one section had gone to Europe and the other had come to India. The alleged difference between the two groups allowed the Europeans to make a distinction between themselves and the Indians. They could argue that European Aryans had made more progress and had a superior civilization. B. G. Tilak, the Maharashtrian nationalist, was also the most famous Indian scholar who argued that Aryans had come from outside India; he concluded that Aryans had come from the Arctic Circle. This theory was politically embarrassing since the low caste leader Jotiba Phule had argued that Aryans were invaders who had colonized the natives and made them into the low castes and untouchables. Hence V. D. Savarkar wrote that it was better to forget certain facts such as the origin of Aryans - even if they were historically true – since this could divide the Hindus! While Savarkar chose to forget, M. S. Golwalkar contradicted Tilak. Golwalkar claimed that the North Pole and the Arctic Circle were once a part of India (occupying Bihar and Orissa) and that only later it drifted away into its present position. While this assertion was politically helpful for the Hindutva nationalist to dismiss Phule's arguments, it has not been substantiated by any evidence. Professional historians have yet to offer any strong proof to show who the Aryans were. It is clear that they were not a race but simply a group of people who spoke a shared language. Their place of origin also remains controversial. On the basis of linguistic evidence however, it is clear that only the Vedas and Azvesta texts of Iran mention the Aryans directly.
Source: Deshpande, Madhav M. 2009. 'The Arctic home in the Vedas': Religion, Politics, and the Colonial Context. In Vinay Lal ed. *Political Hinduism: The religious imagination in Public Spheres*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Thapar, Romila. 2008 *The Aryan: Recasting Constructs*. Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective

Census, language and cow protectioon

Till late 19th century, communalism took the form of occasional conflicts. Hindu cultural consciousness may have made anti Muslim stereotypes acceptable, but had not provoked strong Muslim criticism. Everything changed with the introduction of the census and the number of movements that grew alongside it. The Census, first published in 1871, was based on the colonial understanding that India was basically a land of many religions. Thus the Census classified the population under religious (and caste) heads. This transformed the way people related to their religious identity. While the religious practices and performances of a great many people in the country were drawn from different religions or local customs, the Census forced everyone to define their religions according to its

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classifications: a person was forced to define oneself as Hindu or Muslim or **Animist** and so on. A person could not be a mix of these. Further, every ten years when the new Census was published, the returns would show the different rates of growth of different religions. This introduced a sense of competition about the population size of each religion and with it, mutual distrust.

The effect of the Census was evident in the **Shuddhi** movement. The Shuddhi movement arose from a fear that other religions were converting Hindus and increasing their numbers. Started by the Arya Samaj to convert non Hindus, it became a powerful force from the 1890's. The main target was Muslims: in 1893 only two persons were converted from Christianity while thirteen Muslims were converted. The conversion movement attempted to mobilize groups who practiced both Hindu and Muslim customs. Shuddhi produced a great deal of bitterness in Muslims, especially amongst their communal sections. It led to violence: Pandit Lekh Ram was murdered after his campaigns against the **Ahmadiyas** and Islam. His death further intensified suspicion on both sides. It may be noted that Shuddhi also antagonized the Singh Sabha, a Sikh organization, when Arya Samajis persuaded Rahtia Sikhs to adopt Hindu practices.

The anxiety about numbers became more general because colonial policies were based on giving different treatment to Hindus and Muslims. The administration devised separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims and their respective population size played a very important part in the number of seats that they could contest in local and other elections. In the first decade of the 20th century it was feared that the Census Commissioner was preparing ways to declassify the low castes from the Hindus. This threatened to weaken the bargaining position of the upper castes in relationship to the Muslims. The percentage of Muslims would increase if the number of Hindus went down. It became necessary for Hindu organizations to retain the low castes. This anxiety gave new life to the Shuddhi movement (under Swami Shraddhanand who was also murdered by a Muslim) in the 20th century. It also motivated the Sangathan (organization) movement that sought to unite Hindus across castes. But Muslims spokespersons saw in this call for unity a preparation to attack them.

Value addition: did you know?
Hindu mobilization and the low castes
Observing the resentment of low castes against the upper castes, colonial authorities tried to use the Census to classify them separately from the Hindus. In 1910, E. A. Gait, the Census Commissioner, issued a circular that proposed some 'tests' to define a true Hindu. It asked four questions: whether the respondents worshipped the 'great Hindu gods'; if they were allowed into temples; whether the Brahmins who conducted their rituals were regarded as 'degraded' by other Brahmins; to what degree were they untouchable. Answering 'yes' to these questions – which the low castes were bound to do – would raise doubts about their status as Hindus. This was a major threat since the London branch of the Muslim League had proposed that low castes should not be counted as Hindus for the purpose of elections under the Morley Minto reforms of 1909.   The British were of course interested in making Hindus and Muslims compete with one another. As early as 1891, O'Donnell, the Census Commissioner, had forecast that Hindus were dying out because they were becoming smaller in proportion to the rapidly

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growing Muslim population. O'Donnell's belief, in turn, led to a great outcry among Hindu propagandists. Without the numbers that low castes contributed, Hindus were a 'dying race'. It became clear to Hindu activists that they must pay attention to the 'depressed classes', organize them and enter into social relationships with them. Already low caste leaders like Jotiba Phule of Maharashtra had condemned the upper castes. The great fear now was that Muslims would outnumber Hindus if low castes refused to see themselves as Hindus. Hindu leaders like Lajpat Rai in Punjab and propagandists such as U. N. Mukherji in Bengal, campaigned on this issue. It is interesting that the RSS was formed by Brahmins in Pune after Phule's works had become influential among low castes.

Caste issues divided Hindu organizations even when they tried to appeal to the low castes. As stated, the Hindu Mahasabha included both reformers from the Arya Samaj and orthodox representatives from the Brahman Sabha. But their alliance became strained in 1916 when they were faced with the Inter Caste Marriage Bill. The orthodox section opposed it tooth and nail. It may also be remarked that we hardly find any low caste names among the leaders and cadres of Hindu organizations before Independence.

Source: Datta, Pradip Kumar. 1999. *Carving Blocs: Communal ideology in early twentieth century Bengal*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Jones, Kenneth. 1981. Politicised Hinduism: The ideology and programme of the Hindu Mahasabha. In Robert D. Braid ed. *Religion in Modern India*. New Delhi: Manohar.

The Hindi-Urdu controversy provided yet another source for Hindu communalization. However the issue was not a straightforward one. In the 1830's Persian was replaced by Urdu as the language of official communication. By the middle of the 19th century a new Hindi speaking intelligentsia began to emerge. From 1868, the Hindi lobby began to demand that vernacular textbooks issued by the government be published in Hindi. There was a growing demand grew to replace Urdu with Hindi as the language of official communication in the United Provinces - which would help Hindi speakers to get government jobs. The campaign had a major success when an official circular of 1901 ruled that five Hindi speakers should be appointed to government jobs to every three Urdu speakers.

There was a democratic element to the Hindi agitation since those literate in Urdu formed a small elite of **ashraf** Muslims and Kayasthas. But the demand for Hindi simultaneously appealed to communal symbols. Hindi was symbolized as the pure language of the gods who were native to the land, while Urdu was represented as the decadent and foreign language of the Muslim courts. The irony was, that in actual fact, many of the languages spoken in India (especially Hindustani) had words derived from Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian. In fact this was the reason why Hindi activists demanded implementation of the Devnagari script, for this script was the only clear point of difference with Urdu. Over time, of course, Hindi was sanskritized and its other 'foreign' words were purged. A connected culture of language was destroyed.

Hindu communalism spread most effectively and extensively through the Cow Protection movement. This movement converted riots from being merely stray incidents to becoming

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a part of long-term campaigns. The movement originated in Arya Samaj campaigns that began in the last year of Swami Dayanand Saraswati's life (d. 1883), when he established the first Gaurakshini Sabha and wrote the book *Gaukarunanidhi*. The movement grew rapidly after his death and led to many riots. These occurred in three phases. The first phase was confined to Punjab, where the Arya Samaj had its base. The second phase started after the Allahabad Court in 1887 ruled that the cow was not an object of worship. The movement now rapidly spread eastwards to the Bhojpuri speaking regions of Eastern U.P. and Western Bihar (including Patna and Gaya districts). This phase was quite violent but was suppressed in the mid-1890's. The third phase revived in Bihar from 1910. This was very violent. In the Shahabad riots of 1917, about 150 square miles of area passed out of official control with 150 villages looted and 41 killed. The movement affected both towns and villages and as it spread, its social base also grew. While mainly Rajas, landlords, traders, bankers, officials were involved in the early phases, the later periods also got the support of small zamindars, semi- English educated agitators, professionals, traders and peasants. A notable feature of this movement was the involvement of low caste groups such as Ahirs, Kurmis and Koeris.

Figure 11.2.2: A pro cow protection poster

Source: www.loc.gov/exhibits/world/world-object.html

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Two features of the movement explain its spread and its after - effects. The first is its symbolic power. The movement used print very effectively by spreading writings on and pictures of the cow that represented it as a mother figure. The implication was that those who did not resist the cow killing Muslims were guilty of matricide. Some pictures showed various gods and goddesses in the cow's body, indicating that the death of a cow involved the destruction of many beliefs of the Hindus. The visual campaign was supported by writings on the economic benefits of the cow. The second feature was its methods of mobilization. Arya Samaji preachers as well as itinerant swamis spread the message of the cow. Allahabad emerged as the centre of the movement in the second phase, with national leaders like Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya helping to popularize its cause through the printing presses. Popular institutions such goshalas (home for sick cows) were started; funds were raised through chutki (asking for grain); chain letters and patias (handbills) were distributed widely.

The movement brought together different social forces. It got the support of the orthodox Santan Dharma Sabhas which had earlier been opposed to the reformist Arya Samaj. In places where the Samaj was weak (like Allahabad), it was the Dharma Sabhas which led the movement. After the cow protection movement, the Arya Samaj could no longer be regarded as a marginal force among Hindus. Incidentally, the cow protection issue got the support of various local Congressmen, which also helped to gain acceptability for Hindu communal ideas.

Riots, organizations, negotiations

As yet Hindu communalism did not raise political questions. It had no ideology. Nor was there a sense of the Muslim (or Christian) as one who is utterly different from Hindus. Riots were exclusively attached to the cause of **goraksha**. Riots were not related to other issues, not even the campaign for Hindi. All this changed in the new century.

The shift is visible in the number and spread of riots. Riots had occurred infrequently in the first two decades of the 20th century, most notably in the course of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal (Mymensingh,1906). But in the mid 1920s, riots took place almost simultaneously over the northern, western and eastern parts of the country. Between 1923 and 1926, 76 riots were officially recorded, clustered mainly in areas around Bombay, Delhi and in Punjab, United Provinces, Bihar and Bengal. Violence was intense; the Calcutta riots went on for nearly a month in 1926. It left over a hundred deaths. In these riots places of worship of the two communities – mosques and temples – were targeted and rioters attempted to kill or maim their opponents. Rural riots were different. There were fewer killings and rioters targeted the other community for mainly economic reasons. Hence moneylenders, who were mainly Hindu, were attacked and their records of debts, looted.

Most of these riots took place over the Muslim objection to the playing of music before mosques. The first of these occurred in Multan in 1922 and spread rapidly throughout the country. It spread to many more places than had the cow issue despite the fact that it was not backed up by a movement like the latter. This was partly caused by newspapers. These got divided on communal lines. They sometimes published rumours and sensational details of violence, broadcast views of communal propagandists and made the issue of music before mosque a country-wide concern. Newspapers multiplied the effects of riots in producing deep social divisions. In conflict hit areas, Hindus and Muslims boycotted one another's traders and organized trades on communal lines. In Calcutta, for instance,

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Muslim butchers' shops were boycotted and Hindus opened their own butcher's shops. Mixed localities turned into exclusively Hindu or Muslim localities as people migrated. For Hindu communalists, the issue of music produced popular support, since so much of Hindu devotional practices are musical in their nature, and sounds of gongs and drums are a critical part of Hindu ritual worship. Hindu communal suspicion of Muslims was also intensified by the organized campaign against the alleged abduction of Hindu women by Muslim men – although police reports did not notice any such trend. By stereotyping Muslims as abductors of women, this campaign deeply embittered communal relations.

Value addition: did you know?
Abduction and its effects
In the 1920s newspapers and Hindu organizations began to allege that Muslim goondas were abducting Hindu women. Such allegations were not unknown. In 1884 there was a famous case In Punjab and Sind, of a Hindu woman who married a Muslim man. Both Hindus and Muslims claimed that the other side had abducted her. The case came to court and both sides mobilized big crowds. During the Swadeshi movement there were allegations that Hindu widows had been molested by Muslims in a village. In the 1923 Benares session of the Hindu Mahasabha, Pt Malaviya listed abduction of Hindu women as a major problem for Hindus. This began an organized campaign. In Bengal the campaign was organized by the Women's Protection League (WPL) that consisted mainly of lawyers and newspapermen and was mainly conducted by Hindu owned newspapers. Hindu propagandists claimed that only the Muslim community could produce such goondas. This allegation made the Muslims as a whole responsible. Although it did not directly lead to violence, this campaign made each community suspicious and bitter about the other. The campaign had important social consequences. It was an issue that could mobilize low castes – who were otherwise opposed to upper caste discrimination – together with the upper castes. For instance, this issue allowed the professionals of Kolkata to make common cause with the low caste Rajbansis of North Bengal. It also militarized women. Physical training became popular as women were encouraged to defend themselves against Muslim goondas. Hindutva thinkers such as V.D. Savarkar popularized the image of Muslims as abductors of Hindu women. Organizations such as the Rashtriya Sevika Sangh, the sister organization of the RSS, were influenced by such campaigns to include even paramilitary training for their members. Almost all cases of relationships where the woman was Hindu and the man Muslim, were labeled as abduction cases. In 1929 a girl called Sovanna ran away with her Muslim neighbor in an East Bengal town because she loved him. Newspapers and propagandists said this was a case of abduction. In 1938 however, the WPL changed its understanding. It now said that both Hindus and Muslim males abducted women of their community as well as of the other; it also said that there were a large number of cases in which the family sold off the women. It held the male dominated social order as responsible for abductions and ill treatment of women. Significantly, the WPL was led by women in these years.
Source: Datta, Pradip Kumar. 1999. *Carving Blocs: Communal ideology in early twentieth century Bengal*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Sarkar, Tanika and

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The riots popularized Hindu organizations. A new wave of Hindu organizations had started with the announcement of Separate Electorates in 1909 by the Indian Councils Act. This inspired the massive growth of Hindu Sabhas which aimed to organize Hindus. The numerous Hindu Sabhas were finally united as the Hindu Mahasabha in 1915 with the aim of uniting all Hindus and defending their interests. Both Arya Samajis and **Sanatanists** were involved in the new organization, although the Sanatanists were more prominent. The HMS became inactive during the Non-co-operation/Khilafat days. But it revived under the leadership of Pt. Malaviya from 1921-22 - especially after forced conversions of some Hindus during the local uprising of Mappilas, the Muslim peasants of the Malabar region. Another organization started in this period was the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. It was established in 1925 in Nagpur following a riot. While the HMS was a Congress style organization that provided a platform for all Hindu groups and sects and participated in electoral politics, the RSS was a semi-militaristic, cadre based organization. It defined itself as a cultural organization, did not take part in electoral politics and worshipped Shivaji's flag, the Bhagwa Dhwaj, as the symbol of the nation. Till 1940, it was an ally of the Hindu Mahasabha. Afterwards, it grew very rapidly on its own till it was banned for involvement in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi.

Hindu organizations began to acquire a political programme in the 1920s. In the 19th century, the distinction between Hindu nationalism and a nationalism that included Muslims and other minorities as equals in the nation, was unclear. Literary writers and historians normally assumed the nation to be a Hindu one. Indeed, Hindu Mahasabha members could also be a part of the Congress and many Congressmen took part in anti Muslim campaigns. But a separate Hindu nationalist ideology called Hindutva was developed from the mid twenties. It was founded by V. D.Savarkar, a revolutionary terrorist who later became the President of the Hindu Mahasabha. In a book called *Hindutva, Who is a Hindu* (1923), Savarkar argued that only those who were born in Bharat and whose religion was founded there were the real children of the nation. This meant that others whose religions were founded elsewhere (such as Muslims, Christians and so on), did not have an equal claim on the land. Hindutva was different from other forms of nationalism which believed that all communities in India should be treated as being equal parts of the nation. Hindutva was accepted by Dr. Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS.

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Figure 11.2.3: Statue of V. D. Savarkar with image of the Hindu Nation

Source:
http://www.savarkar.org/en/gallery?g2_path=Color+Gallery/IMGP4240.JPG.html

With these developments, political negotiations between Congress and Muslim leaders became difficult. There had been a phase of unity which resulted in the agreement between the Congress and Muslim League in 1916 called the Lucknow Pact. According to the Pact, separate electorates were accepted with distribution of electoral seats varying from province to province. This pact was the basis of the joint struggle of the Non-Cooperation/Khilafat movement. The withdrawal of the latter and the communalization of the mid twenties led to a more complicated round of negotiations from 1927. Its aim was to present joint constitutional proposals to the Simon Commission. Keeping this intention in mind, Jinnah persuaded Muslim leaders to drop the demand for separate electorates in return for reservation of seats in proportion to population. Agreement seemed likely as the Madras Congress of 1927 accepted the offer. But stiff opposition by Hindu Mahasabha leaders such as Jaykar and Kelkar to concessions, ensured that these negotiations broke down. The Mahasabha had become a powerful political force after having won more seats than the Swarajists in the 1926 elections. There was again a possibility of an inter community compromise during the Round Table Conference (1931). The negotiations in the Minorities Committee remained unsuccessful again because of Mahasabha opposition. Correspondingly, there was little Muslim participation in the Civil Disobedience movement in contrast to their prominence in the Non-cop-operation/Khilafat movement. Indeed, Hindu and Muslim politicians could not forge a mass alliance again.

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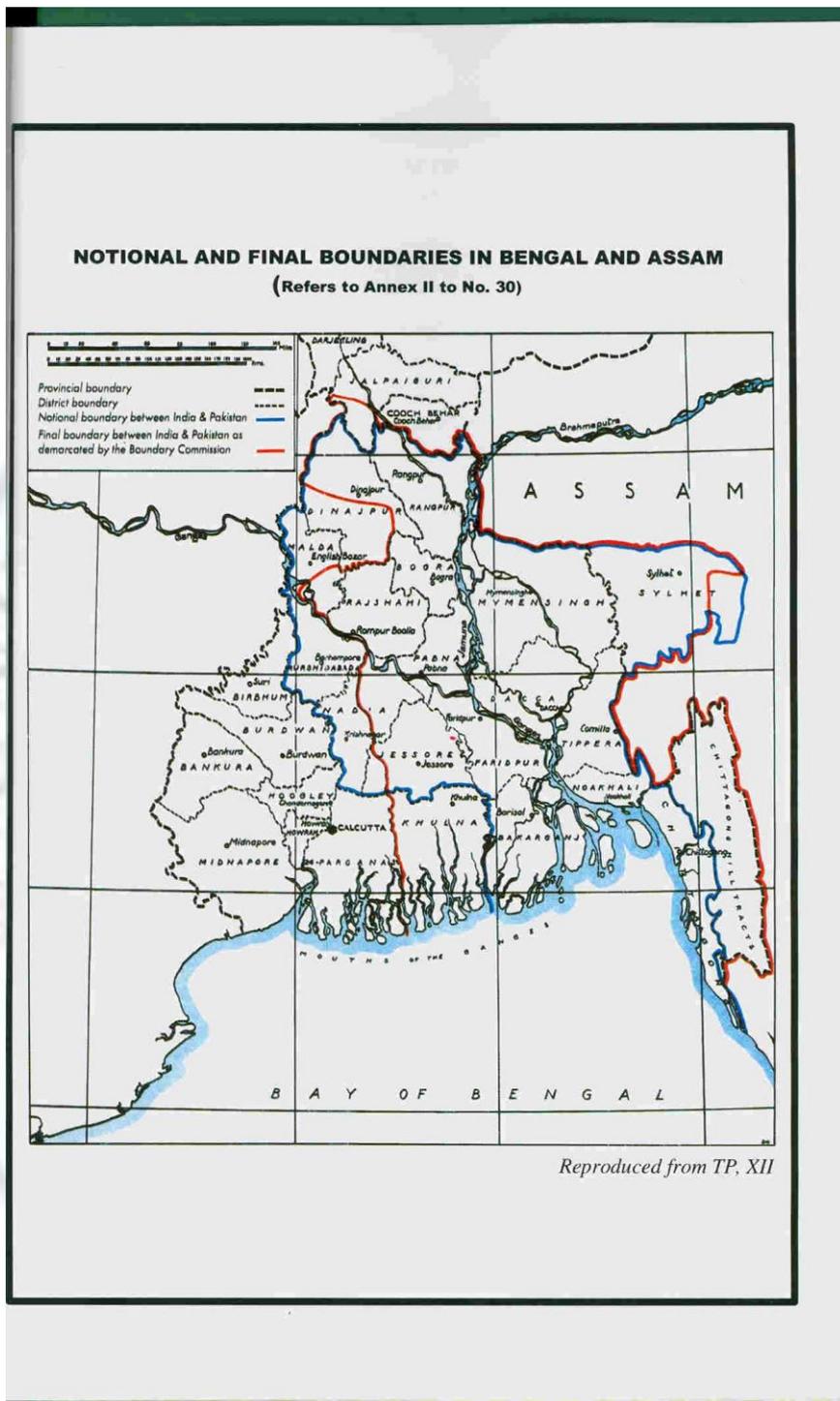## Towards partition: the militarization of Hindu communalism

Figure 11.2.4: Map of Bengal partition, 1947

Source:
http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelpregion/asia/india/indianindependence/map2/bengalass
am.jpg

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The failure of the two phases of Civil Disobedience resulted in acceptance of the political reforms proposed by the colonial government. The MacDonald Award of 1932 assured Hindus and Muslims that they would be given majority representation in the states where they formed the majority of the population. The 1935 Act increased the size of the electorate (from six and a half million to thirty million); the provincial governments were given more powers. These reforms were insubstantial, but they had an important effect on communal relations once elections took place in 1937. The last years of the 1930s saw the stubborn resistance of Jinnah's Muslim League to Congress leadership especially in the United Provinces. The League led a sustained campaign against the Congress ministries accusing them of favouring Hindus. This process culminated in the Pakistan resolution of 1940.

Significant developments took place in Hindu organizations during these years. In 1938 V. D. Savarkar became President of the HMS; two years later M. S. Golwalkar took over as the Supreme Leader of the RSS after Dr. Hedgewar's death. The change in leadership corresponded to a new turn in Hindu organizations. Savarkar proclaimed that Hindu nationalists should not be apologetic about being called communalists. He appealed for Hinduizing politics and militarizing Hindus. The HMS now organized its own paramilitary wing called the **Ram sena**. Earlier it had depended on the RSS for this service. Through this route, the HMS also defined an independent profile for itself. This was necessary because the Congress finally abolished dual membership in 1938. This meant that HMS members had to separate themselves from the Congress. On the other hand, the RSS announced its independence from the HMS (although leaders kept contacts) with the publication of its own 'party' book. This was M. S. Golwalkar's *We Or Our Nationhood Defined* (1938) where he took an even more extreme stance than Savarkar and denied minorities equal citizenship rights and praised Hitler's treatment of the Jews (although this approval was dropped from subsequent editions).

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Figure 11.2.5: Calcutta riots, 1946

Source:

Communalism (both Hindu and Muslim) was succeeding in dividing the country on permanent political and social lines. It was helped in these years by the political uncertainty of a Japanese invasion after the ignominious retreat of British forces in Singapore and Burma. It was feared that there would be chaos and civil war with Muslims. The brutal acts of the extremist Muslim Khaksars of Hyderabad state were publicized to sustain this belief. Under these circumstances of political fear and uncertainty, Hindu organizations expanded rapidly. The HMS became more active among Hindus in Muslim ruled native states, especially Hyderabad. Its militant affiliates such as that Bharat Sevashram Sangha in Bengal, became very active. The RSS had started expanding from its base in Nagpur to UP, Punjab and even Bengal where it was patronized, among others, by Birla, the industrialist. RSS volunteers were also sent to Madras city, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. From 1938 to 1940, its membership increased from 40,000 to 100,000.

The growing militarization of social relations and the mutual suspicions are a backdrop which had to be appreciated in order to understand the tortured negotiations over Partition. The story of the partition negotiations will be dealt with in another lesson. It is only necessary to say here that the differences had to do with opposed political ideas of

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the future Indian state. The Congress leadership stuck to a more unitary state, while the Muslim League wanted a more federated state with a weak centre. The stubbornness of Hindu leaders such as Dr. Moonje, an old Tilakite leader and a supporter of the RSS, made the Congress position inflexible. The partition negotiations often broke down - but they went on for a long time. What made partition an acceptable, if not necessary solution, was the wave of riots that took place in 1946-7.

Riots had been occurring regularly since the twenties, but Jinnah's declaration of Direct Action day on August 16, 1946 to secure the demand for Pakistan, began a nation wide spiral of riots. It started in Kolkata. H. S. Suhrawardy, the Chief Minister, was seen to promise police inaction in a mass meeting of the League and this in turn sparked off Muslim attacks on Hindu traders. However both sides were equally prepared for the clash and it is a telling comment on the state of Hindu organization that more Muslims were killed than Hindus. In all about 4000 were killed with dead bodies – of mainly poor people - heaped up on the streets. Riots spread, as calls for vengeance from both sides circulated in print and speech – first to Mumbai (October 10) and then to the rural, Muslim dominated districts of Noakhali and Tippera in Eastern Bengal where there were many cases of abductions. In a retaliatory move, riots broke out in Bihar (where a special 'Noakhali Day' was observed) with 7000 slaughtered followed by another thousand that perished in Garhmukteswar where Hindu pilgrims killed Muslims. In Punjab, a civil disobedience movement started by the Muslim League also led to riots in the main towns leaving about 5000 dead by 1947.

Figure 11.2.6: Gandhi at Noakhali

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The murderous purpose and organized intensity of the riots, all of which happened within a short space of time, made the possibilities of living together appear a difficult, if not, impossible one. The phenomenon of mass migration following riots – 10,000 left Kolkata city while huge numbers of Muslims and Hindus left mixed localities within the city – only underlined the point. The violence made the political solution of the partition acceptable to people. The Kolkata riots led to a sustained campaign by Congress and HMS leaders to partition Bengal. National level leaders had also come around to accepting partition. Sardar Patel, for instance, declared in 1946 that the time had come 'to cut off the diseased limb', while Nehru felt that it simplified the problem. No one – neither leaders, nor riot participants or those who passively consented – could foresee the even greater intensities of violence and displacement that lay in store.

Value addition: did you know?
In Noakhali with Gandhi

The very last years of Gandhi's life have been described as his 'finest hour'. Here was a man who led the biggest, mass anti colonial movement in the world. Yet, in 1946-7, just before independence, he turned away from the power centre in Delhi. Instead, he went to the ordinary villagers of the Noakhali district who were both participants and victims of riots. In a district that had a heavy concentration of maulvis, local Muslim League propagandists had sown communal bitterness about the Calcutta Riots. This propaganda was more effective because of resentment against local Hindus who owned the largest amount of land despite being the minority. Also, many Muslim peasants had lost their land during the war years as prices had gone up. The organized nature of the riots is indicated by the fact that it broke out on the day of Lakshmi Puja, and took the form of house burnings, abductions and killings.

Ironically this was the same district that had participated in the Non-co-operation/Khilafat movement. In 1921 an illiterate (Hindu) cobbler and two illiterate, (Muslim) small hotel owners defeated the government backed candidates (who included a Rai Bahadur and two Khan Bahadurs) so badly in the local elections that they had to forfeit their deposits!

Gandhi left for Noakhali as soon as news of riots reached the cities. His main concern was to restore confidence in the Hindu villagers so that they could return to their villages. He kept two volunteers, one Hindu and one Muslim in each village and then went and lived in a place called Srirampur for over 40 days. He was initially accompanied only by the atheist scientist, N. K. Bose and another companion. His first prayer meeting had a thousand people. He interacted individually with Muslims and Hindus, visited Muslim houses, advising them on treatment of patients if someone happened to be ill in a household. Meanwhile even more terrible riots broke out in Bihar on 'Nokhali Day'; thousands of Muslims were butchered. Filled with anxiety, Gandhi wrote, "Never in my life has the path been so uncertain and so dim before me". But he worked on his faith in human neighbourliness. He decided on a walking tour of the riot affected villages in order to restore trust in their Hindu neighbours. He said he had to stay with Muslims without any protection, to convince them that he felt as much for them as for Hindus.

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He persisted despite obstacles put in his way. From Noakhali he went to Bihar. Local Muslim leaders there had asked him to visit to restore confidence and peace.

Source: Bose, Nirmal. 1953. *My days with Gandhi*. **Calcutta: Nishana; Pyarelal. 1956.** *Gandhi: The last phase Vol.I, Book I*. **Ahmedabad: Navjivan Publishing House.**

Figure 11.2.7: Negotiations over partition - Nehru and Jinnah

Source: http://www.leics.gov.uk/2667868-2.jpg

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Summary

- The two sources of early Hindu communalism were the rise of the Hindu merchants and stories of Hindu Muslim conflict popularized in literature and drama.

- The Census changed the nature of religious identity and led to anxiety about falling or increasing numbers of Hindus and Muslims.

- The Hindi campaign had both a democratic and a communal element.

- The anti cow slaughter campaign brought together the reformers and orthodox Hindus and produced a mass anti Muslim movement.

- The riots of the 1920s occurred on an all India scale for the first time and helped to concretize both Hindu ideology and organization.

- Attempts to negotiate some unified plan with the Muslim League failed mainly because of opposition by Hindu communal leaders.

- Hindu organizations became militarized during the second world war because it was believed that the British would be forced to leave India leaving behind a situation of civil war.

- The riots of 1946 made partition acceptable.

11.2: Exercises

Essay questions

1) How did the Hindi-Urdu controversy and the anti cow slaughter campaigns contribute to the making of Hindu communalism?

2) What were the social and other effects of riots?

3) What were the developments in Hindu communal organizations and in the Congress that prepared the way for partition?

Objective questions

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Question Number	Type of question	LOD
1	Multiple choice question	1

Question

Which among the following constitute causes for communal clashes in early 19th century small towns? Pick two options.

a) Religious fanaticism

b) Political manipulation by Hindu and Muslim leaders

c) The rise of Hindu merchants

d) The cutting down of the powers of the Kazi and Kotwal

Correct Answer / Option(s)	c) and d)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The new acquisition of wealth by Hindu merchants led many to assert their status in public life; the powers of the Kazi and Kotwal were too weak under the British rule to allow them to arbitrate in local conflicts.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

a) and b): Religious fanaticism has always existed, so it does not explain why it should lead to violence in this period. There were no major Hindu or Muslim communal leaders in this period.

Reviewer's Comment:

Question Number	Type of question	LOD
2	Multiple choice question	1

Question

The Census helped the development of communalism by (pick any two options):

a) making Hindus and Muslims dissatisfied with its accuracy.

b) motivating conversions.

c) recording numbers of those who followed both Hindu and Muslim customs.

d) linking it to electoral politics.

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Correct Answer / Option(s)	b) and d)

Justification/ Feedback for the correct answer

The census created anxiety in Hindu upper caste leaders about the decreasing numbers of Hindus - which would mean that they would get less representation under the system of separate electorates.

Resource/Hints/Feedback for the wrong answer

Problems about accuracy was more a preoccupation with enumerators not with communal propagandists; communal leaders were more interested in separating out Hindu and Muslim communities and would not take an interest in communities that practised customs of both religions.

Reviewer's Comment:

Glossary

Indo Persian: The common culture of Hindus and Muslims in India.

Animist: Colonial category to describe those who were neither Hindu or Muslim and believed in nature worship.

Shuddhi: purification

Ahmadiyas: a Muslim sect

Ashraf: upper class Muslims

Goraksha: Cow Protection

Sanatan Dharm: the ancient and pure Hinduism

Ram Sena: the army of Ram

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Further readings

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