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**Exploding Communalism:  
The Politics of Muslim Identity in South Asia**

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Farewell O Hindustan, O autumnless garden  
We your homeless guests have stayed too long

Laden though we are today with complaints  
The marks of your past favors are upon us still

You treated strangers like relations  
We were guests but you made us the hosts

....

You gave us wealth, government and dominion  
For which of your many kindnesses should we express gratitude

But such hospitality is ultimately unsustainable  
All that you gave you kept in the end

Well, one has a right to one's own property  
Take it from whoever you want, give it to whoever you will

Pull out our tongues the very instant  
They forgetfully utter a word of complaint about this

But the complaint is that what we brought with us  
That too you took away and turned us into beggars

....

You've turned lions into lowly beings, O Hind  
Those who were Afghan hunters came here to become the hunted ones

We had foreseen all these misfortunes  
When we came here leaving our country and friends

We were convinced that adversity would befall us in time  
And we O Hind would be devoured by you

....

So long as O Hindustan we were not called Hindi  
We had some graces which were not found in others

....

You've made our condition frightening  
We were fire O Hind, you've turned us into ash.<sup>1</sup>

Altaf Husain Hali (1837-1914) in his inimitable way captures the dilemma of Muslim identity as perceived by segments of the *ashraf* classes in nineteenth century northern India. Steeped in nostalgia for Islam's past glories and a wry sense of the Muslim predicament, Hali's *Shikwa-e-Hind*, or complaint to India, cannot be dismissed as simply the bigoted laments of a man who has accepted social closure on grounds of religious difference and antipathy towards non-Muslims. To challenge Hali's questionable reading of the history of Islam in the subcontinent or his spurious representations of Indian Muslims in undifferentiated terms as descendants of foreign immigrants is to concentrate on the obvious and miss out the richness of the poetic nuances. What is instructive about the poem is how a committed Muslim with more than a surfeit of airs was hard pressed to deny the decisive and irreversible impact of India on his co-religionists. As the metaphor of fire to ashes makes clear, this is an assertion of a cultural identity, once distinctive but now all too faded. Hali's grievance is precisely the loss of distinctiveness which he believes had given Muslims a measure of dignity and humanity. Bereft of any qualities of friendship or fellowship, Muslims had become selfish, inward looking, indolent and illiterate. None of this is the fault of India. Hali instead blames *qismat* which brought Islam to the subcontinent and made certain that unlike the Greeks the Muslims did not turn away from its frontiers in failure.

India without Islam is an ingenious idea. It would certainly have obviated the need for endless scholarly outpourings on communalism. But however much Muslims may take Hali's lead in blaming *qismat*, Islam in India, united or divided, is a fact of history and an intrinsic feature of the subcontinent's future. What is less clear is whether communalism should continue to serve as a descriptive or analytical clincher in representations of the Muslim past, present and future in the South Asian subcontinent. In the 1990s it has once again taken center stage in academic and political debates, a consequence of the resort to what has been called Hindu majoritarian communalism seeking to preserve or capture centralized state power. Successive Congress regimes in the 1980s surreptitiously invoked a nebulous form of Hindu majoritarianism which has been crafted into a more potent political ideology by the forces of Hindutva. Neither the Congress nor the RSS, BJP and VHP combination would plead guilty to the charge of communalism. Not only the self-professedly secular Indian state and the Congress regimes at its helm, but also their challengers claim the appellation of nationalist. The original sin of being communalist for the most part has been reserved for the subcontinent's Muslims.

Notwithstanding the compromises of secular nationalism with Hindu communalism, the burden of this negative term in the history of late colonial India has fallen on the Muslim minority. The establishment of a Muslim state at the moment of the British withdrawal added immeasurably to the weight of the burden. In the post-colonial scenario in general, and the conjuncture created by the Ayodhya controversy in particular, the Indian secularist response has been to tar both Hindu majoritarianism and Muslim minoritarianism with the brush of communalism. This asymmetry has expressed itself not only in state policy but also in secular academic discourse. Muslim minority 'communalism' has occupied a critical location in academic texts organized around the binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism. If this neat but

misleading dichotomy is to be dismantled, the entire notion of a Muslim minority 'communalism' at the subcontinental level needs to be subjected to a probing analysis.

This task has become especially urgent since such an overarching and loaded term as communalism ends up essentializing the very religiously informed identities, politics and conflicts it purportedly aims at explaining and combating. It is not as if this danger has escaped the attention of scholars engaged, as many of them have been, in disturbing and decentering notions of monolithic religious communities and singular identities.<sup>2</sup> What is remarkable, however, is the continued usage of a term in a debate which widely acknowledges communalism as at best the pejorative 'other' of nationalism and at worst a borrowing from the colonialist project of essentializing Indian society and history.<sup>3</sup> Even those who deploy it as a matter of convention, while inveighing against its analytical utility, have to concede that as the accepted designation for religiously based cultural identities, politics, ideology or conflict, communalism lays emphasis on the peculiarly Indian aspects of what is a global problem of negotiating and accommodating social differences. Whether this compartmentalization of one of the subcontinent's most gnawing and lingering problems - the shifting politics of religiously informed identities - is not an unwitting form of academic communalism remains an open question.

This paper is an attempt to spot the blots in the historiographical discourse on Muslim communalism. While exploring the nexus of culture and political power the argument avoids presuppositions which erroneously link a religiously informed cultural identity with the politics of cultural nationalism. By contrasting the 'inevitability' of a Muslim identity, variously defined, with the 'impossibility' of a supra-regional and specifically Muslim politics in the subcontinental context, the paper aims at demonstrating the largely arbitrary, derogatory and exclusionary nature of the term 'communal' as it has been applied to individuals and political groupings claiming to represent the interests of Indian Muslims.

Such an argument requires a new typology of Muslim political thought, one that goes beyond the facile and rigid distinctions between 'liberals' or 'traditionalists', 'modernists' or 'anti-modernists', 'communalists' or 'secular nationalists'. The chronological starting point of the argument is the late nineteenth century when many of the salient features of a Muslim political discourse began to be worked out by members of the north Indian *ashraf* classes smarting under the loss of sovereignty on the one hand, and the onset of Western colonialism and 'modernity' on the other. Written in an accessible 'new' Urdu, the dissemination of the discourse was facilitated by a rapidly expanding print media. Popular among Muslim middle and upper classes in Muslim-majority provinces like the Punjab and, to a lesser degree, Bengal, the prose and poetry of this era bears the marks of the regional and class identity of its Muslim-minority province exponents. An historical investigation of Muslim identity and politics in the majority and minority provinces of colonial India will be followed by an analysis of the implications of the post-colonial transition for Muslims scattered across separate sovereign states. By both historicizing and conceptualizing the twin issues of Muslim cultural difference and a Muslim politics, the purpose is to show why exploding communalism may not be a wit too late and is perhaps the only hope of genuinely rethinking and renegotiating the perennial problem of difference and identity in South Asia as a whole.

### **Difference, Exclusivism or Communalism: the late 19th and Early Twentieth Centuries**

A more than common preoccupation with their distinctive religious identity has been a feature shared by upper and middle class Muslims in the subcontinent, irrespective of their 'liberal', 'modernist', 'conservative' or 'anti-modernist' leanings. This sense of distinction from non-Muslims has led to the suggestion that 'communal consciousness' is an intrinsic, indeed a normative, part of the Muslim socio-religious and political world view. The elision of religious difference with an essentialized Indian Muslim community is explained in terms of the legitimizing ideals of Islamic solidarity and the necessary subordination of the individual will to the *ijma* or consensus of the community.<sup>4</sup> It is extraordinary, but also revealing, that a decidedly elitist discourse should be seen as not only reflective of Indian Muslims but also their 'communal consciousness'. The politics of Muslim identity in the subcontinent cannot be reduced to a mere rationalization of normative Islamic discourse. There is much variation even within this elite discourse, not all of which focused on the knotty issue of electoral representation, and still greater evidence of Muslim willingness to differ from rather than defer to the consensus of the community, however construed, in the rough and tumble of practical politics.

Before the 1920s when Congress's inclusionary secular nationalist paradigm gained wider currency, the assertion of difference even when bordering on cultural exclusivism did not automatically translate into Muslim 'separatism' or minority 'communalism'. Remarkable as it may seem from the vantage point of today, Hali's *Shikwa-e-Hind* did not stir a public controversy over his, or for that matter his community's, putative lack of allegiance to India. This raises the cardinal question: were concerns about the Muslim community as a distinctive religious entity destined to keep the adherents of this perception on a separate, if parallel, track with those engaged in the project of invoking an inclusionary idea of a single Indian nation? Apparently not if one considers that in 1874 Hali himself had written feelingly in his poem *Hubb-i-Watan* or love of the motherland that a patriotism which went no further than mere attachment to the country was nothing short of selfishness. A true patriot was one who regarded all the inhabitants of India, whether Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or Brahmosamaj as one<sup>5</sup>:

If you want your's country's well being  
Don't look upon any compatriot as a stranger<sup>6</sup>

Granted the range of moods that are the wont of a poet, there is no evident tension or contradiction in Hali's mind between an affinity to the people of India and pride in a selectively imagined and recreated Islamic past. Less inclined to glorify Islamic history but equally conscious of his Muslimness was Hali's mentor, Sayyid Ahmed Khan. Not a religious scholar by training, his rational approach to Islamic theology and law earned him the lacerating abuse of orthodox Muslim *ulema* bunched in the theological seminaries at Deoband and, less vociferously, Farangi Mahal in Lucknow.

The *ulema* were not alone in opposing Sayyid Ahmed's new-fangled views. His ardent promotion of Western knowledge and culture as well as loyalty to the raj drew acerbic comments from Muslims attached to their societal moors and the ideal of a universal Muslim *ummah*. Among Sayyid Ahmed's fiercest critics was the Persian pan-Islamic scholar Jamaluddin al-Afghani who lived in India between 1879 and 1882 and called for Hindu-Muslim unity as the first step to dislodging British colonialism. The contest between Muslims moved by Islamic

universalism and those for whom the immediacy of the colonial context constituted the overwhelming reality was to be played out on the political stage during the first few decades of the twentieth century.

For now it was Sayyid Ahmed's policy which held sway. The Aligarh movement which he fathered became the source of modernist and rational thinking among the Muslim elite and, ironically enough, also provided the catalyst for latter day Muslim political 'separatism' and 'communalism'. By contrast, his more culturally exclusive Muslim opponents, harboring anti-colonial and Islamic universalist sentiments, immersed themselves in religious strictures at traditional educational institutions like *madrasahs* and *maktabs* only to end up squarely on the side of an inclusionary and 'secular' Indian nationalism. Identifying the twisted knots in these two contending and overlapping strands in Muslim thinking highlights the curiosity that passes for minority 'communalism' in subcontinental history.

Unabashedly elitist in his thinking, Sayyid Ahmed has been hailed as the author of the notorious 'two nation' theory by the officially subsidized historians of Pakistan and condemned for being the evil genius who helped carve out a separate niche for India's Muslims within the sphere of colonial policy and political discourse. Yet despite his resolute stance against the Indian National Congress, Sayyid Ahmed was more concerned with dissuading his fellow Muslims from the plague of religious bigotry. Like Hali's, Sayyid Ahmed's Muslimness was rarely at odds with his Indianness. Quite as much as the Hindus, Muslims too 'consider[ed] India as their homeland'. Presaging Hali's *Shikwa-e-Hind* five years earlier without the romanticism or the complaint, he confessed that by living together in India 'the blood of both have changed, the colour of both have become similar, the faces of both, having changed, have become similar.... We mixed with each other so much that we produced a new language - Urdu, which was neither our language nor theirs'.<sup>7</sup> The essence of Sayyid Ahmed's message to his co-religionists was to keep religion and politics on separate tracks. It was *mazhabi tahsab* or religious bigotry which was preventing Muslims from partaking of the new education.<sup>8</sup>

This was Sayyid Ahmed's strategy for the uplift of a demoralized, disparate and disunited 'Muslim community' which his aristocratic imaginings in combination with colonial census enumeration were in the process of giving more supra-local substance than warranted by the empirical reality. Yet Sayyid Ahmed with his arrogant belief in the superiority of *ashraf* culture was palpably uninterested in mobilizing the Muslim *ajlaf* classes. To confuse his ideas on electoral representation with Muslim politics in an era which required at least a partial mobilization of the subordinate social classes is unacceptable teleology. Sayyid Ahmed's understanding of the position of Muslims in the colonial context was more relevant than the normative aspects of Islamic political theory. Since the British saw the Indian Muslim community as unified, if not united, by the common bond of religion, Sayyid Ahmed couched his appeal accordingly.

His rejection of the Congress, which he regarded as a creation of the more advanced Bengali 'nation' and not of Hindus as such, stemmed in large part from the uneven impact of colonial economic and educational policies in the different regions of India.<sup>9</sup> Just a year before the formation of the Congress, Sayyid Ahmed Khan had asserted unequivocally that 'Hindu and Mussalmans are words of religious significance otherwise Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians who live in this country constitute one nation (cheers)'. In his 'opinion all men are one'; he did 'not like religion, community or group to be identified with a nation'.<sup>10</sup> That a call for Muslim

non-participation in the early Congress should have qualified Sayyid Ahmed for the role of a 'separatist' and anti-nationalist underscores the political nature of the distinction between a 'communalist' and 'non-communalist' posture in retrospectively constructed nationalist pasts. Sayyid Ahmed may have been the most prominent spokesman of a north Indian regionally based Muslim elite. Yet his sharpest critics were also Muslim. His emphasis on *ijtihad* or independent reasoning and disapproval of *taqlid* or adherence to the four authoritative schools of Islamic jurisprudence set him apart from the *ulema* who saw in his modernist intellectual stance a barely disguised attack on their preeminent status in Muslim society. While sharing an *ashraf* culture, an affinity for Urdu and a core of Islamic beliefs with Sayyid Ahmed's modernist associates at Aligarh, the guardians of the faith kept these *la-dini* or irreligious Muslims at an arms length.

If issues of religious interpretation divided Muslim from Muslim, Sayyid Ahmed's policy of subservience to the British Raj and reception of Western modernity and culture elicited contempt from a section of his co-religionists. Sayyid Akbar Husayn (1846-1921), better known as Akbar Allahabadi, in his biting humorous and brilliant satirical verses developed a powerful critique of modernity, mercilessly ridiculing Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his associates for their shallow imitation of Western culture:

The venerable leaders of the nation had determined  
Not to keep scholars and worshippers at a disadvantage  
Religion will progress day by day  
Aligarh College is London's mosque<sup>11</sup>

Scathing and relentless in his criticism of a modernity wanting in spirituality, Akbar Allahabadi neither fits the bill of a diehard anti-modernist enamored of obscurantist *maulvis* nor of a religious bigot. He recalled that as a child a *maulvi* tried teaching him knowledge and he in turn tried teaching the *maulvi* reason; the enterprise ended in tears, neither the *maulvi* learned reason, nor Akbar knowledge. It was the degenerate state of the community rather than threats to its existence which agitated him. He could declare with equanimity that India was neither an Islamic country nor of Laksman and Ram. Every Indian was the pliant well-wisher of the English and Hind simply the warehouse of Europe.<sup>12</sup> It is a measure of Allahabadi's distinctiveness as a poet that while enormously popular in Urdu literary circles on both sides of the 1947 divide, he forms no part of either the Indian or the Pakistani nationalist pantheon.

Maulana Shibli Numani (1857-1914) also defies categorization as a 'liberal modernist' or 'anti-modern conservative' and appropriation into mainstream Indian and Pakistani nationalist narratives. An associate of Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Shibli adopted the idioms of modernity without disavowing the basic grammar of Islamic learning. His thematics spawn a rich and varied corpus of writings on Islamic history, theology, law as well as literary criticism and poetry. Not an Islamic universalist, Shibli endorsed Sayyid Ahmed's line that Indian Muslims were British subjects and not bound by religion or Islamic history to submit to the dictates of the Ottoman Caliphate. Yet on matters closer to home, Shibli's Islamic sentiments led him to take political paths different from those charted by Sayyid Ahmed Khan. By 1895 he was publicly opposing Sayyid Ahmed Khan's policy of Muslim non-participation in the Congress.<sup>13</sup> Shibli's perspectives reflect the new and competing trends in Muslim discourse at a time when Sayyid Ahmed Khan's

intellectual influence, if not his legacy, had been overshadowed by events. By the late 1880s British imperial policies in India and the Islamic world were leading more and more Muslims to eschew Sayyid Ahmed Khan's policy of non-participation in the Congress and loyalty to the Raj. Yet during the closing decades of the nineteenth century Hindu revivalist activities, especially in northern India centering on the issue of Urdu versus Hindi in the Devanagiri script and cow slaughter, seemed to lend substance to colonial and *ashraf* notions of an Indian Muslim 'interest' that needed articulation and representation. But while the interests of the 'majority' religious community could be subsumed under the umbrella of the emerging Indian 'nation', those of the largest religious 'minority' remained marooned in the idea of the 'community'.

Instead of stopping to challenge the formulations of majoritarianism and minoritarianism in the evolving discourse of Indian nationalism, scholars seem to have been more fascinated by the 'separatist' and 'communal' claims of a privileged and pretentious segment of the Muslim community. It would not be too far-fetched to suggest that communalism in the subcontinent has been more a function of interpretation than of the actual phenomenon in its manifold dimensions. A shared core of Islamic ideals had never prevented Muslims from taking oppositional positions in relation to one another even at the level of elite discourse. This can be made light of if one regards the strategic essentializing of religious community as more important than its utility as a point of reference for the assertion of cultural difference. To wholly concentrate on the Islamic dimensions of the discourse, as if these are unproblematically singular in meaning, is to ignore key aspects of historical change and the new contradictions and contestations within the Indian 'Muslim community'.

The partition of Bengal in 1905 may have provided the main impetus for the orchestration of the Muslim claim to separate political representation and the establishment of the self-professedly 'communal' All-India Muslim League in December 1906. But it was the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909 which institutionalized what until then had been a dominant colonial perception of the importance of religious divisions in Indian society by granting Muslims separate electorates in representative bodies at all levels of the electoral system. A momentous step it gave Muslims the status of an all-India political category but one effectively consigned to being a perpetual minority in any scheme of constitutional reforms. The structural contradiction between communally compartmentalized electorates and the localization and provincialization of political horizons was to have large consequences for India's regionally differentiated, economically disparate and ideologically divided Muslims and, by extension, for Congress's agendas of an inclusionary and secular nationalism. If the shared idioms of an otherwise varied discourse appear to substantiate the colonial construction of Muslims as a separate and identifiable 'communal' category, the actual politics of Muslims in the different local and regional settings uncovers how common ideas led to uncommon deeds.

After 1911, the annulment of the partition of Bengal, the crisis in the Balkans and the Kanpur mosque incident of 1913 created the conditions for major reformulations of the discourse and politics of upper and middle class Muslims. Voicing the mood in certain Muslim elite quarters, Shibli wrote a series of polemical poems against the All-India Muslim League, rejecting the very notion of a separatist and loyalist politics, and endorsing the establishment of a joint Hindu-Muslim front. Well versed in the normative aspects of Islam, Shibli refused to treat religion as a code for Muslim participation in politics.

This was a stretch removed from the stance being advocated at the time by Abul Kalam

Azad through his organ *Al-Hilal*. By far the most important Muslim 'traditionalist', Azad's somersaults on religion and politics convey the paradoxes of 'communalism' in the subcontinental context. Azad is celebrated in the tomes of Indian nationalist historiography for his steadfast opposition in the forties to the Muslim League's inexorable drift towards 'separatism' and 'communalism'. This is why his early writings on religion and politics make for fascinating reading. Islam was not only the vital component in Azad's identity but also the main source of his intellectual and political orientation. In 1904 he described the Congress as a Hindu body. 'There will be nothing left with us', he wrote, 'if we separate politics from religion'.<sup>14</sup> Azad was crestfallen to see that his co-religionists were 'not united and organised as a community'; they had 'no *quaid* (leader)', a mere 'rabble scattered among the population of India' they were living an 'un-Islamic and irreligious life'.<sup>15</sup> The more than explicit exclusivism and separatism, to say nothing of the implicit sense of superiority, was tempered only by Azad's consistent anti-British posture and support for the Congress.

Azad's Islamism led him to even greater excesses in the name of religion. In 1920 at the height of the Khilafat agitation Azad, backed by the newly founded Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, issued a *fatwa* declaring that under the Shariah it was an 'Islamic obligation' for Muslims to 'quit India'.<sup>16</sup> According to the most prominent Muslim spokesman of Congress's secular nationalism and notion of composite culture, given the choice between country and faith, Indian Muslims could only opt for the latter. These utterances for the most part have been swept under the carpet. Politically 'correct' alignments, not the integrity or substantive content of the thinking, have been the more important factors determining the allotment of titles 'nationalist' or 'communist' to would-be spokesmen of India's Muslims.

An assessment of the political positions of that other champion of Islamic universalism and the Khilafat, Maulana Mohamed Ali, will suffice to make the point. In 1912 he castigated Congress 'nationalists' for refusing to accept that the educated Hindu 'communal patriot' had turned Hinduism into an effective symbol for political mobilization and Indian 'nationality'. The Hindu 'communal patriot' simply 'refuse[d] to give quarter to the Muslims unless the latter quietly shuffles off his individuality and becomes completely Hinduised'.<sup>17</sup> This was a powerful indictment of Indian 'nationalism' from a man who during the non-cooperation and Khilafat agitation of the early 1920s was closely allied with Gandhi. Nothing dissuaded Mohamed Ali from speaking freely and fearlessly as a Muslim 'communal patriot'. Not even the honor of delivering the presidential address at the Congress session in December 1923. Mohamed Ali ascribed his belated entry into the Congress in 1919 to the 'political history of the community' to which he belonged. Making political capital out of Congress's acceptance of separate electorates for Muslims in its Lucknow pact of 1916 with the Muslim League, Mohamed Ali called the Simla deputation a 'command performance'. Separate electorates were 'the consequence, and not the cause of the separation between Muslims and their more numerous Hindu brethren'. India's most hopeful future lay in becoming a 'federation of faiths', not in a 'misleading unity of opposition'.<sup>18</sup> Stated uncategorically from the Congress pedestal, this was a command performance indeed!

Yet few historians of Indian nationalism trace Mohamed Ali's 'communal' lineage to this period. It was only after his falling out with the Congress on the issue of the Nehru report in 1928 that his communal colors begin to be spotted. So even the statements of a self-styled 'communal patriot' enunciated from within the Congress are 'nationalist'; outside its ambit they acquire the



ignominious status of 'communal reaction'. For those who participated in the Khilafat agitation, the collapse of the movement amidst heightened social conflict along communitarian lines became a litmus test for their allegiance to Indian nationalism. Azad, whose political speeches during the campaign had been peppered with verses from the Quran, 'kept himself aloof from the murky communal politics of the twenties'.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Mohamed Ali became a rabid 'communalist'. The assertion that he belonged to 'two circles of equal size...which are not concentric-one is Indian and the other is the Muslim world' is seen as the 'tragedy' of Mohamed Ali's life.<sup>20</sup> Not particularly convincing as a tragic figure, in November 1930 he made an impassioned plea for Indian freedom while strongly advocating the 'Muslim case' for separate electorates, safeguards and majority provinces:

I have a culture, a polity, an outlook on life  
- a complete synthesis which is Islam. Where God  
commands I am a Muslim first, a Muslim second, and  
a Muslim last, and nothing but a Muslim....But where  
India is concerned, where India's freedom is concerned,  
where the welfare of India is concerned, I am an Indian  
first, an Indian second, an Indian last, and nothing but  
an Indian.<sup>21</sup>

A respectable 'nationalist' position in an earlier period, by the 1930s such an expression of the multiple identities of India's Muslims from outside the Congress fold entailed being nailed a 'communalist'.

The arbitrariness of sifting 'nationalists' from 'communalists' becomes a trifle more glaring once the spotlight is shifted away from the level of discourse onto the formal political arenas. Anyone not belonging to the Congress and articulating a politics of 'Muslim interests' is a communalist, not a nationalist. So while the unity of religion and politics at the level of discourse and pro-Congress 'nationalist' activity does not make for a communal position - for instance during the Khilafat movement - the most explicitly non-religious manoeuvres and machinations in the name of a 'community' are sufficient for a reputation as a communal politician. Bickering over the loaves and fishes of office in local and provincial councils, hardly proof of religious concerns, throws up a colorful medley of Muslim political sinners, one more 'communal' than the other. The main qualification for 'communalism' appears to be the pursuit of power politics least engaged with specifically religious issues.

Different historians have examined the growth of 'communalism' in the provinces under the Montford reforms, correctly attributing it to the structural imperatives of the representative institutions created by the colonial state. Yet without a consideration of the politics of Muslims qua Muslims, these interpretations run the risk of becoming tautological. Under separate electorates Muslims voted for Muslims; the elected representatives worked in the interest of their constituents with the result that the politics of Muslims were thoroughly 'communalized'. It might be more even handed to condemn all politics within the inadequate representative institutions of the colonial state as reflecting the religious divide. But that would mean abandoning the binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism. So the slanted logic ends up insinuating that an elected Muslim had to make a real hash of

representative office to escape being a 'communalist'. No such difficulties pin down 'nationalists' drawn from the majority community if elected on the Swarajist or the Congress ticket.

Underplayed in analyses of the Montford reforms is the extent to which the provincial dynamic in electoral and representative activities countered the process of 'communalizing' Muslim politics at the all-India level. The essentialization of religious difference implicit in 'communalism' has clouded any sense of maintaining an analytical distinction between levels of politics. Identifying the well-springs of 'communalism' in distinct locales and provinces does not add up to an undifferentiated political dynamic of all-India proportions. The convergence of Muslim and Punjabi or Muslim and Bengali did not mean exchanging provincial interest for a common religious identity. With their identities bounded by region and informed by religion, the interests of Indian Muslims did not pour neatly into all-India 'communal' molds. This is brought out in stark form by the conflict of interests between Muslims in the majority and the minority provinces. Supra-communal alliances were forged not only in the U.P. where Muslims were in a minority but also in the Punjab and Bengal where they had bare majorities.

In the Punjab the Unionist leaders Fazl-i-Husain and Sikander Hayat Khan, and in Bengal the Krishak Praja leader Fazlul Haq, had made sure that by 1937 the provincial imperative had prevailed over a specifically Muslim communal line within the domain of representative Muslim politics. The pursuit of power, not the preservation of religious distinctiveness, tended to empty an elite political discourse of its normative and substantive content, leaving the Indian Muslim category as an unlikely vehicle for cultural nationalism. The All-India Muslim League's dismal performance in the 1937 elections reveals the complete bankruptcy of any notion of an all-India Muslim 'communalism'. It was the perceived threat from the singular and uncompromising 'nationalism' of the Congress to provincial autonomy and class interests which gave the discourse and politics of the Indian Muslims as a subcontinental category a fresh lease on life.

### **From Community to Nationhood: Separatism or Exclusion?**

A teleological view of history would interpret the transformation of the discourse and politics of a minority religious community into a demand for nationhood as the logical culmination of the 'communal' tendencies among Indian Muslims. Those who subscribe to the 'two nation' theory are among the more notorious practitioners of this approach. But their sharpest opponents have been no less culpable. Reading 'composite culture' for 'nation', assimilation for distinctiveness, does not banish the telos of partition for those wedded to the convention of perceiving historical trends in the binary mode of secular nationalism and religious communalism. The subaltern thunder in South Asian historiography has certainly struck fear in the minds of historians beyond the pale of this select circle. But it has not shed much useful light on how to link 'communal consciousness' and periodic outbursts of inter-communal violence among marginal social groups in the public arenas of localities with the partition of India along ostensibly religious lines. Subaltern consciousness is shaped by too many contending identities to allow for an unquestioning privileging of the 'communal' element within it. 'Communal consciousness' itself has been subject to far greater recent and dramatic historical change than is acknowledged by these historians. Asserting the autonomy of the subaltern subject from elite manipulations in the making of history can be a meaningful proposition only if based on an assessment of the inter-connections between different levels of politics. Short of holding

subaltern consciousness and violence responsible for the partition of India, and that is surely not the intention, there can be no adequate explanation of the post-colonial transition which does not address the calculations and miscalculations of those located at the highest level of politics.

What such an explanation cannot afford, however, is the historiographical error of treating the end result of the 1947 partition as the ultimate goal of Muslim politics and also of broader historical trends subsumed under the theme of 'communalism'. If discrepancies based on class, regional and ideological differences permeated the discourse and politics of Muslim identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the metamorphosis of a minority community into a 'nation' was designed more as a powerful rhetorical device than an accurate statement of the reality.

The idea of a Muslim state, albeit within India and restricted to the north-western Muslim-majority provinces, had been voiced in December 1930 by Mohammad Iqbal at the All-India Muslim League's annual session. A critic of Western nationalism, Iqbal did not declare Indian Muslims a 'nation' when he initially called for a state based on the territorial amalgamation of the Punjab, the North-West Frontier Province, Sind and Baluchistan. This was a proposition that, for a change, bore the marks of Punjabi Muslim rather than Muslim minority province interests. Islam as a living cultural force in India demanded its 'centralization in a specified territory' and was the only sure 'basis of a permanent communal settlement'. None of this was actuated by 'narrow communalism' or 'any feeling of ill-will towards other communities'. There were 'communalisms and communalisms' and it was not the 'low and ignoble' communalism based on antipathy towards other communities but the 'higher aspect of communalism' as culture, which even the Nehru report had endorsed, that Iqbal had in mind.<sup>22</sup> Yet the demand for a state within India where only a fraction of Muslims could live according to their culture and religious traditions was too obviously in the interests of the majority provinces, particularly the Punjab, to excite an All-India Muslim League council dominated by Muslims from the minority provinces. So Iqbal's ideas were dismissed as mere poetics in established Muslim political circles.

The famous resolution passed at the Muslim League's Lahore session marked the transition of the Indian Muslims from a minority to a 'nation'. One point of view which needs putting to rest is that in declaring the Indian Muslims a 'nation', the League was inspired by a normative ideal in Muslim consciousness, namely that the preservation of the religious identity of the community demanded the exercise of political power by representatives of the Faithful.<sup>23</sup> Given the varied uses Muslim thinkers make of the normative ideals of Islam, arguments focusing on discourse do not offer satisfactory explanations of changing historical dynamics. The statement of Muslim 'nationhood' which emanated from Lahore in March 1940 was, to quote one critic, 'an extreme step for solving communal problems'.<sup>24</sup> An explicit revolt against minoritarianism, it was also an implicit coup against the dominant binary mode which extolled Congress's 'secular nationalism' as legitimate and denigrated Muslim difference as illegitimate 'religious communalism'. Declaring the Indian Muslims a 'nation', Jinnah confessed that the idea of being a minority had been around for so long that 'we have got used to it...these settled notions sometimes are very difficult to remove'. But the time had come to unsettle the notion since 'the word "Nationalist" has now become the play of conjurers in politics'.<sup>25</sup>

No amateur conjurer himself, Jinnah came away from the League's session with a mixed bag of tricks. The weightiest was the demand that all future constitutional arrangements be reconsidered 'de novo' since Indian Muslims were a 'nation' entitled to equal treatment with the

Hindu 'nation'. But in attempting to give territorial expression to the Muslim claim to nationhood, Jinnah and a mainly minority province based All-India Muslim League had to make large concessions to the autonomy and sovereignty of the majority provinces, not a very tidy beginning to the search for statehood. If reconciling the contradictory interests of Muslims in majority and minority provinces had thwarted the All-India Muslim League's representative pretensions in the past, the sheer impracticability of squaring the claim of nationhood with the promise of statehood required something more than an artful conjuring trick.

The historiographical debate has deliberated on the issue of Muslim 'nationhood' rather more than on the ambiguities surrounding the demand for Muslim 'statehood'. This has to do with that other telos which presumes the orchestration of separate nationhood as an inevitable overture to exclusive statehood. Recent revisionist historiography on partition, including my own,<sup>26</sup> has noted the uneasy fit between an assertion of Muslim 'nationhood' and the uncertainties and indeterminacies of politics in the late colonial era that led to the attainment of sovereign 'statehood'. While the insistence on national status for Indian Muslims became a non-negotiable issue after 1940, the demand for a wholly separate and sovereign state of 'Pakistan' remained open to negotiation as late as the summer of 1946. The scholarly blindness to this is a product of the double mental barrier both against maintaining an analytical distinction between 'nation' and 'state' and expunging the telos of partition from interpretations of the historical evolution of the demand for a 'Pakistan'.

The claim that Muslims constituted a 'nation' was perfectly compatible with a federal or confederal state structure covering the whole of India. With 'nations' straddling states, the boundaries between states had to be permeable and flexible. This is why Jinnah and the League remained implacably opposed to the division of the Punjab and Bengal along religious lines. It was the veritable absence of an all-India Muslim 'communalism' which had given rise to the claim for Muslim 'nationhood'. This did not translate into a secessionist demand for a Muslim nation-state, but was intended as the building block for a confederal arrangement with the Hindu-majority provinces, or Hindustan, at the subcontinental level.

In the event the strategy went awry, resulting in the exclusion from India of the leader and the party which had staked a claim on behalf of all Indian Muslims. Communally compartmentalized electorates had helped transform the case of Muslim distinctiveness into an assertion of 'nationhood' at the level of all-India political discourse. But the emphasis on provincial and local arenas of politics pitted Muslim regional interests against those raised on behalf of a subcontinental 'community' or 'nation'. The resort to Islam was a mobilizational technique to generate momentum for a political movement seeking a substantial share of power for Muslims in an independent India. If the League's politics lent a 'communal' coloring to the demand for a 'Pakistan' at the social base, there were Muslim groups opposed to its strategy who made an even greater play of Islam as a religious ideology.

After 1940, the Muslim League did a better job manipulating the discourse than in rivetting control over the politics of Muslims in the majority provinces. Yet even at the level of the discourse the League was not the most convincing pretender in the race for the Islamic trophy. As late as the final decade of the British Raj in India, prominent Muslim thinkers, including 'Nationalist Muslims' like Maulana Azad and Maulana Husain Ahmad Madani of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-i-Hind, promoted *muttahiddah qawmiyyat* or composite nationalism with the same passion as their belief in religious and cultural differences between Muslims and non-

Muslims. With the exception of Azad, the most ardent believers in the *ummah vahidah* or one nation theory patented by the Congress were *ulema* who could not imagine an independent India without *shariah* rule. The irony of this non-secular vision co-existing harmoniously with the Congress's secular program underscores the political motivations behind the binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism. More ironic still was the enthusiastic support for the Pakistan demand by Muslim communists and socialists, especially those associated with the Progressive Writers movement.<sup>27</sup> The participation of ungodly socialists in the Pakistan movement fueled charges by Islamic ideologues that the demand for 'Pakistan' was no more than a 'secular' charade. Yet having fiercely opposed Jinnah and the Muslim League, a good number of these religious ideologues and organizations adopted Pakistan as the terrain to launch their crusade for *shariah* rule. The rabidly religious Jamat-i-Islami, the bigoted Majlis-e-Ahrar and the idiosyncratic Khaksars are all examples of this legion.

Unable to resolve the contradictions among Muslims at the level of discourse, the League did even more miserably in the realm of actual politics. At the end of the day the singular nationalism of the Indian National Congress got the better of both the Muslim claim to 'nationhood' and the majoritarian provincialism of Muslims in the north-western and eastern extremities of the subcontinent. The Congress leadership keen on grasping the centralized apparatus of the colonial state was prepared neither to share power with the Muslim League at the all-India level nor accommodate Muslim majoritarian provincialism within a loose federal or confederal structure. It was ready instead to wield the partitioner's axe - in concert one might add with the Hindu Mahasabha - to exclude both the League and the Muslim-majority areas from the horizons of the secular Indian nation-state. Cast against its will into the role of a seceding state, Pakistan was left to begin its independent career with an ideology of Muslim 'nationhood' which could not plausibly be squared with the mutilated and moth-eaten territorial contours of its truncated statehood.

### **Divided Nation, Rival States and the Muslim Quandary**

The anguish of partition for the subcontinent's Muslims has been captured by poets and writers on both sides of the 1947 divide. Despair at the masterly deception that had turned the dream of independence into one of brutal separation pervades the literature written in the very Urdu language which many extremist Hindus hold responsible for stoking the fires of Muslim 'communalism' since the late nineteenth century. In his *Khoon ki Lakeer* or the line of blood, Sardar Jaffari, one of India's leading leftist poets, rejected the newly demarcated boundary as an imperialist artifact:

Who is this cruel person who has with his burning pen  
Cut a deep line of innocent blood across the motherland's  
breast  
What happened? Suddenly all the instruments have changed  
their tune at this gathering.<sup>28</sup>

Across the border in Muslim Pakistan, Ahmad Riaz boldly repudiated the religious loyalty which had brought about the tragedy to reassure his friends in India:

The dawn of independence has come,  
 but still the paths of past and present are in darkness.  
 We are neither infidels nor Muslims.  
 Crushed by famine and hunger, we are the rejected ones.  
 Comrades, hold out your hands, even today we are together.  
 Who could ever divide the estate of literature?  
 Cities can be divided, the streets closed  
 but who can imprison intensity of feeling.<sup>29</sup>

Such warmth of feeling was to become rare as Muslims in India and Pakistan set about renegotiating their identity according to the dominant idioms of the two nation-states. With the Indian and the Pakistani states turning the binary opposites of secular nationalism and religious communalism into ideologies of legitimacy, the dilemma of a subcontinental Muslim identity was to become irresolvable. The imperatives of citizenship in mutually hostile nation-states meant that Muslims were no longer simply a divided community but declared enemies of co-religionists beyond the nearest international check point. Under such inauspicious circumstances even a Hali might have settled for the ashes than the politically injudicious task of breathing fire into the partitioned hearts and minds of Muslims with a rousing *Shikwa-e-Azadi*.

Far from being an indivisible property and a symbol of Muslim cultural identity, the Urdu language became an early and unrelieved victim of attack by the Hindu Mahasabha, the Jan Sangh and the RSS. They demanded a Hindi-only policy in the very region which had nurtured Urdu as its lingua franca. The willingness of the U.P. Congress to go along with these Hindu nationalist organizations dealt a grievous blow to the cultural pretensions of India's Urdu-speaking Muslim elite. The cruelest cut was the charge that by insisting on Urdu as their cultural heritage, now that the majority community had made the sacrifice of partition to settle the problem of difference once and for all, Muslims were furnishing evidence of their inveterate disloyalty to the Indian nation-state. Being born and raised in India, the Muslims learnt to their horror, was no longer sufficient evidence of their Indianness. Those whose faith in the secularism encoded in the Indian constitution made this a questionable proposition had only to be reminded of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's chilling exhortation to Muslims: 'I want to tell them frankly that mere declaration of loyalty to [the] Indian Union will not help them at this critical juncture. They must give proof of their declaration'.<sup>30</sup>

The taunt of disloyalty came from unexpected quarters. Abul Kalam Azad, the Muslim paragon of secular nationalism, reprimanded his co-religionists for vesting their trust in an undeserving leadership and party which had now tossed them to the winds. Nothing less than a complete change of heart was required to win the certificate of loyalty. But with Pakistan as a permanent albatross signifying their negative identity, switching the Turkish fez for the khadi cap and innumerable other such gestures to India's composite culture and secular nationalism - for instance reluctantly giving up separate electorates and sullenly agreeing to let their children learn Hindi instead of Urdu - could not confirm the Muslim minority's positive affiliation to the nation-state. Even if segments of the elite saw political advantages in distancing themselves from the more controversial symbols of their religiously informed cultural identity, there were few such incentives for the mass of poor and illiterate Muslims. Confounding the dilemma of Muslim

identity were the religious and political aspirations of that motley collection of *ulema* who, because they had chosen the Congress instead of the Muslim League, had somehow to be accommodated within the framework of a secular and democratic India. Having purchased tickets for the train purportedly taking India's Muslims to a secular nationalist destination, the *ulema's* ideological world view could obstruct coherent communication between passengers in the first and third class compartments. Irritations with the never ending journey of India's Muslims led to the menacing suggestion that the train would be better off on tracks leading straight across the sealed border.

Hali's *Shikwa-e-Hind* had come to haunt the Indian Muslims with a vengeance. Under suspicion in India and unwelcome in Pakistan, their predicament has been an unenviable one. The distortions of the historical evidence in both states have inculcated among the educated few a congenital animosity towards the country for whose creation they are held responsible. That there has been so little love lost between upper and middle class Indian and Pakistani Muslims is hardly cause for surprise.

The decision to make Urdu the state language of Pakistan harkened back to an overarching conception of Muslim identity which found few echoes in the regionally based cultural identities of its people. Reduced to being a subaltern language in its own regional setting, Urdu came to be regarded as an instrument of neo-imperialist domination. Bengalis in the eastern wing put up stout resistance against encroachments on their cultural autonomy. On February 21, 1952 students protesting the language policy were gunned down by the police. A common religious identity had never meant the denial of a separate cultural tradition. Proud of belonging to the same literary heritage as Rabindranath Tagore and Kazi Nazrul Islam, Bengali intellectuals deplored the official policy of deprecating their Islamic beliefs. There was 'no inherent contradiction in being a Bengali, a Muslim and a Pakistani - all at the same time'.<sup>31</sup> Bengalis were not alone in bearing the brunt of linguistic and cultural denial. In the Punjab, supposedly the political nerve center of Pakistani imperialism, intellectuals working to promote their regional language and culture were declared 'anti-state'. After the military coup of 1958, the state clamped down further on regional literary associations. Bengali resentments found their fullest expression in the establishment of an independent state of Bangladesh. Shamsur Rahman conveyed the long-standing cultural alienation of Muslim Bengal in a poem written during the liberation struggle:

Freedom:

you are Tagore's ageless poetry,  
his immortal songs.

Freedom:

you are Kazi Nazrul, wild-haired sage  
trembling with the thrill of creation.

Freedom:

you are that meeting at the martyr's monument  
on the eternal twenty-first of February.<sup>32</sup>

The brief populist interlude in what remained of Pakistan came as something of a boon for regional language movements. Resistance themes in regional folklore were among the

symbols of protest against the military regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. One Punjabi poet conveyed the growing disdain for the state's attempts to forge a singular national identity on the basis of an alien culture and language:

In vain you are looking for your identity in the imperial  
courts of Delhi?  
Why do you ask deserts to provide you the shadows of pipal?  
You cannot find your own perfumes in other's gardens.<sup>33</sup>

If the Pakistani state's language policy generated more resentment than enthusiasm for Urdu as one of the dominant idioms of national identity, the response of a predominantly Muslim but regionally differentiated population to its ambiguous recourse to Islam proved utterly divisive. The emphasis on religion by its early managers was never intended as a commitment to the establishment of an Islamic state. At the helm of state power, the erstwhile Muslim 'communalists' were not about to pass the mantle of Pakistani 'nationalism' to the religious guardians. In fact the term 'communalism' disappeared from the discourse as 'nationalists' of all hues and colors jockeyed for political ascendancy.

The embattled politics of Pakistan's Islamic ideology scuttled any sort of consensus on national identity. Even as a military-bureaucratic state strained its nerves to keep the Islamicists at bay, it saw attractions in plumping for policies privileging the common religious bond of an otherwise culturally distinctive and economically disparate people. More successful in deluding itself than large segments of a society comfortably positioned to simultaneously live out multiple layers of identity, the inefficacy of the Pakistani state's Islamic card is a powerful indictment of the argument that the religious factor in 'Muslim consciousness' outweighs all other considerations. As electoral results consistently showed up the weak appeal of an exclusively Islamic ideology in politics, it was left to the military-bureaucratic state to embark on policies of Islamization in its search for legitimacy. Yet the most paradoxical legacy of Zia-ul-Haq, the self-proclaimed soldier of Islam, was the intensification of regional, linguistic and sectarian tensions. Whatever the preferred discourse, the politics of identity in Muslim Pakistan have been structured around decidedly non-religious and non-communal considerations.

If a state supported Islam has been unable to lend any sense of commonality to the politics of identity in a predominantly Muslim country, its political utility for secular India's besieged Muslim minority appears even more uncertain. Apart from declaring the political uses of religion illegal, the Indian constitution by scrapping separate electorates removed the principal institutional barrier to the articulation of Muslim politics in other than 'communal' terms. Although there is scant evidence of Indian Muslims voting on the basis of religious considerations, the notion of minority 'communalism' remains enmeshed in Indian political discourse. This has given pro-Hindu as well as ostensibly secular parties the moral pretext to issue periodic condemnations of the narrow mindedness of Muslims on the question of personal law and other matters to do with their religiously informed cultural identity. The tolerant secularist and the bigoted Hindu are really after the same pound of flesh - Muslims have to stop drawing upon the religious and cultural strands of their identity if they want complete integration in the secular and democratic framework of the Indian nation-state.

Discomfort with difference is a function of the inclusionary nationalism and, its



concomitant, equal citizenship which are among the defining features of modern nation-states. But despite ample evidence on the ground, the paradox of inclusionary nationalism ending up as a narrative construction of an exclusionary majoritarian identity has rarely commanded attention from the votaries of the nation-state. In India matters are further complicated by the fact that the inclusionary idiom is expressed in an artificial binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism. To be secular and nationalist for a Muslim entails publicly disclaiming too close an association with the specific traits of the minority community, religious and cultural. Otherwise there is no escaping the pejorative label of 'communalism'. But the protagonists of Hindutva can get away critiquing the state's pseudo-secularism while pitching their bid for the nationalist mantle.

Finding ways to accommodate a distinctive Muslim identity without launching a frontal assault on the contradictory official idioms of the Indian state can result in perilous logic. The inclusionary idiom flows from a singular conception of Indian nationalism whose ideological basis is a secularism with religion left out. Yet there is also the accompanying conception of a composite nationalism deriving its justification from India's pluralist religio-cultural tradition. The idea of a composite nationalism was in some ways an advance on the notion of India as a 'federation of faiths'. It entertains the possibility of the co-existence of religious communities without adequately addressing the problem of difference among them. Secular nationalism, on the other hand, avoids through erasure the problem of difference by projecting a singular narrative construction of Indian identity. Collapsing the pluralism implied in the 'composite' of nationalism with a 'secularism' devoid of religion leads to serious confusion of conceptual categories. This confusion which is expressed in varied ways in academic and political debates flows largely from an inability to retain an analytical distinction between Muslim identity and a Muslim communal politics. A Muslim identity, however one might choose to package it, makes a claim on difference denied by the singular secular nationalist ideal. But in the absence of any neat equation between a Muslim identity and a Muslim 'communal' politics, beyond a handful of electoral constituencies where voting patterns might occasionally reveal such an overlap, there is no reason for a secular nationalist discourse to acknowledge, far less accommodate, difference.

So it is one thing to applaud the declining influence of religious obscurantism on the politics of the Muslim masses and quite another to see this as a triumph of the secular-modernist initiative recently launched by a voluble and variegated segment of the Indian Muslim elite. A socially and economically underprivileged and politically divided minority which is the target of bigotry and organized violence from a determined section of the majority community could do with some measure of electoral solidarity to force the agendas of the state. Dismissing this as 'communalism' of the sort which brought about the partition of the country, the new generation of the Indian Muslim elite in a leap of faith from an all too awkward reality firmly believes in the secular and democratic ideals of their state and polity. Yet forging a secular modernist Indian Muslim identity without dabbling in power politics may require more reason than faith. It is somewhat difficult to imagine how a Muslim elite which has maintained a studied aloofness from their regionally fragmented underprivileged co-religionists are going to mobilize support for a secular conception of identity 'outside the communitarian framework'. Blazing Azad's old trail 'to posit composite nationalism' against 'appeals based on religious solidarity' is a noble secular hope.<sup>34</sup> But it runs counter to the singular secular nationalist idiom insofar as it admits a problem of Muslim identity.

The Muslim quandary in post-independence India is an especially acute one. Needing the very political solidarity which the secular nationalist idiom damns as 'communalism' and the electoral scene in any case renders impossible, the secular modernists can at best try and influence Muslim elite discourse. But as in the past that discourse has never been of a singular or homogeneous cast. Reforming Muslim personal law to fit a secular modernist ideal, hung and drawn by tensions in the composite and secular conceptions of Indian nationalism, without being quartered by the inescapable intervention of the religious guardians is a daunting task. The tragedy of the new breed of Muslim secular modernists in India quite as much as in Pakistan is their lack of facility in Islamic learning. Better trained in Marxist and Weberian paradigms than in the Quran, theirs are not necessarily pens more powerful than the sword. With no Sayyid Ahmed Khan, Syed Ameer Ali, Shibli or Azad waiting in the wings, the words of the insular and bigoted *fatwah*-giving bearded men will ricochet on any debate surrounding Muslim personal law. Indian Muslims with their multiple voices and splintered politics will undoubtedly continue to resist threats to their religiously informed cultural identity. Taking on a variety of forms, it will be a resistance so multifarious as to justify exploding 'communalism' and rescuing the problem of difference from essentialization as well as extinction.

## Conclusion

An exploration of the discourse and politics of Muslim identity over a period stretching more than a century reveals the grave flaws in categorizing the multiple articulation of difference as 'religious communalism' or cultural nationalism. Muslim identity as difference has been riven with too many internal contradictions to be capped by an all encompassing 'communalism'. Historicizing and conceptualizing the related issues of Muslim difference and Muslim politics has suggested the inevitability of the one and the impossibility of the other. A common source of reference in the normative ideals of Islam does not warrant the essentialization of Muslimness implied by 'communalism'. But by the same token, ideological and political disagreements among Muslims does not nullify the case for difference. What it indicates is that the problem of Muslim difference and identity in South Asia has been more complex and nuanced than permitted by the protagonists of the 'two nation' theory or the practitioners of a historiography based on a binary opposition between secular nationalism and religious communalism.

The problem of difference in South Asia as a whole and of Muslim identity in particular cannot begin to be addressed without forsaking the dichotomies between 'secular' and 'religious' as well as 'nationalism' and 'communalism'. Just as the first set of opposites can be found blending into the thought of a single individual, the second binary pair shares a common conception of majoritarianism and minoritarianism in the privileging of religious distinction. The majoritarian premises of Indian and Pakistani 'nationalism' derive equally from the colonial project of religious enumeration. While Indian nationalism asserts its inclusionary idioms in the secular garb and Pakistani nationalism in an inclusionary religious mode, neither avoids the pernicious process of exclusion resulting from the implicit denial of difference. It is the singular and homogenizing agendas of both nation-states which have wittingly or unwittingly created the space for religious bigots seeking political power to target vulnerable minorities. To call bigotry 'communalism' is to implicate in the actions of the few the inactivity of the many. So while there can be no denying the rampant bigotry of so-called Hindu majoritarian 'communalism' in India

and religious 'fundamentalism' in Pakistan, their politics of oppositional identity construction need to be exposed to the full glare of analytical scrutiny. The self-defence of baited minorities produces its own venomous narratives and versions of bigotry. But dubbing the outrage of the Indian Muslim minority to the actions of the Hindutva brigades 'communalism' is to deny legitimacy to any strategy aimed at protecting or accommodating the problem of difference and identity. In much the same way, the regional counter-narratives of difference in Pakistan have to be seen as strategies of resistance seeking release from the fetters of an uncompromising discourse of Islamic identity rather than as a denial of Muslimness.

That the dominant idioms of states, and the ways in which these are reflected in elite discourse, so often fly in the face of the shifting structural contours of politics at the base is reason enough for abandoning some of their more questionable premises. Exploding 'communalism' to uncover the manifold and contradictory interests driving the politics of Muslim identity in South Asia might enable a better appreciation of difference as a lived cultural experience, one that is forever changing in response to broader historical dynamics, rather than an abstract, sterile and essentialized category awaiting a fresh round of scholarly bandaging.

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<sup>1</sup>Altaf Husain Hali, 'Shikwa-e-Hind', (1888) in *Jawhar-e-Hali*, compiled by Iftikhar Ahmed Siddiqui, (Lahore: Kereven-e-adab, 1989), pp.314-30.

<sup>2</sup>For instance Romila Thapar, 'Imagined religious Communities? Ancient History and the modern search for a Hindu identity', *Modern Asian Studies*, 1989, 23, 2, pp.209-231.

<sup>3</sup>See Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>Farzana Sheikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam: Muslim Representation in Colonial India, 1860-1947*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup>Cited in Mushir U. Haq, *Muslim Politics in Modern India, 1857-1947*, (Lahore:, Book Traders n.d), p.35.

<sup>6</sup>*Jawhar-e-Hali*, pp.200-9.

<sup>7</sup>Speech at Patna on January 27, 1883, in Shan Mohammad (ed.), *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan*, (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1972), pp.59-60.

<sup>8</sup>Sayyid Ahmed Khan, 'Tahsab', in Mazameen-e-Sir Sayeed: *Muntakhab Tehzib-ul-Akhlaq*, compiled by Dr Ghulam Hussain Zulfikar, (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1993), pp.44-9.

<sup>9</sup>See his speeches at Lucknow, December 28, 1887 and Meerut, March 16, 1888 in Mohammed (ed.), *Writings and Speeches of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan*, pp.180-94, 204-20.

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp.266-7.

<sup>11</sup>*Kulliyat-e-Akbar Allahabadi*, vol.1, (Delhi n.d), p.95.

<sup>12</sup>See *Intikhab-e-Kalam-e-Akbar*, compiled by Dr Ghulam Husain Zulfikar, (Lahore, 1966), pp.110, 112.

<sup>13</sup>Mehr Afroz Murad, *Intellectual Modernism of Shibli Nu'mani: an Exposition of his Religious and Political Ideas*, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1976), p.100.

<sup>14</sup>Cited in Haq, *Muslim Politics in Modern India*, p.72.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.108.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, p.124.

<sup>17</sup>Mohamed Ali, 'The Communal Patriot', February 1912, in Afzal Iqbal (ed.), *Select Writings and Speeches of Maulana Mohamed Ali*, first edition 1944, revised edition, (Lahore, 1987), pp.75-7.

<sup>18</sup>Mohamed Ali's presidential address to the Indian National Congress at Cocanada, December 26, 1923, in Ibid., pp.111-18.

<sup>19</sup>B.R.Nanda, *Gandhi-Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.391-2.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.390.

<sup>21</sup>Mohamed Ali's speech at the fourth plenary session of the Round Table Conference in London on November 19, 1930, in Iqbal (ed.), *Select Writings and Speeches of Mohamed Ali*, p.356.

<sup>22</sup>Mohammad Iqbal's presidential address to the All-India Muslim League at Allahabad, December 1920 in Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan, All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947*, (Karachi: National Publishing House, 1970), vol.11, pp.158-61, 166.

<sup>23</sup>Sheikh, *Community and Consensus in Islam*, chapter 6.

<sup>24</sup>Dr Radha Kumad Mookerji, *A New Approach to the Communal Problem*, (Bombay: Padma Publications, 1943), p.59.

<sup>25</sup>Jinnah's presidential address to the All-India Muslim League, Lahore, March 1940 in Pirzada (ed.), *Foundations of Pakistan, All-India Muslim League Documents: 1906-1947*, vol.11, p.335.

<sup>26</sup>See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>27</sup>See Khizar Humayun Ansari, *The Emergence of Socialist Thought Among North-Indian Muslims (1917-1947)*, (Lahore: Book Traders, 1990), chapter 6.

<sup>28</sup>My adaptation of Sardar Jaffari cited in M.Yusuf Abbasi, *Pakistani Culture: a Profile*, (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1992), p.76.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, pp.77-78.

<sup>30</sup>Cited in Moin Shakir, *Politics of Muslim Minorities*, (Delhi, 1980), p.137.

<sup>31</sup>Cited in Anisuzzaman, *Creativity, Reality and Identity*, (Dhaka: International Centre for Bengal Studies, 1993), p.104.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid* p.115.

<sup>33</sup>Nirvan Noori cited in Shafqat Tanveer Mirza, *Resistance Themes in Punjabi Literature*, Lahore, 1991, p.201.

<sup>34</sup>Mushirul Hasan, 'Minority Identity and its Discontents: Response and Representation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 19, 1994, pp.441-51.