



GIRILAL JAIN

THE
HINDU
PHENOMENON

Girilal Jain, doyen of Indian journalists and editor of *The Times of India* from 1978 to 1988, was a passionate crusader of the Hindu cause. His posthumous work puts into historical perspective the growing Hindu self-awareness and self-assertion. The author believes that a fundamental shift took place in the power balance between Hindus and Muslims as a result of the consolidation of the British Raj and the disarming of the populace which began in 1818 and was completed in 1858. This shift, he contends, was not reversed by the pro-Muslim change in the official attitude, starting from the 1870s, and by the policy of divide and rule, though it led to the partition of the country in 1947. It is from the establishment of the British rule that the author traces the rise of Hindus.

The socio-economic-political order that Jawaharlal Nehru fashioned is today as much in the throes of death as its progenitor, the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist order. Secularism and socialism have been major planks of these orders. In the face of the dramatic global events of the last few years, both have lost much of their old glitter and, therefore, the capacity to dazzle and mislead.

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By the same token, re-Hinduization of the country's political domain has begun. Superficially, it may be a sheer 'accident' that the battle between aroused Hindus and the imitation Indian state, neutral to the restoration of the country's ancient civilization has been joined on the question of the Ramjanambhoomi temple in the city of Ayodhya.

The concept of nation itself is, in fact, alien to the Hindu temperament and genius. Such a concept is essentially Semitic in character even if it arose in western Europe in the eighteenth century. The nation concept too emphasizes the exclusion of those who do not belong to the charmed circle (territorial or linguistic or ethnic) as much as it emphasizes the inclusion of those who fall within the circle. By contrast, the essential spirit of Hinduism is 'inclusivist' and not 'exclusivist' by definition. In that sense the Hindu fight is not really with Muslims. The fight is between Hindus anxious to renew themselves in the spirit of their civilization and the state (India in name but not in spirit) and the political and intellectual class trapped in the debris in which the British managed to bury our people before they left.



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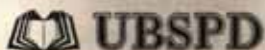
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Editor's Note

Girilal Jain belonged to that minority of Indian intellectuals who welcomed the movement for the Ram temple as part of the process of Hindu self-renewal and self-affirmation. The rise of Hinduism, he argued, was a phenomenon that began 200 years ago with the consolidation of the British Raj and the disarming of the local populace. This produced a fundamental shift in the power balance between Hindus and Muslims which has not been reversed since, though it led to the partition of the country in 1947. Every important Hindu leader from Rammohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru has made his contribution to the Hindu resurgence. The Ramjanambhoomi movement was only the latest manifestation of this phenomenon, its importance being that it had placed the issue of the civilizational base of Indian nationalism at the centre of the country's political agenda.

Girilal Jain believed that the political-economic order that Jawaharlal Nehru had fashioned was as much in the throes of death as its progenitor, the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist order. Two major planks of this order, secularism and socialism, had lost much of their old glitter while the third, non-alignment, had become redundant. By the same token, re-Hinduization of the country's political domain had begun.

It was not an accident that the battle between aroused Hindus and the Indian state had been joined on the question of the Ram temple. For Ram was the exemplar *par excellence* for the Hindu public domain. In historic terms, therefore, the proposed temple was another step towards that goal. The proper English translation of 'Hindu *rashtra*' would be 'Hindu polity' and not 'Hindu nation'.

The concept of nation was, in fact, Girilal Jain argued, alien to the Hindu temperament and genius. It was essentially Semitic in character, even if it arose in western Europe in the eighteenth century when it had successfully shaken off the Church's stranglehold. For, like Christianity and Islam, it too emphasized the exclusion of those who did not belong to the charmed circle (territorial, linguistic or ethnic) as much as it emphasized the inclusion of those who fell within the circle.

By contrast, the essential spirit of Hinduism was inclusivist, and not exclusivist by definition. Such a spirit must seek to abolish and not build boundaries. That is why he held that the Hindus could not sustain an anti-Muslim feeling except temporarily and, that too, under provocation.

In that sense, Girilal Jain argued, the Hindu fight was not with Muslims; the fight was between Hindus anxious to renew themselves in the spirit of their civilization, and the state and the intellectual class trapped in the debris the British managed to bury us under before they left: "The proponents of the Western ideology are using Muslims as auxiliaries and it is a pity Muslim 'leaders' are allowing themselves to be so used."

Girilal Jain had worked out the broad framework of this project and commenced work on the draft when he fell fatally ill in June 1993. The book has been completed on the basis of his draft, notes and recent writings. Despite all its shortcomings I believe the end result is a

fairly accurate statement of his position though, of necessity, it has been stated briefly.

I am grateful to *The Times of India*, *The Sunday Mail*, and *The Observer* group of publications for permission to use material published in their columns. I would also like to thank Mr. Shamlal, Mr. Inder Malhthora, Mr. Dileep Padgaonkar, Mr. Swapan Dasgupta, Mr. Arun Shourie, Mr. Jagmohan, Mr. Ram Swarup, Mr. Sita Ram Goel and Mr. Gopal Krishna, all friends and colleagues of my father, for their comments and suggestions on the work. I am only too conscious that the responsibility for the shortcomings is entirely mine.

Meenakshi Jain



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The Civilizational Perspective

I must say at the outset that I think in terms which are different from the ones that have dominated the public discourse in our country for a century and longer. I think in terms of *civilizations*, and not *territorial states*. It is not that I do not believe in the validity of the concept of the nation-state as an organizing principle in the economic and political field. I do. But I do not regard it as adequate for defining the nature of our enterprise and therefore the obligation of our state which must flow from a definition of its nature. Indeed, I believe that it is our failure to view ourselves as a civilization and to formulate the tasks for our state accordingly that lies behind many of the problems we face.

As I said at the outset, I think in terms of civilizations and not of nations or territorial states. This is a relatively new development in my life and, to be candid, I do not believe it would have crystallized to the extent it has if the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's (VHP) campaign on the Ramjanambhoomi temple in Ayodhya had not acquired the sweep it had by the time of the *shilanyas* in 1989; if this sweep had not got translated into support for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the elections that followed the *shilanyas*; if the BJP had not, as a result,

become a significant factor in Indian politics, and, finally, if the popular response to L.K. Advani's *rath yatra* had not been as overwhelming as in fact it turned out to be.

Success, as the saying goes, has many fathers and failure none. But there is a difference between what we call opportunism and willingness to recognize a significant change, especially a change that promises to mark the end of an epoch and the beginning of a new one. I am persuaded that we are witnessing a change of that order in India.

So, as I view the scene, it is no longer particularly relevant to debate whether Hindu *rashtra* is desirable or not, though many of us, mired as we human beings mostly are in modes of thought which have had their day, will continue to engage in this exercise. It has been firmly and finally put on the agenda, though, again many of us would try hard to avoid this recognition because, more often than not, wish is the father of thought for most of us. The pertinent question now is the speed with which this possibility is likely to be realized.

I for one do not regard speculation regarding the time frame to be in order. As a Hindu I believe in the ineluctable power of the time spirit: *Mahakala* will deliver on time – neither earlier nor later. What is material is that the country is well set on that road, and while there may be, indeed there shall be, setbacks, these will be temporary. History zigzags; it never moves in a straight line. But it moves, and according to a pattern.

An epochal change, it is hardly necessary for me to point out, cannot take place unless the existing order has more or less exhausted its beneficial potentialities, and the new order has been in the making for quite some time. Unknown to us and invisible to us, the two processes are more or less simultaneous. This has been the case in India, as I hope to be able to show. The subject is extremely complex and I cannot possibly do anything

like justice to it for a variety of reasons. This would have been the case even if I was concerned only with the post-independence period, or the freedom movement. But I am concerned with a whole millennium. So you can imagine the difficulties I face in working out and presenting a theory which is reasonably coherent, intelligible and acceptable. Before I proceed further, I might add that in such a framework, there is, at the intellectual level, not much scope for moral judgement and indignation, though all that is, of course, valid at the political level.

Why do I think in terms of a whole millennium which, on the face of it, is fragmented at so many points? My reason is simple. The beginning of the millennium witnessed the beginning of the assault on Hindu India and as we approach its end, we can clearly see the approach of the end of that assault. Only on a superficial, so-called rational, view can it be regarded as an accident that the millennium which began with the destruction of hundreds and thousands of our temples should be drawing towards a close amidst an unprecedented upsurge on the question of the construction of a Ram temple at a site millions of ordinary Hindus regard as the avatar's *janambhoomi*.

For me as an analyst, the condemnation of the campaign in favour of the temple as Hindu 'communalism', 'obscurantism', 'relapse into medievalism' and 'fascism' is as besides the point as condemnation of the destruction of Hindu temples, including the famous Somnath, by Mahmud Ghaznavi at the beginning of the eleventh century. As a Hindu, I, of course, welcome the former and feel saddened by the memory of the latter. But analysis is a different matter altogether. It has to be clinical in its rigour. By that yardstick, the first is an expression of Hindu resurgence and the second of the second Islamic explosion centred on Central Asia, as the first was centred on Arabia.

Religious-civilizational explosions are like floods and earthquakes. Only in retrospect do their adherents and proponents look for and offer justification for them. When they take place, they are their own justification, or condemnation for victims. This was clearly true of the first Islamic wave in the seventh and eighth centuries, which saw the beginning of the attack on the frontiers of our civilization in Afghanistan, Eastern Iran, Baluchistan, and Sind, and this was equally true of the second Turkic Islamic wave which overtook us precisely because our defences on the border had finally given way after three to four centuries of bitter fight.

In parenthesis, I might mention that Arab Islam was as much a victim of this Turkic Islamic explosion as Hindu India. Indeed, for all practical purposes, the Turks took over the Abbasid caliphate in Baghdad by the middle of the tenth century, that is long before Mahmud Ghaznavi began his raids into India proper. The sack of Baghdad in 1258 was only the culmination of a process that had been on for well over three centuries; in fact, close to four.

It will be outside the scope of this discussion for me to go into the state of India at that time and the nature of the Indian response. Even so, it is necessary to make a couple of points in passing because a distorted perspective has come to dominate our thinking in this regard. India, of course, could not mobilize against Mahmud Ghaznavi and subsequent invaders the kind of vigorous response Chandragupta Maurya had after the raid by Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C., but this was primarily because the centre of political power had moved from North India, which had to bear the brunt of Muslim invasions, to the Deccan and the south. It is really a shame that so few Hindus are alive to the achievements of the Rashtrakuta, Satvāhan, Chola and Vijaynagar empires. This applies as much to those

who rejoice in the Rajput resistance, followed by the Maratha and Sikh resistance, as to those who take pride in the 'glory' of the Mughal empire.

It would also be in order to emphasize that the Hindu resistance to Muslim invasions, conquests and rule was truly heroic, both in fact and in spirit. The first aspect is by now well recognized and need not therefore detain us.^{1*} The latter aspect has, however, not received much attention at the hands of historians and, therefore, needs to be specially emphasized.

The Bhakti movement was doubtless part of the Hindu response to Muslim rule. But it is a travesty of the truth to suggest, as is done by any number of Hindu intellectuals, that it represented an attempt to produce a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam. If anything, it was an attempt, even if unconscious, to disarm Islam with the help of a popular movement which clearly demonstrated that equality before God was as much part of Hinduism as it was of Islam. The Bhakti movement was a form of resistance and not an attempt at synthesis or compromise.

Many Hindu intellectuals are just not able to comprehend the fact that there is no human aspiration or experience which lies outside the range of Hinduism; it provides for even demon-Gods. In contrast, all religions are in the nature of sects, though they cannot be so defined because of their insistence on their separateness and, indeed, hostility to Hinduism.

The point I wish particularly to underscore is, however, different; which is that when Hindus fought and lost, they did not throw up prophets of woe and doom; they did not bemoan that their Gods had let them down because they had been 'disloyal' to them. Hindus are

* For further details, please see 'Notes and References' in all following cases.

perhaps unique in this respect. That is perhaps why the well-known British historian Elliot wondered why Hindus had not left any account which could enable us to gauge the traumatic impact Muslim conquests and rule had on them. (Incidentally, one such account entitled *Kanhadade Prabandha* by the Jain Muni Padmanabha written in the fifteenth century regarding the fight for the Jalore fort is available, and the muni-poet praises Muslim valour as he praises Hindu valour. An English translation of this unique document, with an introduction and annotation by V.S. Bhatnagar, has recently been published.)²

A large number of Hindus, of course, cooperated with Muslim rulers and millions even got converted to Islam. It is important to know, even in retrospect, how Islam spread. But, for one thing, the distinction that is often made between conversion by force (sword), temptation (favours by the court) and persuasion (influence of pious Sufis) is rather arbitrary because all three factors operated in conjunction with one another; and, for another, the more critical point for us is that by the time the Mughal empire went into decline in the early eighteenth century, a kind of stalemate had been reached, with neither the Hindus nor the Muslims able to dominate India as a whole. It was in this context that the British came to rule over India.

We can speculate on the likely course of events in case the British had not arrived on the scene. Personally, I do not, as a rule, engage in such speculation. I regard it as futile. We have to interpret facts as they came to obtain on the ground, for whatever reason. In such an approach, it is relevant to discuss the factors behind a particular development. But it is far more pertinent to concentrate on the consequences. That is what, in any case, I propose to do, of course, in relation to my central proposition that we are set on the path to Hindu *rashtra*. The consequences of the Raj form a vast and complex subject. If,

however, it is not possible for us to deal with it in a meaningful manner here, it is also not urgent.

It is a commonplace that the Raj was very different from Muslim rule. Two differences have been spotlighted by any number of historians and commentators. They have said that the British remained foreigners, while Muslim invaders and immigrants made India their home, and that the British drained India of its wealth which Muslim rulers did not because the latter settled down here for good.

For me, however, there is a third difference which is of critical importance. This difference is that the British did not come to India – and did not rule over India – as part of a proselytizing enterprise in the religious realm. Indeed, it was with great reluctance that the authorities in Calcutta, acting on behalf of the East India Company, yielded to the pressure from London to allow Christian missionaries to enter India and engage in proselytization. In the absence of backing by the state, however, the Christian missionaries could achieve only a pretty limited measure of success and, that too, largely among weaker sections of society, which could be tempted and manipulated. This absence of a direct link between the state and the Church offered great relief to Hindus and ensured their survival in freedom, and, therefore, held out the prospect of Hindu self-affirmation. It is my contention that a process of self-affirmation, in fact, began with the establishment and consolidation of British rule. I view Raja Rammohan Roy and other reformers as much in that light as men such as Ramakrishna Parmahansa, Swami Vivekanand, Sri Aurobindo and Maharishi Raman.

The British ruled over India as representatives of Western civilization. Christianity was doubtless a major constituent of that civilization. But with Renaissance in the fifteenth century and Enlightenment in the

eighteenth, Christianity ceased to be its 'informing principle'. The Graeco-Roman heritage took its place. This heritage was pagan; it provided for plurality in every sphere of human activity; and it therefore promoted acceptance of a relativist approach. As such, Hinduism could easily come to terms with it and, in fact, *accommodate* it. And precisely for the same reason, Islam could not come to terms with it. By virtue of being a legatee of Western civilization (rooted at least as much in an ancient pagan civilization, similar to India's, if not India's sister or daughter via Egypt, as in Christianity), the Raj constituted a challenge to Islam, while it served as a stimulus to Hindus for self-discovery and recovery.

As it happened, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, some British and other European scholars were launched on a search for the origins of their civilization. In this search they discovered links not only between Latin, Greek, German, English and French within Europe, but also between classical European languages, that is, Latin and Greek, and Sanskrit and the original language of Zend Avesta. This again is a long and complex story which certainly does not run in a straight line. But it would suffice for our purpose to note that the efforts of Orientalists – Sir William Jones clearly the most outstanding among them in the latter part of the eighteenth century which was of critical importance by virtue of its being the formative period for the Raj as well as for Hindu India in the new context – restored to Hindus confidence in their heritage. This confidence has in a fundamental sense, not been shaken since, whatever else might have happened in between. And, needless to add, no similar advantage flowed to Islam in India, or for that matter anywhere else, from the British Raj, or any other Western empire, or contact.

The British, of course, did not come to India primarily as representatives of Western civilization; they came

principally as traders and settled down as rulers. The consequences of the first role have been extensively discussed and I have not much to add to the broad consensus that this led to our deindustrialization and, therefore, impoverishment. The same is largely true of other consequences of their rule. Here, too, a broad consensus obtains. Even so I would draw attention to a couple of points which, in my opinion, have not received the attention they deserve.

First, the British disarmed us, for the first time in history. Till the consolidation of British power in India in 1858, the Indian peasantry was armed. According to the *Ain-i-Akbari*, four and a half million armed men were available for military service in North India in the sixteenth century and possibly a similar number below the Vindhya, judging by the fact that the Vijaynagar empire could field up to one million soldiers. This subject has not been discussed much. But the gap in this field has been ably filled by a recent publication — Dirk H.A. Kolff's *Naukar, Rajput and Sepoy*.³ Broadly, it makes the points that the Indian peasantry in modern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh (which is the area of Kolff's research) was armed; that a substantial labour market existed; that there was no dearth of employment opportunities for would-be soldiers; that these recruits came from all strata of society including the lowest in ritual terms; that there was no discrimination in the recruitment and treatment of soldiers of any kind on the basis of caste; indeed, that caste is a modern ideology inasmuch as it restricts mobility because from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century Rajput status was accessible to soldiers; and that a Hindu soldier had more than one identity.

Clearly, so dramatic a development as the disarming of a people used to carrying and wielding weapons could not but have had major consequences. Clearly this issue

deserves to be studied at length. In the present context, I would wish to underscore the point that the British move affected Muslims more adversely than Hindus for the simple reason that Muslims were more dependent on the use of the sword than Hindus who had successfully maintained their primacy in business even during Mughal rule⁴ and had been much quicker to take advantage of the opportunities Western education offered them for entry into professions such as law and government employment.

I am convinced that a significant and fundamental shift took place in the power balance between Hindus and Muslims as a result of the consolidation of the Raj and the disarming of the populace which began in 1818 and was completed in 1858, and that this shift was not reversed by the pro-Muslim change in the official attitude, starting from the 1870s, and the policy of divide and rule, though it led to partition in 1947. Indeed, it could not be reversed.

The British, of course, had no desire to help the re-emergence of Hindus. Indeed, as educated Hindus began to assert claims to equality, demand share in government and resent racist slurs, the British took steps to contain them. But all that is besides the point. The relevant fact is that the Raj made possible the rise of a self-confident Hindu elite on an all-India basis, the like of which had not existed since the beginning of Muslim rule.

Partition was a logical corollary to the rise of Hindus. The British assistance to the Muslim League during the Second World War, however important, only accelerated the pace of events; the alternative to partition, in the shape of continued separate electorates, weightage and special reservations would have been disastrous and though partition did not settle the civilizational contest that began with Muslim rule, it facilitated the task for Hindus since they had now a well-organized and powerful pan-Indian modern state of their own.

These observations will almost certainly be quoted to show that I endorse Muhammad Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory. There is nothing I can do to avoid this risk. For my readers, however, I would emphasize not only that I think in civilizational as distinct from national terms, but also that, by my reckoning, Muslims in undivided India could represent only a fragment of Islamic civilization and were, therefore, incapable of becoming a people.

Jinnah could call Indian nationalism, as espoused by the Indian National Congress, 'Hindu nationalism' on the ground that the Congress was a Hindu body, which it was, by virtue of its ethos if not by that of its ideology and composition, and pit 'Muslim nationalism' against it. But he could not possibly overcome the obstinate fact that Islam, on the one hand, does not admit of nationalism and, on the other, does not help overcome local and even tribal loyalties.

Thus, while Jinnah could bring Muslims together on an anti-Hindu platform and force the country's partition, he could not lay the foundations of a Pakistani nation. It is not surprising that Pakistan continues to 'define' itself in anti-India and anti-Hindu terms. It could not possibly overcome its essentially transient character and disruptive role and it has not. The military muscle it has acquired, thanks to US bounty and Soviet stupidity, has inevitably increased its capacity for mischief but not its ability to define itself in terms of itself.

To return to the subject under discussion, independence, accompanied by partition, removed two constraints – British control and Muslim intransigence – blocking our march forward and, in objective terms, therefore, paved the way for the re-emergence of Hindu India in civilizational, and not just in physical, terms. In physical terms, independent India has been Hindu India. But a Hindu civilizational India has yet to emerge.

As I see it, several obstacles have blocked this process. First, as a rule, without any exception, for decades, to the best of my knowledge, we Hindus have viewed our civilization in parochial terms; even those of us who have related it to other pre-Judaic faiths have not realized that the West has achieved what we are struggling to achieve; that the Europeans, in plain terms, have successfully resurrected and renewed an ancient civilization by way of a series of movements beginning with the Italian Renaissance in the fifteenth century. Instead of seeing it as a sister civilization in view of its emphasis on reason, rule of law and spirit of inquiry, we have condemned the West on the ground that it was materialistic, as if material well-being was not one of the principal concerns of our forefathers.

Secondly, we have taken a territorial and, therefore, a mechanical view and not a civilizational view of ourselves as a people. Thus, by reckoning, we were Indians by virtue of living in a country called India and we were equally justified in calling every inhabitant of the territory Hindu since Muslims named it Hindustan. This theory is reflected in the writings and utterances of not only 'secularists', but also BJP leaders. But for this mechanical concept, we could never have accepted the proposition that the Indian state is an impartial arbiter between the two communities. The contrast between the secularist-national position and the Hindu position on this question is sharp.

The secularist-national position is that the Indian state embodies an ideal, and is there to serve it; that while it is a creature of the Constitution, it is above the people; that in our multireligious society, there is no other choice. In the Hindu view, the state has to be an expression of the Hindu ethos and personality. Such a state cannot either discriminate against any religious group or seek to impose a uniform pattern on the

inhabitants. Indeed, it would feel obliged to look after their well-being and the preservation of their ways of life. But the state would see itself as an instrument for the promotion of Hindu civilization.

The final point that I wish to make here is that we opted for the policy of non-alignment with a visible anti-Western bias because we took a parochial view of our civilization and wrongly defined the nature of the state in independent India. Pandit Nehru saw himself as an arbiter between rival camps in the cold war, in disregard of the horror that was communism, just as he saw himself as an arbiter between Hindus and Muslims within the country. Obviously, the cost on both counts has been pretty heavy. If non-alignment has meant the isolation of India from true centres of power in our era, the concept of secularism has meant the moral disarmament of Hindus. Pakistan and China could not have posed the kind of threat they have to our security if we had made common cause with the West and the Muslim problem would not have remained wholly unresolved if we had not misdefined the nature of the Indian state.

A Unique Phenomenon

The first point that needs to be emphasized in a meaningful discussion of Hindu nationalism is that it is something altogether different from other types of nationalisms, with the possible exception of the Chinese about which it is premature to say anything definite since the Chinese people have yet to recover their capacity to shape their future in accordance with their civilization and genius. The reason is simple. The Hindu civilization, which is the basis of Hindu nationalism, is different from any other living civilization, again with the partial exception of the Chinese. Even when the uniqueness of our civilization is accepted, it is sought to be annulled for all practical purposes, by giving it the label 'Hinduism' and equating it with other religions. The tragedy is that most educated Hindus have themselves fallen prey to this semantic confusion. Thus they describe themselves as one community among others. It follows that we should shun the term 'Hinduism'; but that is not a practical proposition.

What we can, however, do is emphasize again and again that *Hinduism is not a religion*. René Guenon, one of the best-known European traditionalist authors on various civilizations, writes in his book *Introduction to*

the Study of the Hindu Doctrines: "...the term 'religion' is difficult to apply strictly outside the group formed by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which goes to prove the specifically Jewish origin of the idea that the word now expresses."¹ He adds: "In India we are in the presence of a tradition which is purely metaphysical in its essence.... A fact which stands out much more clearly here than in the Islamic tradition, chiefly owing to the absence of the religious point of view, ...is the complete subordination of the various particular orders relatively to metaphysics, that is to say relatively to the realm of universal principles."²

Hinduism has been called a confederation of religions by apologists as well as detractors. That definition cannot, and does not, do justice to the spirit of the Hindu people. For, religion as such is a Semitic enterprise. It must, by definition, draw a boundary between the believer and the unbeliever; the chosen and the rejected; the blessed and the damned; the truly faithful and the heretic. It must divide. It just cannot do otherwise unless it comes to be tempered by other influences, as Christianity has been tempered gradually by the upsurge of the Graeco-Roman civilization since the Renaissance in Europe in the fifteenth century. That was a sister civilization to ours. That is why its coming in via British rule could help stimulate and renew Hindu civilization despite its Christian undertones and attempts at proselytization by the missionaries.

Hindus accept no divisions between the believer and the unbeliever. Every path leads to Him (God or Reality); there can be as many paths to Him as the number of human, in fact, sentient, beings. For, every being is differently constituted, with different capacities and needs, and can follow only a path appropriate to him or her. As such, Hindus can have no difficulty in accepting the legitimacy of Christianity and Islam for their

adherents, though for themselves they cannot possibly accept either Christ as the only son of God, or Mohammed as the seal of prophecy and the Koran as the immutable word of God to be taken literally. Indeed, the prophetic tradition is alien to Hinduism. An avatar (incarnation of God) is not a Hindu variant of the prophet. His actions and sayings are not immune to interpretation and, in fact, to disregard and rejection.

Hinduism provides for the ultimate Truth but not for a final and last statement of that Truth. So, we cannot have either *the* son of God, or *the* last messenger of God, or *the* final revelation. Indeed, in our civilization, when we project a *nayak*, we also project a *priiti-nayak*, the *nayak's* opposite.

It is not an accident that Hindus do not bury their dead; they cremate them; they do so primarily because they do not believe in resurrection which, needless to add, is the source of the belief in the possibility of a religious-cultural revival. It is a popular saying among Hindus that the soul sheds the body just as a snake sheds its skin to take on a new one.

Hinduism provides for self-renewal, even if Hindus as such have not been able to make effective use of the built-in mechanism for change for centuries. The concept of *Kalabrahma* or *Kaladharmā* is central to the Hindu way of thinking. It accepts explicitly the inevitability of change with the passage of time. The past is not superseded but is modified according to the demands of the spirit of the times, determined, in the traditional Indian view, by the cosmic movement of planets. Thus the Vedas are followed by the Upanishads and these by the Epics and the Puranas; nothing is final.

The *siddha* tradition is as old as Hinduism; Goraknath, to whom we attribute the Tantric tradition was himself the 84th and the last in the line of master *siddhas*. All in the line engaged in the same search for experience of

Reality and Truth but everyone sought to communicate it in the spirit of the time in which he lived. The same is true of the 24 Jain Tirthankaras and 24 Buddhas. In our times we have the case of the Sikh Gurus – the nine following Guru Nanak embodying the same spirit and engaging in the same search and yet communicating it in different forms. Masters such as Ramakrishna Parmahansa, Sri Aurobindo and Maharishi Raman too sought to renew old traditions. Sri Aurobindo even wrote mostly in the English language. Such a civilization just cannot admit of revivalism.

This catholicity of outlook is, of course, not a peculiarity of Hindus. Other ancient civilizations – Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Iranian, Minoan, Greek, Celtic, Chinese, Mayan and Aztec – are known to have been informed by a similar spirit. None of them is believed to have engaged in proselytization and heresy hunting. Both these began with Yahweh's contract with Moses with the dual proclamation of a chosen people and a jealous God, and achieved their acme under Christianity and Islam since Judaism came to be identified with a specific racial group and not only ceased to be a proselytizing faith but instead became a persecuted one. (With the exception of a brief respite after the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century B.C., when Jews are known to have lost the memory of even their language, they have faced persecution throughout their history, culminating in Hitler's 'final solution' in which six million Jews are known to have been murdered.)

In fact, Moses, real or mythical, marks a radical departure from all previous spiritual traditions. Christian and Muslim writers have argued that uncompromising monotheism, as first propounded by Moses, represents a higher stage in the evolution of religion. But that is a different matter which can be allowed to rest for the time being. What is important to emphasize right now is that

along with the doctrine of uncompromising monotheism, heresy hunting, proselytization and holy wars became integral parts of Semitic religions.

The proselytizing impetus in Christianity and Islam is far from exhausted even in this secular age, as is evident from their massive campaigns, especially in Africa, and from the persecution of Muslim 'heretics' such as the Ahmadiyahs in Pakistan and Bahais in Iran and of non-Muslim peoples in Sudan. The details are blood-chilling.

Nazism, fascism and communism have been expressions of the same Semitic spirit in the secular realm. They too divided human beings into friends and foes and looked for 'dissidents' in their own ranks. Indeed, it would not be too wide off the mark to say that the Christian passion for proselytization got diverted into these 'ideological' channels in our century leading to one tragedy after another, ironically for Christians. While it is terrible that six million Jews should have died in Nazi gas chambers, it should be remembered that something like 100 million Christians perished as a result of Nazism and communism in concentration camps and during the Second World War.

While other people have, in the past, shared a similar catholicity of outlook, Hindus can claim two unique achievements which set them apart. Hindus alone developed yogic techniques on a regular scientific basis which any interested person can study and practice, preferably under the guidance of a guru (preceptor), according to his capacity and commitment. This fact is recognized by leading authorities on yoga the world over. Shamanism is not yoga, as Mircea Eliade, a leading authority on comparative religion, recognizes. And it might be added that yoga is the basis of Hindu spirituality. Equally important, Hindus alone have been able to preserve an unbroken link with the past and a

comprehensive corpus of ancient knowledge in all branches of human activity.

The links with the past have, in many respects, degenerated into mere rituals and superstitious practices in the absence of a living tradition of knowledge and experimentation, which once informed the rituals and other practices. Similarly, ancient texts have often been distorted through literalist interpretations, resulting partly from dramatic changes in language, as from Vedic Sanskrit to classical Sanskrit, for instance, and partly from the same absence of a living tradition of knowledge and experimentation. Both these difficulties are now being overcome to an extent. The hold of rituals has declined and the ancient texts have begun to be better understood. But the process is far from being sufficiently advanced to permit us to speak of a renewal of the Hindu civilization.

Texts such as the Vedas and Upanishads are not intellectual constructs like Western philosophy; they are statements of spiritual experience and guides to that experience. Since the key to them in the shape of yogic techniques survives, it can give master practitioners access to our past in a manner and on a scale which is unique to us. Indeed, such fragmentary texts as survive from other old civilizations are also best approached via the Hindu route. There is a universality about ancient civilizations which is no less remarkable than the globalization of today. So it is logical that we approach the unknown through the known.

It may be recalled that it was in pursuit of yogic *sadhana*, independently of access to Vedic knowledge at that stage, that Sri Aurobindo acquired the key which enabled him to interpret the Vedas in their pristine spirit. He had experiences similar to those described in the Vedas by the great rishis and that enabled him to know what the *slokas*, in fact, meant. Sri Aurobindo writes in

his book *On the Vedas*:

My first contact with Vedic thought came indirectly while pursuing certain lines of self-development in the way of Indian Yoga which, without my knowing it, were spontaneously covering towards the ancient and now unfrequented paths followed by our forefathers. At this time began to arise in my mind an arrangement of symbolic names attached to certain psychological experiences which had begun to regularise themselves; and among them came the figures of three female energies, Ila, Saraswati, Sarama, representing...three out of the four faculties of the intuitive reason – revelation, inspiration and intuition.³

Ramayana and Mahabharata, the great Hindu epics, too have been interpreted in symbolic terms.⁴

The reference to the continuity of our tradition has long been a commonplace. At the level of formulation, it can be traced back to the eighteenth century when Western scholars began to discover and translate Sanskrit manuscripts. The reference is legitimate on two counts. First, the continuity from the time of the Indus Valley civilization is evident in matters such as dress, means of transport, and even sculpture. The dancing girl from Mohenjodaro could, for instance, have been sculpted at any point in Indian history. Secondly, thanks to its faithful preservation, above all by Brahmins, we have access to an unbelievable amount of ancient knowledge in a wide variety of fields. Much of what must have been produced has doubtless perished; but what is left is enormous.

These points need to be emphasized because the continuity of practices, even if routinized, and the availability of an enormous corpus of ancient knowledge make it possible for us to engage in a search for self-renewal and self-affirmation in our own terms. This is not open to

peoples of other ancient civilizations because their past has been obliterated. Ancient Egypt, for instance, is only a memory to Egyptians. The better educated among them can, at best, derive pride from the unrivalled pyramids. The heritage itself means little to them. It certainly does not arouse among them the desire to reclaim it.

To take up our own case, it is about time we recognize that we are not a *nation* in the European sense of the term, that is, we are not a fragment of a civilization claiming to be a nation on the basis of accidents of history which is what every major European nation is. We are a *people* primarily by virtue of the continuity and coherence of our civilization which has survived all shocks. And though inevitably weakened as a result of foreign invasions, conquests and rule for almost a whole millennium, it is once again ready to resume its march.

The sources from which the Indian populace came to be constituted are strangely enough, still a matter of debate. Theories of Aryan invasion/migration and of pre-Aryan indigenous Dravidian people and civilization survive despite the absence of worthwhile evidence. There can, however, be no question that there had come into existence within, more or less, the present boundaries of South Asia a civilization pervasive enough and deep enough to give rise to a people who can be said to possess a collective psyche.

Such a civilization existed in India at least on the eve of the Christian era. Evidence in support of a substantial Buddhist-Jain presence in Tamil Nadu by the second century B.C. and of the fusion of the supposedly Aryan-Dravidian features to produce one homogeneous civilization is by now well documented.⁵

I am not persuaded of the existence of a separate Dravida-speaking community in India. I share the views

of the well-known archaeologist, Dr. S.R. Rao, that the Indus Valley civilization was a Vedic civilization.⁶ But I do not wish to press this viewpoint in this presentation, though I would like to make two points in passing.

First, at the heart of the Aryan-Dravidian theory lies the Western scholarly definition of 'distinct' speech communities in Central Asia, accepted by them as the nursery of races and nations. On their own findings, however, these 'distinct' communities are not all that distinct after all. Indeed, they could not be, in view of their close proximity, on the reckoning of Western scholars themselves. Secondly, if northern Iran and Afghanistan are recognized to be parts of Central Asia, as they are, it is logical to extend the definition to include the northern-western part of India now Pakistan. That would give Vedic Sanskrit, or a possible earlier version of it, the status it may well deserve, but has been denied.

It is in any case beyond dispute that there arose in South Asia a civilization so homogeneous that it is difficult to locate a tradition, or a folklore, in any locality in South Asia in any Indian language which is not related to a similar tradition or folklore in other parts of the land in other languages. In fact, there is a remarkable continuity between classical traditions, widely regarded as the handiwork of the upper strata, especially Brahmins, and folklore, which, on the other hand, is said to be the creation of ordinary people. Again, there is no local or folk tradition which is not found in the Sanskritic-Brahminic tradition.

As Ananda K. Coomaraswamy correctly pointed out, folklore in India should not be contrasted with the classical traditions, as it is in Europe. "Whereas in Europe folk and classical traditions are separate, in India they share a common base.... In fact, these terms represent only different (the local and pan-Indian) expressions of the same tradition, not different traditions". [See Stuart

H. Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan (eds.), *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India.*⁷ This unity covered not only 'Dravida' India, if indeed a distinct Dravida speech community existed, but also tribal India. We have a pretty good idea now of the interaction between tribal India and Hindu India in the rise of Gods, for example.

Orissa is ideal for studying this phenomenon for a variety of reasons. While it is a distinct geographical unit with a distinct cultural and political history, north-eastern and southern influences have met there and it has been in direct contact with Central and North India through the Mahanadi valley. Its regional tradition has remained relatively unbroken. It was, for instance, able to withstand Muslim conquest till 1568, more than three centuries after much of North and Central India had come under Muslim rule. Finally, Orissa has had a large tribal population; even today tribals account for almost 25 per cent of the total population. The uninterrupted tribal-Hindu continuum finds its lasting manifestation in the Jagannath cult of Puri. "The archaic iconography of the cult images on the one hand and their highest Hindu iconology on the other as well as the existence of former tribals (*daitas*) and Vedic Brahmins amongst its priests are no by means an antithesis, but a splendid regional synthesis of the local and the all-India tradition." [See Anncharlott Eschmann *et al.* (eds.), *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa.*]⁸ Interestingly, the very tribes, whose cults have been incorporated, still live as tribal and semi-tribal communities in the region, and Hinduization can be observed "in the making".⁹

To cite another example. The main image of the Khambhesvari temple in Aska (Ganjam) consists of a stone pole – poles and stones normally substitute for images for tribals – which has been anthropomorphized

by the addition of a disk as head. The nose and the mouth are slightly carved; the eyes, the protruding tongue, and the nose ornament, are made of gold. "The image of Khambhesvari confers both: the impression of a real Hindu image – whose body and limbs are mostly not to be seen because of the dresses and ornaments – and the impression of the pole, whose form is still evident in spite of the dress. It is thus a very happy combination...."¹⁰

To clinch the issue. The Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar, built in the eleventh century, has two classes of priests: Brahmins and a class called Badus who are ranked as Sudras and are said to be of tribal origin. Not only are Badus priests of this important temple; they also remain in the most intimate contact with the deity whose personal attendants they are. Only they are allowed to bathe the Lingaraja and adorn him and at festival time when the god, "represented by his *calanti pratima* [original symbols of the deity], leaves the temple only Badus may carry this movable image. Without them, it is said, the god 'cannot move one step'...."¹¹

The temple legends confirm and 'explain' the tribal origin of the cult: "They indicate that the deity was originally under a mango tree...and it was not seen as a *linga* in the first two ages, Satya and Treta. In the Dvapara and Kali ages it revealed itself as *linga*.... The Badus are described by the legend as tribals (*sabaras*) who originally inhabited the place and worshiped the *linga* under the tree".¹²

In view of deliberate attempts in recent decades to project Buddhism and Jainism as separate religions, distinct from Hinduism, it would be in order to deal with them in passing. The attempts have clearly been motivated by the design to separate their followers from the parent body called Hinduism just as Sikhs have been to an extent. Though not to the same extent as in the case

of Sikhs, the attempts have succeeded inasmuch as neo-Buddhists and at least some Jains have come to regard themselves as non-Hindus.

In reality, however, Buddhism and Jainism have been no more than movements within the larger body of Hinduism, not significantly different from Lingayats, Saktas or Bhaktas of more recent times. Regardless of whether we call them sects or religions, and in the case of Jains, whether we accept the view that they represent the earliest religion of India or that their first Tirthankar, Adinath, is the same as the Hindu god Shiva, the reality is the constant interaction of the most intimate kind between them and Brahmins. Indeed, individuals, Brahmin by birth, have been leaders in the formulation and propagation of Jainism as well as Buddhism. Narrowness of the spirit, peculiar to Semitic faiths, has been alien to India.

Louis Dumont has dealt with Jainism and Buddhism in his famous work. *Homo Hierarchicus*.¹³ Tracing the origins of *ahimsa* and vegetarianism, he says both were originally confined to the renouncer (that is a person who leaves social life to devote himself to his salvation) and forced themselves on Hindu society under the influence of Jainism and Buddhism, "the two great disciplines of salvation":

After all, how many kinds of spiritual authority were there? Only two: the Brahman and his tradition, the renouncer and his sects. How many factors of initiative and invention? Only one, the renouncer, faced with whom the Brahman was such an effective factor of integration and aggregation that in the long run he almost completely absorbed his rivals. There was rivalry in public opinion between these two sorts of "spirituality", and this by itself can contribute to the explanation of the efforts to go one better, the

hardening of the doctrines as, penetrating into the social world proper, they were taken up by the Brahman on his own account. (Let us not forget that the Kshatriyas have traditionally remained meat-eaters.) In short, the Brahman would have adopted vegetarianism so as not to be outdone by the renouncer qua spiritual leader.¹⁴

This unity was not ruptured by subsequent invasions by Scythians, Huns and other groups from Central Asia till the arrival of Islam, first in Sind in the early eighth century and, finally, in the Indo-Gangetic plains in the eleventh century. The pre-Islamic invaders did not generally penetrate the heartland of Indian civilization and the Gangetic plains; entering through the north-west, they moved down south-west via Rajasthan into Gujarat. Moreover, they were soon absorbed into the Hindu or the Buddhist tradition, if they did not bear the impress of these traditions already. Unlike in Europe where they finally overwhelmed the Roman empire, they made no lasting impact on India.

The cultural unity we have spoken of would obviously not have been possible in the absence of a common language of literary culture. Sanskrit fulfilled that role. Two views have been expressed about Sanskrit. First, that it was the language of an Aryan people who came to India as conquerors and/or migrants from Central Asia and successfully imposed it on the native peoples. Secondly, that it was a language which was developed within India itself as a result of the synthesis of the languages of various ethnic groups, who were themselves in the process of becoming merged into one people, and that this was the reason why there was no popular resistance to it at any stage.

Clearly, the first is the more widespread view largely as a result of the work of Western scholars. This is rather

surprising not only for the reason (outlined earlier) that if Central Asia was indeed the nursery of nations and speech communities, these could not be all that different from one another in view of the close proximity in which the peoples involved must have lived. There is another reason for the surprise. Max Mueller, who played a leading role in popularizing philology, the so-called science of languages, denied the existence of an Aryan race. Others have followed him, especially after the disaster of Nazism in Europe. Not many people now accept the theory of a pure race.

One of India's best known linguists, the late Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, has expounded the second viewpoint again and again. He was a scholar in the Western tradition of Orientalism. As such, he accepted the theory of Aryan invasion/migration as well as broadly the dates in respect of Indian history as determined by Western scholars; he rejected dates based on astronomical calculations of events mentioned in the Vedas, epics and Puranas. I have reservations on both these counts; but let that pass and let us discuss Professor Chatterjee's views.

According to Professor Chatterjee, various people of diverse origins – the Austric Nishadas (Kols or Mundas), Dramidas or Dravidians, the Aryans and Kiratas or Mongoloids – began to live together in the well-demarcated geographical area of India three to four thousand years ago. Then began a racial fusion and cultural and linguistic miscegenation among them. In this work of welding together diverse people into one, Brahmin thinkers (mainly of Aryan origin) and the various Aryan language-speaking groups of military adventurers and business classes, always on the move, made the greatest contribution. A cultural ideology, including some social trends and practices and religious notions, became established. This cultural basis, with its Sanskrit name

of *Dharma*, became, at least from the end of the second millennium B.C. (circa 1500-1000 B.C.), an irresistible force bringing together, under the guidance of the Brahmin priestly class, various peoples of India.¹⁵

What we loosely call Sanskrit, as the vehicle of Hindu culture, can, with greater accuracy, be described as *Spoken Aryan*, as it evolved roughly between 500 B.C. and A.D. 500. It included not only classical Sanskrit as it evolved from Vedic Sanskrit under the impact of Dravidian and Kol (tribal) speeches but also contemporary Prakrit or vernacular Aryan dialects (Jain Prakrit, Pali, etc.) and the mixed Sanskrit and Prakrit of Buddhists (Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit) and all other speeches within the Aryan orbit as used from 500 B.C. onwards. And in the vital matters of syntax and vocabulary, both classical Sanskrit and various Prakrits were deeply influenced by Dravidian and Austric (tribal) languages. "In the evolution of the Aryan speech, the Dravidians and the Austrics had almost an equal hand as the original speakers of old Indo-Aryan."¹⁶

Further, "Sanskrit looms large behind all Indian languages, Aryan and non-Aryan. It is inseparable from Indian history and culture. *Sanskrit is India*. The progressive Unification of the Indian Peoples into a single Nation can correctly be described as the Sanskritisation of India."¹⁷

Just as Sanskrit was to unify diverse groups into one people with a common culture, Hindavi or Hindi was to play the same role in the preservation of this cultural unity. It is not generally known that Hindavi or Hindi was the successor to Sanskrit as an all-India language from the ninth century onwards; that it was not limited to what is now regarded as the Hindi-speaking region; and that its pan-Indian spread was possible precisely because like Sanskrit, it did not grow out of one Prakrit. As scholars have pointed out, Hindi developed, like Romance

languages in Europe, as an exogenous and not as an endogenous language. Viswanath Prasad writes:

It is generally surmised about the modern Indian languages that each of them must have evolved from some Prakrit or Apabhramsa. Some people think the same about Hindi. But in so far as Hindi does not reflect the features and characteristics of any *one* Prakrit or Apabhramsa, it does not sound reasonable to think that it has derived from any *one* of them. The fact of the matter is that Hindi has developed, like the European Romance languages, by a process of *sankramana*, and not *vyutkramana*, i.e., as an exogenous language and not as an endogenous language. According to Udyotana Suri's *Kuvalayamala*, there were at least sixteen regional languages and dialects current in the eighth-ninth centuries. In the north, in Panjab, and in the east, in the languages and dialects prevalent between Bihar and Bengal, we notice that although in their spoken form they had local peculiarities, they were nevertheless gradually tending towards a common standard. It is clear from the Apabhramsa literature of the eighth to the twelfth centuries that, on account of the particular feature of development mentioned above, the literary language of the time was in a large measure standardized, and in the written form there were not many regional variations. The emergence of Hindi as a common language of literary usage is clearly evident from the Apabhramsa literature of the time. The best examples of the exogenous development of the Hindi language and its literature are to be found in the writings of the Siddha poets. There is no doubt that we find the oldest forms of Hindi in those works.

In 1916, after the publication by the late Pandit Haraprasada Shastri of a collection of Siddha poetry under the title *Bauddha Gan o Doha*, various theories

were propounded about the language of that body of writing. Mr. Shastri himself, and some other scholars, thought it the earliest form of Bengali. On the other hand, others discovered in it the old forms of Oriya or Maithili or Bhojpuri or Magahi.

The truth is that there is a great deal of similarity in these eastern languages; they are all related to Magadhi Apabhhransa which had not, until then, developed many variations in its local forms. Therefore it was easy to discover in the many usages in these works, the forms or signs of development of this or that language. But the most important thing to remember in this connection is that most of these Siddha works had been written in the famous universities of Nalanda and Vikramsila, and their writers mostly belonged to that region. Therefore this surmise is certainly much strengthened: that their language must have been some form of the Magadhi or Magahi prevalent there. With that base the Siddhas unhesitatingly mixed the standard forms of western Apabhhransa with the current forms of the adjacent western districts, and thus developed a literary style in their writings which would help them reach out and influence a much wider public with their ideas. Consequently, in that one mirror of writing it is possible to see reflections of ever so many forms. In fact, Hindi is the result of just such natural and voluntary mixtures, whose oldest specimens can be witnessed in Siddha literature. The late Kashi Prasad Jayaswal and Rahul Sankrityayana were the first people who drew attention to these Siddha poets in terms of the origin and development of Hindi, and to the fact that through them the early period of Hindi authentically goes back to the eighth century A.D. (Quoted in Amrit Rai, *A Divided House: The Origin and Development of Hindi / Hindavi.*)¹⁸

As would be obvious from the foregoing quotation, Siddha poets played a critical role in the development of the Hindi language. They represented a revolt against practices which are associated with *vamacara* (esoteric occult practices of the *mantra* and the *tantra*, of wine and women). They preached a simplistic religion with 'no *mantra* or *tantra*'. Called the *Sahajayani marga*, this trend, starting from the east, conquered the west up to Kabul and beyond. Goraknath, the greatest religious figure since Sankaracharya in the eighth century, was central to this enterprise. He was born in the tenth century. His followers, known as Nath-Panthi Yogis and, subsequently, Kabir and his Nirgun school of poets dominated the scene for 600 years till Ram and Krishna worship took over in the sixteenth century. This remarkable phenomenon of Nath-Panthi Yogis has passed out of our consciousness, though in north-western India, one could encounter them up to the nineteen-twenties. But its importance cannot be overemphasized.

The Turkic conquerors with their proselytizing creed, inevitably introduced a new element on the Indian scene. But in a fundamental sense the unity of Indian civilization was not disrupted. The conquerors, of course, spoke their own Turkish language in their homes and also Persian, which they had acquired in Afghanistan before coming to India, was the language of culture for them. But up to the second half of the sixteenth century Persian served only as the formal and official language at the court and of law courts administering the Shariat. It was then that, at Raja Todarmal's instance, it was made the language of the revenue department in place of Hindavi and other Indian languages. This gave Persian a new status since Hindu employees and aspirants to government jobs had to learn it. This was to culminate in the Persianization/Arabization of Hindavi to make it Urdu.

In the middle of the sixteenth century Malik Muhammad Jayasi wrote his famous *Padmavati*, a work of Sufi mysticism in the guise of a Rajput romance, in the same language as Tulsidas wrote his *Ramacharitmanas*, except that Jayasi used more of Prakritic elements than Tulsidas who, as a Sanskrit scholar, leaned on that parent language. It was in the Deccan, at the end of the century that Persianized diction grew up in Dakhni Hindavi as a result of the introduction of the Persian script. Members of the Muslim ruling elite used the Hindavi they took with them from the north to distinguish themselves from the local Telugu- and Marathi-speaking people and they took to the Persian script in assertion of their identity.

Professor Chatterjee writes: "Still, Deccan Hindustani for two centuries did not cut itself off from ordinary Hindu speech, and the vocabulary of king Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah, the poet-king of Golconda (d.1611), and that of other Sufi poets contemporaneous with and posterior to him, had a good percentage of pure Hindi and Sanskrit words. The Persianising writers of Delhi, Lucknow, Lahore and Hyderabad-Deccan in the 18th and 19th centuries worked a revolution in the spirit of Urdu, which may as a result be properly described as the Mohammedan form of Hindi." (See *Indo-Aryan and Hindi*.)¹⁹

The foundations of two cultures and of partition had thus been laid. Persianized Urdu was to play the role of producing a rival cultural matrix which Persian itself could not have done. But as it happened, the retreat of Muslim power in the world as a whole and in India had begun by then. Great Urdu poets came after the death of Aurangzeb in 1707 and the beginning of the takeover of India by the British East India Company after the battle of Plassey in 1757. The great Ghalib was to seek a stipend from the Company. This retreat was not to be reversed. In India, as we shall see, it was to pave way

for the re-emergence of Hindus and Hindu civilization. This was, of course, not to be a revival which history does not permit. It was to be a return of the Hindu spirit in new forms, necessitated by the impact and dominance of the West, which still continue.

Hindu Nationalism: The First Phase

Since the contribution of British Orientalists in the second half of the eighteenth century to the growth of self-awareness and pride in their past cultural achievements among educated Hindus is well known, it is rather surprising that the rise of Hindu nationalism should be traced back at best to the Arya Samaj in the late nineteenth century and, indeed, to the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925 and 1926. Obviously, the record needs to be set straight and this perspective corrected.

The story begins in 1767 when John Zephaniah Holwell's pioneering work was published under the lengthy title *Interesting Historical Events, relating to the Provinces of Bengal and the Empire of Indostan.... As also the Mythology and Cosmogony, Fasts and Festivals of the Gentoos, followers of the Shastah, and a Dissertation on the Metempsychosis, commonly, though erroneously, called the Pythagorean doctrine*. Holwell's contribution to the European view of India was twofold: he established the great antiquity of the Indian people and the need to apply standards "other than European" to the study of India and its culture. Holwell dismissed previous accounts of India as "defective, fallacious and unsatisfactory...only

tending to convey a very imperfect and injurious resemblance of a people, who from the earliest times have been an *ornament to the creation* if so much can with propriety be said of any known people on the earth".¹

This story has been ably told, apart from O.P. Kejariwal, by P.J. Marshall in his *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*² and David Kopf in his *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835*.³ We do not need to go over that ground again except to make a couple of points.

It will be in order to quote here Sir William Jones's famous statement on Sanskrit because it helped restore Hindu self-confidence to a great extent, though it also gave birth to the Aryan race and Aryan invasion/migration theory which has not been disposed off till today despite the absence of any worthwhile evidence outside the uncertain discipline of philology. According to him:

The Sanskrit language..., "whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure, more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either, yet bearing to both of them a stronger affinity both in the roots of verbs and in the form of grammar, than could possibly have been produced by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologer could examine all three, without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps no longer exists...there is a similar reason, though not quite so forcible, for supposing that both the Gothick and the Celtick, though blended with a very different idiom, had the same origin with the Sanskrit; and the old Persian might be added to the same family."⁴

That was not all. Jones also stressed the similarities between Vedanta and European philosophy. It was not

possible for him, he said, "to read the Vedanta, or the many fine compositions in illustration of it, without believing that Pythagoras and Plato derived their sublime theories from the same fountain with the sages of India". Pieces of Sanskrit literature accessible to him, the six schools of Hindu philosophy and the laws of Manu, the religious myths and symbols and various cultural and architectural remains all testified for him to a "people with a fertile and inventive genius", who "in some early age...were splendid in arts and arms, happy in government; wise in legislation, and eminent in various knowledge...."⁵

The role of Sir William Jones as the father of comparative mythology is less well known among non-specialists. But it is equally significant. He compared the Gods of India, Greece and Italy. Thus, he found Janus similar to Ganesa; Saturn to Manu or Satyavrata; Jupiter to Indra; Hermes to Narada; and Ceres, daughter of Saturn, to Lakshmi. He also gave arguments to show that a group of Egyptian priests had settled down in India and borrowed much from it. He was certain that the connection between the two civilizations existed before Moses. This point has since been accepted, but not widely enough, and it also remains open to question whether Egypt communicated its knowledge of the arts and sciences to India, or vice versa.

Jones was followed by H.T. Colebrooke who specialized in the study of the Vedas. With his *Essay on the Vedas*, he established that the Vedic Hindus believed in the "unity of the godhead". The Jones-Colebrooke portrayal of the Vedic age "was the first reconstructed golden age of the Indian renaissance".⁶ Its importance for the rehabilitation of Hindus in their own esteem cannot possibly be exaggerated.

Obviously, this "reconstructed golden age of Indian renaissance" could not have been sustained without a

reconstruction of Indian history on the modern Western pattern. Again, Sir William Jones made the beginning. Only two clues were available to him — Alexander's invasion of India in 326 B.C. and the report of Megasthenes, Seleucus Nicator's ambassador at an Indian emperor's court, which could be reconstructed, though the original had been lost. Megasthenes spoke of "Patlibothra" which he located at the junction of the Ganges and Erranaboas. Patlibothra could be identified with Patliputra, an earlier name of Patna. But what about Erranaboas which could not possibly be treated as a Greek distortion of the Son river? Sir Jones discovered a reference to Son as Hiranyabahu which rendered into Greek could become Erranaboas. Megasthenes had also spoken of Sandracottus. He could well be Chandragupta, but Chandragupta was not known then. Sir William found in an obscure political tragedy the story of Chandragupta the adventurer who ruled in Patliputra. Thus Indian history in modern form had been born.

The details of the foundation of Indian historiography have been well narrated, among others, by John Key in his richly illustrated *India Discovered*⁷ and need not detain us in this bird's eye view of developments in the last two centuries or so. Even so tribute must be paid to Warren Hastings who admired the Hindu inheritance and made its resurrection possible; James Prinsep, who deciphered the Brahmi script and thus facilitated the discovery of Emperor Ashoka, the most remarkable ruler in ancient India we know of so far; and Lord Curzon who ensured the preservation of India's great sculptural and architectural inheritance.

But for Curzon, this inheritance was in grave danger of being further depleted through sheer ignorance, indifference and vandalism. Curzon appeared on the Indian scene at the end of the nineteenth century. Much more could have been preserved if someone with a similar

awareness had been India's governor-general in the first quarter of the century when the great monuments were discovered and identified. It speaks for the spirit animating the rulers of independent India that even roads named after Curzon and Hastings in New Delhi have been renamed.

As Kopf has put it: "The intellectual elite that clustered about Hastings after 1770 was classicist rather than 'progressive' in their historical outlook, cosmopolitan rather than nationalist in their view of other cultures, and rationalist rather than romantic in their quest for those 'constant and universal principles' that express the unity of human nature."⁸

Much of this was to change for the worse in the nineteenth century when nationalism and racism came to dominate the West European mind. The earliest expression of this change in our case is James Mill's *History of India* published in 1817. It was, in large part, written to refute the views of Sir William Jones. It marked the beginning of the triumph of the Anglicists (read detractors of India) over the Orientalists who were admirers of the Indian civilization. Thomas Macaulay clinched the issue in favour of the Anglicists with his famous minute in 1832. English was to become the medium of instruction and not Sanskrit and Persian which the Orientalists had favoured. In this new Anglicist discourse, India was misunderstood, misrepresented and run down in almost every conceivable way. This shameful history of the imperialist and hegemonic discourse has been discussed comprehensively for the first time by the American scholar, Ronald Inden, in *Imagining India*.⁹

This imperialist perversion in the name of knowledge made it out that Hindu society had got frozen just above the primitive level. In fact, studies of Africa served as the model for studies on India. This by itself is a fascinating story which has been narrated by Adam Kuper in *The*

Invention of Primitive Society.¹⁰ The interesting point about it is that this invention was, to begin with, the handiwork of lawyers and not of anthropologists, who moved into the act much later. It inevitably influenced British civil servants and other Britishers and Europeans who fed on it. It also undermined the development of the Raj as a genuinely Indo-British enterprise. More pertinently, it could not but distort the perspective of the Indian intelligentsia which was to emerge as the dominant force in the country as English became the language of higher education, administration and justice. The distortion produced alienation which, if anything, has grown since independence for the obvious reason that the countervailing power of nationalism and patriotism, which the fact of imperialist domination brought into existence, has weakened. The doctrine of socialism, and of secularism, not as an expression of Hindu catholicity but as an offshoot and ally of socialism, has played a crucial role in this aggravation of alienation, which we shall discuss at a later stage.

The Hindus were clearly not in a position to influence the outcome of the struggle between the Anglicists and the Orientalists. They would have had to accept whatever the outcome. But even if that were not the case, they would have faced the proverbial Hobson's choice. The use of Sanskrit and Persian as languages of education would have perpetuated the Hindu-Muslim cultural stalemate, with the balance in favour of Muslims in view of the existing status of Persian as the language of administration even in non-Muslim states such as those of the Peshwas in Pune and of the Sikhs in Lahore. The changeover to English tilted the balance in their favour, but involved the risk of the continued subordination of their culture and civilization to an alien one. This risk could not be avoided and had to be lived with. And, of course, Western education with English as the medium

of instruction, was not without its advantages. It, for instance, stimulated the development of Indian languages which appeared to have got frozen. The renaissance in Bengali language and literature can, for example, be directly traced to the publication of Nathaniel Halhed's *Grammar of the Bengali Language*.

By this reckoning, 1817, when the foundation of the Hindu College (now known as the Presidency College) was laid is another important date for the purpose of our narration. But whatever the date, the issue is the rise of the new intelligentsia which has been a crucial factor in the building of India today. But in addition to the Western impact, the point to emphasize is that this intelligentsia has not operated in a cultural-civilizational vacuum. India has not been a clean slate on which the British or the intelligentsia could write whatever they chose. Indeed, the slate has refused to be wiped clean. By way of illustration, it may be pointed out that Raja Rammohan Roy, justly regarded as the father of modern India by virtue of his leadership of the Brahma Samaj, was no Westernizer in the normal sense of the term. For one thing, he met the challenge of Christian missionaries head-on and, for another, he made the Hindus suffering from loss of memory and pride aware that in the Upanishads they had an inexhaustible source of wisdom which no other civilization could claim to supersede. He justified the reforms that he campaigned for, such as the abolition of sati, in terms of ancient Hindu traditions and texts.

Keshub Chandra Sen provides a fascinating example of how the Hindus coped with the Christian and the Western challenge. He was a great admirer of Christ so much so that it was believed by, among others, Max Mueller that he was ready to be converted. And not without reason. For he said: "It is Christ who rules British India, and not the British Government. England has sent out a tremendous moral force in the life and character of

that mighty prophet, to conquer and hold this vast empire. None but Jesus ever deserved this bright, this precious diadem, India, and Jesus shall have it."¹¹ Yet Keshub Chandra was strongly attracted and influenced by Ramakrishna Parmahansa, the teacher of Swami Vivekanand and the first of the great saints of the modern period who have helped shape the India we know.

David Kopf gives three reasons for this attraction which deserve attention. First, Ramakrishna was not susceptible to formal education, English or indigenous; this separated him from other Brahmos of whatever ideological bent. Secondly, Ramakrishna's Tantric way of sublimating the sensual drive for women into a spiritual drive for the Divine Mother appealed to Keshub Chandra. Third, Ramakrishna claimed to have experienced direct, intuitive contact with all major religious leaders in history. "In this sense, the Hindu Ramakrishna was perhaps more universalist and Brahma than most of the Brahma ascetics, who were narrowly Vaishnava." These three aspects of Ramakrishna's career as a mystic were probably strong influences on Keshub from March 1875 onwards, when the two men presumably first met at the Kali temple in Dakshineswar. Keshub was intrigued by the religious "experiments" performed by Ramakrishna, and wished to adapt them to his own use, especially those elements of the Sakto tradition in Bengal that emphasized the "motherhood of God". (See David Kopf, *The Brahma Samaj and the Shaping of the Modern Indian Mind.*)¹²

Kopf makes another significant point, which is notable not only because what he says about the Brahmos applied to most educated Hindus but also because it highlights another attempt at synthesis which is characteristic of Hindus. Most Brahmos, he says, viewed the Tantric tradition in Bengal as a debased form of religious expression, and a radical departure from the classical Hindu

tradition. The idea of differentiating the good and bad features within Saktism, and incorporating the good into Brahmoism, probably came to Keshub after his acquaintance with Ramakrishna. For, in the early 1860s, Ramakrishna had already performed experiments to purify Saktism and Tantrism. "His experiments with religious behaviour dealt ultimately with the same problems of unity and diversity that had plagued Brahmos."¹³

In terms of dates, the importance of 1857 cannot be overstated. Whether one regards it as the first war of independence, as Veer Savarkar did, or the Sepoy Mutiny, as the British did, it is not open to question that its failure meant the emasculation of the old order and leadership, Hindu as well as Muslim, and with that, the closure of the era that opened with the arrival of Mahmud Ghaznavi in the eleventh century. The banishment of the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, symbolized the final eclipse of the old order just as imposition on him of the leadership of the uprising symbolized its continuing hold on the imagination of the people. It is not particularly relevant to discuss the nature of the old order, benevolent or malevolent, its character as a predominantly Muslim or a joint Hindu-Muslim enterprise in some periods and other similar questions in the case of a historical shift of this dimension. We are aware that in continuation of our pre-modern approach, most of us continue to discuss history in moral terms, but that only helps cloud our perspective, not clear it.

Inevitably, the emasculation of the traditional leadership had to pave the way for the rise to prominence of the new intelligentsia which had gradually grown in numbers and confidence since its small beginning in the early nineteenth century. As it happened, and not just by some accident, this intelligentsia was predominantly

Hindu in all three presidencies – Bengal, Madras and Bombay. As it also happened, this intelligentsia was ready, by virtue of the impact of Western political ideas, to take to the hitherto unfamiliar concept of nationalism even if with emphasis on the territorial aspect. The Indian National Congress established in 1885 was to be the vehicle of this class, to use this Marxist category for want of a better one. It is from here that the history of Hindu nationalism has to be traced and *not* from the dates of the establishment of the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS.

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee synthesized the Western secular concept of nationalism with the tradition and needs of Hindus even if he was thinking in terms of Bengal and not India when he wrote his famous novel *Anandmath* which contained the patriotic poem *Bande Mataram* (hail to the Mother) that became the national anthem during the struggle for freedom. The very fact that this was replaced by Rabindranath Tagore's *Jana Gana Mana* after independence, as a concession to Muslim susceptibilities, highlights the nature of the freedom movement. Bankim Chatterjee gave us what Sri Aurobindo has described as the "religion of patriotism". Bankim described his own viewpoint not differently from Sri Aurobindo's. He wrote: "taking into consideration the condition of man, patriotism should be regarded as the highest religion."¹⁴ This was the master idea of Bankim's writing. But this was not a mere intellectual idea. He embodied it in the Mother Goddess.

As Sri Aurobindo wrote in his work *Bankim-Tilak-Dayanand*: "Bankim...gave us the vision of our Mother... It is not till the motherland reveals herself to the eye of the mind as something more than a stretch of earth or a mass of individuals, it is not till she takes shape as a great Divine and Maternal Power in a form of beauty that can dominate the mind and seize the heart that these

petty fears and hopes vanish in an all-absorbing passion for our mother and her service, and the patriotism that works miracles and saves doomed nations is born."¹⁵

Bankim was not anti-Muslim. This point has been clinched by Arabinda Poddar.¹⁶ In view of the importance of this question in a definition of Hindu nationalism, it would be in order to discuss his findings at some length. "*Anandmath*", he says, was "definitely and entirely an anti-British novel; the children of the Mother had little to do with Muslims, even when they were depicted as fighting against them." In the first edition of the novel, Bankim, while describing the battle in the third section, does not use the words "*yavan*" and "*nere*" (which implied Muslims), but in their place the word "*ingrej*" (the British) was consistently used. The substitution was clearly an afterthought intended to protect Bankim from the wrath of the British.

In the original edition of the novel *Sitaram*, the Fakir says: "Son, I hear that you have come to found a Hindu dominion; but if you be a slave to popular prejudices you will fail to achieve your aim. If you don't consider Hindus and Muslims as equals, then in this land inhabited by both Hindus and Muslims you will fail to keep your kingdom intact. Your projected Dharmarajya will degenerate into a realm of sin."¹⁷

Finally, in the epilogue to *Rajsinha*, Bankim writes, "...this novel was written not to differentiate between Hindus and Muslims.... In statesmanship Muslims undoubtedly were better than contemporary Hindus.... One who possesses, among other virtues, *dharma*, no matter if he be a Hindu or a Muslim, is the best...."¹⁸

Poddar cites reasons, specific to Bengal, as to why Muslims did not figure in Bankim's vision of the future. First, as occupants of the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy, "they simply did not count". But more important, Bankim was born a Hindu. "His intellectual

quests, through a critical scrutiny of current European philosophies, reinforced his faith in Hinduism as the most rational and elaborate religion. If he sought to establish, in intellectual terms, the superiority of Hinduism to both Christianity and Islam, he thereby did not earn the right to be called a communalist."¹⁹

Swami Vivekanand represents the next phase in the development of the 'religion of patriotism'. Three points are notable in this regard – his identification of Mother India with the supreme God; his attempt to reintroduce the Kshatriya element in the Hindu psyche; and his conviction that India was destined to be teacher of the human race in the spiritual realm. On the first, he said:

So give up being a slave. For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote – this our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race – everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything. All other gods are sleeping.²⁰

On the second, he said:

You will understand *Gita* better with your biceps.... What I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, Kshatra-virya and Brahmateja.²¹

On his return to India after making a deep impact at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Vivekanand declared that the indebtedness of the universe to India knew no bounds. While civilizations had come and gone, the civilization of India was "indestructible and eternal". The message of this civilization had to be spread throughout the world. "For only Vedanta could triumph-

antly stand against the faith-killing, heartless rationalism of modern science; only Vedanta could lead men to salvation."²²

Vivekanand believed that each nation, like each individual, "has one theme in its life, which is its centre, the principal note around which every other note comes to form the harmony. In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England, artistic life in another and so on. In India religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life".²³ There can be no question that Vivekanand represents a landmark in the rise of the Hindu people.

At the time of Keshub Chandra Sen and ahead of Swami Vivekanand, arose in north-western India a mighty force in Swami Dayanand and the Arya Samaj, which was to play a major role in awakening among the Hindus the spirit of self-confidence. This is a vast subject on which excellent studies exist. Here, we need not go into details of the Swami's life, teachings and activities. Some of the controversies which his teachings and activities provoked during his lifetime continue to reverberate. Those too do not belong here. We are concerned primarily with his place in the story of the re-emergence of the Hindu people. That place cannot be overstated. In Sri Aurobindo's words, it was a "master-glance of practical intuition" on his part "to go back trenchantly to the very root of Indian life and culture (the Veda), to derive from the flower of its first birth the seed for a radical new birth. And what an act of grandiose intellectual courage to lay hold on this scripture defaced by ignorant comment and oblivion of its spirit, degraded by misunderstanding to the level of an ancient document of barbarism, and to perceive in it its real worth as a scripture which conceals in itself the deep and energetic spirit of the forefathers who made this country and nation.... Rammohun Roy, that other great soul and puissant worker who laid his hand on

Bengal and shook her – to what mighty issues – out of her long, indolent sleep...stopped short at the Upanishads. Dayanand looked beyond and perceived that our true original seed was the Veda."²⁴

There were similar movements in western India beginning with the Prarthana Samaj which threw up great social reformers such as Mahadev Govind Ranade and Gopal Krishna Gokhale. All in all, the foundations of Hindu nationhood had been firmly and widely laid. Out of these movements of re-formation in north-western India, western India and Bengal, emerged the triumvirate of Lal (Lala Lajpat Rai), Bal (Bal Gangadhar Tilak) and Pal (Bipin Chandra Pal) who dominated Indian politics in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Sri Aurobindo, then Arabinda Ghosh, joined them for a brief period at the time of the partition of Bengal. He then retired from political life to pursue the path of yoga and to illumine the path by his writings.

In this narrative, so far we have referred to the Indian National Congress only once tangentially. This has been deliberate because we have thought it necessary first to outline the parameters within which it would have to function if it was to be effective. More often than not, the cultural-civilizational framework has been sidestepped in discussions of the Congress. By and large, emphasis has been placed, in these discussions, on the one hand, on the growth of aspirations to equality with the British and unemployment among the educated intelligentsia, demands for Indianization of services and admission to exclusive British clubs and the impoverishment of India as a result of British policies, and, on the other, on the involvement or lack of involvement of Muslims in the Congress. This has produced a rather lopsided view of the freedom movement.

As is well known, in its formative phase, the Congress was dominated by moderate constitutionalists who

believed in the bona fides of the British and practised the politics of petitioning the Queen, the British government and Parliament in London. The first big break in this kind of politics came with Lord Curzon's decision to partition the Bengal presidency in 1905. This provoked a fierce reaction among the Bengali *bhadralok* and produced the first mass movement since 1857. This was a turning point in modern India's political history. And it is hardly necessary to underscore the point that this was a Hindu movement even if it is true that some influential Muslims in Bengal were also opposed to partition.

Charles H. Heimsath provides us a good summing up in his *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*.²⁵ He notes that up to the first decade of the twentieth century, the Indian National Congress had tried to define a new India in terms borrowed from "European political experience and western social ethics". But these ideals and methods had failed to win it much popular support. A "reconstructed Hindu nationalism", therefore emerged. Moderate constitutionalists like Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Pherozeshah Mehta and S.N. Banerjee were replaced by men such as Lajpat Rai, Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo, "all of whom identified the nation with the religious tradition of Hinduism".

As *Bande Mataram*, the extremist paper edited by Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh explained: "Swaraj as a sort of European ideal, political liberty for the sake of political self-assertion, will not awaken India. Swaraj as the fulfillment of the ancient life of India under modern conditions, the return of the *Satyayuga* (era of truth) of national greatness, the resumption by her of her great *role* of teacher and guide, self-liberation of the people for the final fulfillment of the Vedantic ideal in politics, this is the true Swaraj for India."

The paper further wrote, "the groundwork of what may well be called the composite culture of India is

undoubtedly Hindu. Though the present Indian nationality is composed of many races, and the present Indian culture of more than one world civilization, yet it must be admitted that the Hindu forms its base and centre.... The dominant note of Hindu culture, its sense of the spiritual and universal, will, therefore, be the peculiar feature of this composite Indian nationality... And the type of spirituality that it seeks to develop is essentially Hindu".

Similar sentiments were echoed by the Prarthana Samajists of western India. Ranade declared in the 1880's that there was little possibility of genuine reform unless the "heart of the nation...is regenerated, not by cold calculations of utility, but by the cleansing fire of a religious revival". In North India the Arya Samaj leader Lajpat Rai wrote: "In my opinion, the problem before us is in the main a religious problem – religious not in the sense of doctrines and dogmas – but religious in so far as to evoke the highest devotion and the greatest sacrifice from us." "The spiritual note of the present Nationalist Movement in India," he said, "is entirely derived from... Vedantic thought." In South India the Theosophical Society leader, Annie Besant, proclaimed: "If there is to be an Indian nation, Patriotism and Religion must join hands in India."

As a result of this reconstructed Hindu nationalism, "the demand for full independence was for the first time understood by great numbers of Indians, and a sincere pride in the Indian heritage made that demand into more than an academic assertion of natural rights."²⁶

As I see it, our history of the past two centuries has been the history of the rise of Hindus after a lapse of centuries of Muslim invasions and rule. This is a wholly

revisionist view of history and would be resisted by the dominant elite which has both made history in this period and written it. But precisely because mine is a radical departure, it merits being spelt out even if it is possible to do so only in bold strokes. I regard the task urgent in view of the havoc that history, as written and taught, has wrought.

The Hindu re-emergence took place under the auspices of the British, which is one reason why the phenomenon has not been seen to be what it has, in fact, been. The British disarmed the peasantry and established the rule of law; they ensured that education and commercial enterprise (and not the sword) would be the gateways to success and prosperity. These measures were a handicap for the Muslim elite which had all along relied on the sword to establish and sustain its hegemony.

The British, of course, had no desire to help in the re-emergence of Hindus. Indeed, after the formation of the Indian National Congress, they spared little effort to contain the rise of Hindus. The grant of separate electorates to Muslims and partition of the Bengal presidency, dominated by Western-educated Hindus in every field in 1905, were two such early steps. More were to follow, leading finally to partition in 1947. But even the mighty and shrewd British could not reverse the overall trend which they had promoted in no small way by undermining the Ottoman empire.

Broadly speaking, two processes have been on in Hindu society since the early nineteenth century — modernization based on the Western model and self-renewal through social reforms. The two processes have been interlinked and must be seen as such. In view of the obvious Western dominance in most fields of human activity, Hindus had no choice but to come to terms with it. Otherwise, they would have stagnated.

Muslim rule had debilitated Hindus to a point where a meaningful attempt at self-renewal was just not possible in the absence of the stimulus that the British provided. The degradation of almost one-sixth of the Hindu population to the status of untouchables, rigidity of the caste structure and excessive emphasis on rituals were expressions of that debilitation.

Hindus in sufficient numbers were ready to accept the British, as is evident from the demand for Western style education with English as the medium in Bengal. The Hindu College in Calcutta, it may be recalled, was established *before* the Anglicists won against the Orientalists and Macaulay wrote his famous minute. But the process of modernization would have been devastating in its consequences if it was not accompanied by a new awareness of, and pride in, our cultural heritage.²⁷ As it happened, British officials-scholars were busy discovering India's past. The discovery amply justified that pride.

This dual reality about Hindu society is not recognized sufficiently and widely enough in our public discourse. Thus it remains fashionable to speak of Raja Rammohan Roy as the 'father of modern India' and to ignore the contribution of Ramakrishna Parmahansa, though the latter and even more significantly, his disciple, Swami Vivekanand, helped restore self-respect and self-confidence among the Bengali *bhadralok* without which they could not have played the role they did in bringing about what is called the Bengal renaissance, precursor of a similar ferment in the rest of the country.

Similarly, it is a commonplace that the Indian National Congress was the handiwork of the Westernized intelligentsia and to disregard the point that it would have remained a body of petitioners if men such as Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi had not brought in the people with the help of ancient symbols and, indeed, if Swami Vivekanand had not paved the way for

them. Thus while Tilak used external symbols such as the Ganesh festival, Gandhi made himself into an icon millions of Hindus virtually worshipped. All these three individuals can be said to have embodied in their persons the two processes at work in Hindu society.

This brings us to the question of the Mahatma's place in the story of the rise of Hindus. It is not easy to answer this question. I, for one, am ill-equipped to make the attempt since I cannot claim to have studied carefully what the Mahatma has spoken and written. But perhaps that is also an advantage in this kind of exercise.

For long I believed that faced with the interlinked problem of getting rid of British rule and reconciling Muslims to an independent India not under their own hegemony, Gandhiji subordinated the goal of Hindu self-reaffirmation to the goal of superficial Hindu-Muslim 'reconciliation'; superficial because it sought to avoid an honest discussion of the two faiths and civilizations and recognition of the reality that one of them must be in a position to define the broad framework for independent India if the existing stalemate and conflict were not to continue indefinitely into the future.

I was not certain whether Gandhiji had studied with enough care the history of Islam in India, especially of the so-called 'reform movements' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seeking effectively to purge it of Hindu influences and practices and thus destroying the bridges connecting the two. I could find no explanation worthy of the Mahatma for his decision to accept leadership of the Khilafat movement. The decision, it seemed to me, revealed the great man's proverbial Achilles' heel.

On deeper reflection I am not so sure. It now seems to me Gandhiji put aside the issue of the pre-eminence of Hindu civilization because he was convinced that Hindus needed first to overcome their weakness. It is well

known that when Mahatma Gandhi arrived on the Indian scene from South Africa, the effort to divide India on religious lines had taken hold and that he struggled all his life to undo the damage in vain. It is not equally well known that an effort to fragment Hindu society on linguistic and caste basis had also been on even much earlier and Gandhiji was able to contain it and instead build a powerful freedom movement. This aspect of the Mahatma's life has unfortunately got obscured with the result that not many of us are aware that Hindu consolidation on a political platform was a primary precondition for a successful independence struggle.

R.C. Zaehner in his work *Hinduism* has described Gandhiji's effort "as a struggle for the recovery of India's dignity, self-respect and soul".²⁸ This was the heart of the matter. India had to be independent in order to recover her dignity and self-respect. And it is indisputable that Gandhiji wanted to re-establish the integrity of Hindu society, to reactivate it, which is what the recovery of the soul would imply. This was a complex effort as it was bound to be. Gandhiji was not a revivalist; he could not have been as effective as he was if he had been just that. The sensibilities of modern educated Indians who constituted his battalions had changed too much as a result of the British impact and the reform movements mentioned earlier. So he reinterpreted the Gita to emphasize the primacy of *karma* (action) yoga for the purpose of legitimizing political activism. Though he professed to be a *sanatanist*, an orthodox Hindu, he was one of the greatest reformers Hinduism had seen. Like other reformers before him he sought solution to the problem of Hindu decline in social reform, with heavy emphasis on the removal of untouchability. As a result of his campaigns, for the first time in history, untouchables gained entry into temples.

Gandhiji was conscious that the old order had been too badly disrupted to be restored and that a new order had to be built, if India was again to become a coherent entity. That was primarily why Nehru came to play the critical role that he did in the country's life.

The differences between the Mahatma and Nehru, it needs to be emphasized, were less significant than the areas of agreement because Gandhiji accorded great importance to Harijan uplift and accommodation of Muslims in the economic-political order on terms acceptable to them. Surely no one can argue that any other Congress leader was better qualified to attend to these concerns than Nehru. Nehru was Gandhiji's legitimate ideological heir and his political status flowed from his ideological closeness to the Mahatma.

It is perhaps not sufficiently known that the Indian people have, since time immemorial, been preoccupied with the problem of founding their polity on *dharma*. Aristotle noted in his *Politics* on the testimony of a Greek historian (whose works are no longer traceable) that India was the only land where virtue was successfully made the basis of the political order. And the Mahabharat lists 16 *chakravartins* (universal rulers) who exemplified virtue. That doubtless ceased to be a reality long ago. But its memory continues to possess the Indian people.

Among the leaders of modern India, Gandhiji alone had the perspicacity to recognize that India's soul responds to embodiments of *dharma*. It was not merely good tactics that led him to give up the European dress for the sannayasi's loin cloth; he had an instinctive understanding of its appeal to the people. He was able to mobilize the Indian masses as no one else before or since precisely because he made himself into a Mahatma. Ordinary Hindus looked upon him as a saviour and educated Hindus found him irresistible. One has only to read an account of his one-day visit to Gorakhpur by

Shahid Amin in *Subaltern Studies*²⁹ to appreciate what it meant to be Mahatma Gandhi. The people came to be convinced that to be loyal to Gandhiji won them rewards from heaven and to be opposed to him brought disasters on them.

It was therefore not an accident that Gandhiji invoked the mighty spirit of Lord Ram, whom the Hindus regard as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu. For Ram of Balmiki is no mere cultural hero as he has been made out to be. He is, above all, an exemplar for the ordering of the community's polity. That is why *shakti* (power) is regarded as vital a component of his personality as *sheela* (conduct suffused with a moral vision but not bound by traditional, received wisdom).

Mahatma Gandhi could not have been thinking of Ram only as a member of the Hindu pantheon when he talked of Ramrajya. He was looking for an ideal concept for the reordering of India's public life when it regained the freedom to engage in such an effort. In that search he landed, inevitably on Ram, inevitably because no one else has ever better embodied the essence of Hinduism in the public domain. Not even Yudhishtira; for his pursuit of *dharma*, like those of his four brothers, was one-dimensional uninformed as it was by a simultaneous pursuit of *kama* and *artha* (pleasure and prosperity, in a crude translation in the absence of exact equivalents).

Gandhiji's own life continued to be inspired and, in fact, dominated, above all, by Ram. For him, as an individual at the conscious level, politics remained an extension of his religion, not in the narrow Semitic and the equally narrow modern sense, but in the large Indian sense which admits literally of millions of paths of self-realization and of reaching God.

That is why Gandhiji sought Hindu-Muslim amity on the platform of essential unity of the two 'religions' and Nehru on that of a common fight against 'feudalism',

exploitation and poverty. Both approaches failed to produce the desired result; they had to fail. The two leaders tried to wish away the unresolved and stalemated civilizational conflict and they could not possibly succeed. The nobility of their purpose, the intensity of their conviction and the Herculean nature of their effort could not prevail against the logic of history. The alternative to partition would have been infinitely worse.

The importance of partition in 1947 for Hindus has been completely missed by the proponents of secular nationalism and Hindu *rashtra* alike. Though partition did not settle the civilizational contest that began with Muslim rule first in Sind and then in much of North India, it facilitated the task for Hindus since they now had a well-organized and powerful pan-Indian modern state of their own. As in the case of Europe, India could have remained a civilization and not become a nation. For it to be both, it needed the intervening agency of an effective pan-Indian modern state. The British provided us with such an agency. Regardless of whatever else they did, the importance of this contribution cannot be denied. On 15 August 1947, the Hindus finally became a *nation*, though not a *Hindu nation*. The distinction is important.

I have often said, half in jest and half in seriousness, that Muhammad Ali Jinnah was the greatest benefactor of Hindus in modern times, if he was not a Hindu in disguise. That has been my way of saying that partition was the best thing that could have happened for Hindus in the given situation in the mid-forties, because, without it, they could not have produced even a workable Constitution, not to speak of a viable economic and democratic political order. But it never occurred to me till recently that the Hindu-Muslim problem, as we faced it in the whole of this century, was the result of an old civilizational stalemate and that partition had finally

ended it in favour of Hindus in three-fourths of India. I now believe that the civilizational unity of Hindus has been too pervasive and powerful to have been shattered by external onslaughts; that Islam in India has been too syncretistic and internally divided to be able to define itself in terms of its own values; that its apparent unity was largely the product of a deliberately fostered hostility to Hindus; and that nationalism in our case has to be pluralistic in its approach and has to centre on our civilization which is universal in the deepest sense of the term by virtue of its being the only primordial civilization to have survived intact and not to have degenerated into a narrowly defined religion. Indeed, it is precisely because Indian nationalism has been informed by a civilization remarkable for its catholicity and broadmindedness that it has not become a narrow creed. That is why it did not acquire an anti-Muslim bias either when the Muslim League unleashed widespread violence, as part of its campaign for Pakistan, or when Pakistan was, in fact, created.

To return to the subject under discussion, 15 August 1947 was a landmark in the rise of Hindus because we emerged as an independent civilization-nation-state. Hindu power was no longer open to challenge which it would have been in the absence of partition. But this reality could not be so defined not only because the Congress leadership was not trained to think in terms of civilizational contests but also because the shock of vivisection of Mother India was too great for most Hindus to allow them to realize that they had reached an important milestone on the road to recovery and reassertion.

The obvious connection between the stance of the leadership and the popular mood at the time of independence is not generally appreciated. This is rather surprising. After all, Nehru could not have survived for 17 long years in the office of prime minister with ease if

the dominant sentiment among Hindus had not been generally favourable towards him and his broad policies. Independent India saw itself, and defined itself, in Western secular terms as a nation-state and not explicitly in civilizational terms as a Hindu *rashtra* for a variety of reasons. The Muslim factor was only one and not critically important to them at the deeper level of the Hindu psyche. At that level, Hindus have never seen any basic conflict between their heritage and Western science and technology and therefore the Western emphasis on rationality. The speed with which so many of them took to Western education and mores speaks for itself.

Till the eve of independence, Hindu thinkers emphasized the contrast between their spiritual heritage and Western materialism as part of the process of recovering their self-esteem. But in reality they needed to overcome the lopsidedness which an undue emphasis on piety at the cost of two of the central Hindu goals of *artha* and *kama* (prosperity and enjoyment) had produced in their lives in the period of their decline when they did not have a state of their own. They had to bury the *maya* (illusion) concept in its vulgar form in fact, if not the theory.

Retreat and Rage

The central issue that arises out of developments connected with the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 is whether the question relating to the civilizational base of the Indian state has finally been put firmly on the agenda, or whether it can again be put off, as it was after the First World War when Mahatma Gandhi took over the leadership of the nationalist movement from Lokmanya Tilak, who soon passed away. In the perspective of history, the answer has to be in the affirmative. The failure of the Marxist ideology in all its manifestations in practice, the collapse of most communist regimes all over the world and the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself have together created conditions in which Indian 'nationalism' can no longer be presented effectively in anti-colonial and civilization-neutral terms. Its civilizational base, structure and character cannot now be kept covered up for long by an ideological shroud. I am aware that a number of assumptions are implicit in these statements. These shall be substantiated as we proceed.

Before I take up this issue pertaining to the confusion of the true nature of Indian 'nationalism', however, it is

necessary to correct the general perspective on the vital question of the role of Indian Muslims in the last two centuries which have witnessed the resurgence of India's ancient civilization in new forms appropriate to the spirit of our times. My perspective is different from that of proponents of Hindu-Muslim cultural synthesis or of composite Hindu-Muslim culture as well as that of advocates of undefined Hindutva.

This perspective is that Muslim power and therefore civilization have been on the retreat all over the world, including India, that this retreat has accounted for all movements we have witnessed in the Muslim world in the last two centuries, and that instead of helping check the retreat, these movements have promoted a ghetto psychology among Muslims. To put it differently, what has generally been regarded as Muslim aggressiveness and separatism, I treat as isolationism and opting out. I am in this essay, not concerned with the nature of Muslim conquest and rule.

To grasp the validity of this approach, it is necessary that we give up what may be called the 'frog-in-the-well' approach to history. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru railed against this narrow approach but not to much avail. Indeed, in respect of the Hindu-Muslim civilizational encounter, he too suffered from the same handicap. Thus we discuss Mohammed bin Qasim's invasion of Sind in the eighth century more or less independently of the expansion of Arab Islam as far as North Africa and the Iberian peninsula in the west, with Mesopotamia, Syria, Egypt and Palestine thrown in, and Transoxania in the north, with the once mighty Iran, Medina, Khurasan and Sistan included in it. And more often than not we fail to take note of the fact that while Arab Muslim armies cut through Christian and Zoroastrian lands like knife through butter, in southern and eastern Afghanistan, the region of Zamindawar (land of justice-givers) and Kabul,

the Arabs were effectively opposed for more than two centuries, from A.D. 643 to 870 by the indigenous rulers, the Zunbils and the related Kabulshahs. Though with Makran and Baluchistan and much of Sind, this area can be said to belong to a cultural and political frontier zone between India and Persia, in the period in question the Zunbils and their kinsmen, the Kabulshahs, ruled over a predominantly Indian rather than Persian realm. Arab geographers commonly speak of the king of *Al-Hind* "who bore the title of Zunbil". (*Zun* was a Shaivite God.) Andre Wink has detailed an equally prolonged resistance on the Makran coast in his *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*.¹

Similarly, we discuss Babar's conquest of parts of North India without reference to the larger Turkish upsurge, culminating in the Ottoman empire, which, at its height, included present-day Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, islands of eastern Mediterranean, parts of Hungary and Russia, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, the Caucasus, Egypt, north Africa (as far west as Algeria) and part of Arabia. This lopsided and parochial view of history was designed, perhaps deliberately, by British historians to inculcate in us a deep sense of inferiority. But whether deliberate or not, the effort succeeded remarkably well. Many educated Indians have accepted that everything worthwhile in India, including Sanskrit, has come from outside and that Indians have never been able to resist foreign invasions and occupations. Nirad Chaudhuri's *Continent of Circe* is perhaps the best-known expression of this British-promoted view of us as a degenerate people.

This gap between fact and history, as generally written and taught, is however, not my interest right now. I wish to emphasize that by the eighth century, Muslims had acquired from Spain to India "a core position from where they were able to link the two major economic units

of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean....Muslims dominated all important maritime and caravan trade routes with the exception only of the northern trans-Eurasian silk route...the Arab caliphate from the eighth to the eleventh century achieved an unquestioned economic supremacy in the world...in monetary terms the result of the Muslim conquests was...a unified currency based on the gold *dinar* and the silver *dirham*.... Possession was taken of all important gold-producing and gold-collecting areas...."²

This economic supremacy provided so powerful an underpinning for the Muslim *ummah* (universal community of believers) and, therefore, civilization that they could survive all internal upheavals, including the Shia-Sunni divide; the decline of the Abbasid caliphate from the tenth century onwards, culminating in the sack of Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols; the upsurge of Turks so much so that they can be said to have dominated the Islamic enterprise from the tenth century to the abolition of the caliphate in 1924. (The Safavid rulers of Iran too were Turkic and so were the Ghaznavids in Kabul.)

It follows not only that, to be fully effective, the challenge to Muslim dominance in that vast area had, in the final analysis, to be maritime but also that the *ummah* and Muslim civilization would find it difficult to survive in a meaningful sense the loss of control of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The Ottoman empire doubtless provided a second powerful underpinning. But its fate too was linked in no small way to the correlation of forces on the high seas.

Mediterranean Europe began to stir in the eleventh century. The crusades, beginning towards the end of the century, were an expression of that upsurge though they took a religious form. But the crusaders were first absorbed in the Muslim population and civilization and then beaten back. So, it was not before the end of the

fifteenth century when Vasco da Gama discovered a new route to India via the Cape of Good Hope (out of Muslim control) and landed in India (in 1498), that a serious challenge to Muslim power can be said to have arisen. Though this challenge took around three centuries to mature and get consolidated, the impact on the fortunes of the Turkish empire was evident by the late sixteenth century, when the Dutch and the British were able to completely close the old international trade routes through the Middle East. As a result, the prosperity of the Arab provinces declined. The import of vast quantity of precious metals from the Americas following Spanish conquest and loot of that continent and the conversion of this gold and silver into currency also played havoc with the Turkish economy. Globalization of the world economy is, after all, not a twentieth century phenomenon!

This is a long and complicated story. The details, however significant and fascinating, like the retreat of the Turks from the gate of Vienna following defeat at the hands of the Hapsburgs in 1688, or Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, exactly three centuries after Vasco da Gama's voyage to India, need not detain us. What is material for our purpose is the steady erosion in Muslim control of the Mediterranean-Indian Ocean trade, the decline of the Ottoman empire and with that the replacement of the Islamic by the European civilization as the dominating reality on the world scene. The dismemberment of the Ottoman empire at the end of the First World War and the subsequent Turkish decision to abolish the caliphate in 1924 can be said to have completed the process. The two developments marked, in a fundamental sense, the closure of the era that opened with the establishment by the Prophet of the first Muslim state in Medina. However bitter and devastating the struggles within it and however painful the setbacks such as the sack of Baghdad in 1258 by the Mongols, the

ummah had been in control of its fortunes from Mohammed's Medina period till then.

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Muslim thinkers and men of action have tried to inaugurate a new era in their history. Their failure to do so is obvious. At various places, beginning with the seat of Ottoman power in Anatolia itself, and at various times, beginning possibly with Shah Waliullah in Delhi at the beginning of the eighteenth century, they have tried different strategies – modernization of the armed forces and administration, Western-style education, reinterpretation of the Koran and return to pristine Islam, Western ideologies from liberalism to Marxism via fascism, pan-Islamism and pan-Arabism. Nothing has worked. (For details see David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle*.)³

The reasons for this world-wide failure are many and complex. Among the most important is the nature of Islam itself. Very early in its history, Islam closed itself on itself. By insisting on the finality of Mohammed's revelation and the immutability of both the Koran and the Sunnah, Islam ensured that there could be no place in it for self-renewal and there has been no self-renewal in Islam as its students would accept.

To begin with there was a lot of free debate in Islam. The presence of Mutazilites and Kharijites,⁴ the rise of major philosophers such as Ibn Sina and of Sufi orders should help clinch the issue. As a result of Greek, Persian and Indian influences and the consequent growth of philosophy and sciences, early Islam, in fact, produced and sustained an intelligentsia which, in the exercise of free thought, took little account of the literal interpretation of the Koran. Sunni orthodoxy, though formulated early in the Islamic enterprise, took centuries to prevail. But once it did, in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries partly as a result of the work of Ibn Tamiyya, it has reigned supreme.

Surprising though it may seem, the Western impact on Muslim societies has only strengthened the hold of orthodox Islam. In order to appreciate this point, it is necessary to recall that under the cover of a single terminology, two distinct religious styles have persisted among Muslims. As the well-known sociologist and Islamicist, Ernest Gellner, has put it: "Islam traditionally was divided into a 'high' form, – the urban-based, strict, unitarian, nomocratic, puritan and scripturalist Islam of the scholars; and a 'lower' form, the cult of the personality–addicted, ecstatic, ritualistic, questionably literate, unpuritanical and rustic Islam of the dervishes and the marabouts."⁵

It would be an exaggeration to suggest that the two traditions have always been at war with one another. For a variety of reasons, Sufi Islam has generally been at a disadvantage and has had to accommodate itself to orthodox Islam. Most Sufis, for instance, have acknowledged that the Shariat is immutable and binding on them as ordinary Muslims. Revivalist movements from time to time such as the Wahhabis have reinforced this disadvantage; Wahhabis fought bitterly against the saint cult which is the core of Sufi Islam. Even so, till recent times there had not existed a social base for a permanent victory of orthodox Islam over Sufi Islam.

Unlike earlier times, however, the colonial and the post-colonial states have been sufficiently strong to destroy the rural self-administration units or tribes that provided the base for the personalized, ecstatic, questionably orthodox, 'low' Islam and thus provided the base for a definitive, permanent victory of orthodox Islam over the other. This, Gellner argues, is the great reformation that has taken place in Islam in the last 100 years and in some ways made its hold on believers even stronger than before.

Neither the colonial nor the post-colonial state need have set out deliberately to weaken rural or tribal societies. That is the unavoidable logic of modernization by way of growth of large urban centres, the decline of rural communities and tribes in economic and political, if not in numerical, terms, and the spread of education, transportation and means of communication. Attempts to promote economic development, access to enormous resources by way of oil revenues, especially since the early seventies, remittances by emigrants to oil-rich Gulf states, and foreign aid were also bound to reinforce this logic.

The ascendancy of 'high' Islam also accounts for the failure of attempts at secularization in the Muslim world. As Gellner has put it, the presence of this genuinely indigenous tradition has helped Muslims escape the dilemma which has haunted many other Third World societies: the dilemma of whether to idealize and emulate the West or whether to idealize local folk traditions and indulge in some form of populism. They have had no need to do either because their own 'high' variant has had dignity in international terms.

Not everyone will agree with this assessment. Some Muslims have sought to emulate the West. Turkey, since the Tanzimat movement in the late nineteenth century, is one example and so is Egypt which was virtually an autonomous province of the Ottoman empire since about the same time. That these attempts failed is, in fact, a critical issue, but that cannot be dealt with here. Broadly speaking, the assessment is valid. Turkey and Egypt too continue to struggle to contain the tide of Muslim revivalism and fundamentalism.

There is another aspect of the Western impact which deserves attention. Millions of those who have been uprooted from the countryside and pushed into crowded slums and/or have found themselves left out of the benefits of modernization and economic development have

sought and found solace in Islam. For them the language of Islam has become the means of coping with 'moral anxiety, social disequilibrium, cultural imbalance, ideological restlessness and problems of identity produced by the economic transformation of the post-independence period'.

The other major cause of the Muslim failure to move ahead is the *ummah* itself. In order to appreciate why this should be the case, it is necessary to know what the *ummah* is. This is particularly so because most non-Muslims, especially Hindus, have no idea what this community of believers means to Muslims and how it has managed to survive the rise and fall of dynasties in the past, endless intra-Muslim wars, the presence of around 50 independent Muslim states, the failure of pan-Islamism and other efforts to establish a coordinating centre.

To begin with, we should note, as Professor Francis Robinson has pointed out in his essay 'Islam and Muslim Separatism'⁶ that the Muslim era does not begin with the birth of Mohammed, as the Christian era does with the birth of Christ, or with the first revelation of the Koran in Mecca, but with the *hijra* (migration) of the Prophet and Muslims to Yathrib (Medina) whereby the Muslim community was first constituted. This was to be no ordinary community. It was to be a charismatic community. That is why Mohammed could declare: "My community will never agree on error." That is why it was to function on the basis of *ijma* (consensus of the Muslim community or scholars as a basis for a legal decision) and suppress dissent. That is why this *ijma* was to play a critical role in the development and enforcement of the Shariat.

The well-known five pillars of Islam – bearing witness to the unity of Allah and finality of Mohammed's

Prophethood, prayers with special emphasis on collective prayers every Friday with the face always turned towards the Kaaba, *zakat* (charity) for purposes of the community, fasting during the month of Ramadan and Haj (pilgrimage) to Mecca -- continuously reinforce this sense of the community. Much of this is familiar to all those who know anything about Islam. But Professor Robinson underscores a few points which deserve attention.

First, the last act of the Friday prayer itself commemorates the community as the Muslim turns to his neighbour on either side in performing the salaam. Secondly, no one who has lived with Muslims in the month of Ramadan can fail to see the powerful sense of community generated in the joint experience of fasting. Thirdly, the performance of the Haj represents the ultimate celebration of the community; for all pilgrims don two white sheets, the *ihram*, in recognition of the equality of all Muslims before Allah, and as they live for the first 13 days of the month on the plain of Arafat, they experience the reality of the community as never before despite differences of language and culture.

In addition, the use of the Arabic script has helped create Islamic languages out of non-Islamic ones, the transformation of Hindavi (or Hindi) into Urdu in India being a case in point. Similarly, Muslims use the same decorative patterns all over the world and segregate their women in the same way. Then there is the classical literature which has been carried wherever Muslims have gone and transmitted from one generation to another. This has produced a common cultural heritage which has defied being swamped by the most dramatic differences of environment, and of pre-Islamic cultures as, say, between India and Arabia. The Muslim personality is a reality despite regional and ethnic differences.

In view of the rise and fall of a number of Muslim dynasties, it is tempting to dismiss the *ummah* as a myth.