The Politics of Religious Nationalism and

New Indian Historiography:

Lessons for the Indian Diaspora

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by

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Abstract

The contemporary rise of a religious-based Hindu nationalism in India has been attended by large-scale conflict and violence directed against members of the minority Muslim communities. In this article I explore the historical roots of communal violence – violence directed against members of a different faith – and the historical evolution of an identity based around being a 'Hindu'. I argues that this category is implicated both within the colonial construction of Indian society as well as within the recent rise of an authoritarian Hindu nationalism which is attempting to capture state power. I also maintain that insights drawn from the new Indian historiography and sociology need to inform debates on 'race' and ethnicity outside India and that the braiding of religious identities into rightist political movements should make us wary of categorising groups with diverse histories on the basis of religion.

I consider the recent rightist movement based around the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya and discuss the processes instituted under modernity which caused a profound rupture in the ways in which self-perceptions and identifications were structured. I discuss the variegated nature of identities that existed in pre-colonial society and call for a closer look at the nature of differentiated social and political identities. I focus on the movement based around the deity Ram and argue that the support given to this by members of the Indian diaspora acts as a violent configuration which seeks to restitute perceived historical wrongs on the platform of a religious-based nationalism. I conclude with a critical examination of the conceptual category of the 'Hindu diaspora,' and ask for an intellectual analysis which is not complicitous with the resurgent Hindu nationalism.

The Politics of Religious Nationalism and New Indian Historiography: Lessons for the Indian Diaspora

The Bharatiya Janta Party – the BJP – is a party dedicated to the replacement of a secular Indian nation with one based on Hindu nationalism. It first captured power in the Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh in 1991. These gains were in large part linked up with the declining political fortunes of the Congress Party, but the BJP stood on a political platform whose immediate and symbolic goal was the destruction of a fifteenth century mosque in the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, known as the Babri Masjid, and the replacement of this mosque by a temple to the deity Ram. The BJP succeeded in coalescing around it forces which supported its political agenda. The electoral victory was followed on 6 December 1992 by the destruction of the Babri Masjid, and was accompanied by rampant violence directed at the members of the Muslim communities. This act of political aggression stands as a grim testimony to the mobilisational power of religious identities in shaping the politics of a rightist nationalism which threatens the security of Muslim minorities living in India and which acts in contradictory ways to consolidate the powers of the dominant social classes.

In the industrially advanced state of Gujarat in western India, the BJP captured 121 out of a 182 seats in the state elections of March 1995, and took over the governance of Maharashtra (with its commercial capital of Bombay) in alliance with the other Hindu rightist party, the Shiv Sena. Since capturing state power in Maharashtra in March 1995, the Shiv Sena–BJP alliance has made moves to placate the interests of foreign capital, and begun a search to rout 'illegal' Muslim workers from the city of Bombay. The victory gained by the BJP in the state of Gujarat and (in alliance with the Shi Sena) in Maharashtra, is especially perturbing given that it is precisely these two states which witnessed some of the worst depredations against the Muslim communities in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid.

How is it possible to combat this aggression against the Muslim minorities? Are there social forces within this region which can counter the politics of violence based on historical vengeance? What are the tools of analysis necessary to analyse the forces of Hindu nationalism – and indeed to understand the nature of shifting social relations between the various religious communities in Indian society under the different historical epochs? The recent political victory of the rightist Hindu party in the state which gave birth to Gandhi demonstrates both the failure of humane and anti-

communal traditions to take root within the emergent Gujarati classes post-Independence, and shows too the ability of a xenophobic ideology to voice the specific class interests of the powerful elite of this region. The insistence on completion of the building of the controversial Narmada dam which serves the interests of the rich farmers; the drive against pavement dwellers and migrant workers in Maharashtra; the legitimation granted to extra-constitutional authorities; and the stated intention to transform the nation into a Hindu polity all mark the coalescence of an authoritarian ideology and politics in an era of globalisation which has witnessed the growth of resurgent nationalisms.

In this article I draw insights from the emerging new historiography of communalism to delineate the complex processes which have gone into the formation of a Hindu nationalism which is seeking to capture power at the centre of the Indian nation-state. While attention will be paid to colonial historiography and to the nature of nationalist politics in the pre-Independence period, I also focus in some detail on the contemporary cultural politics of religious identities, for the categories and conceptualisations of 'culture' and 'religion', as indeed the conceptualisation of 'a Hindu community', are today intrinsically imbricated within the agenda of the new Hindu nationalism, and warrant a close examination.

The Hindu right is also seeking to forge transnational linkages to achieve a global 'Hindu' community in the Indian diaspora.[1] Here, a Hindu nationalism seeks to appeal to the aspirations of diverse and scattered communities. In Britain the redefinition of settled South Asian communities on a religious basis has generated some debate. Considerable attention has been paid to the 'racialisation of religion' following the *fatwah* against Salman Rushdie in February 1989. Authors such as Brah have argued that there has been a reconstitution of the category of 'Asian' to refer specifically to the demonised 'Muslim', and that the notion of the 'Asian' (itself a peculiar construction of post-war Britain referring only to South Asians) serves to highlight the 'Muslim'. The latter has not only been given a very particular pan - European and global connotion, (Brah 1993:20), but stands as the Other to the Civilised Subject.

The Gulf War of 1991 intensified this process, with schoolchildren in Britain perceiving the oil-based conflict as one centred around two different civilisations (Searle, 1992). Attention has also been paid to the ways in which the 'multicultural' agenda in Britain has given rise to factious disputes concerned about identity politics and the question of funding, and the ways in which 'fundamentalisms' impact on the question of gender (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1993:173; Sahgal and Yuval-Davis,

1992).[2] However, much less attention has been paid to the broad processes involved in the construction of the conceptual category of the global 'Hindu' (within which women as well as men are implicated), a newly arrived-at category, which, while driven in more contemporary times by the elite upper sections of India and the Indian diaspora, have their roots in the colonial period. I will show how the ways in which conceptualisations by those seeking to give a specific shape and form to the Indian diaspora on a religious basis (by delineating a section of this as constituting a 'Hindu diaspora') end up replicating colonial categories.

Despite the rich and gifted body of historical works on pre-colonial and colonial Indian society few of these insights have penetrated the relatively closed systems of British historical sociology, nor have they had a significant impact on the debates surrounding the questions of 'race', ethnic and religious identities in Britain. Historical sociology in Britain, and the politics of 'race' and ethnicity are impoverished by the lack of engagement with the vibrant scholarship emerging out of India, and by the continued tendency to view the history of racialised minorities in Britain as beginning at the point of migration – that is to say, at the very point when they are leaving the home-land to embark on the journey to Britain (either directly, or indirectly via E. Africa, etc.). While some 'contextual' material is provided in the literature (in terms of the migrants' social status or their geographical region of departure) what is wiped out in this peculiarly limited and empiricist approach is the ideological imprimatur and moves of two centuries of colonial rule, which did not simply rupture the political economy of the sub-continent, but which, critically, ruptured the processes of self-definitions, subjectivity and subjecthood, both at an individual and collective level.

I thus go on to argue that in Britain, the categorisation of a section of settlers in the Indian diaspora as 'Hindu' is not only an extension of a colonial category, but that this gives both conscious and unconscious validation to the attempted construction of a global 'Hindu' community in the Indian diaspora, central to which process is the erasure of complex and multiply-layered identities which operate in the practice and consciousness of the peoples of India and the Indian diaspora. While I give an historical over-view of these multiple identities, I further show that the construction of a global 'Hindu' community stands as a direct threat to the lives of the Muslim communities in India. This global 'Hindu' community supports the idea of an exclusive identity in three ways:

· It gives both ideological and financial support to the evolution of a Hindu nation-state:

· It acts to control and subvert movements in the diaspora, movements which are much more differentiated and variegated in their visions and aspirations than those of both the Hindu right and the self-consciously anti-fundamentalist left;

and

· It acts as a rallying point of convergence for a violent resolution to perceived historical wrongs.

The contemporary resurgence of nationalisms founded upon ethnic and religious lines in different parts of the world should make us wary of the ways in which intellectual and conceptual tools of analysis can become complicitous in these violent configurations. I turn first to the rise of a growing Hindu nationalism in India and the ways in which it has engendered conflict based around religious identities.

Communalism and the Hindu Right

The wresting of religious icons into a political movement and the attempt at providing a specific kind of 'historicity' to mythological figures (such as the central figure of Ram in 'The Ramayan') have been critical strands in the rise of an aggressive Hindu nationalism in contemporary India. This form of nationalism has not only succeeded in mobilising a large section of upper-caste urban India and the rich peasantry into an orbit of authoritarian and anti-Muslim politics, but it has also, significantly, altered relationships within civil society and has transformed the contours of cultural life and religious belief. Within this project, the Hindu right (which has antecedents in the nineteenth century Arya Samaj, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh founded in 1925 and the Jan Sangh of the 1950s) has sought to rewrite historical processes in order to demonstrate that the 'Hindus' have a long history of persecution under the Mughal emperors, the British raj, and in more contemporary times under independent secular governance. The claim to an elongated and continuing history of oppression of all those people included in the category of 'Hindu' does not only deny the divergent and contradictory interests of all those social groups sought to be brought together within one religious identification (including the previous *antyaj*, the untouchables, as well as the 'tribal' communities); it also seeks to rally these disparate groups into supporting and instituting a nation-state dedicated to the consolidation of the power of this newly configured political formation.

In a timely article, the historian Romila Thapar (1989a:209-10) has brought her considerable knowledge of Indian history to argue that the contemporary identification

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centred around being a 'Hindu' has been very much part of a political project in which religious identities have been invented and 'imagined' 'Communalism' therefore,

> in the Indian context has a specific meaning and primarily perceives Indian society as constituted of a number of religious communities. Communalism in the Indian sense therefore is a consciousness which draws on a supposed religious identity and uses this as the basis for ideology. It then demands political allegiance to a religious community and supports a programme of political action designed to further the interests of that religious community. Such an ideology is of recent origin but uses history to justify the notion that the community (as defined in recent history) and therefore the communal identity have existed since the early past. Because the identity is linked to religion, it can lead to the redefinition of the particular religion, more so in the case of one as amorphous as Hinduism.

This 'imagined' religious community is a construct of the nineteenth century, for prior to this there was no discernible and identifiable 'Hindu' community, just as there was no self-consciously structured religion endowed with the term 'Hinduism'. The modern proponents of 'Hinduism' though, and particularly the Hindu right, seek to transpose this category to past periods (the ancient, the medieval and the early modern) to identify both the Indian peoples and the social processes embedded within the history of this region in terms of the history of this 'imagined' community.

I will return to the complex articulations and assertions involved in the process whereby the growth of the communal ideology became intrinsically intertwined within the political processes which arose in the colonial period. But first, I want to consider the immediate political context in which the Hindu right has directed its power against the Muslim minorities living in India. This sets the parameters to the wider intellectual issues involved.

The Reign of Ram

On the 6 December 1992, the fifteenth century mosque built by the Mughal ruler Babur was demolished by organised forces crystallised around the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, the 'World Council of Hindus'), the Shiv Sena and the BJP. Amidst scenes of jubilation at symbolically destroying a monument identified with the presence of Muslim communities in India, the organised communal forces, with the support of the large crowds gathered there, went on to do violence in the neighbourhoods which housed Muslim families in the town of Ayodhya. The express intent was to mobilise the citizenry on the basis of a religious identity to erode the security of the Muslim minorities and provide a strong power base to a resurgent Hinduism. The rightist

political party, the BJP held control in the state of Uttar Pradesh at the time, and the state organs in Uttar Pradesh were utilised to ensure that the army (which in India is less communal than the police force) did not reach the site of the mosque which was being demolished brick by brick.[3]

The destruction of the mosque was interpreted as a clear signal of victory by those who supported this Hindu nationalism, and throughout India, traders, workers, neighbourhoods and locales which were identifiable as Muslim experienced violence on a scale said to be unprecedented since the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947. The events surrounding the destruction of Babri Masjid changed the parameters of political discourse in independent India, it altered the nature of intellectual debate, and attempts were made both to reshape the contours of civil society and to make dissent to an authoritarian Hindu raj 'inauthentic' and 'unpatriotic'. The claim that Ayodhya was a historical birth-place of the mythological hero Ram, and that the mosque was built by Babur on the foundations of an ancient Ram temple became a potent symbol of aggression, assertion and power by Hindu forces who sallied forth to restitute a perceived 'historical' wrong.

The cities of Bombay (in Maharashtra) and Surat (in Gujarat) witnessed some of the worst violence against Muslim minority groups. In Bombay, some of the places most affected were the slums in Govandi, Jogeshwari and Dharavi. In Govandi, supporters of the Shiv Sena arrived accompanied by the police, and there was unprovoked police firing. At Dharavi on 9 December, 46 hutments belonging to Muslim families were set on fire; the police were said to have aimed bullets at those who were fleeing from their blazing huts; on the same day too, five hundred shops belonging to Muslim traders on Khairani road were burnt (Engineer, 1993a:83-5). On 18 February 1993, the Bombay Municipal Corporation demolished the tenements which had been rebuilt in the Jogeshwari area (Singh, 1993:908). The violence was directed at both the poorest slum dwellers as well as at the traders, with the police, the Shiv Sena and members of the municipal authority implicated. Control over prime land for building was transfigured into violence done to both peoples' lives and property.

Outside the city of Surat a train was deliberately brought to a halt and persons of a Muslim background were targeted, identifiable by dress and circumcision marks. About fifty people were killed (Engineer, 1993b:264). In the city of Surat itself, violence was directed in part to the suburban localities of Vijayanagar and Vishrampura whereby houses with the slogan designating them as 'Hindu' were spared, while those without were gutted, the inhabitants often not able to save themselves from a vengeful crowd

(ibid:263). A large part of this violence was directed at the women from the minority religious community (Shah, Shah & Shah, 1993). While large sections of the middle classes and the upwardly mobile castes were implicated in this violence against the minority communities, sociological analysis has pointed to the aggrandising class nature of this assertion and the communalisation of politics as some of the major processes which have fed into the anti-Muslim violence (I. Engineer, 1994). It has also been pointed out that the nature of industrial growth in the city has given rise to a large and volatile urban proletariat, while Breman has argued that the violence that was unleashed in the city of Surat against members of the Muslim communities needs to be located in the context of the programme of economic liberalisation, which has not only greatly increased social inequalities, but has also has been implemented without any tangible growth in social welfare or infrastructure to secure the necessary social conditions for the integration of a large class of migrant workers into the city (Breman, 1993).

It would, however, be incorrect to single out this body of workers as being solely responsible for the unprecedented level of violence that was witnessed in Surat following the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The demise of the local Congress Party and the increasingly strident politics of the BJP, has shifted the parameters of political allegiances, with the socially mobile 'backward castes' utilising the ideology and practice of the Hindu right to exercise their power (I. Engineer, 1994). The calculated moves by the BJP to single out the names and addresses of Muslim families prior to 6 December 1992 and the failure of the police to respond to the calls of those being attacked, attest once again to a well planned series of attacks within which the police and the municipal authorities were implicated.

While enough is known about the communal connections between political parties and state organs, there has not yet emerged adequate analysis of the ways in which class identifications and class contours have shifted through these attacks on the groups designated as the enemy within. When small traders, migrant workers as well as the well heeled middle classes are all drawn into an orbit of anti-Muslim violence, then some major shifts appear to have occurred in the social and political sphere, which need serious attention.

The reign of a nativist deity Ram was indeed ushered in under the direction of a political party sympathetic to the liberalisation policies demanded by the World Bank, and which has sought to demonstrate an assertive 'Hindu' face in an era of increased globalisation. The imbrication of religion into the political system (with Congress often

stealing the BJP's clothes) and the structure of political identifications continue to affect both the nature of electoral politics and civil society (Sarkar, 1993:163-7). It therefore continues to be of importance to understand and analyse the forces of communalism in their historical processes and as contemporary political assertions. The political situation in India – and even more, concern at the rending apart of civil society – continue to drive academic scholarship to seek an understanding of the beast named communalism.

The Historiography of Communalism

Concern over the communalisation of Indian politics and Indian society has called forth a rich and complex body of historical and sociological writings. This has gone beyond looking at the engendering of communal perspectives in the colonial period, to consider the very premises of Indian nationalism, articulated, projected and delineated in a contradictory process of liberal definitions of individual rights and citizenship and the harnessing of caste and religious identities into the political formation itself.

It is worth tracing the broad outlines of the changing processes which have impacted on the kinds of historical accounts written on communal divisions and religious identities. The nationalists of both liberal and communist persuasion saw the menacing hand of the British in encouraging and entrenching divisive and separatist politics based on a religious identification. Nehru's (1936) *Autobiography* and Dutt's chapter (1940:423) entitled 'The Dark Forces in India' in *India Today*, which ends with a stirring call to 'Keep Religion Out of Politics', remain to this day classic statements on the issue. With the departure of the British, attention moved to debates surrounding the role of the independent state in bringing about the necessary improvements in living conditions. However, independent India continued to witness outbreaks of communal violence: and the power of the landed classes remained. The failure of the new nation-state to implement radical land reform led to the Naxalite movement in the 1960s. The Naxalites initiated a thoroughgoing critique of the Indian nationalist programme, including the nineteenth century social reform movements which were shot through with religiosity. While the movement was brutally crushed by the Indian state by 1970, their intellectual critique remained, and was taken up in various ways by left historians and sociologists.

Intellectually, three broad streams can be discerned in the rise of the new historiography and sociology of communalism:

·   A radical critique of the post-colonial state which questioned the prerogative of ruling national elite to represent the interests and aspirations of the diverse groups living within the nation-state – including their cultural aspirations;

·   The growth of feminist and popular history, which arose from the mid-1970s and emphasised the consciousness, experience and subjectivity of subordinated groups and which has insisted that these be accorded their proper due in the making of history;

and linked to this last

·   The expansion of scholarship in the field of cultural studies, which has sought to analyse and enter into the processes which shape and give form to self-definitions, identifications, emotional structures and memories.

Within this whole process, the history of partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 has come in for serious scrutiny. Feminists whose families were divided at the time of partition, historians with recent experience of communal violence in North India, scholars concerned about the ways in which communal memories continue to structure the perceptions of the various religious communities, have turned to an exploration of this period to throw light on the violent cleavages and configurations which arose at this time.

Contemporary historical and social probings have thus gone well beyond looking at the colonial policies of 'divide and rule' to enter into the difficult processes involved in re-assessing questions pertaining to community structures and community values which fed into the polarisation of religious communities. Disturbing and troubling questions surrounding women's 'agency' within the violence have been raised – women committing mass suicide rather than face the prospect of being 'taken' by the other side; Sikh women committing suicide with their children, and thereby upholding the sanctity of their religious community; Sikh fathers killing their daughters when they thought that their own lives were endangered and thereby preferring to end their daughters' lives themselves; the programme of 'recovery' of abducted women instituted by the Indian nation following the period of partition (at times against the individual wishes of the women who were sought to be returned); the celebration of the women's mass suicides in contemporary booklets directed at children. These and related issues pertaining to women's experiences during the period of partition (and the historical legacy that these memories have left behind) have begun to be explored at painful depth (Butalia, 1993; Bhasin and Menon, 1993).

Significantly, too, recent historiography has also sought to re-assess the nature of complicity and compliance of the different strata of society in the violence surrounding partition, asking, critically, for an admission of responsibility and an acknowledgement of collective blame during this period (Pandey, 1991). The history of partition, with all its attendant violent configurations, tells us much about a particular historical conjuncture within which social relationships (unstable always, but not necessarily cleaved by religious identities) were rent apart in specific urban and rural areas of North India. Memories of this period have also left behind a legacy of politically communalised perceptions. While the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra were not directly affected by the partition (as were the Punjab and Bengal), the arrival and settlement of refugee groups such as the Sindhis within this region, and, much more recently, the stoking of historical vendetta through the mobilising of anti-Muslim sentiments around the temple of Somnath in Gujarat have generalised the sense of a heightened social divide.

There is thus a salience in the internal critiques of Indian society being developed by serious scholars, which are concerned with the relationship between the past and present. However, in the task of understanding the roots of communal politics and the ways in which radically different identifications arose, it becomes important, at least initially, to turn to the period of colonial rule.

Colonialism and Communalism

It is undoubtedly true, as Dutt and others have argued, that the granting of separate electorates on a religious basis by the colonial government in 1909 and the institutionalising of this principle by the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1920 ensured the bifurcation of political allegiances on communal lines (Page, 1982; Robinson, 1974) leading eventually to the partition of the sub-continent. However, what is of more significance to the argument here is the ideological project within which the British began to identify and demarcate the two opposing categories of 'Hindus' and 'Muslims', the manner in which this homogenised previously disparate identities, and the ways in which this process altered self-definitions and self-projections of the diverse groups.

The historian Gyan Pandey has argued persuasively in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1990:9-10) that by the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant strand in colonial writings depicted Indian society as being composed of two hostile religious communities, the 'Hindu' and the 'Muslim', and that it identified the religious community as being the driving force of history:

> Communalism in the colonialist perception served to designate a pathological condition. It was, like the term 'tribalism'...a statement on the nature of particular, 'primitive' societies ..... Communalism captured for the colonialists what they had conceptualised as a basic feature of Indian society – its religious bigotry and its fundamentally irrational character.

The Orientalist project in the Indian sub-continent, with its concern for codification, categorisation and control, viewed Indian society as consisting of two very distinct, monolithic and contending religious communities. Each was thought to have its own contending social structure and sets of beliefs, so that the very historical periods were analysed according to a religious schema – the 'Hindu' period, the 'Muslim' period, and the British period (see Thapar, 1975:14). While this argument gained ground in the nineteenth century, with the support of Orientalist scholarship, it was also accompanied by indigenous social reform movements such as the Arya Samaj which sought to 'purify' religious beliefs both to make it compatible with the religion of the colonisers, and to enhance the degraded self-images of the emerging middle classes (Jones, 1976). The Arya Samaj was particularly powerful in the Punjab, giving the urban traders a specific focus for a political assertion.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also saw movements such as the Cow Protection movement (which had close links with the Arya Samaj), both of which were critical in inserting a particular kind of aggressive religious consciousness within the growing nationalist momentum in North India (Pandey, 1983). The processes of redefinition involved here sought not only to constitute a self-consciously purified 'Hindu' community which attempted to draw within its fold those members they had 'lost' to Islam, but also to instil a sense of pride, virility and power amongst the emergent middle classes in colonial India. While this included in the main the urban upper castes, upwardly mobile agricultural castes such as the Ahirs too sought higher social status both by attempting to have themselves classified *vis a vis* the colonial state as upper caste – and by taking part in Cow Protection with its ensuing conflict with the Muslim communities. Ahirs, who aspired to higher social status, were amongst those involved in attacks on Muslims in various parts of north India – as were the trading and mercantile classes, and petty landlords, in the 1880s and 1890s. The agitation [by Ahirs] appear to have gained a clearer focus and organisational form with the attempt of the 1901 Census to list castes according to precedence (Pandey, 1983:74).

The census operation in India was a vast enterprise, and the process of enumeration and categorisation of Indian society (crucial in the calculations of the imperial power), was to refashion self-images and caste identities so that these became embedded within

more modern and larger political solidarities. Identities which had been much more localised and parochial began to be constructed in larger, pan-regional terms, and regional and national caste associations became implicated within the political process. B. Cohn (1987:230) has called the imperial project one of 'objectification' of the Indian peoples:

> Central to the process of objectification have been the hundreds of situations that Indians over the past two hundred years have experienced in which precedents for action, in which rights to property, their social relations, their rituals, were called into question and had to be explained......[The census] touched practically everyone in India. It asked questions about major aspects of Indian life, family, religion, language, literacy, caste, occupation, marriage, even of disease and infirmities. Through the asking of questions and the compiling of information in categories which the British rulers could utilise for governing, it provided an area for Indians to ask questions about themselves, and Indians utilised the fact that the British census commissioners tried to order tables on caste in terms of social precedence.

Thus, the 'objectification' of peoples of the Indian sub-continent did not merely objectify. It set into motion complex processes whereby different sections entered into movements of self-assertion and wider definitions to enhance their status within the fabric of a changing colonial society. This had far reaching implications both for the construction of religious identities, and for the processes of caste formations to enter into the very core of the political system (Kothari, 1970).

Modernity and the Formation of Identities

In India, the process of modernity has inscribed within it the forces of religious and caste based identities. Rather than modernity eroding these 'pre-modern', 'primordial' forces, these identities were given a newer and more potent lease of life, and were harnessed into the project of achieving a modern nation-hood, modern identities, and modern subjecthood. Newer political identifications around religion and caste were fashioned, newer self-images and self-perceptions arose amongst the various social strata, all of which continue to affect the political, social and cultural formations in modern India.

Two important articles by the political scientist Sudipta Kaviraj (1992a; 1992b) have discussed the distinction between the pre-colonial 'fuzzy' community, and the modern 'enumerated' community which identified and justified itself from the colonial period

onwards. The argument that the pre-colonial conception of community was locally-based, caste-based or *sampraday*-based,[4] in which these identities were neither pan-regional nor national, is an important one. In Kaviraj's (1992a:26) phrase, 'religion, caste and endogamous groups are all based on principles which are not primarily territorial'. The fuzziness and unenumerated nature of pre-colonial identities, argues Kaviraj, meant that the peoples:

> did not see historical processes as things which could be bent to their collective will if people acted concertedly on a large-enough scale. Since they did not ask how many of them there were in the world, they could not consider what they could wreak upon the world for their collective benefit – through collective action. They were thus incapable of a type of large action, with great potential for doing harm as well as good, which is a feature of the modern condition. ... Their sense of community being multiple and layered and fuzzy, no single community could make demands of pre-emptive belonging as comprehensive as that made by the modern nation-state.(ibid).

Kaviraj's is an insightful exposition of the tasks of enumeration in both the colonial and the nationalist project where everything from citizens, majorities and minorities to resources are counted as national possessions, to be readily identified and sought to be controlled (ibid. 30-31). Kaviraj has also argued that the very process of modernity created 'the majorities of the census, [which] given the logic of modern politics, hold a permanent menace, and correspondingly subject the minorities to constant reminders of an equally permanent helplessness (Kaviraj 1992b:4).

While the project of modernity has differed radically in its configurations in India (from that of its imperial parentage) it would be incorrect to view this specific process as having an inevitability to it. There is a specific history to the ideological and politically reconfigured identities based around caste and religion which cannot be viewed as the logical outcome of the process of instituting modernity in India. While it is true that these processes cannot be reduced to the conscious machinations of the colonial government, two points need to be made about the 'logic' of modernity *vis a vis* Indian society:

· There were differential and complex processes of self-definitions which existed amongst different social groups in the pre-colonial period which, in the colonial era, became overlaid by the more politicised ones. However, it was not inevitable that these should have assumed the precise shape that they did, nor that they gained the ascendancy they did, for the processes of defining both subjecthood and claims to be free and equal were politically directed ideological projects with complex twists and

turns. There were contradictory pulls and movements in a society which underwent massive structural changes under the colonial aegis, both in its political economy and in its cultural-psychic visions. To describe these forces as merely being a logical product of modernity is to empty historical processes of the meanings given to them by the historical actors; and

· There continues to be tension and friction between the 'older' fuzzier forms of identity which large numbers of people continue to inhabit in their more day to day and intimate lives, which overlap with, and at times are at odds, with the more politicised and larger identities. These shift and vary according to the group's or individual's standing, political juncture or social situation. In contemporary India, an overly centralised state system has given rise to various regional nationalisms, which at times, as in the Punjab, have coalesced around a religious identity. However, to cite an example to make the argument clearer, although all Sikhs within and outside India were outraged by the army's storming of the Golden Temple in Amritsar in 1984, not all Sikhs vote in favour of a separate state of Khalistan and, more to the point, even a Khalistani gunman may continue to be sheltered by a father who is a Sikh and a mother who is not. A hounded and blood-stained nationalism will learn to live within the contradictions of its own existence.

The newly configured identities continue to be the site of an ongoing struggle between those who seek to shape the world in their own invented self-images through homogenising and hegemonising manoeuvres – and those who, day to day, negotiate, challenge and subvert the complex and fraught histories within which they live.

Modern Hinduism and Political Identities

Is 'Hinduism' which has been assumed to have a hoary, ancient lineage then a product of recent history? What existed of this ancient religion prior to the nineteenth century? The construction of the category 'Hindu', as of a belief that 'Hinduism' is a particularly demarcated category which can encompass within its folds the diverse *sampradays*, beliefs and religious communities (including, today, the previously outcast social groups) is a process which not only seeks to gain the largest numbers within its fold, but also to create a strongly centralised religious identity against that of the 'Muslim'.

The multiple nature of identifications which existed in pre-colonial Indian society has been stressed by various writers. Thaper (1989a:222), for example, writes: 'Identities were, in contrast to the modern nation-state, segmented identities. The notion of

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community was not absent but there were multiple communities, identified by locality, language, caste, occupation and sect. What appears to have been absent was the notion of a uniform, religious community readily identified as Hindu'.

Thapar has made a critical distinction between Brahmanic and Sramanic religions of an earlier period, and the later Puranic religion, all of which became incorporated in the category of being 'Hindu' in the nineteenth century. She has argued that the former was linked to the upper castes and was based around the Vedas and the sacrificial ritual. Sramanism stood in opposition to Brahmanism and was averse to the violence embedded in the sacrificial ritual as well as to the rigidities of the caste system. Sramanism was potentially open to all castes. Besides these two categories there were the multitude of Shakta worshippers centred around goddess cults, as well as the 'animists' so lauded and maligned in the anthropological literature. Before looking at the ways in which these diverse *sampradays*, beliefs and cults became objectified and constructed into a centralised whole endowed with title of 'Hinduism', I wish to focus in particular on the period of the fifteenth and sixteenth century in North India, this being the period when Muslim rule was consolidated, and also the period which has been invoked by the Hindu rightists as the age of darkness in which 'the Hindu civilisation' declined. It is also, of course, the period in which the Babri Masjid was built.

I do not, however, want to go into the historical debates centring around the nature of the construction of the mosque. This has been well done by others (see Gopal (ed.), 1991). Rather, I will focus on the complexities of religious identifications evident in this period in order to demonstrate the nature of profound rupture which took place in the nineteenth century.

Within the fold which later became designated as 'Hindu', there were, in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, not only diverse, but often competing notions of belonging to a particular religious (and hence social) world-view. The strong Vaishnavite movements which arose, centred around Krishna worship, acted as a radical challenge to Shakta worship and the goddess cults, as well as to the Nath-panthis, who were Shaivites of a Tantric tradition.

Rajasthan, like many other regions, was a stronghold of the Nathpanthis in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The proselytising Ramanandi Acharyas who preached devotion to Ram had to work hard to make any inroads into these and ended up performing miracles to surpass the Nath sadhus (Gupta, 1975:132). Ramanand's

disciples included people from different castes, women as well as men, and included members from the Muslim communities too (Ram, 1977:64).

The princes of Mewar in present day Rajasthan have often been interpreted by communal historians as upholders of the true 'Hindu' faith and polity in a time when various north Indian princes made political alliances with the Mughal rulers (which included the giving of Rajput princesses in marriage to the Mughal rulers). The princes of Mewar have thus been eulogised by communal writers as standing firm against these compromised and pragmatic politics (Sarda, 1906, 1918 and 1932). The actual situation, though, was much different. Rana Kumbha, the fifteenth century prince of Mewar is said to have been a fine scholar and a great patron of the arts, who gave considerable support to the building of the magnificent Jain temples in Ranakpur, and who also built the 'Tower of Victory' in Chittorgadh. This particular 'Tower of Victory' is said to have been built to mark Kumbha's defeat of Mahmud Khalji in 1440. However, an essential part of the design is the name of Allah repeated in bands on the third and eighth storeys. Archaeological evidence shows this to be coeval with the building of the pillar, and not a later addition (Garrick, 1887:116).

There were undoubtedly conflicts in this period centring around religious beliefs – but not of the sort beloved of the communalists. The story of Rana Kumbha of Mewar learning the art of turning himself into a deer from a Nath yogi, only to find that the yogi promptly replaced him in the royal bed for a period of six months shows the tense relationship between a corrupt religious group and political power (Gupta, 1975:140). In addition, there was political conflict between the Rajput princes and the Mughal rulers for sovereignty. However, the contemporary assertion of Rajput patriarchy in Rajasthan, central to which is glorification of the memory of women who are said to have committed collective suicide in the state of Mewar in 1534 and in 1567 when the capital of the state fell to the Mughal emperor, rests more on the songs compiled by the courtly bards than on verifiable events.

Dissension between the various *sampradays* continued to mark the sixteenth century. Sixteenth century Bengal was rife with Shakta blood rites too. Chaitanya, the major exponent of Krishna worship in this region, found that his neighbour Srivasa had wine and meat smeared on his door, to defile his rising Vaishnav status (Dimock, 1966:113). The conflict here was more between the orthodox Brahmins who continued to wield power, and the emerging mercantile classes who sought in Vaishnavism an ideology and a practice more suited to their higher status (Sanyal, 1975).

Animosities and antagonisms in this period thus were based around these and similar conflictual differences, which were inextricably linked up with the rise and consolidation of specific social communities. The story of a Shiv follower who hung bells in his ear lobes so that every time he heard a Vaishnav devotional chant, he would pull at his bells to stop the name of Krishna entering his ears, is a testament to the very wide rift which existed between the two doctrinal communities which later came to be incorporated as an unproblematic whole within the 'Hindu' fold. Marks of identification, through the insignia of the religious *sampraday*, the kinds of food eaten and not eaten, and often also whom one could marry or not, were inextricably linked up with very different and specific *sampradayika* identities. Even after Independence, the Swaminarayan *sampraday* in Gujarat actually went to court to claim that they were not 'Hindus', but members of an entirely different religious tradition. They did this in order to be exempted from the Bombay Harijan Temple Entry Act of November 1947, which made it illegal for any temple to bar its doors to the previously outcaste communities. The Swaminarayanis argued that they did not fall within the 'Hindu' fold, and therefore that the Temple Entry Act should not be applied to them (Barot, 1980; Hardiman, 1988).

It is thus difficult to find in the period prior to the nineteenth century a sense of there existing a 'Hindu' identity which encompassed and included the different *sampradays* and movements. Rather, the self-perceptions had to do with being a Krishna follower as opposed to being a Kali or a goddess devotee; of being a Shiv follower rather than a Vishnu follower. The differential religious identities intersected with social class in complex ways, with the Vaishnav sect of Vallabhacharya, with its opulent rituals, being primarily mercantile (Barz, 1976), while the untouchable weaver Kabir drew around him the rising artisanal sections of the period (Habib, 1965).

While these major *sampradays* had specific places of pilgrimage associated with them, which drew in pilgrims from the different regions of the sub-continent, the religious identifications remained specific and uncentralised. There was also a complex process of accommodation and assimilation between popular beliefs which cross-cut specific *sampradayika* dictat – and Islamic beliefs which created newer and differently configured religious traditions, which have been lasting. I am not here simply referring to the large range of borrowings which took place in a 'syncretic' tradition (Roy, 1983), or even to the immense popularity of Islamic *pirs*, *fakirs* and *aulias* (which has also not been eroded despite a century and more of a constructed 'Hinduism'), but to the rise of specific groups such as the Nijananda, or the Prannathi *sampraday* in Saurashtra and Gujarat. These arose in the sixteenth century, and drew in its midst peoples from the

Islamic fold as well as untouchables (Parikh, 1982:14). Members of this sect then had close social relationships including marriage ones. It is however, historically probably correct that despite the remarkable efflorescence in North India of a wide-ranging dissenting and spiritually egalitarian traditions, the 'familial and domestic space, which is the most intimate, sacred, and fundamental for group self-identity, remained entirely exclusive in the manner of the dominant logic of caste society' (Kaviraj, 1992b:7).

The newer (at first dissenting) sects in time often acquired caste-like workings and characteristics. How then were the ascendant Islamic rulers in North India, with their appendages of *Khwajas* and *pirs* viewed? It is worth quoting Thapar (1989:223) in full here:

> The people of India curiously do not seem to have perceived the new arrivals as a unified body of Muslims. The name 'Muslim' does not occur in the records of early contacts. The term used was either ethnic, Turuska, referring to the Turks, or geographical, Yavana, or cultural, *mleccha*. ... *Mleccha* meaning impure, goes back to the Vedic texts and referred to non-Sanskrit speaking peoples often outside the caste hierarchy. ... Foreigners, even of high rank, were regarded as *mleccha*.

It is important to note the peculiar caste basis of this definition – as peoples outside the pale of caste society, who could not be integrated within it. It is also important to note the peculiar ways in which dominant caste categories were reworked to include within them peoples deemed to possess the same qualities and substances. By the sixteenth century, in Rajasthan, the caste term 'Rajput' (for a heroic and brave warrior) was to be extended to a warrior who was a Muslim – within the caste term 'Rajput' were included warriors who earlier would have been seen as *mleccha* (Ziegler, 1973:59).

This is a far cry from both the indigenous communal portrayal of the historical relationships between the Islamic rulers and the peoples of the sub-continent and the colonial depiction of Indian society as one which was forever rent by religious strife between 'Hindus' and Muslims.

However, just as there was often competition and discord between the various *sampraday*, so there would have been, at times, discord in a particular locality between the adherents to the various strands of Islam – and those who were not. The essential point to note is that these local discords and disputations (which at times assumed a religious form), did not take the shape of two monolithically constructed faiths facing each other across the different territories and localities. This larger, national identification was not to derive till the nineteenth century, and arose out of the

interaction of Christian missionaries with indigenous society in which the rising middle classes sought to refashion the degraded view of their customs by evolving a 'purer' form of structure, ritual and observation. Orientalist scholarship also did much to project an elite Brahmanical and textual-based interpretation of 'Hinduism'. And last but not least, when political representation in the colonial period became predicated on religious faith, the modern version of Hinduism was born.

It is difficult to ascertain how deeply the modern identification of Hinduism has percolated amongst the different social strata in India and the Indian diaspora. Indeed it is difficult to ascertain which social conjunctures, and social situations would necessitate the taking on of a 'Hindu' identity as opposed to that of other social categories, amongst the peoples of India as well as the Indian diaspora. Hindu nationalism has not succeeded in obliterating other social identities which are meaningful to the peoples of the sub-continent, nor has the Hindu right been victorious, yet, in hegemonising all forms of belief and customs in the fold designated 'Hindu'. What the Hindu right has undeniably achieved, though, post-Ayodhya, is to give an overtly aggressive shape, contour and meaning to the group called 'the Hindu community' (in the singular) – which stands as a threat to the members of the Muslim minorities in India.

Gyan Pandey's argument about the statism involved in the early nationalist discourse and politics, when it sought to invoke a non-communal past is instructive here. The historical precedents who were deemed to be important in the evolution of a tolerant, humane, and composite culture were the rulers of particular imperial systems – Ashoka, Harsha, Akbar etc. In this statist view, argues Pandey (1990:253):

> There was no room for an accommodation of local loyalties, for continued attachment to religion, or even appreciation of the vigorous struggles that had been waged against these; nor much for the class-divided and regionally diverse perceptions of the 'imagined community', out of the struggle for which Indian nationalism and the Indian national movement arose. By its denial of subjecthood to the people of India – the local communities, castes and classes – nationalism was forced into the kind of statist perspective that colonialism had favoured and promoted for its own reasons. In nationalist historiography, as in the colonial construction of the Indian past, the history of India was reduced in substance to the history of the state. In the colonial account, the state alone ... could establish order out of chaos, reduce the religious and other passions of Indians to 'civilized' proportions, and carry India into 'modernity'.

Given that in contemporary India, many aspects of the nation-state have become communal, it becomes untenable to hold a statist view in the attempt to evolve

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democratic and anti-communal strategies. It is necessary, though, to insist on the democratisation of the state systems so that these do not menace the lives of minorities. It is also imperative to point to the continuity of diverse forms of identifications which, while they have not remained unchanging, retain the specificity of more diffuse, local and varied social experiences. It is also important to explore how and in what ways the earlier nationalist and more contemporary rightist projects have succeeded in making inroads into the processes of identifications, and to map out the ways in which the hegemonising manoeuvres of the right have been resisted. Our knowledge about these processes is at the moment very fragmentary.

Global 'Hindus' and Ram

The processes of globalisation have rendered the developing countries more easily penetrable by foreign capital, and have concomitantly brought into sharp relief questions of national sovereignty and national identities. In the case of India, the rise of a resurgent Hinduism is intrinsically linked up with the rise of aggressive market forces, the supporters of which cultivate at the same time an internally xenophobic agenda against the Muslim communities. Within this project, the aim has been not only to unite the Hindus residing within the boundaries of the Indian nation-state under the banner of Ram, but attempts are continuing to build up a global community of Hindus for whom a culturally assertive movement based around the demonstration of power provides an important point of identification.

In the contemporary rise of Hindu nationalism, the political programme of giving Ram an actual geographical birth place (in the town of Ayodhya), and providing him with a visible mark of his power in the shape of a temple (built on the promised destruction of the Babri masjid) was the one main salient ideological force which catapulted the BJP into political power. The various communities settled abroad, in the Indian diaspora, have been implicated in this contemporary nationalist assertion too. Not only have they organised the sending of bricks to Ayodhya, they have also supported events and religious functions which have given support to the Hindu nationalists. I have described elsewhere the ways in which black Members of Parliament in Britain as well as a local mayor officiated at a function which was designed to sanctify bricks en route to Ayodhya (Mukta, 1989). It is therefore important to turn to some of the intellectual solipses which have been made in the name of the 'Hindu diaspora' (a term recently coined and recently arrived at) and to analyse the ways in which the politics of 'race' and ethnicity are reconfigured within this projection.

The Indian diaspora has responded to the contemporary political assertion of a religious-based nationalism in a differentiated way. For example, in the UK there are the more organised sections, in London and Leicester, from the commercial and professional classes, who have self-consciously lent their considerable financial and political weight to this resurgent Hinduism. By contrast, there are those intellectuals, professionals and activists who have organised against the flagrant abuse of rights and liberties of the Muslim communities, and who are concerned to support a secular polity in India. Then there is the large section of the Indian diaspora who have watched events surrounding the Ayodhya temple with shock and grief, but who have not raised a public voice of protest. Finally, there are also the intellectuals who have given their allegiance to the rising star of the BJP, and who, like the other powerful lobbies of industrialists and financiers, are at the moment hedging their bets between the party at the centre, the Congress (I) – and the oppositional parties (including the BJP) both at the centre and at regional levels.

The Indian diaspora has relied for its public acknowledgement on its intellectual and creative class (the writers, journalists, media spokespersons etc.) to give shape and contour to its diffuse and scattered existence. When its varied and scattered histories and experiences are sought to be bound and encapsulated around the notion of a singular religious identity ('Hindu diaspora') then the various regional, social, political and diverse cultural histories of these groups are emptied into the prism of a monolithically constructed religious identity. There is thus not only a narrowing of conceptual and intellectual categories, but also a denial of the complex experiential bases of the different communities inhabiting the Indian diaspora, which experiential bases need better exploration in historical and sociological discourse.

The political scientist Bhikhu Parekh in an article entitled 'Some Reflections on the Hindu Diaspora' (1994) moves away from complexity to essentialisms. For example, while tracing the patterns of migration from the sub-continent, he moves from talking about 'Indians' to 'Gujaratis' to 'Hindus' (p.604). He affixes the term 'Hindu' to legal status (as in 'the indentured Hindus', p.608); to occupational and class categories (as in 'Hindu accountants, lawyers', p.606); to relationships with the phenomenal world (as in 'the Hindu attitude to animals' p.615) and to an existential condition (as in 'the Hindu predicament', p.608). Despite these attributions of 'Hindu-ness', Parekh accepts that these communities lacked a cohesive unity: ... 'they were divided in terms of castes, sects, regions, languages, religious beliefs and practices' (p.603). However, in seeking to find a 'unity' amongst these disparate and divided groups Parekh finds himself on the road to the valorisation of two domains – that of the family, and of a religious life based

on the text of 'the Ramayan' which he claims 'has come closest to becoming the central text of overseas Hinduism' (p.613).

Not only is this questionable but the attempt at incorporating 'multiple identities' (p.617) into a 'Hindu' grid with centrality given to the worship of Ram and 'the Ramayan' remains uneven throughout. Parekh's reading of 'the Ramayan' begs many questions. Tulsidas, who popularised 'the Ramayan' in the north Indian vernacular, was far from upholding a what Parekh describes as a 'caste-free' world-view (p.614). Tulsidas lamented the fact that the caste hierarchy was being loosened (Thapar, 1989:75) and in an infamous couplet likened women and *shudras* (the lowest caste) to a drum – all were there to be beaten.

This is not to deny the cultural importance of the Ram devotion amongst certain sections of the diaspora. It is precisely because of this importance that the Hindu right managed to reach a captive audience who had come to listen to Morari Bapu and other religious exponents at a brick-worshipping ceremony in Milton Keynes, UK, on 28-29 August 1989 (Mukta, 1989). It is not clear, however, how many of the laity present on that occasion grasped the full implications of this well organised political event which masqueraded as 'worship' – an event that took place prior to the total demolition of the Babri Masjid.

It is the conceptualising of peoples on the basis of a supposed shared religious identity that is the core issue here. Parekh does not simply essentialise this religious identity (as did the colonial historians); but by his extensive and simplifying use of the label 'Hindu' and by granting paramountcy to the singular worship of Ram, he offers an intellectual position which accords well with that of the Hindu nationalists. 'The' diasporic Hindu as represented in Parekh's article is overwhelmingly male, upper caste, middle class and apolitical at the very moment when this transnational citizen is asserting himself in a political movement based around an affirmation of Ram against the Muslims.[5]

For an author who has written two acclaimed books on Gandhi (Parekh, 1989a, 1989b), the lessons of Gandhi's last years, undoubtedly 'the Mahatma's finest hour' (Sarkar, 1983:438), remain yet to be worked through. Gandhi lived and worked in strife-torn areas of Noakhali (November 1946-March 1947), in Patna city and the villages of Bihar in March-May 1947, and in Calcutta (August and September 1947) in the period of the partition violence. In all these places he argued for a return to sanity against the madness that had gripped the populace, heroically managing to convince both the vested political interests, as well as ordinary citizens, to put down their weapons.

Gandhi ultimately gave his life in standing up against the communal violence of his time. In the contemporary politics of Gujarat (which was Gandhi's - and Parekh's - homeland), where today Gandhi is derided by the Hindu right for having been 'soft' on the Muslims, it is to the Gandhi in Calcutta and Moakhali that one must continue to pay homage.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show the diverse historical and political processes which have led to the construction of the category of 'the Hindu', arguing not only that this essentialises the peoples of the Indian sub-continent, but that this is intrinsically implicated within the formation of a very distinctive authoritarian nationalism. A central plank of this Hindu nationalism is to rewrite the history of the Indian sub-continent (and the histories of all those who fall within the ambit of 'the Hindu community') in order to mould these within a political movement dedicated to the restitution of perceived wrongs done to this religious group. The history of the evolution of this category, and the ideological permutations that it has acquired, I would suggest, necessitate at the very minimum a hesitation in the intellectual utilisation of the term 'Hindus' as a readily useful category; whether at a descriptive or an analytical level. The utilisation of this category has had far-reaching implications in the structuring of social relationships in India and the Indian diaspora. It has also had profound implications in the designations of peoples and their subsequent self-images. These ideological projections affect not only social identities in Britain, but equally and perhaps more importantly, political processes in the Indian sub-continent too. In an increasingly globalised world, the responsibility of averting the continuing rise of religious-based nationalisms lies as much with intellectual classes, and the world-views they project, if the future is to be shorn of the fear it inspires.

Notes

1   It is imperative to distinguish between the disparate believers who today might identify themselves as 'Hindu' in the modern sense, from those who align themselves consciously with the political project of Hindu nationalism – as in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) slogan – 'garva se kaho hum Hindu hein' i.e. 'say loudly that you are proud to be Hindus'. We need to continue the process of refining the intellectual definitional tools to distinguish between these consciously anti-Muslim and rightist forces, and the differential layers of believers who, particularly in the diaspora, might identify themselves vis a vis external society as belonging to the 'Hindu' fold, much as their predecessors did to the colonial census commissioners, but who do not necessarily support the politics of the Hindu right. It is precisely these strata that the VHP and the BJP spokespersons are seeking to capture in their attempt to gain cultural and financial support within their political project of constructing a community of world 'Hindus' in the era of globalisation.

2   Women's religious experiences have been both varied and creative – within the established traditions and outside of them. The active role undertaken by urban, upper caste women in India in the political project of Hindu nationalism is a subject I have been unable to explore in this paper. Rather, I have concentrated on an analysis of the concept 'Hindu community', for I have thought it important to map out the broad history of the evolution of this (gendered) category, in terms of its opposition to 'the Muslim'.

3   For political analysis of the events surrounding the destruction of Babri Masjid, I have relied upon *Times of India* (Bombay edition), *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Frontier*, as well as regional Gujarati papers.

4   The term *sampraday* is usually (and incorrectly, in my opinion) translated as 'sect' in the English language. The various *sampradays* in India, prior to the nineteenth century, were loose religious traditions, and were not 'offshoots' of a centralised faith. Rather, they had the character of variegated patches of fabric which became woven into a patchwork quilt in the colonial period. These various and diffuse religious traditions only began to acquire sect-like qualities when the ideological project of creating a recognisable 'Hinduism' was well entrenched.

5   Using Parekh's (1994) article as a starting point, I hope to develop a more sustained exposition and critique of the idea of the 'Hindu' and Indian diasporas.

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