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Language, Religion and Politics

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A connection between language and nation has been often assumed in which national differences and state-formation have arisen 'naturally' out of pre-existing linguistic differences. In cases of considerable linguistic complexity, where major language groups occupy compact geographical areas, multilingual arrangements have been devised sometimes which accommodate linguistic diversities in federal and local units, occasionally also but less commonly within the agencies of a central state as well. However, there is little either natural or inevitable about these solutions, which have generally arisen out of political domination or political conflict and have involved conscious choice by political elites to favor one language or several among other more or less numerous possibilities. In modern India, deliberate choice and selection of official languages through political struggle have been very much in evidence throughout the British and post-Independence periods.

Political Recognition of Languages

The very acts of counting and classifying the various languages of

India and presenting them in a census have been political acts affecting their fates. Moreover, the decision to accept the language choice of the respondent or to allow an enumerator to make a judgement concerning the respondent's language; the selection of languages to be counted; the aggregation of them into groups all have been subjects of political controversy before and since Independence and have changed from census to census. It was only after a century of controversy over these matters that a complete mother tongue census of the population of India was taken in 1971 in which the respondent's own choice was recorded and the results aggregated and classified by respondent choice. The results of that census are of extraordinary interest from many points of view.

The number of languages with very considerable numbers of declared respondents was much higher than the number which have achieved some form of political recognition either before or since Independence. Secondly, the results also reveal there are several mother tongues listed which have received little or no political recognition, but which have numbers of speakers exceeding those which have in fact achieved such recognition. Table 3.1 shows there were 33 mother tongues with more than a million recorded speakers, of which only 15 have achieved significant political recognition in post-Independence India. Several of the larger mother tongues shown in the table are conventionally grouped with Hindi in Census tables of classification, and are classed politically also as 'dialects' of Hindi. By such groupings, the number of 'Hindi-speakers' was increased by approximately 25 percent to 208.5 million. While most speakers of several of these mother tongues have no objection to being merged with Hindi, many speakers of other languages in that list, notably Maithili, do object to their absorption in Hindi, insisting theirs is a distinct language. There are several mother tongues also, especially tribal ones, which have no political recognition beyond the rather limited designation by a State Government as a 'minority mother tongue,' which have considerable numbers of speakers.

It may be asked what has determined whether or not speakers of the larger languages have succeeded in gaining significant political recognition in modern India either as an official language of the Indian Union, or as the official language of a state in which their language is dominant, or a listing in the Eighth Schedule of the

TABLE 3.1

Declared Mother Tongues—1971 Census (provisional figures): Showing numerically important mother tongues at national level as of 1971, with strength of 1,000,000 and above, arranged in descending order of population

No.	Mother tongue	Persons	Status
1	Hindi	153,729,062[a]	Official language of India and of several north Indian states
2	Telugu	44,707,607	Official language of Andhra Pradesh
3	Bengali	44,521,533	Official language of West Bengal
4	Marathi	41,723,893	Official language of Maharashtra
5	Tamil	37,592,794	Official language of Tamil Nadu
6	Urdu	28,600,428	Listed in Eighth Schedule; official language of Jammu and Kashmir
7	Gujarati	25,656,274	Official language of Gujarat
8	Malayalam	21,917,430	Official language of Kerala
9	Kannada	21,575,019	Official language of Karnataka
10	Oriya	19,726,745	Official language of Orissa
11	Bhojpuri	14,340,564[a]	Minority mother tongue of Bihar and U.P.
12	Punjabi	13,900,202	Official language of Punjab
13	Assamese	8,958,977	Official language of Assam
14	Chhattisgarhi	6,693,445[a]	Minority mother tongue of M.P.
15	Magahi/Magadhi	6,638,495[a]	Minority mother tongue of Bihar
16	Maithili	6,121,922[a]	Minority mother tongue of Bihar
17	Marwari	4,714,094[a]	Minority mother tongue of Rajasthan
18	Santali	3,693,558	Minority (tribal) mother tongue of Bihar and West Bengal
19	Kashmiri	2,421,760	Official language of Jammu and Kashmir
20	Rajasthani	2,093,557[a]	Name used in Rajasthan for several mother tongues
21	Gondi	1,548,070	Minority mother tongue of M.P., Maharashtra, and Orissa
22	Konkani	1,522,684	Official language of Goa, Daman and Diu
23	Dogri	1,298,855	Minority mother tongue of Jammu and Kashmir
24	Gorkhali/Nepali	1,286,824	Minority mother tongue of West Bengal and Assam
25	Garhwali	1,277,151[a]	Minority mother tongue of U.P.
26	Pahari	1,269,651[a]	Minority mother tongue of H.P., U.P. and Jammu and Kashmir
27	Bhili/Bhilodi	1,250,312	Minority mother tongue (tribal) of M.P., Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Gujarat
28	Kurukh/Oraon	1,240,395	Minority mother tongue of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal
29	Kumauni	1,234,939[a]	Minority mother tongue of U.P.
30	Sindhi	1,204,678	Listed in Eighth Schedule; minority mother tongue of Maharashtra, Punjab, and M.P.

TABLE 3.1 (*continued*)

No.	Mother tongue	Persons	Status
31	Lamani/Lambadi	1,203,338[a]	Minority mother tongue (tribal) of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra
32	Tulu	1,156,950	Minority mother tongue of Mysore and Kerala
33	Bagri	1,055,607	Minority mother tongue of Rajasthan

NOTE:

[a] In the Reports of the Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities, the 1971 returns for 46 mother tongues including these listed in the table have been grouped with Hindi, giving an 'official' figure for Hindi-speakers in 1971 of 208,514,005; Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, *The Twenty-Third Report by the Deputy Commissioner for Linguistic Minorities in India for the Period July, 1982 to June, 1983* (Delhi: Controller of Publications, 1985), pp. 292–98.

Source: R.C. Nigam, *Language Handbook on Mother Tongues in Census, Census of India, 1971* (New Delhi: Government of India Press, 1972).

Constitution of India with the status of a 'national' language of the country.

First of all, decisions taken by state authorities, sometimes only for administrative convenience, at other times in response to demands with or without significant political weight behind them, have been major factors in determining the fates of the various languages of India. For example, during the British period, Bengali gained an advantage over Oriya and Assamese through its recognition as an official language in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, which for a time also included the present province of Assam. Urdu in north India retained much of the advantages it had gained during Mughal rule because the British continued to recognize it as a language of administration in the north Indian states of Bihar (until 1881) and in U.P. and Punjab until Independence.

During the Nehru period in post-Independence India, the Central Government generally followed pluralist policies in relation to the major languages of India combined with a strategy of non-intervention in regional disputes between speakers of different languages. The consequences were to grant recognition to language groups whose spokesmen were able to demonstrate strong political

support, while avoiding direct confrontations between them and the Central Government. The decisions finally made were, therefore, political decisions, not linguistic ones.

But what has determined the rise of such movements of political mobilization in the first place? Of primary importance has been unevenness in processes of social change, especially with regard to education, urbanization and the movement of people into modern sectors of the economy in search of jobs. Conflicts have tended to arise between members of different language groups when speakers of one such group find themselves or perceive themselves at a disadvantage in relation to groups more advanced in education or urbanization. In such situations, the demand may be made for recognition of a language as a medium of education in the schools, as a recognized language of administration, or as the sole official language of a province. The second factor precipitating linguistic group conflict is job competition among the educated classes, especially in Government service and the public sector. This factor is often a sub-type of the first, but may also arise when groups are equally balanced in 'social mobilization.'

The policies of the Nehru period emphasized arbitration and mediation between contending forces, the underlying principle being that no major decision involving demands of one linguistic group which also affected another such group would be taken without agreement on both sides. On those occasions when the Central Government did feel obliged to intervene, it followed two further principles: unity of action of Central and state governments and Congress party leadership, and division of the Opposition by offering positive inducements to moderate elements and punishment to elements perceived as extremist and threatening to the unity of the country.

Policies pursued during the post-Nehru period have deviated in major ways from this combination of strategies. Although the Central Government has sometimes, as in the Punjab situation, attempted to follow the rule of postponing final decisions until agreement has been reached on both sides of a dispute (the status of Chandigarh and other unresolved aspects of the Punjab reorganization), it has generally played a more manipulative and interventionist role than was customary in the Nehru period. Moreover, Central intervention has often occurred in the absence of unified national and state leadership and has sometimes divided

the opposition in such a way as to favor extremist rather than moderate elements.

The Official Language Problem

The history of the resolution of the official language problem in post-Independence India illustrates clearly two of the main arguments of this chapter: the extent to which language-choices and identities are political rather than practical linguistic matters, and the effectiveness of pluralist solutions to linguistic conflicts. Until Partition, which took place while the Constituent Assembly was still in session, the principal division concerning what should be the official language of an undivided post-Independence India was between those who favored adoption of Hindi in the Devanagari script and those who favored a solution more compatible with Hindu-Muslim unity, namely, adoption of 'Hindustani' in both Devanagari and Persian-Arabic scripts.[1]

The existence of this issue and its quick elimination from contention at Partition reveal the political arbitrariness involved in decisions regarding official language choices. For political, emotional and economic reasons, many Hindus in north India had since the late nineteenth century demanded displacement of Urdu in Persian-Arabic script by Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of court and administration. Muslims of course resisted for the same reasons. The elimination of this issue from serious discussion in the Constituent Assembly after Partition was an arbitrary political act, for Hindustani is the predominant language of north India, not of Pakistan. Moreover, most north Indian Muslims remained in north India where the language issue continued to be of concern to their cultural and political elites.

Nevertheless, once Partition had occurred, the terms of the debate on official language for India shifted to a struggle between Hindi and the other regional languages of the country in which Urdu had no place. Once again, political, emotional and economic factors were more decisive than merely linguistic matters in determining the outlines of the debate and the decisions adopted. Although Hindi is a north Indian regional language, the number of

speakers is so much larger than any other that it was the only indigenous language which could make a claim for recognition as official language of the country. The fact, however, that it remained only a large regional language also limited the legitimacy of its claim especially in the south and in eastern India. However, since no other regional language could challenge Hindi, the argument was made that English, the official language of foreign rule and of Indian elites, should be retained as the official language of independent India. Proponents of Hindi countered with an emotional argument that English was not a 'national' language of India and that it was humiliating for an independent India to retain the language of her former foreign rulers.

Beneath the surface of these discussions based on linguistic and emotional arguments was the issue of privileged access to jobs, especially in the administrative services. Opponents of Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking states anticipated that the adoption of Hindi as the sole official language of India would place their elites at a competitive disadvantage in this respect. Out of this struggle there emerged from the Constituent Assembly the beginnings of a compromise. The Assembly resolved Hindi would become the official language of the country, but English would be retained for a transition period of fifteen years. The other regional languages were recognized in this compromise as the appropriate languages of administration in their own provinces and as 'national' languages of the country as well, to be listed as such in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, thereby entitling them also to a privileged position with regard to distribution of Central Government resources for language development.

The Official Languages Act of 1963 extended and consolidated the Constituent Assembly compromise. Although the Act declared Hindi the official language of the Union from 1965, it established English as an 'Associate Additional Official Language' indefinitely, subject to decennial reviews by a parliamentary review committee. Ambiguity concerning the powers of this committee continued to concern political elites from the non-Hindi-speaking states. Because of these concerns over the ambiguity in the Act of 1963 and disturbances in Tamil Nadu in 1964–65, meetings among chief ministers of the states and the leadership of the Central Government took place in June 1965, out of which there emerged the Official Languages (Amendment) Act of 1967, which clarified the

role of the parliamentary review committee.[2] The clarification ensured that English would be retained as Associate Additional Official Language as long as the representatives of even a single state in the Union desired it.

With the Amendment Act of 1967, major controversies over the official language issue in India came to an end. Not only has English been retained by the Central Government to meet the concerns of non-Hindi-speaking states, but the political resolution has been a multilingual one. All the regional languages of the country remain secure in their home-states and any of them may be used for the written examinations for entry into the senior all-India administrative services.

Linguistic Reorganization of States

The second great set of language issues which the leadership of the country had to face during the Nehru period were the prolonged and divisive controversies concerning the linguistic reorganization of states. In the aftermath of Partition, these issues were considered potentially more threatening to national unity than the official language question. It was feared that creation of states conforming to linguistic regions of the country would promote regional sub-nationalisms, which in turn might become secessionist.

For this and other practical reasons, therefore, the Central Government moved slowly and cautiously in response to demands for linguistic reorganization of states and set clear boundaries within which such demands could be made. These boundaries included a refusal to entertain either secessionist demands or proposals for the creation of federal units based on religious demarcations. They also included a refusal to establish linguistic states on linguistic grounds alone; demands for such states had to be associated with evidence of mass popular support. Finally, as noted above, the Central Government refused to reorganize the existing multilingual states unless and until all major political forces were in agreement.

During the Nehru period the major mobilizations occurred in the south, over demands for the reorganization of the former

Madras province; in Bombay, for the separation of Maharashtra and the creation of Gujarat; in Punjab, for the creation of a Punjabi Suba; and in the northeast, for the creation of several tribal-dominated states out of Assam.

The principal successes in states-reorganization during the Nehru period were in the south and in Bombay. Initial demands for creation of a separate Telugu-speaking province of Andhra were resisted until the mass mobilization which occurred in the aftermath of the death of Potti Sriramulu in 1953, who was engaged in a fast demanding the creation of the new state. There was agreement on the Tamil side as well, based however on the understanding that the city of Madras itself would remain wholly within and under the control of the Tamil-speaking people in the residual state of Madras.[3] It should be recalled that the reorganization in the south was a very complex process involving the break-up of former princely states, the resolution of a multiplicity of claims concerning the status of bilingual districts and taluks on the borders of the several southern linguistic regions, the weight to be given to migrant populations in calculating the percentage of speakers of different languages in such districts, and the relative economic importance of border districts to the states which claimed them.[4] The various conflicting claims which arose out of these matters were all ultimately resolved successfully—the southern provinces were reorganized in stages into the four southern states of today: Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka—and the resolutions have remained stable. Disputes have carried over on the status of some minority districts and on the division of river waters, but have never reached the intensity of corresponding situations in Punjab and the northeast.

The reorganization of the former province of Bombay into the present states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, and the separation of the Marathi-speaking districts of Madhya Pradesh and their inclusion in Maharashtra, was a complex process too. Among the complicating issues, one concerned the separation of the Marathi-speaking districts from the former princely state of Hyderabad and from Madhya Pradesh. Another concerned the integration of the princely states of Saurashtra and Kutch into the Gujarati-speaking region. A third issue which complicated and delayed the western reorganization was the imbalance in political mobilization in the bulk of the Marathi-speaking region, which was strongly in favor of the creation of a separate Marathi-speaking state, compared to the

rather weak demand coming from the Gujarati-speaking parts of Bombay. The most important factor which stood in the way, however, concerned the status of the multilingual city of Bombay and of its financial resources, which the States Reorganisation Commission felt should not go exclusively to either a new State of Maharashtra or Gujarat.[5] Although these complicating issues delayed the western reorganization, the final division in May 1960, which consolidated the bulk of the Marathi-speaking population of the region into Maharashtra, the Gujarati-speaking population into Gujarat, and integrated Bombay fully into Maharashtra constitutes a second major pluralist solution to the linguistic divisions of India during the Nehru period, which has remained firmly in place.

In contrast, the two other major regional reorganizations—of Punjab and in the northeast—were unresolved at the time of the death of Nehru. In the northeast, some steps had been taken towards the creation of separate tribal units, notably the establishment of the State of Nagaland in 1963, but insurrectionist movements persisted throughout the Nehru period among the tribal populations in the region. It requires explaining, therefore, why the reorganizations in these two regions were delayed so long and why the conflicts there have escalated to unprecedented levels of violence. Here we shall only consider whether or not the persistence of these two sets of conflicts arises out of inherent differences between the disputes in these regions and the disputes in the south and west or whether their intractability and intensity is more a consequence of policy changes which occurred in the post-Nehru period.[6]

The Punjab Crisis

The major differences between the Punjab situation before reorganization and the situations in the south and west were, first of all, that the demand for reorganization came nearly exclusively from political spokesmen of the Sikhs. Secondly, the leadership of the principal Sikh political organization, the Akali Dal, was suspected of harbouring secessionist designs. Thirdly, not only was agreement lacking from all sides for reorganization, but the demand

was strongly opposed within the Punjabi-speaking region itself by most spokesmen for Punjabi-speaking Hindus, many of whom went to the extent of denying that their mother tongue was Punjabi. Fourthly, an argument was presented that was not present in the other cases—that there was 'no real language problem' in the former Punjab State because Punjabi and Hindi were 'akin to each other and [were] both well-understood by all sections of the people of the state.'[7] Fifthly, Punjab was a border region and the principal area, outside of Kashmir, of potential land warfare between India and Pakistan.

It can be argued that the decision taken after Nehru's death by the Government of Lal Bahadur Shastri to reorganize Punjab was indeed consistent with previous principles. In the interim, a change in the leadership of the Akali Dal and in the clarity of its demands had taken place: from the militant leadership of Master Tara Singh, with his suspected secessionist tendencies, to the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh, who insisted that the Akali Dal demand was for a Punjabi-speaking state, not a Sikh state. During the sixties also, sentiment had shifted in the Hindi-speaking region in favor of a division of the state.

Why, then, has the Punjab reorganization not led to a satisfactory resolution as in the south and the west? Although communal divisions between Sikhs and Hindus in Punjab have by no means prevented inter-communal cooperation, they have nevertheless hindered the development of a common regional Punjabi consciousness comparable to the regional sentiment which exists in Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu. Second, and related to this factor, has been a lack of political integration in the state.

Once again, the situation in Punjab contrasts sharply with that in Maharashtra, the principal surviving example of Congress dominance in an Indian state, and Tamil Nadu, where a single regional nationalist party, first the AIADMK, then the DMK has succeeded in all elections since 1967 in mobilizing a political majority in the legislature sufficient to govern the state alone. In Punjab, in contrast, politics since the reorganization of 1966 have been marked by an unstable dualistic competition between the Akali Dal, sometimes in alliance with the Jan Sangh or BJP, on the one hand, and the Congress, on the other.

It should be noted also that it is the unique features in the Punjab situation which have been overcome: finding a formula to

satisfy demands from a religious rather than a linguistic group; overcoming the relatively stronger opposition to reorganization which existed in Punjab in comparison with the situation in the former Madras and Bombay provinces; and accepting, ultimately, division and reorganization in a border region. The issues which have not been resolved—the status of Chandigarh, the assignment of disputed areas to the reorganized units, and the division of river waters—are of a type which have been resolved successfully in the previous reorganizations. Moreover, these issues themselves are not responsible for the intensification of the turmoil in Punjab in the eighties, although, paradoxically, their resolution still holds the best promise for restoring normalcy to the state.

The transformation of internecine Sikh violence after 1978 into intercommunal violence and the elevation to political prominence of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, who was alleged to be at the centre of much of this violence, occurred because the Congress found it useful—and also found Bhindranwale personally useful—in the struggle for power with the Akali Dal.[8] Though initially tolerated and supported by the Congress, Bhindranwale and other groups associated with him and his allies soon became an embarrassment as violence began to extend to the killing of Hindus opposed to Sikh political demands and to mass terrorist murders of innocent, mostly Hindu civilians.

Akali leaders reacted by reviving demands for resolution of the issues surrounding the reorganization of Punjab and by bringing forward the long-dormant demand first formulated at a party meeting in 1973 for regional autonomy for the state. Congress responded by attacking the moderate Akali Dal as well as the extremist fringe groups as being all in league and bent upon the dismemberment of India through the secession of Punjab and by stepping up police actions against alleged terrorists. The Bhindranwale forces and those of other groups engaged in the promotion or encouragement of violence responded by retreating into the inner precincts of the Golden Temple, from which they carried on escalating warfare with the police forces, Hindu and Sikh politicians, others opposed to them, and innocent bystanders as well, until the Government of India finally ordered the Indian Army in June 1984 to clear the alleged terrorist groups out of the Golden Temple.

Attempts to resolve the Punjab crisis since then, notably through

an accord with the moderate Akali Dal leaders in 1985 and the subsequent election of an Akali Dal Government have so far failed. Here, Congress and the Akali Dal were caught in a dilemma of their own creation. The latter, galvanized out of its previous political lethargy by Bhindranwale and other fringe groups into a more militant pursuit of favorable decisions on the unresolved issues left over from the reorganization, needed a political victory on these matters for the sake of its own credibility and standing in Punjab politics. Congress, for its part, having helped to create these fringe groups and their secessionist demands, having then extended the secessionist accusation to the moderate Akalis, having then gone before the country in the 1984 election campaign with an assault on the minorities as constituting a threat to the unity of the country, could not easily make the necessary concessions to restore normalcy in Punjab.

The political dilemma of the Congress, in turn, has been produced as a consequence of its departure from the practices followed during the Nehru era in connection with the southern and western reorganizations. The Central Government adopted an interventionist role in Punjab, attempting to manipulate the conflicts to its advantage rather than acting as an impartial mediator. Although the Congress had intervened as well in Akali politics in the sixties, it did so unitedly, with the Central Government supporting the interventions of its State Congress leadership rather than attempting to direct events from Delhi. Finally, Congress intervened in the eighties on the side of the extremists rather than the moderates and sought generally to weaken the latter rather than to eliminate the former and failed to distinguish between genuine secessionist forces and moderate elements who remained committed to peaceful parliamentary politics and the unity of India.

Reorganization of Assam

Five sets of conflicts have intersected in the northeastern region: between Hindus and Muslims; between speakers of two major regional languages, Assamese and Bengali; between plains peoples in general and tribal hill peoples; between Assamese and plains tribal peoples; and between indigenous populations and migrants, including large numbers of illegal migrants from Bangladesh.[9]

Although Hindu-Muslim conflict formed the primary line of cleavage in pre-Partition Assam, it has become submerged in the post-Partition period. Bengali Muslims, reduced to an insecure and powerless minority in post-Partition Assam, chose to ally with Assamese-speaking Hindus against Bengali-speaking Hindus in conflicts over the issue of official language for Assam. In the process, Bengali Muslims went so far as to declare their mother tongue to be Assamese in the census returns. The situation is the mirror image of that in Punjab where Punjabi-speaking Hindus denied their own mother tongue in order to undercut the Sikh demands for a Punjabi-speaking state.

The Assamese-Bengali language conflict in Assam did not, however, take the same form as conflicts in other states. Here, the aspirant language community, the Assamese, struggled not to create a new state, but to establish the dominance of their own language within an existing multilingual unit. The Assamese drive to establish linguistic hegemony in Assam contributed to the intensification of demands from several of the tribal confederacies for separation and for the creation of either new states within the Indian Union or for separate sovereign states. Explicit secessionist demands were made at independence by spokesmen for the Naga confederacy and later on behalf of the Mizo tribes as well.

The States Reorganisation Commission, consistent with its policies of opposing secessionist demands and reorganizations of state boundaries in the absence of agreement from all major groups, argued in its 1955 *Report* against the creation of a separate hill state out of the province of Assam. The negative recommendation was justified on the grounds that the Naga demand was explicitly secessionist while other tribal groups were divided, some being opposed to any reorganization.[10]

The opposition to the creation of any kind of hill state composed primarily of tribal peoples was based upon a more fundamental sentiment akin to the hostility to any kind of communal demand. The members of the States Reorganisation Commission were explicit in their views that an issue of national integration was at stake here which went beyond the issues in dispute in other regions of the country. The British, they argued, had promoted division of the tribal peoples from the plains peoples through their ' "inner

line" regulation policy' which restricted access by plains peoples to large parts of the hill areas. What was required instead was to expand the 'external contacts' of the tribal peoples with the other peoples of the country, which would be best served by their intermingling with the other peoples of an undivided state of Assam.[11]

Insistent and often violent and secessionist demands continued to come from the spokesmen of the several hill tribal confederacies. In response to these demands, the Government of India ultimately agreed to the creation of four tribal states: Nagaland in 1963; Meghalaya for the Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia tribes in 1972; Arunachal Pradesh in 1987 for the scattered tribal peoples living in the mountainous regions; and Mizoram for the Mizo confederacy, also in 1987.

The decisions concerning Nagaland and Mizoram required the prolonged involvement of the Central Government in the suppression of violence and the negotiations of settlements. The nature of the involvement of the Central Government in these two matters changed between the Nehru and post-Nehru periods.[12] The most pressing issue faced by Nehru and the leadership of the Central Government in Assam concerned the secessionist demand of the Naga Nationalist Organisation. The violent insurrection in Nagaland was dealt with through forceful suppression by the Indian Army. Negotiations from time to time were held with non-secessionist leaders, which ultimately led to the creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963.

The settlement in Nagaland, however, did not hold. Violence continued along with secessionist demands. Indira Gandhi had to become involved in the matter early in her tenure. From the beginning of her tenure, the Central Government deviated from the Nehru policies: first, by negotiating directly with avowed secessionist leaders in New Delhi in 1966–67 and second, by intervening directly in the internal politics of the state with the primary purpose of ensuring the loyalty of the chief minister of the state to her leadership.

The Mizo insurrection, which ultimately led to the creation of a separate state of Mizoram within the Indian Union in 1987, began towards the end of the Nehru era in 1959 in the aftermath of a famine. The movement became openly and explicitly secessionist

in 1966. The Central Government suppressed the insurrection forcefully, after which it took the conciliatory action of creating a separate union territory for the Mizo hills districts. Neither suppression nor concession were able to bring the Mizo insurrection to an end. Central Government tactics in Mizoram, however, changed after the defeat of the Congress in Mizoram in the 1977 elections, as elsewhere in most of the country. During this period, the Congress began to shift its ground to build a new support base in Mizoram and entered negotiations with the leader of the insurrection, Laldenga. After the Congress victory in the parliamentary elections in 1984, negotiations with the Rajiv Gandhi Government were resumed, which led ultimately to an accord in 1986, under which Mizoram was granted full statehood and Laldenga was made chief minister.

In its handling of both the Nagaland and Mizoram situations, it should be noted that the Central Government has never deviated from the policy of intolerance towards secessionism. What changed in the period of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi was the adoption of a policy of direct intervention by the Central Government in the internal politics of the states combined with a willingness to deal directly with secessionist leaders so long as the latter could be used for its own purposes, namely, to divide and undercut the support bases of the Opposition and secure a favorable position for the Congress.

A further major complication introduced into the struggle among the multiplicity of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups in Assam in recent years was the rise of a movement among both Assamese Hindus and plains tribals groups for the expulsion from the state of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, mostly Muslim.[13] The success of the movement in negotiating a settlement with the Central Government in 1985 for the removal of illegal migrants from the electoral rolls and the promised return of some of them to Bangladesh has provided only a temporary respite, for the expulsion of these illegal migrants is, in fact, highly unlikely. Moreover, the installation of an Assamese Hindu-dominated State Government after the legislative assembly elections of 1985 in turn has contributed to discontent among the remaining linguistic and tribal minorities in Assam.

Linguistic Minorities in the States

The long process of linguistic reorganization of states, which actually began during the British period, has reduced by about half the percentage of persons (16.5) speaking minority languages in states in which another language is dominant.[14] Although that percentage still leaves about 125 million people as linguistic minorities, it has been argued that there is not much 'scope for further political reorganization' since many of the minorities are scattered, without compact geographical concentrations, or belong to inter-state migrant populations.[15]

These calculations, however, are based on statistics for languages which are presumed to be distinct because of 'mutual incomprehensibility.'[16] However, problems arising from the persistence of linguistic minorities remain even where the minorities do not have compact geographical concentrations, for the Indian Constitution proclaims in several of its Articles the rights of their speakers to preserve their languages and scripts and to be educated through the medium of their mother tongue.[17] As in the case of the major conflicts over official language and linguistic reorganization of states, moreover, predictions concerning the most likely source of contemporary language conflicts and movements cannot be made solely on the basis of the degree of mutual comprehensibility between languages, the size of the linguistic minorities, or the compactness of their distribution.

The major persisting issues concerning the recognition of the rights of minority languages have occurred in the Hindi-speaking states and in Assam, but there has been violent agitation among the Nepali-speaking people of Darjeeling district in West Bengal. Within the Hindi-speaking states, the major persisting issue has been that concerning the status of Urdu, the largest self-declared minority mother tongue in India (Table 3.1).

Demands for recognition of Urdu as a second state language in the north Indian states and for implementation of the constitutional rights of its speakers for education through their mother tongue began to be articulated forcefully by Muslim political organizations in the sixties. Such recognition was resisted and delayed, and was caught between the demands of Muslim groups and the resistance of militant Hindu organizations opposed to such recognition.

Movements for such recognition have often also provided occasions for communal riots at the local level, in Ranchi in Bihar in 1967, for example.[18] In U.P. in 1989, the state legislative assembly took up a bill on the eve of the elections to accord recognition to Urdu as a second official language of the state. The action was followed by a communal riot in Budaun district in the western part of the state.[19]

The connection of the Hindi-Urdu controversy with the bitterness associated with Hindu-Muslim relations in north India has been the major stumbling block to the granting of full recognition of the rights of Urdu-speakers. It is noteworthy in this respect that declared Urdu-speakers in southern states such as Andhra and Karnataka, where Hindu-Muslim relations have been less bitter than in the north, have had much greater success in achieving recognition of Urdu as a legitimate mother tongue for primary and secondary school education.[20]

It is not only vis-à-vis Urdu that Hindi spokesmen in north India have asserted the primacy of the Hindi language written in the Devanagari script, but against all the languages, dialects, and mother tongues in the polyglot regions of north India which are loosely described as 'Hindi-speaking.' Paradoxically, the spread of Hindi has been aided by Hindu-Muslim polarization on the Hindi-Urdu question. As Muslims were exhorted by spokesmen for Urdu in every decade to be sure to declare Urdu as their mother tongue in the Census returns, so the speakers of the numerous mother tongues of north India opted for Hindi. In Uttar Pradesh, where the Hindi–Urdu polarization has been most intense, speakers of Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Braj Bhasha, and the like do not declare their mother tongues.

Yet across the border in Bihar, self-declared speakers of Bhojpuri, Magahi, and Maithili have been counted in many millions (see Table 3.1). Even here, however, with the exception of some spokesmen for Maithili, there have been no major movements for recognition of these languages in the process of linguistic reorganization of states or even for recognition of their separate status within the state of Bihar. Those of most of the other major mother tongues in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and elsewhere in north India, including many tribal languages, also have been either denied or ignored.

Only Punjabi—no more distinct linguistically from standard

Hindi than Maithili or Santali—has succeeded in establishing fully its separateness from Hindi and in achieving full recognition as the dominant language of a state of the Indian Union. The success of the Punjabi language in contrast to the failure of all other mother tongues in the north-Indian 'Hindi-speaking region' brings out clearly the importance of other-than-linguistic issues in the achievement of political recognition for a language.

Spokesmen for Hindi have not been the only linguistic imperialists in modern India. Bengali-speakers spread widely the Bengali net beyond its core during the last century and even sought to include among its dialects Oriya and Assamese. It is only by political and administrative chance that the Maithili language has been absorbed into the Hindi-speaking region rather than into the Bengali-speaking region, where it is also claimed as a dialect of Bengali, properly written in the Bengali script. Only in the last two years, spokesmen for Gorkhali (Nepali) among the Gorkhas in Darjeeling district demanded and achieved through a violent movement recognition of their separate linguistic and political status through the creation of Gorkha Hill Council within the district.[21] The State Government has moved only slowly and reluctantly to provide instruction through the medium of tribal languages at the primary stage, even for the relatively large number of Santali-speakers.[22]

The Assamese too have faced charges of linguistic imperialism from the remaining plains tribal peoples in this still polyglot province. The most recent movement for separation from Assam has been that of the Bodo-speaking people. As with most tribal movements of this type in modern India, the language issue is part of a broader struggle to preserve tribal lands from alienation to, or outright encroachment upon them by, non-tribal populations, in this instance 'immigrant Hindu and Muslim settlers and the Nepalis,'[23] and to further the pursuit by educated middle classes of public service jobs.[24]

The difficulties faced by the Bodos in making a claim for a separate state are common to other tribal groups in other states, notably those who have supported the long-standing demand for the creation of a separate Jharkhand state out of a number of districts in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, and Orissa. The dilemma faced by such groups is that their primary problems are not linguistic and cannot be solved by concessions specifically for the advancement of instruction in their language. The creation of a separate state, ostensibly in recognition of a language, provides the dominant group control over political and economic resources, especially jobs for the speakers of the dominant language.

In fact, the potential for conflict between linguistic minorities and dominant language groups in the reorganized states in general depends very much upon the presence of other-than-linguistic factors. The conflicts over the status of Urdu are salient because of the involvement in them of the whole question of Hindu-Muslim relations. The movements among the tribal peoples for recognition of their languages are really based more on economic issues than on linguistic ones.

Job competition, especially among the educated middle classes, remains always a potential source for linguistic conflicts and movements. Such movements may even arise among the linguistically dominant group in a state, taking the form of demands for job preferences for 'sons of the soil' within their own state, as in the case of the rise of the Shiv Sena among Marathi-speaking Maharashtrians in multilingual Bombay.[25]

Despite the shift in policies and tactics in relation to minority groups in general in the post-Nehru period, it remains the case that the Indian Union has evolved and continues to evolve pluralistic solutions to conflicts related to the country's linguistic diversity. The differences in policies in the post-Nehru period help to explain the greater intensity of these conflicts and the failure to produce satisfactory resolutions, especially in Punjab. The major threats to Indian unity arise when Central Government leaders themselves choose to become directly involved and to tie those struggles to the contest for control of the country, that is, for political power in New Delhi.

Persistence of Hindu-Muslim Divisions

The pluralist policies of the Nehru period were less effective in promoting a satisfactory resolution of Hindu-Muslim relations than in resolving the relations between Hindi-speakers and speakers of other languages. Nehru was personally sensitive to demands for

better representation of Muslims in the public services, for the rights of Muslims to be educated through the medium of Urdu and for the continued use of Urdu for some official purposes as well, and for the full integration of Muslims into the Congress organization as party workers and candidates for the state legislatures and for Parliament. He castigated Hindu communalism and Hindu communal organizations repeatedly in his speeches. Throughout most of the Nehru period also, with some exceptions, incidents of communal violence remained relatively low and the local authorities and the police sought vigorously to contain those outbreaks which did occur.

Congress had always had a base of popular support amongst the large category of Muslim weavers, known as Ansaris or Momins, in the cities and towns of north India, even during the height of Muslim separatist sentiment in the pre-Independence period. The Congress had also had an alliance in the pre-Independence period with the largest section of orthodox Muslims, particularly those associated with the Jamiyyat-ul-Ulama, an organization of Muslim clerics associated with the famous Islamic University at Deoband in western U.P.[26] On the opposite side of Muslim opinion, Nehru sought to integrate into the Congress organization and to place in offices of public trust including the presidency of the country, secular-minded Muslim politicians, such as Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, his political confidant from U.P.; the second President of India, Zakir Husain; and others.[27]

Nehru's personal liberality towards Muslims, however, was not converted into practice in several important respects because of the recalcitrance of state-level Congress political leaders in north India. Moreover, although several elements in the Nehru policy have persisted, the balance in Hindu-Muslim relations has deteriorated sharply since his death, leading to increased levels of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, a considerable increase in the number, intensity, and spread of incidents of communal violence, the increased use of police forces to attack rather than to protect Muslim minorities in urban riots, or to control the riots, and a consequent widespread sense of alienation amongst educated Muslims especially in north India.

Although Muslim M.P.s in the Congress supported Indira Gandhi at crucial points in the succession crisis, she had also to face during these years the rise of new leaders and organizations in north

India, presenting Muslim grievances which had accumulated during the Nehru period, or arisen at its end, into a package of demands to be traded for continued Muslim support. A new organization, called the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (MMM), which soon came under the leadership of Dr. Abdul Jalil Faridi of Lucknow, was formed in 1964 to seek redress of these grievances by bargaining with all political parties. However, these moves backfired.

It was generally believed that a shift in the Muslim vote in the 1967 General Election—along with shifts in the voting behavior of other segments of the population—had contributed significantly to the loss of Congress support in most of the states in north India and to the formation of non-Congress Governments in half the states of the Union as a consequence. However, the MMM was not able to promote the creation in the state legislatures of blocs of legislators favorable to Muslim causes. Few concessions of consequence were made to satisfy Muslim political spokesmen in this period. Worse, local politicians began to use more extensively a familiar technique of using Muslim demands, such as that for recognition of Urdu, to foment Hindu-Muslim riots, which reached much higher levels in the period between 1967 and 1971 than in the Nehru years.

Even at the national level, Mrs. Gandhi and the Central Government proved unresponsive to MMM demands, notably on the issue of the Aligarh Muslim University. As a consequence, the AMU issue became a perennial one in electoral politics for the next decade until finally a new Aligarh Muslim University Act was passed in 1981 acceding to the principal demands of conservative Muslim opinion in north India to preserve its fundamental character as a minority institution for Muslims.

It is noteworthy that throughout the post-Independence period, the traditional bargain between the Congress and orthodox Muslim elites, permitting the retention of Muslim Personal Law, has been maintained in the face of recurrent demands for its replacement by a uniform civil code. Mrs. Gandhi resisted recurrent demands from segments of Hindu opinion and from secular Muslim elites as well to formulate a uniform civil code that would apply to Muslims as well as to all other citizens of India.

The Muslim Personal Law issue provided a major test for Rajiv Gandhi, however, in the Shah Bano case agitation of 1985–86. In April 1985, Justice Chandrachud of the Supreme Court awarded

alimony to a divorced Muslim woman in conformity with provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code protecting indigent persons but contrary to the provisions of the Shariat. Rajiv Gandhi was immediately buffeted on the one side by orthodox Muslim leaders who launched a campaign to demand the passage of a law explicitly excluding Muslim women from protection of their rights under the Criminal Procedure Code, and on the other side by his secular Muslim political allies who urged him to remain firm against the agitation. The Rajiv Gandhi Government ultimately decided the matter in favor of the orthodox Muslim leaders. Legislation called the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill was introduced into Parliament and passed on 6 May 1986, literally adopting the provisions of the Shariat into secular law.[28]

Hindu-Muslim confrontation in the mid-eighties has centered around the Babri Masjid affair, which originated in the town of Ayodhya in Faizabad district, U.P. In January 1986, an agitation was begun by a Hindu organization, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, with the support of the RSS and the BJP, for the restoration of the site, alleged to be the birthplace of Lord Rama, as a place of Hindu worship. Since February 1986, the issue has been transformed into a national controversy. On the Muslim side, a national Babri Masjid Coordination Committee was established and other Muslim organizations were also mobilized to agitate for a speedy solution of the controversy in favor of the retention of the site as a mosque. On the Hindu side, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the RSS, the BJP, and leading Hindu religious figures have continued to campaign for the restoration of the entire site to Hindus for the reconstruction of a grand temple to Lord Rama. The Hindu organizations have far surpassed Muslim groups in mobilizing public action on this issue through its movement to rebuild the temple with consecrated bricks brought to the site by Hindu faithful.[29]

The consequences of the competitive mass mobilizations have been entirely predictable. Several major communal incidents of violence occurred in the aftermath of the initial attempts to mobilize the Muslim community around the issue, especially in Meerut, Delhi, and other parts of western U.P. and in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and have continued during the most recent phase of the VHP movement to bring bricks to the site. These incidents have contributed to an atmosphere of increasing 'polarization of Indian people on religious lines'[30] in a manner reminiscent to some of pre-Independence communal mobilizations.

The resurgence of Hindu-Muslim antagonisms and political conflict in contemporary India is often attributed to the rise of a more militant Hindu nationalism, associated with the RSS, the Jan Sangh, and the BJP, who are also often blamed for the recurring incidents of communal violence. Muslim communal organization itself is sometimes considered primarily a defensive counter-reaction to Hindu communal organization and action. During the Nehru period, it was also argued that one important reason for Muslim identification with the Congress was the fear of militant Hindu nationalism expressed in the steady rise in support for the Jan Sangh through the sixties. However, Congress dominance was not threatened directly by the rise of Hindu nationalism in the sixties, but rather by several other factors which affected communal relations in complex ways. Muslim estrangement from the Congress in the sixties was part of a broader disaffection from the Congress among many other social and cultural groups. The most serious disaffection in north India was the rise of peasant discontent expressed in the formation of the BKD (later the Lok Dal) led by Chaudhuri Charan Singh.

The consequence for the relations between the Congress and Muslims and other minorities of this increased competitiveness, initially concentrated in north India, was that the Congress, from becoming a protector of minorities who had no place else to go, became dependent upon their support in an increasingly fluid party-electoral dynamic. Although the Muslim vote is not solid across constituencies and regions, it remains a critical factor in party calculations because of the tendency for Muslims, like many other castes and communities in India, to vote as a bloc in particular constituencies where they exist in large numbers.[31] Indira Gandhi at first tried to consolidate the support of all the minorities and the poor. However, after the Emergency, with the loss of Muslim and Scheduled Caste support in the 1977 elections, she continued those policies only in part.

The rise of new regional political formations and the increased militancy of others in the non-Hindi-speaking states in the eighties complicated matters still further for Mrs. Gandhi and the Congress and further diluted the Congress' previous strong protection of minorities. In this complex situation, much more so than during the Nehru period, the very lack of solidarity among Muslims combined with their balancing strength in so many constituencies in critical north India also led Mrs. Gandhi towards an attempt to

break into the center of the rural Hindu vote held by the Lok Dal and the BJP by broadening her alliances there.

In general, therefore, in the opinion of the present writer, the drift of what happened under Mrs. Gandhi, which has been characterized as a turning away from secularism by the Congress towards a pandering to Hindu revivalist and communalist forces, has been more the result of a policy of opportunism, of seeking regional alliances with any and all groups to undermine Congress opponents combined with a willingness to exploit communal sentiments for the purpose or to allow local Congressmen to do so. There is, on balance, a clear contrast between the secular consensus under Nehru and its consequences for the Muslim minority in particular and its breakdown under Mrs. Gandhi.[32] Mrs. Gandhi faced a more trying and fluid situation and did not act consistently. The Muslims, from being a protected minority under Nehru, have become an endangered minority, whose support is still needed in crucial constituencies in north India especially, but whose defection and whose demands cause anger and resentment among Congressmen who would rather dispense with such support which must be bought at the potential cost of alienating many Hindus.

Political Construction of Contemporary Social Categories

Conventional histories of Indian nationalism have viewed the long struggle for Independence as involving the attempt to create among the diverse peoples of India a common sense of nationhood which, however, fell apart upon the unbridgeable differences between the Hindu and Muslim 'communities' and ultimately led to the creation of two sovereign states instead of one. Some observers see the present difficulties in Punjab as but a further indication of the artificiality of the Indian state itself and of its continued fragmentation into a multiplicity of imperfectly united nations and sub-nations. In fact, these events are part of a broad process of political construction of social categories, which has been of the essence of Indian politics for a century and continues to be of central importance today.

Idea and Political Consequences of a Hindu Community

According to one view, there is nothing in pre-modern times in South Asia that can be identified as a Hindu category or even a Hindu religion and certainly not a Hindu community or even anything that can be summarized under the heading of 'Hinduism'.[33] The term Hinduism later came to encompass the set of ideas, beliefs, and practices found in the classic shastric texts. In the middle and late nineteenth centuries, some urban elites, some rural itinerant preachers, and others began to draw upon the classic texts in opposition to Christian missionary activities to demonstrate their superiority to the teachings of the New Testament and of the Koran as well. Organizations also grew up, such as the Arya Samaj in western and northwestern India, designed to promote a Hindu community and solidarity in opposition to the encroachments of the alien Christians and of the Muslims as well upon the beliefs and practices of the peoples of the subcontinent. Further moves in the direction of constructing the social category of Hindu and the religion of Hinduism were taken by the British through such devices especially as the Census, which sought to classify all the peoples of India into distinct religious categories such as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian, and placed all those who could not fit into any other category as 'Hindus'. The British authorities went still further in promoting the formation of the modern Hindu community and religion by regulating, supporting and encouraging the formation of state-supported committees to supervise the functioning of the numerous great and small temples in city, town, and countryside.[34] According to this view therefore, by the end of the nineteenth century a new social category of Hindu and a new religion of Hinduism, had been created, which had sets of recognized texts, an acknowledged priesthood of Brahmins, and state-supported or regulated places of worship.

Since the late nineteenth century, there have been numerous movements of Hindu political mobilization which have taken a variety of forms. These include the Gaurakshini (Cow Protection) Sabhas formed in the 1890s, the movement to promote the development and spread of a standardized Hindi language written in the Devanagari script, rather than Urdu in the Persian-Arabic script, as the official language of education and administration in north

India and ultimately as the official language of the country, and the Hindu Mahasabha which worked to create a Hindu political community and to define the Indian nation through symbols drawn exclusively from Hindu texts, beliefs, and practices and from non-Muslim history.

This Hindu revivalism or militant Hindu nationalism has persisted up to the present and has manifested itself in various political organizations and movements and politicized religious movements. The most extraordinary recent attempt to unite the Hindu community by merging religious devotion with politics was the politicization of the once-in-twelve-years Kumbh Mela held in Allahabad in 1989.[35] Most important was the mobilization of the faithful around the issue of Babri Masjid and other Hindu sites on which mosques have been built and the launching of the Ramshila movement under which individual devotees pledged to carry a brick to Ayodhya for the rebuilding of the temple to Lord Rama on the disputed site of Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi.

Nevertheless, there remains in India today considerable ambiguity concerning the use of the word 'Hindus' to define any clearly demarcated group of people in the subcontinent and considerable doubt about the existence of a Hindu political community. On the one hand, the historic problem of a split between 'caste' Hindus and 'untouchables' persists in contemporary Indian politics, as do divisions among 'caste' Hindus themselves. On the other hand, there has been also an historic tendency to subsume Sikhs, Jains, and others in the Hindu fold. While this tendency is bitterly resented by some groups such as most Sikhs especially and is considered to be part of the absorptive quality of Hinduism, it also suggests the continued indefiniteness of its religious, social, and political boundaries.

On the other hand, revivalist or militant Hinduism is a pervasive and politically important presence in contemporary Indian politics. Its enhanced strength is reflected not only in organizations or voting power, expressed most recently in its success in emerging as the third largest party in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections and as the critical factor in the formation of the Government, but in its ability to capture a good part of contemporary political discourse as well. The tendency among militant nationalist organizations such as the RSS and the BJP to insist that Hindu and India are virtually interchangeable categories has spread beyond the organizational

confines of these two organizations. The idea is that India is 'the natural homeland of Hindus' and Hinduism is central to 'Indian national identity'. Such views are not confined to committed Hindu revivalists, but are replacing the secular democratic ideas previously held by the 'westernized middle classes' and the composite nationalism of Nehru, which emphasized Hindu-Muslim synthesis.[36]

There is a developing sense among Indian intellectuals that secularism has become either discredited or inadequate to the task of providing a value consensus in which Indians of all races and creeds may participate in a common non-violent political framework. Consequently, the definition of the central politically relevant values of South Asian religions has become a new terrain of confrontation. On the one side, it is argued, are those who see in Hinduism and in other South Asian religions as actually practiced by ordinary people 'religion-as-faith' whose central values are tolerant towards other religious practices and beliefs, accepting of diversity, and unwilling to accept the existence of clear boundaries between the beliefs and practices of different faiths.[37] On the other side, in this view, are those for whom religion is an ideology, who see Hinduism as an integrative faith into which many different rituals, practices, dogmas and beliefs may be absorbed, but who also see it as having a pristine essence which has been lost sight of or corrupted as a consequence of centuries of alien rule and infiltration into indigenous beliefs of alien Christian and Islamic beliefs and practices.

Adherents of the first view move easily from religious to political pluralism, towards favoring regionalism, pluralism, decentralization, and tolerance of minorities. Those on the other side tend to see a need for political as well as religious unification in a country viewed as in danger of political disintegration, favor a strong centralized state to overcome the danger, and feel that the Indian state and its policies have for too long 'only benefited the minorities'[38] whose demands have become unreasonable.[39] In place of tolerance for minorities, it is argued that it is time to stop pandering to them, and instead compel them to accept 'the political consequences' of the fact that they are minority groups living in a Hindu society,[40] and deal firmly with those persons among the minorities who refuse to accept the consequences of their numerical inferiority.[41]

Although the first view of 'religion-as-faith' is probably closer to the authentic beliefs and practices of most ordinary people in India, the linkage between such beliefs and practices and a coherent political ideology for contemporary India is still in the early stages of formation and confined mostly to a small intellectual elite. Rather more powerful in the eighties has been the reassertion of Hindu revivalism and communalism.

One must be careful in discussing revivalism and communalism to distinguish these terms both from each other and from upsurges in religious fervor which are endemic in Indian society. Revivalism involves the self-conscious 'reassertion of rituals and symbols of religion' or the selection of particular rituals and symbols for reinterpretation usually because of their perceived unifying capacity. Communalism involves the politicization of such rituals and symbols, 'pujas and processions'.[42] Religion becomes transformed into 'a political instrument'.[43] Communalism goes further and attempts to eliminate the natural 'heterogeneity' which exists within the Hindu, as well as the Muslim communities, in India and transform the community into a unified political corporate group.[44] Moreover, it stresses not merely Hindu unity, but 'the antagonism between Hindus and Muslims'.[45]

Idea of a Separate Muslim Political Community

Despite the general co-mingling of the Muslim and non-Muslim populations throughout South Asia, religious revivalist, educational, and political movements developed in the late nineteenth century—even earlier in the case of movements of religious revival—which drew upon the differences at the elite levels between Muslims and Hindus and sought to create a stronger sense of loyalty, solidarity, and faith among ordinary Muslims in their religious, social, and political separateness from Hindus. Representative institutions introduced by the British, especially the system of separate electorates for Muslims and non-Muslims, encouraged these developments, as did political differences at the elite levels between Muslim and Hindu politicians. Then, in the thirties, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, known in his earlier career as a committed secularist and exponent of Hindu-Muslim political accommodation, launched the Pakistan movement with the argument that the

Hindus and Muslims of South Asia were in every significant respect—religion, language, diet, and dress—utterly different and politically incompatible and that, therefore, they constituted separate nations entitled to separate states of their own.

However, neither in Pakistan nor in India, which still had a population of 75.5 million Muslims in 1981, has the Muslim political unity achieved in 1946-47 been sustained. On the contrary, Pakistan disintegrated in 1971 with the creation of Bangladesh and continues to have severe problems of internal unity among its other linguistic nationalities, while the Muslims of India have never since 1946 been able to unite as effectively as then in a common cause. There remain, therefore, among Muslims in India as among Hindus dual traditions of unity and disunity.

Yet, to some observers of modern Hindu-Muslim relations on the Indian subcontinent, the latest phase in Hindu-Muslim relations is nothing but a repetition of the inevitable: the resurgence of the natural separatist sentiment of Muslims, of a religious cultural community whose fundamental values are distinct from those of Hindus, of a community which cannot tolerate minority status in a secular state. This line of argument, however, has been opposed by many who point to the persistence of significant elements of a common Hindu-Muslim popular culture, the existence of fundamental differences even at the elite levels in Hindu-Muslim relations in north and south India, the contingent and ephemeral character of those movements which have at times succeeded in mobilizing the Muslims of India on a broad basis, and the evidence of a considerable degree of contemporary integration of Muslims into the secular political system of party and electoral politics.[46]

Any meaningful discussion of the issue of Muslim identity in contemporary India must distinguish between religious practices and beliefs and the cultural identities involved with them, on the one hand, and political communalism on the other, the use of real and imputed differences between Muslims and Hindus to create separate political identities. It has been shown how the Muslim festival of Moharram in Banaras has been subject to a multiplicity of interpretations.[47] In the early twentieth century, Moharram was an occasion in which both Muslims and Hindus participated. Since the communal riots of the 1930s, however, Hindu participation has ceased and some Hindus have come to consider the Muslim festival as a symbol of Muslim militancy and opposition to Hindus. On the

other side, a rise in Durga Puja celebrations in Banaras, has been interpreted as a counter to the Muslim Moharram processions. For the local participants, however, both celebrations are expressions of their own faith rather than manifestations of Hindu-Muslim hostility.

The transformation of local incidents of religiosity or of conflict between persons from different religious groups into communal demonstrations or confrontations and their expansion into the broader political arena of 'Hindu-Muslim conflict' often involves the bringing into operation of a combination of local and extra-local factors. There may be local persons who wish to make something more of such incidents either to gain local political advantage by exploiting them, or to gain economic advantage against business rivals from the opposite community, or for some personal advantage or for other non-religious reasons. The expansion of such incidents and their placement in a broader regional or national context requires as well that there be some external political organizations or movements hoping to benefit from them for electoral purposes or for purposes of building a communal political movement. Once a broad communal political movement gets started in this way, its leaders are likely to engage in a process of cataloguing the incidents of alleged persecution or discrimination or violence committed by one community against another. Communal political movements attain their grandest crescendo when they succeed in persuading their followers that the religion itself is in danger at the hands of non-believers. It also becomes important in order to maintain a communal momentum to take advantage of particularly emotive opportunities, however remote they may be from the concerns of ordinary believers. An example of this type is the disturbances manufactured in Bombay over the publication of *Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, though the book itself had already been banned by the Government of India.[48]

Many observers have been suggesting that communal organization and polarization are approaching a new peak comparable to that which occurred before Partition. The existence of such a polarization has not yet been demonstrated in electoral figures, which have shown no difference in overall voting patterns for Muslims in the country compared to Hindus, nor in the development of militant, extremist, or terrorist movements among Muslims such as have

arisen in recent years among Sikhs, various groups in Assam, among the Gorkhas, and elsewhere in India. On the other hand, the rise in communal riots, the evident growth of anti-minority feelings among educated middle class Hindus and of lack of trust of Hindus on the part of educated middle class Muslims, and the proliferation of new communal organizations among both Muslims and Hindus in recent years appear to point in the opposite direction.

Conclusion

The political construction of religious and other communities in South Asia has been, by no means confined to Hindus and Muslims. The process has occurred prominently as well among Sikhs, various tribal groups and tribal confederacies, the speakers of many of the numerous language groups, and among certain caste categories. It is a process that was heavily influenced in the pre-Independence period by the British obsession for counting, classifying, and categorizing the peoples of India and placing each and every body and soul into clear caste, linguistic, religious, and other niches. Numerous attempts were made to divide the amorphous Hindu population into various sub-categories as well: 'untouchables,' non-Brahmins, Dravidians, and the like. And of course wherever such categories were introduced, 'minorities' were created whose interests had to be protected against the threatened oppression of some 'majority', usually identified as 'Hindus' or 'caste Hindus'. Some of these categories had only local importance. Others, like Muslims, had political significance throughout the entire sub-continent and at every level in the political system from the local to the national. The peculiarity of the Muslim situation was that, in some places, the Muslims were a 'minority', in others a 'majority'.

After Independence, the Congress leaders sought to put an end to this whole process of categorizing, separating, classifying, enumerating and granting special concessions to various groups of people, which they considered to have already sundered the unity of the country and to constitute a clear and future danger as well. However, at the same time, they made an exception for the Scheduled Caste population on grounds that their disadvantages

were such as could only be remedied by special protections, an exception which opened the lid on a box which has since flown completely open. In the eighties, the whole issue of preferential treatment for various so-called 'backward castes' had become among the most divisive in Indian politics.[49]

It would be a great mistake, however, to presume that the process of identity formation is somehow either 'natural' or uniformly successful or that the results are invariably permanent. On the contrary, it is better to think of social and political identities in the Indian subcontinent as being in a perpetual state of flux, of political categories as being still under construction, with their boundaries fluid. It is not to be assumed that India is a country divided into clearly demarcated caste, communal, and linguistic groups in perpetual conflict with each other. Nor is it to be assumed that, when they do arise, such conflicts are necessarily intractable and bound to lead to secessionism or the ultimate disintegration of the Indian state. Such conflicts rather tend to arise under conditions which can be specified and which are affected especially by three sets of forces: competition among persons from different cultural categories for the same economic opportunities; designation by the authorities of certain groups as disadvantaged and entitled to political recognition and the reservation of some economic opportunities specifically for them; and exploitation and manipulation of such differences by political leaders. Moreover, for the most part, such conflicts have been confined to particular regions in India. It is rather more rare and more complicated for such conflicts to find expression, as they did in 1946-47, in polarized confrontation between communal categories across the entire country.