

# Religious Radicalism and Security in South Asia



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RELIGIOUS RADICALISM  
AND SECURITY IN SOUTH ASIA

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# 1

ROBERT G. WIRSING

## **Introduction: Religion, Radicalism, and Security in South Asia**

**I**n the immediate aftermath of its publication, Harvard University Professor Samuel P. Huntington's 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?" generated a firestorm of debate.<sup>1</sup> Critics called it an overstatement, simplistic, even mischievous. A decade later, his central thesis—that conflicts between religion-based civilizations would dominate world politics in the coming century—seemed to be holding its ground. Indeed, more than a few seasoned observers of world politics were expressing the view that Huntington's argument had been substantially vindicated by events—that, by almost any imaginable measure, religion had emerged in the first years of the twenty-first century not only as a central issue of international public discourse but also as a central ingredient in violent global conflict.<sup>2</sup>

1. Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993).

2. Hoover Institution's Stanley Kurtz began an essay reconsidering Huntington's thesis, published about ten months after the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, with the comment: "This is Samuel P. Huntington's moment. The world of cultural and religious strife anticipated by Huntington in his much-discussed (and widely excoriated) book, *The Clash of Civilizations*, has unquestionably arrived." See "The Future of 'History,'" *Policy Review*, no. 113 (June/July 2002), online edition.

It is unlikely that Huntington himself could have foreseen either the rapidity or extent of religion's rise to prominence in world affairs. He had warned, of course, that Islam had especially bloody borders; but that the rough outlines of a global fault line war pitting the West against the Islamic world, or at least against its most refractory components, would be in place less than a decade hence was clearly beyond anyone's powers of prophecy.

Islamic militancy was already a burning issue in much of the world by the end of the twentieth century. In late 2001, it quite unexpectedly hurtled to the top of the world threat list, driven there by the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington and the subsequent launching of the global war on terrorism. The humiliating defeat of Baathist-ruled Iraq by American-led coalition forces in April 2003 seemed bound to keep it there. Notwithstanding strenuous efforts in this period by numerous national leaders and a host of intellectuals to draw a clear distinction between Islam as a major and humane world religion and Islam as a cloak for politically motivated terrorist violence, the temptation to dilute the distinction has faced increasingly less resistance. Indeed, there was some danger that a "clash of civilizations" of some sort was no longer mere abstraction.

Religion's rise in salience was especially visible in world public opinion, where stunning changes in perceived threat seemed to confirm Huntington's postulated refashioning of the world order. For instance, a massive Pew Global Attitudes opinion survey of more than thirty-eight thousand people in forty-four nations, conducted roughly a year after 9/11, turned up disturbing evidence of profound differences in how people from different regions of the globe viewed the United States and the U.S.-led global war on terrorism.<sup>3</sup> Majorities rated the United States favorably in thirty-five of the forty-two countries in which the question was asked. The most negative opinions of both the United States and the global war on terrorism were recorded in predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East and South Asia—Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Pakistan, Egypt, and Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup>

3. *What the World Thinks in 2002: The Pew Global Attitudes Project* (Washington, D.C.: The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, December 2002).

4. Of Muslim countries in what the survey designated the Middle East/Conflict Area, only Uzbekistan, where an extremely high 85 percent of those polled gave the United States a favorable rating, departed from the norm. Majorities in all Muslim countries in the survey, again excluding Uzbekistan but including Indonesia and Senegal, opposed the war on terrorism.

Of these, Pakistan—in spite of its membership of the global coalition against terrorism and key role in the coalition’s war in Afghanistan—stood out for its people’s apparent disdain for America and lack of sympathy for the global war on terrorism. According to the survey, only 10 percent of Pakistanis (the second-lowest percentage among all nations surveyed) had a favorable opinion of the United States; only 2 percent (the lowest figure among all the nations surveyed) had a positive impression of the spread of American ideas and customs; only 9 percent (again, the lowest figure among all nations surveyed) preferred American ideas about democracy; and while 45 percent opposed the U.S.-led war on terrorism, only 20 percent favored it. Bangladesh respondents were only mildly more favorably inclined: 45 percent had a favorable view of the United States (against 47 percent unfavorable); 31 percent preferred American ideas about democracy (against 31 percent who did not); only 14 percent had a positive impression of the spread of American ideas and customs; and only 28 percent favored the U.S.-led war on terrorism.

An especially startling finding surfaced in a Pew follow-up survey question that queried respondents’ view of suicide bombing in defense of Islam. At least a quarter of Muslims in eleven of the fourteen countries surveyed believed that suicide bombings could be justified in order to defend Islam from its enemies. Support for suicide bombing had surprisingly sizeable majorities in Lebanon (73 percent) and Ivory Coast (56 percent); and relatively high minorities supported it in the two Muslim-majority South Asian countries in the survey—Bangladesh (44 percent) and Pakistan (33 percent).<sup>5</sup>

Not surprisingly, the generally negative opinions Muslims around the world seemed to harbor about the United States and the global war on terrorism were strongly reciprocated by residents of the United States. In a summer 2002 poll of 3,262 Americans sponsored jointly by The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations and the German Marshall Fund, terrorism topped the list of perceived threats to U.S. vital interests. Muslim countries had remarkably low ratings on the poll’s “favorability on thermometer scale”: Saudi Arabia (33 degrees), Pakistan (31 degrees), Iran (28 degrees), and Afghanistan (29 degrees) had all fallen in favor or remained stationary since 1998 in marked contrast with countries like Russia (55 degrees), Britain (76 degrees),

5. *What the World Thinks*, 5.

or Germany (61 degrees)—all of whom had risen in favor substantially. There were also clear signs of marked increases in wariness among Americans toward Islam: the proportion of Americans who considered Islamic fundamentalism a critical threat to vital American interests had jumped twenty-three points—from 38 percent to 61 percent—since 1998; four out of ten Americans declared the terrorist attacks of 9/11 to represent the “true teachings” of Islam—to a great degree (21 percent) or to some degree (18 percent); and there was strong support (76 percent) for tightened restrictions on immigrants to the United States from Arab or Muslim lands.<sup>6</sup>

Islam, whether combined rhetorically with militancy, fundamentalism, radicalism, or terrorism, without doubt currently occupies the spotlight in the West’s efforts to beat back the current challenge to its dominance of the global order. Admittedly, Islam may persist in this role—or even fill it in yet more catastrophically violent ways—well into the future.<sup>7</sup> It should not be imagined, however, that Islam is the only religion on the planet able and willing to swell the ranks of religious radicalism or, for that matter, to inspire acts of terrorism. Militant Hindu and Sikh movements, not infrequently tinged with violence and terrorism, have lengthy histories in India. Religious radicalism is not a rarity amongst Christians, either. On the contrary, there are indications that the world’s rapidly expanding Christian population may be acquiring “fundamentalist” traits hitherto attributed mainly to Islam. Observing that “in the past half century the critical centers of the Christian world have moved decisively to Africa, to Latin America, and to Asia,” Pennsylvania State University historian Philip Jenkins argues that revolutionary change in world Christianity is in progress, that the motivation for change is conservative and fundamentalist at its core, and that “in its variety and vitality, in its global reach, in its association with the world’s fastest-growing societies, in its shifting centers of gravity, in the way its values and practices vary from place

6. *A World Transformed: Foreign Policy Attitudes of the U.S. Public after September 11* (Chicago: The Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 2002).

7. This is the unsettling message of a recent commentary by a leading American academic. According to him, “a dialectical and symbiotic connection, perhaps an escalating and vicious cycle, exists between the [growth of the American Empire and the growth of Islamic terrorism], and the world is about to witness a titanic and explosive struggle between them.” James Kurth, “Confronting the Unipolar Moment: The American Empire and Islamic Terrorism,” *Current History* (December 2002): 404.

to place—in these and other ways it is Christianity [not Islam] that will leave the deepest mark on the twenty-first century.”<sup>8</sup>

## South Asian Regional Perspective

THE GLOBAL WAR ON TERRORISM launched in October 2001 has had a visibly profound impact on the states of South Asia—on Pakistan most directly and physically, of course, but in one way or another on the others as well. However, its impact on these states has been in certain key respects less traumatic—less politically and socially destabilizing, in other words—than in the case of countries in some other regions. This is in part because South Asia, so far at least, has not been a primary target in the war: It housed none of the so-called “rogue” states, none of the notorious “axis of evil.”

In larger part, however, the states of South Asia have taken the war on terrorism more or less in stride because religious radicalism and its terrorist offshoots were already staples of the political agendas of these states long before they reared their heads in New York and Washington. These phenomena have none of the novelty in South Asia, to put it simply, that they undoubtedly possess in South Bronx. Indeed, few if any of the world’s other geographic regions can boast of more deeply entrenched and widely felt patterns of religious radicalism than have been evident for decades in South Asia. This applies especially to the two largest and most populous countries in the region, India and Pakistan, but it also applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to Bangladesh. Though these states differ greatly amongst themselves when it comes to the roots, nature, and scale of religion-related radicalism, in all three states these phenomena are now major public issues. They crop up constantly both in their domestic politics and in their relations with one another.

### INDIA

On India’s domestic front, religious radicalism has found its politically most powerful expression in the so-called *sangh parivar*—the family of militant Hindu groups (including, most notably, the Rashtriya

8. Philip Jenkins, “The Next Christianity,” *Atlantic Monthly* (October 2002): 54–55. Jenkins’ ideas are elaborated in his book, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Shiv Sena, and the Bajrang Dal) that form the organizational backbone of contemporary Hindu nationalism. The Hindutva ideology of these groups, having the goal of a united Hindu Rashtra (Hindu Nation)—and asserting existence of a blanket “Hindu” national identity for all of India’s inhabitants, be they formally Hindu or not—occupies one side in a heated and momentous debate nowadays over India’s national destiny. How one feels this destiny is best served—in regard to such issues as the disposal of Kashmir, for instance, or the content of school history textbooks, or the treatment of India’s religious minorities, or the restoration of the Ram temple at Ayodhya, or even the protection of India’s innumerable “holy cows”<sup>9</sup>—inevitably turns in no small measure on one’s understanding of religion and of its relationship to Indian nationalism. Presently well positioned to advance its Hindutva-oriented understanding of these is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political embodiment of Hindu nationalism and current leader of the country’s ruling coalition government. For all of India’s political parties, however, no matter how liberal and secular they claim to be, the matter of religious identity is never very far from the top of the political agenda.

The radical religious strain in Indian domestic politics surfaced quite plainly in the legislative assembly elections held in Gujarat State in December 2002. In these fiercely fought and immensely crucial elections (the first of ten state elections scheduled in the run-up to the national elections in 2004), Narendra Modi, the controversial incumbent chief minister, led the BJP’s state unit to a smashing political victory—securing 126 seats (more than two-thirds of the total) against its Congress rival’s paltry 51. Almost all political analysts have conceded that the Muslim massacre of Hindu pilgrims that occurred at Godhra earlier in the year in the states’ south, together with the widespread anti-Muslim violence that followed it, bore heavily on the election results. As India’s liberal intellectual class tended to see it, the election’s outcome was yet another unwelcome sign that India’s secular statehood stood in considerable peril. Yogendra Yadav, one of

9. The University of Delhi historian who first sought to publish a book arguing that the cow did not achieve sacred standing in Hinduism until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries reportedly received death threats for his heresy. D. N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (New York: Verso, 2002).

India's most seasoned election analysts, observed in *Frontline*, for example, that "the BJP managed to recover its eroding social base with carefully crafted and subtly executed politics of hatred. It did succeed in keeping the damage within limits and offset these against gains made in new regions and among new social groups. Anti-Muslim violence played a crucial role in this process of recovery, damage control and acquisition."<sup>10</sup>

On India's foreign front, New Delhi has traded very heavily in recent years in accusations of religious extremism against its major regional rival, Pakistan. The allegation that Pakistan was a "state sponsor of terrorism"—in particular, of *Islamic* terrorism—in Muslim-majority Kashmir was already a mainstay of Indian appeals for international (especially American) support by the middle of the 1990s; and it grew steadily more prominent thereafter. In a letter to President Bill Clinton on 12 May 1998, for example, in which he explained the rationale underlying India's initial series of nuclear tests, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee complained of India's "deteriorating security environment" and, without actually naming Pakistan, of India's having been "for the last ten years ... the victim of unremitting terrorism and militancy sponsored by it in several parts of [the] country, specially Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir."<sup>11</sup> Vajpayee's External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, echoing these sentiments and capitalizing on the growing international unpopularity of Islamabad's patronage of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, declared in a public speech a year later in the wake of the Kargil crisis that Pakistan's action at Kargil was "an overspill of the 'Afghanistan disorder syndrome' ... a manifestation of this medieval malevolence spilling over from Afghanistan."<sup>12</sup>

Application of the terrorist label to Pakistan gained much greater credibility in late 2001, of course, when the West's hugely expanded apprehensions over the tactics of religious radicals suddenly seemed to overlap—and thus to validate—India's pre-existing fear that Kashmir had been "hijacked" by *jihad*-motivated and Pakistan-based

10. Yogendra Yadav, "The Patterns and Lessons," *Frontline* 19, no. 26 (21 December 2002 – 3 January 2003), online edition.

11. "India's Letter to Clinton on the Nuclear Testing," *New York Times*, 12 May 1998, online edition.

12. Jaswant Singh, "Kargil and Beyond" (speech given at the India International Centre, New Delhi, 20 July 1999), text reproduced by the Embassy of India web service.

foreign militants. Having survived for years on Western political agendas primarily as an instance of human rights deprivation, the Kashmir dispute now seemed in real danger of slipping into the category of just another front in the global war on terrorism.

### PAKISTAN

Pakistan's national reputation has been subjected to a relentless battering in recent years—and not only from its Indian adversary. Routinely described in the Western media as a politically maimed and potentially “failed” or “failing” state, Pakistan was said by responsible observers even before 9/11 to be “drifting toward religious extremism.”<sup>13</sup> Prominent American academics and professional analysts claimed that many Pakistani Army officers “share the religious zeal of the fundamentalists”<sup>14</sup> and that the country's thousands of madrassas (traditional religious schools, seminaries or academies) were serving as massive institutional incubators of religious fanaticism as well as recruiting centers for the Islamic jihad.<sup>15</sup> Prestigious American think tanks occasionally weighed in with highly damaging country profiles of their own. For instance, the comprehensive report (*Transition 2001*) presented to the Bush administration in its first weeks in office by a blue ribbon panel assembled by the Rand Corporation contained the stark warning that

Pakistan is in serious crisis and is pursuing policies counter to important U.S. interests. The United States should increase pressure on Islamabad to stop support for the Taliban, to cooperate in the fight against terrorism, to show restraint in Kashmir, and to focus on solving its own internal problems.... Pakistan continues to be beset by unhealthy political, economic, and strategic trends.... The most disturbing of these trends has been the growth of Islamic extremism. Extremist groups thrive because of Pakistan's continuing state failures and because they are intentionally supported by

13. Barry Bearak, “Death to Blasphemers: Islam's Grip on Pakistan,” *New York Times*, 12 May 2001, online edition.

14. Sumit Ganguly, “Pakistan's Never-Ending Story,” *Foreign Affairs* 79, no. 2 (March/April 2000): 6.

15. See, for instance, Rahul Bedi, “Kashmir Peace Talks Collapse,” *Jane's Intelligence Review* 12, no. 10 (1 October 2000), online edition for Asia.

the Pakistan military and secret services in the pursuit of the latter's goals in Kashmir and Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup>

Not the least damaging assessment, however, had come on 25 March 2000, not long before the release of the Rand report, directly and unequivocally from an American president. In his televised address to the people of Pakistan during a brief five-hour visit to the country at the end of an India-centered trip to the region, Bill Clinton came within a hair's breadth of branding Pakistan a sponsor of terrorism. Specifically, he admonished his listeners to recognize "that no grievance, no cause, no system of belief can ever justify deliberate killing of innocents. Those who bomb bus stations, target embassies and kill those who uphold the law are not heroes." He noted Pakistan's "tragic squandering of effort, energy and wealth on policies that make [it] poorer but not safer." On Kashmir, he urged restraint and respect for the Line of Control. He called attention to what he designated "a stark truth," specifically that "there is no military solution to Kashmir," then added the biting moral admonition that "it is wrong to support attacks against civilians across the Line of Control."<sup>17</sup>

The advent of the global war on terrorism brought only modest relief for Pakistan's beleaguered public image. Indeed, though Pakistan found itself suitably positioned once again in the frontline of the West's fight against a common enemy, Pakistan's reputation continued to take a beating. The radical Islamist *cum* terrorist brand clung to it like a tar baby—even more tightly, it seemed, when linked with allegations of nuclear recklessness. Witness, for example, the comments of Jim Hoagland, a two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, in an article appearing in the *Washington Post* on 24 October 2002, soon after charges were made that Pakistan had supplied to North Korea equipment for enriching uranium. Provocatively headlined "Nuclear Enabler: Pakistan Today Is the Most Dangerous Place on Earth," the article declared that

[President] Pervez Musharraf's Pakistan is a base from which nuclear technology, fundamentalist terrorism and life-

16. *Transition 2001* (Washington, D.C.: The Rand Corporation, January 2001), xiii, 45.

17. "Complete Text of President Clinton's Address to the People of Pakistan," *Dawn*, 25 March 2000, online edition.

destroying heroin are spread around the globe. American and French citizens and Christians of any nationality, including Pakistani, are indiscriminately slaughtered by fanatics as occasion arises. This nuclear-armed country is in part ungoverned, in part ungovernable.<sup>18</sup>

For those already convinced that the repugnant reputation was wholly deserved, the results of the October 2002 elections of Pakistan's national and provincial assemblies seemed to offer confirmation. The elections catapulted into the political limelight the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA), a fiercely anti-U.S. bloc of six ultra-conservative Islamist parties. The alliance won an unprecedented 52 of 272 seats (19 percent) in the National Assembly election, lifting the religious parties into a potentially power-brokering role in the central government for the first time in Pakistan's history; and in the provincial elections, the MMA won outright control of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and a major share in power in a coalition government in Baluchistan—like the NWFP geographically situated next to the strategically sensitive Afghanistan border. There were a number of reasons for the MMA's electoral triumph; and some of them had very little to do with Islam. Moreover, the fact that the MMA secured only 11 percent of the popular vote nationwide (and much less than that in the country's most populous provinces—the Punjab and Sindh) argued fairly persuasively against the idea that religious fanaticism was sweeping the nation. Nevertheless, the belief that Pakistan was not wholeheartedly committed to the West's side in the global war on terrorism could not easily be dismissed.

### **BANGLADESH**

Bangladesh has long enjoyed a reputation as an especially moderate Islamic country. Considered by many to be culturally more Bengali than Muslim, it was a relative latecomer to the list of nations said by some to be dangerously infected with the virus of religious radicalism. A number of developments prompted its placement in this category. One of them was the surprising capture of sixteen seats in the National Assembly by the rightwing Jamaat-i-Islami (JI)

18. Jim Hoagland, "Nuclear Enabler: Pakistan Today Is the Most Dangerous Place on Earth," *Washington Post*, 24 October 2002, online edition.

religious party in the October 2001 general elections. In fact, this figure represented only 5 percent of the total number of seats. Moreover, the JI's success was mainly the fortuitous product of its inclusion in a four-party electoral alliance formed by Begum Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP), which won a smashing victory over the Awami League and, besides, an outright parliamentary majority in its own right. Bangladesh' Islamists were not in a position, in other words, to claim an electoral coup even remotely on the scale of the one scored by Pakistan's Islamist parties exactly a year later.

A perhaps equally potent reason for ringing of the religious extremist alarm bell over Bangladesh were sensational reports of spreading Islamic militancy—including attacks on the country's Hindu minority (as much as 11 percent of the population)—that seemed to surface with increasing frequency in world media in the wake of the October 2001 elections. To the great chagrin of the BNP's leadership, widely circulated articles warning of the mushrooming growth of militant-run madrassas, of the existence of covert military training camps for recruits to the Islamic jihad, and of a thickening web of organizational links between militant Bangladeshi groups with al-Qaeda appeared under such arresting headlines as “Beware of Bangladesh—Bangladesh: Cocoon of Terror,”<sup>19</sup> and “Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror.”<sup>20</sup> An October 15, 2002 *Time* magazine report bearing the title “Deadly Cargo” observed that “signs abound that Bangladesh has become a safe haven for Islamic jihadis—including Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters fresh off the boat from Afghanistan.” This article told of a midnight rendezvous in December 2001 off the coast of Bangladesh, where more than a hundred heavily armed al-Qaeda fighters, fleeing American bombing in Afghanistan, were allegedly off-loaded and sped to hiding places presumably in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>21</sup> Faced with such reports, the Bangladesh government fought back, insisting that it was the target of an internationally orchestrated slander campaign.<sup>22</sup> It appeared most unlikely, however, that the issue of religious radicalism would soon be

19. Bertil Lintner, “Beware of Bangladesh—Bangladesh: Cocoon of Terror,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* (4 April 2002).

20. Lintner, “Bangladesh: Breeding Ground for Muslim Terror,” *Asia Times*, 21 September 2002, online edition.

21. Alex Perry, “Deadly Cargo,” *Time Asia*, 15 October 2002, online edition.

22. Haroon Habib, “Bangladesh Alleges Slander Campaign,” *The Hindu*, 18 October 2002, online edition.

removed from the domestic and foreign policy agendas of Bangladesh.

### **Workshop on Religion and Security in South Asia**

RELIGIOUS RADICALISM was a significant policy problem in most of the South Asian countries even before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. From the brief discussion above, one can readily see that it has grown into a yet more formidable problem since then. This problem clearly presents itself today as a challenge to *domestic* policymakers in most of the seven countries of South Asia; it presents itself also as a challenge at the levels of *regional* and *international* security policy. Without doubt, religious radicalism merits classification, in particular, among the most serious challenges currently confronting U.S. security policy pertaining to the South Asian region. This holds true even if the scale of religious radicalism's threat to the region (or any country in it) in the popular imagination is grossly overstated.

Recognition of the need for serious examination of the problem of religious radicalism in the South Asian region prompted the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, Hawaii, to hold a workshop on "Religion and Security in South Asia" from 19–22 August 2002. The workshop focused on the three largest countries of the region—India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. It brought together senior policymakers, defense officials, journalists, intelligence analysts, nongovernmental organization (NGO) activists, and leading academics concerned with South Asia to discuss issues relating to the phenomenon of religious radicalism in the region. The specific objective was to advance policymakers' understanding of the relationship between religious radicalism and security in this region, and thus to improve their capacity to fashion security policies appropriate to the challenges of religious radicalism in the present period. Thirty-eight individuals from six nations (Bangladesh, Denmark, India, Pakistan, Thailand, United States) participated in the workshop.

The workshop was organized into nine panels focused on three broad themes: (1) the ideological, organizational, and institutional

roots of religious radicalism in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, (2) the relationship of religious radicalism to the threat of both domestic and interstate violence in South Asia, and (3) the policy implications, both domestic and international, of religious radicalism. Specific questions considered in the workshop included the following:

- What is the scale of religious radicalism's threat to the security of South Asia and adjoining regions?
- What differences exist in the nature and scale of religious radicalism in the three countries under study?
- In organization, ideology, and political impact, how does *Islamic* radicalism compare with *Hindu* radicalism?
- Exactly what does religion, understood as a body of beliefs and doctrine, have to do with religious radicalism? To what extent is religious identity merely a *vehicle* rather than an *inspiration* for religious radicalism?
- How important are madrassas as "incubators" or "factories" of Islamic militancy and terrorism?
- What are the causes and current dimensions of inter-communal and sectarian violence in these three countries?
- What is the relationship between ethnic separatism and religious radicalism—in particular as manifested in Kashmir and in India's Northeast?
- What impact has the global war on terrorism had on the growth and severity of religious radicalism in the three countries? In particular, what has been its impact on India-Pakistan relations?
- How have the international community and, especially, the United States government reacted to religious radicalism in South Asia? How have their policies differed in this regard from country to country in the region?
- What policy measures should the United States, other countries, and international organizations take in South Asia to best meet the challenge of religious radicalism?

The papers assembled in this volume address these issues and others. From the beginning, care was taken to ensure that all topics dealt with—all of them enormously controversial—would be addressed from a diversity of philosophical and national points of view. Thus, no “school perspective”—much less any “school solution”—will be found herein. The organizers of the workshop, and of the book, understood that a major challenge was to maintain throughout the project a commitment to impartial, unfettered, and rigorous scholarly inquiry. Naturally, this does not mean that a reader will find the argument in each chapter entirely appealing. Were that the case, the organizers would surely have failed in their task. It is the hope of the project’s organizers that the contents of this volume will stimulate closer attention—by policymakers as well as academic analysts—to the widespread, multifaceted, and profoundly important phenomenon of religious radicalism in South Asia.

PART ONE

# ROOTS OF RELIGIOUS RADICALISM



# 2

MOHAMMAD WASEEM

## **Origins and Growth Patterns of Islamic Organizations in Pakistan**

**D**uring the flurry of scholarly studies after September 11, 2001, researchers typically focused on investigation into Quranic teachings, analysis of *jihad* and jihadis and interpretations of the “Muslim mind” in general. This approach was sometimes put in a larger context of the perceived clash of civilizations. The specific Islamic civilization was characterized as a relatively emotive, undisciplined, medievalist and essentially irrational force inherently disruptive of the modern civilization led by the West. Often, jihadi parties and groups, topped by the erstwhile Taliban and its ally al-Qaeda operating in the region surrounding Pakistan, provided the basic material for outlining the emergence of a self-propelling motivating force in the form of Islamic organizations. According to this approach, this inner state of mind of Muslim terrorists inspired by jihadist teachings lies at the heart of the problem.

Paul Brass distinguishes this so-called primordial approach from the instrumentalist or circumstantialist approach, which considers Islamic ideology as a social construct sponsored by the elite in pursuit

of political objectives.<sup>1</sup> While the primordial approach stresses the innate mobilizing and inspiring strength of the appeal of Islamic values and norms, the circumstantialist approach focuses on state policies and organizational goals. The latter approach has been an obvious casualty in the heat of debate during the war against terror. It has been generally discounted as irrelevant and inapplicable to the current Muslim challenge to the world peace and stability. For example, in a recent opinion poll in the United States, 82 percent of people believed that terrorism was not related to public policy as pursued by Washington. In most Muslim countries, including Pakistan, there are estimated to be as many people or even more who would believe otherwise. In other words, the Muslim self-statement is rooted in the circumstantialist approach to Islamic militancy. According to this, it is the perceived unjust policies of the United States that should be held responsible for the emergence of anti-American feelings throughout the Muslim world. It is argued that the content and style of Islamic organizational activities can be most fruitfully evaluated in a contextual framework.

We propose to look at the issue of Islamic militancy in Pakistan with reference to the postcolonial state, which cultivated Islam as a supreme source of legitimacy. In addition, we shall discuss the emergence of political Islam as an electoral force, a quarter of a century after independence. Similarly, we want to analyze the political role of sectarian organizations along with their madrassa-based educational and training activities. Finally, we shall discuss the input of international Islamic networks in the emergence of the militant thought and practice.

## State and Islam

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE POPULAR RESPONSE to Western policies or to policies of pro-Western regimes in the Muslim world, there can be fundamental differences in the potential of Islamic movements to challenge, reshape or topple the ruling set-up. This depends largely on the nature of a specific Muslim state. On the one hand, there are the

1. See Paul Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation and Ethnic Identity among the Muslims of South Asia," in D. D. Taylor and Malcolm Yapp, eds., *Political Identity in South Asia* (Surrey, 1979), 47–48.

ex-British colonial societies including India, Sri Lanka, Kenya and Ghana as well as Muslim states such as Malaysia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sudan, and Nigeria. Here, a kind of “tutelary democracy” prevailed at the time of independence, comprising objectified sources of authority in the sense of rule of law and rule of public representatives on the one hand and the power base of traditional elite operating in the modern state sector through electoral politics on the other.<sup>2</sup> No populist revolution has upturned a government in any of the Commonwealth countries in the postwar era, from either religious or class perspective.

On the other hand, there are non-ex-British colonies such as Vietnam, Kampuchea, Angola, Mozambique and Muslim states of Algeria and Indonesia. Here, the second component of the British colonial legacy, i.e., the traditional elite acting as a broker between the state and society, was missing. As the “assimilationist” policies of colonial governments co-opted the local elite, the latter lost legitimacy in the public eye and thus rendered initiative into the hands of radical urban intelligentsia. Following the pattern of their modern predecessors who had fought against the French colonial rule, Islamic groups in Algeria ran a populist election campaign and almost captured the state in the aborted 1993 elections.

At the other end, Muslim countries with a non-colonial past, including Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria, lacked the first component of the colonial state, i.e., objectification of the sources of authority in the form of constitutional rule. Here, the state depended in the last resort on a “community of trust” represented by Pehlavi dynasty, Kabul nobility, House of Saud, Takritis and Alavis, respectively.<sup>3</sup> The process of modernization, postwar communication explosion and horizontal mobility—especially urbanization—created enormous pressures on these states. They lacked an internally differentiated legal-institutional mechanism to keep the oppositional movements decentralized as well as de-ideologized. Iran and Afghanistan collapsed in the face of these movements, while Saudi Arabia faces

2. Myron Weiner, “Empirical Democratic Theory,” in Myron Weiner and Ergun Ozbudun, eds., *Competitive Elections in Developing Countries* (Duke University Press, 1987), 4–5.

3. Charles Tripp, “Islam and the State in the Middle East” (paper presented at the Conference on Sectarianism and the Secular State, ICES, Colombo, 1992), 3.

grim prospects of a populist challenge in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Pakistan is a constitutional state, with a colonial legacy deeply rooted in the rule of law as well as electoral democracy, which was disrupted by four stints of military rule. Paradoxically, the new state was carved out of India as a Muslim state in the teeth of opposition from some Islamic groups and parties led by Jamiat Ulema Hind (JUH). However, certain lesser Islamic groups became part of the Pakistan movement and later emerged as an in-built pressure group within the post-independence state system. We can outline four major currents of Islamic thinking and activity in British India that together formed the Islamic tradition as part of the political culture of Pakistan in its early phase: mass agitation such as the Khilafat movement and Hijrat movement (1920–24); institutions of Islamic learning such as at Deoband, Breilly and Lucknow, which provided a framework for the Muslim self-statement about classical values and norms of Islam and the contemporary response of Muslim societies to Western domination; Islamic revivalist movements led by Wahabis at one end and Ahmadis at the other, with organizations such as Tableeq and Tanzim operating in the middle for restoring the glory of Islam; and mulla activism in the Pakhtun tribal area adjoining Afghanistan, which characterized the local rebellion against a remote, impersonal and alien state in a narodnik spirit.<sup>4</sup> Islam in Pakistan has represented all four trends represented by street agitation, anti-Western intellectual discourse, religious scholarship of madrassas and the potential for a xenophobic tribal rebellion in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), respectively. While the general public displayed these strands of Islamic thought and action, the official Islam focused on the “two-nation theory” and later Pakistan ideology as sources of state legitimacy and profile of national destiny.

For a quarter of a century after independence, the modernist Muslim elite kept the reigns of government firmly in its own hands. The logic of Partition as fulfillment of the demand for a separate Muslim homeland carved out of British India kept Islam at the center of the nationalist discourse. Additionally, the migrant-led ruling

4. D. Reetz, “Muslim Concepts of Local Power and Resistance: Islamic Militants in the Indian Frontier Province before Independence” (paper presented at the Fourteenth European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Copenhagen, 21–24 August 1996), 2.

elite—including the first governor general Jinnah and the first prime minister Liaquat, who came from Bombay and United Provinces (UP) in India, respectively—opted for a model of centralist rule sometimes described as the viceregal system.<sup>5</sup> Governments used Islamic ideology to counter the demand for provincial autonomy in pursuit of their agenda for national unity. Ulema and Islamists in general occupied a secondary role in public life. While operating from the madrassa and the pulpit of the mosque, they demanded rule of shari'a in Pakistan. Under successive parliamentary governments (1947–58) followed by General Ayub's military—and later presidential—rule (1958–69), the ruling elite adopted various strategies to control, cajole or co-opt Islamist elements. The latter condemned the former for being lackeys of the secular West.

### Emergence of Political Islam

THE 1970 ELECTION WAS A TURNING POINT in the history of Islamist groups and parties. General Yahya's military government (1969–71) faced the leftist challenge from Zulfikar Ali (Z.A.) Bhutto in West Pakistan and the Bengali nationalist challenge from Mujiburrehman in East Pakistan. It decided to back Islamist elements in both wings to stem the tide of anti-establishment feelings. The 1970 election is generally identified with the emergence of politics of the Left in West Pakistan, not the least because it led to the formation of Bhutto's populist government in Islamabad.<sup>6</sup> However, the 1970 election also ushered in an era of politics of Islam. Ulema moved out of their mosques and madrassas, and managed to get eighteen out of three hundred seats in the national assembly (NA). Surprisingly, the conservative Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI)—based on the Deobandi sect—got seven NA seats in the Pakhtun tribal belt of NWFP and Baluchistan. It formed coalition governments in the two provinces and even got chief ministership for itself in NWFP. The relatively less strict Jamiat Ulema Pakistan (JUP)—based on the Brelvi sect—also got seven seats, while the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI)—the essentialist party of university graduates—won four seats.

5. See K. B. Sayeed, *The Political System in Pakistan* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968).

6. For example, see S. J. Burki and Craig Baxter, "Socioeconomic Indicators of the People's Party Vote in the Punjab: A Study at the Tehsil Level," in W. H. Wriggins, ed., *Pakistan in Transition* (Islamabad: 1975), 64–67.

While politics of the Left represented the popular wave under Z.A. Bhutto, the opposition politics took a turn in the 1970s in favor of Islamic parties. First, they moved from a mere pressure group to becoming stakeholders in the political system itself, and sought to Islamize the system from within. Second, they formed coalition governments in the two provincial governments and thus got a share in state power in terms of resource allocation to their constituents. Third, in the event of a total defeat of the mainstream Pakistan Muslim League (PML) factions in the 1970 elections, the mantle of legitimacy for the role of opposition through the media and public forums fell on the JI-JUI-JUP representatives in and outside legislatures. They consistently criticized Bhutto for his un-Islamic (read “socialist”) policies and introduced a comprehensive Islamic discourse for discussing the national agenda in public. Finally, they lent a religious character to the anti-Bhutto movement after the controversial elections of 1977. The relatively secular ethnic elite and liberal mainstream politicians in the opposition’s Pakistan National Alliance (PNA) felt obliged to accept the ideological leadership of Islamic parties, not the least because the latter mobilized thousands of madrasa students to bring demonstrations out in the street and used mosques for propagating war against an “infidel” Bhutto.

Islamism almost forced itself as a source of legitimacy for the new military leader General Zia (1977–88). The more the Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) leader Bhutto displayed his potential to challenge Zia from jail, the more Zia manipulated Islamic ideology for stabilizing his regime. He issued the controversial Hadood Ordinances shortly before hanging Bhutto ostensibly to pre-empt the much-feared agitation from his party. Zia castigated democracy as an importation from the West and instead upheld Islam as a source of legitimacy. The Islamic parties JI, JUI and JUP joined Zia’s military government in an all-out effort to stop Bhutto’s party from coming back to power in the event of elections. Cooperation between army and Islamic parties that started under Yahya came to fruition under Zia. The JI earned the dubious title of Martial Law’s B team. Islam and democracy appeared to be incompatible entities.

During the Zia period, Islamist groups and parties gained immensely in terms of building an image of street power. The first major agitation of Islamist elements in the 1953 anti-Ahmadiya movement had brought down the Daultana government in Punjab

and subsequently the Nazimuddin government in the Center. In the following decades, several governments took to their heels in the face of a threat of Islamic agitation.

In 1962, Ayub accepted the demand from the Islamist group for changing the name of the country from Republic of Pakistan to Islamic Republic of Pakistan. In 1974, Z.A. Bhutto obliged Islamists by declaring Ahmadis—his erstwhile allies in the 1970 elections—a religious minority. In 1981, Zia conceded to the Shia activists by exempting Shias from payment of Zakat, which was generally identified with Sunni jurisprudence. In 1995, Benazir Bhutto withdrew her decision to audit the finances of madrassas, stop guerrilla training of their students and reform their hate-based curricula in the face of a nationwide strike. In 1998, Nawaz Sharif met the same fate when he wanted to implement these reforms. In 2000, General Musharraf withdrew his proposal to reform the procedural aspects of the Blasphemy Law in the face of a threat of street agitation from Islamists. In this way Islamic parties demonstrated their street power whenever their interests were threatened.

The war in Afghanistan, which was initiated, financed and sponsored by Islamabad and, indirectly but more effectively, by Washington, took Islamic politics into its militant mode of operation. Afghan mujahideen and their counterparts from Pakistan embraced the ideology of jihad against the Soviet Union. Islamic parties, especially JI but also JUI with its base among the tribal Pathan population in the vicinity of the war theater, accumulated immense financial resources, gained access to the diplomatic world and got hold of lethal weapons in large numbers. However, these parties progressively lost electoral space. Their combined vote came down from 21.5 percent in 1970 to 6.7 percent in 1993. In 1997, all Islamic parties put together got two out of 207 National Assembly seats. It was clear that their real strength and agenda had moved outside the narrow confines of electoral politics and even the territorial limits of Pakistan.

The armed might of jihadist parties was rendered ineffective during the U.S.-led war against terrorism in 2001–02. The loss of direction for Islamists, combined with despondency, led to reworking of links with ideological allies at home and abroad. As Pakistan moved to elections in October 2002, the anti-American sentiment provided a rallying ground for Islamic parties.

## Sectarian Dimension

ALMOST ALL ISLAMIC PARTIES and groups in Pakistan are based in specific sects and subjects. Only JI, along with its student body Islamic Jamiat Talba (IJT), is supra-sectarian in approach and activity.<sup>7</sup> This party represented the Islamist conservative section of the urban middle class, educated in colleges and universities. JI has no constituency in rural areas, few pockets of support among industrial workers and a limited electoral strength. It has essentially operated as a pressure group for Islamizing the state and implementing Sharia. It produced Islamic literature in the Urdu language, which tried to grapple with modern issues of politics and administration, education and health, and manners and morals. JI aimed at Islamizing the state system of Pakistan through electoral democracy, using the instrument of law. It established its student wings in the institutions of higher learning throughout the country. The military elite often used the JI's endemic presence in professions—e.g., Urdu press, as well as colleges and universities—to destabilize an incumbent government, especially a PPP government. The party enjoyed its heyday under Zia who turned its intellectual, organizational and ideological resources into a great asset for his agenda to deflect democratic challenges at home and regulate the support mechanism for the war in Afghanistan. Being educated in colleges and universities, JI-oriented men and women have a strong job orientation and indeed already have a considerable presence within the power-wielding institutions of the state.

However, a sectarian party is the prototype of Islamic organization today.<sup>8</sup> Pakistanis are predominantly Sunni and followers of the Hanafi school of thought (as opposed to the relatively more strict Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi schools popular in several Arab countries). Sunni-Hanafis have their center of gravity in the Indo-Muslim civilization, especially in the two seminaries at Breilly and Deoband in northern India. Brelvis encourage saint-worship and shrine-worship, indulge in superstitious practices and uphold the tradition of Sufi orders established over centuries. They represent the majority in Pakistan, with a large base in the peasant culture of Punjab. JUP, as

7. For details, see Vali R. Nasr, *The Vanguard of Islamic Revolution: The Jamat Islami of Pakistan* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995).

8. Mohammad Waseem, "Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan," in K. M. de Silva, ed., *Conflict and Violence in South Asia* (Kandy, 2000), 71–74.

the leading Brelvi party, is typically non-militant. Brelvi ulema allow separation between church and state inasmuch as their followers vote for local influentials who may not be JUI nominees. JUP has generally kept a low profile, except during the 1977 anti-Bhutto movement. It held an all-Pakistan Sunni conference in 2000. As an offshoot of JUP in Karachi, the Sunni Tehrik represents a diehard approach to the Sunni agenda.

While Brelvis represent oral orthodoxy cushioned by devotional practices, Deobandis represent literate orthodoxy with a strict adherence to the classical texts of Islam. This sect has produced several organizations: JUH in the 1920s, Ahrars and Majlis Tahaffuz Khatme Nubawat (MTKN) in the 1940s and its leading party in Pakistan JUI, which was sometimes divided into rival factions, such as Hazarvi versus Thanvi groups and Fazlurrehman versus Samiul Haq groups. As JUI(s) embraced militant politics during the Zia period, the Sipah-i Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) emerged as its sectarian outfit. The latter in turn gave birth to a terrorist group Lashkar-i Jhangvi (LJ), which had a clear mandate to kill Shias and destroy their infrastructure. As the main anti-Shia groups for the last two decades, SSP and LJ were widely held responsible for sectarian terrorism. Nawaz Sharif introduced an Anti-Sectarian Bill in the national assembly in 1993 to control their activities. But the bill was allowed to lapse, ostensibly for the fear of alienating the pro-Nawaz Sunni establishment. General Musharraf finally banned LJ in 2001.

In Punjab, the appeal of Deobandis has been limited to some lower middle class sections of the population. However, Pakhtuns of NWFP and also Baluchistan emerged as natural followers of Deobandism. The rigid adherence to Pakhtun tribal customs amply correlated with textual rigidity and puritanical behavior preached by Deoband. The popular Deobandi institution of Tablighi Jamat was concerned with proselytization, correct ritual practice and a jihad of soul through peaceful means rather than through militant action against non-believers. On the other hand, the Pakhtun Deobandism, and later Afghan Deobandism, flourished under war against communist infidels.<sup>9</sup> When the chief of the seminary at Deoband and his entourage visited NWFP in 2001 to participate in the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary

9. Barbara Metcalf, "Piety, Persuasion and Politics: Deoband's Model of Islamic Activism" (working paper), 5.

of their school, they were reportedly alienated by the deafening sound of gunfire that welcomed them. Deobandism, along with tribalism rooted in the Pakhtun segmentary lineage system, produced a jihadi culture that soon spilled over to various areas of Punjab and Sindh. A thriving gun industry in the tribal area and the U.S.-supplied arms in the hands of Afghan mujahideen built the new jihadi infrastructure in northwest Pakistan.

Another Sunni subsect called Wahabi, or Salafi, has recently gained ground in major cities of Pakistan. Jamiat Ahle Hadith (JAH) remains the major Wahabi party. It is widely known that Salafis represent and safeguard Saudi Arabian interests in Pakistan. Being very strict about Islamic teachings and disallowing liberal and modern interpretations of the Quran and Sunna, this sect has a limited appeal beyond certain commercial and professional middle class sections. After the 1991 Gulf War, when most of Islamic parties and groups opposed the U.S.-led coalition against Saddam Hussein, Saudi Arabia felt obliged to shift its patronage away from parties such as JI and created a string of Salafi establishments in Pakistan. In the backdrop of the continuing war in Afghanistan and the emergence of jihadist struggle in Indian-held Kashmir, the new Salafi outfit Dawat-ul-Irshad (DI) established guerrilla training camps such as Ma'skar Tayaba in Kunar province in Afghanistan and Markaz Tayaba in Muridke near Lahore. Their guerrilla force, Lashkar Tayaba, claimed several activities in Indian Kashmir. Salafis are ultra-fundamentalists in their approach to theological matters.<sup>10</sup>

The Shia-Sunni conflict has occupied the center stage in terms of sectarian strife during the last two decades. The Shia, as a minority at 15 percent of the population, became overtly political in the late 1970s. First, Zia's largely Sunni-based Islamization program shook the Shia community out of complacency and caused widespread mobilization in the pursuit of sectarian ends. Secondly, Khomeini's revolution in Iran reinvigorated Shia minorities everywhere, especially in Pakistan. Shias formed a new party, Tehrik Nifaz Fiqh-i Jafaria (TNFJ), in a bid to safeguard their religious and economic interests, and establish an Islamic state in Pakistan. The murder of the Shia revolutionary leader Ariful Hussaini, allegedly at the hands of Sunnis, was followed by revenge killings on both sides. SSP led a vehement

10. See Guilain Denooux, "The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam," *Middle East Policy* 9, no. 2 (June 2002).

campaign for declaring Pakistan a Sunni state, and carried out numerous acts of terrorism against Shias. Some younger Shias formed their own militant organization, Sipah Muhammed (SM), which, however, soon lost ground.

One can distinguish between the two generations of Islamists in Pakistan's history. The first-generation Islamists, who were generally supra-sectarian, aimed at changing the law of the land, struggled to enter the state through elections, operated through the printed word and dabbled in conceptualizing the West, modernity, science, public morality and statehood. The second-generation Islamists were sectarian, localist and militant. They lacked intellectual tools for understanding the dynamics of the state, the region, and the world at large. They focused on simple polarities such as Islam and the West as good and evil, respectively. They prepared themselves for war against the perceived domination of Christians and Jews over the Muslim World. The liberal intelligentsia often criticized the first generation for trying to turn the wheel of history backwards. It condemned the second generation for attempting to change the rules of game from ballot to bullet and "externalizing" the public agenda in terms of a grand polarity between Islam and the West in the world at large.

### **Institutional Setting**

ISLAMIC SEMINARIES (MADRASSAS) have made news headlines ever since mujahideen organized resistance against the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan. The number of madrassas in Pakistan increased from around 700 in both East and West wings to 868 in Punjab alone in 1975 to 3,874 in the whole country in 1995. In 2002, more than 5,000 madrassas were supposed to be active on the ground.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1980s, thousands of new madrassas were opened in the backdrop of state incentives such as allocation of funds through the Zakat Foundation. Many of these madrassas operated as base camps for recruiting and training Afghan mujahideen. Typically, madrassas have been socially embedded in sectarian communities. The five major federations or associations of madrassas in charge of their organizational and infrastructural requirements belong to Deobandi, Brelvi, Salafi and Shia sects, and JI. Apart from a few centers of excel-

11. Waseem, "Sectarian Conflict," 66–70.

lence in Islamic teaching, these madrassas generally lack in quality. Saudi Arabia and Iran allegedly provided financial and infrastructural support to Sunni and Shia madrassas, respectively, and thus waged a proxy war on the soil of Pakistan. Students of madrassas typically belonged to families living at the edge of the society in terms of poverty, suppression, economic breakdown and migration from rural to urban areas. Students were socialized along the message of hostility toward others, including institutional and sectarian rivals and religious enemies, especially Hindus and Jews, the Westernized ruling elite in Pakistan and the West. There are many respectable madrassas, such as Jamia Ashrafia, Jamia Rashidia and Madrassa Khairul Ulem, which impart classical knowledge of Islam. Indeed, madrassas generally remained confined to teaching religious classics and preaching piety in their respective localities. However, a minority of these madrassas was engaged in the jihadist activities, especially in the backdrop of mujahideen's war in Afghanistan, followed by Taliban's rule in Kabul from 1996 to 2001.

Benazir and Nawaz Sharif balked over the issue of regulating madrassas for the fear of inviting the wrath of Islamist groups. The Musharraf government issued a Madrassa Registration Ordinance in June 2002 to control foreign funding, improve curricula and disallow training in the use of arms.<sup>12</sup> An umbrella organization of madrassas, Jamiat Ittehad Ulama (JIU), rejected the ordinance and opted for a general strike. Its predecessor had been active against all official attempts at regulation of madrassas from 1995 onward.

The thinking in official circles and in the educated middle class about madrassas revolves around the idea of bringing them into the mainstream education program. For that purpose, it has been suggested to introduce computers, science education and other practical arts in madrassas to enable them to produce students with the potential for productive participation in public life. However, a parallel mode of thinking points out that such a policy will further strengthen madrassa people in pursuit of their primitive goals through militant activity with the help of modern organizational and technological means. At the heart of the problem lies the inefficiency and inability of the state to improve the regular school system and

12. *Dawn* (19 June 2002).

link the educational and manpower policies to curb unemployment and improve social services.

### **International Dimension**

CONTEMPORARY ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS have internalized the technological dynamics of globalization. The speed and style as well as content of messages sent across the world have multiplied the impact and scope of Islamic movement everywhere. We can outline three major aspects of this phenomenon. First and foremost, it is the worldview of Pakistani decision makers (as well as opinion makers) that provides the conceptual framework for intellectual activity of local Muslims. The articulate sections of the population in Pakistan have a worldview characterized by an Indo-centric foreign policy, on-again, off-again suspicion of the West, and a world of Islam perspective. The unresolved Kashmir Conflict has kept Indo-Pakistan relations at a boiling point for most of the post-independence period. For eighteen years after the emergence of Bangladesh, Kashmir remained on the back burner of Pakistan's foreign policy. As the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan, Kashmir emerged as the new area of Muslim struggle against the non-Muslim rule in India. A decade of jihad, which pushed Moscow out of Afghanistan, gave birth to a new doctrine of armed struggle in pursuit of the goal of national self-determination. The fact that it was a proxy war between the two superpowers and that it was the U.S. commitment of financial, military and diplomatic resources that decisively turned the tide in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union did not represent the central point of understanding of the mujahideen's victory in Kabul, either in Afghanistan or in Pakistan. A decade of mujahideen struggle in Kashmir started, which occasionally brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war.

Large sections of Islamic groups and madrassa-trained students emerged as the new generation of mujahideen committed to rid Kashmir of Hindu rule. The new pattern of armed activity in Indian Kashmir produced a variety of militant organizations. Some were affiliated with Islamic parties in Pakistan, such as Hizbe-ul Mujahideen with JI, and Lashkar Tauheed and Salafi Group for Call and Combat with JAH. Others had Arab, Central Asian and Afghan connections, such as Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, al-Jihad based in Egypt, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, al-Qaeda Islamic Army,

Taliban Islamic Movement and Harkat-i-Islami. Similarly, al-Badr, Jamiat al-Mujahideen, Harkatul Ansar (renamed Harkatul Mujahideen) and Jaish-e-Muhammed (renamed al-Furqan) operated in Indian Kashmir but cultivated close relations in Pakistan and other Muslim countries. Various new groups have emerged in the triangle of crisis comprising Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan, including al-Uzman, al-Omar and al-Saiqa. Others were charity organizations such as Wafa Humanitarian Organization and al-Rashid Trust, as well as the controversial Ummat Tameer Nau, led by an ex-chief of Atomic Energy Commission of Pakistan. One can also mention smaller outfits such as Karwan-i-Khalid, Zarb-Momin and Zarb-Islami. These organizations operated in the three countries of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan in pursuit of shared foreign policy and strategic objectives, which were ideologically embedded in the larger civilizational goals.

Confusion, conflict and suspicion of the West in Pakistan draw on the colonial past, the historical legacy of the Crusades and, more recently, the Arab-Israel conflict. All Muslims, Arab and non-Arab, liberal and conservative, educated and non-educated, share the agony of humiliation in the form of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories. Public opinion in Pakistan, as elsewhere in Muslim countries, holds the West, especially the United States, responsible for this grave aggression against a classical Muslim land. Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza has done more damage to relations of Islam with the West than has any other issue during the last three and a half decades. Other Muslim causes such as Kashmir, Chechnya, Bosnia and Kosovo belonged to communities that were once part of Muslim empires but became politically unprotected after the frontiers of Islam shrank over the centuries. The dichotomous model of the world, along the lines of Islam and the West, has taken root in Muslim societies everywhere, even as their governing elite continue to look toward the West for financial and diplomatic support as well as national security. This attitude has crystallized into an Islam perspective whereby Muslims operate in a mini world of their own and seek to establish institutional networks to unite this world against the wider world presided by the West.

Secondly, transnational Islamic networking is a major development in the non-state sector in recent decades. One can outline several

nodal points of contact between Muslim activists throughout the world. First, Islamic militant groups from Muslim societies bear grievances against the West for causing damage to their territorial interests such as in Palestine. Second, historical Muslim minorities struggle to safeguard their cultural, religious, economic and political interests against policies of their respective majority-based states such as Russia, India and China. Third, Muslim expatriates in Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Germany feel marginalized in terms of employment, cultural autonomy and racial harmony. For example, the second-generation Pakistanis in Britain experienced multiple setbacks, including loss of identity, loss of culture, and loss of status. Against odds of all kinds, Islamic identity operates as irreducible minima for Muslim migrants in the West, who suffer gross alienation from their respective state systems and mainstream educational, cultural and media systems.<sup>13</sup>

The response of Muslims in all these situations is the recourse to the cause of Muslim unity, solidarity and fraternity. There is a reworking of the Muslim project in process, which was initially started by the Muslim Brotherhood in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Islamic militants in Pakistan, as well as among British Pakistanis and across the border in Indian Kashmir, tend to see their counterparts in Hezbollah of Lebanon, Islamic Jihad of Egypt and Hamas of Palestine. While terrorism in the West is perceived as disruption of a just society by unjust means, Islamic militants understand terrorism as a form of mandatory war against the unjust global society presided by the United States.

Pakistani activist groups and individuals have frequently interacted with their counterparts in Western societies as well as in other Muslim communities. In comparison, there is far less activity by way of transnational networking among civil society activists from universities and the media, as well as lawyers, engineers, doctors, artists, writers and human rights activists. While globalization is progressing

13. See Yunas Samad, "The Plural Guises of Multiculturalism: Conceptualizing a Fragmented Paradigm," in Tariq Modood and Prina Werbner, eds., *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe: Racism, Identity and Community* (London: Zed Books, 1997).

14. Laden Boroumand and Roya Boroumand, "Terror, Islam and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 2002).

rapidly through the communications explosion, the integrative and assimilative activities in the cultural, educational and political fields have failed to keep pace. The United States is widely criticized by the liberal intelligentsia in Pakistan, as elsewhere in the Muslim world, for hoisting a military dictator on top of the nation and for paying lip service to the cause of democracy.

Thirdly, the self-statement of the West in terms of the perceived clash of civilizations has not helped matters. The Western input in the emergence and activation of the dichotomous worldview among Muslims can be understood in terms of a continuing preoccupation with the “otherness” of Islam. For example, terrorism is conceived as a state of (Muslim) mind rather than as an issue related to U.S. public policy. Similarly, there is rampant cynicism in Muslim countries rooted in the injustice syndrome, drawing heavily on unresolved conflicts such as Palestine and Kashmir. Policies, or indeed non-policies, about the issue of settlement of millions of Palestinian and Afghan refugees, among others, have turned their temporary settlements into breeding houses of hatred and frustration. Similarly, the policy of rendering Muslim countries as rogue states and thus pushing them to exit from the world system has mobilized a large number of people in Muslim countries belonging to South and Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, as well as historical Muslim minorities and the Muslim expatriate community in the West.

Over the centuries, Pakistanis have lacked a continuous identity that would have served as a wellspring of territorial nationalism in the country. They are by definition pan-Islamic in their vision. The process of moving away from Hindu-dominated Indian civilization, which started in 1947 and acquired a new impetus in 1971 after the emergence of Bangladesh, has got Pakistan deeply involved in the destiny of the Islamic nations and groups the world over. Islamic organizations in Pakistan thrive on their transnational vision and networks operating within a dichotomous framework of world politics.

## Conclusion

OUR OBSERVATIONS POINT to the complex origins and patterns of growth of Islamic organizations in Pakistan. We have discussed the way Islamic ideology functioned as the supreme source of legitimacy for the state, and defined the parameters of the political context that eventually laid down the turf for politics of identity. The Islamic movement changed its character from a pressure group for establishing the rule of shari'a in the first quarter of a century after independence, to an electoral and then a militant force in the second quarter. The regional input in the form of the war in Afghanistan combined with Zia's vehement pursuit of the Islamization program in the 1980s to produce a dynamic pan-Islamic agenda and a vast Islamic network at home and abroad based on sectarian parties and madrassas.

The army-dominated state apparatus in Pakistan has militated against providing social, cultural, economic and political space to the civil society in general and public representatives in particular. On the other hand, Islamic parties and groups enjoyed a relatively free hand to operate in the educational, cultural and, increasingly, political fields. Even more significantly, the state elite sought to provide a role for Islamist groups against various political forces identified with the Left, ethnolinguistic communities, provincial autonomy activists and the liberal intelligentsia. The involvement of Islamic militants in the wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir contributed to privatization of foreign policy and militarization of Islamic activists. The international Islamic networks finally provided a global agenda for the movement in terms of endemic anti-Americanism. The unresolved conflicts around the world involving Muslim communities, especially in Palestine, sharpened the boundaries of the conflict. We can conclude by observing that state policies, regional instability and non-resolution of conflicts involving Muslims in the region and in the world at large are the leading determinants of the nature and direction of Islamic organizations in Pakistan.

# 3

TAJ I. HASHMI

## **Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh: Genesis, Dynamics and Implications**

**A**pparently, the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971 in the name of Bengali nationalism signaled the departure of “political Islam” or Islam-based state ideology of the Pakistani period (1947–71). To some scholars, the creation of Bangladesh delegitimized the “two-nation theory,” which in 1947 justified the communal partition of the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. Soon after its emergence, Bangladesh adopted the four-pronged state ideology of nationalism, democracy, socialism and secularism. However, not long after the emergence of the nation-state, Islam re-emerged as an important factor in the country, both socially and politically. Although the not-so-democratic regime of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (1972–75) retained secularism, along with democracy, socialism and nationalism, as the state principles, his assassination and the overthrow of his government by a military coup d’état in August 1975 brought Islam-oriented state ideology by shunning secularism and socialism. Not long after his ascendancy as the new ruler in November 1975, General Ziaur Rahman replaced the outwardly secular “Bengali nationalism” with “Bangladeshi nationalism.” One may argue that “Bangladeshi” is

inclusive of the different non-Bengali minorities; nevertheless, the term highlights the Muslim identity of the country, differentiating its Muslim majority Bengalis from their Hindu majority counterparts in West Bengal in India.

It is noteworthy that most Bangladeshi Muslims suffer from a tremendous identity crisis. They are not sure which comes first—their loyalty toward Islam or toward Bangladesh. It seems, after the failure of the “socialist-secular-Bengali nationalist” Mujib government in 1975, his successors realized the importance of political Islam to legitimize their rule; hence, the rapid Islamization of the polity. This type of state-sponsored Islam, reflecting the hegemonic culture of the civil and military oligarchies seeking political legitimacy, may be classified as “political Islam.” This is not typical to Bangladesh and has happened elsewhere in the Muslim world. Countries such as Egypt and Algeria, for example, which also went through socialist and secular phases of their history under Nasser, Ben Bella and Boumediene before turning to “political/militant Islam” in the recent past. Very similar to Egypt and Algeria, while the successors of Nasser and Boumediene have adopted political Islam to legitimize their rule, the successors of Mujib also adopted political Islam after the failure of the “welfare state” or the promised socialist utopia. The case of Pakistan is very different. The ruling classes there have established their hegemony by legitimizing themselves in the name of Islam—the *raison d’être* for Pakistan, which has a special significance for the bulk of the Pakistani Muslims.

Meanwhile, like their counterparts elsewhere, Bangladeshi Muslims at the different levels have adopted various other types of Islam—escapist, fatalist, puritan, and militant, for example—as alternatives to their failed welfare state. An understanding of political Islam and other variables in the arena of Bangladesh politics requires an intimate knowledge of what the people need and what the leaders have been promising them since the inception of the separatist movement for Bangladesh in the 1960s. The gap between what the people have attained since independence and what the liberal-democrat, socialist-secular and nationalist leaders (both “Bengali” and “Bangladeshi”) have been promising to deliver is the key to our understanding of the problem.

This chapter addresses why and how Islam has re-emerged in Bangladesh as socially and politically significant by highlighting both the local and external factors in this regard. This study examines the nature of Islam in South Asia and elsewhere in the Muslim world. A historical appraisal of the State-Islam-*Ulema* (Muslim theologians) nexus and its gradual transformation are important aspects of this study. In sum, the study shows that both the state and large sections of the population have been using Islam for political purpose. While secularism, democracy and independence are burning issues in the political arena, nobody can ignore the cultural and political aspects of Islam in Bangladesh. Various groups of nationalists, sections of the ulema representing both the political and non-political organizations, and even members of the armed forces from time to time champion the cause of Islam—some of them by openly demanding the transformation of the country into a *shari'a*-based “Islamic State,” and some by opposing liberal democratic and secular institutions with a bias toward political Islam. Who will eventually call the shots in the near future is the question.

Since Bangladesh is the third-largest Muslim country in the world (after Indonesia and Pakistan), it is only natural to assume that Islam plays an important role in molding its politics and culture. Around 90 percent of the population is Muslim—most importantly, representing one of the poorest, least literate and most backward sections of the world population. If mass poverty, illiteracy and unequal distribution of wealth have any positive correlation with Islamic resurgence and militancy, then Bangladesh has to be a fertile breeding ground of what is wrongly defined as “Islamic fundamentalism.” Of late, the Awami League (the party under Sheikh Mujib that championed the cause of greater autonomy for East Pakistan, ultimately leading to the independence of Bangladesh) has been projecting its main political opponents—the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Jamaat-i-Islami (partners in the BNP-led coalition government since October 2001)—as “fundamentalist” with a view to gaining political leverage after its abysmal performance in the parliamentary elections held in October 2001.<sup>1</sup> However, despite its poverty, backwardness and the preponderance of Islamic ethos in the mainstream of its politics and

1. *Bangladesh Observer* and *Daily Star*, October 3, 4 and 5, 2001.

culture, Bangladesh is not just another Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia or even Pakistan. Despite having many striking similarities with the Islamic movements elsewhere, their Bangladeshi counterparts have striking dissimilarities with them as well.

### **The Nature of Islamic Movements in Bangladesh**

HERE, ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS have another dimension—they are primarily rural-based, agrarian and reflective of peasant culture and behavior. The country is predominantly agrarian, with more than 80 percent of the population being rural, mostly impoverished peasants primarily depending on primitive modes of cultivation, having incomplete access to the means of production, lacking power, security of tenure and viable means of sustenance and employment. And as we know, peasants, being traditional, fatalist and religious if not pious by nature, often resort to religion as a means of identity as well as support and sustenance. In short, peasants' political behavior and culture are not devoid of religion. Their mundane activities, including the political ones (in power perspectives), are inspired by their "moral economy,"<sup>2</sup> which again is subject to their religious belief system. Consequently, peasants' violent acts and proclivity to anarchy in the name of religion, often classified as "prepolitical" activities of the "premodern,"<sup>3</sup> get the epithets of "Islamic" militancy, fanaticism, and "fundamentalism" if the perpetrators happen to be Muslims. Hence, the significance of the peasant factor in understanding Islam in Bangladesh society and politics.

Although the "peasants' Islam," or what we may call the "little traditions," to paraphrase Redfield, represents the mainstream of Islam in Bangladesh, urban Muslim elite and their rural counterparts, representing the "great traditions" of Islam, have been the main custodians and guardians of Islam in the country. It is, however, interesting that not only are the "little traditions" of Bangladesh very different from their counterparts elsewhere, but the "great traditions" of Islam

2. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 5, 9, 13–55; Taj I. Hashmi, "Moral, Rational and Political Economies of Peasants: An Appraisal of Colonial Bengal and Vietnam" (paper presented at the Second International Conference on Indian Ocean Studies, Perth, 1984).

3. Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia: The Communalization of Class Politics in East Bengal, 1920–1947* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 4–20.

as believed and practiced here are also very unique. The synthesis of the two traditions, leading to syncretism, is what prevails as “Islam” in Bangladesh. Despite their concerted efforts, the Islamic puritan reformers, the “Wahabis,” Faraizis, Tayyunis and others since the early nineteenth century, have been able to change little in this regard. While sections of ultra-orthodox Muslims claim to be adherents of the Islamic “great traditions,” they have also inherited syncretistic beliefs and rituals as their forebears were not immune to the “little traditions” of Arabia, Central Asia, Iran and northwestern India and Bengal.<sup>4</sup>

### Who are the Islamists?

THIS STUDY REQUIRES AN UNDERSTANDING of the two parties that have been championing the cause of Islam—one, on behalf of the Government since 1975 and the other, the various Islamic groups, parties and individuals with both pro- and anti-government inclinations. These groups and individuals may be classified as (a) the fatalist/escapist; (b) the Sufis/*pirs*; (c) the militant reformist (“fundamentalist”), and (d) the “Anglo-Mohammedan” (“opportunist”/“pragmatist”). The fatalist/escapist groups represent the bulk of the poor, unemployed/underemployed people having a next-worldly outlook and philosophy. They often belong to the Tableeq Jamaat; a grassroots-based puritan movement originated in northern India in the 1920s, having millions of adherents in Bangladesh. Unlike the militant reformists belonging to the Jamaat-i-Islami (despite their formal adherence to constitutional politics) and other groups, including the clandestine ones, the Tableeqis represent a pacifist, puritan and missionary movement. Every winter they organize a mammoth rally or *ijtima* at Tungji, near Dhaka, attended by more than a million devout Muslims from Bangladesh and elsewhere. The Sufis and *pirs* represent mystic Islam. They belong to several mystic orders or *tariqas*, having *muridan* or disciples among all sections of the population, especially among peasants. They exert tremendous influence on their muridan. They may be politically motivated having renowned politicians,

4. Asim Roy, *Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), passim; Hashmi, *Women and Islam in Bangladesh: Beyond Subjection and Tyranny* (London: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 60–74.

including General Ershad, as their muridan. They are generally opposed to the Jamaat-i-Islami and Tableeq movements, but there are instances of Jamaatis and Tableeqis paying respect to certain pirs. While the militant reformists, including the Jamaat-i-Islami, are in favor of an Islamic state as an alternative to the existing system of government in Bangladesh, the “Anglo Mohammedans” are the anglicized or Westernized Muslims aiming to synthesize Islamic and Western values for temporal benefits. They can be believers, agnostics and even atheists, but for the sake of expediency, political legitimacy, social acceptance and above all, power, are often vacillating. They popularize political Islam, which could be avowedly anti-Indian and tacitly anti-Hindu. They are very similar to the Pakistani ruling class who, since the inception of the country, has been promoting the communal, anti-India/anti-Hindu political Islam for the sake of legitimacy. It is noteworthy that the followers of the above groups might shift allegiance. A Tableeqi might join the Jamaat-i-Islami (as Jamaat leader Ghulam Azam did) and an Anglo-Mohammedan might turn Tableeqi one day.<sup>5</sup>

However, despite their mutual differences and enmity, especially between the orthodox ulema/pirs and the Jamaat-i-Islami, these groups have certain commonalities. Excepting the Anglo-Mohammedans, the other three groups oppose women’s liberation; Western codes of conduct, law and ethics, and even dress and culture; and are in favor of establishing shari’a or Islamic law. The most important aspect, which is common to all four groups, is their stand vis-à-vis India and Pakistan. They are invariably anti-Indian and pro-Pakistan. It may be mentioned that the ulema belonging to the “Wahabi” school of thought, who run thousands of *madrassas* or Islamic seminaries with an ultra-orthodox and conservative curricula throughout Bangladesh, are inimical to the Jamaat-i-Islami and its founder, Maulana Maududi (1903–79).<sup>6</sup> The

5. Hashmi, “Islam in Bangladesh Politics,” in Hussin Mutalib and Taj I. Hashmi, eds., *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State* (London: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 103–5; Razia Akter Banu, “Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh: Challenges and Prospects,” in Mutalib and Hashmi, *Islam, Muslims*, 80–96; K. M. Mohsin, “Tabligh Jama’at and the Faith Movement in Bangladesh,” in Rafiuddin Ahmed, ed., *Bangladesh: Society, Religion and Politics* (Chittagong: South Asia Studies Group, 1985).

6. Maulana Mansurul Haq, ed., *Mr. Mawdudir New Islam* (Bengali), Jamia Qurania Arabia (Lalbagh, Dhaka: 1985), passim; *Jamaat Unmasked: The True Colour of a Fundamentalist Party* (Dhaka: The Council of National Religious Scholars [Jatiyo Olama Parishad], 2001), passim. These publications reflect the views of the anti-Jamaat Muslim clerics, mainly belonging to the Deoband school of thought, who run the qauami madrassas in the subcontinent.

counterparts of these seminaries in Pakistan and Afghanistan, known as *qaumi* (national) madrassas, produced the *Taliban*. The “pro-Taliban” groups in Bangladesh, for ideological reasons, are opposed to the Jamaat-i-Islami. However, as it happened in Pakistan, they might unite against common enemies at the height of polarization between Islam and some other forces, especially in the wake of 9/11, the Afghan War of 2001 and the Israeli invasion of the Palestinian territory in March and April 2002.

### Historical Overview

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW of the Islamization process in East Bengal, along with an understanding of the socio-political history of the region, especially with regard to the Pakistanization of the region with peasant, petty bourgeois and middle class support, is essential for understanding the problem. Muslim peasants and other underdogs joined the Pakistan movement with hopes to circumscribe the power of the Hindu landlords, middle classes and traders. Their eventual overthrow and replacement by the weaker, budding Muslim middle classes and upper peasantry were parts of the Bengali Muslim “peasant utopia.”<sup>7</sup> The emergence of Bangladesh after the overthrow of the dominant non-Bengali Muslim elites by the subjugated Bengali Muslims did not signal the disappearance of the age-old fault line between the Muslims and Hindus of the subcontinent. The creation of Bangladesh did not destroy the two-nation theory of the founding fathers of Pakistan. Renowned Indian journalist, Basant Chatterjee, makes this irrevocable argument:

Somebody should ask these hypocrites if they could give one good reason for the separate existence of Bangladesh after the destruction of the two-nation theory. If the theory has been demolished, as they claim, then the only logical consequence should be the reunion of Bangladesh with India, as seems to be the positive stand of the Bangladeshi Hindus.... for the people know that had Pakistan not been created then, Bangladesh too would not have come into existence now.<sup>8</sup>

7. Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia*, chapters 5, 6 and 7.

8. Basant Chatterjee, *Inside Bangladesh Today: An Eye-witness Account* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1973), 155.

Chatterjee further apprehends that with the gradual shifting of Hindus to India due to the prevalent anti-Hindu feelings in the country, “Bangladesh would by itself become ‘Muslim Bengal.’”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, one may argue that with the creation of Bangladesh, the “Hindu phobia” of Bengali Muslims—a legacy since the British colonial days, which transformed into “Indophobia” during the Pakistani period (1947–71)—is still present in the psyche of the average Bangladeshi Muslim. As the peasant factor is important for understanding the Islamization process in the country, so too is the “India factor.” An understanding of the predominant petty bourgeois and lumpen culture is also essential in this regard. They are equally, if not more, violent, anarchical and vacillating as the peasantry.

Bengali peasant support for the various Islamic movements since the early nineteenth century not only projects the violent, “pre-political” and non-committal aspects of the peasant community, but also suggests how vulnerable Muslim peasants have been to the manipulative leaders who mobilize mass support in the name of Islam or any other ideology. It is noteworthy that before their political mobilization took place in the early nineteenth century by Islamic reformists-cum-militants, the Wahabi and Faraizi leaders, East Bengali peasants and aboriginal tribesmen had come under the influence of “warrior-Sufis” in the late medieval period. The warrior-Sufis were mainly responsible for the rapid Islamization and peasantization of the region in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, converting the bulk of the indigenous population who had not yet fully integrated into the amorphous Hindu and peasant communities. Sufis played the leading role in reclaiming land by clearing forests in the deltaic southeastern “frontier land.” They introduced a new religion, Islam, as well as new agrarian implements and technology, such as the plough and other methods to contain the turbulent rivers, which were shifting eastward during the period.<sup>10</sup>

The Wahabi and Faraizi leaders, and especially the most influential Maulana Karamat Ali Jaunpuri (1800–1873), a former Wahabi-turned-“loyalist” Islamic reformer of the nineteenth century, brought the syncretistic Bengali Muslims, mainly peasants, into the fold of shari’a-

9. Ibid., 143.

10. Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), chapters 5 and 8.

based, orthodox and puritan Islam. The Wahabi and Faraizi leaders mobilized Bengali Muslim masses against British colonial rule as well as against the local exploiting classes of (Hindu) *zamindars* (landlords), *bhadralok* (professionals) and *mahajans* (moneylenders). The first step toward the mobilization process was through the extensive Islamization of the masses. Karamat Ali and his hundreds of successors, who adopted pro-British loyalist attitude out of pragmatism after the failure of the Indian Mutiny of 1857–58, not only Islamized the bulk of the Bengali Muslims but also created a strong sense of belonging to an amorphous Muslim community of the subcontinent.<sup>11</sup> The omnipotence of the Islamic reformers in the absence of a powerful modern and moderate Muslim leadership in nineteenth-century Bengal led to the ascendancy of the ulema as political and religious leaders of the Muslim community. The Hindu revivalist movements, as well as the anti-Muslim socio-economic and political stand of the bulk of the Hindu elites and middle classes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, further strengthened the hold of the ulema and their patrons, the *ashraf* (aristocratic, upper-class Muslims), on the Bengali Muslim masses. The Hindu opposition to legislative and other government measures to benefit the Bengali Muslims, such as the Bengal Tenancy Act of 1885, its amendments, the enactment of the Bengal Free (rural) Primary Education Bill and the establishment of the Dhaka University in Muslim majority East Bengal, further antagonized the latter toward the Hindus and prepared them as staunch supporters of the communal partition of the subcontinent in 1947.

The re-emergence of the ulema in the arena of Bengal politics in 1919, spearheading the pervasive anti-British Khilafat (Caliphate) movement with Muslim support at every level, Islam and ulema continued to play very important roles in the political mobilization of the Bengali Muslims up to the partition of 1947. The Muslim elite, the *ashraf-ulema-jotedar* triumvirate, representing Muslim aristocrats, clergy, and rich peasants/petty landlords, successfully mobilized Bengali Muslims against the dominant Hindu *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate, common enemy of both the upper- and lower-class

11. See A. R. Mallick, *British Policy and the Muslims in Bengal, 1757–1856*, 2nd ed. (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1977), chapters 3, 4 and 5; Muin-ud-Din Ahmad Khan, *History of the Fara'idi Movement*, 2nd ed. (Dhaka: Islamic Foundation, 1984), passim; Hashmi, "Karamat Ali and the Muslims in Bengal, 1800–1873," in *Dhaka University Studies* 23 (June 1976).

Muslims. By 1947, this mobilization in the name of separate Muslim identity led to the transformation of East Bengal into the eastern wing of Pakistan. The arousal of Muslim communal solidarity among the bulk of Bengali Muslim masses as an alternative to class solidarity demonstrates that religion and ethnicity always have the potential to become more important than class differences.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting that despite the constant harping on the themes of Islamic solidarity and Muslim separatism under the aegis of the Pakistani ruling classes during 1947 and 1971, most East Bengali Muslims distanced themselves from “communal/political Islam.” Not long after the Partition of 1947, East Bengali Muslims started preferring secular institutions, including democracy, to Islam for the sake of their Bengali identity. The clash of these two identities—“Islamic” (Pakistani) and “secular” (Bengali)—ultimately led to the creation of Bangladesh. This was possible after the mass emigration of members of the Hindu *zamindar-bhadralok-mahajan* triumvirate to India and the emasculation of the rest of the hitherto dominant Hindus in East Bengal in the wake of the Partition. Not long after the Partition, it dawned upon sections of the East Bengali Muslim elites that Pakistan, the promised utopia of Muslim separatist leaders, was nothing but a mirage—the “promised land” of South Asian Muslims was a deceptive arrangement to exploit the eastern wing as a colony of the western wing of Pakistan. Gradually, sections of the masses became aware of the reality. This transformation was possible as the founding fathers of Pakistan promised “everything to everyone” with a view to gaining support for Muslim separatism in the name of Islamic fraternity, liberty and equality. Not only Bengali and non-Bengali Muslim politicians were selling the idea of the “golden Pakistan” to the Bengali Muslims, but leading Bengali Muslim intellectuals—academics and writers—also played very significant roles in the mass mobilization for Pakistan. One may agree with the view that “any attempt to understand the disenchantment with the Muslim League [which championed the cause of Muslim separatism and Pakistan] after independence has to take into account the initial hopes and expectations that brought the League into power in the first place.”<sup>13</sup>

12. Rafiuddin Ahmed, *The Bengali Muslim 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981), 84–95, 160–65, 190; Hashmi, *Pakistan as a Peasant Utopia*, chap. 7.

13. Ahmed Kamal, “A Land of Eternal Eid—Independence, People and Politics in East Bengal,” in *Dhaka University Studies* 46 (June 1989): 81.

## **Islam, Secularism and Bengali Nationalism, 1972–75**

BENGALI NATIONALISM, more precisely, East Bengali nationalism, had been the guiding principle of Sheikh Mujib's Awami League, which eventually formed the first government in independent Bangladesh. The exclusion of the Indian Bengalis (mostly Hindus, who opted to live as citizens of the Indian state in the wake of the partition of 1947) as members of the Bengali nation as defined by the Awami League, practically indicated that the Muslim majority Bengalis of the erstwhile East Pakistan wanted to secede from the dominant and exploiting non-Bengali West Pakistan out of sheer economic, political and cultural differences. By "culture," the top leaders and the bulk of the followers of the movement for Bengali nationalism only meant linguistic and other aspects of culture, excluding religion. This means they were (are) Bengalis but nevertheless remained (remain) Muslims at the same time. They never visualized, let alone fought, for a secular/socialist Bangladesh. Had the Pakistani ruling elite in 1971, instead of killing Bengalis indiscriminately accepted Sheikh Mujib, the leader of the majority party Awami League, as the prime minister of Pakistan, "Bengali nationalism" would have got a totally new meaning, by only highlighting the separate ethnic/linguistic identity of East Bengalis of Pakistan. However, the rulers of the new nation of Bangladesh for various reasons—mainly political—adopted the four-pronged state ideology of "Bengali nationalism," socialism, secularism and democracy, à la Nehruvian "democratic socialism" (often touted as "Mujibism").

The abysmal failure of Mujibism to alleviate poverty and restore law and order eventually led to the Islamization of the polity. The failure of the welfare state forced a large section of the underdogs to cling to Islam either as a means to escape from the harsh reality or to achieve their cherished Golden Bengal through piety, Islamic justice and egalitarianism. Without having substantial changes in living conditions (around 50 percent of the population still live below the poverty line), the tide of Globalization in the post-Cold War period has not reduced the Islamic fervor of the people. The obsolescence of socialism/communism as an alternative to "illiberal democracy" and autocracy in the Third World since the early 1990s, and the sudden rise in the intensity of Islamic resurgence and "Islamic" terror

globally in recent years have further intensified Islamism in Bangladesh.

The overall situation of the country in the wake of the liberation of 1971 was unbearable for the bulk of the people. Although there was relief from the nine-month-long reign of terror under the Pakistani occupation army, the liberation did not bring the expected end of suffering and exploitation. Fellow Bangladeshis, genuine and pseudo freedom fighters, mostly donning the Awami hat, started a reign of unbridled corruption, nepotism and lawlessness throughout the country. While Awami leaders, in the name of socialism, were busy plundering the nationalized industries, banks and insurance companies, and “abandoned” non-Bengali properties previously owned by Urdu-speaking refugees from Bihar, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, the bulk of the Bengalis were soon turned into the disillusioned, hungry and angry masses. By 1974, Bangladesh had already become the “basket case” of Henry Kissinger. The floods and subsequent famine of 1974 eliminated thousands and impoverished most of the population. By then, the promised “rice at fifty *paisa* (half a taka) per *seer* (slightly less than a kilogram),” contrary to the Awami League promise on the eve of the 1970s parliamentary elections, was selling at ten taka per *seer*. Even during the Liberation War of 1971, the finest variety of rice, the staple food, was selling at one taka per *seer*. Other consumer goods were selling at ten to twenty times cheaper during the last days of united Pakistan in comparison to the mid-1970s. Hyperinflation, corruption and non-availability of essentials soon turned the average Bangladeshi into an anti-Indian/anti-Awami Leaguer. This is well reflected in Basant Chatterjee’s conversation with a rickshaw-puller in 1973 in Bangladesh. The rickshaw-puller blamed the Awami League and India for his misery: “Ever since the ‘azadi’ [independence] has come, we poor people are only having our backs broken. In older times, we made about five takas a day, but then rice was available at one taka a *seer*....But now...we need five for the rice only....For us poor people Pakistan was all right. At least, we had enough “bhat” [cooked rice] then to eat to our fill....All these thugs [Awami Leaguers] are looting the country, and along with them their friend India is also looting the country.”<sup>14</sup> Many of them swelled the ranks of the opposition groups and parties, including the leftist National

14. Chatterjee, *Inside Bangladesh Today*, 68–70.

Socialist Party (JSD) and the clandestine Maoist Sarbahara Party of Siraj Sikdar. A large number of them, including many erstwhile collaborators of the Pakistani occupation forces, joined hands with Maulana Bhashani (the champion of “Islamic socialism”) who soon after the liberation started a vitriolic anti-Awami, anti-Indian campaign. Bhashani’s popularity and the sharp decline in that of Prime Minister Mujib paved the way for the rise of various Islamic groups not long after the assassination of the latter in 1975. Mujib, on the one hand, promoting the idea that secularism “did not mean the absence of religion,” was giving generous state patronage to madrasa education and, on the other hand, religion for his government “was a shadow, the ghost of the past one did not know how to deal with.”<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, by early 1975, the Mujib government had crushed both the JSD and the Sarbahara Party, the secular and leftist opposition groups. While the bulk of the JSD leaders were behind bars, in January 1975 Sarbahara leader Siraj Sikdar was killed in police custody. Justifying his killing, Prime Minister Mujib boastfully raised the question in the parliament (televised nationwide): “Where is Siraj Sikdar?” The last straw on the camel’s back was the introduction of the one-party government under Sheikh Mujib, in the name of the so-called Bangladesh Peasants’ and Workers’ Awami League (BKSAL). This act established a Soviet-style government where top-ranking bureaucrats, university teachers, and even the chiefs and deputy chiefs of the armed forces, had to join the BKSAL. This act in January 1975, on the one hand killed the remnants of whatever was left of democracy and, on the other, rendered underground, clandestine politics—both secular and Islamic—as the only option for the people.<sup>16</sup>

## **Political Islam and Bangladeshi Nationalism, 1975–81**

IN THE LONG RUN, the Islamic parties outpaced the various secular/leftist parties in the wake of the overthrow of the BKSAL regime in August 1975. Henceforth, both the military and civil governments of

15. Syed Jamil Ahmed, “Bengali Nationalism through Sociology of Theatre,” in A. M. Chowdhury and Fakrul Alam, eds., *Bangladesh on the Threshold of the Twenty-first Century* (Dhaka: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, 2002), 301.

16. Zillur R. Khan, *Martial Law to Martial Law: Leadership Crisis in Bangladesh* (Dhaka: University Press Ltd., 1984), chap. 4.

the country promoted political Islam to contain the militant one promoted by the grassroots-based, well-organized Jamaat-i-Islami and other groups. It is noteworthy that General Zia's government (1975–81) withdrew the ban imposed on all Islam-oriented political parties by the Mujib government for their active collaboration with the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971. Zia and his successors promoted Islam and Islamic parties, including the Jamaat and Muslim League, for the sake of legitimacy and for containing the most organized Awami League.<sup>17</sup>

From the rapid success of President Zia in popularizing his ideals, programs and most importantly, his regime, among the bulk of Bangladeshis, it appears that political Islam fetched him rich dividends. Curiously, what “soldier” Zia grasped quite well—that the country was least prepared for socialism and secularism—was simply beyond “politician” Mujib's comprehension. His associates, mostly sycophants and half-educated political agitators from the countryside and small towns, were too naïve to understand the reality. Moreover, the rich dividends from the nationalized industries and financial institutions for them, acquired in the name of socialism, were too lucrative to lose. The collective failure of the Awami leadership also concerned its failure to grasp the implications of discarding the Islamic character of the polity. One may point out the way the Mujib government replaced a Quranic inscription, “Read in the name of thy Lord,” with “Knowledge is Light” from the emblem of Dhaka University. In hindsight, one may mention how the Communist Party, stigmatized as the promoter of a “Godless” and “un-Islamic” order, failed to break through in the peasant and worker fronts in the 1940s and afterwards. We know how the bulk of Bengali Muslims, including peasants and workers, whole-heartedly supported the Muslim separatist Pakistan movement in the 1940s. Sheikh Mujib and his over-enthusiastic associates were not clear about how to implement socialism and secularism in Muslim majority Bangladesh, where most of the population were both religious and in favor of private property. The people had never been prepared to work for these alien concepts during the Liberation War. It seems they fought for independence, not for secularism and socialism.

17. Hashmi, “Islam in Bangladesh Politics,” 110–13.

The subsequent governments gradually leaned toward the oil-rich Muslim countries of the Middle East and the West for the sake of sustained growth and legitimacy. Significantly, the Saudi recognition of Bangladesh came only after the assassination and overthrow of Sheikh Mujib. Meanwhile, Bangladesh's transformation into a quasi-Islamic state by discarding socialism and secularism went unhindered because the West, especially the United States, preferred pro-Western Islamists to pro-Communist social democrats during the peak of the Cold War in the 1980s. Meanwhile, President (General) Zia amended the constitution, replacing socialism and secularism with "social justice" and "absolute faith in God almighty," respectively. He also had "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" (in Arabic) inserted at the beginning of the constitution.<sup>18</sup>

### **Political Islam, Military Rule and Legitimacy**

IN MAY 1981, ZIA DIED in an abortive military takeover. In March 1982, General Ershad, the army chief, toppled the successive, elected government. Ershad had neither the charisma nor the popularity of Zia, and is widely known for his promiscuity and unbridled corruption. Consequently, with a view to legitimizing his rule, in June 1988 he amended the constitution by introducing Islam as the state religion. It may be mentioned that with a few exceptions, most Muslim countries have this constitutional provision, including the secular countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Tunisia.<sup>19</sup>

However, one may argue that Ershad, of all people, could not be sincere about his commitment to Islam. He played the Islamic card for the sake of containing the so-called fundamentalist forces and his secular opponents by legitimizing his rule among the majority of Bangladeshi Muslims who, according to one study, favor non-cleric, English-educated, "anti-Indian" and Islam-oriented politicians as their leaders.<sup>20</sup> Ershad introduced the *Zakat* Fund to raise poor-tax in accordance with the teachings of Islam. He also declared Friday as the weekly holiday and frequently visited mosques, shrines and the

18. "The Proclamation [Amendment] Order, 1977," *Bangladesh Observer*, 23 April 1977.

19. Talukder Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends," in S. R. Chakravarty and Virendra Narain, eds., *Bangladesh: History and Culture, Vol. I* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1986), 46.

20. Razia Akter Banu, *Islam in Bangladesh* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), chap. 9.

Muslim holy places in Mecca and Medina. Ershad played the “India card” quite well. After having some diplomatic problem with India in 1982, he bitterly criticized India for the construction of the Farakka barrage across the Ganges and told his people: “It is being said today that if we do not get water from Farakka the northern and southern regions of Bangladesh will turn into deserts. *I want to remind everybody concerned that Islam was born in a desert, but Islam did not die. Islam could not be destroyed.*”<sup>21</sup>

As Ershad failed to legitimize his rule through popular support, he befriended some influential pirs, those of Atrashi, Charmonai and Sarsina, for example, and some Anglo-Mohammedan leaders who congratulated him for the State Religion Act. However, the Jamaat-i-Islami and pro-Iranian Maulana Mohammadullah (Hafizjee Huzur), an influential cleric, challenging Ershad’s legitimacy, condemned the act as an inadequate sham. However, some obscure Islamic groups and quite surprisingly, the Bangladesh Teachers’ Federation, supposed to be secular, favored the act. Curiously, Anglo-Mohammedan Kazi Qader (Muslim League leader) felt the act was aimed at suppressing the movement of the God-fearing Muslims. He demanded the immediate declaration of Bangladesh as an “Islamic Republic.”<sup>22</sup> However, whatever he did in the name of Islamization of the polity has remained unaltered.

Although various feminist and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) bitterly criticized the State Religion Act in Bangladesh, most of the Bengali Muslims have accepted the provision. So far no subsequent government has gathered enough courage to alter the amendment. Two women’s organizations, Naripakhyo and Oikyobaddho Nari Samaj, came forward to protest against the act. In doing so, they stoked the issues of “sovereignty of the country” and “the spirit of the Freedom Struggle,” presumed to be in danger because of the act. However, many men jeered at them for holding rallies, asking them to observe *purdah* (seclusion of women from public view), presumed to be a requirement by Muslim women. Many men were even happy about an Islamic State of Bangladesh where women would not compete with them in the job market.<sup>23</sup>

21. Maniruzzaman, “Bangladesh Politics,” 71.

22. Hashmi, “Islam in Bangladesh Politics,” 114–16.

23. *Holiday* (Bangladeshi weekly), 18 April 1988; *Sangbad* (Bengali daily), 17 April 1988.

Not long after the enactment of the State Religion Act, several liberal democrats and women's organizations started a campaign to rekindle the "Spirit of the Liberation War" or secularism to contain Ershad's autocracy. Several NGOs, funded by overseas donors, came forward in support. After failing to repeal the act, a section of left-oriented intellectuals, under the leadership of Ahmed Sharif, a retired Dhaka University professor, and retired Colonel Nuruzzaman (Freedom Fighter) lent support to the anti-Ershad movement. Under the banner of the *Muktijuddho Chetona Bikash Kendro* (Centre for the Development of the Spirit of the Liberation War), they spoke at some of the women's rallies. Stressing the virtues of democracy, socialism and secularism, Ahmed Sharif felt that "food in stomach is Islam" and urged that "the right to be fed be incorporated in the Constitution" instead of Islam as the state religion.<sup>24</sup> While the various Islamic groups, including the Jamaat-i-Islami, condemned Ershad as an "Indo-Soviet agent and enemy of Islam," they did not join hands with the secular, socialist and liberal democrats, let alone the women's groups. The latter had been avowedly anti-Jamaat for its "fundamentalist" tilt and collaboration with Pakistani rulers in 1971. They turned their attention to discredit the various collaborators of the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971 as the "enemies of the people." Meanwhile, by the late 1980s, a Bengali book had come out in the market with a long list of the "killers and collaborators of 1971." The polity since then has been sharply polarized between the so-called "pro-" and "anti-Liberation" forces. The former represents the so-called secular and liberal parties and individuals who are soft on India and harsh on Pakistan. The latter, the so-called "Islam-loving" groups and individuals, have strong to very strong anti-India and pro-Islam commitments. Although many of these groups and individuals had soft corners for Pakistan during the Liberation War of 1971, they also raise the "Liberation-in-danger" slogan, along with the age-old "Islam-in-danger." While the secular groups, by "Liberation-in-danger" mean the alleged Pakistani machination to subjugate Bangladesh, to the latter, the independence is at stake because of Indian "expansionism." Roughly, the Awami League and its secular allies represent the former while the BNP and its Islamic allies are with the latter.

The parliamentary elections of 1991, held after the overthrow of Ershad in December 1990, contrary to the expectations of the Awami

24. Ibid.

League, brought Khaleda Zia, the widow of President Zia, to power. Her party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) came to power with the support of the Jamaat-i-Islami and she became the prime minister. It is interesting that most political parties, including the Communist Party of Bangladesh, used Islamic slogans for their success in the elections of 1991. While the “Islam-loving” parties, got 54.13 percent of the votes, the Awami League-led Eight-Party alliance, despite its Islamic rhetoric, slogans and banners, managed to poll only around 34.81 percent of the votes in the elections.<sup>25</sup> One may again deduct more than 10 percent minority (mainly Hindu) votes from the total votes polled by the Awami League-led alliance, as traditionally the minorities have been voting for the Awami League. This means that in 1991, around 75 percent of Bangladeshi Muslims did not vote for the Awami League.

### **The Jamaat-i-Islami Factor**

THE JAMAAT-I-ISLAMI CAME INTO BEING in the 1940s in north India. Maulana Mauddudi, the founder, who had earlier strongly opposed the concept of Pakistan, later migrated to Pakistan from north India and worked for the establishment of an Islamic state, based on the shari’a law. The Jamaat throughout the Cold War maintained a pro-Western and anti-Communist policy. The party collaborated with the Pakistani occupation army in Bangladesh and is despised by many liberal democrats and others for its role in 1971. Not long after the overthrow of the Mujib government in 1975, the Jamaat emerged as a legitimate organization in Bangladesh. Unlike its counterparts in India and Pakistan, the Jamaat in Bangladesh is led and followed mostly by upper peasants and lower middle classes. It is widely believed that the Jamaat, having several NGOs, clinics and charitable organizations across Bangladesh, has been gaining ground, emerging as an alternative to the secular organizations.<sup>26</sup> Of late, sections of the Jamaat

25. Hashmi, “Islam in Bangladesh Politics,” 125–27.

26. Zohair Hossain, “Maulana Sayyid Abul A’la Maududi: An Appraisal of His Thought and Political Influence,” *South Asia* 9, no. 1 (June 1986); M. S. Agwani, “God’s Government: Jamaat-i-Islami of India” and R. A. Banu, “Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh,” in Mutalib and Hashmi, *Islam, Muslims and the Modern State*; Professor Ahmed Sharif, telephone conversation with author, Melbourne, Australia, 15 June 1994.

workers have adopted an anti-U.S. stand, especially in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001. Throughout the Cold War, the United States had a soft corner for the Jamaat and similar Islamic parties elsewhere, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Due to political repression and lack of any democratic outlet in Egypt and in some other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, grass-roots-based Islamic parties have been clandestine militant organizations. In the post-Cold War era, U.S. indifference and hostility toward the hitherto friendly Islamic parties for their anti-Israel/anti-U.S. policy, turned them into anti-U.S. By the early 1990s, several militant splinter groups, mainly representing the unemployed/underemployed Muslim youths, emerged out of the powerful Muslim Brotherhood. The likelihood of such a transformation of the Jamaat in Bangladesh cannot be totally ruled out, either.

Although the Jamaat had faced a three-pronged attack from the Ershad government, “secular/socialist/liberal” groups, and as mentioned earlier, by a section of the orthodox ulema, mostly belonging to the conservative Deoband School, the party was gaining ground. While the “secular/liberal” groups condemn the Jamaat for its obscurantism and “war crimes,” a section of the ulema regard Maulana Maaddudi, the founder, a heretic and the Jamaat a heresy. The 1980s through the early 1990s had been the golden era for the Jamaat. By then their student wing had captured student unions at Chittagong and Rajshahi universities by defeating the combined groups of their opponents. This was the period when the party enjoyed the blessings of Saudi Arabia and, most importantly, the United States.<sup>27</sup> The Jamaat cut a good figure in the parliamentary elections of 1991—capturing eighteen seats and more than 12 percent of the votes (more than four million votes)—compared to ten seats and slightly more than a million votes in the elections of 1986.<sup>28</sup>

The emergence of the Jamaat as the third-largest party in terms of its share in total votes cast in the 1991 elections alarmed its rivals. In March 1992, the proponents of the Spirit of the Liberation War, under the leadership of Colonel (retired) Nuruzzaman (with the

27. Hashmi, “Islam in Bangladesh Politics,” 120–22.

28. Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh, *Bulletin: Jamaat-i-Islami Bangladesh* (Dhaka: April 1991), 8.

blessings of Ahmed Sharif) organized a “public trial” of Jamaat leader, Ghulam Azam, an alleged war criminal, for his active collaboration with Pakistan during the Liberation War. No sooner had Ghulam Azam been elected as the chief of the Jamaat in Bangladesh, than the organizers of the “trial” formed the Killer-Collaborator Elimination Committee (*Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul*). Promptly, the Awami League lent support to the Elimination Committee. Obviously, as some analysts observe, they did so to gain political leverage.<sup>29</sup> The “trial” was embarrassing both for the Jamaat and its allies, the BNP government. Curiously, the Awami League, which had earlier supported the physical attack on Jamaat leader, Matiur Rahman Nizami, by some Dhaka University students in May 1991, later asked the Jamaat leaders to “forget the past and look forward to the future.” And in early 1991, the party had no qualms about sending its presidential candidate to Ghulam Azam for his “blessings,” as the members of the parliament elect the president of the Republic. The Jamaat then had twenty members in the parliament with unflinching loyalty toward Ghulam Azam.<sup>30</sup>

Islamists in Bangladesh also started facing a hostile West not long after the Gulf War of 1991. The West must not have relished the way a large number of Bangladeshi Muslims, including leading politicians from the so-called liberal democratic parties like BNP and Awami League, had expressed solidarity with Saddam Hussein. Some candidates during the parliamentary elections of 1991 even identified themselves as “Saddam’s candidates,” displaying life-size portraits of the Iraqi dictator.<sup>31</sup> The Jamaat, however, opposed Saddam Hussein’s Kuwait invasion, which, according to a Jamaat leader, cost them dearly as most Bangladeshi Muslims were supporters of Saddam and bitter critics of the West.<sup>32</sup> However, the Jamaat’s poor performance in all the previous and successive elections belies this assertion. Nevertheless, the fact remains that by the 1990s the Jamaat had not only regained its lost image (despite its anti-Liberation role in 1971) but also started playing the role of “king maker,” as evident from the

29. Badruddin Umar, “Why Has Ghulam Azam’s Trial Emerged as an Issue? [in Bengali],” *Ajker Kagaj* (Bengali daily), 1 April 1992.

30. Jamaat-i-Islami, “Nizami Analyzes Election Results,” *Bulletin*, 7.

31. Hashmi, “Islam in Bangladesh Politics,” 127.

32. Jamaat-i-Islami, “Election Results,” 7.

results of the parliamentary elections since 1991 vis-à-vis the formation of government by the two major political parties, BNP and the Awami League.

The late 1980s and early 1990s also witnessed the gradual transformation of the cold war between the Islamists (mainly the Jamaat) and the so-called secular/liberal forces into open confrontation. The latter, the “pro-India” and “pro-Western” lobbies, respectively, represent the Awami League (and its allies belonging to the erstwhile pro-Soviet political parties) and the various NGOs/ human rights groups. They have been opposing the Jamaat in the name of championing the cause of Liberation, women’s rights, human rights, minority rights and secularism. The Taslima Nasrin episode, the NGO-mullah conflict and the mutual mud-slinging between the mullah and Awami-NGO lobbies are parts of the play called the “Public Trial of Ghulam Azam” in 1991. While the mullah have been vilifying the Awami-NGO lobby as the “enemies of Islam,” “Indian agents” and “agents of neo-imperialism,” the latter have been portraying the former as “anti-Liberation/Pakistani agents,” “fundamentalist/Taliban” and “Communal” (anti-Hindu and anti-minority fascist). One may cite scores of scurrilous writings against the so-called Islamic fundamentalist-cum-communal forces, especially the Jamaat.<sup>33</sup> The “secular/liberal” group owns most of the well-circulated Bengali and English newspapers in the country. The Reliance Group of India owns the well-circulated *Janakantha*.

Nothing could be more trite than portraying the Jamaat as “communal” and “anti-Liberation” in the post-Liberation period, let alone as pro-Taliban. Jimmy Carter felt that Islamic parties who believed in election, despite having “fundamentalist” belief and support for

33. Ahmed Sharif et al. (eds.), *Ekattarer Ghatak O Dalalra Ke Kothay* (Bengali), Mukti Juddho Chetona Bikash Kendra, Dhaka, 1987; Borhanuddin Khan Jahangir, *Bangladeshe Jatiyatabad Ebong Moulbad* (Bengali), Agami Prakashani, Dhaka, 1993; Aman-ud-Daula, *Ghulam Azamer Nagarikatta Mamlā* (Bengali), Dibya Prakash, Dhaka, 1993; Maulana Abdul Awwal, *Jamaater Asal Chebara* (Bengali), Agami Prakashani, Dhaka, 1993; Shahriyar Kabir (ed.), *Bangladeshe Shampradayikatar Chalchitra* (Bengali), Pallab Publishers, Dhaka, 1993; Shahriyar Kabir (ed.), *Ekattarer Ghatak Jamaat-i-Islami: Atit O Bartaman* (Bengali), Mukti Juddho Chetona Bikash Kendra, Dhaka, 1989; Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, *Communal Discrimination in Bangladesh: Facts and Documents*, Dhaka, 1993; Taslima Nasrin, *Lajja* (Bengali), Pearl Publishers, Dhaka, 1993; and *Lajja: Shame*, Penguin Books, London, 1994.

shari'a law, could not be classified as "extremist."<sup>34</sup> And those among them who have accepted the reality of Bangladesh cannot be simply rejected as anti-Liberation, either. Nevertheless, the fact remains that some powerful Jamaat leaders do not believe in the democratic way of coming to power—some of them do not rule out the adoption of the "other means," or armed insurrection, to capture power.<sup>35</sup> Jamaat workers' militancy and their occasional armed encounters with "liberal democrats" (mainly the Awami Leaguers) have alarmed many about an eventual Jamaat takeover of the country. Many Bangladeshi intellectuals feel that the BNP-Jamaat coalition government that came to power in October 2001 has been too soft on the Jamaat. Even the government's 2002 banning of a movie, *Matir Moina*, for its negative portrayal of the madrassa system of education, is read by many not as a fear of the Awami League by the BNP, "but of Jamaat-i-Islami deserting BNP."<sup>36</sup>

### **Popular Islam, Fatwa, Women and NGOs in the Village Community**

THE WRITINGS AND COMMENTS by Taslima Nasrin (b. 1962), a medical doctor-turned-feminist writer, on Islam, patriarchy and society in Bangladesh in the early 1990s brought her (and eventually her country) to the limelight. Nasrin is another member of the so-called secular-liberal-democrat group of Bangladesh, reflecting her rabid anti-Islamic, pro-Indian and anti-male bias in her writings—both in literary works (often classified as soft porn) and essays. Already very controversial and unpopular both among Islamists and others in Bangladesh for advocating free sex and other maverick ideas, including the merger of Bangladesh with the Indian State of West Bengal, Nasrin endeared many Indians. In early 1993, for her fiction, *Lajja*, which portrays the plight of the Hindu minority in Bangladesh—paradoxically in the wake of the killing of thousands of Muslims in India during and after the demolition of the Babri Mosque in late 1992—Nasrin became very popular among Hindu militants in India. This

34. *Daily Star*, 5 August 2001.

35. Maulana Abbas Ali Khan (acting chief of the Jamaat), interview with author, Dhaka, 21 May 1991.

36. Afsan Chowdhury, "Is 'Islam in danger' Slogan Back in Circulation?" *Daily Star*, 21 May 2002.

novelette, soon translated into English and several other Indian languages, grossly exaggerated the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh by singling out the Jamaat-i-Islami workers as members of the killer-rapist-abductor gangs.<sup>37</sup> Not long after the publication of *Lajja*, a couple of obscure mullahs from the periphery issued the so-called *fatwa-to-kill* against the author. Soon, they denied having issued such a fatwa. Despite their denial, the Indian and Western media publicized the so-called death threat portraying Bangladesh as another “Islamic” country with all its negative attributes, turning Nasrin into their Salman Rushdie and the two mullahs into the protégé of Ayatollah Khomeini.<sup>38</sup> Nasrin’s alleged remarks made to Indian media in 1994 suggesting to “rewrite the Quran” enraged the bulk of the Bangladeshi Muslims, and this finally led to her expulsion from the country. The wide coverage of the Taslima Nasrin episode in Indian and Western media has convinced many that Bangladesh is not different from other “Islamic” countries vis-à-vis their intolerance and obscurantism.

While the Taslima Nasrin episode was drawing world attention, persecution of rural women in the name of Islamic justice was occurring in the countryside. The cruel and illegal acts of the traditional village courts, or *salish*, was very disturbing to human rights activists and others. The public trial of poor women by village elders and mullahs, which led to several deaths of the victims, convinced many in the West and elsewhere about the “impending” ascendancy of the Islamic extremists to power in Bangladesh. Meanwhile, the proliferation of Western donors aided NGOs in the country, who have been advancing micro-credit to rural women (albeit at very high interest rates, the average being around 32 percent), running schools and generating jobs, mainly for women, polarized the polity between pro- and anti-NGO groups. Broadly, the former represents the so-called secular-liberal-democrat people (often the beneficiaries of the NGOs) and the latter mainly Islam-oriented and anti-West/anti-globalization groups and individuals. The controversial and extortionist modus operandi of NGOs, especially the way the Grameen Bank, BRAC and Proshika

37. Taslima Nasrin, *Lajja: Shame* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

38. Hashmi, “Women and Islam: Taslima Nasreen, Society and Politics in Bangladesh,” *South Asia* 18, no. 2 (December 1995); Hashmi, *Women and Islam in Bangladesh*, chap. 6.

operate, preferring women to men as their clients in the name of female empowerment and alleviation of poverty, has alienated village elders and others from the NGOs. In the common parlance of the villagers, the various powerful local and foreign NGOs are described as: “*CAREer gari, BRACer bari, Grameener nari, aar Proshikar barabari*” (CARE [An American NGO] is known for its vehicles, BRAC for its buildings, Grameen for its women and Proshika for its excesses). Purportedly, mullahs’ and village elders’ dislike for the NGOs was due to their “anti-Islamic” activities, including bringing women to the close proximity of unrelated men and for their alleged promotion of Christian missionaries. The conflict may be explained as another dimension of the age-old elite conflict between the dominant urban and weak rural elite. NGO preference for women to men as their clients has hit patriarchy and the well-entrenched village elders and mullahs by posing the threat of taking away their traditional clients as well. The NGO lobby’s projection of the mullahs as “fundamentalists,” “anti-women” and “anti-liberation” led to the proliferation of anti-NGO fatwas and backlash at NGO workers in the countryside. Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini, an influential cleric, in a public meeting demanded the execution of NGO activist Kazi Faruq Ahmed, for his “anti-Islamic” activities.<sup>39</sup>

The fatwa controversy came to the limelight in the 1990s after the local media, NGOs and donors took exception to the persecution of rural women in the name of Islam. Poor rural women, often victims of rape by influential villagers or those alleged to have cohabited with their former husbands after being divorced, are punished for committing adultery. Sometimes influential village elders force them to remarry someone as penance to committing adultery through the *salish*. The village mullah, totally dependent on village elders for sustenance, play the vital role in justifying the “judgments” in the name of *shari’a* law. In late 2000, one Shahida, a village woman at Naogaon district in northern Bangladesh, fell victim to a *salish* verdict and was forced to commit suicide. Wide publicity of the incident led to the High Court verdict declaring the dispensing of fatwas illegal on January 1, 2001.<sup>40</sup> The influential *Jamaat-i-Islami*, several Islamic groups and hundreds of *ulema* condemned the judgment as un-

39. *Daily Star*, 4 April 2001.

40. *Prothom Alo*, 2 January 2001.

Islamic and the judges as *murtads* (apostates).<sup>41</sup> While Maulana Fazlul Karim, the influential *pir* (Sufi) of Charmonai (avowedly opposed to the Jamaat and female leadership, and very soft on General Ershad), the chief of the Islamic Constitution Movement, condemned the judgment, Mufti Amini threatened to launch a “Taliban-style Revolution” in Bangladesh to counterpoise the “enemies of Islam.”<sup>42</sup> Islamic zealots were on the rampage at Brahmanbaria, Chittagong and certain other places, chanting anti-government and pro-Taliban slogans: “*Amra sabai Taliban, Bangla habe Afghan*” (We are all Taliban and will turn Bangladesh into another Afghanistan).<sup>43</sup> Although most liberal-democrats favored the anti-fatwa judgment, the government, being apprehensive of the backlash, was thinking in terms of reviewing the judgment.<sup>44</sup>

Soon the polarized polity witnessed the showdown between pro-fatwa clerics and anti-fatwa, pro-NGO *Nagorik Andolon* (Citizen’s Movement). Among others, the Pir of Charmonai, Mufti Amini and Mufti Azizul Haq, organized a grand pro-fatwa rally in Dhaka on February 2, 2001. Declaring the NGOs as “number one enemy” of Islam and Bangladesh, the clerics blamed the Awami League government for appointing judges with bias against Islam.<sup>45</sup> The pro-NGO and anti-fatwa *Nagorik Andolon* confronted the clerics and asked the government to ban all religiously motivated political parties.<sup>46</sup> Under quite confusing and mysterious circumstances, a police constable was killed inside a mosque at Muhammadpur in Dhaka. The government put the blame on a section of the clerics for the murder and also for possessing “time bombs,” said to have been recovered from a madrassa at Muhammadpur.<sup>47</sup> According to the government, Islamic militants killed the police constable while Shaykh-ul-Hadis Azizul Haq, the chief of the pro-BNP Islamic Unity Front, was present in the mosque. The government also claimed that the *Ulema Parishad* (Council of Clerics), an Islamic organization, had been collecting money for jihad. It produced a “receipt” for the collected amount

41. *Daily Star*, January 2, 3 and 4, 2001.

42. *Janakantha & Jugantar* (Bengali dailies), 6 January 2001.

43. *Prothom Alo*, 6 February 2001.

44. *Ibid.*, 9 January 2001.

45. *Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, 3 February 2001.

46. *Holiday*, 9 February 2001.

47. *Prothom Alo*, 4 February 2001.

from a madrassa at Muhammadpur. In view of the prevalent situation, while the Awami League has been trying to single out the rival Islamists and BNP as pro-Taliban terrorists and the BNP has been singling out the former as opportunist, one may not take the “evidence” seriously.<sup>48</sup> The government version of the murder of the policeman in the mosque lacks credibility as well. Haji Mackbul Ahmed, an Awami League MP and local godfather, was too powerful and influential to be overpowered by a handful of clerics and madrassa students.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the government was considering the formation of a Shari’a Board to issue fatwas in accordance with Islam and on behalf of the state.<sup>50</sup> Liberal democrats and leftists opposed any such move to institutionalize fatwa through the state machinery.<sup>51</sup> However, one may set aside the liberal-democrats’ reservations about the mullahs’ authority to issue fatwas as they represent the minority view, mainly belonging to the urban middle and upper classes. The acceptability of the fatwa-dispensing mullahs in the countryside is reflected in several violent incidents. In January 2001, villagers at Nandigram in Bogra district, for example, damaged the vehicle of a Bangladesh Television crew, who went to interview one Maulana Ibrahim, who in 1995 came to the limelight for his famous anti-BRAC fatwa stirring up a big mob against the NGO. Most villagers were in favor of the cleric and regarded the TV crew as pro-NGO.<sup>52</sup>

The Muslim community at the grassroots level favors fatwa as the fastest and cheapest way of getting justice. The average mullah’s revulsion for NGOs is well taken by Bangladeshi Muslims at the grassroots level as well. This is reflected in the popularity of scores of mullah-cum-demagogue, including Maulana Delwar Hussein Saidi (a Jamaat MP since 1996), Pir Fazlul Karim, Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini and Mufti Ubaidullah and others. Saidi’s video and audiocassettes containing rustic speeches and extreme views, reflecting the little traditions of Islam in Bangladesh, sell by the thousand throughout the country.<sup>53</sup> One year after the controversial anti-fatwa judgment, Saidi felt that

48. *Daily Star*, 5 February 2001.

49. *Holiday*, 20 April 2001.

50. *Prothom Alo*, 15 February 2001.

51. *Ibid.*, 18 February 2001.

52. *Ibid.*, 14 January 2001.

53. Hashmi, *Women and Islam in Bangladesh*, 88–89.

“fatwas should guide the judiciary and not the other way round.”<sup>54</sup> On February 6, 2002 some clerics commemorated the deaths of several Islamic activists who died in police firing protesting the anti-fatwa judgment in 2001.<sup>55</sup> Bengali Muslim support for the mullah is well reflected in some popular Bengali songs, played by taxi drivers and others at the grassroots level. One such song depicts the plight of the under-employed madrassa graduates and their prejudice against women and modernization: “What is the use of studying the Quran and Hadis at the madrassas if they are obsolete in the courts of law? What is so great about being a man if the country is under female leadership? What is the benefit of manhood if the universities in the name of coeducation promote lewdness?”<sup>56</sup>

### **Islamic Militancy: Real or Imaginary?**

MEANWHILE, URBAN MULLAHS with rural backgrounds and links have been campaigning against the NGOs and their urban patrons and associates, mainly professionals and intellectuals, often portraying them as murtads, enemies of Islam and agents of neo-imperialist West.<sup>57</sup> And as per Islamic law, apostates are liable to capital punishment. Death warrants and bomb attacks on some of the enlisted murtads presumably by Islamic militants became quite common during 1991 and 2001. The ongoing conflict between the pro-NGO “civil society” and the anti-NGO Islamists in early 2001 alarmed the U.S. State Department and various donor agencies, including the Asian Development Bank. Pointing out its adverse effects on the economy of Bangladesh, they condemned the “violation of human rights” in the name of Islam.<sup>58</sup>

While celebrating the Bengali New Year—an “un-Islamic” festival to some Muslim clerics—on April 14, 2001, a bomb killed several people at Ramna Park in Dhaka. In June, a village church was bombed at Gopalganj (Sheikh Hasina’s home district) and soon the police arrested one Mufti Hannan, the alleged mastermind. The police also arrested four madrassa teachers for their alleged involvement in the

54. *Jai Jai Din* (Bengali weekly), 15 January 2002.

55. *Prothom Alo*, 7 February 2002.

56. *Jai Jai Din*, 15 January 2002.

57. Hashmi, *Women and Islam in Bangladesh*, 204.

58. *Dainik Dinkal* (Bengali daily), 28 February 2001; *Holiday*, 2 March 2001.

Ramna Park bombing. However, the Hasina government lost credibility for producing contradictory stories and evidence with regard to the bombing.<sup>59</sup> Yet from another newspaper report we learn about the *Harkatul Jihad*, an “Islamic militant” group, said to have been engaged in terrorist activities in parts of Chittagong district in association with several Rohingya Muslim militant organizations from Arakan, Myanmar. The previous governments up to 1996 (prior to the formation of the Awami League government under Hasina) allegedly armed these groups who aim at capturing state power.<sup>60</sup> One has to be too naïve to believe the story. As discussed earlier, during the fracas between the pro- and anti-fatwa groups in 2001, some mullahs threatened to stage a “Taliban-style revolution in Bangladesh.” The rhetoric, wishful thinking and verbal attacks on secular law and institutions do not prove anything. Despite the sensational reporting by a section of the press, hinting at the “impending” collapse of law and order, one does not get any conclusive evidence about the so-called Taliban activities in Bangladesh. The following reports may be cited in this regard:

One Muhammad Yaqub, a “Taliban militant,” who had been to Saudi Arabia as an expatriate worker and trained in Afghanistan, was arrested in Chittagong.<sup>61</sup> Members of the Shahadat-i-al-Hikma [hitherto unheard of], a pro-Taliban “martyrs’ organization,” pasted posters at different places in Rajshahi, including the University campus, exhorting Muslims to learn “the proper use of arms.” Syed Kausar Hussein, the chief of the group, who had been to Saudi Arabia as an expatriate worker, was trained in Afghanistan. According to the police, the posters reached Rajshahi from Dhaka. Hussein is a former *madrasah* student and used to run a small business in Rajshahi.<sup>62</sup>

A cover story by the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER) in April 2002 is another reflection of this alarmist view.<sup>63</sup> The FEER story does not comfort the liberal democrats and secular people. According to Bertil Lintner, the Thailand-based Swedish journalist: “A revolution

59. *Prothom Alo*, June 9 and 10, 2001; *Daily Star*, 15 June 2001.

60. *Azadi* (Bengali daily), 20 June 2001.

61. *Prothom Alo*, 12 January 2001.

62. *Ibid.*, 24 April 2001.

63. “Beware of Bangladesh—Bangladesh: A Cocoon of Terror,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 April 2002.

is taking place in Bangladesh that threatens trouble for the region and beyond if left unchallenged. Islamic fundamentalism, religious intolerance, militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist groups, a powerful military with ties to the militants, the mushrooming of Islamic schools churning out radical students, middle class apathy, poverty and lawlessness—all are combining to transform the nation.” The report also suggested that Western donors and diplomats, more concerned with the problems of governance and development than the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh “seem to have paid scant attention to the deeper long-term danger” of Islamic resurgence in the country. Citing the indifference and complacency of the Bangladeshi middle classes and government about the “impending threat” of Talibanization of the polity, the report considers the electoral success of the Jamaat-i-Islami, having seventeen seats in the three-hundred-member parliament and two ministers in the cabinet of the BNP-led coalition government, ominous. According to the report, more extremist Islamic clerics and groups in Bangladesh, such as Maulana Ubaidul Haq and the “shadowy” Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami, having connections with their Pakistani, Afghan, Chechen, and Southeast Asian counterparts with the blessings from Osama bin Laden, have been active in the region. The January 22, 2002 attack on the American Cultural Centre in Kolkata has been imputed to Harkat gunmen. The report cited how Jamaat supporters in general and Ubaidul Haq in particular took part in anti-U.S. protests during the Afghan War in late 2001. According to the report, while addressing thousands of Muslims—including the President and several cabinet ministers of Bangladesh at the Eid congregational prayer in Dhaka in December 2001—the latter publicly condemned the U.S. president as “the most heinous terrorist in the world.” “America and Bush must be destroyed. The Americans will be washed away if Bangladesh’s 120 million Muslims spit on them,” the cleric exhorted. Several local newspaper reports are corroborative of the reported speech.<sup>64</sup>

It seems the report has nothing to do with reality. One is not sure if there is any hidden agenda of individuals or groups behind such reporting. Soon after the excerption of the Internet version of the story in local newspapers, the BNP-Jamaat coalition government

64. *Prothom Alo*, 20 December 2001.

under Khaleda Zia condemned the report as baseless, imposing a ban on the circulation of the April 4 issue of the periodical in Bangladesh. However, no sooner had Sheikh Hasina of the opposition Awami League blamed the BNP-Jamaat coalition government for the “prevalent terrorist image” of Bangladesh than Prime Minister Khaleda Zia blamed Hasina’s party for “planting” the *FEER* story.<sup>65</sup> A similar sensational report came out in the *Wall Street Journal* (April 2, 2002) entitled, “In Bangladesh, as in Pakistan, a Worrisome Rise in Islamic Extremism.” “Militant groups with links with international terrorists” and “powerful military with ties to militants” are said to have mobilized Islamic militants in the country. One wonders if there is a link between such sensational writings and what Sheikh Hasina and her party have been doing, i.e., vilifying the BNP and its allies as “Islamic fundamentalists” and as local agents of Osama bin Laden. Curiously, the report portrays the Awami League as “left-leaning and secular,” ignoring how the party since the early 1990s has been projecting itself as a champion of Islam and how Sheikh Hasina donned the Islamic *hijab* on the eve of the 1996 parliamentary elections and became the prime minister. The pro-Awami League sympathy of the reporter is further reflected in his corroboration of Sheikh Hasina that the BNP-led coalition government, which came to power after “ousting,” not “defeating” the Awami League, has established “a reign of terror across the country.” The reporter blamed the BNP-led government as “anti-Hindu” and “pro-fundamentalist.” It is curious that he blamed the Harkat-ul-Jihad al Islami behind the threats against Taslima Nasrin in 1993 and for “the attempted murder” of popular poet Shamsur Rahman in 1999. One has every reason to agree with Enayetullah Khan, the editor of weekly *Holiday*, that the so-called attack on the poet was a sham and that he has “lost his face as a tool of propaganda.” Khan points out Bertil Lintner’s “Indian connection” for embellishing his article “with Indian intelligence quotes as credible evidence of the Harkat-ul-Jihad nexus between Pakistan and Bangladesh through the intermediation of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan.”<sup>66</sup>

65. *Ibid.*, 4 April 2002; *Daily Star*, April 4, 11 and 12, 2002.

66. “O Secularism!” *Holiday*, 5 April 2002.

It is interesting that while the BNP-led government sued the *FEER* for damages to the tune of one billion dollars for tarnishing the country's image,<sup>67</sup> liberal democrats and the media also condemned the *FEER* reports for their anti-Bangladesh stand. The *Daily Star* of Bangladesh (a "liberal democrat" daily, soft on the Awami League) in an editorial mentions "regular and credible elections," the freedom of expression, the existence of private TV channels, women's impressive turnout in elections, the rise in the literacy rate, women's representation in the armed forces and their gradual empowerment process in Bangladesh to portray a liberal democratic image of Bangladesh. The editor considers the *FEER* article prejudiced, one-sided and highly irresponsible.<sup>68</sup> The countrywide condemnation of the article (with the exception of the Awami League corroborating the story) was soon followed by its rebuttal by foreign reporters, diplomats and others familiar with Bangladesh. According to Philip Bowring, former editor of the *FEER*, Western "Islam-bashers" have been responsible for this type of "media demonization of Islamic nations." He blames the avidly pro-U.S. Dow Jones, who owns the periodical, for the sensational story, in line with the Western media in the wake of 9/11. "For sure, some nasty extremists do exist in this as in all other countries, but the nation's secular polity and the precedence of Bengali over Islamic identity is rooted in its independent history," Bowring reiterates. To him, there is no point in going after the "make-believe enemies" in countries like Bangladesh, as the real terrorists live elsewhere, including some of the major Western cities. Bowring is critical of alienating hundreds of millions of Muslims, whom he thinks "are far more moderate than Christian fundamentalist zealots such as Attorney General John Ashcroft in the Bush government."<sup>69</sup> Among several Western observers, Mary Anne Peters, U.S. ambassador to Bangladesh, was very critical of the *FEER* and the *Wall Street Journal* for publishing such biased articles on Bangladesh, "a liberal Muslim" nation. She felt that investigation was essential to find out the truth behind the story.<sup>70</sup>

67. Ibid.

68. "FEER's Prejudiced and One-sided Cover Story," *Daily Star*, 5 April 2002.

69. "West's Islam-bashers Playing into bin Laden's Hands," cited in *Holiday*, 12 April 2002; *Daily Star*, 16 April 2002.

70. *Daily Star*, 14 April 2002.

Despite such claims by Sheikh Hasina and other Awami League leaders, in tune with the *FEER* report that there are Taliban elements in the country and in the BNP-led coalition government formed in October 2001, the allegations do not make any sense, as the Jamaat-i-Islami is not a pro-Taliban organization at all. To Hasina, two cabinet ministers belonging to the Jamaat and one of her contenders in the election represent the Taliban. She told this to a BBC reporter in the United States. Another Awami League leader, former foreign minister Abdus Samad Azad, told the same thing to the visiting British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Dhaka.<sup>71</sup> And the BNP cannot be singled out as an ally of the Jamaat. The Jamaat and Awami League were together against the BNP government of 1991–96.

## Conclusions

THE MUTUAL VILIFICATION of the two parties indicates how the country is sharply polarized between the pro- and anti-Awami League camps, the former representing “liberal democracy” and “pro-liberation forces” and the latter, “pro-Islam” and “anti-Indian” viewpoints. The Awami League tries to get dividends by projecting the BNP as “anti-liberation” for its electoral alliance with the Jamaat, which actively collaborated with the Pakistani occupation forces in 1971.

It seems the circulation of an English booklet on the eve of President Clinton’s trip to Bangladesh in March 2000 by the Awami League government was another attempt to vilify the BNP-led opposition group as “Islamic terrorist,” a *bête noire* to the United States. It was also an attempt to establish the Awami League as the only liberal democratic alternative in the country. The booklet contained sensational information about the “impending threat” of terrorist attacks on Clinton by Islamic militants. One is not sure if this led to the cancellation of the president’s scheduled trip to a village around 30 kilometers off Dhaka to meet female members of a local NGO. It is also widely believed that the Awami League government resorted to the same trick immediately after September 11 (on the eve of the parliamentary elections of October 2001) by pasting posters on city walls in Dhaka, portraying BNP leaders as “pro-Taliban,” “friends” of

71. *Prothom Alo*, January 1 and 5, 2001.

Osama bin Laden. And as we know, both major parties of Bangladesh adopt expedient slogans and policies for the sake of power. As the Awami League has no qualms about using the Islamic card for political leverage, so is the rival BNP, which does not hesitate to portray it as the champion of liberal democracy and nationalism. Despite championing the cause of democracy, the Awami League did not accept electoral defeats in 1991 and 2001 parliamentary elections gracefully. While Sheikh Hasina imputed the 1991 defeat to a “subtle rigging” by the rival BNP and its “Islamic” allies, to her, the BNP victory in 2001 was possible because of the “crude rigging” by the “anti-liberation” forces. With a view to tarnishing the image of the BNP and its Islamist allies, especially among the Western donors, in early June 2002, the pro-Awami League Centre for Research and Information published a book, *A Rigged Election, An Illegitimate Government: Bangladesh Election 2001*. It is noteworthy that both the elections were held under caretaker governments under the supervision of international poll observers. However, nothing would be more simplistic than explaining the rise of Islamism as a mere by-product of the perennial conflict between the Awami League and its adversaries.

As indicated in the *FEER* report, one does not totally reject the presence of Islamic militants, fanatics, “fundamentalists” and even pro-Taliban activists in the country. In the changed post-Cold War environment of globalization and market economy, which is forcing the less developed countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh to adopt World Bank and IMF recommendations—at the cost of the poor and under-employed beneficiaries of state subsidies and welfare—Islamism has been emerging as an alternative order. Very similar to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Algeria and Egypt, among other Muslim countries, the Bangladesh polity has been divided between the Western and “vernacular elite,” to paraphrase Oliver Roy;<sup>72</sup> the latter representing the underdogs, forced to adopt alternative ideologies for the sake of survival. During the Cold War, socialism, nationalism and separatist ideologies had been quite handy as alternatives to “Neo-Colonialism,” said to be the root of all evils. Curiously, the West, especially the United States, during the Cold War promoted Islamism in various

72. Oliver Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1994), passim.

countries including Egypt, Pakistan and Afghanistan to counterpoise communism. Leaders belonging to the upper classes often espoused radical ideas in the name of establishing the Islamic welfare state. Some Muslim leaders, such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Nur Muhammad Taraki, Ben Bella, Nasser and Mujib for example, promoted “national socialism” as their version of the welfare state. In the post-Cold War era, Islamism has replaced the earlier doctrines with certain modifications—though retaining the same mass appeal—to empower the underdogs representing the peasantry (and/or tribes) and the “vernacular elite” from the lower middle classes.

While in Iran and Afghanistan the well-entrenched mullah, in the absence of strong middle classes and modern institutions, succeeded in installing themselves to power (in both the cases with mass support), things are not that smooth for the Bangladeshi mullah. However, one finds striking similarities between pre-revolutionary Iran and Bangladesh since its inception in 1971. In Iran, during the Allied occupation in the 1940s, impoverished rural masses moved to the cities. In the 1960s, there was a further influx of peasants into the cities in the wake of the so-called “White Revolution of Reza Shah II.” Thus, Islam-oriented people with peasant ways of thinking outnumbered the pro-Shah, privileged and Westernized secular upper classes. These uprooted rural migrants had close links with the influential clergy and the countryside. And we may agree with V.S. Naipaul, that it takes more than one generation “to change a village way of thinking,” and that the sharply polarized population of the major cities in Iran, having no communication with each other, “were two tribes living in one country.”<sup>73</sup> Apart from the similarities between Iran and Bangladesh, especially with regard to the influx of conservative peasants into the urban areas, there are striking dissimilarities between the two. Unlike Iran under the Shah, Bangladesh has been far more tolerant, democratic and “Islamic.” Here the governments from time to time adopt and sponsor “Islamic” slogans and characters for the sake of legitimacy. The replacement of Persian “Khuda Hafiz” (God bless you) by Arabic (more acceptable to the puritans) “Allah Hafiz,” in government functions and media, for example, by the BNP-led coalition government in 2001, may be cited

73. V. S. Naipaul, *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1998), 257–58.

in this regard. It seems the major “liberal democratic” parties of Bangladesh have been competing against each other to prove their Islamic credentials.

Again, contrary to conventional wisdom, Islamism is no longer the monopoly of the mullah. In Bangladesh, the bulk of the Jamaat-i-Islami cadres, if not the leaders, are not madrassa-educated mullahs, but are from the various petty bourgeois classes representing the middle and poor peasantry, petty businessmen and shopkeepers, school teachers and other underemployed and unemployed classes.<sup>74</sup> Many of them can be classified as members of the peripheral “vernacular elite” or graduates from Bengali medium institutions—the least preferred in the private sector job market. They nourish a tremendous sense of deprivation and, like their Algerian, Egyptian and Iranian counterparts, have the potential to turn very violent and anarchical. And their madrassa-educated counterparts—even poorer and almost totally unemployable in both the public and private sectors other than in low-paid teaching positions or as employees of mosques—are also angry and frustrated with anything that goes in the name of secularism and modernism. Historically, the replacement of Hindu landed and professional elite in the wake of the Partition, non-Bengali elite after the Liberation of 1971, and of English-educated elite in the name of Bengali nationalism by the relatively inferior and unskilled people, has been responsible for social disorder, political chaos and economic mismanagement. The ongoing triangular conflict among modernists in line with globalization, Bengali nationalists and Islamists in the country is reflective of the situation.

While the well-organized Jamaat has been gaining legitimacy in the eyes of many—including Jimmy Carter—for adopting constitutional politics, a section of the mullahs, mainly the pro-establishment pirs and others without any firm base, has remained vacillating and opportunistic. They are very critical of the Jamaat as well. Pir Fazlul Karim of Charmonai, for example, on the one hand is critical of female leadership and of the Jamaat for lending support to female leadership (considering it un-Islamic), and on the other hand he extols the attributes of General Ershad, widely known for his corruption and promiscuity. “Despite all his faults, Ershad has two virtues—firstly, he is a

74. Razia Akter Banu, “Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh,” 84–95.

man; and secondly, he has formally repented for his sins,” so goes the eulogy.<sup>75</sup> The pir, among many other clerics, wants to withdraw female students from all schools in the country, especially those “who look older than their age.”<sup>76</sup> As one does not take these pirs, who have hardly any political leverage, seriously, so one does not give any credence to the non-cleric politicians with regard to their pro-Islamic rhetoric. G.M. Qader (Ershad’s brother), an MP from the Jatiya Party (Ershad Group), having very little influence on the people, for example, wanted to table a bill in parliament to make the saying of prayer five times a day obligatory for every Bangladeshi Muslim. Otherwise, he demanded, they should be jailed and liable to pay a hefty fine.<sup>77</sup> The mutual admiration of ultra-orthodox mullahs and sections of the Anglo-Mohammedan politicians, their advocacy of shari’a law and their tirade against the Jamaat are reflective of their desire to get political legitimacy by using Islam and setting aside the Jamaat. It seems radical Islamic rhetoric is their only way to make room for themselves in the political arena of Bangladesh. Otherwise, they know, it is next to impossible to dislodge the powerful BNP and Awami League to their advantage. The BNP and Awami League, on the other hand, use the Islamic card firstly to neutralize the Jamaat and secondly to appease the vast majority of God-fearing and anti-Indian Bengali Muslims for the sake of political legitimacy and leverage.

In sum, this study reveals that the people in general have lost faith in the prospect of a welfare state in Bangladesh. There is more or less a consensus among the educated people about corruption among their politicians and bureaucrats. It may be mentioned that in 2001, Transparency International found Bangladesh to be the most corrupt country out of ninety-one countries of the world.<sup>78</sup> Another study reveals that in the last thirty-odd years since independence, corrupt politicians, bureaucrats and their cronies have plundered around Taka 1,350 billion (approximately US\$30 billion) or about 75 percent of the total foreign aid received by the country.<sup>79</sup> Every now and then peo-

75. *Prothom Alo*, July 13 and 25, 2001; March 11 and 29, 2002.

76. *Jai Jai Din*, 1 January 2002.

77. *Daily Star* and *Prothom Alo*, 7 March 2002.

78. *Janakantha* and *Independent*, 28 June 2001.

79. Abul Barkat, “The Economy of Bangladesh in the Thirty Years of the Post-liberation Period: A Legacy of Failure in Human Development” [in Bengali], (paper presented at a seminar organized by the Bangladesh Itihas Parishad [History Society], Dhaka, 26 April 2002).

ple read in local newspapers about the hundreds of loan defaulters of the country who have borrowed billions of taka from local banks and have never returned the money. In view of the above, it is no wonder that millions of Bangladeshis have turned fatalist and escapist, taking refuge in religion. Their religiosity and inherent peasant culture are conducive to the growth of fatalism as well.<sup>80</sup>

Curiously, despite all the extortion, corruption and the consequential poverty and misery of the people, as reported by the BBC, a survey in 1999 portrayed the Bangladeshis to be “the happiest people on earth.” As we know, “the happiest people” have no reasons to take up arms or turn into Taliban for the sake of an Islamic revolution in Bangladesh. The “happiest people” of the country are actually part of the Third World poor, always in the state of “pathetic contentment” reflecting their pragmatism. And seemingly, there is no way out to experience growth, development and prosperity for the average Bangladeshi in the near future. According to the *Quarterly Economic Update* of the Asian Development Bank in the first quarter of 2002, about half of the population lives below the poverty line in Bangladesh, which would need forty-eight years to eradicate poverty at the existing growth rate of around 4 percent per year. The future seems to be quite bleak—the figures of 35 percent unemployed, and more than forty people vying for a single job, do not promise a rosy prospect for the country. The upshot has been the mass exodus of landless peasants to the urban areas, especially to Dhaka, the capital city.

To conclude, we may assume that although the fatalist peasant masses, resigned to their pathetic contentment, are not possibly posing a threat to the law and order situation, as peasants “never make history” and are incapable of leading themselves other than organizing short-lived, “pre-political” uprisings reflecting their “class-in-itself” mentality; the real danger comes from the disgruntled lower middle classes and the various lumpen elements in society. The broken promises of the successive governments since independence, which have delivered more of the same—hollow promises, corruption, unemployment and misery, adversely affecting the loyalty of the

80. Hashmi, “Culture, Governance and Underdevelopment: A Case Study of Bangladesh” (paper presented at the Thirty-fifth Bengal Studies Conference, Manhattan, Kansas State University, 18–20 May 2001).

petty bourgeoisie and the fast disappearing middle classes—may trigger the rise of the Jamaat as the alternative of the so-called liberal democratic and secular parties. This, however, would not signal the ascendancy of Islamic militants and anti-Hindu communal forces to power. It is highly unlikely that if the Jamaat and its allies ever come to power, that any threat would be posed to India, let alone to the West. Despite the alarmist views of some Western analysts, governments and their local adherents in Bangladesh, who seemingly have been influenced by Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, the ascendancy of Islam to political power in Bangladesh would not destabilize the region. However, the persecution and suffering of Muslims, for example in the Middle East and India, continue to arouse sympathy for their coreligionists and anger against their actual and perceived persecutors among the bulk of the Bangladeshi Muslims. Their solidarity with fellow Muslims elsewhere does not necessarily mean that Bangladeshi Muslims have turned terrorist, posing a threat to global order and democracy.

# 4

ARUN R. SWAMY

## **Ideology, Organization and Electoral Strategy of Hindu Nationalism: What's Religion Got to Do with It?**

**I**t is sometimes said that generals fight the last war. Similarly, political analysts tend to find the most recent global scourge in every societal ailment they encounter. In the 1940s and 1950s many populist movements and regimes were mistakenly viewed as “fascist”; in the 1960s and 1970s numerous third world nationalist movements were perceived as and professed to be communist; and since the Iranian revolution of 1979 “fundamentalisms” seem to have flourished. Sometimes more than one of these labels has been applied to the same movement. In India, Hindu Nationalism was—and often still is—perceived as fascist, particularly by its Indian critics, while outside observers have found it altogether too easy to treat it as the Hindu equivalent of Islamic radicalism. Consequently, before inquiring “how deep are the organizational roots of religious radicalism in India,” we have to first settle whether it is religious at all.

The first part of this paper accordingly examines the evolution of Hindu Nationalist ideology to emphasize a point that has been made many times: Whether or not Hindu Nationalism is “fascist,” it is most

assuredly not “fundamentalist.” Hindu Nationalists are concerned with the strength and unity of Hindus as a political community, not with their forms of worship. They have charged religious minorities with divided loyalty and have been responsible for organized mass violence against Muslims. However, they have not, historically, been concerned with imposing any view of Hindu religion on its practitioners or punishing Hindus who violate the precepts of the “true” religion.<sup>1</sup> In short, for Hindu Nationalists, there are traitors, but not apostates.

The second part of the paper reviews the evolution of Hindu Nationalist organizations. The section traces how local militant movements coalesced at the All-India level, how one organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) came to be identified as the central organization of this ideological tendency, and the relationship of the RSS to political parties and other organizations associated with Hindu Nationalism. The main theme of this section is the enduring tension in Hindu Nationalism between organizational loyalty and ideological purity on the one hand, and the need to build larger coalitions on the other.

The final section examines why Hindu Nationalism, which for so long existed on the margins of Indian political life, came to dominate the polity fifty years after independence. The focus is on electoral processes, not on the motives and violence of activists, which are discussed by other papers in this workshop. The argument is that the ideological factors often cited as reasons for the growth of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)—the broadcast of Hindu epics during the Congress period of the 1980s, and the movement to replace a mosque at Ayodhya with a temple—played a permissive role at best. The growth of the BJP has occurred not as a direct result of these factors, but because of its ability to exploit material and status grievances among discrete segments of Indian society, as well as rivalries within the Congress party and between it and various regional parties. While most of these issues had a natural affinity with traditional positions of Hindu Nationalists, the affinity was not with a religious agenda but with a militaristic approach to foreign policy, a historic preference for

1. The only religious demand made by Hindu Nationalists—that the slaughter of cows should be banned—also grew out of a conflict between Hindus and Muslims in northern India and is now downplayed as many southern Hindus do eat beef.

smaller states (so as to strengthen the central government), and their historic opposition to affirmative action.

### **Ideology: Inventing a Hindu Nation**

Hindu Nationalism should be distinguished from the nationalism of the Indian National Congress, or Congress party, often referred to as “Indian nationalism.” As Jaffrelot has pointed out, while the nationalism of the Congress party was essentially territorial and “civic,” identifying as Indians all inhabitants of the British Indian Empire, Hindu Nationalism has sought to identify an Indian nation according to ethnic criteria.<sup>2</sup> For Hindu nationalists, emphasizing Hindu identity is a way of overcoming the linguistic and regional diversity of India, by emphasizing a shared cultural heritage that also distinguished most Indians from non-Indians. There was, of course, an obvious difficulty: not all Indians were Hindus and, moreover, not all parts of India had a Hindu majority. Of course, for Hindu nationalists, this obstacle was an opportunity, for it was by casting Muslims as the Other and the enemy, that they have sought to unify Hindus. The challenge posed by Muslim-majority provinces was largely, though not entirely solved by the Partition of British India into India and Pakistan, but this left a greater difficulty for Hindu Nationalism—the diversity of Hinduism itself.

Hindus have no central organization, no single religious text and do not share the same rituals and practices, deities or beliefs. What Hindus across India shared was a distinctive social structure, composed of hereditary occupational groups or “castes” that were ranked according to various criteria.<sup>3</sup> However, this social structure was as much a source of division as unity, as local “caste systems” varied considerably and lower-ranked castes were in the process of challenging it, in any case.

Moreover, to the extent that there was a pan-Indian “Hindu” tradition, it was the preserve of the one pan-Indian caste, the Brahmins, who formed an elite segment of priests and *literati* within

2. Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996), chap. 1.

3. See Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (London: Paladin, 1972). Dumont's famous view that the criteria of “purity” and “pollution” were the dominant sources of ranking has since been challenged by many other authors.

Hindu society. Consequently, any effort to emphasize a shared Hindu tradition ran into resistance from both advocates of regional cultures and the champions of upwardly mobile castes. Not surprisingly, therefore, support for Hindu Nationalism has traditionally been limited to elite segments of the largest linguistic region, the Hindi-speaking Gangetic plain, and until recently had difficulty expanding outside that constituency.

Nonetheless, it is misleading to treat Hindu Nationalism as simply a conservative ideology aimed at preserving the privileges of the existing elite. B.D. Graham, who popularized the term “Hindu Nationalist,” aptly distinguishes “Hindu nationalists” from “Hindu traditionalists”:

Whereas the Hindu traditionalists were conservative in their approach, enlisting time-honored values to justify the continuation of a hierarchical social order, the Hindu nationalists wanted to remold Hindu society along corporatist lines and to fashion the state accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

Hindu traditionalists “stressed the need to preserve Hindu religious beliefs and social practices and to foster the study of the Hindi and Sanskrit languages and their literatures,” while Hindu Nationalists were “concerned not simply to conserve Hinduism but to develop the latent power of the Hindu community.”<sup>5</sup> Hindu Nationalists, seemingly “inspired by European fascism” and “concerned with modernization and industrialization,” sought to “remold” state and society “along corporatist lines.”<sup>6</sup> Hindu traditionalists, in short, might have been concerned with preserving the social order; but Hindu Nationalists sought, or at least were willing to remake that social order in order to promote the unity (*sangathan*) of Hindus as a political entity.

Despite this fundamental difference of orientation, Hindu traditionalists and Hindu Nationalists are often found in the same organizations

4. B. D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 6. Unlike Graham, I have chosen to capitalize “Nationalism” to distinguish Hindu Nationalists from Hindus who might be nationalist in the Congress mold.

5. Graham, “The Congress and Hindu Nationalism,” in D. A. Low, ed., *The Indian National Congress* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), 174.

6. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 44–45.

and cooperate politically, a fact that has often presented Hindu Nationalists with dilemmas over how to enlist a broader constituency. At the same time, Hindu Nationalists and Congress-style Indian nationalists also have many concerns in common, which on some issues makes it difficult to distinguish between these ideologically. A brief review of the common antecedents of these three tendencies in the religious and political ferment of the British colonial period might help clarify these ambiguities.

The ideological roots of Hindu Nationalism, indeed of Indian Nationalism, lie in religious revivalist and reform movements that emerged among educated Hindus in the nineteenth century. The first such responses in India were liberal reform movements especially in Bengal, which sought to “purify” Hinduism of those traits that appeared most barbaric to the Western eye. Like other, later movements, early Bengali reformers viewed Indian (Hindu) civilization as having degenerated from an earlier period of glory because of the corruption of Hinduism by those features of Hindu society, which most offended Western sensibilities: caste, untouchability, polytheism, child marriage and polygamy.<sup>7</sup>

Later in the century, various regions in India experienced a different kind of religious response to the challenge of foreign conquest. This combined militant religious revivalism with the political agenda of ending British rule and was often tied to an economic nationalism that was at the heart of all Indian varieties of nationalism. These movements occurred in different regions and typically blended pride in region and language with their religious revivalism and placed emphasis on promoting physical fitness, often founding gymnasiums for this purpose. In Bengal, activities were often conducted through secret societies that sometimes practiced terrorism; elsewhere they initiated boycotts of foreign cloth or with social reform.<sup>8</sup> In Bombay

7. Jaffrelot, “Hindu Nationalism: Strategic Syncretism in Ideology Building,” *Economic and Political Weekly* (20–27 March 1993): 517–20; Daniel Gold, “Organized Hinduisms: From Vedic Truth to Hindu Nation,” in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed*, The Fundamentalism Project, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

8. John R. McClane, “The Early Congress, Hindu Populism and the Wider Society,” in Richard Sisson and Stanley Wolpert, eds., *Congress and Indian Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 66–67; Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India, 1885–1947* (India: Macmillan, 1983), 97; Rajat Kanta Ray, “Moderates, Extremists and Revolutionaries: Bengal, 1900–1908,” in Sisson and Wolpert, eds., *Congress and Indian Nationalism*.

the Congress leader Bal Gangadhar Tilak was on the one hand opposing legislation that raised the age of marital consent for girls and promoting a new Hindu festival while, on the other, attempting to start a boycott of foreign cloth to protest countervailing excise taxes imposed on Indian cotton.<sup>9</sup> Both Tilak and the terrorist societies of Bengal had a direct influence on contemporary Hindu Nationalism. Tilak's Ganesh festival was adopted by the Shiv Sena party of Maharashtra as an expression of Hindu assertion, while the RSS was influenced in its organization by Bengali terrorist societies.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to recognize that the nationalism of the Congress, too, shared motivations with these early religious reform movements. The secular liberalism of many Congress leaders, such as the first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, grew out of a conviction shared with Hindu reformers that caste, superstition, and obscurantism had contributed to the decline of Indian civilization. Congress' economic nationalism, like that of Hindu Nationalists, was a reaction to the experience of economic backwardness and colonial exploitation. Congress leaders were also afraid and suspicious of regionalist and sectarian divisions and, like Hindu Nationalists, believed that had Indians not been internally divided, they would never have been conquered. However, Congress leaders, especially after Gandhi, sought to overcome these differences by emphasizing the plurality and diversity of Indian civilization, while Hindu Nationalists emphasized—and if necessary invented—common elements.<sup>11</sup>

V.D. Savarkar was the first to articulate a coherent ideology of Hindu Nationalism in a 1924 book titled *Essentials of Hindutva*. In it he identified the movement's objective as Hindu sangathan, or the unification of Hindus. Hindu Nationalist ideology, as expounded by Savarkar, was first and foremost an ideology about building a modern nation-state in India, and as such focused on questions that a doctrine concerned with religious revivalism would have largely ignored. The principal issues of the day for Savarkar, as for Nehru,

9. Sarkar, *Modern India*, 91.

10. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 35–36.

11. The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885. Gandhi took over its leadership in the 1920s.

were the political representation of and relations among different groups, and how to promote economic development. Savarkar justified his answers on the grounds that they would further the strength and unity of the nation, rather than by appealing to religious values.

What Savarkar sought to define and defend was not a set of religious values or practices, but an Indian nationhood defined in primordialist terms. For Savarkar, an Indian was anyone who viewed India as both “fatherland and holy land.”<sup>12</sup> The definition was self-consciously crafted to include all religious traditions that arose within the subcontinent, including Sikhs, Jains, and even Buddhists, but to exclude practitioners of “foreign” religions such as Christianity and, especially, Islam.

This concern for militancy in the face of an “invader” rather than an “infidel” is reflected after independence, for example, in foreign policy. Not surprisingly, Hindu Nationalists have been consistently hostile toward Pakistan, but this has often extended to the Muslim Middle East generally. Unlike the Congress, which has supported the Palestinian cause, Hindu Nationalists have long favored an alliance with Israel. Hindu Nationalists have also generally been more hawkish, calling for a commitment to military strength and often favoring the use of force and have been advocating the acquisition of nuclear weapons since the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

Hindu Nationalism has also expressed its concern with strength and unity on a variety of other secular issues. Similar to the Arya Samaj—and the Congress—Hindu Nationalists have strongly favored trade protection and government action to promote domestic industry, positions that distinguished them from the conservative Swatantra Party of the 1950s and 1960s, as well as from opposition parties associated with farmers’ interests. Unlike the Congress, they have been staunch defenders of private property but have at times advocated land reform and corporatist approaches to labor relations with the state mediating between labor and business to ensure

12. Gold, “Organized Hinduisms,” 1991.

13. See, e.g., Jana Sangh, *Jana Sangh Souvenir* (publication issued for the 15th annual session of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 25–27 April 1969); Balraj Madhok, “Why Jana Sangh?” in Ramdas G. Bhatkal, ed., *Political Alternatives in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967).

productivity. Consequently, Hindu Nationalists can often appear schizophrenic on economic policy when viewed through a conventional left-right lens, but their views are generally consistent with an ideology that is concerned primarily with questions of national unity, power and status.<sup>14</sup>

Hindu Nationalists have also historically expressed a strong preference for a unitary state and a more uncompromising stance on cultural assimilation in other areas, such as language, where they have historically favored the promotion of Hindi as a national language. The last two positions have made it difficult for Hindu Nationalists to penetrate southern India, whose inhabitants speak Dravidian languages that are unrelated to the Indo-European languages of northern India, although they have often borrowed Sanskrit words. Concerns over preserving regional identity have also made the four southern states, and some of the other non-Hindi-speaking states such as West Bengal, far more concerned with preserving states' rights. It was not until the 1990s when the BJP began to downplay these issues and ally with regional parties in these states that it was able to win elections in them.<sup>15</sup>

However, the area where Hindu Nationalists are generally acknowledged as having been consistent, and which defines them in the eyes of observers, is the relationship between Hindus and religious minorities. The principal question in the 1930s was whether to grant Muslims and other minorities special electoral representation. The Congress had agreed to rather limited concessions to Muslims and certain low-caste groups, but these were still more generous than Hindu Nationalists were willing to countenance.<sup>16</sup> Hindu Nationalists accused Congress of violating the principles of secular nation building, a charge that they were to repeat throughout the post-independence period. Thus, denounced Congress' acquiescence in the reservation of seats for Muslims:

14. For a more detailed analysis see Arun R. Swamy, "The Nation, the People and the Poor: Sandwich Tactics in Party Competition and Policy Formation, India, 1931–1996" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996), chap. 7.

15. Interestingly, S. P. Mookherjee, the first president of the Jan Sangh, the BJP's predecessor, who was from Bengal himself, had a more pluralistic view of language. See *Jana Sangh*, 75.

16. These "reserved seats" for Muslims were created by the Government of India Act of 1935, which created elected provincial governments, but were abolished by the Indian Constitution. Reserved seats continue to exist for certain low-caste groups.

They call themselves Indian Nationalists! But every step they take is communal. They have guaranteed special protection to minorities....Is that Indian Nationalism?....A truly Indian National electorate must be only an Indian electorate pure and simple....<sup>17</sup>

Savarkar's charge that it was Congress that was practicing "communal" politics extended also to Congress' accommodation of caste sentiments: "They mark down Hindu homes even according to castes ... and then allot their candidates according to their castes.... They appeal even to caste pride and caste hatred. In the election season they are communalists of the worst type...."<sup>18</sup>

This idea that it was Congress, rather than the Hindu right that was "communal," has remained an enduring feature of the rhetoric of this political tendency. Thus, S.P. Mookherjee, Savarkar's successor in the 1940s, stated in 1945:

Our fundamental difference is that we refuse to surrender on the basic principle of India's integrity nor do we subscribe to pandering to intransigent communalism.... [T]he Congress policy of appeasement has merely widened the national resistance and has gravely jeopardized the legitimate rights of Hindus as such....<sup>19</sup>

The charge of "pandering" and "appeasement" have since become staples of Hindu Nationalist criticism of the Congress policy toward minorities. The present Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was attacking "the bane of pseudo-secularism" in the late 1960s.<sup>20</sup> In the 1990s the current deputy prime minister, Lal Krishna Advani, coined the terms "genuine secularism" and "positive secularism" to describe BJP positions.

17. Presidential speech to Hindu Mahasabha, 1938, excerpted in C. H. Philips, *The Evolution of India and Pakistan, 1858-1947* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 362.

18.

19. *Ibid.*, 369.

20. *Jana Sangh*, 55-59.

## Organization: Unifying Hindus

Until the 1920s, the only coherent organization expressing militant Hindu views was a religious reform movement that drew as much on the reformist tendencies of earlier religious responses as on the militant revivalism of Tilak and the Bengal secret societies. This was the Arya Samaj (Aryan Society), which was founded in western India in 1875 and struck its deepest roots in the Muslim-majority province of Punjab. As with earlier reform movements, the Arya Samaj sought to simplify religious practice and remove untouchability as well as to incorporate elements of Christian and Muslim religious practice, most notably a purification ceremony used to elevate the status of low-caste Hindus and to “reconvert” Muslims and Christians. However, the Samaj sought the essence of Hinduism more in an idealized vision of an ancient age of valor than in the later philosophical traditions of monistic spiritualism, and at times sought to define “Hindus” less in terms of religious belief or practice than in terms of territorial and racial identity. Samajists dated the decline of Hindu—and by extension, Indian—civilization as having started with the Muslim conquests of the twelfth century and viewed Muslims as an adversary as much as the British.<sup>21</sup> Finally, the Arya Samaj was both actively political and economically nationalist. In all these respects Arya Samaj anticipated later Hindu Nationalism, to which it eventually gave birth.<sup>22</sup>

Despite its reformist agenda, the Arya Samaj’s anti-Muslim orientation led it to link up with other movements that stemmed from the growing conflict between Hindus and Muslims in the Gangetic Plain. A major source of this conflict was the rivalry between educated Muslims and Hindus over which language or, more accurately, script, should be used for official purposes. Hindi and Urdu are essentially the same language but written in the Devanagari (Sanskrit) and Arabic script, respectively. Advocates of Hindi have also sought to “purify” the language by removing words of Persian, Arabic and Turkish origin and replacing them with words of Sanskrit derivation; it is this Sanskritized Hindi that is taught and used for official purposes in

21. Gold, “Organized Hinduism,” 1991.

22. For example, Arya Samaj leaders started an insurance company and a bank (the Punjab National Bank), and sponsored Indians to go to Japan for technical education. See Sarkar, *Modern India*, 39, 99, 127.

India. The choice between Hindu and Urdu made little difference at the level of spoken conversation but had tremendous implications for the job prospects of the two groups, as well as symbolic importance.

The language conflict linked up with a militant movement among Hindus in the northern Gangetic plain for the abolition of cow-slaughter. In the 1880s and 1890s, Cow Protection Societies instigated riots over whether Muslims should be allowed to slaughter cows, in the towns of Punjab and the United Provinces (UP) along the Ganges valley, climaxing with forty-five such riots and 107 killed in 1893.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, Cow Protection Societies appear to have grown out of town societies established to defend orthodox Hinduism against the challenge posed by Hindu reformist movements. These often competing Societies for the Defense of Orthodoxy (*Sanatan Dharma Sabhas*) frequently pursued very specific goals such as winning the right to organize—and control the patronage associated with—particular local religious festivals. Although primarily urban, the cow protection issue allowed the orthodox societies to establish links to the countryside, often through the travels of itinerant preachers, and through organizations set up to collect funds from the countryside and funnel them to town organizations. However, in the countryside they often targeted not only Muslims but also rising low-caste groups Hindus associated with cow-slaughter.<sup>24</sup>

At the turn of the century many of these regional expressions of cultural regeneration and militant nationalism coalesced into a frontal assault on the liberal, secular, and gradualist ethos of the mainstream Congress leadership. The challengers were styled extremists, in contrast to the more liberal moderates, who sought political change through constitutional means. Extremism reached its peak during the *Swadeshi* (“Indigenous”) movement (1905–8), which sought to undermine British power and interests by boycotting foreign goods, especially British cloth, and led to a split in the organization in 1907 when extremists walked out and launched an India-wide *Swadeshi* boycott.<sup>25</sup>

23. Sarkar, *Modern India*, 79.

24. Sandria B. Freitag, “Sacred Symbol as Mobilizing Ideology: The North Indian Search for a ‘Hindu’ Community,” *Journal for the Comparative Study of Society and History* (1980): 612–13, 615.

25. *Swadeshi* literally means “national” or “indigenous.” The conflict within Congress was triggered by a difference over how to respond to a British decision to divide Bengal between Hindu-majority and Muslim-majority regions.

Starting around 1907 provincial Hindu Sabhas (Hindu Councils) were formed by revivalist groups associated with the extremist tendency<sup>26</sup> and in 1915, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was founded as an umbrella organization for these organizations.<sup>27</sup> (Brown 1985; 228). In 1923, the Mahasabha was given a formal organization modeled after Congress (Brown 1985: 228) and also started to become more expressly anti-Muslim and began to “show an interest in contesting elections as an independent force.”<sup>28</sup> At this time the Mahasabha incorporated the Arya Samaj’s *shuddhi* (“purification” or reconversion) program and “called for Hindu defence squads,” becoming in effect “an alliance of Arya Samajist reformers with Sanatan Dharma Sabha conservatives in a common Hindu-communal front.”<sup>29</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s the main achievement of the Mahasabha was to scuttle any compromises mooted between the Muslim League and Congress on separate electoral representation for Muslims. Mahasabha links with Congress continued until 1934—when Hindu traditionalists and Hindu Nationalists in Congress formed the Congress Nationalist Party to contest elections. Hindu Nationalism became more pronounced in the Mahasabha after V.D. Savarkar became president in 1937.<sup>30</sup>

However, although Hindu nationalists were found in the Mahasabha, and Savarkar gave the movement its principal ideas, the principal organizational vehicle for Hindu nationalists was the RSS. Founded in 1925 by a medical doctor and former Mahasabha member from Maharashtra, K.B. Hedgewar, the RSS is most famous for its paramilitary organization and emphasis on inculcating martial values. The RSS has a hierarchical chain of command and is organized into local units called shakhas, whose members engage in daily training in martial arts and cultural activities and are expected to live an austere life, many remaining celibate. The second head of the RSS, M.S. Golwalkar, who took over after Hedgewar’s death in 1940, articulated an ideology of Indian nationhood in ethnic and racial terms that drew

26. Graham, “The Congress and Hindu Nationalism,” 172.

27. Sarkar, *Modern India*, 235.

28. Graham, “The Congress,” 172.

29. Sarkar, *Modern India*, 235.

30. Graham, “The Congress,” 175.

heavily on European fascism.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, in pursuit of Hindu sangathan, the RSS sought—like the Arya Samaj—to incorporate low-caste members, a decision unimaginable within the framework of orthodox Hinduism.<sup>32</sup>

The RSS viewed—and views—itsself as a cultural organization, not a political party. What this means is that it does not field candidates for elections although, as we shall see later, it has been closely associated with parties that do. RSS members were forbidden to openly enter party politics: “The true measure of their importance was in their agitational work and their unusual discipline.”<sup>33</sup> The motivation for this rigorous ethic of discipline and self-purification was a desire to overcome the “docility and mildness of the Hindus” (in the words of an early Mahasabha president) that was held to be the cause of their long subjugation to foreign (Muslim and European) rule.<sup>34</sup>

Initially the political strategy of Hindu chauvinist politicians (both Nationalist and traditionalist) was to capture Congress. There were Hindu traditionalists in the Congress who, led Deputy Prime Minister Vallabhbhai, questioned the loyalty of Muslims and held out the possibility of Congress eventually absorbing the Mahasabha and the RSS. Mookherjee was even in the post-independence cabinet. Nehru, who was committed to building a secular state, was on the defensive within Congress until the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 by a couple of former RSS members. Following the assassination the RSS was banned and, although the ban was lifted within a year, the idea of an alliance with Hindu chauvinist organizations was delegitimated in Congress.<sup>35</sup>

These experiences convinced Hindu nationalists of the need to contest for power as well as to shed their communal image. When the Hindu Mahasabha, which was contesting elections, reaffirmed its decision to restrict its membership to Hindus, Syama Prasada Mookherjee, Savarkar's successor as president of the Mahasabha, resigned from the organization and founded a new electoral party that would be open to Muslims and would attract RSS members. The new

31. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 50–62.

32. Jaffrelot, “Hindu Nationalism,” 521.

33. Graham, “The Congress,” 334.

34. Jaffrelot, “Hindu Nationalism,” 520.

35. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 9–12.

party was called the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, or Indian People's Party. Founded in 1951 just before the first elections to be held under universal suffrage, the Jan Sangh,<sup>36</sup> as it is better known, sought to give Hindu Nationalism a new face, that of an Indian nationalism that did not exclude minorities but rather made the test of Indianness an identification with the Sanskrit-based cultural heritage.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the code phrase ceased to be Hindu *rashtra* (Hindu nation) and became Bharatiya *sanskriti* (Indian culture).<sup>38</sup> This distinction continues to be made by many Hindu nationalists today. Both the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS retained their separate identities, but the RSS was closely connected with the new party, lending many of its cadres to the Jan Sangh's leadership, and continues to be tied to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Jan Sangh's successor.

While the RSS played a central role in the Jan Sangh from the 1950s on, it continued to sponsor non-electoral organizations aimed at "unifying Hindus" and inculcating in them the values it thought essential to strengthen the Hindu nation. Principal among these are the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council, founded in 1966 and the VHP's youth wing, the Bajrang Dal. Taken together, these various organizations with ties to the RSS are often referred to as the *sangh parivar* or "Family of the Sangh (RSS)."

The VHP, which is said to receive much of its funding from Indian immigrants to the United States, has sought to bring the diverse sects of Hinduism together under a common umbrella, but with little success. The lack of a central organization to Hinduism meant that the VHP had to convince individual leaders of sects, monasteries to affiliate themselves with it. The major spiritual figures of Hinduism had no reason to lose their autonomy by submitting themselves to a central authority, so the VHP was only able to attract minor religious figures. Moreover, in its one effort to get these diverse spiritual leaders to agree on a common set of principles, the VHP was unable to find

36. The party's official name was rendered in English as "Bharatiya *Jana* Sangh," indicating a Sanskrit pronunciation, but it is usually referred to as the *Jan* Sangh, indicating a Hindi pronunciation. In the Devanagari script, which is used for both Sanskrit and Hindi, "Jana" and "Jan" are written identically. I use "Jan" except when referring to documents that use "Jana."

37. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, 13–28.

38. Donald Eugene Smith, *India as a Secular State* (London and Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1963), 470–71.

any that could distinguish Hinduism clearly from other religions.<sup>39</sup> The VHP eventually turned to other methods to unify Hindus, and began to champion the building of a temple at Ayodhya (discussed below). The VHP and Bajrang Dal have often acted independently of the BJP and are frequently blamed for carrying out violent attacks on Muslims, such as the massive riot in Gujarat state in March 2002.

Relations between the electoral and non-electoral wings of the sangh parivar are often strained, as electoral strategies frequently require reaching a wider audience than the RSS or VHP can appeal to. The Jan Sangh's founder, S.P. Mookherjee, who had never belonged to the RSS, as well as many of the party's early leaders, had no such affiliation. However in 1953, Mookherjee died in police custody in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, where he had gone to champion the cause of Hindu minorities who sought to eliminate Kashmir's autonomous status. The Kashmir issue has remained of vital concern for Hindu Nationalists to this day, and the BJP continues to call for the elimination of all special rights enjoyed by the state. Within the Jan Sangh, the consequences of Mookherjee's death were to allow the RSS to exert much stronger control over the party. Although the Jan Sangh continued to have presidents who were not RSS members, the real power in the party soon rested with its general secretary, Deen Dayal Upadhyay. With Upadhyay's murder in the late 1960s, the leadership of the party eventually passed to the two men who continue to lead the BJP today: Atal Behari Vajpayee and Lal Krishna Advani, both RSS members.<sup>40</sup>

The 1960s saw the emergence of another Hindu Nationalist party, the Shiv Sena. The Shiv Sena was not associated with the RSS, although it emerged in the same region that had produced the RSS, the state of Maharashtra. Unlike the sangh parivar, the Shiv Sena was centered around a single leader, Bal Thackeray, a political cartoonist-turned-demagogue who was initially concerned with castigating not Muslims but South Indian migrants to the city of Bombay, Maharashtra's capital.<sup>41</sup> The Shiv Sena turned to a militantly anti-

39. Jaffrelot discusses the VHP and reports that the only common elements they could find among all Hindu sects was bathing in the morning, and "remembering God." See Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, 196–202.

40. See Graham, *Hindu Nationalism*, chapters 2 and 4 for a discussion of this period.

41. Mary Fainsod Katzenstein, *Ethnicity and Equality: The Shiv Sena Party and Preferential Policies in Bombay* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979).

Muslim position in the late 1980s and has been allied with the BJP since. The Shiv Sena has been much more openly and virulently anti-Muslim than has the BJP. In 1993 the party was blamed for carrying out riots against Muslims in Bombay and its leader, Thackeray, has frequently threatened to disrupt cricket matches between India and Pakistan, even when this would embarrass the BJP government, of which his party is a member.

The Jan Sangh ceased to exist in 1977 when it merged with other non-communist opposition parties to form the Janata Party. In elections that year, held after an eighteen-month period of emergency rule when most opposition politicians were put in jail, the Janata Party won power nationally and in many states, allowing many Jan Sangh leaders to hold office for the first time. However, the Janata Party was mired in conflict among its constituent units, and the ties of former Jan Sangh members to the RSS were one of the principal sources of concern. The party split twice, in 1978 and 1980. The second split occurred when former Jan Sangh members, along with some others, left to form the BJP.

The BJP initially sought to disassociate itself from the RSS, and the RSS in turn expressed neutrality between the BJP and the Congress, which was taking an increasingly Hindu turn. At first the party even declared itself committed to a program of “Gandhian socialism,” coining a novel phrase containing two words that none associated with the old Jan Sangh. However, the BJP won only two seats in the 1984 elections, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s assassination gave Congress its biggest landslide victory ever. The party then cooperated with the VHP in a movement to construct a temple on the site of a mosque at Ayodhya. It has since vacillated between what Jaffrelot calls an “ethno-nationalist” strategy<sup>42</sup> and one aimed at building a broader coalition of anti-Congress parties. This tension has continued during the BJP years in power.

## **Electoral Strategies**

DURING THE 1950S AND EARLY 1960S, the Jan Sangh’s electoral strategy was aimed mainly at consolidating the conservative Hindu vote in North India. Despite occasional efforts to champion more populist causes such as land reform, it sometimes recruited traditional princes

42. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*.

as candidates in an effort to attract votes. Ideologically, its major focus was on preventing concessions to Pakistan. The party also supported the use of Hindi as a link language and is generally identified as a Hindi chauvinist party, although some Jan Sangh leaders often state a preference for Sanskrit. Finally, the party opposed the attempts to codify and reform personal Hindu law in the 1950s<sup>43</sup> and has continued to object to the lack of reform in the personal laws of other religions, although the issue is now couched as a call for a uniform civil code.

The party received a boost from India's military defeat at China's hands in 1962. This experience made the party's militant nationalism more acceptable, even resulting in the RSS being allowed to march in the annual Republic Day parade. The China war also led to contacts between the Jan Sangh and other opposition parties who believed Nehru and his defense minister had failed to adequately defend Indian interests out of a romantic belief in the natural affinity of socialist China and India. These efforts resulted in their support of a common candidate to defeat the defense minister, V.K. Krishna Menon, in a parliamentary by-election.<sup>44</sup>

By the late 1960s, the Jan Sangh found itself pulled in different directions. It began to cooperate with other opposition parties in the Hindi-speaking north in an effort to defeat the Congress party. These parties shared an antipathy to the economic policy of the Congress, which emphasized state ownership and heavy industry. Most were also opposed to the centralization of power under the Congress, although for different reasons, and likewise favored making Hindi the national language for different reasons.<sup>45</sup> These coalitions were able to hold power briefly in several states between the elections of 1967, when the Congress party lost a large number of seats across the country, and that of 1971 when Indira Gandhi led a revived Congress to a landslide victory on a promise to "Remove Poverty." As the prospect of electoral success appeared to improve, the party made efforts to address questions of distributional justice and to broaden its appeal. This in turn, however, led to conflicts in the party. The bulk of the party leadership, led by two successive party presidents who continue

43. Smith, *India as a Secular State*, 471.

44. Walter K. Anderson and Sridhar D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1987), 172.

45. For an analysis of these alliances focusing on ideology, see Swamy, "The Nation, the People and the Poor," chap. 6.

to lead the BJP today, Lal Krishna Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee, supported the “leftward” moves. However, a leading party ideologist, Balraj Madhok, who had served as president in 1967, sought to preserve the Jan Sangh’s identity as a conservative party and was eventually expelled.<sup>46</sup>

In the 1980s, the Jan Sangh’s successor, the BJP, was initially the least successful of the three major fragments of the Janata Party. The others, the Janata Party and Lok Dal, had left the Janata experiment with strong enough bases to compete with the Congress in at least one state each and in the mid-1980s were able to come to power in Karnataka and Haryana, respectively. In other states, too, new opposition parties, sometimes breakaway factions of the Congress, were able to win power. These various regional opposition parties typically had in common a base among relatively prosperous farmers’ castes and represented the aspirations of upwardly mobile segments of their states.<sup>47</sup> The BJP, by contrast, despite having a strong presence in three states (Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat) was unable to win power anywhere and, as we have noted, fell to two seats out of 542 in the 1984 election.

However, in the five years following the 1984 elections, the Congress government of Rajiv Gandhi made a number of decisions that made middle- and upper-class Indians receptive to a more pro-Hindu and anti-Muslim appeal. First, under pressure from conservative Muslims, the government made controversial decisions that clearly violated the spirit of secularism and offended both Hindu and Muslim liberals. These included banning Salman Rushdie’s controversial novel *Satanic Verses*,<sup>48</sup> and passing legislation to overturn a Supreme Court ruling that had struck down provisions in Muslim personal law concerning a divorced Muslim woman’s right to alimony.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, the government’s decision to broadcast year-long televised serials depicting the Hindu epics undoubtedly helped create a sense of shared cultural identity among Hindus around the country, appeared

46. Anderson and Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron*, 181–82, 186–87.

47. Swamy, “The Nation, the People and the Poor,” chap. 6.

48. Rushdie, whose family migrated to Pakistan but who himself moved back to India before emigrating to Britain, was of course sentenced to death by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini.

49. The case was brought by Shah Bano, a Muslim woman who had been divorced by her wealthy husband of many years. The court granted her alimony under Indian civil law.

to identify the state more closely with the Hindu cultural tradition, and probably prepared the ground for the BJP's rise. Most importantly, a court ruling, probably instigated by the Gandhi government, opened the disputed religious site at Ayodhya to worship by Hindus.

The decision to open the Ayodhya shrine was apparently taken to placate right-wing Hindu politicians who were enraged by the decision to reaffirm Muslim personal law. It opened a Pandora's box of consequences that continue to plague India today. The site in question contained a mosque said to have been built by the first Mughal Emperor, Babur, and hence known as the Babri Masjid (Babur's Mosque). Since the middle of the nineteenth century there had been riots over the site as some local Hindu groups claimed that it had once held a temple marking the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram, and that this temple had been torn down by Babur.<sup>50</sup> The site had been declared a disputed site and closed by the courts since 1949, and had excited little attention in the interim despite efforts by the VHP to politicize it. In 1988, under Advani's leadership the BJP decided to champion the demand for the construction of a temple on the site—dubbed Ramjanmabhoomi or “birthplace of Ram” by the movement—and launched a nationwide movement in support of it. The broadcast of the Ramayana, the Hindu epic depicting Ram's life, undoubtedly helped create a broad constituency for the movement—though not necessarily a deep one—and Advani toured the country dressed as Ram in a car altered to resemble an ancient chariot. In 1989, however, the BJP suspended the movement to conclude electoral alliances with the Janata Dal.<sup>51</sup>

The Janata Dal was formed when the Janata Party (or what was left of it) merged with the Lok Dal<sup>52</sup> and a breakaway faction of the Congress led by Rajiv Gandhi's former finance minister, V.P. Singh. The Janata Dal struck separate deals with the BJP, the two communist parties, and various regional parties to ensure that the vote against Congress was united in as many parliamentary constituencies as possible. During the 1989 elections, the campaign focused on the corruption of the Gandhi government and a Janata Dal promise to waive

50. The belief has persisted despite the painstaking efforts of historians and archeologists to demonstrate that there is no evidence of such a temple having existed.

51. For details of this phase of the movement and the BJP's strategic choices, see Jaffrelet, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, chap. 11.

52. The Lok Dal, a north Indian farmers' party, had actually split into two rival factions centered in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana, respectively, but both joined the Janata Dal.

loans owed by farmers to government-owned banks. The BJP also based its campaign on these issues. The election saw the Congress party drop to its second-lowest seat tally since independence but, with 197 seats in the lower house of parliament, remain the largest party in the country. The Janata Dal emerged as the second-largest party with 143 seats, followed by the BJP with 86 and the two communist parties at around 50.

What is crucial to realize, however, is that the BJP's electoral alliance with the Janata Dal helped it at least as much in the 1989 elections as had the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. At the national level, while the BJP increased its seat tally from two seats in 1984 to eighty-six in 1989, its share of the votes increased only from 7.4 percent to 11.5 percent. The 1984 figure was probably lower than it might have been, as a result of the pro-Congress "wave" following the assassination of Indira Gandhi, while the 1989 figure is not much higher than the Jan Sangh's peak of 9.4 percent in 1967. Significantly, the state where Ayodhya is located, Uttar Pradesh, saw virtually no change. By contrast, the Janata Dal, with 17.8 percent of the vote, received a higher share of the national vote than did any party in Indian history other than the Congress or the original Janata Party, and also increased its share of the vote in a number of major states.<sup>53</sup>

After the 1990 state elections, the BJP needed to ally with the Janata Dal, usually as a junior partner, in every major state where it won a share of power, except one. These were largely the Hindi-speaking states of the northern plain. In the 1990 state elections, it was the Janata Dal that came to power in the two largest states in the country, Uttar Pradesh—the state where Ayodhya is located—and Bihar. In two other states, Rajasthan and Gujarat, the BJP and Janata Dal were almost evenly divided, and agreed to let the BJP form the government in Rajasthan, leaving Gujarat to the Janata Dal. In Maharashtra, the BJP emerged as a significant opposition force only because of its alliance with the Shiv Sena. Only in Madhya Pradesh, a state where it had established an early presence and the Janata Dal was weak, did the

53. The relevant figures for the elections of 1984, 1989 and 1991 are reproduced in Tables 1, 2 and 3. For figures relating to earlier elections, see David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy, *India Decides: Elections 1952–1991* (New Delhi: Living Media Ltd., 1991). For a summary of the reservations issue and analysis of its political implications, see Swamy, "The Nation, the People and the Poor," chap. 7.

BJP take power by itself. An examination of the eight states where the BJP has established a presence in recent years confirms that the major increase in BJP votes came between 1989 and 1991, at the expense of the Janata Dal. Only in two states, Gujarat and Maharashtra, did the BJP vote increase significantly between 1989 and 1991. (See Table 1 on the following page.)

These observations are important, as it is sometimes argued that the BJP's 1988 campaign for the construction of a temple at Ayodhya helped the party significantly expand its base. In fact, there is little reason to think it did any such thing. It was only in the 1991 election, after the collapse of the Janata Dal, that the BJP reached 20 percent of the national vote and became a contender for power on its own in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

Rather than expanding as a direct result of Hindu Nationalist mobilization, the BJP was able to capitalize on its prominent position following the 1989 elections to exploit various other grievances in Indian society. Principal among these was the introduction of affirmative action quotas ("reservations") for the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in 1990, which opened up many more fissures in Hindu society than are generally recognized. Secondary factors include the resentments of neglected regions within many Indian states, the persisting breadth of the Congress party's electoral support that led many regional parties to prefer to ally with the BJP (which did not challenge them on their home turf), and the perception among the urban middle classes that India was not receiving the international respect it deserved.

The turning point came in October 1990. Following the December 1989 elections, the Janata Dal had formed a minority coalition government in alliance with regional parties, with V.P. Singh as prime minister. The BJP and communist parties both supported the coalition in parliament, allowing it to claim a majority, but did not join the government themselves. Factional disputes erupted in the Janata Dal between V.P. Singh and Devi Lal, a farmers' leader who was deputy prime minister. V.P. Singh decided to cement his own political base by unilaterally announcing the government's decision to implement a long-standing government report that recommended affirmative action programs for OBCs.

The Indian Constitution had guaranteed national affirmative action quotas to the lowest-ranked social groups, the ex-"untouchables" or

**Table 1.** Vote share (%) in national elections, 1984–1991<sup>a</sup>

State	Year	Congress	BJP	Janata factions <sup>b</sup>	
Bihar	1984	51.80	6.90	13.70	6.7
	1989	28.10	11.70	37.70	
	1991	23.6	15.90	34.10	
Gujarat	1984	53.20	18.6	16.6	2.3
	1989	37.0	30.4	27.7	
	1991	29.0 <sup>c</sup>	50.40	13.7 <sup>c</sup>	3.40
Karnataka	1984	51.60	4.70	35.1	
	1989	48.90	2.6	28.3	10.6
	1991	42.10	28.8	18.5	
Madhya Pradesh	1984	57.1	30.0	2.7	
	1989	37.7	39.7	8.3	
	1991	45.3	41.9	4.2	
Maharashtra	1984	51.2	10.1	7.6	
	1989	45.4	25.0 <sup>d</sup>	11.0	
	1991	48.4	29.6 <sup>d</sup>	9.9	1.4
Rajasthan	1984	52.7	23.7	11.2	3.9
	1989	37.0	29.6	25.7	
	1991	44.0	40.9	6.2	3.3
Uttar Pradesh	1984	51.0	6.4	21.6	3.6
	1989	31.8	7.6	35.9	
	1991	18.3	32.8	21.6	10.1
All-India	1984	48.1	7.4	6.7	5.6
	1989	39.5	11.4	17.8	
	1991	36.6	20.0	11.8	3.3

Sources: For 1984 and 1989 information: David Butler, Ashok Lahiri and Prannoy Roy, *India Decides: Elections 1952–1991* (New Delhi: Living Media Ltd., 1991); for 1991 information: V. B. Singh, *Elections in India: Data Handbook on Lok Sabha Elections, 1986–1991* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1994).

<sup>a</sup> This table includes data for Congress, BJP and main Janata factions in major states where the BJP vote has increased.

<sup>b</sup> The larger faction is listed first; a second is listed only if it received more than 1 percent of the vote.

<sup>c</sup> Congress and the Janata Dal (G) were allied and subsequently merged.

<sup>d</sup> Includes Shiv Sena with 1.2 percent in 1989 and 9.9 percent in 1991.

“Scheduled Castes,” while allowing states to identify other relatively disadvantaged groups, or OBCs who also deserved affirmative action at the state level.<sup>54</sup> In the late 1970s the Janata Party government appointed the Mandal Commission to identify a national list of OBCs to create national quotas for them. The Mandal Commission used a combination of social and economic criteria to identify which groups fell below the state’s mean for socio-economic advancement, and its list consequently excluded a large number of prosperous peasants who were politically dominant in many states.<sup>55</sup> The Mandal Commission’s report was shelved when the Congress party returned to power in 1980.

When V.P. Singh announced he was going to implement the Mandal Commission report, riots broke out in cities across north India. (The south had had OBC reservations for some time and was not as affected.) Shortly thereafter the BJP announced it was reviving the movement for Ayodhya, and Advani started to lead a march of activists toward the site. Janata Dal state governments in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh blocked the march, arresting Advani and even ordering police to shoot marchers at Ayodhya. The BJP withdrew support from the government and the Janata Dal split shortly thereafter, with one faction governing briefly with the support of the Congress.<sup>56</sup> When elections were held in 1991, the Janata Dal’s share of the vote had collapsed and the BJP had benefited tremendously, increasing its vote share to more than 20 percent and its seats to 120. (Refer to Table 1 above.)

54. They are referred to as Scheduled Castes because they are enumerated in a list or “schedule.” Affirmative action quotas are also guaranteed to Scheduled Tribes—communities that traditionally lived on the margins of settled agricultural society.

55. For a detailed analysis of the politics of OBC reservations, see Swamy, “The Nation, the People and the Poor,” chap. 7. The groups referred to as “dominant peasant castes” vary from state to state and do not exist in some states such as Bihar, where the rural social structure was more sharply polarized. The best-known examples are the Jats in northwestern India (Haryana, Punjab—where Jats are Sikhs—and parts of Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh); Patidars or Patels in Gujarat; Kammas and Reddis in Andhra Pradesh; Vokkaligas and Lingayatas in Karnataka; Nairs in Kerala; and Gounders and Thevars in Tamil Nadu. For more details, see the various state studies in Francine Frankel and M. S. A. Rao, *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, vols. I and II (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989 and 1990). Some of these groups, notably Thevars, have been granted OBC status.

56. For an overview of these events, see Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement*, chap. 12. It should be noted that Jaffrelot differs from the explanation of the BJP’s rise suggested here by ascribing it in large part to the Ramjanmabhoomi movement.

The most likely explanation for the expansion of the BJP's vote share between 1989 and 1991 is that many voters from upper or "dominant" peasant castes—who had supported the Janata Dal because of its agrarian emphasis but were not eligible for OBC affirmative action benefits—defected to the BJP as a result of the V.P. Singh government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report. Unfortunately few opinion polls report the views of "dominant" peasant castes separately. However, one major opinion poll conducted prior to the 1991 election did provide a breakdown by occupation, which showed that the most dramatic change was the decline in support for the Janata Dal among "cultivators" and a commensurate increase in support for the BJP in the same group. (Refer to Table 2 below.)

**Table 2.** Support for major parties by occupational group, 1989 and 1991

Party	Election year	Business/ self-employed	Cultivators	Other work
Congress	1989	37	34	33
	1991	35	33	25
Janata Dal	1989	17	28	23
	1991	11	17	17
BJP	1989	20	14	17
	1991	28	25	24

Source: *Frontline*/MARG pre-election survey, data used courtesy of Mr. N. Ram.

Additional support for this explanation is provided by another major opinion poll conducted after the 1999 election, which reported the views of "dominant" peasant castes and broke down political support for the BJP by both caste and class. This poll showed that dominant peasant castes were second only to the traditional upper castes in their support for the BJP, and that this support drops off sharply as income declines. (Refer to Table 3 below.)

**Table 3.** Support for BJP by caste and class hierarchies, 1999

	Very high income	High income	Medium income	Low income	Very low income
Hindu upper caste	47	42	44	39	22
Hindu dominant peasant caste	37	33	36	21	12
Hindu upper OBC	23	27	19	20	14
Hindu lower OBC	28	18	19	15	16
Scheduled tribes	53*	44*	22	17	11
Scheduled caste	26*	23	17	11	7

Based on a small sample size.

Source: CSDS post-election survey analysis in Yogendra Yadav, "The BJP's New Social Bloc," *Frontline* 16, issue 23 (6–19 November 1999), <http://www.flonnet.com/fl1623/16230310.htm>.

In years following the 1991 election, the BJP was able to expand further in some states, notably the largest state, Uttar Pradesh, by exploiting other conflicts arising from the reservations issue, especially those between more and less disadvantaged segments.<sup>57</sup> The BJP also began to champion the cause of neglected regions within some of the larger Hindi-speaking states, calling for these states to be divided, and was consequently able to expand its appeal in some other states.<sup>58</sup>

Even with all of these tactical forays, however, the BJP's share of the vote largely hit a plateau after 1991. In 1992 the party launched a movement centered on the Ayodhya conflict again, but the consequent destruction of the mosque by a Hindu Nationalist mob, and

57. Kanchan Chandra, "Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh: The Ethnification of the Party System and its Consequences," in Roy Ramashray and Paul Wallace, eds., *Indian Politics and the 1998 Election: Regionalism, Hindutva and State Politics* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999).

58. David Patrick Stuligross, "A Piece of Land to Call One's Own: Multicultural Federalism and Institutional Innovation in India" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2001), 307–23.

subsequent riots, led to the party's defeat in 1993 in three of the four states it ruled. In 1996 its vote share was unchanged, and the Congress received more votes, although the BJP won 161 seats to the Congress' 140 and emerged as the single largest party in the parliament. Following the 1996 elections it was the Congress' turn to support a Janata Dal-led coalition government without joining it. When this arrangement collapsed in 1998, the Janata Dal fragmented again, and some factions allied with the BJP. Both the alliances, and the fact that the BJP was the only remaining viable vehicle for anti-Congress votes, allowed the party to increase its vote share to 25.8 percent, but this was still behind the Congress, although again the BJP won more seats.

The government's decision to test nuclear weapons and build a nuclear arsenal was popular with the urban middle class, but later that year the Congress defeated the BJP in two major states on the issue of prices. When the BJP's first coalition government fell in 1999, the following elections demonstrated that the relative vote shares were still virtually unchanged, and the Congress again regained some states in which it had previously lacked power. However, by now the BJP had largely cemented its alliance with a large number of regional parties, including former factions of the Janata Dal and Congress.<sup>59</sup>

The BJP's inability to expand its vote share and its abysmal record in state elections have clearly worried the party's leadership. Since 1998 when the BJP came to power, the Congress has defeated the BJP or its allies in Maharashtra,<sup>60</sup> Madhya Pradesh (where a Congress government was re-elected), Rajasthan, Karnataka, Assam, Punjab and Delhi and Manipur. Other parties have defeated the BJP or its regional ally in Bihar (again winning re-election) and Tamil Nadu. In

59. The BJP's share of the national vote in 1996 when it increased its parliamentary strength from 120 seats to 161 was 20.3 percent, almost identical to its 1991 vote share. In 1998, when the BJP began to ally with disaffected regional parties, the party's vote share increased to 25.6 percent and remained at the same level in 1999. The Congress' vote share in 1996 and 1998 was 28.8 percent and 25.8 percent, respectively. The Congress did contest more seats than did the BJP but, unlike the BJP, had few significant allies adding to its tally. For details on the elections from 1991 to 1998, see G.V.L. Narasimha Rao and K. Balakrishnan, *Indian Elections: The Nineties* (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 1999), 43; for details on all Indian elections since 1967, see the Election Commission of India's web site, [www.eci.gov.in](http://www.eci.gov.in).

60. In Maharashtra a coalition government of the Shiv Sena and BJP was replaced by one of the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party, a breakaway Congress faction.

Uttar Pradesh, the main prize, a BJP government was defeated but became a junior partner in a coalition government after the elections. After elections to several states in February 2002, Gujarat was the only large state where the BJP was in power without coalition partners, and in Gujarat the Congress had recently won local elections handily.

It is a sign of both the BJP's weakness and observers' distrust of the party, that the March 2002 riots in Gujarat, in which Hindu mobs burned Muslim neighborhoods and businesses over several days, were widely interpreted as a BJP ploy to return to ethnonationalist mobilization in an effort to ensure that it did not lose Gujarat.<sup>61</sup> The Gujarat state government's subsequent decision to go for early elections seems to confirm this analysis. Since February 2002, the VHP has become increasingly assertive, while the national BJP government has begun to focus on its hard-line stance and military mobilization against Pakistan.

## Conclusion

HINDU NATIONALISM AS A DOCTRINE has been concerned primarily with promoting unity and a sense of nationhood among Hindus rather than religion per se, but this has largely been motivated by and focused on demonizing minorities, especially Muslims. Although the doctrine has deep ideological roots in Indian responses to British colonialism, and it is served by organizations, notably the RSS, whose discipline, coherence and longevity are well-established, Hindu Nationalism until recently was a fringe movement limited to certain elite groups. The movement's expansion in the late 1980s and early 1990s came about in part because of the errors of other parties, but the popularity of the BJP, the main Hindu Nationalist party, appears to have peaked and may be in decline. Today the BJP is in power largely by default: the Congress is still not strong enough to win elections on its own, and other parties prefer the BJP to the Congress, which could threaten them in their own states.

61. The riots were ostensibly triggered by a Muslim mob burning on a train compartment carrying VHP activists back from Ayodhya. Most reports, however, suggest that the riots had been planned for some time and had the active backing of the state government.

However, with elections due in two years, domestic political losses are driving Hindu Nationalists to take risky actions with potentially far-reaching international ramifications. Hindu Nationalist electoral parties have historically oscillated between policies aimed at building broader coalitions and those aimed at shoring up the support of core activists. All the signs suggest that the BJP is returning to its militant strategy. The most obvious potential consequence for regional security is the possibility of a war between India and Pakistan that could go nuclear. A somewhat more likely scenario might be increasingly provocative actions at home, especially on the controversial Ayodhya issue, that lead to an increase in conflicts between Hindus and Muslims and, conceivably, result in greater tensions with the Muslim world, especially Pakistan.

# 5

MUMTAZ AHMAD

## **Madrassa Education in Pakistan and Bangladesh**

**M**odernization in the Islamic world has been characterized by an unusual tension which, if not the result, is at least the concomitant of the contradiction between the persistence of a highly institutionalized tradition and the emergence of vigorous reformist challenges from both within and outside Islam. In the context of South Asia, two interrelated features of modern Islam remain significantly relevant to the current debate on the role of Islam in public affairs. First of these is the inordinate regard in which traditional Islam is held—a regard that manifests itself in the continued social and political influence of the *ulema* and their madrassa system. The second feature is the so far very limited legitimacy achieved by most attempts to re-think and re-state Islam—as opposed to attempts to reform society by simply neglecting Islam.

The persistence of traditional Islam as a significant cultural alternative and as the intellectual mode of still vital religious institutions in South Asian Muslim societies is nowhere more salient than in the madrassa system. Madrassas have long been the centers of classical Islamic studies and the guardians of the orthodoxy in South Asian Islam.

They are the social sites for the reproduction of Islamic orthodoxy. Hence, to say that the ideological orientation of madrassa education is conservative is to state the obvious: they are supposed to be conservative, as their very *raison d'être* is to preserve the integrity of the tradition. Indeed, it is fair to argue that madrassas constitute the core of the religio-cultural complex of Islam in South Asia.

The ulema, as the bearers of the legal and religio-political tradition of the latter Abbasid period, have four primary concerns: 1) the unity and integrity of the Islamic Ummah as a universal religious community; 2) the integrity of orthodox beliefs and practices of Islam as represented in Asharite theology and the consensus of the classical jurists; 3) the preservation of the *shari'a*, especially in matters pertaining to family laws and religious rituals; and 4) the dissemination of the Islamic religious knowledge under their supervision and guidance. As interpreters, they resolve religious disputes and issue *fatwas*, providing the faithful with religious guidance on all kinds of issues. As religious functionaries, they organize and lead congregational prayers, supervise the celebration of Islamic religious occasions, and conduct marriage ceremonies and burial rituals. The madrassa education is critical for all of these concerns and functions.

The madrassas in today's Pakistan and Bangladesh, as in India, represent the legacy of the spectacular resurgence of Islamic religious education in India during the late nineteenth century, beginning with the establishment of the Deoband Madrassa in 1867. Since then, the madrassa system has played an important historical role by preserving the orthodox tradition of Islam in the wake of the downfall of Muslim political power; by training generations of Islamic religious scholars and functionaries; by providing vigorous religio-political leadership; and, more importantly, by reawakening the consciousness of Islamic solidarity and the Islamic way of life among the Muslims of South Asia.

The madrassas in Muslim South Asia teach a curriculum known as *Dars-i-Nizami*, first introduced by Mullah Nizamuddin Sihalvi (d. 1747) who was a scholar of some repute in Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy in Lucknow. This curriculum is not the same as that associated with the name of Mullah Nasiruddin Tusi (d. 1064) and the Madrassa Nizamia, which he established in eleventh-century Baghdad. Almost all Sunni madrassas, irrespective of whether they

are of Deobandi, Bareilvi, or Ahl-i-Hadith persuasion, follow the same standard Nizami course of studies adopted by the Deoband seminary in 1867. It consists of about twenty subjects broadly divided into two categories: *al-ulum an-naqliya* (the transmitted sciences), and *al-ulum al-aqliya* (the rational sciences). The subject areas include grammar, rhetoric, prosody, logic, philosophy, Arabic literature, dialectical theology, life of the Prophet, medicine, mathematics, polemics, Islamic law, jurisprudence, Hadith, and Tafsir (exegesis of the Quran). It is important to note that out of the twenty subjects, only eight can be considered as solely religious. The remaining subjects are otherwise secular and were included in Nizami curriculum both to equip the students for civil service jobs and as an aid to understanding religious texts. Also, facilities for teaching all of the subjects and books are not usually available in all madrassas. This is particularly true in the case of subjects such as medicine, mathematics, history, philosophy, prosody, and polemics. The result is that the students often have to move from one madrassa to another to complete their curriculum. This also results in the failure of many madrassas to institutionalize their grading and promotion procedures.

As is well known, most of the books taught in this curriculum are very old. Books used in philosophy and logic, for example, were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Medicine is taught through an eleventh-century text that is still considered an authentic study of human anatomy and pathology. In what we have described as purely religious subjects, the books used date back to the seventeenth century at the latest and the eleventh century at the earliest. Books prescribed for astronomy, mathematics, and grammar are more than five- to seven-hundred-year-old texts.

In most of the madrassas there are no formal admission procedures, and academic schedules are often flexible. Some major madrassas have, however, institutionalized their admission, grading, and promotion procedures and have established some degree of rigor in their academic schedules. The complete Nizami curriculum runs from seven to nine years after the completion of the elementary level. The entire system has been traditionally supported by the community through trusts, endowments, charitable donations, and *zakat* contributions. However, since the introduction of the compulsory collection of *zakat* and *ushr* by the Zia ul-Haq government in 1980, a large

number of madrassas receive regular financial assistance from the publicly administered zakat funds. Not only do the students not pay any tuition, they are provided with free textbooks, board and lodging, and a modest stipend.

In terms of levels of education, the madrassas in Pakistan are categorized as: (1) *ibtadari* (elementary), where only the Quran is memorized and taught; (2) *vustani* (middle level), where selected books from *Dars-i-Nizami* are taught; and (3) *fauquani* (higher level), where the entire *Dars-i-Nizami* is taught. In some madrassas where competent ulema are available, students after their graduation take up post-graduate courses of study in *tafsir*, *hadith*, or *fiqh*.

With the exception of a few madrassas managed by the provincial government *Auqaf* departments, madrassa education in Pakistan is mainly in the private sector. In the majority of cases, madrassas are personal enterprises of prominent ulema who own and manage the madrassas and make arrangements for their finances. Usually, the founders of the madrassas are ulema of good standing who have a degree of influence in the local community, which enables them to acquire land, housing facilities, and financial resources for the madrassas. Most of the madrassas are registered with the government as charitable corporate bodies and have acquired tax-exempt status, thus receiving an indirect subsidy from the public treasury. Some larger madrassas have their own board of trustees or executive committees, which consist of local business elites, landed gentry, and prominent ulema. In most cases, these are merely ceremonial bodies, meant largely to provide decorum and legitimacy to the respective madrassas. Major policy decisions regarding doctrinal preferences, curriculum, and selection of teachers and students remain the exclusive prerogative of the ulema.

Unlike Pakistan, Bangladesh has two kinds of madrassas: *Quomi* madrassas—estimated at more than 6,500 at the secondary, intermediate, and higher levels with about 1,462,500 students and 130,000 teachers. These *Quomi* madrassas in Bangladesh, which are predominantly of *Deobandi* persuasion, teach the standard *Dars-i-Nizami* prevalent in all South Asian madrassas. The *Quomi* madrassas are private, receive no financial support from the government, and are supported by religious endowments or by zakat, *sadaqa*, and donations from the faithful. This financial autonomy of the madrassa system has been a major source of the independent religio-political power

base of the ulema in Bangladesh and Pakistan. It has also enabled the ulema to resist the efforts of state authorities to introduce reforms in the madrassa system and to bridge the gap between the traditional system of Islamic education and modern secular education.

The other category of madrassas in Bangladesh is the government-controlled, or Alia madrassa system, a unique system of Islamic religious education with few parallels in the Muslim world. Divided into five distinct levels—ibtedai (elementary), dakhil (secondary), alim (higher secondary), fazil (B.A.), and kamil (M.A.), these madrassas teach all the required modern subjects such as English, Bangla, science, social studies, math, geography, history, etc., along with a revised version of Dars-i-Nizami. Although they are privately owned and managed—with the exception of five major Alia madrassas that are wholly controlled by the government—the Government of Bangladesh pays 80 percent of the salaries of their teachers and administrators as well as a considerable portion of their development expenditures. The 2000–01 budget, for example, allocated TK 4.91 billion for salary support of the non-government madrassas. The government also allocated considerable funds for the construction of 1,741 new madrassas in the private sector.<sup>1</sup> These Alia madrassas are registered with, and supervised by, the government-appointed Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, which also prescribes the curriculum and syllabi and conducts examinations. However, the government has approved equivalence of only dakhil and kamil to Secondary and Higher Secondary certificates, respectively.

According to the latest data (2000–01) available to the madrassa education board, there are 6,906 non-government Alia madrassas in Bangladesh with the largest number, 4,826, at the dakhil level. The total number of students at all levels in the Alia system is 1,879,300. The number of teachers in these madrassas is 100,732. Unlike the graduates of Quomi madrassas, whose degrees are not recognized by the government and who pursue their careers in religious establishments and private businesses, the majority of the graduates of Alia madrassas merge into the general stream of education by continuing their education in colleges and universities. It is no wonder that a recent survey found that 32 percent of Bangladesh university teachers in the humanities and social sciences were graduates of Alia madrassas.

1. *Daily Star*, 9 June 2000.

There are also elementary level madrassas known as maktabas, or ibtedai madrassas, first formally approved by President Zia-ur-Rahman in 1978. The Madrassa Education Board has approved only 5,150 of all independent ibtedai madrassas, with 23,176 teachers and 377,749 students. But a report in the *Daily Dinkal* suggested the existence of 18,000 independent ibtedai madrassas with 85,000 teachers and close to two million students.<sup>2</sup> This latter figure should be closer to reality since a 1992 Ministry of Education estimate puts the total number of ibtedai madrassas at 17,279. At any rate, the important thing to note here is: a) the significant contribution of ibtedai madrassas in providing elementary education in areas where no government primary schools are available; and b) that these ibtedai madrassas are now acting as feeder institutions for both the Alia and Quomi madrassas. More than 50 percent of students in Quomi madrassas and more than 70 percent of students in Alia madrassas come from an ibtedai background.

Let us at this stage examine some numbers to see the magnitude and the expanse of the civil society space covered by the religious sector in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

**Table 1.** Profile of madrassa education in Pakistan

Number of secondary and higher madrassas	6,000
Senior and graduate level madrassas	4,335
Deobandi madrassas	2,333
Barelvi madrassas	1,625
Ahl-i-Hadith madrassas	224
Shia madrassas	163
Number of all students	604,421
Local students (Pakistani)	586,604
Foreign students	17,817
Afghan students	16,598

2. *Daily Dinkal*, Dhaka, 2 March 1998.

**Table 2.** Growth of higher madrassa education in Pakistan: 1947–2001

Year	Number of madrassas	Number of teachers	Number of students
pre-1947	137	...	...
1950	210	...	...
1960	472	1,846	40,239
1971	908	3,185	45,238
1979	1,745	5,005	99,041
1984	1,953	...	...
1986	2,261	12,625	316,380
2001	4,345 *	...	604,421

\* This does not include 655 other madrassas that do not offer complete Dars-i-Nizami curriculum.

**Table 3.** Profile of madrassa education in Bangladesh

Number of private (Quomi) madrassas	6,500
Number of government-funded (Alia) madrassas	6,906
Number of teachers in Quomi madrassas	130,000
Number of teachers in Alia madrassas	100,732
Number of students in Quomi madrassas	1,462,500
Number of students in Alia madrassas	1,878,300
Total number of madrassas (Quomi + Alia)	13,406
Total number of teachers (Quomi + Alia)	230,732
Total number of students (Quomi + Alia)	3,340,800

**Table 4.** Ibtedai madrassas and maktabas in Bangladesh, 2001

Number of Ibtedai (elementary madrassas)	18,000
Number of teachers in Ibtedai madrassas	85,000
Number of students in Ibtedai madrassas and maktabas	1,377,749

This is some civil society!

The madrassa system is supporting close to six million students in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. An overwhelming majority of these students come from poor families who cannot afford to send their children to modern schools because, first, in most cases modern schools do not exist at an accessible distance, and second, the schools are either too expensive or too crowded. In the case of Pakistan, the majority of madrassa students belong to the rural areas of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP), Azad Kashmir, and the economically depressed regions of Punjab. They are mostly drawn from the low strata of society. In a survey conducted in 1976, more than 80 percent of the madrassa students in Peshawar, Multan, and Gujranwala were found to be sons of small or landless peasants, rural artisans, or imams of the village mosques. The remaining 20 percent came from families of small shopkeepers and rural laborers. A more recent survey, conducted in 2000, found that 55 percent of madrassa students came from peasant families and petty traders. The interesting thing to note is that the number of students whose fathers were employed in lower level private sector jobs rose from 5 percent in 1976 to 35 percent in 2000. Only 3 percent of students in the 2000 survey said their fathers were imams of the mosques. The majority of students come from large but low-income families. The 2000 survey found that 63 percent of madrassa students had five or more siblings, and 28 percent of them had seven or more brothers and sisters. In the case of Bangladesh, an overwhelming majority of Quomi madrassa students (82 percent) come from poor families of rural areas and small towns. Sylhet, Chittagong, and some northern districts have traditionally been the main base of recruitment for the Quomi madrassas. The student body of the Alia madrassa system is much more diverse and includes a large number of students from the lower middle classes as well. In India, madrassa education has been the only education available to Muslims who now face discrimination along with poverty and illiteracy.”

One must also note that madrassa education has been and remains one of the surest paths of social mobility for the lower level occupational castes and artisans of the rural areas of Pakistan. Whatever occupational backgrounds the students have, upon the completion of their madrassa education, they are certain to take a step forward in the hierarchy of social stratification, in terms of both income and social

status. Thus the social significance of the madrassa education lies not only in the fact that it imparts religious education to a large number of students, but that it also ensures access to employment. It has been observed that while there has been considerable unemployment among the youth educated at secular schools and colleges, the graduates of madrassas have rarely faced such problems and usually find jobs commensurate with their training. A survey in 1979 showed that among the graduates of the 1978 class of two major madrassas in Karachi and one in the NWFP, only 6 percent were still unemployed by the middle of 1979.

Although the ulema have vigorously resisted efforts by the state to introduce changes in their madrassas, it would be wrong to assume that madrassas have become petrified forever. Contrary to general belief, traditional orthodoxy has never stagnated into a kind of intellectual-theological rigidity. Although the madrassa system of education remains an exclusive and relatively isolated phenomenon, there are, nevertheless, powerful economic, social and political forces and institutions that cut across socio-economic and cultural strata and tend to create new linkages, howsoever weak, between the traditional and modern sectors.

These processes and institutional changes have become more significant in the post-independence era, as the changed political context has created a series of symbolic and institutional linkages (e.g., shared religious symbols; government and private-sponsored Islamic educational and cultural activities, projects, and advisory institutions; political parties and elected assemblies; and communication media, particularly the growing vernacular press) that facilitate interaction between the ulema and the modern educated elite. It is rather surprising that these interactions (especially in the context of an increasingly mature democratic political process in Bangladesh) have not so far created a measure of shared intellectual space and a common language of religious discourse between the ulema and the modern-educated Muslim intellectuals.

Two recent attempts to establish what was described as “modern type” madrassas may pave the way for some integration, even at a very small scale. One is the establishment of Madrassa Darur Rashad in Mirpur, Dhaka, which gives admission only to college graduates and has a condensed five-year course of Islamic studies. The other is

Dhaka Cadet Madrassa, which combines all subjects of college education with the usual Islamic sciences, using English as the medium of instruction for general subjects and Arabic for Islamic religious subjects. The quality of the English language teaching in these two madrassas is far better than that of public or private sector colleges. Market forces, it appears, have done something here that government would not, i.e., these madrassas seemed to have emerged in response to the increasing demand for English-speaking, modern-educated ulema to act as imams and khatibs for the Bangladeshi expatriate communities in the United Kingdom and North America.

Another such example is that of a Nadva-linked madrassa in Chittagong, where both Arabic and English are used as the medium of instruction and more than 90 percent of the students merge in the modern educational stream upon graduation from the madrassa. A similar example is from Bhera, near Sarghoda in Pakistan, where the madrassa established by Pir Karam Shah provides all facilities to its students to pursue college and university degrees.

It is important to note that whatever changes have taken place in the madrassa education have been initiated from outside of the madrassa education, or have come as a response to challenges posed by the state. One such challenge was posed by Ayub Khan's modernizing regime as to the centrality of the role of the ulema in Pakistan's religio-cultural life. The ulema responded to this challenge in a most creative way. Not only did the number of higher madrassas double during the Ayub period but also, in order to expand the recruitment base of students for these madrassas, hundreds of "feeder" madrassas were established in small towns. Management practices and educational procedures of madrassas were rationalized, and all major schools of thought—Deobandis, Barelvis, Ahl-i-Hadith, and Shias—organized federations of their respective madrassas. These federations helped introduce reformed syllabi, rationalized the examination system, and afforded the ulema an effective platform for coordinating their strategies aimed at countering the government's efforts to reduce their social and political influence and social autonomy.

The bureaucratization of the madrassa system also included the rationalization and expansion of its financial resource base through the recruitment of the business community into its management structures, a measure that later proved to be an important source of

funding for the madrassa system. The expanding economy of the 1960s provided ample funds, and the new urban development schemes provided easy and cheap land for building new madrassas and expanding the existing ones. The spectacular expansion during the Ayub Khan era of Oarul Ulum, Madrassa Arabiya Islamiya, and Dar-ul-Ulum Amjadiya of Karachi; lamia Ashrafiya, lamia Nayimiya, lamia Madina, and Dar-ul-Ulum Hizbul Ahnaf of Lahore; Madrassa Khairul Madaaris and Madrassa Qasimul Ulum of Multan; and Oarul Ulum Haqqaniya of Akora Khatak and Dar-ul-Ulum Sarhad of Peshawar, gives clear evidence of the relationship between economic growth, urban development, and religious revival.

The rapid expansion of the economy during the decade of development provided the ulema with new and large sources of income for their madrassas. This not only mitigated the economic crisis experienced by the religious establishment during the 1950s, but also lessened its dependence on the rural-based feudal class. Its new financiers were the bazaar merchants, small- and middle-level businessmen, commission agents, wholesalers and, in Karachi, people like Valika, Bhawani and Adamji, members of the top twenty-two families in Pakistan. This meant the religious establishment now had the financial wherewithal not only to face the challenge of the state, but also to adjust its financial base in accordance with new socio-economic realities.

The mid-1960s also witnessed important curriculum reforms in the madrassas. Among other things, the most important reform in major madrassas was the introduction of the English language and other modern subjects, especially in the fields of comparative religion, history, and law. Some prominent madrassas in Punjab linked their courses of studies with the general education curriculum, thus enabling their students to acquire degrees from the government schools and colleges and obtain jobs in the “secular” sector also. The younger generation of prominent ulema families was especially encouraged to acquire modern (English) education to prepare them to deal with the state authorities on the one hand, and with their modernist and fundamentalist adversaries on the other. This paid enormous dividends during the Bhutto and Zia periods. Maulana Taqi Usmani (son of Maulana Mufti Muhammed Shafi) of Karachi, Pir Karam Shah of Sarghoda, and Maulana Samiul Haq (son of Maulana

Abdual Haq) of Akora Khatak and others among their cohorts, by dint of their exposure to modern education and facility with the English language—besides, of course, their traditional madrassa education—were appointed as federal Shariat Court judges, and as members of the Council of Islamic Ideology and many other newly created Islamic institutions, commissions, and committees during the Zia period.

In the case of Bangladesh also, the ulema have shown remarkable flexibility in adapting to the changing social, economic, and political conditions, as is evident in the important changes in the social organization of madrassa education. The Alia madrassa system is a spectacular example of how modern and traditional systems of education were combined, notwithstanding its well-known inadequacies and shortcomings. But what is not widely known and appreciated are the important changes that have been introduced in Quomi madrassas during the past three decades. The following changes are worth mentioning:

1. Bangla has replaced Urdu as the medium of instruction. This is an important step in the process of “indigenization” of Islam and Islamic scholarship and their de-linking from their North Indian Islamic wellsprings.
2. Bangla has been made a compulsory subject up to the secondary level (Marhala-i-Sanvia). It is interesting to note that Quomi madrassas did not teach Bangla at any level before 1972.
3. Subjects such as politics, economics, and history of Islam in the Indian subcontinent up to the establishment of Bangladesh have been added.
4. English has been added as a compulsory subject in the primary section, and several madrassas now provide facilities for English education at higher levels as well.
5. Elementary school education has now been integrated within the Quomi madrassas, incorporating all subjects of general education along with the usual Islamic education.
6. Comparative religion has been added to the curriculum.

7. Bureaucratization of admission and administrative procedures, and professionalization of management practices, especially in large madrassas, are being undertaken. Personal computers will play an important role in this process, and soon several large madrassas will have their own websites.
8. A major breakthrough has been the standardization of academic performance evaluation by instituting a centralized system of curriculum, syllabi, and examinations under the auspices of two major federations of Quomi madrassas: Wafaqul Madaaris, which has 1,500 affiliated madrassas, and Anjumun Ittehadul Madaaris, which has more than 500 affiliated madrassas.
9. Funding resources have been diversified. Although traditional sources—zakat and sadakas raised from local communities and local and Pakistani business communities' donations—are still important, the expatriate Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf states, Western Europe, and North America have now become a substantial source of funding for Quomi madrassas. Similarly, Europe and North America-based Muslim non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as some individual Muslim philanthropists in the Gulf and South Africa, are also providing funds, especially for elementary religious education. In the case of a few Ahl-I-Hadith madrassas—the largest being in Rajshahi—the Saudi-based World Muslim League (Rabita Alim Al Islami) has also been a generous donor.

A great deal has been written on madrassas in the West in the wake of the September eleventh tragedy and the U.S. war on terrorism. Several reports on CNN and PBS, as well as Jessica Stern's article in *Foreign Affairs* and Jeffrey Goldberg's article in the *New York Times Magazine*, besides several dozen columns of Thomas Friedman, have suggested that the madrassas in Pakistan have become a hotbed of Islamic extremism and the breeding ground of terrorism. They have been variously described as "dens of terror," "jihad universities," "jihad factories," and, as the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee described them, "factories of terror." In general perception, madrassas have become synonymous with terrorism and terrorist training camps. Many journalists and commentators have suggested

that these madrassas teach “jihadi literature” in their course of studies and that their entire curriculum is intended to produce “holy warriors.” It has also been suggested by many Western scholars that there is an inherent relationship between what is taught in the madrassas on the one hand and religious extremism, Talibanism, militancy, anti-Americanism, and even terrorism, on the other. It is also argued that madrassa students, through their reading of religious texts, become “soldiers of God” and engage in militant activities against those they consider enemies of Islam. Let us critically examine these assertions.

First, if the madrassa education is the only or the main cause of Islamic militancy, radicalism, and anti-Americanism, why did these tendencies not manifest themselves before the 1990s? The curriculum of the madrassas has remained the same for about 150 years. Second, those who suggest an inherent relationship between the madrassa curriculum and Islamic militancy and describe madrassas as “jihad factories” are probably unaware of the fact that this curriculum is the most pacifist in its orientation. Its approach to Islam is ultra-conservative, literalist, legalist, and sectarian, but definitely not revolutionary, radical, or militant. It is interesting to note that in the standard syllabus on the study of Hadith, chapters on jihad in all the six standard collections of the Prophetic tradition are not discussed at all. During the study of fiqh (jurisprudence) texts also, the entire time is spent on “problems of menstruation,” laws relating to marriage and divorce, and other legal hairsplitting rather than on political or jihadic issues.

There is absolutely nothing in the madrassa curriculum that can be deemed as promoting or encouraging militancy, not to mention terrorism. Radicalism that we see in some madrassas in Pakistan today is an extraneous phenomenon brought into madrassas by some international and domestic political actors who wanted to use the religious capital and manpower of these madrassas for their own objectives.

An overwhelming majority of madrassas in Pakistan—as in India and Bangladesh—are engaged in traditional Islamic studies and are NOT involved in any militant activities, or even sectarian strife. In fact, most of them shy away from politics in order to concentrate on their primary mission. It was only after the Soviet invasion of

Afghanistan in 1979 that some madrassas on the northern and southern border areas of Pakistan—which always had a majority of their students from Afghanistan—came to be associated with the Afghan jihad movement against the Soviet Union. One also has to remember that there were five million Afghan refugees in hundreds of refugee camps in the NWFP and Baluchistan. It is estimated that 40 percent of them were school-age children, many of them orphans. These madrassas provided them with free food, shelter, and basic skills of how to read and write, along with some Islamic education.

Most of the madrassas associated with militancy and terrorism after the mid-1990s were established in the 1980s. But what were established for the particular purpose of fighting against the Soviets were in fact military training camps where some religious education was also imparted, obviously to strengthen the spirit of jihad against the Soviets. The point is that they were not the institutions originally conceived as madrassas that later turned into terrorist training camps; they were, from their very inception, conceived as militant training camps and were given a cover of a madrassa to Islamically legitimize their operations and to solicit funds from all over the Muslim world. The story of these madrassas is thus integrally linked with the story of Afghan jihad of the 1980s and of the Cold War that created the political conditions for this jihad. Therefore, the answers to the questions being asked these days in the media and in scholarly and policy circles—who established these madrassas? why they were created? who provided them generously with funds? and more importantly, who revived the so far dormant tradition of jihad as an armed struggle against the infidels?—lie not only in Kabul or Islamabad or Peshawar or Riyadh, but also in Langley, VA.

As we all know, after the Afghan jihad was over, the “facilities” created for the Afghan jihad in these madrassas came in handy for another jihad in Kashmir, again with the involvement of the Pakistan Government. What the Kashmir operation and the proliferation of jihadi organizations in the mid-1990s did was to bring this madrassa-based militancy from the tribal belt of the NWFP to the plains of the Punjab, where it was linked up with sectarian violence and anti-Indianism.

# 6

YOGINDER SIKAND

## **Reforming the Indian Madrassas: Contemporary Muslim Voices**

**M***adrassas*, or Islamic schools, serve an important function in the lives of many Muslims in India today. No reliable figures exist for the number of madrassas in India, but there are estimated to be several thousand.<sup>1</sup> Many of them are just mosque schools (*maktabs*) where Muslim children are taught to read the Quran and memorize parts of it and are also taught Urdu and the basics of the faith. Several large madrassas also exist, with smaller ones loosely affiliated to them. Some of these have exercised, and continue to exercise, an important influence on Muslims in other countries, especially (but not only) among the South Asian diaspora.

This paper deals with the question of reforms in the Indian madrassas, looking at how the demands for reform are being articulated by Muslims in India today, both *ulema* as well as others. It focuses on the rationale for reform, the forms that these reforms should take and the impact of these suggested measures, concluding with a brief reflection on the debate in India today about the alleged links of some

1. Manzoor Ahmed, in his study of Indian Muslim education, estimated the number of madrassas at around thirty thousand. See Manzoor Ahmad, *Islamic Education: Redefinitions of Aims and Methodology* (New Delhi: Genuine Publications, 2002), 32.

madrassas with outside radical Islamist movements, examining how this debate has impacted efforts to reform the madrassas.

As Zaman writes in his study of madrassas in Pakistan, the significance of contemporary initiatives at reforming the madrassas has not been properly appreciated.<sup>2</sup> The issue of madrassa reform has crucial implications for Muslim education in India, the nature of Muslim leadership, and for community agendas. Because of the links, in terms of shared traditions that some of the leading Indian madrassas have with madrassas elsewhere—particularly in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal—and the influence that Indian ulema have, since the last century, had on Muslims in other countries, reforms in the Indian madrassa system have a broader relevance than in the Indian Muslim community alone.

### **Traditional Madrassa Education in India**

ACQUISITION OF ISLAMIC KNOWLEDGE is said to be a fundamental duty binding on all Muslims. From the time of the Prophet until the eleventh century, education, principally the study of the Quran, and later the *hadith* (Prophetic Traditions), was provided in the mosques and was, at least in theory, open to all Muslims free of cost. With the development of Sufism from the third Islamic century onward, education was also imparted in Sufi lodges by Sufi masters. Islamic education was seen as not merely the transmission of knowledge but, above all, as aimed at the molding of the character of the student, who was expected to follow as closely as possible the pattern of the Prophet and his companions.

Although the early Muslim community lacked a class of priests—for the Quran sternly forbids intermediaries between the individual believer and God—by the eleventh century, with the establishment of large Muslim empires, a class of clerics, specializing in the minutiae of Islamic law, gradually developed. This went hand-in-hand with the emergence of a specialized institution for Islamic learning separate from the mosque, the madrassa. Although there is evidence of smaller madrassas having existed earlier, the first state-sponsored

2. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, "Religious Education and the Rhetoric of Reform: The *Madrasa* in British India and Pakistan," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 2 (April 1999): 295.

madrassa in the Muslim world, which was to set the pattern for madrassas elsewhere, is said to have been the Nizamia Madrassa at Baghdad, founded by the eleventh century Seljuq Vizier Nizam-ul Mulk Hasan ibn 'Ali, and called the Nizamia Madrassa after him. Nizam-ul Mulk later established several other such madrassas, such as the one in Nishapur. These institutions aimed at the training of a class of experts in Islamic law, ulema, who would go on to staff the bureaucracy of the state as judges (*qazis*) and *muftis* as well as administrators. Thus, at the very outset, the institution of the officially sponsored madrassa was seen as serving as an arm of the state, and over time the ulema attached to the royal courts were to be used to legitimize state authority. Nizam-ul Mulk is said to have been particularly concerned with the growing popularity of the rationalist Muta'zilites and the Isma'ili missionaries who were very active in his time and posed a threat to the Sunni establishment and the Seljuq state. The ulema of his madrassas were seen as a bulwark against the threat posed by these groups by upholding 'Asharite and Shafi'i orthodoxy.<sup>3</sup>

The syllabus employed at the Nizamia madrassa, which served as a model for madrassas elsewhere, represented a blend of *naqli 'ulum* (revealed sciences), including the Quran, the hadith, *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *tafsir* (Quranic commentary), on the one hand, and the *aqli 'ulum* (rational sciences), including Arabic language, grammar, logic, rhetoric, philosophy, astronomy, medicine, physics and mathematics, on the other. In medieval times, the madrassas served as the only available centers of formal education for Muslims. Their graduates went on to assume a variety of occupations, such as administrators and military officers, as well as what would today be called strictly "religious" posts as judges in religious courts, teachers in Islamic schools and prayer leaders in mosques (*imams*).

In north India the earliest available evidence of madrassas dates back to the late twelfth century, when Sultan Muhammed Ghori conquered Ajmer in 1191, in present-day Rajasthan, and set up a madrassa in the town. As Turkish rule expanded over other parts of India, Muslim rulers established madrassas in their own domains, providing

3. Zia ul-Hasan Faruqi, *Musalmano Ka Ta'limi Nizam* (The educational system of the Muslims) (Delhi: Maktaba Jami'a, 1992), 6061.

them with extensive land grants (*jagirs*, *madad-i-ma'ash*) for meeting their expenses and scholarships for their students. Muslim nobles and scholars also followed suit and set up large educational centers. Great centers of Islamic knowledge emerged in various parts of India, and the madrassas of Gujarat, Uch (Sind), Multan (Punjab), Delhi, Pandua and Gaur (Bengal), Bidar, Gulbarga and Aurangabad (Deccan) were among the most renowned in the entire Muslim world at their time. Generally, despite the Quranic insistence on the equality of all believers, students and teachers at the madrassas were drawn from the Muslim elite—the *ashraf* nobility—consisting of migrants from Central Asia, Iran and Arabia, and their descendants. The thirteenth-century court historian Ziauddin Barani insisted that higher education must remain a closely guarded preserve of the ashraf. The “base-born” *ajlaf*, Muslims of indigenous origin, he insisted, must remain content with just a basic knowledge of the Islamic faith and rituals.<sup>4</sup>

The syllabus employed at the Indian madrassas went through a process of gradual transformation over time, corresponding with the changing needs of the state.<sup>5</sup> Until the early sixteenth century, the focus of the madrassas was essentially on fiqh, the details of Islamic jurisprudence. From then onward, and particularly from the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, philosophy and logic and other “rational disciplines” (*ma'qulat*) grew in importance, while strictly “religious” disciplines seem to have been less central. With the efforts of the early eighteenth-century Shah Waliullah, the study of hadith began to be emphasized. Shah Waliullah, whose legacy is today claimed by most contemporary South Asian Muslim schools of ulema, returned from a stay of several years in Arabia, and introduced for the first time the teaching of the six canonical collections of hadith (*sabih sitta*) in his father's school, the Madrassa-i-Rahimiya, in Delhi. He insisted that the naqli 'ulum must form the core of the madrassa syllabus, and was opposed to what he saw as the excessive

4. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darsgah* (The religious schools of India) (Hamdard Educational Society, 1996), 33–40.

5. For a history of the syllabus and methods of teaching of the Indian madrassas, see Abul Hasnat Nadwi, *Hindustan Ke Qadim Islami Darsgah* (The old Islamic schools of India) (Azamgarh: Dar-ul Musannifin, 1971); Muhammad Sharif Khan, *Education, Religion and Modern Age* (New Delhi: Asish Publishing House, 1999), 84–102.

focus in the curriculum on the aqli ‘ulum, particularly Greek philosophy and logic.<sup>6</sup>

Shah Waliullah’s efforts to reform the madrasa syllabus met with little success, however, as the center for Islamic education had, by this time, shifted eastwards, from Delhi to Lucknow.<sup>7</sup> In the mid-eighteenth century, Mulla Nizamuddin (d. 1748), scion of a family of learned Mughal ulema, established himself at the Firanghi Mahal in Lucknow, a mansion that belonged to a European merchant but had been gifted to the mulla by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. There he set about preparing a reformed madrasa syllabus, named after him as the *Dars-i-Nizami*. The syllabus included new books on hadith and Quranic commentary, but the focus on the rational sciences remained, for products of the madrasa were to be trained not only for strictly religious posts but also as general administrators and functionaries in the state bureaucracies.<sup>8</sup>

With the establishment of British rule, the madrasas were faced with what was seen as a grave threat to their existence and identity. In the 1830s, Persian was replaced with English as the language of official correspondence by the East India Company in the territories under its control. State-employed *qazis* were replaced by judges trained in British law, as the application of Muslim law was restricted only to personal affairs.<sup>9</sup> A new system of education was gradually set up, where Islam had no place. Many of these modern schools were established by Christian missionaries, whose antipathy for Islam was well known. The endowed properties of several madrasas were also resumed by the East India Company. Thus, increasingly bereft of royal patronage and finding their avenues of employment greatly restricted, the madrasa system and the ulema as a class had now to contend with a major challenge to their survival.

6. Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, introduction to *Dini Madaris Aur ‘Asr-i-Hazir* (Religious schools and the modern age), by Muhammad Rizwan-ul Qasmi (Hyderabad: Markaz Da’wat-o-Tahqiqat, 1994), 8.

7. Mohammad Akhtar Siddiqui, “Development and Trends in Madrasa Education,” in A. W. B. Qadri, Riaz Shakir Khan and Mohammad Akhter Siddique, eds., *Education and Muslims in India Since Independence* (New Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1998), 81.

8. Francis Robinson, *The ulema of Firangi Mahal and Islamic Culture in South Asia* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001).

9. Although, of course, under the Mughals and even earlier, the *shari’a* was never enforced in its entirety.

The revolt of 1857, in which several Indian ulema are said to have played an important role, represented, in a sense, an effort on the part of the increasingly threatened ulema to defend their privileges. With the failure of the revolt, many ulema turned now to setting up a chain of madrassas, for it was felt that under alien rule Islam was under grave threat and that it was only by preserving and promoting Islamic knowledge that the younger generation of Muslims could be saved from sliding into apostasy and prevented from falling prey to the blandishments of the Christian missionaries. Because they perceived themselves under siege and saw Islam as under attack by the Christian British, the ulema seem to have adopted a deeply hostile attitude toward Western knowledge. The “educational jihad” that they now launched to preserve traditional Islamic learning was seen as taking the place of the failed physical jihad against the British,<sup>10</sup> and as working to train a class of ulema who would take revenge on the British for having overthrown the Mughals.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the madrassas that they set about establishing closed their doors to modern knowledge, which was seen as somehow “un-Islamic,” owing to its association with the British. This was the beginning of the great divide between what was now seen as “religious” (*dini*) knowledge, on the one hand, and modern “worldly” (*duniyavi*) learning, on the other, the two being seen as opposed to each other.<sup>12</sup> Because of the way in which this hierarchy of knowledge was constructed, the curriculum of the madrassas came to be seen as almost entirely unchangeable, although in the past it had been subject to considerable change over time.<sup>13</sup>

The setting up of the Dar-ul-Ulum Madrassa in Deoband in 1865, today the largest traditional madrassa in the world, marked a turning point in the history of madrassa education in India.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to past precedent, the madrassa eschewed all patronage from the state

10. *Kul Hind Dini Madaris Convention: Pas-i-Manzar, Rudad, Tajaviz-o-Faisale Aur Rabita-i-Madaris-i-Islamiya Ka Qayyam* (The All-India religious schools’ convention, background, details, suggestions and decisions and the formation of a federation of Islamic schools) [henceforth, *Kul Hind*], (New Delhi: All-India Milli Council, n.d.), 3.

11. Mumshad ‘Ali Qasmi, *Tarikh-i-Dars-i-Nizami* (The history of the Dars-i-Nizami) (Bilaspur: Majm’ al-Bahuth al-‘Ilmiya, 1994), 48.

12. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darsgah*, 45.

13. Mumshad Qasmi, *Tarikh-i-Dars-i-Nizami*, 45.

14. For a history of the Deoband Madrassa, see Barbara Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India 1860: 1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

and relied entirely on public donations. In the absence of the Muslim ruler as patron, it was now the ordinary Muslim, with whom the ulema had, until then, had few links, who came to symbolize the survival of Islam in the country. Thus, the founders of the Deoband madrasa made efforts to establish close links with ordinary Muslims in small towns and villages. A few years after its setting up, its graduates had established their own small madrassas in various parts of India, spreading the Deobandi teachings of Islamic reform. Consequently, the social composition of the madrasa student body began undergoing a noticeable change, as many young men from lower class, *ajlaf* families began enrolling in Deoband and the network of Islamic schools that it helped spawn. For these people, access to the cherished resources associated with the Islamic scripturalist tradition provided a means for upward social mobility in a society deeply stratified by caste. Further, the free education, board and lodging provided by the madrassas often attracted many poor Muslims who could not afford to study in schools that charged fees. The hope of getting employment as *muezzins*, imams and madrasa teachers, also attracted many poor Muslims with no other reasonable job prospects. On the other hand, middle class Muslims increasingly began to send their sons to modern, English-medium schools, as these provided avenues for occupations in the new economy. Thus, increasingly, and especially after 1947, the madrassas came to be associated with the lower classes, and today it is only very rarely that rich Muslims would send their children to such schools.

As for the syllabus, hostility toward British rule meant that modern knowledge was viewed with suspicion. It was felt that “worldly” knowledge might tempt students away from their pursuit of religion, and hence was to be approached with extreme caution. Although some of the leading founders of Deoband are said to have legitimized the acquisition of such knowledge for the sake of the “advancement of Islam,” it was not incorporated into the syllabus of the school.<sup>15</sup> Deoband followed the basic structure of the Dars-i-Nizami, but

15. Muhammad Qasmi, *Dini Madaris Aur 'Asr-i-Hazir*, 47–48. According to one Indian *'alim*, the founders of the madrasa believed that while modern education was not to be shunned, since the government schools were providing it there was no need to duplicate the government's efforts, and that the madrasa should, therefore, focus only on *shari'i* subjects (Mufti Ziauddin, in *Kul Hind Dini Madaris Convention Souvenir* [henceforth, *Souvenir*] (New Delhi: All-India Milli Council, n.d.), 32.

made several modifications in the syllabus, by reducing the number of books on philosophy and logic and incorporating more texts on hadith, fiqh and tafsir. Efforts to introduce modern disciplines met with no success. Two years after the founding of the madrassa, in 1859, a committee of the leading ulema of Deoband suggested reducing the length of the course of study from ten to six years, which the madrassa agreed to. The rationale given was that by doing so, the students would be able to study in modern schools after they graduated.<sup>16</sup> However, few, if any, actually did so. It is said that Maulana Qasim Nanotawi, the founder of the madrassa, had at one stage thought of introducing the teaching of English in the madrassa so the students could be trained to engage in missionary work among English-speaking people. This suggestion was, however, later ruled out.<sup>17</sup>

As a reaction to Deoband's perceived hostility toward modern subjects, the Nadwat-ul ulema was set up in Lucknow in 1892, to train ulema well versed in both the traditional Islamic as well as modern disciplines. Its rector, Shibli Nu'mani, sought to introduce the teaching of English, along with modern social and natural sciences, in the syllabus, arguing that the early Muslims had not desisted from taking advantage of the learning of the Greeks and the Iranians; Islam, he argued, being an eternal religion, had always been open to new developments in the realm of the 'aqli 'ulum. However, he encountered stiff opposition from the conservative ulema,<sup>18</sup> some of whom branded him as a *kafir*. As a result, Nadwa failed in its mission to develop a new class of ulema, but Shibli's vision remained a powerful source of inspiration for reformers in post-1947 India.

## **Madrassa Reform in Present-day India**

MUSLIM ADVOCATES OF REFORM in contemporary India include both trained ulema, products of madrassas, as well as men who have been educated in modern schools. Some of them have studied in madrassas and have then gone on to receive higher education in regular universities. While all of them seem agreed on the importance of the

16. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darshana*, 119.

17. Ibid., 11. Qamruddin writes that in 1925 Deoband started a course in Sanskrit to train Muslim missionaries to work among Hindus but that it was soon abandoned.

18. Ibid., 42.

madrassas as institutions geared to preserving and promoting Islamic knowledge and Muslim identity, there is considerable variation in their approaches to the nature and extent of the reform they advocate. There seems, however, a consensus that the core of the reform project should consist of modification in the madrassa syllabus and the methods of teaching. This section looks at the ways in which these appeals for reform are articulated and expressed by these advocates of reform.

The rationale for introducing modern disciplines in the madrassas is framed in principally three ways. First, it is said to be in line with the Islamic understanding of knowledge as all embracing, covering both *'ibadat* (worship) as well as *mu'amilat* (social relations, worldly pursuits). Second, introducing modern disciplines is said to be essential in order for Muslims to prosper in this world, in addition to the next. Third, it is seen as essential in order for the ulema to engage in *tableeq*, or Islamic missionary work. All three tie in with a new, more activist understanding of the role of the ulema. The ulema are no longer to remain restricted to teaching in the madrassas. Rather, they are to play an important role as leaders of the community. Some writers stress that the ulema have, in fact, the divinely ordained responsibility of providing leadership to the entire world as leaders of the followers of the one true faith.

## Islam and Knowledge

ADVOCATES FOR REFORM see the present syllabus used in the Indian madrassas—generally some variant of the Dars-i-Nizami—as stagnant, in many respects no longer in tune with the demands and needs of the times. Because the syllabus has remained largely the same for the last three centuries, with only minor modifications, the ulema are seen as rapidly losing their relevance for Muslim society, cocooned as they are in a world that has long since passed.<sup>19</sup> The reformists insist that for the ulema to be able to play the role that Islam has envisaged for them, as guides of the community, the madrassa syllabus must be considerably revised. This entails a new understanding, said to be

19. Muhammad Arshad, “Azad Hindustan Mai Musalmano Ki Ta’limi Surat-i-Hal” (The educational conditions of Muslims in independent India), in Parwaz Rahmani and Muhammad Arshad, eds., *Hindustani Musalman* (The Indian Muslims) (New Delhi: Da’wat Publications, 2001), 101.

more Islamically authentic, of the place of knowledge and the role of the ulema in Islam.

Reformists insist that knowledge in Islam is one whole, and that the division between *dini* (religious) and *duniyawi* (worldly) knowledge, with the two opposed to each other, which many contemporary ulema seem to have accepted, has no sanction in the Quran.<sup>20</sup> The very first revelation to the Prophet, “Read, in the name of your Lord,” and the numerous hadith stressing the superiority of the scholar over the worshipper and the martyr, are said to indicate the great emphasis Islam gives to the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>21</sup> The Quran is quoted as repeatedly exhorting the believers to ponder the mysteries of creation as signs of the power and mercy of God. Knowledge of the creation is said to be the means for acquiring knowledge of God.<sup>22</sup> Thus, far from leading to doubt and disbelief, scientific investigation, if conducted within properly defined Islamic bounds, can deepen one’s faith and is, in fact, commanded so by God. The Prophet Muhammed is portrayed as the pioneer of universal literacy and education.<sup>23</sup> The circle of followers who learned the Quran from him, first in Mecca and then in Medina, formed the first Muslim “school.” Education was considered a duty (*farz*) binding on all Muslims, men as well as women, rich and poor.<sup>24</sup> The education imparted in the “schools” at the time of the Prophet was centered on the Quran, but the Prophet also encouraged his followers to gain worldly knowledge. This is suggested by the hadith, “Go unto even China in search of knowledge,” for China was renowned at that time for its advancement in various sciences. In addition, the Prophet is also known to have instructed some of his disciples to learn foreign languages, to communicate the message of Islam to non-Arab peoples, as well as other subjects such as mathematics and

20. Sayyed Abul Hasan ‘Ali Nadwi, *‘Ilm Ka Muqam Aur Abl-i-‘ilm Ki Zimmedariyan* (The place of knowledge and the responsibilities of the intellectuals) (Lucknow: Majlis Tahqiqat-o-Nashriyat ul-Islam, 1997), 7.

21. Abdur Rauf Jhandanagari, *al-‘Ilm wa’l ulema* (Knowledge and the ulema) (Maunath Bhanjan: Idara Da’wat ul-Islam), 22. The author quotes a hadith to the effect that on the Day of Judgment, the light of the writings of the *‘alim* would weigh as much as the blood of the martyr.

22. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta’limi Masa’il* (Our educational problems) (Bangalore: Furqania Academy, 1989), 5.

23. Zafar ‘Alam, *Education in the Early Muslim Period* (New Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i-Islami, 1997).

24. Arshad, “Azad Hindustan Mai Musalmano,” 97.

medicine.<sup>25</sup> Thus, following the Prophet, Muslims today must consider it a duty to acquire not only knowledge of the *shari'a* but also of the world (*duniya*).

Reformists argue that since Islam is all-embracing in its scope, providing guidance not only for worship and devotion but also rules for collective existence, ranging from personal affairs to matters of the state, Muslims must acquire knowledge of all aspects of the *duniya*, in addition to that of the *shari'a*. Since Islam is God's chosen religion and is valid for all times, the *ulema* must remain abreast with changing developments in the world to be able to express Islam anew in response to changing conditions.<sup>26</sup> It is only by acquiring knowledge of the modern world, of both the natural as well as the social sciences, that Islam, which is seen as a complete "system" (*nizam*), can be "implemented" in its entirety over all aspects of the Muslims' personal as well as collective affairs.<sup>27</sup> It is wrong, reformists argue, to consider that the sciences developed by people of other communities are necessarily un-Islamic and false. Indeed, they might contain much from which Muslims can benefit and can be used for the "cause of Islam," such as modern technology.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the *madrassas* should be willing to incorporate new knowledge in the realm of the natural and social sciences into their syllabus, provided these are in accordance with the teachings of Islam.<sup>29</sup>

Since the conditions of the world are constantly changing, so, too, must the curriculum of the *madrassas* constantly evolve. While the core of the syllabus, consisting of the *naqli 'ulum*, should remain unchanged, its *aqli 'ulum* component—which is merely a means to acquiring knowledge of the *naqli 'ulum*—must be subject to revision

25. Sayyed Muhammad Salim, *Aghaz-i-Islam Mai Musalmano Ka Nizam-i-Ta'lim: Abad-i-Banu Umayyaya Tak* (The system of education of the Muslims from the dawn of Islam until the age of the Umayyads) (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i-Islami, 1988), 30.

26. Abul 'Irfan Khan Nadwi, "Nisab-i-Ta'lim Aur Tariqa-i-Ta'lim: Maujuda Ahad Ke Taqaze" (The syllabus and method of education: the demands of the present age), *Islam Aur Asr-i-Jadid* 12, no. 4 (October 1980): 26.

27. Islam thus comes to be presented in reified terms, as a neatly defined body of knowledge, almost as a thing in itself.

28. Wahiduddin Khan, *ulema Aur Daur-i-Jadid* (The *ulema* and the modern age) (New Delhi: al-Risala, 1992), 42.

29. Iqbal Ahmad Ansari, "Dini Madaris ka Ta'limi Nizam" (The educational system of the religious schools) in *Arabi Islami Madaris Ke Nisab-o-Nizam-i-Ta'lim* (The syllabus and system of education in Arabic Islamic schools) (Patna: Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), 156.

in accordance with the changing context.<sup>30</sup> The ulema must realize that the Dars-i-Nizami, the main syllabus used in most of the Indian madrassas, was itself prepared in and for a certain historical context, and since the context has changed, the syllabus can no longer remain stagnant, as has largely remained the case so far.<sup>31</sup> This requires the introduction of modern subjects in the madrassas, and the deletion of books that are no longer valid and that were designed for a different age. In addition to issues of traditional fiqh that have no relation with the modern world (such as slavery), the present curriculum is said to teach many subjects that are of no contemporary use or relevance, such as Greek philosophy, which need to be replaced by modern equivalents.<sup>32</sup>

The inclusion of “modern” subjects is said to be necessary in order to develop a new fiqh attuned to the particular context of contemporary India, for the old books of fiqh deal with many issues that are no longer relevant and are also silent about matters that modernity has forced people to deal with.<sup>33</sup> For this new Islamic jurisprudence, the focus of the teaching should shift from the details of jurisprudence (*fur'u*) to the principles of law (*'usul*). One writer even suggests that madrassas familiarize their students with international law and comparative legal systems, to “meet modern challenges.”<sup>34</sup> Since the traditional fiqh, which forms the foundation of the present madrasa syllabus, is lacking, in many respects, for a society that is no longer “closed and isolated,” the Indian ulema must go directly to the Quran to gain insights into how Islam can be expressed in contemporary terms.<sup>35</sup> Muslims must realize that past interpretations of Islam are not binding on them, for the classical interpreters were human beings after all, whose understanding of the scripture was heavily influenced by their own environment. While what is of value in their interpretations must not be shunned, the ulema today must approach the Quran

30. Muhammad Muhsin, “Dini Madaris ka Nisab” (The syllabus of the religious schools), in *'Arabi Islami Madaris*, 102.

31. Muhammad Salam Qasim, “Dars-i-Nizami Aur Islah-i-Nisab Ke 'Usul-o-Mabadi” (The Dars-i-Nizami and the principles of reform of the syllabus), in *'Arabi Islami Madaris*, 105.

32. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darshana*, 53.

33. Faruqi, *Musalmans Ka Ta'limi Nizam*, 86.

34. Muhammad Qasim, *Dini Madaris Aur 'Asr-i-Hazir*, 29.

35. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darshana*, 140.

without blind reliance on the classical interpreters and seek to discover what message it has for the present, for it is a book with eternal validity.<sup>36</sup> Blind adherence to traditional fiqh (*taqlid*) as taught in the madrassas must be shunned, and a new class of ulema, with a knowledge of modern disciplines, must come to the fore who must engage in *ijtihad*, the creative interpretation of Islam in the light of modern conditions,<sup>37</sup> and thereby refute the allegations of Orientalists and others that Islam has no relevance to the present day.<sup>38</sup> This new fiqh must be contextually interpreted, taking into account the specific Indian context, where issues of religious pluralism, and the increased demands for women's emancipation and social justice for oppressed communities provide challenges for which traditional fiqhi formulations have no relevant answers.<sup>39</sup> In addressing these new issues, the ulema might need to work along with pious Muslims who have been trained in modern subjects and together come up with new solutions.<sup>40</sup>

This advocacy of introducing modern learning, of course, does not mean an uncritical adoption of Western paradigms of scientific knowledge, especially in the social sciences. Reformists make a cautious distinction between the products of modern technology that, as they see it, could be used to serve the cause of Islam, and the underlying assumptions of Western science—materialism and skepticism in matters of religion, calling for what is now fashionably called the “Islamization of knowledge,” stressing the need for suitably “Islamized,” “modern” disciplines to be taught as “commentaries on various aspects of the Quran.”<sup>41</sup>

In the writings of the reformists, Islam's position on universal education is seen as setting it apart from and above all other religions. While other religions, such as Judaism and Hinduism, see knowledge as the close preserve of a small priesthood, Islam stresses the need

36. Muhammad Faruq Khan, “Quran ki Ta’limi aur Tadrisi Masa’il” (Educational and teaching matters related to the Quran), in *Dini Madaris Aur Unke Masa’il* (Madrassas and their problems) (Baleriyaganj: Jami’at-ul Falah, 1990), 14–16.

37. Abid Raza Bedar, preface to *‘Arabi Islami Madaris*, 5.

38. Ghulam Yahya Anjum, *Anwar-i-Khyal* (The lights of thought) (New Delhi, 1991), 120.

39. Fazlur Rahman Faridi, in *Kul Hind*, 86.

40. Muhammad ‘Uzair al-Mazhari, “Ladkiyon Ki ‘Ala Dini Ta’lim Ka Masla” (The question of girls’ higher religious education), in *Dini Madaris Aur Unke Masa’il*, 117.

41. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta’limi Masa’il*, 10.

for all people, men as well as women, to acquire knowledge. The contrast with Christianity is repeatedly stressed. Christianity is said to be radically indifferent to worldly affairs, making a sharp distinction between what is Caesar's and what is God's, and thus between sacred and profane knowledge. Hence, the church is accused of having a fierce hostility toward science and reason and to have enjoyed a long history of persecuting scientists. In contrast to Christianity, the Quran does not enjoin blind faith but, rather, a faith based on reason ('*aq*). Further, unlike Christianity, Islam does not negate the world or advocate monasticism. Rather, it strikes a harmonious balance between this world and the next, and so positively encourages the cultivation of knowledge of the world and both worldly as well as spiritual welfare and progress.<sup>42</sup> Hence, in contrast to the Christian world, scientific development occurred on a grand scale at a time when Islamic civilization was at its zenith, because of—rather than, as in the Christian case, despite—the deep-rooted influence of religion.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the great achievements of early medieval Muslim scientists, in a range of fields, including medicine, astronomy, physics, mathematics, biology and engineering, owed essentially to the encouragement provided by Islam to explore the duniya as a “sign” (*ayat*) of God's majesty.<sup>44</sup> These scientists are said to have been pious Muslims, seeing their own scientific work as entirely in keeping with the teachings of Islam. It is also argued that the great universities of the medieval Muslim world provided inspiration and knowledge to European scientists at a time when Europe was still reeling under the Dark Ages and the church was vehemently opposed to science. Modern science is said to have its roots in the medieval Islamic tradition.<sup>45</sup> Hence, for present-day ulema to take to scientific education is not to abandon their faith or to embrace the alien. Rather, it is to claim what was once theirs, a return to their authentic roots. In fact, modern science, if studied cleansed of its “un-Islamic” associations, can only help to further strengthen the Muslims' faith in Islam. On the other hand, if the

42. Aslam Parwez, “Madaris Ke Nisab Aur Science” (The syllabus of the madrasas and science), in '*Arabi Islami Madaris*, 125.

43. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta'limi Masa'il*, 3.

44. Ishtiaq Ahmad Zilli, in '*Arabi Islami Madaris*, 32.

45. Aftab Ahmad, “Madaris-i-'Arabiya Ka Nisab Aur Waqt Ki Zarurat” (The syllabus of the Arabic schools and the needs of the times), in '*Arabi Islami Madaris*, 143.

ulema continue to ignore the importance of modern disciplines they would meet the same fate as the church in Europe, and the younger generation of Muslims would begin to turn away from Islam in the wrong belief that it is opposed to reason and worldly progress.<sup>46</sup>

### New Roles for the Ulema

SOME MUSLIMS WHO CALL FOR REFORM in the madrasa syllabus, stressing the need for introducing modern (*asri*) disciplines, consider it as essential for the activist role they see for the ulema, as deputies (*na'ib*) of the Prophet charged with the responsibility of leading the community, and, indeed, all mankind, in accordance with the Quranic injunction of "enjoining what is good and forbidding what is evil."<sup>47</sup> If the ulema are to be successful in that divinely appointed task, they must be aware of modern developments and thereby prove their value to the community. Armed with religious as well as modern knowledge, the ulema must play a central part in social reform, and also as social workers, struggling for justice for all humankind irrespective of religion.<sup>48</sup> Modern education, along with religious training, would enable madrasa products to "gain social prestige" and turn into "useful citizens." Accordingly, madrassas must also teach new subjects that would enable their students to play a role in national development, such as the natural and social sciences, the philosophy of the Indian Constitution, civics, and the principles of social justice, human rights, justice, equality and freedom.<sup>49</sup> This would lead to a transformation in how the ulema see the rest of the world and how the world sees them. Because they are said to be cut off from the fast-changing world around them, the madrasa students, says one writer, "suffer from an intense inferiority complex, hating everybody with modern education and being hated by them, in turn." If they were to prove their relevance and usefulness in the modern world, they would be able to recover for themselves the position that Islam gives them of guides of the community.<sup>50</sup>

46. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta'limi Masa'il*, 8.

47. 'Abdur Rahman, quoted in *Souvenir*, 5.

48. Salamatullah, *Hindustan Mai Musalmano Ki Ta'lim* (The education of Muslims in India) (Delhi: Maktaba-i-Jami'a, 1990), 145.

49. Ansari, "Dini Madaris ka Ta'limi Nizam," 165.

50. Moinuddin Ahmed, *Ulema: The Boon and Bane of Islamic Society* (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1990), 105.

## Madrasa Modernization and Worldly Progress

INTRODUCING MODERN SUBJECTS in the madrassas is also seen as providing Muslims with real-world benefits. Thus, a leading writer associated with the Jamaat-i-Islami argues, “to keep Muslims ahead of other communities, it is necessary to have worldly power, which is possible only through acquiring scientific and technical education.”<sup>51</sup> Modernizing the curriculum is also seen as addressing a central problem for many madrasa graduates, that of employment in an economy for which they have little or no training. Typically, the ulema have responded to the question by dismissing it altogether. Madrasa students, they insist, should have no care for where and how they would earn their livelihood, for God shall provide for them.<sup>52</sup> Some writers, however, recognize that employment is a fundamental concern for the students, most of who come from poor families, and are sent to the madrassas by their parents in the hope that on graduation they would be able to earn a livelihood as imams in mosques or teachers in maktabas and madrassas. They see the introduction of modern education as also helping to address the problem of acute unemployment among madrasa graduates, because, they argue, the existing avenues of employment for them, mainly as teachers in madrassas or imams and muezzins in mosques, are limited.<sup>53</sup> It would allow madrasa students to enter regular schools and colleges and thereby help the madrassas “become a part of the national education mainstream.”<sup>54</sup>

Teaching “modern” subjects in the madrassas, the reformists contend, would also help bridge the gap between the ulema and the modern-educated Muslims, who are seen to have fallen prey to “un-Islamic” ideologies and ways of life. If the madrassas were to incorporate modern subjects into their curriculum they might also

51. Sultan Ahmad Islahi, *Madaris Mai Scienci Ta'lim* (Scientific education in the madrassas) (Delhi: Markazi Maktaba-i-Islami, 1990), 6.

52. Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Dini Madaris: Din Ki Hijazat Ke Qiley* (Religious schools: the forts for the defense of the faith) (Delhi: Farid Book Depot, 2000), 22–27. Usmani is a Pakistani Deobandi whose works have been widely published in India.

53. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darsgah*, 12.

54. Ansari, “Dini Madaris ka Ta’limi Nizam,” 162. Needless to say, many ulema react angrily to these suggestions, insisting that madrasa education must be acquired solely for the sake of God, untainted by desire for worldly gain.

succeed in attracting students from better-off families to enroll and thus not only help undermine the existing educational dualism, but also improve the standards of the madrassas and, as one *'alim* suggests, the moral standards of the students.<sup>55</sup> This is also seen as helping to rescue those Muslim children who are being subjected to a subtle policy of Hinduization and “intellectual apostasy” in the government schools.

Some writers see the reform process as ultimately aimed at completely doing away with the division between ulema and modern-educated Muslims, calling for a single, unified syllabus that represents a harmonious balance of *shari'i* and modern knowledge. In this way, pious Muslims would be trained to be masters of religious law, on the one hand, and doctors, engineers, sociologists, economists and so on, on the other, who would be “the envy of the world,” and help the community attain “success” in this world and in the next.<sup>56</sup>

### **Madrassa Reform and Muslim Missionary Activism**

INTRODUCING MODERN DISCIPLINES in the madrassa syllabus is also seen as central to the divinely ordained task of tableeq, or the preaching of Islam. Thus, it is repeatedly stressed that the eleventh-century Imam Ghazali (1058–1111), the most accomplished Islamic scholar of his times, studied Greek philosophy to refute those Muslims who had fallen prey to its snares and had dismissed religion as a human creation. By mastering Greek philosophy, he was able to refute its claims and establish the supremacy of Islam. Likewise, present-day ulema must closely study, indeed master, “un-Islamic” philosophies, not for their own sake, but to expose them and assert the truth of Islam. A new science of Islamic theology (*ilm ul kalam*) is called for, one that seeks to present Islam in contemporary terms in order to appeal to the modern mind. For this, the ulema must be familiar with various contemporary ideologies and knowledge systems that are opposed to Islam.<sup>57</sup> By teaching these subjects, the madrassas would help train what one leading Indian *'alim* calls “an ideal ideological army” whose task would be to “defeat all other religions and ways of

55. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta'limi Masa'il*, 19–20.

56. Anjum, *Anwar-i-Khyal*, 123.

57. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta'limi Masa'il*, 15.

life,”<sup>58</sup> and to “wage war against falsehood.”<sup>59</sup> Numerous writers suggest that the teaching of comparative religions should be introduced in the madrassas to equip the students with tools to rebut the upholders of other faiths. Some argue that students need to be taught to use computers and the Internet to engage more fruitfully in tableeq work. The need for studying English and other “non-Muslim” languages is stressed as indispensable for successful tableeq and for countering anti-Islamic writings in these languages.<sup>60</sup> While some writers see the tableeq project in terms of a battle against people of other faiths by dismissing their faiths as false, others argue that the ulema, trained in modern subjects and armed with a knowledge of other religions, must seek to promote peace, love, dialogue and harmony with people of other communities, for it is only in a climate of tolerance that others would be willing to listen to the appeal of Islam.<sup>61</sup>

It is also argued that if the ulema, as leaders of the Muslims, fail to take to modern education, the community would fall behind other communities and be turned into helpless victims. The strength of the contemporary West is said to lie in its command over knowledge, and the ulema are exhorted to follow its examples if they are to establish the Muslims as leaders of the world, intellectually as well as economically, politically and militarily.<sup>62</sup> If Muslims were to lead the world in the development of knowledge, others would accept their leadership and follow them, and might even be inspired to convert to Islam. By mastering modern knowledge, the ulema would, it is said, also be able to impress on the non-Muslims that Islam has the perfect solution for all worldly problems, and this might inspire them to accept the true faith.<sup>63</sup>

58. Ibid., 10.

59. Ibid., 19.

60. Syed Shahabuddin Dasnavi, “Madrasa System: Chand Mashvare” (Madrasa system: some suggestions), in *‘Arabi Islami Madaris*, 25. While the “other” is seen, typically, as “the enemy of Islam,” and tableeq is described in combative terms, some writers stress the need for a change in how Muslims look at others. One ‘alim calls for introducing modern disciplines in the madrassas to help equip Muslims to “dialogue through serious and scientific discussion” with other people, “viewing them not as enemies but as seekers of the truth,” who are to be approached with “love and concern,” and “words of compassion.” See Wahiduddin Khan, *al-Risala*, no. 286 (September 2000): 27–29.

61. Mohsin Usmani Nadwi, “Madaris Ka Nizam-i-Ta’lim Aur Naya Challenge” (The system of madrasa education and the new challenge), *Islam Aur ‘Asr-i-Jadid* 32, no. 4 (October 2000): 107–08.

62. Shihabuddin Nadwi, *Hamare Ta’limi Masa’il*, 8.

63. Nazir al-Hafiz, *‘Arabi Islami Madaris*, 38.

## The Limits of Reform

ADVOCATES FOR THE INTRODUCTION of modern subjects in the madrassa curriculum are aware of the limits of reform, but there is considerable debate about how far reform should proceed. This tension centers on the perceived role and function of the madrassa. Those who see madrassas as aimed at only training students for professional religious posts argue that modern subjects should be allowed only insofar as they might help their students understand and interpret Islam in the light of modern education.<sup>64</sup> Others, recognizing that not all the graduates of the madrassas might be able or even want to become professional ulema, have suggested the creation of two streams of education in the madrassas. In the first stream, students who want just a modicum of religious education and then go on to join regular schools, would be taught basic religious subjects along with modern disciplines. The second stream would cater to students who wish to train as professional ulema, and would focus on *shari'i* subjects, teaching modern disciplines only to the extent necessary for them to interpret Islam in the light of modern needs.<sup>65</sup> A vocal minority insists, on the other hand, that an entirely new system of education must take the place of the traditional madrassas, where a unified syllabus, based on a harmonious blend of *shari'i* and modern subjects would be taught in equal proportions, and whose graduates could go on to train for a range of occupations, both religious as well as other, including joining the government bureaucracy, which would not only give them a source of gainful employment but would also, it is said, afford them an opportunity of engaging in tableeq among non-Muslims.<sup>66</sup> Some go so far as to suggest that the larger madrassas, after being suitably reformed, be converted into universities, funded by but autonomous of, the government of India, with the smaller madrassas being affiliated with them, following in the path of madrassas in many Muslim countries. This, however, is not a widely shared view.<sup>67</sup>

64. Anzar Shah Kashmiri, in *'Arabi Islami Madaris*, 36.

65. Aftab Ahmad, "Madaris-i-'Arabiya Ka Nisab Aur Waqt Ki Zarurat" (The syllabus of the Arabic schools and the needs of the times), in *'Arabi Islami Madaris*, 144.

66. Nishar Ahmad Faruqi, in *'Arabi Islami Madaris*, 65.

67. Sultan Ahmad Islahi, *Hindustan Mai Madaris-i-'Arabiya Ke Masa'il* (The problems of the Arabic madrassas in India) (Aligarh: Idara 'Ilm-o-Adab, n.d.), 152.

## Reforms in Teaching Methods

BESIDES REFORMS IN THE CURRICULUM of the madrassas, reformists also argue for suitable changes in the methods of teaching. Many writers are critical of the current stress on parroting entire sections of books without exercising reason or critical thought, as a result of which few students are said to actually properly comprehend what they are taught.<sup>68</sup> Critics see the madrassas as discouraging debate, dialogue and critical reflection,<sup>69</sup> and as treating their students as passive students, thus cultivating a climate of stern authoritarianism.<sup>70</sup> The stress on bookish learning is said to have deflected attention from moral development, and some writers bewail what they see as the low moral standards of many madrassa students. One ‘alim laments the charged polemics that madrassas train their students in, remarking that instead of teaching them how to engage in “peaceful and scientific dialogue” with people of other faiths, treating them as “enemies” rather than with “love and concern,” they train them in “heated debate,” although this is said to be against the practice of the Prophet.<sup>71</sup> Another writer points out that madrassa teachers refuse to let their students read any literature outside the syllabus, and that this narrows the vision of the students. This, he says, is opposed to Islam’s stress on general knowledge and its openness to learning.<sup>72</sup> He argues the need for madrassas to interact with the wider society, even going so far as to suggest that they should invite non-Muslims to their meetings, and strive to establish peaceful relations with them, enlightening them about Islam and working with them for peaceful coexistence.<sup>73</sup> It is only by integrating with the wider society, including non-Muslims, and by being willing to learn from others, including from people of other faiths, suggests a Muslim critic, himself a madrassa graduate, that madrassa students can broaden their horizons and develop a proper contextual and relevant understanding of the faith.<sup>74</sup>

68. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darsgah*, 118.

69. Salamatullah, *Hindustan Mai Musalmano Ki Ta’lim*, 185.

70. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darsgah*, 149.

71. Wahiduddin Khan, *al-Risala*, no. 286 (2000): 29.

72. Qamruddin, *Hindustan Ki Dini Darsgah*, 53.

73. *Ibid.*, 307.

74. Washim Ahmad, “Psychology of Education: Madrassas of UP,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 2000, 25–31, <http://www.epw.org.in/35-13/comm5.htm>.

Overall, then, the rationale for introducing modern disciplines in the madrasa syllabus is framed in terms of defense, staving off the creeping influence of other faiths or ideologies, or, in terms of the Islamic mission, as equipping the ulema to establish the “superiority” of Islam over other religions. It can be seen as a growing realization on the part of the ulema that unless changes are brought about in the system of madrasa teaching, the madrassas would lose their relevance and the influence of the ulema, as guardians of the Islamic scripturalist tradition, would further decline.

### The Pace of Reform

THE ACTUAL PACE OF REFORM in the madrasa system in India has been slow and halting. Many madrassas have drastically reduced the number of books on antiquated Greek philosophy and logic in their syllabus, and have replaced them with more books on hadith and other *naqli ‘ulum*. In recent years, several madrassas, including even the archconservative Deoband, have introduced the teaching of modern subjects, including basic English, and elementary social and natural sciences, along with Hindi and, in some cases, a regional language in their syllabus,<sup>75</sup> but the standard of teaching leaves much to be desired. Recently, the Deoband Madrasa launched English and computer courses for selected students. The Markaz-ul Ma’arif in New Delhi, affiliated to the Deoband, trains fifteen Deobandi graduates every year in computer applications, English and comparative religions. Some of its graduates are now running social work centers, providing medical and educational assistance to poor children, particularly in northeast India, thus charting out a new role for socially engaged ulema.<sup>76</sup> Certain madrassas, such as the Jami’at ul-Huda (Jaipur), the Madrasa Falah-i-Dara’in (Surat) and the Jami’a Sabil-us Salaam (Hyderabad) have also introduced technical training into their curriculum, thus providing their students alternate sources of employment. Some larger madrassas have managed to secure

75. Atiq-ur Rahman and Muhammad Shah Jahan Qasmi, “Hindustan Ke Aham Dini Madaris Ke Nisab-i-Ta’lim: Ek Taqabli Ja’iza” (The syllabus of India’s important religious schools: A comparative study), in *‘Arabi Dini Madaris*, 187–206.

76. S. Ubaidur Rahman, “Markaz-ul Ma’arif: A Shining Example,” *Milli Gazette*, 16–28 February 2002, 11.

recognition of their degrees by certain government-funded universities, such as the Aligarh Muslim University (Aligarh), the Osmania University (Hyderabad), the Jami'a Millia Islamiya and the Jami'a Hamdard (New Delhi), which allows their graduates to enter the universities at the master's level. In this way, these madrassas are being enabled to enter the educational mainstream. However, the number of madrassa students who manage to join universities is still abysmal, estimated, according to one source, at only fifty each year.<sup>77</sup>

Efforts to reform madrassas have also been attempted by some state governments, and, as in Pakistan today, the Government of India has also been pressing for the modernization of madrassas. The government has been increasingly trying to regulate the functioning of the madrassas, seeing them in terms of a security threat. This approach has been further strengthened with the active involvement of students of Deoband madrassas in Pakistan in the Taliban movement, and the growing radicalization of many madrassas in Pakistan. Fears have been expressed and accusations have been made of certain Indian madrassas emerging as "hideouts" and "breeding centers" of Islamist "radicals," although evidence for this seems lacking. The autonomy of the madrassas is seen as a particular challenge by the state, for this is seen as leaving the madrassas open to radical Islamists who might use them to challenge the state and promote Islamist militancy. Hence, reform of the madrassas through modernization is seen as a means to prevent the madrassas from emerging as centers of oppositional Islamist activity, and, by many Muslims themselves, as a subtle way to wean the Muslims away from their faith.

Government appeals for modernization of the madrassas seem to rest on the premise that the madrassas are meant to be institutions for the general education of Muslims and, therefore, must meet the generally accepted standards for modern schools to enable their students to enter the mainstream.<sup>78</sup> Hence, the need for madrassas to

77. Hakim Sayyed Muhammad Hasnan Nagrami, "Farighin-i-Madaris-i-'Arabiya ka Mustaqbil" (The future of the graduates of the Arabic schools), in *'Arabi Islami Madaris*, 183.

78. The government's case for the reform and modernization of madrassas to enable Muslims to enter the educational mainstream of the country puts the onus of Muslim educational backwardness largely on the madrassas themselves. This argument seems specious, at best, and the concern of the government with the madrassas clearly

introduce modern subjects in their syllabus is stressed. This view clashes with that of the ulema, who see the madrassas as institutions meant for the preservation of Islamic knowledge and for the training of ulema. Hence, they insist that the teaching of modern subjects, if allowed, must be strictly subordinate to that of religious subjects. This differing perception of the role of the madrassas—along with the fear that the introduction of modern subjects would lead to an undermining of the authority of the ulema as interpreters of the faith—accounts in large measure for the distinct lack of enthusiasm on the part of most madrassas for the madrassa modernization programs of the state and central governments.

In India today, the governments of five states—West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Assam and Uttar Pradesh—have set up Boards of Madrassa Education that frame the syllabus of madrassas affiliated with them, consisting of both traditional Islamic as well as modern subjects. The boards also conduct the examinations, enabling the students to join secular schools after graduation. This has been welcomed by some, but others argue that in this way the religious content of the syllabus has been considerably watered down and that, burdened with the need to learn both religious as well as modern subjects, the students do well in neither.<sup>79</sup>

In recent years, the Government of India, as well as some state governments, has launched some small schemes ostensibly to assist some madrassas, such as providing them paid teachers to teach modern subjects. These efforts have, however, failed to make much of an impact, and only a few smaller madrassas have taken advantage of these schemes, for fear of government interference and control, which they see—and probably rightly so—as aimed at weakening their Islamic identity by introducing the teaching of government-prescribed books

appears motivated by other factors. If promoting Muslim education was indeed a primary concern of the government, it should have paid more attention to setting up more modern schools in Muslim localities, which it has failed to do. In fact, the level of educational provision by the state in Muslim areas is far below the level of other, particularly Hindu, areas, leaving the state open to charges of discrimination against Muslims. Then again, proposals to legitimize government involvement in the running of the madrassas on the grounds of helping to modernize them seem hollow in the face of what is today a concerted effort on the part of the Indian state to Hinduize the education system, including introducing subjects such as astrology and Hindu rituals and mythology in the syllabus in schools and colleges.

79. Khalid Saifullah Rahmani, in *Kul Hind*, 76.

in the social sciences, which generally betray a heavy Hindu and often anti-Muslim slant.<sup>80</sup> Many ulema associated with the madrassas see the efforts by the state to reform them as a subtle means of Hinduization, for if modern subjects were to overwhelm and marginalize traditional Islamic subjects, the religious identity of the madrassas, seen as the “forts of Islam,” would be effectively undermined, and the road cleared for absorbing the Muslims into the Hindu fold.<sup>81</sup>

### Madrassas under Siege?

TODAY, OFFICIAL CIRCLES, fiercely anti-Muslim Hindutva groups and large sections of the Indian press seem to have mounted a concerted campaign to dismiss the madrassas not just as bastions of conservatism and reaction but also as training grounds for Islamic “terrorists.”<sup>82</sup> This climate of hostility seems to have worked to further heighten the suspicions of the madrassas and has made the effort to reform them even more difficult.<sup>83</sup> In February 2001, the Indian government brought out a document prepared by the Group of Ministers on National Security, alleging that madrassas, particularly in some border regions, were working in league with “pan-Islamist militant outfits” and “radical organizations” in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and some other West Asian states. It suggested that some of them were engaging in “indoctrination of Muslims in [...] fundamentalist ideology,” which, it said, had grave implications for inter-communal relations and for the stability of the state.<sup>84</sup> In the wake of the attack on the World Trade Center in New York in September 2001, attacks on

80. For instance, the suggestion that *madrassa* introduce the teaching of what is called “Vedic Mathematics.” See Nizam Elahi, *Modernisation of Madrasa Education Scheme in India* (Delhi: State Council for Educational Research and Training, 2001), 21.

81. One prominent Indian Muslim politician even suggests that the real purpose of the government’s proposals for modernization of madrassas is to “monitor what goes on inside the madrassas through a government-funded monitor in the form of a teacher of English, mathematics and sciences.” (Syed Shahabuddin, quoted in Madhav Godbole, “Madrassas: Need for a Fresh Look,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 October 2001, 3890.

82. Thus, for instance, in June 2002 a leading Hindu fascist organization, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) demanded a ban on madrassas, alleging that hundreds of thousands of “fundamentalist students of the Taliban variety are churned out” from these institutions.

83. Mujahidul Islam Qasmi, in *Kul Hind*, 12.

84. Quoted in M. Saud Alam, “Modernisation of Madrasa Education,” *Radiance Viewsweekly*, 3–9 March 2002, 9.

the madrassas in the Indian press have mounted. Madrassas have been branded as centers of anti-national, pro-Pakistan propaganda, allied with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence, and as dens of Islamic “terrorism.” The state has sought to introduce new laws to monitor to growth and functioning of madrassas, particularly in the border areas, and is considering legislation to regulate funding to them,<sup>85</sup> on the grounds that they might be being used as hideouts of “anti-national” elements, although the government has failed to come up with any solid evidence of these claims,<sup>86</sup> even in the case of the madrassas in Kashmir.<sup>87</sup> Some madrassas have been raided by the Indian police, and staff and students have been harassed.

Faced with increasing opposition from militant Hindu groups and large sections of the Indian press and the suspicion of the state, Indian madrassas have had to deal with charges of lending support to radical Islamist movements in Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan, many of whose activists are madrassa students. On the whole, the Indian madrassas have responded by denying any links with these movements, stressing instead their “secular” and “patriotic” credentials, pointing out the great role of the ulema in the freedom movement against the British, opposing the “two-nation” theory of the Muslim League, and preaching harmony between Hindus and Muslims.<sup>88</sup> In the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, as madrassas came under increasing attack in India from right-wing Hindu organizations and leading sections of the Indian press, the largest and most influential madrassa in India, the Dar-ul-Ulum at Deoband, was moved to firmly deny any organizational links with the Taliban or with other radical Islamist organizations. In June 2002, the rector of the madrassa, Maulana Marghub ur-Rahman, issued a statement insisting that persons belonging to madrassas and religious institutions in Pakistan or elsewhere engaged in promoting terrorism against India were “outside the scope of ideals.” It declared that

85. “No Survey on Foreign Funds to Border Area Madrassas,” *Deccan Herald*, Bangalore, 18 May 2002.

86. Yoginder Sikand, “Madrassas: Escalating Witch-Hunt,” *Meantime*, 15 September 2001, 26–29; Sikand, “Targeting Religious Schools,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 September 2001, 3342–43; S. Ubaidur Rahman, “Nepal-border Madrassas: No Iota of ‘Terrorism’ or ‘ISI’ Activity,” *Milli Gazette*, 16–31 July 2001, 4.

87. “Kashmir Madrassas Have Not Produced a Single Terrorist,” *Milli Gazette*, June 1–15, 2002.

88. See, for example, the statement by Maulana Abdullah Mughisi, secretary of the department of religious education of the All-India Milli Council, in *Souvenir*, 15.

clearly “elements promoting or abetting violence and terrorism against Islamic teachings cannot be Deobandis,” even if they claimed to be so. True Islam, the maulana insisted, demanded that Muslims be patriotic, abstain from harming or killing innocent people and generally lead a pious life. The founders of the madrassa, he stressed, had exhorted Muslims to work for the unity of India and for harmony between people of different faiths.<sup>89</sup> This denial of links with radical Islamists does not necessarily mean, however, that Deoband was necessarily opposed to their broader agenda of an Islamic state, in Afghanistan or Pakistan, but only that it was opposed to the violent actions of some Islamist groups in and against India, seeing this as harmful to the interests of the Indian Muslims, living as they do as an increasingly beleaguered minority. Thus, leading ulema of Deoband have admitted they did support the Taliban in its opposition to America and generally welcomed its policies that aimed at establishing a Deobandi-style Islamic state in Afghanistan.<sup>90</sup> In this way, the Deobandi ulema have sought to chart an uneasy balance between supporting the aims of the Taliban and dismissing reports of actually assisting it.<sup>91</sup> To equate the Indian madrassas with the Deobandi madrassas in Pakistan, as the Indian government seems to be doing, is, however, misleading, for the contexts in which they operate are totally different. In Pakistan, the madrassas were supplied with liberal

89. “Deoband Ex-Communicates Believers in Violence,” <http://www.milligazette.com/Archives/15072002/1507200259.htm>

90. On Osama bin Laden, leading Indian Deobandi ulema are said to believe that he was engaged in a jihad, but argued only those Muslims living in the lands controlled by him and the Taliban could participate in the war in Afghanistan. The Indian Muslims, they maintained, must support Osama, but only through “legal” means, and must pray for his success. They laid down that it was not allowed for Indian Muslims to actually travel to Afghanistan to participate in the jihad. Absolving Osama of all charges of terrorism, arguing that his only concern was to establish a “true” Islamic state in Afghanistan, they insisted that America was “the greatest terrorist state in the world.” They exhorted the Indian Muslims to undermine American interests, but, again, only through “legal and constitutional means,” such as boycotting American goods (Shahbaz Nadwi, “Deoband Se Taliban Tak: Akabir-i-ulema-i-Deoband Kya Kahtey Hain?” (From Deoband to the Taliban: what do the elders of Deoband say?), *Afkaar-i-Milli*, December 2001, 33–35.

91. Thus, the head of the Deoband madrassa (Waqf), Maulana Salam Qasmi argued that the decisions taken by the Taliban had no bearing on the Muslims of India. Another leading ‘alim of the madrassa, Maulana Nur ‘Alam Amini, insisted that Deoband still adhered to its long-held position of “supporting secularism and a composite nationalism” in India, and asserted, “in the event of a war between India and Pakistan, we would support India.” He admitted that the madrassa did support the Taliban, on religious grounds, but differed with it on its understanding of the question

patronage by the state churning out students to participate in the American-assisted Afghanistan jihad.<sup>92</sup> In India, on the other hand, the madrassas have no such access to funding and armed training.

In the present climate of hostility and suspicion, the agenda of reforming the madrassas has become particularly difficult, as suggestions for reform are easily dismissed as “anti-Islamic” ploys aimed at weakening what are called “the forts of Islam.”<sup>93</sup> Besides the current wave of attacks on the madrassas in India, other factors make the task of reform more difficult. Given the fact that almost all their teachers and students now come from lower and lower-middle class backgrounds<sup>94</sup> and that they remain largely insulated from the developments in the wider society, the need for reform is not felt as urgently as it should be. Reform is also seen as threatening their privileges and their position as sole interpreters of normative Islam. The existence of fierce differences of school of thought and sect has made it impossible for the setting up of an all-India body to regulate the policies and activities of the schools, and efforts to do so in the past have all failed. Almost all madrassas are administratively independent, which means that efforts at reform have so far been scattered and sporadic. Madrassas that wish to introduce modern subjects often lack the necessary funds and trained teachers. To add to this, the growing persecution of Muslims in India can only make madrassas even more defensive and impervious to change, and might even make talk of Islamic “terror” in madrassas a self-fulfilling prophecy.

of jihad against India. On the question of the war between the Taliban and the United States, these Deobandi ulema insisted that it was a legitimate Islamic jihad because America had allegedly launched a war against Islam and has attacked Afghanistan without proper justification, but pointing out that it is not binding on Muslims other than the Afghans to participate in it. The argument that all the Muslims of the world must participate in the jihad was dismissed as “an extremist position.” The other Muslims must assist the Afghans in their jihad against America, they advised, but only through “constitutional and legal means.” To talk of launching jihad in India, they stressed, was “against all wisdom” and could only be “counter-productive” (Ibid., 33–35).

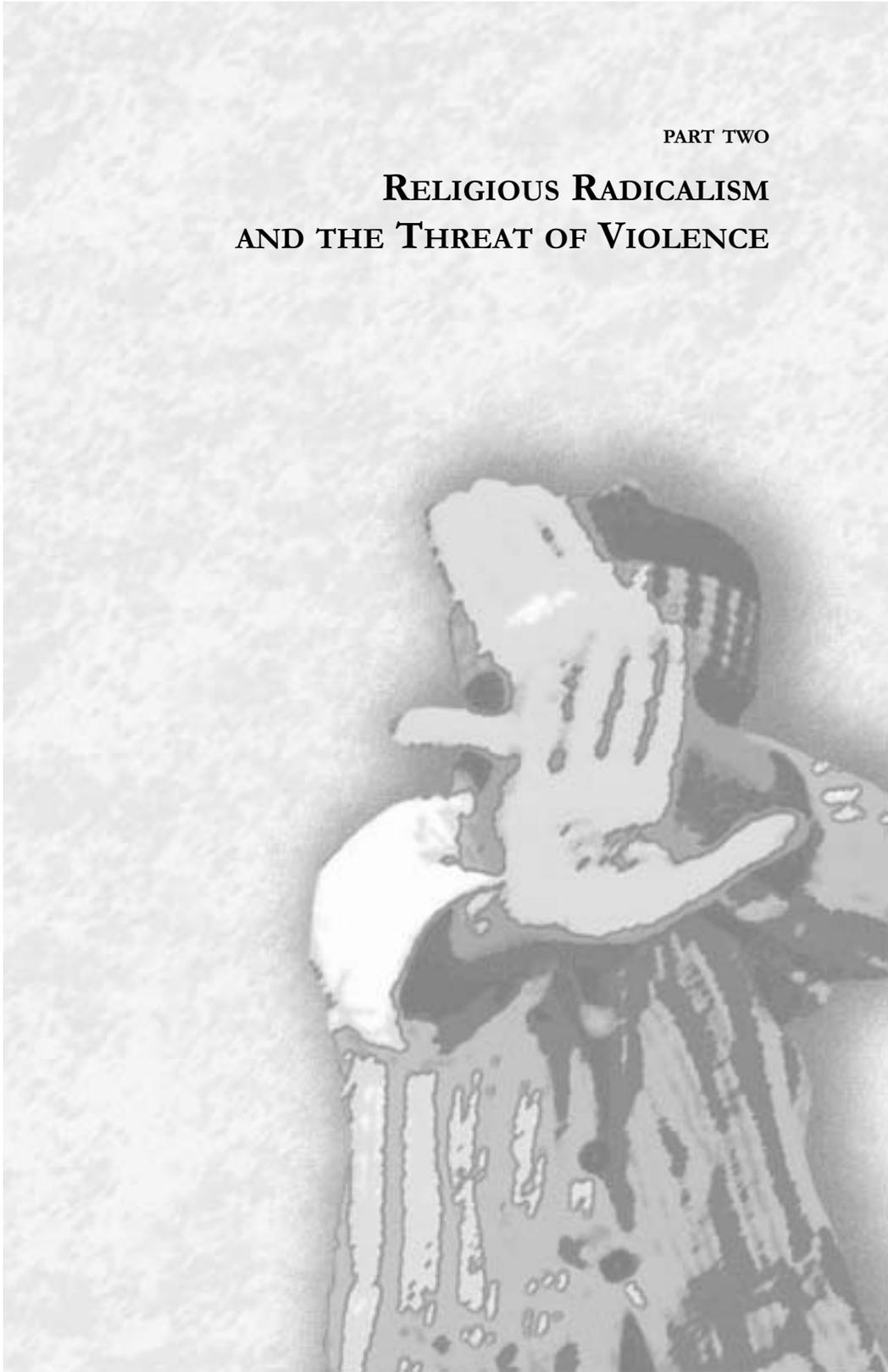
92. Iqbal Khattak, “U.S. Allowed Growth of Seminaries as Part of Bleed-Russia Strategy,” *Friday Times*, Lahore, <http://thefridaytimes.com/news3a.htm>.

93. Thus, government and Hindu propaganda about the madrassas are seen as aimed at destroying the identity and faith of the Muslims, for, as the ulema see it, madrassas are the guarantor and the “fort” of Islam in India, and “weapons against un-Islamic forces” (Muhammad Baqr Hussain Qasmi, in *Souvenir*, 7; Sayyed Hamid, “Dini Madaris Ka Nizam-i-Ta’lim” (The system of education in religious schools), *Islam Aur Asr-I-Jadid* 32, no. 4 (October 2000): 59).

94. A leading Indian ‘alim estimates that 99 percent of madrasa students come from poor families, who send their students to them not for the sake of acquiring knowledge but in the hope of future economic gain (Mujahidul Qasmi, in *Kul Hind*, 17).

PART TWO

**RELIGIOUS RADICALISM  
AND THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE**



# 7

SUROOSH IRFANI

## **Pakistan’s Sectarian Violence: Between the “Arabist Shift” and Indo-Persian Culture**

**A**t the start of a new millennium, India and Pakistan signify a virtual inversion of what their founding fathers Mohandas Gandhi and Muhammed Ali Jinnah stood for. In India, Gandhi’s legacy of non-violence and Muslim inclusivism has been largely displaced by communal violence and the rise of the very kind of Hindu fanaticism that gunned him down in 1948. In Pakistan, Jinnah’s vision of a democratic Pakistan, where religion was to be a personal matter that had “nothing to do with the business of the state,”<sup>1</sup> has been eclipsed by frequent military takeovers and a rising spiral of sectarian violence unprecedented in the subcontinent’s history. Indeed, in many ways both India and Pakistan are like mirrors to each other, where an internal critique of one virtually amounts to that of the other. This is poignantly reflected in Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Jagmohan’s critique of an India “that had gone astray almost in every sphere of life” under “unprincipled and irresponsible” political parties and leadership because its “foundational planks are missing.”<sup>2</sup>

1. Muhammed Ali Jinnah’s speech at the inaugural session of Pakistan’s Constituent Assembly, 11 August 1947.

2. Jagmohan, *My Frozen Turbulence in Kashmir* (New Delhi: Allied Press, 1992). For a fuller account of Jagmohan’s critique, see pages 618–28.

Whatever Jagmohan's notion of the missing planks in Indian polity, this paper argues that besides other factors, Pakistan's sectarian violence is partly rooted in the eclipse of an Indo-Persian cultural matrix<sup>3</sup> that historically constituted a "foundational plank" of the subcontinent's Muslim identity. Moreover, the eclipse of this matrix since the subcontinent's partition into the independent states of Pakistan and India in 1947 has been marked by the ascent of an "Arabist shift"<sup>4</sup>—the tendency to view the present in terms of an imagined Arab past with the Arab as the only "real/pure" Muslim, and then using this trope of purity for exorcizing an "unIslamic" present. Consequently, the Arabist shift lost the eclecticism and intellectuality that were the basis of a creative South Asian Muslim identity, and this has led to a hardening in the understanding of Islam as a result of imagining Pakistanis in Arabist terms.

The Arabist shift touched new heights through a convergence of General Zia-ul Haq's politically motivated Islamization of Pakistani state and society and the U.S.-sponsored *jihad* in Afghanistan on the one hand, and the fallout of the Iranian revolution, the Kashmir dispute, and uneven development on the other. Such a convergence was also boosted by romantic notions of an Arab-centric popular imagination as indeed the ground realities of multiple economic interests. For example, in a romanticized notion of Pakistan's breakup in 1971, the secession of Bangladesh is seen as a consequence of the failure to adopt Arabic as a

3. The founding moment for the Indo-Persian cultural eclecticism may be located in the eleventh century when the city of Lahore in the Punjab province emerged as a major center of Persianate culture. Persian became the administrative language of successive Indian rulers even as it sparked a cultural efflorescence through a synthesis of Sufism with a multicultural Indian society. See Muzaffar Alam, Françoise Nalini Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau, eds., *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000), 24. Also see Suroosh Irfani, "Globalization and Marginality: Between the Blindfolded Bull and Burning Boats," in Suroosh Irfani, Durre Ahmed and Eric Winkle, eds., *Inside Islam: Politics, Gender and Culture* (Zed Books, forthcoming).

4. As used here, the "Arabist shift" is traced to the onset of the Indian Wahabi movement in the early nineteenth century. Unlike their more rigid Arab counterparts, leaders of the Indian Wahabi movement such as Syed Ahmed Barelvi were radical Sufis representing a degree of spiritual eclecticism of the Indo-Persian cultural matrix. This is borne out by Barelvi's promotion of the four main Sufi orders in India and his frequent references to Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273), the icon of Persianate mysticism—a standpoint at a far remove from the sectarian-militant Wahabi-Deobandi groups operating in Pakistan today. For Barelvi's Sufism, see Marc Gaborieau, "Sufism in the First Indian Wahhabi Manifesto: Siratu' l mustaqim by Ismail Shahid and Abdul Hayy," *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, 149–64.

national language; whereas cooperation in defense-related areas at the level of the state has been augmented by joint Pak-Arab business ventures that include partnership by "political" families, such as the family of the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. There has also been a huge increase in the remittances of Pakistani expatriates from the oil-rich Arab states.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the Arabist shift is also underscored by the fascination of many Pakistanis and especially the religio-political groups with Talibanic Islam—generally seen as a slide toward a tribal, anti-intellectual and misogynist view of Islam promoted by a narrow interpretation of the Quran. And although the Taliban is not Arab, Talibanic Islam is a vigorous manifestation of the Arabist shift, of which Osama bin Laden has become the icon par excellence in Pakistan today.

Shia-Sunni violence in Pakistan, then, is drawing upon "a generation of social upheaval" and a failure of domestic and foreign policies in a minefield that Pakistan has been turned into by the internationalization of jihad and the unresolved Kashmir issue. Such violence is also spawned by a cultural imaginaire of religious triumphalism and a failure to evolve inclusive forms of Muslim subjectivities in a globalizing moment—a crisis of identity summed up in the Arabist shift.<sup>6</sup>

The discussion that follows, therefore, touches upon three interconnected strands of history, culture and politics underpinning the sectarian/religious violence today: Where a historical contextualization of the Shia-Sunni issue suggests that religious/sectarian violence in Pakistan has assumed different modes at different historical junctures. Moreover, not only are the modes of religious violence (both sectarian and jihadi, where sectarian = Shia-Sunni confrontation; jihadi = liberatory struggle, holy war) interconnected, they also are equally a result of a crisis in cultural identity as well as of concrete economic and political factors. And finally, the linkages between national political exigencies and the imperatives of international politics indicate that Pakistan's internal scene cannot be understood independently of U.S. and Indian policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Kashmir.

5. Remittances from expatriate Pakistanis for the year 2002–2003 are expected to top \$3 billion, of which remittances from Arab countries (primarily Saudi Arabia and the oil-rich Sheikdoms) are estimated to account for three-quarters of the amount. See *Dawn*, 4 October 2002, 16.

6. For the dynamics of the Arabist shift at the level of popular culture and its relationship to religious violence, including attacks by armed Wahabi-Deobandi militants on *qawalli* musical concerts, see Irfani, "Globalization and Marginality."

## Shia and Sunni Islam

WHILE BOTH THE SHIAS AND SUNNIS share the fundamental premises of Islam—belief in Divine unity (*tauhid*), the Prophet Muhammed and the Quran—the crux of their differences is rooted in the question of succession and leadership of Muslims after the Prophet died in 632. Shias hold that the leadership (*imamat*) of the community was the exclusive prerogative of the prophet himself, and after him, resided with his descendants, the *ahl e bayt*. In the Shia view, the prophet's son-in-law Ali should have succeeded him, and they claim that the prophet had in fact designated Ali as his successor. They are, then, the Shias (partisans) of Ali, or Ali's party. Sunnis, however, believe that it was up to the people to elect a leader on the basis of their own judgment. Consequently, Muslims elected Abu Bakr, a companion (*sahaba*) of the prophet as the first caliph of the Islamic state.

However, Shias follow a line of religious leadership emanating from Ali, whom they regard as the first *imam* (or successor). In all, there are twelve imams in the Shia lineage, the twelfth imam, Mehdi, is believed to have gone into occultation, and he will appear at the end of the world as a messiah. The prophet's grandson Hussein was the third imam, who was martyred in the desert of Karbala by the army of the tyrant ruler Yazid because of his refusal to yield to Yazid's demand for political allegiance. The cosmic thematics of the struggle between truth (Hussein) and falsehood (Yazid) were thereby factored into the tragedy of Karbala, where Hussein's memory as a martyr of justice is revered by Shias and Sunnis alike. The invocation of a discourse of martyrology by many Shias and Sunnis, as indeed their veneration for Ali for his humanity and valor, often blurs the sectarian divide at the emotional and psychological levels. A case in point is Tipu Sultan, ruler of the Indian state of Mysore, whose death in 1799 while defending his capital against the British made him a national icon of the Indian freedom struggle. Invocations to Ali were inscribed on the arms of Tipu, who attributed his victory over the British in the battle of 1783 to Ali's intercession.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, so high was Tipu's veneration for Ali that it gave rise to the notion of his being a Shia,

7. Kate Brittlebank, *Islam and Kingship in a Hindu Domain: Tipu Sultan's Search for Legitimacy* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 44.

"though such an interpretation seems simplistic in the Indian context of spiritual eclecticism."<sup>8</sup>

Iran is the world's only Shia majority Muslim state, and as a channel of cultural osmosis has given rise to an influential Shia minority in the subcontinent, even though the first Shias who settled in Sind during the ninth century were of Arab origin.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it is generally believed that the Mughal emperor Humayun (d. 1557) was soft on the Shias out of gratitude to the Persian king who helped Humayun regain his throne after being chased out of India by the warlord Sher Shah Suri in 1540. Humayun spent part of his long exile as a guest of Shah Thamasp of Persia, a Shia,<sup>10</sup> and after his return to India in 1555, many more Iranians migrated to the subcontinent and made it their home.<sup>11</sup>

The Shia-Sunni divide, however, remained a source of simmering tension during the Mughal rule, and by the turn of the nineteenth century had "developed into full-scale polemical warfare, each side accusing the other of being heretics and infidels."<sup>12</sup> Such a development, however, was part of an intense debate regarding Muslim social and religious institutions at a moment marked by the ascent of British power and erosion of Mughal authority, as indeed the contestation of growing Shia appeal by a newly emergent Sunni reformist movement that got identified with the puritanical Wahabi movement in Arabia led by Abdul Wahab (d. 1792), the ideological father of the House of Saud. Even so, tension between the Shias and the Indian Wahabi

8. Ibid., 43. Tipu also used to participate in the *ashura* procession that Shias traditionally take out on the tenth of the Islamic month of Muharram to commemorate Imam Hussein's martyrdom. However, such participation by the Sultan might have also had the objective of ensuring peace during Muharram, the month when Shia-Sunni tensions often lead to violence, mainly because of purist Sunni objections to the "innovative" rituals of Shia processions.

9. K. R. Malkani, *The Sindh Story* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers, 1984).

10. Abraham Eraly, *The Great Mughals* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 1997), 107.

11. That this Indo-Persian political affinity/expediency of the Moghul era has been subsumed by the Arabist shift today is reflected at several levels: If Humayun the Moghul king spent a part of his exile as a guest of the Persian monarch, the exiled former premier Nawaz Sharif is lodged today in a Jeddah palace as a guest of the Saudi king, while former prime minister Benazir Bhutto has chosen Dubai as home base for her self-exile. Such an opening of Pak-Arab channels at elitist levels of the state, government and society was also paralleled by the influx of Arab volunteers in Pakistan during the period marked by the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan to 9/11.

12. Syed Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Shah abd'l Aziz: Puritanism, Sectarian Polemics and Jihad* (Canberra: Marefat Publications, 1982), 3.

movement was somewhat diluted by the Wahabi jihad against Ranjit Singh, the Punjab ruler who gained notoriety by converting Lahore's Badshahi mosque into the stables of his army.

The moving spirit behind the Indian Wahabi movement was the charismatic Syed Ahmed Barelvi (d. 1831), who remains an icon of Islamic revivalism in terms of a Wahabi-Deobandi<sup>13</sup> nexus, the dominant force of Islamic orthodoxy in Pakistan and Afghanistan today. The avatars of such a nexus dominating Pakistan's religio-political landscape include the various factions of the mainstream Sunni Deobandi *Jamiat Ulema Islam* (JUI) and several other sectarian and militant groups generally seen as Deobandi-Wahabi organizations, such as the *Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan* (SSP), *Lashkar-i-Jhangvi* (LJ), *Tebrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi* (TNSM), *Harkat-ul-Mujabideen* (HM), *Lashkar-e-Toiba* (LET), and *Jaish-e-Muhammed* (JEM), besides many splinter factions. The main Shia religio-political groups are the *Tebrik Nifaz Fiqh-i-Jafaria* (TNFJ) and *Tebrik e Jafaria Pakistan* (TJP), besides the well-organized *Imamia Student Organization* (ISO) that predates both and was formed in 1972. The main militant Shia force is the *Sipah-i-Muhammed Pakistan* (SMP), now split into different factions.

## Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

### THE ANTI-AHMADI RIOTS OF 1953

The first sectarian trouble in Pakistan arose during the month of Muharram in 1950 in the city of Hyderabad in Sindh, in which nine *mobajirs* (migrants) who had come to Pakistan from India after 1947,

13. The term Deobandi refers to the ulema trained at the Deoband seminary in India as well as those who follow a conservative orthodoxy identified with Deoband. After the uprising for Indian independence was crushed in 1857, Muslims were roughly divided into two groups: those who cooperated with the British and moved on with the world by opting for modern education, symbolized by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan's reformist movement and the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental college he founded at Aligarh in 1878, and those who held back, refusing to have any truck with the British rulers, and who founded the seminary at the city of Deoband in Utter Pradesh in 1867. Deobandi seminaries dominate the religious landscape in Pakistan's Northwestern Province and Baluchistan. One of the biggest Deobandi centers is the Binori Masjid seminary in Karachi, where Mulla Omer and Osama bin Laden reportedly first met in 1989, under the tutelage of the seminary's chief, Mufti Nizamuddin Shamzai, thereby sealing the Deobandi-Wahabi-Afghan linkage. See Khalid Ahmed, *Pakistan: The State in Crisis* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002), 45.

were killed by police firing. While the violence was rooted in a rumor that a Sindhi Shia had kidnapped a Sunni mohajir child during the ashura procession, the daylong disturbances that it gave rise to had strong underpinnings of *mohajir-maqami* (local Sindhis) tensions.<sup>14</sup> However, the first major sectarian agitation that gripped the country was the anti-Ahmadi movement in 1953, which led to the imposition of martial law in the Punjab for the first time. The army had to be called in to control the riots that had erupted in Lahore following a virulent campaign against the Ahmadi community led by the *Jamaat-i-Islami* and *Majlis e Khatme Nabuwwat*, a Sunni pressure group.<sup>15</sup> Leaders of the 1953 agitation wanted the Ahmadis to be declared a non-Muslim minority, arguing that in claiming to be a messiah, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (who founded the Ahmadiyya movement in late nineteenth century) had violated a basic tenet of Islam that holds Muhammed to be the last prophet of God. They also demanded the removal of Zafrulla Khan, an Ahmadi who was Pakistan's foreign minister, and a ban on the employment of Ahmadis in government service.

Martial law was imposed after rioters in Lahore had gone on a rampage on 5 March 1953, burning two post offices, eight buses and a police station, besides shooting dead a deputy superintendent of police. Firing by police left ten persons dead and seventy-four injured, and there were eleven more fatalities before normality was restored<sup>16</sup> on 9 March after hundreds of activists who had barricaded themselves in mosques surrendered—as many as 597 of them in Lahore's Wazir Ali mosque alone.<sup>17</sup> The three religious leaders who led the movement (including Maulana Mauddudi, head of *Jamaat-i-Islami*) were tried by a military court and given the death sentence, later commuted to life imprisonment under international pressure, especially from Muslim countries like Egypt.

That the anti-Ahmadi agitation was tacitly supported by the Punjab chief minister Mumtaz Daultana to divert attention from "the disastrous effects of the [government's] haphazard economic policies"<sup>18</sup>

14. Oskar Verkaaik, "May 1990 and Muharram 1950: Two Cases of Political Violence in Hyderabad Pakistan," *The Eastern Anthropologist* 53 (2000).

15. The pressure group arose from the *Majlis-i-Ahrar* (which had campaigned against the Ahmadis since the 1930s), after the Ahrar dissolved itself following Pakistan's creation in 1947.

16. *Pakistan Times*, March 6 and 14, 1953.

17. *Ibid.*, March 9 and 10, 1953.

18. *Ibid.*, Editorial, 15 March 1953.

was borne out by the labor unrest that followed on the heels of the agitation, and also by an unprecedented budget deficit. Indeed, the anti-Ahmadi movement became a pretext for the ouster of Prime Minister Khawja Nazimuddin amid accusations that he had mishandled the crisis because of his sympathies for the Islamic parties.<sup>19</sup> However, it was not until 1974 that the campaign against Ahmadis achieved its primary objective, when Pakistan's national assembly unanimously passed a constitutional amendment designating the Ahmadis as a non-Muslim minority.

By the mid 1980s, however, the focus of sectarian politics had shifted to Shia-Sunni violence amid an atmosphere marked by Shia activism and a Sunni extremist demand for declaring Shias a non-Muslim minority. Such a demand, however, was bound to be self-defeating because notwithstanding Shia-Sunni differences, Shias are generally regarded as part of the mainstream Muslim community, especially in the subcontinent where Shias were rulers of the various Indian kingdoms and states, including Awadh, Bijapur, Golconda, Rampur and Hyderabad. Moreover, some of the best-known leaders of Pakistan had Shia background, such as Muhammed Ali Jinnah and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, while the presence of Benazir Bhutto and Abida Hussein in the current political scene shows that at the level of national politics, the Shia-Sunni divide tends to become virtually irrelevant.

### **Shia-Sunni Violence: The Tribal and Urban Scene**

THE SCALE, INTENSITY AND PATTERN of organized sectarian violence in Pakistan today are in sharp contrast to the anti-Ahmadi movement of 1953, where public rallies and street processions went on for several months before culminating in the Lahore riots. Moreover, the ongoing Shia-Sunni violence is also marked by differences along the tribal-urban divide. In the cities of Parachinar and Hangu in the tribal northern areas, sectarian strife has at times virtually taken the form of a tribal civil war, with the army and paramilitary forces having to be called in to restore order. For example, Parachinar, a city of five hundred thousand inhabitants and capital of Kurram Agency bordering Afghanistan, was torn by sectarian clashes on 5 September 1996, following an incident of

19. Ian Talbot, *Pakistan: A Modern History* (Lahore: Vanguard, 1999), 141.

wall chalking by sectarian students. Confrontation between rival student groups escalated into nine days of sectarian war, in which some two hundred people were killed and many more injured.<sup>20</sup> While the army moved in and took control of Parachinar, "free use of missiles, mortars, and rocket launchers forced residents of several villages to take shelter in nearby mountains."<sup>21</sup> There were also reports of missile attacks from the Paktia province of Afghanistan bordering the strife-torn area, hitting the Shia villages of Paiwar, Kharlachi, Burki and Bughday in the upper Parachinar.<sup>22</sup> As the army recovered illegal weapons in Parachinar during a house-to-house search<sup>23</sup> after it clamped a curfew, Interior Minister General Naseerullah Babar publicly expressed his dismay in the national assembly for the government's failure in protecting people because "two neighboring countries (Iran and Afghanistan) were fighting their war in Pakistan."<sup>24</sup> He also blamed the religious schools as "the main cause of bloodshed in Parachinar,"<sup>25</sup> and regretted that the government had given land to the two countries for building their madrassas.<sup>26</sup> Even so, General Babar was only partly right in attributing disturbances to Iran and Afghanistan and their madrassas, given that the tactical use of the sectarian factor in this strategic region had been perfected by General Zia-ul Haq during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan: in 1986, for example, General Zia allowed the Sunni Afghan mujahideen and their local Sunni supporters to mow down the Turi Shias of upper Parachinar for obstructing the use of their territory as a launching pad against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul.<sup>27</sup>

20. *Dawn*, 19 September 1996. The number for fatalities given by *Navae Waqt* (14 September 1996) is one hundred. The inconsistency is often due to the exaggeration of numbers by Shia and Sunni combatants, who tend to inflate the casualties each side has inflicted on the other.

21. *Dawn*, 13 September 1996.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Dawn*, 15 September 1996. While General Babar regretted the role of Afghanistan and Iran in Pakistan's sectarian war, leaders of the Parachinar chapter of the religio-political group *Able Sunnat wal Jamaat* accused the government for the sectarian clashes for its failure to stop the "supply of arms and ammunitions to the rival faction from India." See *Dawn*, 13 September 1996.

24. *Dawn*, 16 September 1996.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*

27. Khaled Ahmed, "When the State Kills," *Friday Times*, September 2001.

The Parachinar<sup>28</sup> paradigm of sectarian violence marked by the use of heavy weapons by both sides, support of Afghan settlers and Taliban for the local Sunnis, and the deployment of the army for restoring order, has been replicated in several other clashes in the tribal areas. In March 1998, sectarian violence erupted in the city of Hangu, eighty kilometers from Peshawar, after a procession of hundreds of Shias celebrating the traditional Iranian new year (the spring solstice, *naurooz*) came under indiscriminate fire, because “the procession was taken out despite opposition from Sunni militant group, the supreme Sunni council.”<sup>29</sup> Ten people were killed and twenty-five were injured as the violence spread to the nearby villages following the failure of the paramilitary forces to restore order. Army units, therefore, were called in from the Kohat garrison, but the Shahukhel village near Hangu was razed to the ground by armed tribal lashkars of the Sunni Orakzai tribe, whose arsenal included locally made anti-aircraft guns.<sup>30</sup> While the district administration eventually brokered a ceasefire between the two warring groups using the mediation of a local *jirga* besides Shia and Sunni *ulema* flown in from Peshawar, the ceasefire was all too precarious. The city was gripped by sectarian violence in the following years, and most recently again on 2 March 2001, when three Shia shopkeepers were gunned down in the main bazaar by militants of the anti-Shia SSP, who had come all the way from Punjab for the act. The shooting took place while the district administration was negotiating with local Shia and Sunni leaders as to how to ensure peace during the upcoming *naurooz* celebrations later that month. In this particular case, then, it was not so much a local incident that sparked the clashes but the extension of SSP death squads to the tribal areas. By killing the Shias in Hangu, the militants were exacting revenge for

28. Parachinar sums up the dynamics of sectarian violence in Pakistan’s tribal areas. Demographic pressures and a rising population have exacerbated the crises of an area where the presence of an effective Shia minority is routinely challenged by Afghan settlers and local Sunnis, and where the power of the tribal elders has been weakened by extremist young militants well trained in the use of sophisticated weapons. Moreover, given the virtual absence/inaccessibility of government schools, children are indoctrinated in sectarian hatred at an early age in the Shia- and Sunni-run madrassas. See Robert Kaplan, “The Lawless Frontier,” *Atlantic*, September 2000.

29. *Dawn*, 22 March 1998.

30. *Dawn*, 23 March 1998 (editorial) and 26 March 1998.

the execution of SSP leader Haq Nawaz in Punjab's Mianwali jail, where Haq Nawaz was hanged on 28 February 2001 after an eleven-year-long trial for the murder of Sadek Ganji, the director of the Iranian cultural center in Lahore. As the government had taken hundreds of SSP activists in the Punjab into preventive custody prior to the execution, SSP militants took their revenge in the far northern city of Hangu.<sup>31</sup>

In urban Pakistan,<sup>32</sup> however, Shia-Sunni violence has mostly become a contest for body counts among rival sectarian death squads, claiming 1,287 victims between 1990 and 2002.<sup>33</sup> Initially, the violence was restricted to target killing of sectarian leaders and activists, teachers and students; then followed attacks on police patrols, jail superintendents, high-ranking government officials and judges carrying out investigations against sectarian terrorists. By the mid-nineties, worshippers in mosques and mourners in cemeteries were also included among the soft targets of sectarian gunmen, besides bureaucrats and businessmen, Iranian diplomats, construction engineers and military cadets in the cities of Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi and Multan. By the start of the new millennium, doctors were also added to the sectarians' death list—the militants believed that "a doctor presented a strategic target because of the publicity his killing generated."<sup>34</sup>

To be sure, a defining moment in Shia-Sunni radicalization was the Iranian revolution in 1979 and General Zia's promulgation of *zakat* (wealth tax) and *ushr* (farming tax) ordinances under Sunni Islamic law in 1980. As these laws conflicted with Shia law, General Zia's move triggered the first mass demonstration, when thousands of Shias turned out in Islamabad and demanded the repeal of these

31. The daily *Aaj*, 2 March 2001. Also see Rahimullah Yusufzai's report in *The News*, 4 March 2001.

32. The start of urban violence may be dated to the killing of the Sunni Wahabi leader Alama Ehsan Zaheer in Lahore in 1987, and the Shia leader Alama Arif al-Hussaini in Peshawar in 1988. Zaheer was head of the religio-political party *Jamiat Able Hadith* (JAH), while Hussaini was head of TNFJ.

33. The figure is for Pakistani cities and does not include the tribal areas. More definitive data for the Punjab, the hotbed of sectarian violence, are furnished by the Crime Investigation Department of the province. It gives the number of people killed in 1,106 incidents of sectarian violence between 1990 and 2001 as 776—of which 546 were murdered by the Sunni and 230 by Shia militants. See *The News*, 18 May 2002.

34. *Newsline*, August 2001, 40.

ordinances. The protest gave birth to TNFJ (Movement for enforcement of the Jafaria [Shia] Law) as a new force in Pakistan's politics.<sup>35</sup> TNFJ's emergence also marked a radical shift in the intra-Shia scene as the center of gravity of Shia politics, traditionally associated with big landlords, shifted to the Shia ulema and the younger militant groups. The increasingly confrontational and aggressive posture of TNFJ, however, led to a Deobandi Sunni backlash that took the form of *Anjuman-i-Sipah Sahaba Pakistan (ASSP)*, or Association of the Soldiers of the Prophet's Companions of Pakistan, founded in 1985 by Deobandi ulema and former members of JUI. The organization was later renamed as Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), or Soldiers of the Prophet's Companions. With its alleged Saudi support augmented by Iraqi money and domestic donations, besides the money from extortion, robberies<sup>36</sup> and kidnappings, SSP emerged as a well-funded extremist outfit and joined the ranks of religious parties that were becoming like "monsters' in terms of material resources, fire power, and the pressure they could exert on policy matters."<sup>37</sup>

Further radicalization of sectarian militancy occurred in 1994 after a group of younger Shia militants broke away from the mainstream TNFJ that they accused of being too conservative in protecting the Shias and founded the Sipah-i-Muhammed Pakistan (SMP), or

35. TNFJ arose out of the Federation of Shia Ulema and the support of the Shia Imamia Student Organization. Though still in the political arena under the leadership of Alama Hamid Moosavi, it has lost much ground to the TJP, a breakaway group formed in 1993 by Alama Sajid Naqvi and the major Shia organization in Pakistan today. In 1998, another Shia organization by the name of *Shura e Wabdat* was formed with a view of representing all Shia groups and factions under one umbrella.

36. A report by the special branch of the Punjab police points to the involvement of religious activists in unlawful activities and also notes that criminals wanted by the police often took shelter as workers of religious organizations. See Azmat Abbas, *Sectarianism: The Players and the Game* (Lahore: South Asia Partnership-Pakistan, 2002), 21. SSP leaders claim that rather than Arab states, their sympathizers give them financial assistance. However, intelligence sources have alluded to the secret visits of SSP leaders to the Saudi Embassy in Islamabad, as well as indirect contacts between them. See Imtiaz Gul, *The Unholy Nexus: Pak-Afghan Relations under the Taliban* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002), 100.

37. *The Herald*, May 2000, 53. In March 2001, the chairman of the SSP supreme council, Maulana Zahid Mahmood Qasmi (son of late SSP founder Ziaul Qasmi), announced the dissolution of the supreme council after accusing the SSP leadership of political indifference and embezzlement of Rs.10 million of party funds. At the same time, Qasmi announced that he had now joined the *Jamiat Ulema Islam (Ajmal Qadri)* as its secretary-general. See *The News*, 11 March 2001.

Soldiers of Muhammed.<sup>38</sup> The high point of SMP's terrorism was the January 1997 bombing of the Lahore high court where an SSP leader, Ziaur Rehman, arrested earlier by the police during an anti-terrorist raid, was being taken for a hearing.<sup>39</sup> The bombing killed the SSP leader, a journalist, and twenty-two police constables. Retaliation by SSP was swift. Hundreds of enraged activists set ablaze the Iranian cultural center in Lahore on 19 January, and the Iranian cultural center in Multan the following month, killing seven employees of the center, including its director.

Responsibility for these attacks was claimed by Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), Jhangvi's Soldiers, an SSP faction formed by the former SSP information secretary Riaz Basra and named after Haq Nawaz Jhangvi, a founding SSP member whose murder in February 1990 had led to the revenge killing of Sadek Ganji that Basra had masterminded. And although Basra was arrested after Ganji's murder, he was allowed to escape<sup>40</sup> and base himself in Afghanistan, where he trained militants for the war against Shias in Pakistan, as well as for killing members of the Afghan opposition in Peshawar. Indeed, the ideological symbiosis of SSP and LJ with Mulla Omar's Taliban was amply demonstrated during the reported participation of the SSP and LJ militants in the massacre of Shias in Mazare Sharif, after the mainly Shia city was captured by the Taliban on 8 August 1998.<sup>41</sup> The killing of Iranian diplomats and officials in Pakistan was replicated in Mazare when nine Iranian diplomats were executed by the Taliban after the

38. During an interview in 1996, the commander-in-chief (*salar e ala*) of *Sipah-i-Muhammed* claimed that he had as many as fourteen thousand members in Pakistan, offices in other countries, and had even seen action in Lebanon along with two hundred other Pakistani Shias. SMP's aim, he added, was to work for an Iranian-style revolution that could put an end to all foreign interference in Pakistan. See "Ghulam Reza Naqvi, Salar e Ala," *The Herald*, October 1996, 57. However, late in 1996, SMP split into two factions after a bloody infighting in its leadership. Internal rifts, penetration by pro-government elements, and the turning against SMP by the local Shias in the SMP stronghold of Thokar Niaz Beg, a Lahore suburb, enabled the police to launch one of its most spectacular anti-sectarian operations: it broke through SMP defenses in Thokar Niaz Beg and converted the SMP headquarters into a police station with the help of the locals.

39. Ibid.

40. Basra's protectors are said to have included powerful politicians, such as the Punjab chief minister Manzoor Wattoo who "stage managed" his escape (see Abbas, *Sectarianism*, 13) as well as "rogue" elements of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, the ISI (see *The Herald*, December 2001, 20).

41. *The Herald*, September 1998, 32.

Iranian consulate was captured—an act that Iran held Pakistan responsible for and that led to the first ever anti-Pakistan demonstration in Teheran.

### Context for Shia-Sunni Radicalization

PAKISTAN'S SLIDE INTO SECTARIAN VIOLENCE may be seen as the upshot of several intertwining factors, including domestic politics, regional upheavals and the Cold War. In this respect, the late president General Zia ul-Haq's coup d'état against Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's government in 1977 stands out as a marker in the domestic front. Lacking any political constituency or a social base of his own other than the army, Zia launched his Islamization drive to carve out a constituency for himself, even if that meant spawning new sectarian and ethnic groups and co-opting the religio-political parties. Among the latter was the Jamaat-i-Islami, a party that had historically stood in opposition to the creation of Pakistan and had been roundly rejected by the people in successive elections. However, its alliance with Zia enabled the party to dig inroads for its totalitarian brand of Islam that reflected the ideas of its founder, Maulana Maaddudi. Without a hint of irony, the humorless Maaddudi promoted an Islamic state where "no one can regard his affairs as personal and private... [because] an Islamic state is a totalitarian state."<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Maaddudi shunned democracy and freedom of thought even as he admired the Nazi and Fascist parties for having achieved power "through deep faith in their principles and blind obedience to their leaders."<sup>43</sup> Inevitably, the alliance of Zia's military dictatorship with the Jamaat and the mosque stirred up primordial passions, even as it empowered the semi-literate mullas as commissars of the state and distributors of its largesse through zakat (wealth tax) funds to the poor. Moreover, in rural areas the mullas became collectors of the ushr (farming tax) and this changed their status by turning them into instruments of local government.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the government's decision to provide zakat funds to madrassas led to their mushrooming growth, even as their

42. Maulana Maaddudi, "Political Theory of Islam," quoted in K. K. Aziz, *Pakistan's Political Culture* (Lahore: Vanguard), 265.

43. *Ibid.*, 261.

44. Abbas Rashid, "The Politics and Dynamics of Violent Sectarianism," in Zia Mian and Iftikhar Ahmed, eds., *Making Enemies, Creating Conflict: Pakistan's Crisis of State and Society* (Lahore: Mashal, 1997), 36–37.

graduates became cadres of the religio-political parties and functionaries of the various government-funded institutions.

At the same time, the internationalization of the Afghan jihad turned Pakistan into a frontline state and the center of what Eqbal Ahmed has aptly termed as Jihad International Inc.<sup>45</sup> By funneling billions of dollars into a jihad that mostly favored Afghanistan's Wahabi Sunni parties like Gulbuddin Hikmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami over others, the canker of Shia-Sunni sectarianism was transposed on the Afghan jihad; the idea was to marginalize Iran in a post-Soviet Afghanistan that was to be dominated by forces friendly to their U.S.-Saudi-Pakistani benefactors. Moreover, local and regional patronization of the madrassas and jihadi training camps "and support for groups like Taliban and al-Qaeda by elements of the Pakistani state and society were crucial in transforming the Shia-Sunni conflict in to a parallel supra national, supra ethnic sectarian conflict."<sup>46</sup>

To be sure, if the Cold War gave General Zia a shortcut to legitimacy and recognition on the international front, the social fallout of modernization as marginalization, unemployment and alienation gave sectarianists a shortcut to political power on the domestic front. This is borne out by the case of Jhang in central Punjab, home base for SSP and LJ and one of the few cities with a substantial Shia minority. The Shia community has traditionally dominated Jhang, given that most of the larger landlords are Shias. However, over the years the influence of shopkeepers, traders and transporters, as well as migrants from East Punjab and some industrialists, had steadily increased.<sup>47</sup> In this changing social configuration, politics was articulated in the form of sectarianism, and an active sectarian identity was superimposed on "an existing divide between the landed elite and the middle and lower middle classes."<sup>48</sup> In the absence of secular and socialist parties in the political landscape, as had been the case with Pakistan in the 1960s and 70s, the contest for access to resources and status, therefore, was framed in terms of confrontationist sectarian identities, especially among the young who were "readily swayed by

45. Eqbal Ahmed, *Roots of Religious Violence in Contemporary Pakistan*, 10. See Eqbal Ahmed on google.com.

46. Iftikhar H. Malik, *Islam, Nationalism and the West: Issues of Identity in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 1999), 119.

47. Rashid, "Violent Sectarianism."

48. Ibid.

simplistic ideas and quick to embrace an identity in which they felt more secure.”<sup>49</sup>

Moreover, according to SSP’s “creation myth,” the organization was formed by maulanas Jhangvi, Ziaur Rahman Farooqi, Israrul Haq and Azam Tariq on their own and without any prompting by outside influences. However, a recent study drawing on independent sources and the record available with the Punjab police shows that SSP was in fact created by a group of businessmen from Jhang, “and Maulana Jhangvi was invited to join only because they wanted to use the religious factor to fulfill their political ambitions.”<sup>50</sup> Consequently, Jhang’s leading businessman Sheikh Yousaf was elected as a member of the Punjab Assembly with SSP support in 1985, as was Mian Abid, an industrialist.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the SSP’s formation in 1985 is also significant as it coincided with the year that non-party elections were held under General Zia’s rule. Indeed, Maulana Jhangvi launched a virulent anti-Shia campaign “with the sole agenda of defeating Abida Hussain,” a Shia politician of national standing, but Jhangvi lost when he contested against her for a national assembly seat in 1988.<sup>52</sup> Even so, SSP emerged as a mainstream political party because of its aggressive appeal and support from other Wahabi-Deobandi religious groups. It even joined into electoral alliance with Benazir Bhutto’s Pakistan People’s Party (PPP), as well as the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), and was given two ministerial positions in the cabinet of the Punjab Chief Minister Arif Nakai. Clearly, extremism and sectarianism had homed into mainstream politics as a legitimate player.<sup>53</sup>

## Sectarianism after 9/11

THE ONGOING CRACKDOWN against sectarian outfits and al-Qaeda suspects has shown that in operational terms, “many of the sectarianists were part-time jihadis and vice versa.”<sup>54</sup> This is borne out by the linkages of sectarian terrorists belonging to SSP and LJ with jihadi

49. Ibid.

50. Abbas, *Sectarianism*, 11.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid. Such legitimacy is also underscored by continuing Saudi support for Wahabi-Deobandi sympathizers of SSP, a case in point being the appointment of SSP member Tahir Ashrafi as advisor for religious affairs to the Punjab governor “on the intervention of the Saudi government.” See page 13.

54. *The Daily Times* (editorial), 1 July 2002.

groups like HM and JEM in the kidnapping and murder of journalist Daniel Pearl in January 2002.<sup>55</sup> Sheikh Omer, sentenced to death in July for masterminding Pearl's kidnapping and execution, was a member of JEM, while the militants who led the police to the graveyard where Pearl was buried were members of SSP and LJ. Moreover, the terrorists who are said to have confessed to carrying out Pearl's execution and are in police custody now are LJ militants.<sup>56</sup> Also, the linkage of members of SSP, LJ, HM, and JEM with al-Qaeda's Egyptian, Iraqi, Saudi and Yemeni operatives has been unearthed following a joint operation of the FBI with Pakistani agencies in Karachi. As the drive against terrorism inside Pakistan picks up and meets with success, it is becoming clear "that the proliferation of jihadi organizations was in fact a result of 'strategic handling' and the never ending feuding that went on with these rather loosely organized outfits. Osama bin Laden dealt with almost all of them as one Deobandi-Wahabi consensus that drove the jihad in Afghanistan and Kashmir."<sup>57</sup>

To be sure, the relationship of SSP and LJ with jihadi groups, Taliban and al-Qaeda, predates September 11. Aspects of such a relationship had come to light following LJ's failed assassination attempt against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on 3 January 1999, when a bomb planted under the Raiwind Bridge that Nawaz Sharif's motorcade was to pass blew up prematurely. The three LJ militants later arrested for involvement in the bombing had received training in Afghanistan, and one of them was a trainer himself in a camp run by HM, the militant group active in Kashmir.<sup>58</sup>

At the same time, the symbiotic relationship of SSP and LJ with the mainstream religio-political organizations, such as the various factions of the JUI and its madrassas, suggests the religiosity and aspirations that sectarian subjectivities exemplify run through sections of the mainstream religious groups as well. Moreover, Shia-Sunni violence thrived not only because of the sectarian groups' nexus with jihadi and mainstream Islamist groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan, but also because of

55. *The Friday Times*, 21 June 2002, 5.

56. *Dawn*, 5 August 2002.

57. See Khaled Ahmed, "The Achievements of Harkatul Mujahideen," *The Friday Times*, 2–8 August 2002, 10. Ahmed also notes that HM chief Fazlur Rahman Khaleel took his boys to Afghanistan to fight on the side of al-Qaeda and the Taliban: "Sixty-three of his warriors were killed before the Taliban were routed, Khaleel returned safely and is living in Islamabad."

58. Abbas, *Sectarianism*.

a degree of support from Saudi Arabia and Iran, as indeed the protection extended to the various sectarian leaders by influential politicians and hard-line government officials, including elements of the ISI.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, the destructive impact of sectarian violence goes far beyond its body count,<sup>60</sup> or the number of hard-core terrorists in the country.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the danger that sectarian violence poses to Pakistan is not only because of the presence of sectarian groups per se, but also a complicit religious culture that underpins the networking of terrorist groups and the mainstream religio-political parties in the country and beyond. Such a symbiosis of subjectivities on the one hand and organizational networking of extremist groups on the other is virtually blurring the boundaries between “extremist” and “mainstream” in the Islamist spectrum.

For example, if the JUI (Fazal-ur Rahman faction) allowed SSP’s leader Riaz Basra to contest the 1987 national elections as its candidate, both the JUI (F) and the Jamaat-i-Islami joined SSP in an effort to prevent the death sentence awarded to SSP’s Haq Nawaz (for his role in murdering Sadik Ganji) from being carried out. These Islamic parties reportedly went to the extent of demanding that if it was not possible for General Musharraf’s government to pardon Haq Nawaz, he should be exiled like Nawaz Sharif<sup>62</sup> to Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, both the extremist outfits and the mainstream religio-political groups look up to bin Laden as a “hero of Islam.” This is borne out by the reaction of the religious parties alliance calling itself *Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal* (MMA), United Action Assembly,<sup>63</sup> to the

59. *The Herald*, December 2001, 20.

60. The worst year of sectarian violence was 1997, when two hundred people were killed and one hundred and seventy-five injured in ninety-seven incidents. A crack-down by the Punjab government brought down the average annual sectarian fatalities and incidents to around seventy and thirty, respectively. While there was a marginal decrease in sectarian violence under the military government, the teaming up of sectarianists with al-Qaeda operatives and the jihadi militants has given the whole issue a new turn.

61. According to LJ leader Akram Lhori arrested in June 2002, there are one hundred and fifty LJ militants in the country. (*The Nation*, 2 July 2002). As for the SMP, it has been considerably weakened by infighting, penetration of security agents and the drying up of funding by Shia contributors who believe that militancy has undermined Shia security. See Zaigham Khan in *The Herald*, September 1998, 29 and 48.

62. *The Herald*, March 2002.

63. The six parties are JUI (F), JUI (Samiul Haq), Jamaat-i-Islami, Markazi Jamiat e Ahle Hadith, Jamiat Ulema Pakistan (Noorani), and the Shia party TJP.

government ads carried in the national print media in June 2002 portraying bin Laden and his al-Qaeda associates as "religious terrorists." The ad carried pictures of Osama, his key lieutenant, and sixteen other al-Qaeda associates and local militants wanted for attacks on foreign targets in Karachi. Reacting to the ad at a public gathering, JUI's information secretary repeated his party's position that "Osama is a hero to the Islamic world and the Musharraf government would not get any sympathy by branding him a religious terrorist."<sup>64</sup> On his part, Qazi Hussain Ahmed, head of the Jamaat-i-Islami termed the Osama ad as part of an international conspiracy in which "Pakistan's government had sided with the Zionists' agenda."<sup>65</sup> He went on to argue that "bracketing of Islamists with terrorists [was] a Zionist conspiracy because Islam is fast spreading in Europe and America."<sup>66</sup> Such lionization of Osama is even more vigorous in the tribal areas. For example, following the shoot-out in July between the police and four Uzbek al-Qaeda militants near Kohat in which all the Uzbeks were killed, scuffles broke out between pro-al-Qaeda demonstrators and the police over claiming the bodies of the slain terrorists. The government eventually removed the bodies to Peshawar for secret burial, even as the spot where the terrorists fell was turned into a shrine by the locals.<sup>67</sup>

Inevitably, such glorification of al-Qaeda terrorists by a Talibanic Pakistan has a corollary among the "Vedic Taliban"<sup>68</sup> in India, where Hindu policemen who participated in the massacre of Muslims in the recent pogroms in Gujarat were glorified as heroes.<sup>69</sup> Clearly then, such a melding of subjectivities of religious violence across Pakistan and India suggests that the radicalization of the Arabist shift in Pakistan and of "Vedic Taliban" in India are two sides of the same cultural problematic: the eclipse of the subcontinent's eclecticism of which the Indo-Persian matrix was a prime expression.

64. *The Nation*, 2 July 2002.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. *The News*, 12 July 2002. See also Rahimullah Yusufzai, *Newsline*, July 2002, 62.

68. Mukul Dube, "The Vedic Taliban," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 May 2002.

69. See Pankhaj Mishra, "We Have No Orders to Save You: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat." A Report by Human Rights Watch. *New York Review of Books*, 15 August 2002. According to the report, "the police led the charge, using gunfire against Muslims ... a key BJP state minister was reported to have taken over police control rooms on the first day of the carnage, issuing orders to disregard pleas for assistance from Muslims."

## Conclusion

PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN THE U.S.-LED WAR against terrorism and its rethinking of the jihadi networks are becoming a bone of contention in a country where the imperatives of domestic security and cultural identity in the context of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan are weighed down by connotations of a "war between Islam and America"—the slogan being used by the religio-political opposition for framing its stance vis-à-vis the Musharraf government in the October elections. To be sure, President Musharraf's aligning of Pakistan with the United States in the war against terrorism has both undercut and radicalized the Arabist shift. This is reflected by a defiant flaunting of bin Laden as a primordial Arab and Islamic hero by the religio-political groups and the MMA, especially in terms of their opposition to Musharraf and his "secular" government and supporters. A case in point is the full-page ads that appeared in the Karachi daily *Ummate Muslima* praising bin Laden as a "holy warrior and a lion of God whom the 1.4 million American army has failed to capture and subdue." The ads appeared on July 2 and 4 in retaliation to the government's ads of June 30 depicting bin Laden as a terrorist.<sup>70</sup> Seen in the context of a general radicalization of the religio-political right, some of whose elements are threatening that "power can be taken from the army by force,"<sup>71</sup> there is an urgent need to look at the war against terrorism in terms of a comprehensive campaign on multiple fronts: social and economic, educational and cultural, political and security. Indeed, the crackdown against the terrorists of today should be accompanied at the same time by a battle for the hearts and minds of the people for preempting the terrorists of tomorrow. After all, if there are thousands of Pakistanis dying to fight America, there are thousands of others dying to live in America, as indeed a great many more who see the present crisis as a battle for Pakistan's survival as a sovereign and moderate state.

To conclude, Pakistan's Shia-Sunni violence has come a long way from the killings of sectarian leaders, religious teachers and activists,

70. See *The Friday Times*, 19 July 2002.

71. *The Herald*, May 2000, 52. Such a confrontationist stance marks an unprecedented radicalization of the religio-political parties against the army, inasmuch as until recently the religious right's rhetoric was mainly against the secular elements and "the hateful NGOs," rather than the army itself.

through the target killing of government officers, members of security forces, businessmen, lawyers, doctors, innocent civilians in mosques and cemeteries, to a launching pad for a war against Westerners following the Taliban's rout in Afghanistan. Even so, it seems the use of politically inspired religious violence in the country has not entirely eclipsed a pacifist Indo-Persian culture: For example, unlike Pakistan's Afghan-Arabs who pay homage to al-Qaeda terrorists, the villagers near Murree stood in the way of terrorists who were fleeing after attacking a Christian missionary school on 8 July 2002, and this led the terrorists to blow themselves up following the example of their Arab role models. However, in addressing the problem of Shia-Sunni violence in terms of the escalation of its scope and interpenetration with other religio-political forces in the country and outside, the following points need to be considered.

1. Despite the tribal "civil wars" and sectarian death squads, by and large Shia-Sunni violence lacks grassroots support. Indeed, as a product and response to the larger dynamics of modernization, the internationalization of jihad, the standoff over Kashmir and an Arabist shift in cultural imagination, religious extremism stands to subvert Pakistan much like Jihad International subverted Afghanistan, even as Afghanistan was attempting to modernize with Soviet support. The decentering of power in Pakistan—in the form of militarization of the religio-political strata, the fragmentation of militant and terrorist groups, and their interstitial nexus with sections of the mainstream Islamists—is in some ways a corollary of the atomization of Afghanistan and crumbling of the Soviet Union. Hence, stabilization of Afghanistan and support for Pakistan (economic, security) merit the same kind of sustained involvement by the United States that won it the Cold War. In this sense, economic development of the region should amount to a preemptive security policy internationally.<sup>72</sup>

72. Such an approach toward regional and global risk management largely depends on how the United States views and conducts the war against terrorism: as a unilateral project to secure strategic geopolitical positions, or as an attempt that ensures other countries have a stake in the international system through equitable international trade, democratization of international institutions, and so forth. See Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "War on Terrorism: 9/11 and Globalization from Below," *The Daily Times*, 11 July 2002.

2. In a globalizing moment where the local and the global are increasingly intertwined in an interdependent world, forms of religious violence cannot be wished away in isolation from the historical and political contexts giving rise to them—be it Afghanistan after the Cold War/Taliban, Palestine under Israeli occupation, or Kashmiri aspiration for self-determination. A long-term solution of Pakistan's sectarian and religiously inspired violence within the country and beyond, is therefore contingent upon a radical improvement in Indo-Pakistan relations. This will make it possible for Pakistan to focus more on internal security and also to evolve a more inclusive Muslim identity rooted in the Indo-Persian culture. However, given the tension and mistrust between India and Pakistan, it is imperative that while the two countries address the Kashmir question, they should also evolve multilateral cooperative mechanisms with the United States and the UN on the issues of education, development and culture for promoting and preserving peace and security over the long haul.
3. The crackdown by President Musharraf's government against sectarian and other militant groups has partly helped in breaking the organizational structure of the sectarian groups. At the same time, this has led to a sectarianist infusion into other extremist and mainstream Islamic groups for a "decisive battle between Islam and America."<sup>73</sup> Such a radicalization of the Islamic forces has given rise to an unprecedented defiance on part of the civil society's religio-political strata against the army. In such a context, it is vital for the army and the political parties to reach an understanding for power sharing.<sup>74</sup>

73. Terming the forthcoming elections as "a war between Washington and Medina," MMA chairman Maulana Noorani called on his supporters at a meeting on 25 July in Islamabad to "expel the U.S.-backed secular elements from the country" by electing a religious leadership. See *The Nation*, 26 July 2002. Its rhetoric notwithstanding, MMA's primary target is to win 10 percent of the seats in the next parliament to enable it to assume a "kingmaker's role" in a fractious political scenario. See Ibne Nasim, "MMA—The Force to Reckon with?" *Weekly Independent*, 25–31 July 2002.

74. As the results of the October 2002 elections showed, MMA exceeded its own expectations by winning twice as many seats (fifty-two), even though it polled only 11.10 percent of the votes. By comparison, the PML (Nawaz) won fourteen seats despite polling more votes (11.32 percent), whereas the People's Party got the highest number of votes (25.01 percent) with sixty-two seats, and the pro-Musharraf PML (Quaide Azam) won seventy-seven seats with 24.81 percent of the vote. See *Dawn*, "PPP Got Highest Number of Votes," 18 October 2002, 16.

In the absence of a comprehensive campaign against terrorism that also addresses its root causes and aims for the hearts and minds of the people, the explosion of a tribal warrior culture masquerading as religious extremism in Pakistan could well mark a quantum leap in the destabilization of the region and the world.

# 8

SURINDER SINGH OBEROI

## **Ethnic Separatism and Insurgency in Kashmir**

**P**resently, in the absence of any great political leadership in Kashmir, the mantle of leadership is falling on religious leaders who are using the issue of continuing violence in the troubled valley in their regular congregations. Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq, the head priest of Kashmir, says, “definitely more Muslim youth are seen in the mosques because the only place where they get some sort of relief or respect after being humiliated by Indian security forces (seen as Hindu troops) is in places of worship.”

This in turn is changing Kashmir into a complex web of inter-confessional problems, as both India and Pakistan are trying to use the sentiments of a particular sect for their advantage. If Muslim radical groups in Kashmir have been demanding a merger with Pakistan, then radical Hindu groups in Jammu are asking for a division of Jammu and Kashmir into three states on the basis of religion.

Equally, in a post-nineties scenario, Muslims in Kashmir by and by are being divided on the basis of casteism, sufiism, peerism and fundamentalism. New sections of the *al Hadees* and *Tableeq* schools of

thought are emerging, their institutions resembling *Jamaat-i-Islami*, which does not believe in sufiism or shrine worship.

India and Pakistan are knee-deep in the Kashmir issue and both countries are using the religious-racial card, thus entangling the issue and making it more difficult to untie this particular Gordian knot.

Some intelligence agencies, for their own interests, are dividing Kashmiris into *Shia*, *Sunni*, *Paharis*, and *Backewals*. The urban-village divide is also surfacing in the valley. It is a known fact that the ethno-political problems often get aggravated and bring an outside influence into what could otherwise be regarded as an internal affair. There have been Sikh and Hindu massacres and killings of laborers from Bihar and Nepal, indicating clearly that a specific influence intends to keep non-Muslims away from the valley. The long-term consequences are that such events may demolish the once-composite and plural society where cracks are already visible.

Meanwhile, in a knee-jerk reaction after September 11, the administration is coming up against the waves of gun culture in Kashmir and is chasing foreign militants and trying to break their influence on society. The administration is also trying to choke the inflow of illegal money into Kashmir by identifying the property acquired by the new Islamic groups as well as persons involved in bringing in financial help to the separatists. In other words, New Delhi is trying to use the same measures against terrorists in Kashmir as the United States used against the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In the early nineties, Kashmiri Pundits (elite Hindu class) were driven from their homeland.<sup>1</sup> The young Pundits growing up outside Kashmir know only one thing: that their elders were driven out by militants and forced to leave their belongings and live in refugee camps. Some Hindus, mostly from rural areas, continue to live as displaced persons in unhygienic refugee camps in Jammu and New Delhi. Several of them have died of heat stroke, as they were not used to living in plains or deserts.

In Kashmir, Muslim teenagers have grown up under the shadow of the gun and a security bunker in their neighborhood, with a feeling that troops from outside Kashmir are ruling the valley with the barrel

1. Kashmiri Pundits constitute only 5 percent of the population of Jammu and Kashmir.

of the gun. The cycle of hatred thus spans generations, and hope for Kashmiri Pundits returning to Kashmir seems bleaker with each passing year.

Youth from the scattered generation of Kashmiri Pundits growing up outside Kashmir for the last thirteen years are shaped in a different culture and are no longer a part of Kashmir. Several of these youth have not even seen snow or mountains and only hear stories of Kashmir from their parents or relatives.

These young Pundits, it seems, have said good-bye forever to the Himalayan valley. Being among the educated class for centuries, they prefer to be educated outside Kashmir than to live in an atmosphere of suffocation where today, no one is ready to provide them security. Daily violence and incidents such as attacks on the Kashmir Assembly harden their resolve to not return to the troubled valley.

Muslims in Kashmir, on the other hand, are growing up under the umbrella of a single religion: Islam. The younger generation can scarcely imagine how their elders used to live with Kashmiri Pundits or how educated Pundits who maintained secularism in the curriculum dominated the education system in Kashmir.

The six-year-old ruling government, under the chief ministership of Farooq Abdullah, has failed to create an atmosphere where Kashmir Pundits can return, despite the government's election manifesto in 1996 that considered the return to be a priority. The same election manifesto was used in 2002 (autonomy plus return of Hindus) by the ruling National Conference, but without participation by the real opposition (separatists) in the elections, the manifesto remains meaningless.

Pundits, who left Kashmir in early 1990, are now selling their property, never to return. A cursory survey suggests that at least 60 percent of the Hindu property in Kashmir has been sold.

The continuing violence has polarized Hindus and Muslims. For the first time, the most visible face of an effort by Islamic militants can be seen by their actions in "Operation Fidayeen" (dying in the name of Allah while fighting for Islam).

After nearly achieving their goal of changing the demographic structure in the valley, militants are extending their activities across the Pir Panchal mountain range in the Jammu division. A series of Hindu massacres in the Doda, Poonch and Rajouri districts of Udhampur and Jammu has led to the migration of minorities from the upper

ranges. Militants in these mountainous regions are ruling the roost in the absence of security positions, as difficult terrain makes it impossible for troops to station themselves on these hilly ridges.

As a coup d'état, the government has come up with Village Defense Committees (VDCs). Most VDCs consist of Hindus who have been issued arms by the government to protect the villagers.

This situation widens the split between Muslims and Hindus. Muslims, scared of militants, are not joining the groups, while Hindus are dependent on the VDCs. Minor incidents lead to scuffles, which then lead to communal tensions.

### **Situation in Kashmir**

AFTER THE SEPTEMBER 11 ATTACK on the United States, life on the street of Srinagar, the summer capital, which had been limping back to normalcy, once again saw a change. Though the situation seems normal in the daytime, the nighttime hours are tense and abnormal. Those living near the Line of Control (LOC) have shifted to safer places. Villages dotting the LOC have been mined, and the presence of security troops has increased manifold. The fear of war between India and Pakistan, despite the recent de-escalation of tension, continues to keep the countries' respective armies and weapons face-to-face on the 1,100-kilometer disputed LOC and the international border.

In this situation, mothers continue to wait for family members that do not return in time. The warrens and walkways of Srinagar and its surroundings remain scorched and stationary. People still prefer to not celebrate night marriages.

The daytime veneer of normalcy seems increasingly dangerous as the underlying hatred continues to brew. It is just a matter of time before the volcano of enmity erupts on the streets if the government's policy to win Kashmiris does not surface, or if meaningful dialogue between Pakistan and Indian leadership fails to take off.

### **Present Actors in the Conflict**

THE TWELVE-YEAR-OLD ARMED STRUGGLE that laid the foundation in Kashmir under the slogan "Independent Kashmir" has melted into Islamic jihad, spearheaded by radical leaders bent on installing the rule of Allah. But after September 11, the Kashmiri Muslim militants, as

well as separatist leaders and their sympathizers, are rethinking the role of foreign Islamic militants in Kashmir.

Is the presence of foreign militants going to help or hurt the freedom struggle? This question is being debated on the streets of Srinagar, and public opinion is divided. The new generation is in favor of foreign elements, while saner elements say their role is over. This was recently witnessed on the death anniversary of Molvi Farooq, on May 21, 2002, where Hurriyat leader Abdul Gani Lone was shot dead. A four-hour procession and speeches were punctuated by pro-Jihad and pro-foreign militant slogans despite the Hurriyat leadership's discouraging of such actions. The seventy-one-year-old Lone, who earlier had said the role of foreign militants was over, paid the price for his words, creating renewed fear amid the moderate leadership.

Indian officials presently believe that some one thousand-plus Muslim mercenaries, mostly Pakistani- and Pashtun-speaking Afghans, are leading the campaign and have given a new thrust to the decade-old separatist campaign that shows no signs of ending. Guerrillas, who are expert in mountain warfare and can live for months in stocked caves, claim they have a following of thousands pitted against a huge reservoir of Indian army, paramilitary and Kashmir police. Carrying ample arms and ammunition, the first thing guerrillas do is to construct a camouflaged bunker in the mountains; sometimes they even buy temporary truce with the security troops.

The main fear that foreign militants may have links with the Taliban of Afghanistan is proving to be truer as there has been an increase of attacks on security positions after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The post-Afghanistan repercussion has seen fissures among the groups of militants in Kashmir, and internecine clashes were reported between local and foreign militants.

The second actors are local Muslim militants who number about three thousand, according to Mr. A.K. Suri, police chief of Jammu and Kashmir. Most of these militants are also pro-Pakistan but are somehow people-friendly. For example, the *Hizbe-ul Mujabideen* militant outfit is divided. One is preaching hard-line Islam and is directly under the control of Pakistan, while the second—led by Majid Dar,<sup>2</sup>

2. Dar had announced the cease-fire in July 2000, which continued for two weeks, and has now lost two of his commanders in mysterious circumstances. It is believed that foreign militants killed these two local commanders.

who is camping in Kashmir and is considered a moderate—may play an important role in the future. Dar does not want foreign militants to control the Kashmir movement. This group is also flexible and does not believe in Islamic rule in Kashmir despite its slogan that Kashmir should be a part of Pakistan, but they are ready to compromise on something less.<sup>3</sup>

The third actors are the separatist political amalgam of some twenty-three outfits known as the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). The APHC is not presently enjoying a marked respect among the local populace as it has not been able to give anything but death and destruction to the masses. Still, the APHC constitutes the main actors in the theater of the conflict, and these actors share the same emotions as common people on the street. Without Hurriyat participation there is no solution possible in Kashmir. Professor Abdul Gani Bhat says, “we live in the masses and not in the bunkers ... some people might be angry with us but they understand our limitations.” Three of the executive members of APHC, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Yaseen Malik and Abdul Aziz, along with dozens of second- and third-line leaders, are in Indian jails.

The fourth important actors are Indian security forces, which are present in large number and do not have a good human rights record. After September 11 the security troops felt more concerned about the continuing violence in Kashmir, but became morally encouraged after the United States declared two top militant outfits as terrorists. Indian security troops posted in Kashmir now have more pressure from New Delhi to control the militancy. An international campaign has been launched to prove that Kashmiri militancy constitutes cross-border terrorism. Though the vigil on the villages dotting the LOC has increased to check the infiltration, any tactical change in the militancy is yet to be seen.

### **Insurgency in Kashmir—Changing Tactics**

AT FIRST SIGHT, there seems to be no marked change in the militants' actions in Kashmir; however, more foreign militants are getting killed. The pro-Pakistani groups are still visibly controlling the militancy but the strategy is changing; local militants with hard-line Islamic ideology

3. Interview with Majid Dar.

are seen in the forefront. Outfits use different names to maintain the discipline of the militant cadre and the distribution of money and weapons they receive from their elders based in either Pakistan or other Islamic countries.

The banning of the two terrorist organizations will hardly make a difference; as evidenced since 9/11, local militant outfits such as al Umar Mujahideen, Tehrik ul Mujahideen, and Jamiat ul Mujahideen are more hostile, recruiting local young Muslim boys mostly from rural and poor areas.

After the declaration of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), locals have been scared to give hideouts to foreign militants. If security troops were to find a foreign militant hiding in a house, the house would surely be blasted and the militant killed. In recent encounters, militants were seen hiding in the mosques. In fact, there has been a proliferation of mosques in Kashmir. One cursory survey suggests that more than three thousand new mosques have been built across the valley since 1990.

### **Prevailing Flux in Kashmir**

THE KASHMIR MOVEMENT FOR INDEPENDENCE remains on the front burner but there are no leaders available to carry the movement forward. Those still in Kashmir are too scared to act as leaders due to radical militants and their supporters. Unlike in the early nineties, the present Islamic militant groups have a limited following among the locals.<sup>4</sup> These armed guerrilla groups have no political party. According to one survey, the role of Jamaat-i-Islami, which once had less than 10 percent support, is losing its ground. The main scare, however, remains the growth of the *Wababi* and *Khilafat* type of Islam and the strengthening of its roots in Kashmir. Already several organizations named after social workers are new milestones in Kashmir. Several orphanages and medical centers are being financed through unaccounted money, which is routed to Kashmir from Gulf countries. Two dozen top businessmen and social workers were arrested this year for acting as conduits for *hawala* (illegal transition) money. Police recovered large sums of money in July 2002 from a

4. There is always a fear of repercussions. In several cases, houses were blown up by security troops once they found militants using the houses as hideouts.

commander of Hizbe-ul Mujahideen and a journalist. On their disclosure, a few separatist leaders were arrested for collecting and forwarding hawala money for separatist activities. Two top leaders of the Hurriyat are also in jail for allegedly receiving hawala money. Police say more money has been pumped into Kashmir from Islamic countries since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. According to Indian intelligence reports, every executive member of the Hurriyat is getting Rs. 700,000 per month.

Another activity of the fundamentalist Islamic group is to rope important, influential, and rich people into its fold as role models in society. Several such people are falling prey to this design, either intentionally or unintentionally.

One should know that Kashmir's decade-old freedom struggle is being used intelligently by fundamentalists to change the kind of Islam in Kashmir. This is a dangerous trend but no one agrees or suggests ways to curb it because it is not visible to the naked eye. This policy received body blows but did not change after the fall of the Taliban.

One important observation is that the population of the Kashmir valley is now 99.5 percent Muslim. There are no minorities left.<sup>5</sup> Scattered massacres of minorities in the last five years of militancy act as a shield for the return of Hindu migrants. Hindus are encouraged to sell their properties and are getting a good amount of money from Muslim Kashmiris.

The bleeding valley has seen an increase in the construction of mosques across the state. The architecture of these mosques features domes and minarets, unlike earlier times when mosques had stupa-type ceilings resembling Buddhist or Hindu temples. These mosques are also used as a resting place for militants and have provided jobs for hundreds of unemployed youth as preachers, priests, or caretakers of the religious places.

Thus, Islamic militant groups in the valley are seen differently by unemployed and underdeveloped<sup>6</sup> youth, who silently respect the militants because they die for a cause. Youth are told that Muslims of

5. In early 1990, two hundred thousand Kashmiri Hindus left the valley. Since then, only four thousand Hindus and about thirty thousand Sikhs remain in the valley, whose population is more than six million.

6. Seventy percent of the Muslim youth come from a rural background and are not well educated. They have a limited vision, which I describe as "valley vision." Fifty percent of these youth have not seen any other state of India and live in a closed society and mindset. They have no jobs and easily fall prey to Islamic propaganda.

the outside world are fighting for Kashmir's independence and dying for them.

The disappearance of Osama bin Laden and Maulana Omar is fast turning into a myth of invincibility and stories are floating around about how Allah has helped them to disappear. Islamic clerics in Kashmir are using these stories while preaching to the youth in the rural mosques. The new generations of Kashmiris born in this atmosphere are fast learning the new rules of life, least realizing that these groups have some different hidden agenda.

The lack of jobs and rehabilitation for former militants<sup>7</sup> is increasing the sympathy for foreign militants. Post-9/11 situations have also seen the recycling of Kashmiri Muslim militants in Kashmir.<sup>8</sup> Young, jobless boys have limited vision and take the recourse of Islam for salvation.

Private discussions among Kashmiri intellectuals reveal a worry about the unseen powers that are forcing their womenfolk to observe *purdah* (wearing of the veil). These forces are also trying to change the style of education in Kashmir. Some places named after Hindu culture, such as Anantnag and Gulshan Nagar, have been renamed as Islamabad and Gulshanabad. Ideologically, the locals do not agree with this type of growing Islamic chemistry but are throttled to defend their own culture lest they be killed either in the name of an informer or infidel.

One of the professors at Kashmir University said, "we are afraid that our culture, both social and religious, is being invaded by outsiders and fear that the new generation is fast learning the Wahabi and Khilafat type of Islam." The well-read and secular-minded in Kashmir recall the last century of Afghan rule in Kashmir, which has been described by historians as the worst rule in history.

Also, the tribal raid of late 1947 in Jammu and Kashmir is still fresh in the minds of local people. Poonch, Rajouri and Uri, the three border towns of the Indian Himalayan state, have several memorials that recount heroic tales of the legends who died fighting to save the chastity of their womenfolk and to save their native land. Locals now consider the Indian forces to be more or less in the same league.

7. According to official figures, more than forty thousand former Muslim militants and their sympathizers were once arrested and released.

8. Police say more local boys since September 11 are either crossing over to Pakistan or getting locally armed training, which includes several former militants.

## **The Role of Indian Troops in Kashmir**

SECURITY TROOPS ARE CONTENT, their claims concerning the linkage of terrorism in Kashmir to Pakistan and to Afghanistan having been vindicated (this is the slogan one hears after visiting any security camp or office). This sore victory is seen as a great morale booster; the ruling political leaders' statement in Delhi to wage a war against Pakistan is like a drip of dextrose to the sagging morale of the security troops.<sup>9</sup>

But there is a sense of something missing. Enmity exists between troops and the local populace, and every incident forces them to further dislike each other. The post-Afghanistan situation gives more confidence to the security troops, who consider Kashmir terrorism to be similar to that of Afghanistan. Security troops want the world to allow them to crush the militancy in Kashmir but do not want to see any other peace-keeping force on their land to monitor their actions.

The local population continues to consider the paramilitaries as outsiders. Troops, on the contrary, consider Muslims supportive of militancy. No one is working to bridge the gap, which has turned into a deep cavity. Incidents such as September 11 and the ensuing war in Afghanistan have led to more fissures. The misunderstanding increases with every passing day. After the December 13 attack on the Indian parliament, Kashmiris have felt scared to travel outside Kashmir because hotels and guest houses in Delhi and other places ask Kashmiris to register with local police.

In Srinagar and across the Himalayan state, more than 350,000 troops are directly or indirectly involved in counter-insurgency operations. With the new threat of war and now assembly elections, the number has increased by 150,000. Indian troops remain alert on the rugged, porous and snow-capped borders. In towns their vigil has multiplied. One of the surveys conducted by students of mass-media communication shows that more than 90 percent of the security troops, including the paramilitary, are from outside Kashmir. To illustrate the relationship between security troops and the local population, I will describe one of my encounters when I was moving along with security troops literally on the LOC.

9. The issue is being used to woo Americans and to maintain pressure on Pakistan. The United States is openly mediating the Kashmir issue in the name of facilitator, and repeated visits of U.S. political leaders to the subcontinent serves to at least start the first step of negotiation between the two enemy neighbors.

As I was in the border town of Kupwara, 120 kilometers north of Srinagar and bordering Pakistan-administered Kashmir, a soldier aimed and yelled, "There, on the roof, it looks one of the militants is on top of the house." The patrolling troops dashed toward a three-story residential building just across from the snow-covered, rectangular terraced fields.

Some of the soldiers ran to cover the back of the building, while two of them pressed against the compound's brick and mud wall, hitting the main gate with the butt of their automatic rifles. They forced open the jammed door.

An old woman shuffled out and opened the main gates. Anxious soldiers raced past her to the top of the floor, found nothing, and started searching the old mud and timber house. Ten minutes later, they came down dragging a shrieking and nervous teenager who begged for mercy, claiming he was a student and had nothing to do with the militancy. Half a dozen nervous family members, bare-footed, mostly women and old men, joined in pleading to leave the boy alone, as he was innocent. They showed the boy's identification card and books as evidence.

"I know the area well," said the soldier, "You were wearing a white *pheran*" (traditional Kashmiri rough woolen cloak used for warmth). Focusing on us and pointing his gun toward the frightened boy, he lectured, "I know this house and I know militants visit this house." Thinking for a minute and observing the surroundings he ordered, "next time I have any complaint about the presence of the militants here, I'm not only going to arrest you but your whole family," and he let the boy go.

Relieved but tense family members hurriedly returned to their dwelling as the soldiers left the area and disappeared in the nearby alley. In the house, the silence broke with the elderly person scolding his son for always bringing trouble to them. I saw three more young boys, trembling and freezing in a corner of a dark and cold room. The elderly members cursed their children for yelling and making the house a playing field and thus an attraction for the patrolling security troops. The children were advised in their native Kashmiri language to learn the new ways of living with the changing scenario in Kashmir.

In a conversation with the family members over a cup of tea, I learned that the three boys were playing on the top floor of the house, which resembled a big hall. In the dark hours, because of the

prevailing situation in the border areas, locals do not venture out. There is also no development. Most of the time there is no electricity, not to mention stadiums, libraries or recreational clubs. Patrolling troops saw some of the boys dashing in what looked like a hall and suspected them to be militants.<sup>10</sup> As troops approached the house, the instant reaction of the boys was to remove the pheran and prepare to face the troops in pants and sweaters, lest they be considered militants.

For many in Kashmir, the above incident is routine. Every day there are several raids on private houses to arrest militants, and every day a couple of search and cordon operations take place. Confidant and trusting steps are lacked by security troops in these operations. The steps taken by troops are to control mass riots, not to control mass movement. The occasional and tentative moves toward accommodation between Kashmir and New Delhi have not been promising.

### **Security Forces Express an Opinion**

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, security troops have been more vigilant on the rugged borders dividing India and Pakistan, as it is suspected that there are more chances of hard-liners escaping Afghanistan to enter Kashmir. "We have to continue our patrolling to show the militants that we can reach wherever we want and we can control the situation," said an army officer based at the LOC.

Another army officer, who did not visit his home even after the birth of his second child, said, "duty is duty. What we really want is for none of us to be killed or injured so we can all go back to our homes and families alive."

There is hardly an Indian paramilitary man or army officer who was not or is not posted in rotation in the troubled areas of Kashmir to control the armed struggle since 1989. You find several of the officers in the leisure cocktails comparing their past experiences in violent Kashmir with what is happening today. "I don't see myself fighting non-professionals as was the case in early nineties. Now I find them more trained and confident," said a young captain of the army. "I was also not trained for this type of job to fight in the towns, nor do I feel proud to be there on the streets, but I have no choice."

10. Militants cross over from Pakistan-administered Kashmir to Indian Kashmir through porous border areas of Kupwara and usually mix with the local population before proceeding to other parts.

He regrets using force on boys who are still in their early teens: “You feel bad arresting young, innocent kids who are fighting someone’s else war. But you have to apply force to extract weapons and truth,” confesses the officer, who says foreign militants are instantly killed even if they are caught alive.

The young captain also does not deny that he lives under the constant threat of a militant attack and that fear has become part of his life. Militants today are fighting with a changed strategy and find more support among the rural poor than among the urban rich. Troops maintain pressure on the residents to keep militants on the run.

“Whenever we arrest someone in the rural areas, nearly all the villagers swarm the security camp, swearing the arrested fellow is innocent and pleading to release him and assuring that never again will he indulge in any activities ... but you soon sniff out the system of survival the locals have adopted. They sometimes know the militants but don’t want to share the information with us until they suffer from them. Behind your back, sometimes, you hear just abuses because they consider you not very friendly,” admits an army officer. Another officer explains, “The first month I acted as the most descent guy on earth and started helping them but the second month turned me crazy as I was showing too much courtesy, which began altering my private hours, literally making me a nervous wreck. I then started beating them to avoid me. I lost my doctrines—I had lost my human feelings after living in a society that never wanted to see the end of the violence but believed in leg-pulling and favors, even at the cost of someone’s life.” He called them the “enemy within.” There have been several cases in which a soldier runs amuck, killing his own colleagues or committing suicide. The usual explanation by the army is that soldiers are living under tremendous pressure and tension in Kashmir.

The above incidents show that there is no policy of security troops staying in Kashmir for two to three years just looking forward to completing their tenure and returning home safely. The continuity in the security force policy is lacking. The new officer will criticize his predecessor and make it a point (with some exceptions) to see that he is moving in a new direction, as he considers that all the steps taken by his former office holder were wrong because there were no immediate results or improvement in the situation.

Contrary to human tendencies, new bonds or developing relations are not visible between the local populace and the security troops. There are hardly any cases of marriages between locals and security troops, despite their living in Kashmir for more than a decade. Furthermore, hardly a Kashmiri family maintains friendly relations with a security person who is transferred out of Kashmir, unlike other places where new relationships are maintained through correspondence or other ways of communication.

### **Locals Understand the Language of Survival**

LOCALS HAVE LEARNED HOW TO GET BY and prefer to keep their young ones away from the troops lest they be identified as militants or sympathizers and arrested and interrogated. One hardly finds a Muslim youth that has not faced some sort of interrogation or been paraded in front of informers in the infamous “crack-downs” (search and cordon operations). Hundreds of young boys are missing in custody. Presently, two organizations of affected persons are fighting for their rights in court. (In private, the soldiers admit they can only scare the young boys and let them go. They too are equally scared of the militants.)

### **Separatist Groups and the General Populace in Kashmir**

ISLAMIC GUERRILLA LEADERS were once proud to exhibit they had fought against the Russians in Afghanistan. It was like a certificate of advanced training in guerrilla tactics for the Mujahideen. Before 9/11, guerrilla leaders used to compare the situation time and time again with what was happening in Afghanistan, considering themselves a part of the Muslim Umma and boasting to implement Islamic rule not only in Kashmir but on the whole planet. Today they speak less of Afghanistan and do not want to compare their insurgency with the Taliban lest the Kashmiri struggle too will have to suffer.

Islamic guerrilla leaders say they are struggling only for the freedom of Kashmir. Some separatist leaders say they do not want Hindu-dominated areas of Jammu or Buddhist-dominated areas of Ladakh.<sup>11</sup> These separatists outrightly reject that any al-Qaeda

11. Professor Abdul Gani Bhat said this in his individual capacity and not as chairman of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference.

member is present in Kashmir, unlike in 2001 when every burial procession of a militant killed in an encounter would attract noisy pro-Islamic and pro-Taliban slogans.

Under the surface, one finds that the sympathetic tone for the Afghan Mujahideen continues. For instance, locals silently pray for their sacrifices in their hideouts and vow to take revenge. Although the lack of verbalizing about Afghanistan or Islamic militants is a tactical change, a layer of hatred is swelling underneath that could, over time, burst out in one way or another.

“Even Prophet Muhammed bought peace with the infidels on their terms and conditions for ten years till He defeated them ... Inshaallaha! We will do the same,” said Mushtaq Sopori, an active member of the al Hadees sect of Islam in Kashmir that promotes mosques and educational institutions across the valley.

As the relationship between India and Pakistan spirals downward, security troops continue to arrest hard-line overground activists in Kashmir. More than a dozen Jamaat-i-Islami and APHC leaders and activists were arrested in a four-month period in 2002 under the new law of POTA.

A diabolic shift is distinctly visible. The future policy or strategy of the active radical groups in Kashmir will definitely be more clandestine. There is a fear that Kashmir Muslim teenagers will be the future members of the *fidayeen* (suicidal squad) if steps for the solution of the Kashmir problem are not properly addressed.

Secondly, intellectuals are beginning, for the first time, to compare the Kashmir issue to other Muslim struggles and blaming the West. One strong view, held by Kashmiri Muslim intellectuals who acknowledge the existence of radical Islam, holds that such movements can best be seen as an extreme response to the intrusion of the West, which has seldom tried to solve problems such as those in Palestine, Bosnia or Kashmir. Kashmiri politicians also want America and its allies fighting in the war against terrorism in the backyard of Kashmir, to learn from the mistakes of the British Empire. Kashmiri politicians blame the British for not tying up the loose ends of the Kashmir issue, which have, since 1947, festered between the two South Asian rivals to such a degree that today even the British government is suffering. “What could have been solved in two meetings then is leading into a nuclear war,” said Nazir Ronga, president of the Kashmir Lawyers Association.

Most grievances of the Kashmiri Muslims describe Western imperialism against the Islamic world like the introduction of Israel into the Middle East and the threat to Islamic societies by the spread of what is often seen as “corrupt Western culture.” In this view, the terrorist acts of September 11 were regrettable but understandable, flowing from the widespread rage against the West found in many Muslims. The terrorists were drawn from a much larger pool of discontented and angry Muslims. “‘Good’ Muslims do not approve of acts of terrorism, which are widely regarded as acts of self-defense, and are thus defensible morally,” says another leading Muslim advocate in Srinagar.

Most locals in Kashmir were surprised after the September 11 terrorist attacks but some took pride in it. “That Muslims are ready to die in the name of Allah to defend Islam is seen in itself as a unity among Muslims across the globe. It is an act of sacrifice and achievement for Islam and we should be happy that the younger generation of Muslims worldwide is learning from the elder Muslims how to defend Islam against the unfaithful. They are not falling prey to corrupt Western culture,” says a professor of a college in Sopore town, North Kashmir.<sup>12</sup>

The implications of such a view are quite specific, showing that Kashmiris are not happy with the attack on Afghanistan but they cannot criticize it openly lest they too be dubbed as terrorists by the international community. The only way to release their anger is to criticize the West and its policies against Muslims.

“The West must stop pursuing a policy with a double standard. It must change its policies toward Israel, it must support oppressed Muslim groups around the world, especially in Palestine, Kashmir, and Chechnya, and it must abandon its support for reactionary and oppressive Islamic regimes.” These arguments carry much weight in Kashmir today because Muslims see India as an ally of Israel. They feel Israel is helping Indian security forces in counter-insurgency operations.<sup>13</sup> Kashmiri people are suffering at the hands of Indian security troops who are mostly from the other states of India.

12. Sopore is a stronghold of Jamaat-i-Islami and was the most affected town in the last ten years of militancy.

13. Militants kidnapped four Israeli tourists in Kashmir in 1991 and one Israeli tourist was killed. Since then, Israeli tourists do not visit Kashmir.

Hundreds of human rights abuses have been registered against the troops but seldom are actions taken against them.

Since the fall of the Taliban, locals have demanded more vociferously that Asia Watch and Amnesty International be allowed to visit Kashmir as they feel troops have been given more power in Kashmir since September 11 and are not accountable to their superiors. The charge was outrightly denied by the troops' superiors and India does not allow the entry of the two organizations.

### **New Reasoning Emerges in Kashmir after 9/11**

WITH THE FALL OF THE TALIBAN and the installation of a new government in Afghanistan, a fresh reasoning is emerging among Muslim separatist leaders: that the Kashmir movement should no more have the influence of foreign Islamic militants lest the world declare them too as terrorists. Professor Abdul Gani Bhat, chairman of the APHC, for the first time asked India and Pakistan to freeze the Kashmir issue. Farooq Abdullah, chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, has also moved rapidly to cash in on the confusion. The chief minister called for strikes across the LOC on terrorist camps, which has been endorsed by nearly all political parties (ruling an opposition) to go all offensive against Pakistan and the terrorist groups.

Observers feel that Farooq wants to remain more loyal than the king and can please New Delhi in all respects to stay in power. Farooq used the issue for the state elections held in September and October 2002 to sweep the elections once again and rule for another six years. New Delhi had resisted his move and tried to rope in some separatists but failed. Americans had pressured India by demanding that the elections be held under governor's rule and that international observers be allowed to monitor the elections, but these demands were not met by India.

The Afghanistan situation has already weakened the position of separatist organizations; in the coming year, separatists cannot think of participating in the elections or they will face a miserable defeat because at this stage they cannot bargain with New Delhi. Thus, all the bridges and contacts New Delhi gained with separatists through interlocutors have been burned. The Hurriyat has recently agreed to participate in elections but for the representative character, considering these elections as the first step for negotiating with Indians.

Another thought of school emerging in the valley is that a fresh epoch will begin for Kashmir once the situation in Afghanistan completely settles. The moderate and suffocated intellectual class, with a cautious optimism and crossed fingers, feels it is the right time for the international community to mediate and settle the Kashmir issue. Their voices suggest that the West should no longer sit on the fence and helplessly watch the dangerous trends emerge in Kashmir since the present visible opportunity may not exist in the future. The truth remains that any serious peace process would need much greater commitment; otherwise, the proliferation of weapons, terrorism, sectarianism and fundamentalism will grow in South Asia.

After nearly a decade of violence in Kashmir, the September 11 attacks on the United States and the fate of the Taliban regime are forcing the locals to visualize a modernistic reasoning to resolve and mend the dispute between the two South Asian archrivals. Such a resolution will not only keep Islamic fundamentalism out of South Asia but will also allow Kashmiris to live a respectable life free from fear. To exclude the dimension of the ongoing Kashmir problem from any permanent political solution would be folly and would lay the groundwork to reap another generation of violence from the war-scorched soil of Kashmir. Kashmir should be seen as the overarching concern; otherwise, the world will again have to assemble to resolve the unfinished partition left over by the British in 1947.

### **Focal Issue**

THE GENERAL CONCERN OF SEPARATIST LEADERS is that they are ready for any respectable negotiation, but New Delhi will have to keep in mind the fact that fifty thousand to eighty thousand Muslim families have lost their loved ones in the last twelve years. Also, more than one hundred thousand Muslim families have indirectly suffered. The main argument by these moderate separatist leaders is that they are accountable to and will not be pardoned by the Kashmiri masses if they compromise with India by participating in the election just for the sake of the civilian government administration. "Compromise at what cost?" asks Yaseen Malik, chief of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front.

## Conclusions

THE SECURITY SITUATION IN THE KASHMIRI VALLEY is at an alarming juncture. Meanwhile, a renewed series of attacks on the security positions by the militants in spring and summer of 2002, including a fidayeen attack on the State Assembly and Indian parliament house in New Delhi, has been a morale boost to the otherwise sagging militancy in Kashmir. The past experience of the Indian intelligence suggests that militants may soon do something spectacular to attract international attention and to keep the local populace under fear prior to the elections. Intelligence officers say whenever pressure builds up among the militants, they try to ward it off by initiating some action.

The lesson to be learned from the post-Afghanistan situation is that if a vacuum is allowed in a conflict-like situation, then radical groups who rule with a religion-and-gun ideology will take advantage of the circumstances. In the case of Kashmir, all sides in the conflict have no solution to the problem. So for personal gain, all parties drag on the strife with no concrete objectives. The longer the conflict continues, the more polarized the sides become. In Kashmir, boys are no longer boys; they are becoming militant and fluent in the language of the gun. There is hardly a child in Kashmir who has not seen the deadly automatic assault rifle or a dead body.

The hatred is not surprising, as more than thirty-five thousand people have been killed in the continuing decade-long conflict. Troops have killed more than fifteen thousand militants and wounded hundreds more. Also, more than thirty-five thousand people were arrested under charges of supporting or participating in the militancy. Thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims have been forced to flee the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Distrust between the security troops and the local population is complete. One wonders how the Hindu and Muslim communities will again co-exist in Kashmir, even if the conflict ends.

Hardly any research is being done either in Kashmir or in other parts of India to tackle the Kashmir situation. "Some of the non-resident Kashmiris have become spokespersons of the Kashmir cause in the United States or in other European countries where they would be unimportant and jobless without the Kashmir issue." These organizations also collect large sums of money in the name of jihad in Kashmir and would like to see the conflict continue.

As the Kashmir uprising drags on, one of the outcomes is the growing enmity between Hindus and Muslims, which had never erupted previously. Today, if the fate of Kashmiris moves us, it is because it has become a twentieth-century saga. One feels an eerie premonition and vulnerability before the spectacle. What happens in Kashmir seems both a reversion and a forecast.

Kashmiri masses are sandwiched between reversion and forecast—not knowing what their future is or which side they should support. They condemn the continuing massacres in Kashmir but do not want to blame anyone. They are leaderless and tired of the ongoing violence.

Today, Kashmir brings hope to none. The environment of hatred begets hostility and vice-versa. Kashmir is no longer a magical place. In these circumstances of continuing hostility and non-accommodation, the role of a third party (or parties) becomes a must. The key to an effective American policy in South Asia depends on Washington's engagement with India and Pakistan. India is an emerging major power and Pakistan, despite its internal economic and political problems, is also a significant state. Musharraf is trying hard to bring economic stability to his country. Washington, since the fall of the Taliban, is assisting them by lifting sanctions and providing billions of dollars as loans and donations. The United States is also keeping a vigil to reduce the risk of accidental war between India and Pakistan.

Three developments in Kashmir that have partially come out of the ashes of September 11 have influenced Kashmiri perceptions and have helped, I believe, ripen the Kashmir Conflict for resolution.

First, the defeat of fundamentalist forces in Afghanistan that use terror as a weapon definitely has ramifications in Kashmir, where such elements have been trying to impose their ideology. Such forces should not be allowed to grow in Kashmir; now is the right time to nip the devil in the bud.

Second, a space has been created for the voice of Kashmir's indigenous people to once again take center stage. Indigenous Kashmiris are already re-energizing, emboldened by the expectation that the international fight against terrorism will not just target terrorist groups but will also promote an atmosphere of reconciliation and justice in Jammu and Kashmir. Indigenous Kashmiris expect a well-meaning and ultimately peaceful solution to the conflict by encouraging dialogue between New Delhi and Kashmiri leaders.

Third, as a result of coalition building, Kashmir does have some hope that the West can engage both India and Pakistan in a dialogue stressing the need to resolve this dispute by emphasizing an incremental peace process that does not necessarily mean independence from or accession to Pakistan.

# 9

MARTIJN VAN BEEK

## **Dangerous Liaisons: Hindu Nationalism and Buddhist Radicalism in Ladakh**

**O**ne day, I fear, like in Ayodhya, the lie will outlive the reality and this magic land of Buddha, where the mountains change colour every time the sun shifts—from green to orange to purple to suddenly blazing gold at midday—may become yet another political battlefield where religion will divide people, create dissonance, change cultures, rewrite history, falsify our past. In the name of truth, patriotism, faith.”

—Pritish Nandy<sup>1</sup>

ON JULY 1, 2002, a signboard outside the Jokhang Vihara in Leh bazaar announced a press conference to be held that afternoon at the headquarters of the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) in the same complex. There, the president of the LBA, Tsering Samphel, shared with a handful of local scribes his joy over the resolutions passed a day earlier in New Delhi by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) calling for the trifurcation of

1. Pritish Nandy, “Ladakh Is Too Innocent for Bloodshed,” Rediff on the Net, 9 November 2000.

the state of Jammu and Kashmir, granting statehood to Jammu and the Kashmir Valley, and Union Territory status to Ladakh. Tsering Samphel later explained to me that this was a very happy occasion indeed, as the LBA now had “support across the length and breadth of the country.” Soon after, the resolutions were dismissed by Union Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani, freshly elevated to deputy prime minister, as trifurcation of the state would weaken India’s case in the Kashmir dispute. The RSS responded by pledging its support to an agitation by the Jammu and Kashmir Nationalist Front, led by RSS supporters, soon after amalgamated in a movement called the Jammu State Mukti Morcha. A spokesman for the RSS was reported to have denied that support for trifurcation of the state was communal, insisting that it was necessary on the basis of geography and the injustice and discrimination of the people of Jammu and Ladakh.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the Kashmir issue, the non-Valley regions and populations rarely figure prominently in national awareness or public debates. Ladakhi representatives do not, as a rule, get invited to participate in discussions on the future of Kashmir; even the Hurriyat Conference has only recently sought to establish a dialogue with Ladakhi leaders.<sup>3</sup> Internationally, the Ladakh region is practically invisible, hardly ever earning more than a few lines in the many tomes dedicated to the Kashmir issue.<sup>4</sup> Although Ladakh is by far the largest constituent region of Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, totalling 59,246 square kilometers (58 percent of the territory), its population of almost 230,000 is a mere 2.31 percent.<sup>5</sup> With four assembly seats and one lone Lok Sabha seat, Ladakh hardly figures in electoral arithmetic. But Ladakh is also widely regarded as a relatively unproblematic region: the Kashmir militancy has barely affected the region directly, and its majority population of Tibetan Buddhists are widely regarded as inherently peaceful and patriotic. The fact that almost half the population of the region are Muslims does not generally find a place in Indian popular imagination, which sees

2. See, for example, “RSS to Press for Trifurcation” in *The Indian Express*, 5 July 2002, web edition.

3. The one exception to Kashmiri militant disinterest in Ladakh has been Shabir Shah, who has repeatedly visited Ladakh since his release from prison in 1995.

4. A notable recent exception is Navnita Chadha Behera’s interesting study, *State, Identity and Violence: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2000).

5. Data from the Census of India, 2001, web site: [www.censusindia.net](http://www.censusindia.net).

Ladakh predominantly as a quaint, colorful backdrop for adventure holidays, populated by maroon-robed lamas living in whitewashed monasteries perched on hilltops.

Since 1989, this image of Ladakh as Shangri-La has begun to crack, first by the launch of an agitation with strong communal overtones in which the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA) demanded secession from Kashmir and Union Territory status for Ladakh. The level of violence of this agitation was negligible by comparison with the bloodshed in the Kashmir Valley, and by 1993 negotiations between Center, State and the LBA had resulted in a reconciliation between Buddhist and Muslim organizations and concession of a Ladakh Hill Development Council for Leh district—although implementation only took place in 1996. Ladakh, as far as Indian public interest was concerned, lapsed back into its state of remote, strategic border region, the site of “routine exchanges of fire” along the Line of Control. In 1999, the Kargil conflict brought the region international attention. Bose may well be right that “the Kargil episode may yet go down as a bizarre if lengthy footnote in the history of the Kashmir conflict.”<sup>6</sup> But in Ladakh, the Kargil conflict has triggered a significant increase in the flow of central government funds and other benefits. It also has had important consequences for relations between Buddhists and Muslims, as well as between Ladakh and Kashmir, directly and because of the heightened attention for the region from Hindu nationalists. Political leaders and activists from both Leh and Kargil used the opportunity offered by the media attention to promote their demands for a greater share of development resources and more autonomy; in 2000 the LBA relaunched its agitation for Union Territory status for Ladakh.

There are significant parallels between the ways in which Kashmiri militants regard their relationship with India, and that in which many Ladakhis perceive theirs with Kashmir. Whereas Kashmiri secessionists consider India as an oppressive, colonial power, Ladakhi autonomy movement leaders look upon Kashmir as their colonizer; and just as Kashmir’s accession is regarded as illegitimate by radicals in the valley, Ladakhi representatives have repeatedly stated that their

6. Sumantra Bose, “Kashmir: Sources of Conflict, Dimensions of Peace,” *Survival* 41, no. 3, 149–71.

bonds with Kashmir are only those of having been ruled by the same Dogra maharajas, and hence that Ladakh should now be free;<sup>7</sup> Kashmir and Ladakh both claim the right to self-determination, although Ladakhi leaders have said that they have opted for accession to India; and while Kashmiri movements seek to free the region from India, Ladakhi movements have for decades sought to “Free Ladakh from Kashmir,” as stickers, posters and graffiti proclaimed in 1989. Most importantly, for the present discussion, in Kashmir as well as Ladakh, the language and practices of religious radicalism have come to play a significant role in the respective struggles, suggesting that at the heart of the matter in both cases lie fundamental incompatibilities of religious and cultural identity. As pointed out in many recent analyses of the Kashmiri struggle, religious radicals hijacked the movement in the 1992–93 period, and over time the local component among the militants and the local agenda of independence have been marginalized.<sup>8</sup> In the case of Ladakh, communalism was an important feature of the agitation for Union Territory status launched in 1989. This communalization was part of the Buddhist political elite’s strategy to gain the ear of the central government, although the movement and its aims historically had been anti-Kashmiri rather than anti-Muslim, and a common platform with the region’s Muslims was soon re-established after negotiations with the central government over the Ladakhi demand for autonomy began in earnest. However, since the rise to power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 1998, and particularly after the Kargil conflict and the resumption of the agitation for Union Territory status by the LBA, communal idioms have gained importance again. The question is, why religious radicalism and communalist idioms came to play such an important role in Ladakh, how this development can be understood in terms of both internal and exogenous factors, and what consequences this may have for peace and security in the region.

7. See, for example, the argument as presented in the “Memorandum submitted to the PM in 1949 by Chhewang Rigzin, President, Buddhist Association of Ladakh on behalf of the People of Ladakh,” *Hindu World* 41 (February 1949), 30–33.

8. See, for example, Behera, *State, Identity and Violence*; Sumantra Bose, *The Challenge in Kashmir: Democracy, Self-Determination and a Just Peace* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1997); Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Tavleen Singh, *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1996).

The case of Ladakh, despite or perhaps because of the region's supposed marginality to the Kashmir question as a whole, illuminates in multiple ways the causes and dynamics of religious radicalism in secessionist struggles in the subcontinent. First, as I have argued extensively elsewhere, the Ladakhi case shows, upon close examination of the historical and ethnographic record, that identitarian readings of the movement and its communalization—taking the religious communities as given and the claims of their representatives at face value—fail to capture the underlying causes of the conflict and do not provide a sufficient explanation for the communal form that the demand for secession has taken in the late 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Second, and relatedly, it is clear that local agency is crucially important for understanding the communalization of the movement for secession from Kashmir, but in itself must be placed in the broader context of the dynamics and idioms of Indian politics. As argued by Paul Brass, local villagers, or in this case Ladakhi Buddhists, should not be regarded as innocent victims of exogenous communalist forces.<sup>10</sup> Also in Ladakh, local political actors, as I will discuss in more detail below, have been actively fostering communalist representations of the Ladakhis' plight.<sup>11</sup> Local stereotypes and suspicions about other communities, including perceptions of the character and direction of the Indian political system, are shaped as well as recast and deployed in the pursuit of local political agendas. Hansen rightly notes that “communal consciousness and stereotypes are ... integrated parts of the social and political imaginary in many parts of India.”<sup>12</sup> The point is not that all Indian politics is communal, but that it is *perceived* in Ladakh to be rooted in communalism. The third necessary element of an analysis of the causes, dynamics, and consequences of religious radicalism must be the role of this broader context in which local politics plays out, and which it in turn informs.

9. See, for example, Martijn van Beek, “Beyond Identity Fetishism: ‘Communal’ Conflict in Ladakh and the Limits of Autonomy,” *Cultural Anthropology* 15, no. 4:525–69, and “Hill Councils, Development, and Democracy: Assumptions and Experiences from Ladakh,” *Alternatives* 24, no. 4:435–59.

10. Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

11. In this connection, the fear expressed by Pritish Nandy in the quotation at the beginning of this essay describes a situation already in existence in Ladakh.

12. Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 215.

The past decade has seen a dramatic change in the political landscape in India with the rise to power of the sangh parivar. The language of secularism may still be deployed by the BJP, but the political imaginary of Hindutva is obviously reshaping the conception of nationhood and belonging in India and is giving religion a new and more radical salience and legitimacy in the political field.<sup>13</sup> Ladakh's Buddhist political leadership has been quick to seize the opportunities it sees for promotion of its cause of Union Territory for Ladakh. Although the LBA strongly condemned the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and expressed its solidarity with the Muslims of the country, it has over the past three years actively sought to improve its links with the RSS and VHP, culminating for the time being in the resolutions passed by these organizations at their national conventions in 2002. As I will argue in the following, it would be a mistake to regard this cozy relationship as expressive of an uncritical and unbridled enthusiasm on the part of the Buddhists in Leh for the cause of Hindutva. Rather, as has been the case with the playing of the communal card in 1989, the LBA believes it can use the sangh parivar to keep pressure on the Center for its demands, while at the same time avoiding being swallowed up by the Hindu nationalists. As I will argue below, Ladakhi Buddhist fears of Islamic radicalism—and more generally of being outnumbered by Muslims—are paralleled by similar fears of being overrun by Hindus from the plains.<sup>14</sup>

Ladakhis, including the population of Shi'ite-dominated Kargil district, are struggling for a better life, economic prosperity, and greater political control over their affairs. They fear being marginalized even further, whether under Kashmiri or Indian administration. The alliance with radical forces in India, or, as in the case of Kargil, in Iran, must also be seen in this light, as a strategic and defensive response to perceived threats to local interests. Religious radicalism in the region is not, as I have already indicated, a strictly exogenous phenomenon, but the external dimension is crucial

13. Excellent accounts of the rise of the BJP and the communalization of Indian politics can be found in Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in Indian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and in Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*.

14. The example of the Buddhist regions of Himachal Pradesh, where local Buddhists take additional Hindu names, where the economy is increasingly dominated by Hindus, and where Buddhism is thought to be in serious decline, is frequently cited as the *other* danger facing Ladakh.

to its evolution and emanations. The use of communalist strategies has obvious dangers for local peace and stability, as well as for the region as a whole, first and most obviously because of the specter of rising local religious radicalism. As I will discuss in the following, the increasingly communal rhetoric of the LBA comes at a time when signals are emerging from Kargil that political leaders and community organizations there are considering to join the demand for Union Territory.<sup>15</sup> This rapprochement from the side of the Shi'ite majority in Kargil is jeopardized by the radicalization of the LBA's rhetoric and alliances. Beyond such immediate local political-strategic concerns, the alignment of the LBA with radical Hindutva forces is regarded by some as dangerous, because Kashmir and Ladakh are pawns in the political games of more powerful religious radicals based beyond the region. To the extent that the Ladakhi movement is seen as a struggle for cultural survival, subsumption by the Hindu nationalists, it is feared, might well subject Ladakh's Buddhists to the fate of their co-religionists on the southern slopes of the Himalaya.

Before discussing in more detail the recent rise of Hindutva forces in Ladakh and their relationship with local political actors and organizations, it is necessary to go back in time briefly in order to appreciate the extent to which radical religious movements from other parts of the subcontinent have shaped political mobilization in Ladakh.

## Organizing the Buddhists

THE LATE NINETEENTH and early twentieth century saw the emergence of a host of religious community and caste-based reform movements throughout the Indian subcontinent. Jammu and Kashmir were no exception: in Jammu, the Dogra Sabha for Hindus was formed as early as 1903, the Anjuman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam in Srinagar was founded in 1905, and the Yuvak Sabha seeking to

15. In the summer of 2002, the two major rival factions on the Kargil scene, the Islamiya Public School faction and the Imam Khomeini Memorial Trust (KMT), buried their differences and withdrew their support from the National Conference, supporting an independent candidate for the Assembly elections instead. There appears to have emerged consensus for a more forceful pursuit of regional interests, including the establishment of a hill development council for Kargil and a "regional council" for Ladakh as a whole. The KMT continues to reject the Leh demand for Union Territory status.

promote the interests of the Hindu (“Pandit”) community in the valley in 1915.<sup>16</sup>

The 1920s and early 1930s were characterized by growing resistance to the rule of the Hindu Maharaja, and in the wake of violent clashes in 1931, the British government in India instituted a commission of inquiry into the grievances and complaints of the different communities of the state. It was in this connection that the first organization purporting to represent the interests of the Buddhist community of the state was formed, the Kashmir Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha (KRBMS). “Those were the days of political upheaval in the Kashmir State. The Sabha, therefore, had to devote its attention and energy to the cause of the forty thousand helpless and downtrodden Buddhists of Ladakh whose case in the general scramble for percentages, would otherwise have gone by default.”<sup>17</sup> The KRBMS was not a Ladakhi organization, but the creation of a handful of neo-Buddhist Pandits based in Srinagar who had secured the sole right to representation of the Buddhists of the state from Ladakh’s foremost religious leader at the time, Skushok Stagtsang Raspa of Hemis monastery.<sup>18</sup> Soon after, in 1933, the first local Buddhist organization, the Ladakh Buddhist Education Society (LBES), was formed with the direct involvement from the well-known writer-activist Rahula Sankrtyayana, who visited the region in 1926 and 1933 in the context of his work for the Arya Samaj.<sup>19</sup> Already during his first visit he had discussed with prominent religious leaders, including Stagtsang Raspa and Sras Rinpoche of Ridzong monastery, the dangers of growing numbers of Muslims and the low birth rate among Buddhists due to monasticism and polyandry. The LBES was dissolved in 1938 and

16. See, for example, Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy. 1846–1990* (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Aparna Rao, “A Tortuous Search for Justice: Notes on the Kashmir Conflict,” *Himalayan Research Bulletin* 15, no. 1: 9–20.

17. KRBMS, *Triennial Report of the Kashmir Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha* (Srinagar: Kashmir Raj Bodhi Maha Sabha, 1935), 4.

18. For details about the KRBMS and the role of Kashmiri Pandits in the early organization of Ladakh’s Buddhists, see Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen, “Protestant Buddhism and Social Identification in Ladakh,” *Archives de Sciences sociales des Religions* 99 (juillet-septembre), 129–51.

19. See Martijn van Beek, “Rahul Sankrtyayana and Early Buddhist Organisation in Ladakh,” *Ladakh Studies* 16:23–27 for a more detailed discussion. Sankrtyayana’s own accounts of his visits to Ladakh were published in Rahula Sankrtyayana, *Meri ladakh yatra* (Ilahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1939); *Meri jivan-yatra*, vol. 1 (Ilahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1950); *Meri jivan-yatra* 2 (Kolkata: Adhuniya Pustak Bhavan, 1951); and *Yatra ke panne* (Dehradun: Sahitya Sadana, 1952).

replaced by the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA), which again had strong involvement of Kashmiri Pandits, at least in the years until independence. From the start, then, modern Ladakhi Buddhist activism was strongly informed by outsiders and their understanding of the Indian political system, as well as what they thought was good for the Ladakhi Buddhists.

### **A Separate Nation by All the Tests: The Struggle for Autonomy**

PARTITION AND THE TUMULTUOUS disputed accession of Jammu and Kashmir to the Indian union changed the focus of the Ladakh Buddhist Association, as the YMBA renamed itself, from a concern with improvement of the fate of the Buddhists within the state through the promotion of education and the combating of social evils, to asserting the right to self-determination and the need for secession of Ladakh from Jammu and Kashmir State. Ladakh, it was argued, was “a separate nation by all the tests—race, language, religion, and culture determining nationality.”<sup>20</sup> From a Ladakhi perspective, the shift from Dogra rule to Kashmiri Muslim rule meant merely the exchange of one discriminatory regime with another. Although communal tension and violence in other parts of the subcontinent did have some impact on Muslim-Buddhist relations in Ladakh, there was no sustained or widespread breakdown of communal amity in Leh or Kargil.<sup>21</sup>

At least during the first two decades after Independence, linking the demands for autonomy in Jammu and Ladakh appears to have been part of the strategy of Hindu activists in Jammu rather than of the Buddhists of Ladakh. In Jammu in 1952, growing dissatisfaction with the alleged pro-Kashmiri policies of Sheikh Abdullah led to an agitation against Muslim dominance

20. “Memorandum submitted by Kalon Tsewang Rigzin, President, YMBA, in July 1949 to Jawaharlal Nehru,” reproduced e.g., in Bal Raj Madhok, *Kashmir: Center of New Alignments* (New Delhi: Deepak Prakashan, 1963) and Behera, *State, Identity and Violence*.

21. There is disagreement among local scholars and witnesses over whether the Muslims wholeheartedly joined the efforts to defend Ladakh against the raiders, or whether they at least initially refused to join the Home Guard raised by Kalon Tsewang Rigzin and others, as asserted e.g., by Shridhar Kaul and H. N. Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages: Towards a New Identity* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1992), 71–72, 170–72.

spearheaded by the Praja Parishad and drawing support from the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, the Hindu Mahasabha, the Ram Rajya Parishad and others.<sup>22</sup> The Praja Parishad made explicit reference to the Ladakhi Buddhists in formulating their grievances against Muslim dominance, although its agenda for complete amalgamation of Jammu and Kashmir with the Indian Union was not shared by Ladakhi Buddhist leaders, who have always preferred direct rule from Delhi and secession from Kashmir.<sup>23</sup> Ladakh's political scene at this time was dominated by Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, the leading cleric of the Gelugpa sect of Tibetan Buddhism in Ladakh, who was made a cabinet minister in the Bakshi government in 1957. The Bakshi regime gave concessions to Ladakhi and Jammu demands, while at the same time deftly sabotaging the emergence of organized regional opposition to his regime in Jammu.

In 1962, when elections were held for the first time in Ladakh, local opposition against Bakula Rinpoche emerged, including both Buddhists and Muslims, and demanding a more forceful approach to promote Ladakhi demands. A key demand was the introduction of central administration along the lines of the system applied to the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). In fact, Ladakh did indeed come under central administration for a brief period in the wake of the Sino-Indian war of 1962, but this was withdrawn soon after G.M. Sadiq took over the reins of power in 1964. This in turn triggered resistance in Ladakh. Sadiq partly coopted Ladakh's leadership and simultaneously sought to split Ladakhi Buddhist unity by supporting Sonam Norbu and Khanpo Rinpoche of Thikse monastery against Bakula Rinpoche and his followers.<sup>24</sup> This faction was known as Congress "B" in Ladakh and included many prominent Muslims as well as Buddhists, which illustrates once more the impossibility of reducing Ladakhi politics at this time to a contest between monolithic

22. Behera, *State, Identity and Violence*, 85.

23. The Ladakhi Muslim leaders' views at this time are difficult to ascertain. At this time, of course, Ladakh was a unified district with a slight Buddhist majority population.

24. The split between Thikse and Bakula reflected a number of different pre-existing faultlines both within and across religious communities in Ladakh. Sadiq apparently successfully exploited these fissures, rather than creating them. See also Behera, *State, Identity and Violence*, 119–20. The intricacies of factionalism in Ladakh are discussed in more detail in van Beek, "Beyond Identity Fetishism."

religious communities.<sup>25</sup> Bakula and his followers launched a campaign for NEFA-type administration to be restored, but to no avail.

In 1969, however, a prolonged agitation with decidedly communal overtones broke out in Ladakh, demanding NEFA-type administration as well as a host of other concessions.<sup>26</sup> The agitation faded quickly after Bakula Rinpoche and his right-hand man Sonam Wangyal accepted minor concessions from Sadiq, while most major demands remained unfulfilled. The agitation and the alleged sell-out by Bakula Rinpoche to the Kashmir government caused a further deepening of the rifts in the Buddhist community, while the communal idiom of the agitation eroded the possibilities for a united Ladakhi movement for autonomy at this time.

### **The Normalization of Communalism**

THE COMMUNALIZATION of the 1969 agitation is regarded by some contemporaries as a manipulation by Bakula Rinpoche and Sonam Wangyal, but the playing of the communal card was also part of the standard repertoire of Kashmiri and Indian politics, and increasingly significant. Sheikh Abdullah, albeit advocating a staunchly secularist political agenda, was well known for citing the Quran in his public speeches, preferably delivered from the Hazratbal mosque. As suggested by Behera, G.M. Sadiq had let the Jan Sangh develop in Jammu, as they were expected to be less of a threat than a regional party on non-communal lines.<sup>27</sup> The Congress, when it came to power with Mir Qasim, allowed the Jamaat-i-Islami to solidify its base in the valley while the Jan Sangh continued to develop in Jammu, so that the Congress could present itself as the guardian of the interests of the minorities. Sheikh Abdullah, after his return to power, pitched his vision for the future in terms of a Greater Kashmir, claiming Muslim-majority Doda and Kargil district (carved out of Ladakh

25. See also B. L. Kak, *Chasing Shadows in Ladakh* (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1978) and Kaul and Kaul, *Ladakh Through the Ages*, for discussions of Ladakhi politics in the 1960s.

26. These included, among others, the settlement of Tibetan refugees who had entered the region in the wake of China's occupation of Tibet, the recognition of the "bodhi" language, establishment of a degree college, and representation of Buddhists in the government.

27. Behera, *State, Identity and Violence*.

district in 1979) as part of this Kashmir, which shared nothing but religion. By the late 1970s, the political process in the state, as in other parts of India, had become thoroughly communalized.<sup>28</sup>

Despite this process of communalization, the LBA generally kept its distance from Hindu nationalist forces in Jammu, although it did accept and welcome expressions of support from that side. During the 1967 and 1969 agitations, the Jan Sangh had expressed its support for Ladakhi demands, and also in 1981, when the demand for Union Territory was raised, Hindu nationalist forces expressed their support for the Ladakhi cause. However, it was not until the agitations of the late 1980s that the LBA was in more regular contact with national outfits such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party. This was partly the result of a conscious choice by a new generation of LBA leaders to play the communal card in the struggle for Union Territory for Ladakh. The new leadership had strong roots in the Congress party, and had become convinced that communalism was necessary to get the attention of the national government. Having watched agitation after agitation fail because of the cooptation of leaders and the splitting of the Ladakhi front, these younger leaders, most of whom had been educated at prestigious institutions in India, decided a more forceful approach was necessary to create a sustained movement. A more active relationship with Hindu nationalist forces was an element of this new approach.

In 1988, the alleged abduction of fifty Buddhist children from Ladakh, who had been taken to Srinagar by Christian missionaries, made national headlines and drew expressions of support from the Arya Samaj and the VHP, including demonstrations by “hundreds of activists” in Delhi.<sup>29</sup> In September 1989, the BJP Central Office in New Delhi sent a delegation led by Ashwini Kumar and Chaman Lal Gupta to Leh to carry out an on-the-spot investigation of the causes

28. A well-informed journalist's indictment of the political establishment's mishandling of Kashmir and the communalization of its politics is Tavleen Singh's *Kashmir: A Tragedy of Errors*.

29. Press release dated 22 June 1968, Indraprastha Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Delhi. It is worth noting that a considerable number of the explosions recorded in Jammu and Kashmir in 1988 took place in Ladakh as part of the anti-Christian agitation. According to Home Ministry statistics for January 1988 to June 1993, a total of 184 violent incidents resulting in four deaths were recorded for Leh district. See Robert G. Wirsing, *India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On Regional Conflict and Its Resolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 128–31.

of the agitation that had begun in July that year and which in August had led to the death of three people in police firing.<sup>30</sup> Later, the BJP repeatedly wrote to the prime minister, Narasimha Rao, to press for the Ladakhi demand, and members of the BJP asked questions in parliament on behalf of the Ladakhis. In March 1990, a national convention on the Ladakh issue was held in Delhi, with leading BJP members such as Ashwini Kumar on the organizing committee. In August 1990, a delegation from the LBA participated for the first time in a BJP convention at Jammu. At a Jammu press conference concluding the meetings, BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee expressed his support for Union Territory for Ladakh.<sup>31</sup> Hari Om, in a lengthy report on the conference, described the Ladakhi participation as “historic,” as also Kashmiri Pandits expressed their “unstinted and unqualified support” for the cause of Jammu and Ladakh.<sup>32</sup> Thupstan Chhewang, then president of the LBA, was quoted as saying: “For 43 years the people of Jammu and Ladakh have been denied their constitutional rights. We have been struggling for justice, but separately. Let us unite, for our sufferings are common.” But despite these professions of solidarity and cooperation, the LBA leadership let the relationship with the Hindu nationalists lapse into near-oblivion, not responding to invitations from the Jammu Mahasabha for a joint platform and from the BJP general secretary to participate in the BJP’s All-India session in February 1991. The LBA did, however, send a telegram congratulating Advani and Vajpayee on their success in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, expressing the LBA’s conviction that the “nation will emerge stronger and Ladakh will receive special attention under your leadership.”<sup>33</sup>

30. Their report, dated 19 September 1989, limits itself largely to listing the various grievances and demands of the LBA, as well as an overview of previous agitations since 1969. It mentions the arrest of four Buddhist boys in 1988 for “terrorist activity” but does not mention the campaign against the Christians, which included attacks with explosives on Christian-owned buildings and vehicles. For concise discussions of the 1989 agitation and its background, see John Bray, “Ladakhi History and Indian Nationhood,” *South Asia Research* 11, no. 2:115–33, and Martijn van Beek and Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen, “Ladakh: ‘Independence’ Is Not Enough,” *Himal* 8, no. 2 (March/April), 7–15.

31. *Daily Excelsior*, 2 September 1990, 1.

32. Hari Om, “Jammu and Ladakh: BJP–LBA Unity, I,” *Daily Excelsior*, 16 September 1990, 10.

33. Quoted from a carbon copy of the original undated telegram kept in the LBA archives in Leh.

The sudden decline in the LBA's and Buddhist leaders' interest in openly sharing the dais with Hindu nationalist forces can be explained by two related developments. First, the central government had made it clear at an early stage of negotiations for a Hill Council for Ladakh, which began in January 1990, that such a concession could not be made unless there was a united (i.e., non-communal) demand for such an arrangement. In view of this pressure, the LBA lifted at the end of 1992 the "social boycott" that it had imposed on the entire Muslim population of the region in 1989, and a joint "Coordination Committee" was formed with representatives from the Buddhist, Shia and Sunni, and Christian communities. Clearly, this made it difficult to simultaneously pursue a communalist alliance with the forces of Hindutva. Especially after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, which had been condemned swiftly by the LBA, overt alliances with BJP and VHP were out of the question. Secondly, negotiations with the Center, especially after the return to power of the Congress (I) under the prime ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao, suggested that the Hill Council would be granted in a matter of months, so that the need for opposition pressure on the government became less important. The Congress, despite its role in fueling the flames of communalism in Jammu and Kashmir, continued to have a public image in Ladakh of secularism and pro-minority stances. Most of Ladakh's political leaders were or had been Congress members, and eventually the Congress won all thirty elected seats on the Hill Council when it was finally formed in 1995.

Although it would be an exaggeration to suggest that relations between Buddhists and Muslims were cordial by the mid-1990s, there seemed to be little political mileage to be gained at this time from national alliances with the sangh parivar. At the local level, however, relations between Buddhists and Muslims remained tense, as symbolized by a "loudspeaker war" between the Sunni mosque and the Buddhist Chokhang Vihara, on opposite sides of the main bazaar of Leh.<sup>34</sup> But while there was little immediate interest from the Buddhist radicals' side in maintaining or reviving contacts with the

34. From 1996 until 1999, every time the call for prayer would sound from the mosque, the LBA switched on a tape with religious chants or songs. The practice was in retaliation for the fact that several local mosques in the suburbs and villages around Leh had installed loudspeakers.

Hindu nationalists, there was growing interest from the latter in developments in Ladakh.

Local political processes and strategic considerations of Buddhist and Muslim leaders in Ladakh played a major part in the evolution of communal politics in the region, but this development was informed to a considerable degree by the broader national political context. Arguably, national developments have played a still more significant part in shaping relations between Buddhist radicals and Hindu nationalist forces more recently. Especially since 1997, the sangh parivar has taken a more active interest in Ladakh. This interest has resulted in two major RSS initiatives in Ladakh: the Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan and the Ladakh Kalyan Sangh.

### *Sindhu hai ji!* The RSS Discovers Ladakh

IN OCTOBER 1997, the first Sindhu Darshan took place, a pilgrimage to the river Indus in Ladakh. The initiative for the event had been taken by Lal Krishna Advani, then president of the BJP, together with Tarun Vijay, the editor of the RSS weekly *Panchjanya*. During an election campaign visit to Ladakh in 1996, after the end of president's rule in Kashmir, they had stayed in a government guest house near the river in Choglamsar and had "discovered" that "it was our Sindhu *Ma*, the same Sindhu which is our identity [...] from which we derive Hindu-Hindustani-India," as the Sindhu Darshan information materials proclaim.<sup>35</sup> The idea for a *yatra* was developed with the assistance of then BJP president L.K. Advani, Indresh Kumar and other RSS leaders. The first Sindhu Darshan did not have any central government participation, but Advani, Jammu and Kashmir Chief

35. Quotes from Tarun Vijay (1997), "Mother Sindhu, We Have Not Forgotten You!" (<http://delhi.vsnl.net.in/sindhu/tv-leh.htm>), downloaded 28 May 2002. There is a historical precedent for the insight that the Indus flows through Ladakh. Karan Singh, son of the last Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, wrote in his autobiography about his trip to Leh and Kargil with Nehru and Indira in 1949: "From Leh we flew to Kargil, the second town in Ladakh and the center of the area inhabited by Shia Muslims. The Ceasefire Line passed very close to Kargil, and the army was more in evidence. The brigade headquarters where we stayed were situated on the banks of the Indus. It struck me as curious that although the very name of our country and its predominant religion are derived from the Indus, the only place where this great river now flows through Indian territory is Ladakh." Karan Singh, *Heir Apparent: An Autobiography* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 140. Actually, the *Yuvraj* was mistaken: Kargil lies on the banks of the river Suru, a tributary of the Indus.

Minister Farooq Abdullah and Ladakh Hill Council Chief Executive Councillor Thupstan Chhewang attended, together with several other national and local dignitaries and a handful of ordinary *yatris*. The event received some coverage in the national media, but not much notice was taken, despite the fact that the organizers tried to pitch it as part of the celebrations marking fifty years of independence.

The breakthrough for the Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan came in 1999 with the rise to power of the BJP and especially because of the Kargil conflict, the incursions across the Line of Control in Ladakh that triggered fierce clashes between India and Pakistan. Sindhu Darshan took place after the end of hostilities and became an orgy of nationalist fervor. A stamp was even issued to commemorate Sindhu Darshan, showing a drawing of the Indus in the Ladakhi landscape with an impression of the *vishabha* and accompanied by a saying from the Rig Veda.<sup>36</sup> By the next year, responsibility for the organization had been taken over by the central government and the prime minister himself attended, further cementing the event as a national one. Pitched as a “celebration of national unity and communal harmony” and “a movement to honour brave jawans,” Sindhu Darshan is now held annually on June 1–3, and the Department of Tourism promotes the event through its website and special brochure, while government-owned Ashok Travels offers package tours.<sup>37</sup> In 2002 the proceedings were broadcast live on Doordarshan and forty-five non-resident Indians from twelve different countries were reported to have participated and to have donated money for the construction of a sprawling Sindhu Cultural Center near Leh.<sup>38</sup>

The general public in Leh is at best skeptical of the Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan. In the early years, the event took place largely in

36. The secretary of the Philatelic Association was quoted as saying: “The multi-theme stamp is of interest to varied categories of collectors. The seal will interest archaeologists, it will hold appeal for students of geography or collectors of landscapes for the gorgeous Ladakhi landscape, river, mountains. The saying from the Rig Veda has added appeal.” Sushma Chadha, “Philately,” *The Financial Express*, 15 August 1999, web edition.

37. The official India tourism website for Sindhu Darshan is [www.sindhudarshanindia.com](http://www.sindhudarshanindia.com). The earlier RSS sites are [www.sindudarshan.com](http://www.sindudarshan.com) and [delhi/vsnl.net.in/sindhu](http://delhi/vsnl.net.in/sindhu). In 2001, Sindhu Darshan got a counterpart in the northeast of the country with the first Brahmaputra Darshan, held in Arunachal Pradesh. Brahmaputra Darshan is organized and promoted by the district administration of East Siang. See <http://www.esiang.com/bdarshan.htm>.

38. See PTI reports, 1–3 June 2002.

isolation from the local society and economy, as yatris were given accommodation and food by the army and spent hardly a single paisa locally. In 1999, tremendous animosity was caused by the requisitioning of seats for the yatris on Indian Airlines flights out of Leh after flights had been canceled for a week due to bad weather, leaving large numbers of locals stranded.<sup>39</sup> Some conservative Buddhists object to the construction of the *ghat* at Shey Manla, close to a site with ancient Buddhist rock carvings and practically next door to the Dalai Lama's summer residence (and opposite the new masjid of Chushot on the other side of the river). Expansion plans of the Sindhu Darshan organization are viewed with suspicion, particularly as Tarun Vijay and LAHDC Chief Executive Councillor Thupstan Chhewang in 2002 flew by helicopter to visit a cave in the mountains south of Leh, where a natural *Shivlingam* is found. There is some concern among the local population that this process of discovery and appropriation of pilgrimage sites will turn Ladakh into another Lahul—a Buddhist region where the local religion is gradually marginalized by Hinduism and where locals have adopted Hindu names in addition to their Buddhist ones.<sup>40</sup> The actual proceedings of Sindhu Darshan attract few locals other than political and community leaders and those who have to perform in the cultural and religious program; even concerts by famous musicians on Leh's pologround do not bring out the crowds. The ritual of Sindhu Darshan, a puja on the banks of the river, has no parallel in local Buddhist tradition, and the speeches of politicians do not hold much attraction. Despite the relatively good

39. See also the report by Praveen Swami, "The Other Victims of Kargil," *Frontline* 16, no. 1 (3–16 July 1999), web edition.

40. The site is in fact visited from time to time by local Buddhists. The "conversion" of religious sites is not a new phenomenon, of course. Recent examples include the establishment of *pattar sahib* gurdwara near Leh, where an impression believed to have been left on a rock by sixth-century saint Padmasambhava, commonly referred to as Guru Rinpoche by Tibetan Buddhists, was recognized by the Sikh community as an impression of Guru Nanakji. The site was converted with permission from Bakula Rinpoche. See David L. Snellgrove and Taddeusz Skorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh, Vol. 2: Zangskar and the Cave Temples of Ladakh* (Delhi: Vikas Publishers, 1980), 76–77. In 2001, the Sikhs purchased a sacred tree just behind the mosque in Leh, fencing it in and proclaiming the tree to have sprouted from the toothpick dropped on this spot by Guru Nanak, who is identified on a sign here as "Guru Nanak Rinpoche Lamaji." The tree had been owned by one of Leh's most prominent Buddhist families.

accessibility of the site in Shey, only a few hundred locals bother to attend.<sup>41</sup>

Politicians and tourism operators—and more than a few people are both—see Sindhu Darshan as a great instrument for promotion of Ladakhi interests and of Ladakh as a tourist destination. Numbers of domestic tourists visiting Ladakh had dropped dramatically as a result of the civil war in Kashmir and the agitation for Union Territory in Ladakh. The Kargil war and Sindhu Darshan gave a tremendous amount of national television coverage to Ladakh, and numbers of domestic tourists have more than doubled since 1999.<sup>42</sup> As a Ladakhi tourism operator put it, “Indians will never come unless there is also some religious attraction here.” Politically, too, Sindhu Darshan is regarded as a boon. The *Daily Excelsior* newspaper from Jammu wrote—somewhat clumsily but accurately—in an editorial, “never before there has been so much convergence of Indian polity in Leh during the Sindhu Darshan or on any other occasion.”<sup>43</sup>

The annual Sindhu Darshan constitutes an important opportunity for Ladakhi political leaders to bring their grievances and demands to the attention of national political leaders and media. In 2002, a joint Ladakhi statement in support of Sindhu Darshan was published, signed among others by representatives of the Shia, Sunni, Hindu, Sikh and Christian communities, the merchants’ and travel agent associations, as well as the presidents of the local branches of the Indian National Congress, the National Conference, and the BJP.<sup>44</sup> In the statement, the “enthusiastic participation in the festival by the people of Ladakh” was noted together with the “deep seethed [sic] patriotism inherent in each Ladakhi who have proudly sacrificed their many sons in the defence of the nation.” These official expressions

41. The disdain of locals for Sindhu Darshan was graphically expressed by the Ladakhi dance group that performed in 2001. Immediately after their performance they left the grounds and went home, while the other performers, from Arunachal, Himachal Pradesh, and Kashmir, remained and eagerly availed themselves of the photo opportunity with Advani, Farooq Abdullah and other dignitaries at the conclusion of the festivities. Shots with famous Bollywood actor Amrish Puri appeared to be most sought after.

42. The organization itself claims a four-fold increase, but this is based on the unusually low number of domestic tourists that visited the region in 1999.

43. “Editorial,” *Daily Excelsior*, 9 June 2000, web edition.

44. The statement was printed, published, and distributed in press kits by the Department of Tourism, Ministry of Tourism & Culture, Government of India, and included the names, organizations, titles, and telephone numbers of the signatories.

of enthusiasm, however, are often qualified considerably in private conversations, when not only Muslim but also Buddhist leaders express concerns. Despite the official de-saffronization of Sindhu Darshan through the emphasis on national unity, communal amity, and the promotion of Ladakh as a tourist destination, its RSS antecedents and Hindu-Hindustan-Hindutva character remain uncomfortable for Buddhist and Muslim Ladakhis alike.

### Serving the People

SINDHU DARSHAN WAS BUT ONE, albeit very high-profile, dimension of the RSS strategy to establish a stronger presence for itself in Ladakh. Little known to large sections of the general public in Ladakh, a second important initiative has been the establishment of a local non-governmental organization called the Ladakh Kalyan Sangh in Hindi and Ladags Pandey Tshogspa in Ladakhi. This organization, formally started in 1995, though not really active until 1997, is a “classical” RSS outfit dedicated to “*seva ... sanskar ... ekta*,” as one of its brochures states.<sup>45</sup> The Ladakh Kalyan Sangh is staffed by three young volunteers in Leh: two Ladakhis (one of whom is a monk) and a young man from Manali, who has been in charge since March 2002. The parent organizations of the LKS are Vidya Bharati and Seva Bharati, and operations in Leh are overseen from Jammu. Its main activity is social work and education, especially targeting children from poor families.

In addition to sewing and typing classes, the Pandey Tshogspa has thus far established thirteen *sanskar kendra* or “coaching centers,” including two in Shergol Block of Kargil district, the “frontline” between Buddhist and Muslim majority regions. In the coaching centers, children are provided some instruction in academic subjects; “moral education,” cultural activities, daily prayers and physical education are also part of the curriculum. Each coaching center has one teacher, who attends an initial three-day workshop at the organization’s offices in Leh, while by the summer of 2002 seven teachers had been sent for six-month teacher training courses in Delhi. The LKS also engages in what it refers to as “student development,” and has

45. Like the early Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan, it too appropriated the logo of the fifty years celebrations, printed on its official information material.

recruited sixty-five students from villages throughout Ladakh—apparently including some Muslims—who have been sent to hostels in Delhi, Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh run by Vidya Bharati. In addition to its village-based education activities, the LKS has also organized seminars in Leh, including one on “The Role of Vedic Religion and Buddhism for the Unity of the Country,” or “Hindutva” as a Sangh volunteer pointed out helpfully. In these seminars, local scholars as well as local political leaders have participated.

As the leader of the LKS confided, having explained the organization’s structure and its activities, “this organization is really run by the RSS. We are here to stop the Muslims.” According to him, Ladakh is a high-priority area for the national organization and “we get anything we ask for.” In addition to imparting education in academic subjects and “hindutva,” he said the organization tried to support Ladakhi Buddhists living in or close to Muslim majority areas. Hinduism and Buddhism, my interlocutor explained, were the same religion really, although he admitted to some difficulty in convincing some local people about this. “But we are making progress.” The presence of posters of the Ayatollah Khomeini and other Shi’ite clerics in Kargil, he said, showed that it was impossible to trust “these people,” and this had been confirmed by the “Turtok incident” in 1999. At the time, twenty-four local Muslim youths had been arrested after illegal weapons had been discovered in the village, which is right near the Line of Control and had been part of Pakistan until 1974.<sup>46</sup> He added that the Khomeini Memorial Trust in Kargil recruited Muslim youths and took them away. “I suspect they take them to madrassas,” he added.

Education is a major concern for parents in Ladakh, particularly as the performance of government schools is abysmally poor—more than 90 percent of students fail the matriculation exam that gives

46. In fact, all the accused were acquitted in 2001. The case against them turned out to be fabricated by the police and fell apart in the Sessions Court. The men had, however, spent two years in the Leh Central Jail, apparently killing time playing volleyball. Upon their release, they participated in and won a local tournament, beating all competitors with ease. The real culprit(s) who had brought in weapons were never identified. Those arrested were mostly people who had actually led the police to the arms cache. While the original case received a lot of coverage in the national media and was exploited to the fullest by the LBA and others, the acquittals were not even announced on local radio. Two of the accused had been police officers and were reinstated after their release from jail.

access to higher education. The only alternative, private school, is beyond the means of many rural families. Any organization that offers free coaching or education in boarding schools in India or Leh is likely to find many takers in Ladakh—some evangelist Christian mission schools recruit students in Ladakh today, the backlash of 1988 apparently forgotten. So far, few people appear concerned over the activities of the LKS/RSS in Ladakh. A Muslim leader told me that the RSS would not affect his community much, but he did expect that they would have a major impact on the Buddhists, because, as he put it, “they have a weak conception of religion.” According to him, the RSS “will change the mindset of the Buddhists.”

### **Dangerous Liaisons: Toward Brotherhood in Saffron?**

AS EXEMPLIFIED by the Sindhu Darshan Abhiyan and the Ladakh Kalyan Sangh, Hindu nationalists have taken a greater interest and adopted a more active role in Ladakh, especially since the Kargil war. As already pointed out by Wirsing, Kashmir has succeeded Ayodhya as an attractive cause for the sangh parivar, allowing it to pursue a Hindu nationalist agenda in the name of national unity and patriotism.<sup>47</sup> The Akhil Bharati Vidhyarti Parishad’s march on Lal Chowk and Murli Manohar Joshi’s *Eka yatra* sought to do just that already in the early 1990s. Most significantly, and in a clear departure from the past, the LBA now openly and actively associates itself with the VHP, RSS, and Panun Kashmir, not merely accepting their expressions of support, but actually joining a common platform with them for trifurcation—or quadrifurcation, really, if one includes the demand for Panun Kashmir. The question is how we should understand this move, and what its consequences might be for a peaceful and durable settlement of Ladakhi demands, which in turn must be part of any settlement of the Kashmir issue as a whole.

There are several ways in which the saffronization of the LBA might be interpreted. First, it is clear that the LBA is seeking to put pressure on the central government. During the 1989 agitation, with the Congress in power, it could do so quite simply by adopting simultaneously the language of patriotism and communalism. The eruption

47. Wirsing, *India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute*, 165 ff.

of armed struggle in the valley allowed the LBA to stress the Buddhists' patriotic credentials while simultaneously denouncing the Kashmiris and by extension Muslims in Ladakh as secessionists who could not be trusted. The LBA could maintain that it was not communal, but that "Ladakh's unique identity"—Buddhist, to be sure—was threatened by these others, who were "real" communalists. Playing the national media and politicians with great skill, Leh quickly managed to obtain significant concessions, although realization of the Hill Council would take another six years of struggle. In 1989, with the Congress on the defensive and in need of relative stability in Ladakh—if only to be able to maintain that the Kashmir problem was limited to the valley—the BJP could be used by traditional Congress stronghold Leh to put pressure on the Center. With the BJP at the helm at the Center, pressure has to be exerted in a different way. On the one hand, until August 2002, the Ladakh Hill Development Council was firmly controlled by the Congress party, although the Lok Sabha seat for Ladakh remains in the hands of Hassan Khan, a Kargili member of the National Conference—a National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partner. The district Congress organization had remained officially secular, seeking to use the national Congress to exert pressure on the NDA, while the LBA—once dubbed a Congress front organization by the NC—can follow a harder "Hindutva" line. Given the Ladakhi Buddhist leadership's track record in political strategy, it is quite possible that the hardening of the LBA's communal stance should be seen as "merely" strategic, as part of a two-pronged approach—a kind of political good cop/bad cop routine.

There continue to be warm relationships between the LBA and other Buddhist politicians.<sup>48</sup> So far no Buddhist leader has publicly questioned the LBA's alliance with Panun Kashmir, RSS and VHP, although LUTF leaders have insisted that their own campaign for trifurcation has a non-communal basis. And while the current LBA president repeatedly has denied the possibility of the imposition of another social boycott on the Muslim community in Ladakh, his rhetoric has become more saffronized, and he does not hesitate to speak disparagingly of a "fashion of secularism." During the Kargil

48. It is worth noting that the LBA president, Tsering Samphel, is a former MLA and district president of the Congress. He has been in the forefront of the fight for autonomy since the 1960s.

conflict, the LBA Youth Wing demanded that refugees from Kargil be sent back, as they could not be trusted. In July 1999, the Congress president made some remarks about the Quran that were regarded as blasphemous by the Muslim community, and a few days later three monks were shot dead by Kashmiri militants at a roadblock at Rangdum. According to the LBA, this was a “retaliatory killing” and an attempt of the militants to spread unrest to Ladakh, although indications suggest that it was probably an unfortunate coincidence, rather than a pre-planned attack, which led to the murders.<sup>49</sup>

Ever since the Kargil conflict, the LBA has repeatedly denounced the government’s “pampering” of Muslims. The army, funded by the central government, began a series of initiatives under the “Operation Sadbhavna” scheme, including the provision of free transport and the establishment of schools and vocational training centers. Initially, these initiatives were targeting villages along the Line of Control. Upon vociferous protests from the LBA, the program was expanded to central Ladakh and the Tibetan border areas as well.<sup>50</sup> And while more than 2,500 Ladakhi Buddhists were recruited into the expanding Ladakh Scouts regiment and paramilitary units, the LBA nonetheless saw reason to complain because of the discontinuation of the Special Security Bureau program training Buddhist villagers in the use of weapons—a program initiated in the wake of the Sino-Indian war of 1962. According to the LBA, the discontinuation was due to Muslim complaints that only Buddhists were given training and weapons. A final example of the continued concerns expressed by the LBA over Muslim advancement involves the census of 2001, the first since 1981 to have been carried out in Ladakh. The new census results are said to show that the lead of the Buddhist community over the Muslims has shrunk further.<sup>51</sup> The LBA’s fear of being outnumbered by Muslims is an old one, as mentioned earlier. To counter the threat, the LBA actively campaigns against birth control measures (officially for

49. Rangdum has been the scene of a long-running dispute between Bakarwals and locals, who accuse the shepherds of encroaching and stealing fodder. The roadblock was put up to check trucks for fodder. When the militants’ truck was stopped, they apparently panicked, shooting the monks manning the barrier.

50. Since the transfer of General Ray earlier in 2002, the scheme is said to be rapidly unravelling, exactly as Kargili activists and politicians had feared it would.

51. I have not yet seen the census figures broken down according to religion. The official census web site, [www.censusindia.org](http://www.censusindia.org), does not yet provide these tables.

violating Buddhist precepts regarding the sanctity of life). The fact that the voters' list in Kargil has more people on it than that of Leh, despite the latter's slightly larger population, is taken as further evidence of Muslim manipulations aimed at dominating the Buddhists. Perhaps the LBA president has indeed become more communalist, but undoubtedly such complaints and the representation of Turtok as "evidence" of the Muslim community's treachery and of Rangdum as simply a communal attack must also be seen as part of the normal representational strategies in Indian politics.<sup>52</sup>

### **New Directions?**

IN AUGUST 2002, a new strategy was adopted by the Buddhist political establishment in Leh. An announcement was made that all district units of political parties, including the Congress, National Conference, and BJP, were disbanded. Buddhist ministers in the state government, Rajya Sabha member Thikse Rinpoche, and the two MLAs for Leh district all announced their resignation from their respective political parties. Simultaneously, the formation of a Ladakh Union Territory Front (LUTF) was announced that would field candidates for the upcoming Assembly elections. The formation of a regional party had been a long-standing wish of some members of the Buddhist political establishment, but had never been achieved previously, partly due to deep rifts within the Buddhist community. Muslim leaders of Leh had not been taken into confidence about the formation of a regional party, but were invited to join the movement. Although stressing that there was no unequivocal agreement with the demand for Union Territory, representatives of the Shi'ites and Sunnis within days announced that they would support the LUTF and would not field other candidates, so as not to jeopardize communal amity in the region. Both the LUTF candidates, Rigzin Jora and Sonam (Pinto) Norbu, could thus be declared elected unopposed. The assembly elections led to the demise of the National Conference regime, and on November 1, 2002, a new coalition government of People's Democratic Party and Congress (I) was sworn in, headed by

<sup>52</sup>. For elaboration on this reading of Indian political discourse, see van Beek, "Beyond Identity Fetishism."

former Congress stalwart Mufti Mohammed Sayeed. Great care was taken to create a coalition that could be seen also to represent the interests of the Jammu and Ladakh regions. The independent MLA for Kargil, Haji Nissar Ali, and LUTF MLA for Leh Rigzin Jora were given positions as ministers of state in the new government.<sup>53</sup> In Leh, the gesture from the Muslim leadership not to field a candidate in the elections was reciprocated soon after by the appointment of Muslim Executive Councillor Ghulam Abbas Abidi.<sup>54</sup> Kargil's KMT, meanwhile, announced that it will not support Union Territory, but will push for the creation of a Hill Council for Kargil and a common regional council for Ladakh.

These recent—and at the time of writing still unfolding—developments suggest that a hard-line “Hindutva” strategy is less likely to be pursued by the political leadership in Leh at this time, although it is quite possible that the LBA will continue to rattle its sabers to keep the pressure on the state and central government. The new government appears to have the establishment of regional councils high on its agenda, and it is not unthinkable that genuine devolution of power to Ladakh may go some way in assuaging radical Buddhist elements, although the experiences with the LAHDC under Farooq Abdullah's regime have given rise to doubts about the feasibility of “genuine autonomy.” Not surprisingly, VHP and RSS leaders in Jammu have expressed their unhappiness with the new coalition, no doubt in part because its explicit attention to regional representation in the coalition and to regional imbalances in its proposed program of action takes much of the wind out of the sails of the sangh parivar. At the same time, settling regional demands without resorting to communal arithmetic may pose a formidable challenge.

Today, there are radical elements with strong communalist outlooks in Kargil as well as Leh, among Buddhists as well as Muslims.

53. The choice of these two candidates by the Buddhist leadership suggests a conscious attempt to balance political and communal interests. Pinto Norbu is a long-time National Conference member who commands considerable respect among the Muslims of Leh. Rigzin Jora is a former Congress man, who most recently served as LAHDC executive councillor, and previously as general secretary of the LBA. He was one of the key leaders of the 1989 agitation.

54. According to the LAHDC Act, one of the executive councillors must be a member of the “principal minority” (i.e., a Muslim), but this had not been honored since the elections for the second LAHDC in 2001. See the report by Tashi Morup in *Kashmir Times*, 20 October 2002, web edition.

However, there is little sign as yet that the overtures from the sangh parivar to Buddhists in Leh have more than strictly instrumental appeal. The identification of Buddhism as “identical” with Hinduism, or as a mere subset of Hinduism, goes directly against the “Buddhist pride” agenda promoted by the LBA and the Ladakh Gonpa Association—the organization representing the interests of the monastic establishment. The LBA’s religious agenda is aimed at promoting a revitalization of Buddhism through instruction of the general population in the basic teachings of the Buddha, bringing the religion back among the people rather than leaving it up to monks. At the same time, several monasteries have embarked on recruitment drives—Thikse Rinpoche going as far as to demand a child from each family affiliated with his monastery. While this shows that the main Buddhist institutions do not share the same views about which way Buddhism should develop, amalgamation with Hinduism is obviously not a serious option. Thus, while the LBA and some Buddhist political leaders may be willing to share a platform with the sangh parivar to promote their agenda for Union Territory status, Hindutva as such would not appear to have much appeal in a region like Ladakh. Yet despite this limited appeal of Hindutva, the saffronization of education, of the media, and of public life in general are likely to strengthen even further the perceived validity and necessity of communal idioms. It is here, perhaps more than in any other sphere, that the long-term dangers of the liaison with Hindu nationalist organizations lie: the poisoning of relations between Buddhists and Muslims in Ladakh, further weakening the opportunities for a united, autonomous Ladakh. Given the economic and geographical interdependencies between the two regions, but also in view of their shared history and culture, such a permanent rift would be a tragedy for all concerned.<sup>55</sup>

55. AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This paper draws on research conducted regularly in Ladakh since 1985, most recently in the summer of 2002. My research has been made possible by the numerous people in Leh and Kargil, among them leaders of Buddhist and Muslims organizations, officials and “ordinary” Ladakhis, who have generously shared their knowledge and perceptions of these sensitive matters. Research in 1999 was funded by the Danish Humanities Research Council. Earlier research upon which this paper draws was made possible by a United States Institute of Peace Jennings Randolph Peace Scholar Award. Responsibility for the views expressed in this essay is solely mine.

# 10

SUBIR BHAUMIK

## **Ethnicity, Ideology and Religion: Separatist Movements in India's Northeast**

**T**he “Northeast,” seen as India’s “Mongoloid fringe,”<sup>1</sup> was one of the last areas to be taken over by the British in the subcontinent. Having conquered almost the whole of it by the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the British turned to secure the frontiers of their Indian Empire from the perceived threats of Russian expansion in Central Asia and from the westward surge of the Burmese Empire. The debacle in Afghanistan forced them to leave it as a useful buffer between Tsarist Central Asia and British India, but the defeat of the Burmese army encouraged them to take over the Northeast of India.

The British decided on limited administration of the Northeast. The Inner Line Regulations ensured that the hill regions beyond the plains of Assam were largely left to their traditional chiefs once they accepted British suzerainty. The princely kingdoms of Tripura and Manipur were treated as dependencies, remote-controlled by political

1. Nandita Haksar, India’s leading human rights lawyer known for her campaign against excesses by security forces in northeast India, says “the northeast is very distinct from the rest of India essentially because of race.” See Haksar, “Movement of Self Assertion in the Northeast,” in Madhushree Dutta, Flavia Agnes and Neera Adarkar, eds., *The Nation, the State and Indian Identity* (Kolkata: Stree, 1996).

agents but not administered on a day-to-day basis. For the British, the Northeast remained a frontier, never a constituent region of the empire.<sup>2</sup> Only Assam was integrated, its rich tea plantations and oil-fields, its agricultural output and potential for industries providing enough justification for direct administrative control.

Even in neighboring Burma, the British followed the same policy. Lower Burma was administered directly from Kolkata, but the British chose to extend “limited administration” to the hill regions of Upper Burma. A rich plain like Bengal, Assam or Lower Burma, thriving on settled agriculture, rich in minerals and oil, was worth direct control despite native resistance. But a remote and difficult hill region was better left to political agents, spies and missionaries to closely watch rivals across strategic frontiers and convert the tribesmen to Christianity to secure their loyalty toward the empire. If the plains fed the economic sinews of the empire, the hills played the buffer against rivals in the Great Game and provided fighters for the colonial army.

But though northeast India and Upper Burma remained a partially administered frontier, some senior British officials, in the years before the final withdrawal, proposed to integrate these two hill regions and develop it as a “Crown Colony” to ensure a limited but strategic presence in rimland Asia.<sup>3</sup> Due to strong nationalist opposition in both India and Burma, the Crown Colony plan failed to materialize.

## Guerrilla War in Rainbow Country

BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE BRITISH, no empire based in mainland India had controlled any part of what now makes up the country’s Northeast. Migration from the Indian mainland was limited to preachers and teachers, traders and soldiers of fortune. Mainland cultural influence was also limited to Assam, Manipur and Tripura, where the kings adopted variants of Hinduism as the state religion. The uninterrupted freedom from mainland conquest for a great length of

2. Alexander Mackenzie first articulated the concept of a “northeast” frontier. See Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the Northeast Frontier of Bengal* (1884), reprinted as the *Northeast Frontier of India* (Delhi: Mittal Publishers, 1979).

3. J. P. Mills in 1942–43 first proposed the “unification of the hill regions of Northeast India and Upper Burma.” Later Reginald Coupland fine-tuned the proposal that the area should be administered as a “Crown Colony” even after the British withdrawal from the subcontinent. See Coupland, *The Constitutional Problems of India, Part 3* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944).

history, coupled with the region's racial distinctiveness, gave its people a sense of being different from those in mainland India. So, India's northeast territories "look less and less India and more and more like the highland societies of Southeast Asia."<sup>4</sup>

After Partition, the 225,000-square-kilometer region remains sandwiched between Chinese-Tibet, Burma, Bangladesh and Bhutan, linked to the Indian mainland by a tenuous 21-kilometer wide "Siliguri Corridor." It is a polyglot region, its ethnic mosaic as diverse as the rest of the country. Of the 5,633 communities listed by the "People of India" project, 635 were categorized as tribals, of which 213 were found in the northeast Indian states. This project also listed 325 languages—of which 175 belonging to the Tibeto-Burman and the Mon-Khmer family were found in northeast India. Some of the bigger tribes, such as the Nagas, number around one million—the smallest, such as the Mates of Manipur (population: eight thousand), have just a few thousand left.<sup>5</sup> Even the bigger tribes are often mere generic identities rather than nationalities, without a common language (as in the case of the Nagas), held together more in opposition to the Indian nation-state than by an organic growth of national consciousness.

All of India's major religions are practiced here, with Christianity dominating the hills and Hinduism and Islam dominating the plains. Animistic faiths and Lamaist sects are also found in the region. Assamese and Bengali speakers are the most numerous—but linguistic preferences in the region have often changed due to political considerations and have sometimes concealed ethnic and religious divisions. In Assam, the migrant Muslim peasantry of Bengali origin chose to register as Assamese speakers during every census after Independence to melt into the local milieu. The Assamese also co-opted Muslim migrants as "Na-Asasimyas" or neo-Assamese—if only to ensure a predominant position of Assamese language in the state; in such situations linguistic predominance is what ethnic domination is often built on. But when these Muslims were targeted by the Assamese on a large scale during the 1983 riots, many of them started registering as Bengali speakers, leading to a decrease in the number of Assamese speakers in the 1991 and 2001 Census.

4. Peter Kunstadter, *Highland Societies of Southeast Asia* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967).

5. Subir Bhaumik, "Negotiating Access: Northeast India," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (2000).

In the pre-British era, the population flow into what is now north-east India almost wholly originated from the east. Being closer to the highlands of Burma and southwestern China than to the power centers of the Indian mainland, this region was exposed to a constant flow of tribes and nationalities belonging to the Tibeto-Burman or the Mon-Khmer stock, one settling down only to be overrun by the subsequent wave. The incomplete process of racial assimilation, the frequency of fresh migrations and the restrictive nature of empire-building in the region account for its current ethnic diversity.

But the direction of the population flow changed with the advent of the British. The colonial masters brought peasants and agricultural laborers, teachers and clerks from neighboring Bengal and Bihar to open up Assam's economy. The trickle became a tide, and the sweep was soon to cover states like Tripura, where the Manikya kings offered Bengali farmers "jungle-avadi" or forest clearance leases to popularize settled agriculture that would, in turn, increase the revenue.<sup>6</sup> The hill regions were protected by the Inner Line Regulations; the plains and the Princely domains were not. The steady population flow from mainland India, particularly from undivided Bengal, accentuated the ethnic and religious diversity and introduced a nativist-outsider element to the simmering conflict.<sup>7</sup>

The Partition led to a rise in the flow of refugees and migrants from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Tripura's demography changed qualitatively in two decades, with the Bengalis becoming a clear majority. The pace of demographic change was slightly slower in Assam than in Tripura, but it was pronounced enough to upset the "sons of the soil," provoking both armed and unarmed protest movements. The fear that other northeastern states would "go the Tripura way" has weighed heavily on indigenous peoples and early settlers throughout the Northeast and provoked the more militant of them to take up arms.<sup>8</sup>

6. J. B. Ganguly, "The Problem of Tribal Landlessness in Tripura," in B. B. Datta and M. N. Karna, eds., *Land Relations in Northeast India* (Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1987).

7. See Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil: Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978); Sajal Nag, *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationalities Question in Northeast India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1990).

8. Subodh Debbarma, vice-president of the Tribal Students Federation (TSF) of Tripura, told a news conference in Guwahati, Assam, that "Assam would soon become another Tripura, where the sons of the soil have become aliens within half a century." Reported in *Sentinel* daily newspaper (Guwahati), 3 June 2002.

This paper examines the complex interplay of ethnicity, ideology and religious identity in shaping the insurgent movements in north-east India and examines their external linkages. The paper explores the degree to which these factors have promoted or restricted the growth of local nationalisms that could sustain the separatist movements in a position of challenge to the Indian nation-state.

### **Ethnicity, Guerrilla Warfare and the “Foreign Hand”**

A TRADITION OF ARMED RESISTANCE to invaders developed in the region even before the British came. The Ahom kings fought back the Mughals, the Tripura kings fought back the Bengal sultans, but when the British went into the Northeast, they encountered fierce resistance in the Naga and the Mizo (then Lushai) hill regions in Manipur and in what is now Meghalaya. The Naga and the Mizo tribesmen resorted to guerrilla war, holding up much stronger British forces by grit and ingenious use of the terrain until, in some places of the Mizo hills, entire villages were “populated only by widows.”<sup>9</sup>

After the British left, the Indian nation-state faced uprisings in Tripura almost immediately after Independence and in the Naga Hills since the mid-fifties. The Communists, who led the tribal uprising in Tripura, called off armed struggle in the early fifties and joined Indian-style electoral politics. But since the 1980 ethnic riots, Tripura has witnessed periodic bouts of tribal militancy, with the Bengali refugee population its main target. The Naga uprising, the strongest ethnic insurrection in northeast India, has been weakened by repeated splits on tribal lines. Talks between the Indian government and the stronger faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), started in 1997, are continuing, but a possible resumption of Naga insurgency remains a worst-case scenario for Delhi in the Northeast.

Armed uprisings erupted in the Mizo Hills following a famine in 1966. A year later, guerrilla bands became active in Manipur and Tripura. Since most of these rebel groups found safe bases, weapons and training in what was then East Pakistan, the defeat of the Pakistani armed forces in 1971 adversely affected the rebels from northeast India. For nearly seven years, they were deprived of a major

9. Suhas Chatterjee, *Mizoram under the British Rule* (Delhi: Mittal Publishers, 1985).

staging post in a contiguous foreign nation. China, which trained and armed several batches of Naga, Mizo and Meitei since 1966, had stopped help by the early 1980s. By then, however, Bangladesh's military rulers, foisted to power by the bloody coup that killed the country's founder Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, had revived the Pakistani policy of sheltering, arming and training rebel groups from northeast India. Almost all the separatist groups in the Northeast—Nagas, Mizos, Meiteis, Tripuris, and now even those from Meghalaya—have subsequently received shelter and support in Bangladesh. On the other hand, Indian agencies used the Northeast to arm and train, support and shelter the Bengali guerrillas against Pakistan in 1971 and then the tribal insurgents from Chittagong Hill Tracts against Bangladesh.<sup>10</sup>

Since the 1980s, Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has also used Bangladesh to establish contact with some of the rebel groups from Northeast India. A few of them have received weapons, specialized training in explosives and sabotage, and even funds. Surrendered insurgents have said the ISI has encouraged them to take on economic targets such as oil refineries and depots, gas pipelines, rail tracks and road bridges.<sup>11</sup> Burma and Bhutan have also been used as sanctuaries by some of these rebel groups but there is little evidence of official patronage from governments of those countries. There are some unconfirmed reports of Chinese assistance to the NSCN, the Meitei rebel groups and the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA).<sup>12</sup>

10. For details of Chinese and Pakistani and then Bangladeshi support to separatist groups from northeast India, see Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire: Northeast India* (Delhi: Lancers, 1996). Also see Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast* (Delhi: Viking, 1994).

11. Munim Nobis, former "foreign secretary" of ULFA, quoted in Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*. The Group of Ministers (GOM) report in India on security, intelligence and border management categorically mentions use of Bangladesh territory by the ISI to "destabilize" India's northeastern region. Report published in 2000.

12. Surrendered ULFA leader Luit Deuri told this writer in a BBC interview on 19 January 2001 that a Chinese agency codenamed "Blackhouse" had supplied them huge consignments of weapons through Bhutanese territory. Much of the weapons the NSCN initially procured from the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia between 1988 and 1995 are believed to have been routed to it by the Chinese agencies, the use of the surrogate designed to conceal the origin of the supply. Recent seizures of a huge quantity of weapons from the Meitei rebel groups by the Burmese army in November 2001 from around Tamu—nearly 1,600 pieces of automatic weapons—have prompted speculations about the supply from January 1990.

By the early 1980s, the whole region was gripped by large-scale violence. There were fierce riots in Tripura and Assam. Separatist movements intensified in Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur, later spreading to both Assam and Tripura. India's young Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi took the initiative to arrive at settlements with the militant students of Assam, the separatist Mizo National Front (MNF) and the Tribal National Volunteers of Tripura. But other insurgencies continued and new ones emerged. If the separatist movements such as those of the Nagas and the Mizos had challenged federal authority, the recent insurgencies of the Bodos, the Hmars, the Karbis and the Dimasas directly confront the regional power centers—the new states of Northeast. If the Nagas and the Mizos fought for a separate country and finally settled for a separate state within India, the smaller ethnicities such as the Bodos or the Hmars fight for autonomous homelands they want carved out of the states such as Assam and Mizoram.

Very often in the Northeast, a negotiated settlement with a separatist movement has opened the ethnic fissures within it. The Hmars, the Maras and the Lais fought shoulder to shoulder with the Lushais against the Indian security forces during the twenty years of insurgency led by the MNF. But twenty years of bonding through the shared experience of guerrilla warfare failed to develop a greater “Mizo” identity. The Bodos, the Karbis and the Dimasas all joined the Assam movement to expel “foreigners” and “infiltrators.” But after settlements with the Indian government, they felt the Assamese “had taken the cake and left us the crumbs.”<sup>13</sup> The result: fresh agitations, often sliding into violent insurgencies, spearheaded by smaller ethnicities demanding separate homelands. The ethnic imbalance in power-sharing has often caused retribalization, which has had its own cascading effect in restricting the growth of local nationalisms that could challenge the Indian state.<sup>14</sup>

13. The late Upendranath Brahma (former president of the All Bodo Students Union), interview by author, Agartala, 16 April 1988. Bhaumik analyzed this phenomenon of minor tribes and clans challenging the preponderance of the bigger ones in “Northeast India: The Second Ethnic Explosion” (paper presented at the Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford University, 22 January 1990).

14. Bhaumik, “Northeast: Evolution of a Post-Colonial Region” in Partha Chatterjee, ed., *Wages of Freedom: Fifty Years of the Indian Nation-State* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

After fighting India for forty years, Naga “nationalism” remains an incomplete process, its growth retarded by at least three major splits within the separatist movement, mostly along tribal lines. Even a China-trained leader like Muivah, a Tangkhul Naga from Manipur state, has no hesitation branding Angamis as “reactionary traitors” and his own tribe, the Tangkhuls—who form the bulk of the NSCN—as “revolutionary patriots.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the Tangkhuls who dominate the NSCN are seen in the Nagaland state as “Kaccha Nagas” (impure Nagas).<sup>16</sup> The trend has been no different in Mizoram or Manipur. The Kuki demand for a separate homeland that pitted them against the Nagas has driven some smaller clans away from them and led to the emergence of a separate “Zomi” identity. Tribes such as the Paites prefer to be called “Zomis” and their militias have sided with the NSCN against the Kuki militant groups. The Hmars, Lais and the Maras have joined the Chakmas and the Reangs to challenge the Mizos.

In Tripura, the Mizos in the northern Jampui hills demand a regional council within the Tribal Areas Autonomous Council of Tripura to preserve their “distinct identity,” whereas their ethnic kinsmen in Mizoram are wary of similar demands by smaller ethnicities. The Reangs in Tripura resent attempts by the Tripuris to impose the Kokborok language on them. And they look back at the brutal suppression of Reang rebellions by the Tripuri kings as “evidence of ethnic domination that cannot be accepted anymore.”<sup>17</sup> These intra-tribal tensions have weakened efforts to promote a compact “Borok” or tribal identity against perceived Bengali domination.

India’s first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, excluded the Northeast from the process of linguistic reorganization that Indian states were subjected to in the mid-fifties. Stress on language and ethnicity, he reckoned, would open a Pandora’s box for a remote, sensitive region such as the Northeast. So he let the hill regions stay with

15. Thuingaleng Muivah (NSCN’s general secretary), “Polarisation,” NSCN document, published from Oking (headquarters), 1985.

16. Bhaumik, *Nagas, India and the Northeast* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1994).

17. Dhananjay Reang (founder of the NLFT), interview by author, Kumartilla, Agartala, 16 October 1999. Reang was earlier vice president of the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV) and a pioneer in the tribal guerrilla movements of Tripura. But now he bitterly complains of how Reangs have been intimidated, their women raped and men killed by the NLFT.

Assam, and the two former princely states—Manipur and Tripura—were administered as Union Territories from Delhi. But the Naga insurrection forced Delhi to create the Nagaland state to take the steam out of the armed uprising. Once a million Nagas got a separate state, other ethnicities, some more populous than the Nagas, were to make similar demands. When refused, they would do what the Nagas did—challenge the Indian state with arms.

In the five decades after Partition, the Northeast has been India's most sustained insurgency theater. The intensity and the focus of the movements have changed over the years, and a number of the movements have been co-opted by the Indian state through power-sharing arrangements. But the call to arms has remained a popular option with the battling ethnicities of the Northeast—either in challenging Delhi or while settling scores among themselves. And quite often, a number of armed movements in the region have used separatist rhetoric, despite being essentially autonomist or nativist in character, merely to attract attention in Delhi.<sup>18</sup>

Once India carved out the state of Nagaland in 1963, Assam's role as a sub-regional hegemon was threatened, its position as India's political subcontractor in the Northeast destined to end. Within a decade of the creation of the Nagaland state, Delhi had to affect a political reorganization of the whole region, through which three new administrative units were formed. These three became full-fledged states in the 1980s, as India desperately sought to control violent ethnic insurgencies in the area. On the other hand, the breakup of Assam not only produced fresh demands for ethnic homelands within what remained of it, but it also drove a section of the ethnic Assamese to insurgency. With the hills gone, the Assamese turned to their valleys to find they were fast becoming a minority there. The anti-foreigner movement rocked Assam between 1979 and 1985 and led to large-scale, free-for-all types of ethnic riots. The ULFA, now the leading separatist organization in Assam, was born out of this movement. Its initial credo was ethnic cleansing—it sought by the force of arms to drive the “foreigners” (read: migrants from Bangladesh) out of Assam.

18. TNV fought for an “independent Tripura” but came to a settlement with Delhi in 1988 after it agreed to reserve a mere three additional legislative assembly seats for tribals. Such instances of using “secessionism” more as rhetoric than as a matter of conviction abound in the Northeast.

But over time, the ULFA's politics has changed. Sheltered in Bangladesh, Burma and Bhutan, and having to face the military might of the Indian state, the ULFA has denounced the Assam movement as "one that was led by juveniles, who failed to understand that migration per se was not bad and had helped many countries like the U.S.A. to become what they are today." The ULFA says that the Bengalis—Hindus and Muslims alike—have "immensely contributed to Assam" and "those of them who feel themselves as part of Assam should be treated as its legitimate dwellers."<sup>19</sup> It is difficult to ascertain how much of this policy shift—projecting itself as the "representative of the Asombashis" (dwellers of Assam) rather than the Asomiyas (Assamese)—stems from tactical considerations such as seeking shelter in Bangladesh and gaining the support of Assam's huge Bengali population, and how much of it is a genuine attempt to rise above the ethnic considerations to forge a secular, multi-ethnic identity to fight Delhi.

But the ULFA is being pragmatic only in trying to project territory and a multi-ethnic credo as the basis for a future independent Assam. It is only acknowledging the polyglot nature of the state of Assam—and the rest of the region—despite its broad racial difference with the Indian mainland. It is seeking to restore the multi-ethnic and assimilative nature of the Assamese nationality formation process, which was ruptured by racial-linguistic chauvinism of the upper-caste Assamese power-holder elites in the 1960s, as a result of which tribe after tribe exercised the exit option from Assam, fueling the demands of an ever-increasing number of ethnicity-based states in northeast India.

Significantly, though the ULFA has targeted Hindi-speaking populations for large-scale attacks after 1990, it has avoided any attack on Bengalis, Nepalis or tribal groups that it sees as potential allies in the struggle against "Indian colonialism." The Hindi speakers have been seen as "Indian populations supportive of the colonial rule."<sup>20</sup> But its growing lack of faith in ethnicity as the basis for its political militancy stems from a realization that there could be no "pure ethnic homeland" in Assam or anywhere else in northeast India. A broad-based

19. Central Publicity Department, "Probojon Loi" (Regarding Infiltration), document issued by the Central Publicity Department (ULFA, 1992).

20. The Assam Tiger Force (ATF) claimed responsibility for attacks on the Hindi speakers in Assam, but Assam police say it is certain the ATF was a ULFA front.

Assamese nationalism, unless it caters to the distinct ethnic aspirations of the tribes and other communities in Assam, is a non-starter.

The ULFA therefore, shrewdly enough, projects a future independent Assam as a federal Assam, where Bodo, Karbi, Dimasa, Rabha, Lalung or Mishing, or even Bengali homelands can exist, so long as the “basic values of Assamese society and culture are accepted.”<sup>21</sup> A security adviser to the Assam government describes this as “a clever ploy to broaden the support base of the ULFA insurgency against India.”<sup>22</sup> But Assam’s political leadership now talks the same language, of the need to accept the polyglot character of Assam, and of satisfying the aspirations of the ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, if not for anything else, only to stave off another breakup of the state.<sup>23</sup>

So, though ethnicity has been the mainstay of separatist movements and often formed the basis for the creation of political-administrative units in northeast India, its self-corrosive propensities have restricted the growth of local nationalisms strong enough to confront Delhi. Meghalaya came into being as a tribal state; today the three major tribes, Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, fight for the spoils of political office on ethnic lines, while some militant organizations such as the Achik National Volunteer Council are fighting for a separate state for the Garos. Mizoram has problems with its ethnic minorities. The Reang and Chakma tribes complain of ethnic and religious persecution and allege that the dominant Mizos, almost wholly Christian, want to convert them to Christianity and the Mizo way of life. The Lais and Maras want to join the Reangs and the Chakmas to form a separate unit, a Union Territory, which they want to be administered from the Centre.<sup>24</sup> The Naga-Kuki clashes throughout northeast India that left hundreds dead in the 1980s and 1990s raised the specter of Bosnia or Kosovo, of how conflicting homeland demands could lead to ethnic cleansing in pursuit of the impossible—creation of “pure ethnic states.”

21. *Freedom*, ULFA’s weekly e-newsletter, 25 May 2001.

22. Jaideep Saikia (Security Advisor to Government of Assam), *Mukbomukhi (Face-to-Face)*, a chat show hosted on Doordarshan’s Seventh Channel (Kolkata), Rainbow Productions, 17 February 2002.

23. Pradyut Bordoloi (Assam’s Minister of State for Home), interview by author, *BBC World Service*, 29 March 2002. Bordoloi described Assam as a “multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and a multi-religious entity.”

24. Memorandum jointly submitted by the Lai, Mara and Chakma district councils to the Indian government on 17 August 2000.

## Independence or the Indian Revolution?

IN SOME PARTS of what became India's Northeast, Communist parties subtly articulated ethnic issues to create a support base among the indigenous tribespeople. In Tripura, the Communists played on the tribal's sense of loss and marginalization following the end of sovereign princely rule and the kingdom's merger with India. Having first secured popularity in the tribal areas through a powerful literacy movement (Jana Shiksha or Mass Literacy), the Communist Party of India (CPI) absorbed into its fold the main tribal organization, Gana Mukti Parishad, at the peak of its nationwide armed struggle in 1948. The CPI adopted the Parishad's political program as its own on questions of tribal rights, loss of tribal lands and the threat to the distinctive social organization of the tribespeople but avoided demanding secession. Hundreds of Parishad activists and leaders turned into Communist guerrillas and fought "for the Indian revolution" rather than for an independent homeland like the Nagas.<sup>25</sup>

But when the CPI gave up armed struggle and purged those advocating the "adventurist line," the tribal guerrillas in the Communist force, Shanti Sena (Peace Army), gave up their weapons and returned to normal life. And taking advantage of the situation, the Congress-dominated state administration started resettling the newly arrived Bengali migrants in large numbers in the tribal-compact areas of Tripura. Since the tribespeople were largely supportive of the Communists, the Congress wanted to alter the demographic profile of the constituencies by promoting the organized rehabilitation of the Bengali migrants. It did help the Congress—it won both the parliament seats in 1967 after losing them to the Communists in three successive elections—but as the tribals lost out in the number's game, they lost faith in the Communist party and began to turn to militant ethnic politics.<sup>26</sup>

Having first manipulated ethnic concerns to build up a party nucleus and political base, the Communists succumbed to electoral concerns in Tripura. With other tribal parties and insurgent organizations surfacing to articulate the ethnic issues, the Communists have

25. For details on the Communist uprising in Tripura, see Bhaumik, *Insurgent Crossfire*, and Harihar Bhattacharya, *Communism in Tripura* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1999).

26. Bhaumik, *ibid.*

fallen back on their support base among the Bengalis. Since 1978, they have won all but one of the state assembly elections, but their popular base in the tribal areas has taken a beating. In 2000, for the first time, the ruling Communists lost the state's Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council to a militant tribal party, the Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT).

The IPFT enjoyed the backing of the separatist National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT). The NLFT's rhetoric is secessionist but its leaders have said they are open to negotiations on an "appropriate power-sharing arrangement for maximum possible tribal control in the state assembly, the autonomous district council and on the state's resources."<sup>27</sup> The IPFT has now been renamed Indigenous Nationalist Front of Tripura, with two more tribal parties joining it. One of them is the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS), the first exclusively tribal party in the state, and the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV), which led a bloody insurgent movement targeting Bengali settlers and the security forces between 1978 and 1988. The ruling Communists admit that they face a stiff challenge in the next state assembly elections in 2003 with the INFT tying up with the Congress, which typically wins some seats in Bengali areas.

The Communists in Tripura used a tribal organization and its leadership to promote their complex ideology in a backward agrarian society where slash-and-burn agriculture was still prevalent and industries were virtually absent. The Ganamukti Parishad had retained its distinct character even after its merger with the Communist Party organization, but during the two decades that followed the end of the Communist armed struggle, it played a much reduced role in influencing the Communist political agenda. Having widened their political base to win elections, the Communists tried to overlook the ethnic issues until they were forced to support the tribal autonomy movement in the 1980s. The INFT has moved into the vacuum, aggressively ethnicizing the state's political discourse and questioning the relevance of Communist ideology for the tribespeople. Unlike the TUJS, which accepted the role of a junior partner in the coalition with the

27. Nayanbashi Jamatia (NLFT leader), telephonic interview by author, used in BBC Bengali service on 3 March 2002. Jamatia said the NLFT leadership had communicated its desire to negotiate with Delhi through the Assam Rifles, which, he admitted, had been in touch with them.

Congress that ruled Tripura between 1988 and 1993, the INFT is likely to dominate the coalition because it is likely to win more seats than the Congress.

In Manipur and Assam, the Communists continue to win a few seats in the state assembly. They have strong pockets of support that were once built up through the struggle for peasant rights, but they share power only as minor partners in regional coalitions. In Manipur, the CPI has joined the Congress-led ruling coalition formed in February 2002 to keep the BJP out of power in the state. But in Assam, it opposed the Congress and came to power by teaming up with the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a party that grew out of the “anti-foreigner” agitation of the 1980s, which the Communists had opposed as “parochial” and “chauvinist.”<sup>28</sup> The AGP later ditched the Communists and forged an alliance with the BJP before the 2001 state assembly elections.

But the Communist ideology, in its Maoist manifestations, did find takers among the secessionist groups in the Northeast. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur, throughout the 1980s, said it was “part of the Indian revolution,” its stated mission to “bring down the bandit government of Delhi.”<sup>29</sup> Only much later did it limit itself to fight as the “vanguard of the struggle for the independence of Manipur.”<sup>30</sup> Its reading of Indian polity as being “semi-colonial and semi-feudal” bears striking resemblance with the class character analysis of the Indian state done by Indian Maoist groups such as People’s War or the Maoist Communist Center (MCC).

The PLA’s core leadership was trained in China. Though the ethnic rebel armies of the Naga and the Mizo hills had received military training in China before them, the Chinese only tried to politicize a few Naga leaders such as Thuingaleng Muivah, the present general secretary of the NSCN. Muivah says he had some exposure to Marxist-Leninist ideology before he led the first batch of Naga rebels to China in 1966 at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>31</sup> But there was no attempt to politicize the Mizos or most of the Nagas, who were devout Christians. China merely wanted to use them against

28. *Peoples Democracy*, mouthpiece of the CPI (M), 27 March 1981.

29. *Dawn* (mouthpiece of the PLA of Manipur), 3 June 1980.

30. Thuingaleng Muivah, “Never Say Die,” interview by author, Mannerplaw, Thailand, published in *Sunday* magazine, Kolkata, June 16–22, 1996.

31. *Ibid.*

India to counterbalance the continued Indian support to the Tibetans. But the PLA's core leadership—the first batch of eighteen “Ojhas” (pioneers)—went through heavy political training. The Chinese had hopes they would coordinate their struggles with the Indian Maoist groups and strengthen the cause of the Indian revolution.<sup>32</sup>

Later, ULFA, a separatist organization committed to Assam's liberation from India, had voiced the Marxist-Leninist (M-L) “colonial thesis” of India's peripheral regions, such as Assam being an “internal colony” of India. Individual ULFA leaders, some of whom came from left political backgrounds, have expressed admiration for CPI (M-L) leader Charu Majumdar, hailing him as the “first real hope of the Indian revolution.”<sup>33</sup> The Autonomous State Demands Committee, which wants an autonomous state for Karbi tribesmen in central Assam, have close connections with the CPI (M-L)—at least two of their senior leaders are in the CPI (M-L)'s central committee. But the ASDC has lost out on influence to an armed insurgent group in the area, the United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). This is a repeat of the Tripura scenario—pro-Left organizations seeking to use ethnic issues to build up influence, but finally losing out to groups directly articulating ethnic concerns and keen to use the distinctive ethnicity as a plank for political power-sharing or protest.

The Maoist groups in mainland India, despite their very limited presence in the Northeast, support the “struggle of the oppressed nationalities” in the region.<sup>34</sup> In private, Maoist leaders differentiate between those struggles led by a “conscious leadership” (meaning those who repose faith in Marxist-Leninism) and the rest.<sup>35</sup> The Maoists are perhaps aware of the potential for a tactical understanding with the ethnic separatist groups in the battle against the Indian state—but they have their preferences. The ULFA in Assam, the PLA in Manipur, or even an NSCN led by Thuingaleng Muivah would be more acceptable to them than a National Liberation Front of Tripura,

32. Nameirakpam Bisheswar Singh (former PLA chief), interview by author at his Babupara residence in Imphal, 16 May 1986.

33. Arun Mahanta, an important ULFA functionary in a personal e-mail to the author, made this comment about Charu Majumdar on 6 May 2000.

34. *Biplobi Yug* (Revolutionary Age), monthly journal of the Peoples War group's Bengal unit, 18 August 2001.

35. Comrade Sagar (real name: Niranjan Ghose), Peoples War's central publicity secretary, interview by author, *BBC Radio World Today*, 19 May 2001.

which not only pursues violent ethnic cleansing against Bengalis and smaller tribes such as the Reangs and the Chakmas, but also declares “evangelization” of the tribes of Tripura as a key objective.

### The Cross, Saffron and Crescent

THOUGH ETHNICITY AND IDEOLOGY—the former more than the latter—remain major influences on separatist and autonomist groups in northeast India, religion is increasingly beginning to influence the political agenda of some of these groups. Religious distinctiveness, when coterminous with ethnicity, exacerbated the sense of otherness in the Naga and the Mizo hills. Since the tribespeople in both these former head-hunting hill regions had been largely converted to Christianity since the last quarter of the nineteenth century, they felt emotionally alienated from the Indian cultural ethos, which was often equated with the “Hindu entity.”<sup>36</sup> Christianity reinforced and complemented, rather than supplanted, the sense of distinct ethnicity and otherness among the Nagas and the Mizos. Separatist groups such as the Naga National Council (NNC) and the MNF laced their separatist rhetoric with free use of Biblical imageries—and the MNF even christened its military operations (e.g., its first uprising on 28 February 1966 was referred to as “Operation Jericho”). But rebel regiments were named after tribal heroes such as Zampuimanga rather than after Biblical heroes.<sup>37</sup>

When the NNC decided to send the first batch of Naga rebels to China, the powerful Baptist Church was upset with the rebel leaders. The NNC as well as the NSCN, which is led by the China-trained Thuingaleng Muivah (who continues to revere Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai as the “greatest leaders of the century”),<sup>38</sup> have subsequently made conscious efforts to appease the church. Muivah, much

36. The NSCN manifesto says: “Though as a doctrine, Hinduism is not a recruiting force, it is backed by a Hindu government. The forces of Hinduism, viz., the numberless Indian troops, the retail and wholesale dealers, the teachers and instructors, the intelligentsia, the prophets of non-violence, the gamblers and the snake-charmers, the Hindi songs and Hindi films, the rasgulla makers and the Gita, are all arrayed for the mission to supplant the Christian God, the eternal God of the Universe. The challenge is serious.” The Manifesto was issued from the Oking, the NSCN headquarters inside Burma, on 31 January 1980 by its chairman Issac Chisi Swu.

37. Nirmal Nibedon, *Mizoram: The Dagger Brigade* (Delhi: Lancers, 1983).

38. Muivah, interview in *Sunday*.

less of a practicing Christian than is the NSCN chairman Issac Chisi Swu (who prays regularly), was the one to coin the phrase, "Nagaland for Christ," which found its way into the NSCN's lexicon. This writer found the "Nagaland for Christ" slogan boldly hanging over the churches in the NSCN camps where Sunday services were regularly performed by the NSCN's "Chaplain Kilonser" (religious affairs minister) Vedai Chakesang and his team.<sup>39</sup> Though personally attracted by Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought, Muivah was quick to see that most of his leaders and fighters were devout Christians, and that religion and ethnicity could complement each other to foment separatism among the Nagas.

The MNF was much more serious about its Christian identity and much more particular about fostering religiosity. Senior leaders such as Zoramthanga, then MNF vice president (and now chief minister of Mizoram state), personally conducted church services in the rebel camps. Many MNF leaders became preachers after their return to normal life. Consumption of alcohol and drugs, so easily available in the Northeast because of its proximity to Burma, was strictly prohibited among the guerrillas, who were encouraged to propagate their "evil influences" to the rest of the society.<sup>40</sup>

But MNF chief Laldenga, after becoming chief minister following the political settlement with the Indian government, snubbed the church when it started pressurising his government to ban the sale of alcoholic drinks. Laldenga did not want to lose one of the most important sources of revenue for his government. The Congress took advantage and proclaimed in its election manifesto its commitment to promote "Christian Socialism" in Mizoram.<sup>41</sup> The MNF was defeated in the ensuing elections in 1989 with the church's support. After Laldenga's death, Zoramthanga took over as party president and repaired the MNF's relations with the church. He assured the church leaders of his commitment to continue with prohibition and the MNF is said to have won the last state assembly elections with church support.

39. Bhaumik, "Brothers in Arms," *Sunday*, 20 June 1987.

40. MNF "order" no. 3 (1986), entitled "Eradication of Drugs and Liquor in Mizo Society," issued to all units of the organization.

41. Congress (I) manifesto for the 1989 Mizoram state assembly elections, issued in Aizawl, Mizoram.

In neighboring Tripura, first-generation Christian converts constituted a large percentage of the leadership and the fighters of the Tribal National Volunteers (TNV). Its chairman, Bijoy Hrangkhawl, remains a devout Christian. Non-Christian tribesmen who joined the TNV were encouraged, though not forced, to convert. But the state's strongest rebel group now, the NLFT, insists on conversion of non-Christian recruits. Some of those who have broken away from the NLFT—such as its former area commander Nayanbashi Jamatia—are Hindus or animists who say they strongly resent “the leadership’s interference with personal faiths and religions.”<sup>42</sup>

The NLFT, in keeping with its stated objective of turning Tripura into “the land of Christ,” has also issued fiats to tribal communities to convert to Christianity as a whole.<sup>43</sup> That has provoked the predominantly animist Reangs and the Hindu Jamatia tribesmen to resist them. Even after the NLFT “banned” the worship of Durga (Goddess of Power), Saraswati (Goddess of Learning) and Laxmi (Goddess of Wealth) in the hills, the spiritual head of the Jamatia tribe, “Hada Okrah” Bikram Bahadur Jamatia performed the Pujas (worship).<sup>44</sup> But his followers had to face attacks and Bikram Bahadur Jamatia escaped two assassination attempts. Some leading tribal priests, such as Shanti Kali, were killed by the NLFT; even their womenfolk were raped by the rebels. On 7 August 1999, the NLFT kidnapped four senior leaders of the Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). All four are said to be dead. The NLFT allegedly enjoys the support of the Tripura Baptist Christian Union (TBCU). According to TBCU sources, both voluntary and forced conversions to Christianity have increased among the tribespeople in Tripura since the TNV, and then the NLFT, intensified its activity.<sup>45</sup> For many tribesmen, Christianity is a source of a new, extra-territorial

42. Nayanbashi Jamatia (NLFT leader).

43. The Constitution of the NLFT, “Sacrifice for Liberation,” issued on 22 December 1991, talks of its armed wing as the “National Holy Army.”

44. Statement of the “Hada Okrah” Bikram Bahadur Jamatia, reported in *Dainik Sambad*, Bengali daily of Agartala, Tripura, 16 September 2000.

45. TBCU sources say the number of Christian converts has gone up sharply since the TNV and NLF started operating in the hilly interiors of Tripura. In 1981, Tripura’s Christian population stood at 24,872. By 1991, it had risen to 46,472. TBCU sources say there are now nearly 90,000 Christians in the state, almost wholly made up of converts. The TBCU’s mouthpiece, the *Baptist Herald*, details the major acts of conversions.

identity providing confidence to challenge the dominant cultures of the Bengali migrants rather than being absorbed by such cultures.

In Manipur, the Meitei separatists, mostly born Hindus, advocated a revival of the state's leading pre-Hindu faith, Sanamahi. They also tried to undermine the use of the Bengali script for the Meitei language and promote the Sanamahi script to encourage ethnic revivalism for strengthening the appeal of the separatist movement. But there were hardly any reports of conversion to Christianity among the Meitei rebel groups. They undermined the role of religion, either in practice or by abnegation.

In Assam, the ULFA stayed silent on the question of religion, and its guerrillas played a visible role in containing religious riots in the Hojai region of the Nagaon district.<sup>46</sup> The ULFA has been accused of recruiting Muslims of Bengali origin in greater numbers in the last few years, apparently to appease sentiments in Bangladesh, where Muslims continue to find refuge. But this writer has been to several ULFA camps and has interacted with a wide cross-section of ULFA leaders and guerrillas—some still fighting and others surrendered—and has hardly seen any religious activity in the camps. Hindu, Muslim and Christian cadres of the ULFA participate in Assamese festivals such as Bihu, which has more to do with harvests in what is still essentially a peasant society.<sup>47</sup>

In Tripura, where the NLFT has run into stiff resistance not only from Hindu tribesmen but also from left-minded rebel groups such as the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), religion has also played a divisive role in the Bodo separatist movement in Assam. The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) is predominantly Christian. It supports the church's demand for the use of the Roman script for the Bodo language—similar to the NLFT's support for a similar church demand to use Roman script for the Tripuri Kokborok language—and its guerrillas have killed many Bodo intellectuals, cultural icons and writers who oppose the demand. Their victims include a

46. "ULFA jangira bandhuk uchiye danga thamalen" (ULFA stops riots at the point of gun), a report in *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, Bengali daily of Kolkata, 21 December 1992.

47. This writer has extensively visited a number of ULFA camps in Bhutan and Burma as well as those of other northeast Indian rebel groups. Absence of religious activity is conspicuous in ULFA camps and those of the Meitei rebel groups.

former president of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (Bodo Literary Society). The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) and the underground Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) remain committed to the “traditional Bodo way of life” and oppose the demand for using Roman script for the Bodo language.

The overt Christian religiosity of some separatist groups has provoked Hindu nationalist groups such as the RSS to see a “foreign hand” behind the ethnic rebellions of northeast India. RSS leaders, upset with both the spread of Christianity in ever-new areas of the Northeast as well as rebel attacks on their leaders and institutions supported by them, refer to the church’s use of “liberation theology” slogans like “To Christ through People’s Movements” (used by some Baptist denominations in the Northeast) as evidence of its connivance with ethnic separatism.<sup>48</sup> To counteract this alleged nexus, the RSS is trying to infiltrate a number of ethnic movements, mostly spearheaded by smaller tribes who oppose imposition of Christianity by bigger ethnic groups and rebel armies. Along the Tripura-Mizoram border, the RSS has a strong presence in the camps where the Reangs, displaced by violent evangelistic Mizo groups, have taken shelter. There have been reports that the Reang rebel group, Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF), has received backing from the RSS—as have the Jamatias opposing the NLFT. The RSS has even asked the federal home ministry to provide arms and funds to the Reang and the Jamatia groups. But most of the organizations supported by the RSS represent mainland Indian communities.

The Congress had also used the religious factor in the Northeast when it built up a Zeliang Naga leader, Rani Gaidiliu, to counter the Naga separatist movement. The Rani’s followers practiced the animistic Haraka faith and were opposed to Christianity. But unlike the RSS, which sees religion as the major cause of the ethnic divide in the Northeast, the Congress used religion to promote challenges to separatist movements and weaken them by simultaneously playing on the religious (Haraka versus Christian) and the ethnic (Zeliangs as different from Nagas) divide.<sup>49</sup> Its stand on the religious question in the

48. V. Sudarshan (RSS chief), interview by author, Kolkata, 20 January 2002.

49. S. C. Dev, *Nagaland, the Untold Story* (Kolkata: Glory Printers, 1988).

Northeast has been governed by electoral concerns—from the use of the sects of Anukul Thakur and Anandmoyi Ma, Hindu cult figures, to win the Bengali Hindu vote in Tripura, to the use of Pir of Badarpur or Jamaat leader Assad Madani in Assam to win the Muslim vote, to the championing of “Christian Socialism” in Mizoram—and its use of religious issues in the Northeast smacks of rank opportunism.

But though the RSS has been stridently vocal about the church-separatist nexus, its preoccupation with the emerging threat of Islamic radicalism in the Northeast and the rest of the country has occasionally prompted its leaders to try and promote “Hindi-Christian understanding” in the region. The RSS chief V. Sudarshan recently told a news conference that “the resurgence of militant Islam based in neighboring Bangladesh and continuous infiltration from that country were the biggest threat to the region that Hindus and Christians must fight together.”<sup>50</sup> But efforts to bridge the Hindu-Christian divide in the Northeast by playing up the issue of illegal infiltration from Bangladesh were not very successful after Hindu fundamentalists elsewhere in India attacked Christian preachers, including the brutal murder of Australian priest Graham Staines, which evoked a lot of protest from the Christians in the Northeast.

By the time India was partitioned, the Muslim population in north-east India was mostly concentrated in Assam with a small sprinkling in Tripura. Assam, similar to undivided Bengal, was ruled by a Muslim League government during the Second World War. During that phase, a large number of peasants from Eastern Bengal were encouraged to settle down on the “chars” (river islands) of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. But just before Partition, Sylhet was detached from Assam and given to Pakistan. Some Hindu leaders felt that “amputation of the diseased arm” had been good for Assam.<sup>51</sup> But the inflow of Muslim migrants to Assam has continued even after the breakup of Pakistan. Some religious parties in Bangladesh still feel that Assam should have gone to East Pakistan during the Partition because of its large Muslim population.<sup>52</sup> In Assam and princely Tripura, Islamic

50. Sudarshan's news conference as reported in *Shillong Times*, Meghalaya, 16 May 1997.

51. Sardar Patel, quoted in R.N. Aditya, *Corridors of Memory* (Kolkata: KLM Firma, 1970).

52. Jamaat-i-Islami monograph, “Bharat Baghe Mussalmanra ki Hariyeche” (Dhaka, 1969).

parties tried to merge those territories with Pakistan during and after 1947—and parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami continue to feel these areas of northeast India would be a “normal appendage” of Bangladesh.

But until the rise of the BJP in India and its growth in parts of Assam by skillful exploitation of the Babri Masjid issue, Islamic radicalism was practically absent in Assam and the rest of the Northeast. The riots during the Assam agitation, though apparently aimed at “outsiders” and “infiltrators,” did target the Muslims of Bengali origin in a big way. More than two thousand of them were killed in the riots at Nellie and Chaulkhowa Chapori from February to March 1983. The ferocity of the violence split the groups leading the Assam agitation along religious lines, and a number of Assamese Muslim leaders broke away from the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) immediately after the 1983 riots, alleging that the agitating groups had been “infiltrated by the RSS.”<sup>53</sup> But there was no violent Muslim backlash. Only some defense groups, such as the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU), were organized in the predominantly Muslim area. And though political parties and the police in Assam made exaggerated projections of their strength and intentions, and the local Assamese press floated stories about their linkages to Islamic fundamentalist groups in Bangladesh, these groups were essentially defensive in nature.

Immediately after the riots and the Assam accord of 1985 that brought an end to the agitation, the Muslims of Bengali origin joined their linguistic Hindu brethren to form the United Minorities Forum (UMF). Traditionally they had voted for Congress but they felt let down by the Congress government in 1983. One of the founders of the UMF said: “For the first time in post-Partition Assam, the Bengali Hindus and Muslims felt the need to come together to protect their interests. We found we were in the same boat. Since we were more than 40 percent of the state’s population, we were sure we could defend our interests against rising Assamese chauvinism.”<sup>54</sup> But after

53. Seema Guha, “Assam Movement: Shadow of the RSS,” *Sunday*, 28 February – 6 March 1983.

54. Gholam Osmani (former UMF president now back in Congress), interview by author, 28 May 1995.

the rise of the BJP, Bengali Hindus in Assam, unlike their brethren in West Bengal and Tripura, largely turned toward the politics of Hindutva in a decisive way. The Muslims were left with little choice—in elections, they began to vote for the Congress and most of the UMF leaders returned to that party. But the younger and more religious elements did form some militant groups, defensive to begin with but now increasingly proactive. The Idgah Protection Force (IPF) was formed just before the demolition of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, and some of its supporters were responsible for the attack on the Hindus at Hojai in 1992, in which ninety Hindus were killed. Incidentally, the victims were mostly Bengali Hindus who had started supporting the BJP and its campaign to construct a Hindu temple at Ayodhya in place of the disputed Babri Mosque.

Following the Hojai riots, a number of Muslim radical groups have surfaced in Assam, essentially feeding on the community's growing insecurity in a state where the power-holder elites see them as "agents of Pakistan or Bangladesh." The Assamese fear of being reduced to a minority in their own land, fuelled by the changing demography of the state during the last forty years, has given rise to strong anti-Muslim feelings. Assamese political groups advocate the scrapping of the Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunals (IMDT) Act promulgated in 1983 by the state's Congress government. These groups say the act, by placing the burden of proof of someone's foreign identity on the state, is actually protecting "illegal foreign migrants" in Assam.<sup>55</sup> The Assamese groups have received strong support from the BJP, which, in Assam now, has a strong base both among Bengali and Assamese Hindus. Recently, the regional party, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), has called for a special session of the Assam legislative assembly to discuss the infiltration issue. The ruling Congress government has ruled that out, suspecting a fresh move by the AGP and the BJP to whip up passions against the IMDT Act, a legislation the Muslims see as their only source of legal protection against arbitrary and forced deportations.

55. Sarbananda Sonowal (AASU president), interview by author, aired in South Asia Report, *BBC World Service Radio*, 22 August 1994.

In the 2001 state assembly elections in Assam, the AGP and the BJP worked out a political alliance to fight the elections together. For the first time, Assam witnessed the politics of “religious consolidation,” as the AGP was now reconciled to the BJP’s political stand of treating Bengali Hindus as refugees and Bengali Muslims as infiltrators, preferring to shelter the former and push back the latter into Bangladesh. The Congress came back to power with the support of its votebanks among the Muslim and the Tea tribes (descendants of those who came from Bihar’s tribal regions to work the British tea estates in the nineteenth century), who account for more than 40 percent of the electorate. The BJP’s subsequent efforts to penetrate the Tea tribes, exploiting the religious divide within the community (Assam’s tea laborers are largely first- or second-generation Christian converts, but many remain Hindus), have not met with much success. Assam’s Muslim and Christian minorities, faced with “religious consolidation” of Bengali and Assamese Hindus who would account for more than 40 percent of the population, have decided to stick it out with the Congress. Their combined strength does give them a chance to share power and ensure security.

But this does not appease some Muslims in Assam who have formed militant Islamic groups. The Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) is the strongest of these groups.<sup>56</sup> Formed in 1997, the MULTA has close connections with the Sunni radical group, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). The MULTA leaders signed an agreement with SSP leaders at a meeting at Jamait Ul Uloom Ali Madrassa in Chittagong in February 2001. The SSP decided to back the MULTA in its militant activities in Assam. At the political level, the MULTA demands 30 percent reservation in education and employment for Muslims in Assam and also a similar reservation for seats in the state assembly, quite in keeping with their share

56. The Assam police lists a total of seventeen Muslim fundamentalist groups it says are active in Assam, including the MULTA. The other groups are Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA), Adam Sena, People’s United Liberation Front (PULF), Muslim Security Council of Assam (MSCA), United Liberation Militia of Assam (ULMA), Islamic Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA), Muslim Volunteer Force (MVF), Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS), Islamic United Reformation Protest of India (IURPI), United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (UMLFA), Revolutionary Muslim Commandos (RMC), Muslim Liberation Army (MLA), Muslim Tiger Force (MTF), Muslim Security Force (MSF), Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami of Bangladesh, and Harkat-ul-Mujahideen of Pakistan.

of the state's population. But at the religious level, they want the establishment of a chain of Islamic courts in Assam to dispense justice in keeping with the tenets of Shariat.<sup>57</sup>

The Assam police have arrested some MULTA activists, while some have surrendered. During interrogation, some of them have confessed to receiving training at al-Qaeda and Taliban camps in Afghanistan with logistic support provided by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).<sup>58</sup> The MULTA also recently participated in a convention of Islamic radical groups in Bangladesh held at Ukhia near the coastal town of Cox's Bazaar on 10–11 May 2002. Six Bangladesh-based Islamic militant groups, such as Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJAI) and Islamic Shashantantra Andolan, were joined by two Burmese Rohingya Muslim rebel groups and the MULTA at the convention, which was attended by more than sixty delegates of the total nine groups who joined the convention. The convention decided to form an umbrella organization to coordinate the jihad for turning Bangladesh from a "Dar-ul-Harb" (Land of Infidels) into a "Dar-ul-Islam" (Land of Islam)—but it also decided to intensify efforts for the creation of a "Brihat Bangladesh" (Greater Bangladesh) by incorporating areas of Assam and Burma's Arakan province that are now largely settled by Muslims of Bengali origin. Indian intelligence sees the Bangladesh Islamic Manch as a replica of the United Jihad Council in Pakistan. While the United Jihad Council coordinates the struggle for Kashmir's forced merger with Pakistan, the Bangladesh Islamic Manch, in its inaugural declaration, says it will work for the "willful merger" of areas of Assam and the Arakans, which have large Muslim populations of Bangladeshi origin.<sup>59</sup> That Assam has India's highest percentage of Muslims in any state other than Kashmir only reinforces their fear.

At last, the scare scenario that generations of Assamese have been fed is finally coming true. Groups that would prefer to merge areas of Assam with a Muslim majority and contiguous to Bangladesh have finally emerged. Security analysts in Assam envisage the "eastward surge of the Jihadis"—a projected growth of Islamic militant activity

57. Saikia, "Swadhin Asom or Brihot Bangla" (Independent Assam or Greater Bengal), in *Contours*, a collection of his columns (Assam: Sagittarius, 2001).

58. Ibid.

59. "Bangladesh Islamic Manch—Formation and Alignments," report prepared by the Special Bureau's Bangladesh Desk, June 2002.

in the arc that begins at India's Siliguri Corridor (North Bengal area that connects India to its Northeast)—goes through Bangladesh and stretches in India's Northeast and Burma's Arakan province with linkages running west toward Pakistan and the Middle East and east toward Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines.<sup>60</sup> The presence of Islamist parties, such as the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Islamic Aikyo Jote in Bangladesh's present ruling coalition, has fuelled fears that the country founded on the ideals of Bengali nationalism might become the fulcrum of jihad in the eastern slice of South Asia, which is quite as sensitive and conflict-prone as its west.<sup>61</sup> The repression of Hindu, Christian and Buddhist minorities in Bangladesh after the change of guard in October 2001, widely reported in Bangladesh's vibrant and largely secular press, has provided substance to such apprehensions.<sup>62</sup>

If globalization is the mantra of the new millennium, then conflicts, just as economies, are likely to be globalized. And if the religious divide fuels a "clash of civilizations," South Asia and its regions will be sucked into it. Religion, which led to the Partition of the Indian subcontinent but did not overtly influence the "little nationalisms" of northeast India, may begin to play a more important role in politics of the region. Not the least because ruling entities such as the BJP in India and the four-party, BNP-Jamaat-led coalition in Bangladesh are choosing to play up and play by the religious divide.

60. Saikia, *Contours*.

61. Bertil Lintner, "Beware of Bangladesh: Cocoon of Terror," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 April 2002.

62. Bangladesh press reports detailing atrocities on minorities are quoted in the *Annual Autumn Souvenir* of the Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Council.

# 11

SAMIR KUMAR DAS

## **Ethnicity and the Rise of Religious Radicalism: The Security Scenario in Contemporary Northeastern India**

**T**his paper focuses on the complex interconnection between ethnicity and religious radicalism in contemporary northeastern India and seeks to derive its implications for the region's security. While ethnicity is always considered as one of the dominant factors influencing and shaping the politics of the region, its connection with religious radicalism has become a subject of discussion only in very recent years. In most of the writings on politics of the region, religious radicalism—or for that matter any of its kindred variants—hardly receives any mention.<sup>1</sup> In strategic circles, however, religious radicalism in the Northeast is predominantly seen as a major threat sponsored and masterminded by unfriendly foreign powers acting in close collaboration with, and sometimes at the behest of, forces having no

1. To cite an example, a recently published book on Assam does not contain any entry on religion in its index. See Sanjib Baruah, *India: Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Identity* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

national and territorial base.<sup>2</sup> Thus, in sharp contrast to the first genre of writings, they not only express a particularly alarmist view but also vociferously deny its internal basis.<sup>3</sup> Both of them, however, fail to appreciate the fact that much of religious radicalism in the Northeast is embedded in ethnicity and does not exactly manifest itself in the way it does in other parts of the country. Religious radicalism situates itself within an ethnic matrix and assumes a highly complex character. This paper highlights the importance of understanding this complexity and its bearing on the security scenario of the region.

Religion, in the sense of a standardized set of ideas and practices, was relatively unknown to the predominantly tribal-inhabited parts of the Northeast. The oral nature of tribal religions and traditions allows a certain degree of flexibility and openness. The ideas and practices would vary significantly from one area to another, even among the members of the same family of tribes. Many of them do not feel the necessity of codifying and standardizing their ideas and practices. The religion of the Khasis of Meghalaya, for example, describes man's relation to God as direct and unmediated. No fixed set of ideas and practices is expected to govern their inter-relationships. Since there is a direct "covenant" between man and God from the beginning of time, there are no scriptures and standard forms required to follow while communicating with Him.<sup>4</sup> As religion becomes standardized, it rules out the possibilities of flexibility, openness and local variations. Standardization therefore serves as a means through which the adherents of religious ideas and practices articulate themselves into a relatively stable community. The articulation of a community, in other words, presupposes a certain standardization of its religious ideas and

2. See, for example, Jaideep Saikia, "Swadhin Asom-Brihat Bangla?" in *Contours: Essays on Security and Strategy* (Guwahati: Sagittarius, 2001), 18–20. See also P. V. Ramana, "'Networking' in the Northeast: Partners in Terror," *Faultlines* 11 (April 2002): 99–126. Strategists and strategic analysts often accuse the social scientists who research this region of being insensitive to the threat posed by "terrorism" in general and Islamic militancy in particular. See Ajai Sahni, "Social Science Research and Contemporary Conflicts: The Challenge of Research on Terrorism," *Faultlines* 9 (July 2001): 131–57.

3. Saikia, for example, observes that the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), one of the principal insurgent groups operating in the region, has failed to rope in new cadres deeply committed to its ideology and also in "instilling a growth curve in its ideology." See Saikia, *Contours*, 72.

4. Kynpham Singh, "Khasi Religion and Khasi Society," in Sujata Miri, ed., *Religion and Society of North East India* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1980), 44–45.

practices. For unless the norms are fixed and ideas and practices crystallized, no stable community of adherents can cluster around them. If people fight among themselves over what the ideas and practices are or should be, they do not form a homogeneous community.

“Religious radicalism,” to my mind, is a comparatively recent coinage. Its preference to other adjacent and much-used yet necessarily distinct terms, such as “communalism” and “fundamentalism,” may not at first sight appear to be too obvious to someone who is not very conversant with the society and politics of South Asia. While these terms may not be mutually exclusive, each has its distinctive accent and emphasis. The term “communalism” is usually reserved for referring to the political use of religion by arraying one community against another, whereas “fundamentalism” refers to the transformation (often described as “distortion”) at the level of ideas and practices characteristic of any particular religion. Political use calls for certain flexibility in the realm of these ideas and practices, for their use must render them serviceable to the exigencies of a given situation. Fundamentalism, by definition, rules out such flexibility for it freezes off certain ideas and practices by way of accepting them as “fundamental” and hence inviolate. But if one takes a longer time frame, one notices that ideas and practices held as “fundamental” to a particular religion by its adherents at any given time may not be held as such at another time. The changes in the corpus of so-called fundamentalist ideas and practices, even in the case of such stable and standard religions as Islam and Christianity, are too obvious to be easily brushed aside.

Religious radicalism, as we have said, is a new currency.<sup>5</sup> It first of all underlines the importance of religion in clustering a body of adherents around it and making them chart out a separatist path. Religious radicalism serves as the principle of community formation. As it brings together a group of adherents, it enables them to supersede the differences that are otherwise internal to them. Nagas, as we know, are an extremely polyglot and heterogeneous body of people consisting approximately of thirty-two groups strewn around various

5. Aijaz Ahmed used the expression in 1996. Aijaz Ahmed, “Radicalism of the Right and Logics of Secularism,” in Praful Bidwai et al., eds., *Religion, Religiosity and Communalism* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1996), 37–74.

parts of the Northeast and bordering Myanmar. They are not only culturally different but speak languages and dialects sometimes unintelligible to each other. Insofar as the Nagas convert themselves to Christianity, they are capable of transcending many of their cultural and linguistic differences. By the same token, the advent of Christianity introduces new and hitherto unknown sources of division within the same ethnic community (say, between the Christian and non-Christian Nagas). The rise of “radical” Islamic organizations in Assam, especially in the 1990s, has its social constituency among the Muslim immigrants—mostly from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. This has in fact brought about a sharp division between the Hindus and the Muslims among the immigrants. The riots that broke out in Assam in 1992 were confined to these two communities of immigrants. More often than not, community formation goes hand in hand with the demand for a separate statehood—whether within the Indian Union or without. As we will see, radicalism and separatism usually go together. Sometimes separatism is also expressed through a plea for redefining the nationhood, per se, of a country in a way that implies exclusion of certain communities hitherto considered as its constituent parts.

Secondly, all this is accompanied by a certain radicalization of the ideas and practices. Some of the factors responsible for this may be noted in this connection. One, the newfound zeal in following and observing them—especially in the Christian-dominated parts of the Northeast—is not only obsessive but speaks of a certain ethnicization of an otherwise universal faith. The Christianity practiced by the Nagas is known as “Naga Christianity.” Similarly, the Christianity practiced by the Khasis is called “Khasi Christianity.” Even if most of the Nagas and the Kukis happen to be Christians, they seldom pray in the same church. Vaishnavism in Assam also has its own peculiarities and is markedly different from that of Bengal or other parts of eastern India.<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Hinduism in Manipur is different from that of the rest of India.<sup>7</sup>

Two, this also implies a certain standardization of the norms and practices of the religion. The early flexibility in the observance of

6. See Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India* (Guwahati: Gauhati University Press, 1955), 69–71.

7. N. N. Bhattacharya, *Religious Culture of Northeastern India* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1995), 49.

norms and practices slowly gives way to their standardization. Certain ideas and practices are taken to be the be-all and end-all of a community so much so that anybody not seen to be falling in line faces various forms of social punishment (e.g., ridicule and rebuff, social ostracization, physical harm or annihilation or the threat of such). In the absence of a standardized religion among many of the communities living in the region, some of their ideas and practices are expressly projected as their own and enumerated to hold the members together and put up an organized resistance to others—maybe their Christian counterparts. For them, it is like founding a new religion seen as a cementing force in the face of a Christian or Hindu onslaught. *Brahma* among the Bodos,<sup>8</sup> *Sanamahi* among the Meiteis of Imphal valley,<sup>9</sup> *Seng-Khasi* among the Khasis of Meghalaya<sup>10</sup> and *Heraka* among the Kacha Nagas (consisting of the three tribal communities of Zemei, Lingmei and Rongmei, also known as Kabui)<sup>11</sup> living in the hills of Manipur are illustrative of this trend.

Three, radicalization in the Northeast assumes an organized character. The militant Islamic organizations seek to arrogate to themselves the sole authority of interpreting Islam. Social and political organizations set forth the norms according to which the adherents are expected to conduct their lives. This involves gradual restriction of scope for local variations and flexibility in the observance of these norms. An example may be cited in this context. Professor Leela Gogoi has classified “the Muslims of Assam” into five distinct categories: the descendants of the prisoners of war held hostage by the Ahom rulers in course of their operation against the Mughals; the descendants of *pirs* (holy men) and their disciples who came to Assam for preaching their respective dispensations; the descendants of eight artisan families specially employed by the Ahom dynasts; the natives

8. See Kameswar Brahma, *A Study of Socio-Religious Beliefs and Practices and Ceremonies of the Bodos* (Kolkata: Punthi Pustak, 1992), 193–208.

9. See N. Vijayalakshmi Brara, *Politics, Society and Cosmology in India's North East* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

10. See N. K. Das, *Ethnic Identity, Ethnicity and Social Stratification in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Inter-India, 1987), 231–34. Also see Sunil Sen Gupta, “Alienation or Crisis of Identity: Struggle of the Seng-Khasis” in S. B. Chakrabarti, ed., *Social Science and Social Concern*, Felicitation Volume in Honor of Professor B. K. Roy Burman (Delhi: Mittal, 1988), 346–55.

11. See Stephen Fuchs, *Godmen on Warpath* (New Delhi: Munshiram Banarasilal, 1992), 136–51.

(*thaluwa*) converted to Islam; and temporarily settled, cultivating (*pamuwa*) Muslims.<sup>12</sup> Since most of the Muslim immigrants are engaged in farming and cultivation, they evidently belong to Professor Gogoi's last category. Interestingly he makes a distinction between the "Muslims of Assam" (*Asomar Musalman*) and the "Assamese Muslims" (*Asomiya Musalman*). In his words, only the latter ought to be regarded as "an inseparable part of Assam's original (*mul*) nationality."<sup>13</sup> His hesitation to include the immigrant Muslims in the "original" Assamese nationality is overt. Today, however, the inclusion of the Assamese Muslims in the so-called original Assamese nationality is not as unproblematic as Professor Gogoi wants us to believe.<sup>14</sup> The examples of harassment and humiliation meted out to such eminent litterateurs as Syed Abdul Malik, whose identity as "Assamese Muslims" has never been in doubt, were by no means rare during the days of the Assam movement (1979–85).

This paper makes a preliminary attempt to draw attention to the formation of radical religious discourses that are slowly gaining currency in the region in recent years. The importance of studying their historical roots can hardly be denied. The paper of course makes occasional references to the region's history. But this should not be taken to mean that present-day religious radicalism in the Northeast stands in any simple and linear correlation to its history. In fact, there are as many histories of religious radicalism as there are radical religious discourses. Thus to cite an example, as many as ten political organizations "representing the Meiteis and those who speak Meeteilon" in a memorandum submitted to the prime minister of India raised the demand for inclusion of Meeteilon in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 1992. They also urged the central government to recognize "original" Meeteilon script (in place of Bengali prevailing at that time) as "the only script" to communicate their language. The memorandum seems to have presented a history that not only draws them closer to their Mongoloid and tribal

12. Leela Gogoi, *Asomar Sanskriti* (in Assamese) [The Culture of Assam] (Jorhat: Bharati Prakashan, 1982), 273. Note: All translations from original Assamese/Bengali sources are by the author.

13. *Ibid.*, 279.

14. For an analysis of the crisis of identity faced by Assamese Muslims, see Udayon Misra, "Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam," *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai) 34, no. 21 (22 May 1999): 1,270.

neighbors but virtually erases another equally significant “history” of their incorporation into the Vaishnavite brand of Hinduism since the beginning of the eighteenth century. Bengali, being the language of Santa Das Gossain—the meandering monk from Sylhet who had preached Vaishnavism to Manipur Court—becomes the visible symbol of such incorporation. In other words, the formation of a radical religious discourse makes certain historical statements possible and thereby sets forth a trajectory that fixes its limits.

In a region like the Northeast, radical religious discourses are situated within a very complex demographic and ethnic matrix. The process of community formation inspired by the emergence of radical religious discourses in the Northeast has taken on an ethnic character as much as the prevailing ethnic lines of difference slowly get translated into religious divisions. To appreciate their complex interconnections, it may be instructive to keep three relatively distinguishable *moments* in mind. Each moment is characterized by a specific conjunction of ethnic and religious forces. These moments should not be taken as precise and neatly divided chronological stages. For all of them can be (and in reality are) simultaneous and overlapping. The first moment is represented by the tribes’ *encounter* with the standard religions from outside. In most cases, such encounters have resulted in the incorporation of the masses of tribals into some standard religion—whether Hinduism or Christianity. It may be noted in this connection that Islam did not exist as an alternative in a region that never formed part of Mughal India. As we have seen, the encounter invested the tribals of diverse groups and sub-groups with some form of a pan-tribal identity. The second moment is that of *resistance*. This is a moment characterized by the tribes’ resistance to the dominant trend toward their incorporation into the fold of any standard religion. Interestingly, the articulation of tribal religions at this moment follows the same rules and codes as those of the so-called standard religions. In a region like the Northeast, where immigration from across international borders has already assumed alarming proportions, the third moment is represented by the slow and rather imperceptible *translation* of the citizen-foreigner dichotomy into a plain and simple Hindu-Muslim divide in recent years. We know that the number of Muslims living in Assam, especially in bordering districts, has gone up to a point where it cannot be accounted for merely by their

natural growth. Muslim immigrants are viewed predominantly as a threat to the language and culture of the Assamese.

The paper also discusses the implications of the rise of religious radicalism for the security of the northeastern region. The Indian state faces a threat to its security insofar as its claim to represent the nation is contested through the invocation of radical religious discourses. Such discourses, as we will see, contest not only the state's *authority* to stake the claim but also the *way* it imagines the nation into existence while representing it. As argued elsewhere, the nation that the state in post-colonial India claims to represent is marked by a certain discontinuity with the one that came into being in the course of the nationalist movement.<sup>15</sup> We view religious radicalism as a threat—whether actual or potential—to the state's representation of Indian nationhood.

Accordingly, the paper is divided into four closely inter-related parts. The first three parts analyze three distinct moments of religious radicalism in the Northeast. In the fourth, we seek to derive their implications for the security of the region.

Before we make any headway, it is necessary to mention at least three major limitations of this paper. First, it is true that the relative invisibility of religious radicalism in the region produces a certain insensitivity to the security threat associated with it. But the paper does not suggest that we instantly press the panic button. Such reactions, I feel, are extremely premature. Although the combination of the ethnic with the religious makes for an interesting and in some sense unique case, no attempt has been made in this paper to compare it with the scenario of the rest of India. Secondly, the main objective of this paper is to analyze, *in very broad terms*, the phenomenon of religious radicalism in contemporary northeastern India. While pursuing this objective, the paper draws on some examples and cases that may appear to be of a highly selective and arbitrary nature. The selection of cases was by no means an easy job. But in most cases, it has been inspired by concern for the region's security. While the importance of closer and detailed micro-studies can hardly be doubted, any analysis of the overall security scenario in the region at the initial stage calls for an understanding of the phenomenon only in

15. Samir Kumar Das, *Ethnicity, Nation and Security: Essays on Northeastern India* (New Delhi: South Asian, 2003).

broad terms. It is also interesting to know whether fragmented and dispersed micro-studies, by themselves, can at all contribute to any meaningful understanding of the region's overall security scenario. In support of my arguments, I have depended primarily—though not exclusively—on some of the research I have conducted in various parts of the Northeast during the 1990s. References to many of these examples and cases are both brief and sketchy. Thirdly, foreign powers—not quite known for their friendliness to India—reportedly play a role in aiding and abetting the phenomenon of religious radicalism. We do not have any independent way of verifying the linkage. This definitely is one of the major limitations of the paper. It is only likely that they try to fish in *already* troubled waters. But to attribute the entire phenomenon to the activities and machinations of a few foreign powers and external forces is perhaps too simplistic.<sup>16</sup>

## Encounter

CONTRARY TO WHAT THE COLONIAL RULERS and anthropologists would have us believe, contemporary evidence suggests that the Nagas, especially those living in the foothills, were in constant contact with the tribes of the nearby plains in upper Assam. But the nature of the contact was such that they by and large did not perceive it as a source of threat to their distinctive cultural identity. Such contacts involved a wide variety of social, economic and cultural exchanges of commodities, services and women. But it was only with the colonial annexation of the Naga Hills during 1832–74 and the advent of the American missionaries in 1872 that the Nagas felt threatened and organized themselves against the colonial rule and the American missionaries.<sup>17</sup> By all accounts, the early history of the spread of Christianity in the hills was fraught with frictions and violent conflicts between the missionaries and the autochthonous tribal groups.<sup>18</sup>

16. I have criticized the “foreign hand theory” in Samir Kumar Das, “National Security in the Age of Globalization: A Study of the State’s Responses to Ethnic Insurgency in Assam,” in Gurnam Singh, ed., *Ethnicity and the Emerging International (Dis)Order* (New Delhi: Kanishka, 2002).

17. See Sanghamitra Misra, “The Nature of Colonial Intervention in the Naga Hills, 1840–80,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 51 (19 December 1998), 3,273–79; Sajal Nag, “The Context of Insurgency in Northeast India” (2002, photocopy).

18. Verrier Elwin, himself associated with the church, chronicles many examples of such frictions in the nineteenth century. See Verrier Elwin, ed., *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

Contact per se was not a taboo for the Nagas. But the contact that brought them into an essentially asymmetrical relationship with the colonial rulers definitely was. Interestingly, it was only after independence of India that Christianity became a formidable force and the number of Christian converts started growing up by leaps and bounds.

It is interesting to note how Christianity plays a key role in the articulation of the Naga rebel discourse. Today Naga rebel discourse, especially the one articulated by the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (now Nagalim) (I-M), has reached a point where it is impossible to sever it from Christianity. First of all, Christianity serves as thread that is believed to have bound heterogeneous Naga groups together into one single Naga “nation.” Now 98 percent of the Nagas happen to be Christians. The articulation of the Naga rebel discourse implies an erasure of the pre-Christian past that is marked by fierce and violent internecine conflicts among various Naga groups. A.L. Ao, a distinguished Naga scholar, in his recently published book argues that it is only “through the love of Jesus” that the Nagas “came to know of each other and recognize the existence of the co-tribes.”<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, while Christianity could not serve as a unifying symbol in the battle against the colonial rulers practicing the same religion, it is looked upon as a potent force that is capable of differentiating Nagas from the “Hindu state” in India. The Manifesto of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M), prepared in 1980, accuses the Indian state of having “introduced decadent Hindu culture and literature to the Nagas on a massive scale.” This, as Ferdaus Quarishi argues, may be one of the factors explaining the rising number of converts in the wake of independence of India.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that the Naga rebel discourse shows a tendency of accepting Christianity as an accomplished and irreversible fact of Naga history. While the role of Christianity in bringing the Naga “nation” into existence in its present form can hardly be denied, its relation to the constitution of the Naga “nation” is neither axiomatic nor free from hassles. Some of the problems that continue to act as fetters may be

19. A. Lanunungsang Ao, *From Phizo to Muivah: The National Question in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Mittal, 2002), 217.

20. Ferdaus Quraishi, *Christianity in the Northeastern Hills of South Asia: Social Impact and Political Implications* (Dhaka: University Press, 1987), 11.

noted at this point: One, it has brought in a new source of division between the Christians and the non-Christians even within the Naga rebel ranks. The friction can be traced back to the days of Naga National Council (NNC), the harbinger of insurgency in the Naga Hills. In the 1960s when a section of Naga rebels started hobnobbing with China and sought help from her, the church leaders under Rev. Longri Ao expressed their concern.<sup>21</sup> The tilt toward Communist China was perceived by the church as a threat to the propagation and spread of Christianity. In July 1989, Isak Swu and Tuengaling Muivah, the chairman and secretary, respectively, of NSCN, accused Khaplang, then vice chairman, of killing dozens of “Christian socialist revolutionaries” who were Tangkhul Nagas. Two, the increase in the number of Christians in Nagaland is neither sharp nor unilinear. The abrupt decline in number, especially in some years, actually shows that some Nagas who had earlier converted to Christianity must have refused to identify themselves as Christians in subsequent years. If one tabulates the volume of the Baptist Church’s membership between 1941 and 1965, one is surprised to discover the sudden fall in some particular years. For example, in 1944, the membership dropped to 30,980 from 32,452 in the immediately preceding year. In 1947, the figure stood at 41,237 compared to 50,601 in the previous year. In 1952, membership declined to 56,272 from the previous year’s 63,392. In 1959, it fell to 72,531 from 74,053 in 1958. Similarly, it declined from 90,718 in 1961 to 76,840 in 1962.<sup>22</sup> It seems that their conversion makes room for such withdrawals and the path from tribalism to Christianity is extremely slippery.

We may wrap up this section by way of pointing to the transformation that Christianity undergoes while becoming a rallying cry for the constitution of the Naga “nation.” Christianity among the Nagas is of course “Naga Christianity.” According to Julian Jacobs, Christianity in Naga Hills has “a character that is *sui generis*.”<sup>23</sup> Ethnicization of religion deprives it of its universal appeal and prevents them from being united with other non-Naga Christians (e.g., the Kukis). Even after

21. B. G. Verghese, *India’s Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development* (New Delhi: Konark, 1997), 93.

22. Figures compiled from P. T. Philip, *The Growth of the Baptist Church in Nagaland* (Gauhati: Baptist Mission, 1976), 226.

23. Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas: Society, Culture and Colonial Encounter* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 157.

embracing Christianity, Khasis do not cease to be Khasis. R.T. Rymbai, for example, argues that of “the three commandments” that guide the religious life of the Khasi-Pnars of Meghalaya, the third (*tip kur, tip kha*) “forms an integral part of their religion.” While paraphrasing this commandment, he writes:

The Khasi-Pnars take their descent from the mother. The children take their surnames from hers. All those who descend *ka iambei*, the first ancestors, form one composite clan. Marriage between members of a clan is forbidden. It is a sin, which is unforgivable...I cannot imagine a Khasi-Pnar born and brought up a Christian, deliberately violating this commandment and can hope that this abominable sin, which the Khasi-Pnars called *ka pap ka sang*, will be forgiven if he prays in the name of Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

## Resistance

WE HAVE ALREADY SAID that the tribals’ encounter with standard religions was never free from problems. They found their own religion insufficiently equipped to put up a resistance to the spread of Hinduism or Christianity. The eclipse of tribal religions in the wake of what we call “encounter” has more or less been a universal story. Tribal religions are commonly categorized as “Others” in government circles. The figures under this category register what looks like an irreversible decline. In the encounter between the standard and tribal religions, the latter was seen to give way. In Assam, the decrease between 1951 and 1961 was about 7 percent; in Manipur about 22 percent. Between 1961 and 1971, the decrease in Meghalaya was about 4 percent and in Nagaland about 21 percent.

In most cases, resistance is triggered by the threat tribal religions face while encountering standard religions from the plains. The Bodos were the earliest in the region to have embraced Hinduism under the influence of the Vaishnava *gossains* (preachers) in the sixteenth century. Before their encounter with Hinduism, the Meiteis of Imphal valley had their traditional religion that included “total” faith

24. R. T. Rymbai, “Some Aspects of the Religion of the Khasi-Pnars,” in Miri, *Religion and Society*, 38–42.

in Lord Sanamahi, the highest local deity of Manipur, homage to *paphal* (a particular posture of a coiled serpent symbolizing cosmic power) and the observance of a number of rituals and festivals. Over a period of three centuries, the Meiteis were converted to Hinduism through the introduction of alien Hindu religion under the patronage of King Garib Nawaj (1707–48). The entire Meitei population was converted to Hinduism during his time by a royal edict passed in 1717. This was followed by a series of measures to destroy all traces of the traditional Meitei religion. In 1723, most of the temples of the *lais* (local deities) were destroyed. In 1927, all the *maichous* (local scholars of excellence) were ordered to bring all the books and manuscripts written in old Meitei script in their possession and all these were burnt to ashes in an event popularly known as *puya maitabba*. A strict royal edict was proclaimed that forbade singing of the devotional songs in Manipuri. Many people reading Meeteilon script were executed. As Hodson comments: “Religious dissent was treated with the same ruthless severity as meted out to political opponents, and wholesale banishment and execution drove the people into acceptance of the tenets of Hinduism.”<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note how resistance is organized by way of “reviving” what the members of a tribe consider to be their traditional (sometimes described by them as “original”) faith. The recent “revival” of the worship of *Bathou* as the supreme God and cactus (*sisu*) as the emblem of that God is an expression of their eagerness to differentiate themselves mainly from the Assamese-speaking Hindus. It is interesting to note that the Meitei resistance to their gradual incorporation into the Hindu fold took on an essentially linguistic character. During the Meeteilon movement, the Government of India was accused of having unleashed and perpetrated “linguistic imperialism.” In November 1991, the All-Manipur Students’ Union (AMSU) spearheaded a civil disobedience movement that included, among other things, boycotting of the scheduled languages in educational institutions, rebuffing the national anthem and a ban on screening of the Hindi and other scheduled language films. Mr. K. Saratchandra, then president of AMSU, warned that if the government failed to concede their demand (for the inclusion of Meeteilon

25. T. C. Hodson, *The Meitheis* (London: David Nutt, 1908).

in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution), “it might harm the integrity of India.”<sup>26</sup> In short, traditional Meitei religion and culture were invoked only to emphasize their role in vitiating the language and posing a threat to the natural continuity of the community. The Meitei case demonstrates how religion becomes secondary only to language in the quest for collective identity.

It is in this context that the tribal attempts at reviving their religions need to be examined. We have already said that conversion to standard forms does not rule out their distinctive ethnic identity. The “revival” of the tribal elements is possible because “Hindu eschatology absorbs (rather than obliterates) the tribal traditions.”<sup>27</sup> In most cases, tribal religions are seen to undergo some kind of standardization while organizing their resistance. Stephen Fuchs, for example, has described the introduction of *Heraka* among the Kacha Nagas as a means of “sanskritizing” their faith and keeping them at par with Hinduism.<sup>28</sup> Rani Gaidiliu, one of its principal mentors, became a member of the All-India Hindu Council in 1962.

## Translation

ASSAM REMAINED by and large outside the communal map of India. While large parts of India were rocked by successive tremors of post-Partition riots, Assam and many other parts of the Northeast were surprisingly free from the menace. The state did not fall in line when communal riots broke out in northern India in 1964 on the issue of the alleged theft of the holy relic of the Prophet from the Hazratbahl mosque in Kashmir. It seems that Assam’s inclusion in the communal map is a comparatively recent phenomenon. It is only with the demolition of the “Babri Masjid”/“disputed structure” in 1992 that the news of communal riots starts to trickle in from the state. It is important to understand the phenomenon in its proper perspective.

26. *Hindustan Times*, 29 April 1992.

27. Chandra Jyoti Sarmah, “Religious Trends and Identity Crisis: A Cross-cultural Study among Three Plain Tribes of Assam,” in Sarthak Sengupta, ed., *People of Northeast India: Anthropological Perspectives* (New Delhi: Gyan, 1996).

28. Fuchs, *Godmen on Warpath*, 145.

The Assam movement (1979–85) is usually regarded as a benchmark in the politics of the region on several counts. First of all, it was perhaps the only one of its kind in post-colonial India that could not only involve diverse segments of the people of Assam but also sustain itself for six long years. Indeed, the popular base of the movement was so significant that the *Assam Tribune*, then the largest circulating English daily published from Assam, in one of its editorials likened it to the Gandhian civil disobedience movement of 1942. Secondly, it brought to a head for the first time the issue of “illegally settled foreigners” coming from across the borders. Migration to Assam is by no means new or unprecedented. Assam’s attraction as a favorite destination of the immigrants since the beginning of the last century is by now well recorded.<sup>29</sup> With a vast expanse of fertile, alluvial land and population density at its lowest in the-then India, it became the natural destination of the poor and land-hungry peasants. Communal considerations might have played a part in bringing in an ever-increasing number of immigrants—mostly peasants of Muslim background, from adjoining East Bengal as a means of broadening and consolidating the support base of the Muslim League reigning in Assam in the early part of the twentieth century. While sporadic outbursts by the natives against such settlement were by no means rare,<sup>30</sup> there was hardly any organized and enduring mass movement of this magnitude organized against the settlers. The Assam movement in a way seems to have burst open the lid that had capped, as it were, the grievances accumulated over the years in the minds of the natives. Thirdly, it sparked similar movements in many other parts of the Northeast at about the same time or even thereafter. Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh were rocked by a series of similar anti-foreigner agitation both in the 1980s as well as in the 1990s. In many ways, the Assam movement is paradigmatic of many of these subsequent movements in the region.

Since it was a movement that could successfully draw diverse segments of the people of Assam together under the umbrella of a

29. Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826–1947* (New Delhi: PPH, 1977), 102.

30. According to Amalendu Guha, Manik Chandra Baruah was the first to have raised his voice of protest against the dangers involved in indiscriminate immigration of Muslims way back in 1915. See Amalendu Guha, *ibid.*

strong and enduring mass movement (at least during the initial years), the Assam movement was bound to be of multi-dimensional nature. The movement seems to have been characterized by the complex interplay of a number of discourses. All of them converged at a common site, enacted and played out in complex and apparently unpredictable ways. There is a tendency in scholarly circles to lose sight of this enormous complexity and reduce the movement to any one of them. We feel that the complexity was irreducible, and it is interesting to see how these discourses impinged on each other and produced strange and unanticipated results. At one level, it was a movement that centered on the opposition between the citizens and the foreigners. (A “tussle between the citizens and foreigners” as Prafulla Mahanta, the president of the All-Assam Students’ Union during the movement, who subsequently became the chief minister of Assam, points out.<sup>31</sup>)

The three major demands underlying the movement were detection, disenfranchisement and deportation of foreigners. The leaders and ideologues of the Assam movement strove hard to keep the opposition from sliding into a simple Hindu-Muslim divide. For example, it was asserted that the movement was explicitly targeted against the “foreigners” irrespective of their religious and ethnic identity.<sup>32</sup> This is what encouraged them to describe it as “Indian” and emphasize their identity as Indian citizens. They congratulated themselves on being the first to take up a cause of national importance. They also wondered why such a cause had so long been neglected at such great expense. As Mahesh Joshi, an ardent sympathizer of the movement, has put it: “The basic fact of the Assam movement is that the people of Assam are fighting an all-India battle ... single-handed.”<sup>33</sup> It is true that in some cases, as we have said, the Muslims per se were indiscriminately branded as “foreigners” and those among them whose identity as Indian citizens was never in doubt were forced to bear the brunt of the movement. It amounted to a violation of what the leadership had

31. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, *The Tussle between the Citizens and Foreigners in Assam* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1986).

32. All-Assam Students’ Union, *The Foreigners Problem: Why a Solution is Still Elusive?* (Panbazar: Lawyer’s, 1983).

33. Mahesh Joshi, *Assam: The Indian Conflict* (New Delhi: Prachi Prakashan, 1981), 90.

celebrated as the *authentic* opposition.<sup>34</sup> Caught in the grave dilemma of failing to acknowledge what in practice was widespread, the public reactions of the Assamese leadership to the incidents of violation were interesting: sometimes, it simply refused to accept the fact that violations had taken place at all and chose to adopt an ostrich-like policy. Often it was forced to acknowledge violations at the instance of others by disingenuously reading them into the authentic one, by castigating the victims as people who might have been Indian citizens themselves but went out of their way in sheltering and protecting their co-religionist “foreigners,” thereby jeopardizing Indian interests. “Good” Muslims are always “bad” citizens. The perceived otherness of immigrant Muslims remained deeply embedded—yet publicly unacknowledged—in all such attempts. Besides, the leaders and ideologues seemed to have made a subtle distinction between the Hindus and the Muslims among the immigrants and went on record saying that the threat to their language and culture came from the Bengali-speaking Hindu immigrants rather than their Muslim counterparts. As Homen Borgohain observes: “The problem of outsiders for many of the Assamese is the problem of Bengali Hindus. Because they believe that it is only from them that the danger to their culture could come.”<sup>35</sup> The Muslim immigrants have returned Assamese as their mother tongue in consecutive census operations conducted in the state especially since Independence. It was only in 1991 that many of them returned—albeit at the instance of some minority organizations (e.g., the United Minorities Front)—Bengali as their mother tongue, thereby forcing a decline in the percentage of Assamese-speaking people for the first time in Assam’s history.

But at another level, the leaders and ideologues emphasized their identity as Indian citizens not because the Assamese were any more Indian than others, but because they looked upon their Indian identity as a vehicle of preserving their distinctive ethnic identity, language and culture. Most of the documents published by the organizations

34. I have discussed this opposition in Samir Kumar Das, “In Search of a Community: The Immigrant Muslims of Contemporary Assam,” in C. Joshua Thomas, ed., *Dimensions of Displaced People in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Regency, 2002), 350–51.

35. Homen Borgohain, *Babiragatar Samasya* (in Assamese) [The Problem of Outsiders] (Guwahati: Kamal Malakar, 1979), 24.

leading the movement emphasized the threat that the alarming influx had posed to the Assamese language and culture and asserted their “right to place under the sun.”<sup>36</sup> In short, Indian citizenship provided an empty space within which their Assamese identity was enacted and played out.

Immigration from across the borders has by all accounts gone down in recent years. Census figures show that Assam’s population grew by 53 percent between 1971 and 1991 (no census could be held in 1981 due to the movement), 1 percent lower than the All-India average. Though decreasing in numbers, there is reason to believe that immigration has acquired some alarming proportions in recent years. Research intermittently conducted on the problem of immigration in the Brahmaputra Valley points to some alarming trends. First, the migrants no longer come in a haphazard and sporadic manner. They do not pour in from wherever they can. Nor do they settle wherever they see vacant land in Assam, which earlier was the case.<sup>37</sup> In most cases the immigrants enter Assam from some well-known points of entry in an organized and planned manner. They usually take the help of their local contacts—sometimes people of their own villages settled in Assam, or even Indian brokers or middlemen who make money by way of getting them transported to their places of destination and providing them with “official” papers as proof of their Indian citizenship. It seems there exists a well-knit network thorough which migration takes place. The role of the early settlers coming from the same village or district of Bangladesh is important in getting the late-immigrants settled and economically rehabilitated. Since the entire process works as a chain, their detection and punishment by the guest-state become highly improbable. By the time their presence starts being felt in the polity and economy, they are pretty well settled and it is impossible to single them out and detect them. While the presence of operatives, middlemen and brokers establishing a network through which immigration takes place and continues unabated

36. See for example, Asom Sahitya Sabha (Asom Literary Society), *Eclipse in the East: An Analysis of the Present Agitation in Assam* (Guwahati: Publicity Cell, Asom Sahitya Sabha, 1980), 8.

37. I have discussed migration in Samir Kumar Das, “Immigration and Agricultural Modernization: The Case of Assam (1979–83),” *Socialist Perspective* 20 (Kolkata), nos. 3 & 4 (December 1992–March 1993): 165–75.

can hardly be doubted, their connection to what Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya calls, “Muslim conspiracy” of transforming the demographic composition of Assam is not all too apparent.<sup>38</sup>

Secondly, the demographic pattern of the Brahmaputra Valley thus has undergone a distinctive change in recent years. The valley is known for the presence of some very conspicuous immigrant-inhabited pockets and there is reason to believe that these pockets are swelling, in terms of percentage of the population living there. The extraordinary growth of population in pockets known to have a very high concentration of immigrants is disproportionately greater than the average growth rate of population in Assam. Two factors continuously work against any neat and precise estimate of the district-wide composition of population in Assam. The cracking and splitting of districts, especially since the early 1980s, does not allow us to compare the population trends in any simple manner. Moreover, since no census operation could be held in Assam in 1981, population data usually come in the block of twenty years. However, if one chooses to break up the entire block in order to obtain the average for the decade—whether of 1971–81 or 1981–91—certain interesting facts become obvious. Most of the districts, though not all, which during either of these two decades recorded a growth rate higher than that of 1961–71, are believed to be immigrant-inhabited pockets of the state. Table 1 on the following page gives us some idea of the population trends in these districts.

Table 1 takes into consideration only those districts where the percentage of population growth during 1971–81/1981–91 has been greater than that of the previous decade. Not all cases of unusual increase can be attributed to the influx of population from across the borders. For example, the increase in some of the upper Assam districts, such as Jorhat, may have been due to the displacement of population caused by the devastating rounds of annual floods in the adjoining districts of Majuli and Dhemaji.<sup>39</sup> Cachar and Hailakandi,

38. See Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya, *The Silent Invasion: Assam versus Infiltration* (Guwahati: Spectrum, 2001), pp. 122–28.

39. Studies have been conducted under the auspices of O. K. D. Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati, to survey the impact of floods on the population composition of some of the upper Assam districts. The reports are available for private circulation.

**Table 1.** District-wide population trends (%) in Assam

District	1961–71	1971–91	1971–81/ 1981–91
Kokrajhar	8.12	22.48	11.24
Kamrup	1.07	26.92	13.46
Darrang	1.51	12.39	6.19
Sonitpur	-8.2	29.52	14.76
Morigaon	0.38	13.39	6.69
Nagaon	3.08	12.27	6.13
Golaghat	4.81	27.27	13.63
Jorhat	6.7	15.63	7.81
Sibsagar	-3.89	12.29	6.14
Tinsukia	4.9	16.01	8.00
N. C. Hills	3.05	58.3	29.15
Hailakandi	-3.62	22.93	11.16
Cachar	1.36	22.63	11.81

Source: *Statistical Handbook: Assam* (Guwahati: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, 1996), 18–19.

though outside the Brahmaputra Valley, are a favorite immigrant destination primarily because of their ethnic proximity to the local population. N.C. Hills has a substantial percentage of tribal population and of late there is believed to have been a perceptible immigration of the tribals from the neighboring states of the region. But the districts of lower Assam mentioned above are widely believed to have contained many immigrant-inhabited pockets. The ethnic divide between the immigrants and the natives shows signs of coinciding with a certain territorial segregation in the state. The hitherto noticed cheek-by-jowl settlement of the immigrants and the natives might have its pitfalls, but it certainly gave both these groups an opportunity to know each other and interact. This has led a number of social scientists working on the region to express satisfaction with the process of social assimilation taking place between the groups. In a sense, this was true. For example, some recent studies point to a growing assimilation of the people living in the *Char* (embankment) areas. According to a report prepared by Assam's Char Unnayan Nigam

(Embankment Development Corporation) in 1997, an estimated 2.1 million people live in as many as 2,089 Char villages. Muslims constitute an overwhelming majority (about 1.8 million) among them. Most of their forefathers came to Assam in the late-nineteenth century and have become, in the words of Dr. Rezaul Karim, “an inseparable part of the Assamese nation.”<sup>40</sup> They have adopted Assamese as their mother tongue and even sided with the Assamese in the language movements of 1960 and 1972. But with the change in the demographic settlement pattern, occasions of interaction between these groups have been considerably reduced. As the immigrants—mostly Muslims—live in ghetto-like settlements and in the process reduce the natives to a minority in the immediate neighborhood, they cannot be expected to “accept Assamese cultural icons and institutions so easily.”<sup>41</sup> Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya refers to a survey conducted by Sudhakar Rao on the settlement pattern in the district of Marigaon, which is known for its high concentration of immigrants. According to him, during the early 1980s when the Assam movement was at its peak, as many as twenty-five villages of the district were “totally de-Hinduized.” Rao analyzed the case of seventy-four other villages, which were “exclusively Hindu villages until 1983” but which were in the process of “being taken over by the Muslim immigrants.”<sup>42</sup> The rate of immigration exceeds that of assimilation. In fact, according to Udayon Misra, it is the other way around. The inclusion of “the neo-Assamese Muslims” (in an obvious reference to the immigrants who had returned Assamese as their mother tongue in the consecutive census operations) has led to the “transformation of the Assamese identity”:

Regarding the majority of the Assamese language, there seems little doubt because the number of neo-Assamese will keep on increasing. But while the future of the Assamese speaker is ensured, the future content and course of Assamese language and literature is bound to change along

40. Rezaul Karim, “Asomar jatiya jeewan aru char-chaporir musulman” (in Assamese) [The National Life of Assam and the Musalmans of the Embankments], *Asom Sabitya Sabba Patrika* 56, no. 2 (February 2001): 29.

41. Udayon Misra, “Immigration and Identity Transformation in Assam,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1,264–71.

42. Quoted in Bhattacharyya, *The Silent Invasion*, 125.

with the expansion of the cultural determinants of the Assamese society. While the large majority of the neo-Assamese Muslims are today in the process of being integrated with the Assamese community whose cultural determinants are largely Hindu, yet further imbalance in the demographic structure in favor of immigrant Muslims may result in the rise of pan-Islamic positioning.<sup>43</sup>

Thus to conclude, the particular settlement pattern and the waning of social intercourse between the immigrants and the natives are what make the present-day immigration particularly threatening.

Thirdly, the immigrant pockets seem also to turn fast into hotbeds of fundamentalism and insurgency. It is true that fundamentalism has never been altogether alien to the political practice of the immigrant Muslims. Yet, its present-day version is remarkably different on many counts. First, there is reason to think that the newly ascendant Islamic fundamentalism has acquired an organized and militant character. Security agencies in India reportedly have information that about fifteen militant Islamic organizations are operating in the state, of which three (viz., Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam [MULTA], Muslim Liberation Army [MLA]—formerly known as the Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam [MULFA], and Islamic Liberation Army of Assam [ILAA]) are quite strong. Many of them are reportedly acting at the behest of such foreign espionage agencies as the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and “ultra-fundamentalist bodies” such as Islamic Chhatra Shibir and Jamaat-i-Islami of Bangladesh. Formerly their activities were restricted to the multi-ethnic areas of the Brahmaputra Valley (e.g., Nagaon and Marigaon) where Muslims have always been in sizeable numbers. But now their activities have spread out to the vast areas of Barpeta, Goalpara and Dhubri, and even to such far-off areas as Cachar of the Barak Valley.<sup>44</sup> While their activities are engulfing ever-newer areas, they are also undergoing a certain militarization. The roots of fundamentalist militancy among immigrant Muslims may be traced back to the large-scale

43. Udayon Misra, *The Transformation of Assamese Identity: A Historical Survey*, H. K. Barpujari Endowment Lecture 4 (Shillong: North East India History Association, 2001), 82.

44. Dileep Chandan, “Assam: Closing Ranks,” *Sunday*, May 7–11, 1997, 59–60.

anti-Muslim pogroms in the Brahmaputra Valley organized during the tumultuous days of 1983. One may recall that the Muslim section of the AASU leadership, comprising such persons as Nurul Hussain and Nekibur Zaman, was so deeply hurt at this that it severed all connections with the organization for turning itself into a mouthpiece of the “chauvinist Hindus” and thereby sacrificing its secular character. A Muslim Volunteers’ Force was raised in Assam as a vanguard for protecting the Muslims against attacks from the Hindus. Its stated objectives are:

... to impart training in the Muslims for self-defense, to form “death squads” to enroll people and training them for protecting the people belonging to the Muslim community in buses, trains and in public places, to take suitable measures against those who by virtue of their power and high ranks are condemning the Muslims, torturing and killing them, to take counter-measures then and there, to take steps for restoring Muslim interests wherever they are in jeopardy, to extend help to Muslims who are in dire straits, to convert Assam into the Waterloo of RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and to take a constant vigil on government employees and to inform the authorities about their misdeeds.<sup>45</sup>

Even Saiyad Azad Madani, widely appreciated for his moderate views, called upon the Muslims to unite against the Asom Gana Parishad, a proclaimed successor to the forces loyal to the erstwhile Assam movement, and to take up arms whenever necessary:

The religion has not prevented Muslims from fighting the enemies. If someone comes to attack you, then try to make him understand with sympathy; but if someone does not understand, then engage him in a frontal battle.<sup>46</sup>

In the same public meeting held at Doboka, Assam, Madani also exhorted Muslims to train in karate and kung fu in self-defense and to spend a minimum of three to four hours a day for arms training. The

45. *Saptabik Neelachal* (in Assamese), 20 July 1983.

46. *Agradoot* (in Assamese), 25 February 1990.

Muslims, he added, should remember that Asom Gana Sangram Parishad, which had spearheaded the movement, killed “thousands of their brothers” in earlier years. Muslim fundamentalism has so far made it a point to see the Indian state as the ultimate savior and protector of Muslim interests. But now it seems that the fundamentalists no longer show the patience of keeping faith in the state. Their faith has of late been severely eroded with the effect that they either fall prey to foreign forces or feel the necessity of standing on their own and resolving their problems without resorting to the Indian state. That the faith of Muslim immigrants has considerably eroded in recent years is evident from the fact that *Kalam*, which by its own admission is the spokesman of the Muslims, accused Hiteswar Saikia, then chief minister of Assam, of falling “victim to the Hindutva-wadi game plan.”<sup>47</sup> The more this feeling gets entrenched, the less they are likely to approach the state to vent their grievances.

It is true that the opposition between citizens and foreigners shows signs of being translated into a plain and simple Hindu-Muslim dichotomy. But still a section of insurgents is not easily reconciled to this trend. In tune with its “secularist” stand, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) promises to fight hard against this. ULFA’s designation of the immigrants from East Bengal as “one of the major parts of the people living in Assam” (*Asombasi*) is significant. In one of its most detailed statements on the question issued in 1992, ULFA argues that Assam has always been a “nation of immigrants” insofar as the people of diverse nationalities and sub-nationalities came to Assam at different times and made it their home. The organization reminds us of the rich contributions made by the immigrants from East Bengal—whether by rendering vast tracts of fallow land cultivable or by enriching the Assamese language and culture by embracing them. It is unfortunate that the “All-India political leaders” have used them as “political pawns” and “vote banks” by making false promises. Warning against the commonplace attempts at condemning and stigmatizing them as “neo-Assamese” or “cultivating Assamese,” ULFA proposes to redefine the word “Assamese” (*Asomiya*) and make immigrants of East Bengal one of its inseparable parts. As it maintains: “Instead of referring exclusively to the

47. A. H. Imran, “Anuprabesh: sharyantrer neel naksha” (in Bengali) [Infiltration: The Blueprint of a Conspiracy], *Kalam* (Kolkata), August 1992.

Assamese-speaking people, by Assamese we refer to all the ethnic groups and their combinations, to all those who are committed to the all-round development of Assam.”<sup>48</sup> Two, it actually calls for translating the citizens-foreigners dichotomy into a battle against *dilli-bad* (“Delhi-ism” or the “colonialism of New Delhi”). It counts on the immigrants from East Bengal as a partner in its battle against “colonial domination”: “People who are backward in terms of education and economy and who are involved in the fierce struggle for existence cannot be our enemies.”<sup>49</sup> It seems that ULFA looks upon them as crucial class allies in this battle.

ULFA’s “secularist” outlook was reflected in the role it played in course of the communal riots of Nagaon in 1992. On the one hand, it took upon itself the responsibility of maintaining law and order and compensated for the reported inadequacy of both police forces and firearms at their disposal. On the other hand, the “armed” campaign of its cadres against the perpetrators of communal hatred and, most importantly, for the preservation of peace and communal amity was, according to newspaper reports, very effective.<sup>50</sup> However, the Front’s self-professedly “secularist” stand on the question of immigrants is not at all free from ambiguities. For one thing, it runs the risk of alienating the general Assamese sentiments that still largely weigh against the presence of illegally settled foreigners. ULFA perhaps understands this, and it is because of this that it reportedly issued a statement in quick succession, overriding the one mentioned above. A similar statement of Arabinda Rajkhowa (its present chairman), released to the press in late 2001, is reflective of ULFA’s continuing uneasiness with the question of foreigners. Besides, according to some strategic analysts, ULFA cannot afford, for obvious reasons, to alienate Bangladesh by way of coming down heavily on the foreigners.<sup>51</sup> For ULFA, it is really tight roping insofar as the question of immigrants is concerned.

48. “Asomabasi Purbangeeya janagoshthiloi ULFA-r Ahvan” (in Assamese) [ULFA’s Call to the Groups of East Bengal Living in Assam], *Budbbar* (Guwahati), 24 June 1992, 5–6.

49. *Ibid.*

50. Subir Bhaumik, “Sena-police noi, Nagaonke banchalo ULFA jangirai” (in Bengali), [Neither the Army nor the Police, ULFA Militants Saved Nagaon], *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (Kolkata), 15 December 1992.

51. Saikia, *Contours*.

## The Question of Security

RADICAL RELIGIOUS DISCOURSES pose a threat to security on at least two mutually divergent grounds. First, some of them question the very *raison d'être* of the nation-state. When religion is made to serve as the basis of an Islamic *Ummah* or Brotherhood, it refuses to be confined to any particular nation and evidently cuts across diverse ethnic and national lines. The Taliban is a classic example of this critique. It does not propose to replace one nation-state by another. Rather, it proposes to do away with the very structure of nation-states.<sup>52</sup> Notwithstanding the universalism, its connection with the Islamic *jibadi* groups, reportedly operating in some parts of Bangladesh and the Northeast, is believed to be tenuous. That the Bangladeshis are not taken by bin Laden as “true Islamic Brothers” and are castigated as *mishkins* speaks of the deep yet latent ethnic divide that marks the movement.<sup>53</sup> The mission of Islamic Brotherhood is likely to take more time to articulate.

Secondly, insofar as religious radicalism serves as a basis of separate community formation—variously described by its adherents as a “nation” or a “nationality”—it produces a plea for bringing a separate state into existence. The nation-to-state trajectory is perfectly in consonance with the classical paradigm of the nation-state. For by establishing themselves as a nation, the members of a community lay their claim to a separate and independent statehood. What is significant to note here is that it contests only the Indian state’s claim to represent them. One of the arguments advanced by a section of Naga rebels is that since they are Christians, they do not form part of “Hindu India.” While the claim to nationhood is vindicated by the presence of a separate religion—separate from that of the “Hindi-Hindu mainstream”—their presumed nationhood becomes the basis of the demand for political self-determination and separate statehood. A section of the immigrant Bengali-speaking Muslims of Assam provides the social constituency of the demand for an independent “Islamistan” or “the United States of Bengal” comprising the border-

52. See Oliver Roy, “The Changing Patterns of Radical Islamic Movements,” CSNS Policy Paper Series, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2001).

53. Bhaumik, “Bangladesh: The Second Front of Islamic Terror” (2002, photocopy).

ing districts of Assam and Bangladesh. The very demand of such states—let alone their formation—challenges the “ideological basis” of the Indian state.

As a corollary, the discourses question merely the Indian state’s authority to represent their communities as parts of the Indian nation. But these do not necessarily question the authority, per se, of the Indian state to represent the *Indian* nation. The point is, since they do not consider themselves as constituent parts of the Indian nation, they likewise do not like to be represented by an agency that represents it. The Naga rebel discourse is interesting because it not only wants to assert the right to “political self-determination,” but also looks upon the enjoyment of this right as a guarantee for promoting “good neighborliness” between the Indians and the Nagas.<sup>54</sup> However, it is firmly entrenched in the nation-state paradigm.

The interconnection between ethnicity and religious radicalism in the Northeast is far too complex to allow any simple conversion of the religion-based “two-nation theory” into a multi-nation theory where Christianity is yet another basis of nationhood or its axiomatic linkage with external forces. Mediation of ethnicity by the forces of religious radicalism keeps the process of community formation in the region perpetually fluid and uncertain.

54. See Kaka Iralu, “Why I Write the Book: A Note to the Reader,” in *Nagaland and India: The Blood and the Tears* (Kohima: Kaka Iralu, 2000).

# 12

RODNEY W. JONES

## **America's War on Terrorism: Religious Radicalism and Nuclear Confrontation in South Asia**

**T**he new approach [to Iraq] is revolutionary. Regime change as a goal for military intervention challenges the international system established by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia ... And the notion of justified preemption runs counter to modern international law ... The most interesting and potentially fateful reaction might well be that of India, which would be tempted to apply the new principle of preemption to Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

SECURITY CRISES have defined and reshaped U.S. relations with South Asia nearly as often as they have with the adjoining Middle East. Nuclear and war-threatening crises have reemerged in quick succession lately in South Asia. This makes that region arguably as dangerous to international security as the Middle East is—not least when the shadow of a new preemptive war against Iraq looms on the horizon. The impact of radicalized religious groups is now a prominent part of these world-shaking regional crises.

1. Henry A. Kissinger, “Our Intervention in Iraq,” syndicated column in the *Washington Post*, 12 August 2002.

To enumerate the most recent crises in South Asia: In May 1998, it was the overt military nuclearization of India and Pakistan—an ominous watershed. In May 1999, the Kargil Conflict followed, a low-intensity war in Kashmir under the “nuclear shadow.” In October 2001, the United States counter-attacked al-Qaeda and its Taliban hosts in Afghanistan after the terrible 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States—a defining moment for much to come. In 2002, it was India’s mobilized military confrontation with Pakistan, a defining moment for relations between India and Pakistan.

The India-Pakistan military confrontation persists today—even though it seemed to lose some of its sizzle mid-way through the year.<sup>2</sup> In June 2002, senior American and British leaders finally interceded with some conviction in Delhi and Islamabad. What was this India-Pakistan confrontation all about? What does it tell us about the phenomenon of religious radicalism and violence in that part of the world? How close did India and Pakistan get to the beginning of a hot war before July 2002? What were the odds that the outbreak of a hot war could have degenerated into a spiral toward nuclear war? Would this military confrontation have even arisen from the December 13, 2001 attack on India’s parliament, had the U.S. “global war on terrorism” not been underway in Afghanistan, nearby? Did the broader “war on terrorism” shape India’s specific objectives vis-à-vis Pakistan in this confrontation? Is this current confrontation a harbinger of more to come? Does it tell us anything about a deeper issue, namely, whether the ongoing tension between India and Pakistan would be easily resolved if the element of religious radicalism were taken out of the picture? Or is the conflict deeper than that?

This paper is an overview of the meaning of the India-Pakistan military confrontation. The analysis necessarily reflects the impact of religious radicalism and militancy, not only on the confrontation itself, but also on the relationship between India and Pakistan, and the U.S. role in that region, since September 11, 2001. It argues that the U.S. war on terrorism radically increased the potential capacity of militant

2. The confrontation began to subside, though it did not end completely, after elections in Indian-held Kashmir and the national elections in Pakistan, by October 2002. This chapter was completed in August 2002. The epilogue was added in November 2002.

organizations to trigger war between India and Pakistan, a war that neither side would ultimately benefit from and that almost certainly would have catastrophic consequences if it went nuclear. It acknowledges that the December 13 terrorist attack on India's parliament was a serious provocation, but concludes that it was not sponsored or engineered by the state of Pakistan and was really as much an attack on the government of Pervez Musharraf as on the ostensible target in India.

This analysis further argues that India dangerously overreacted by choosing to exploit military brinkmanship for coercive diplomacy. India's overt aim was to force Pakistan to outlaw militant organizations operating across the line in Indian-held Kashmir and to get the support of the international community to make this permanent. In essence India hoped to seal off Kashmir irrevocably from Pakistani influence, to squelch the Kashmiri struggle for independence at its roots, and to turn Indian-held Jammu and Kashmir into a normal state inside the Indian union. India's underlying aims seem to have reached even deeper. Taking advantage of the war on terrorism, India sought to stigmatize Pakistan permanently in the eyes of the world as a terrorist state, thereby marginalizing its external influence altogether. India also sought to convince the United States that India has been the victim all along, partly to defuse the reaction to its nuclear ambitions. In fact, India largely succeeded in realizing these objectives, at least for the near term, although how far it succeeded in stigmatizing and marginalizing Pakistan remains to be seen.

With this Indian strategy in mind, the paper argues further that while religious extremism has become an ingredient of the India-Pakistan rivalry, the underlying conflict is political and will not be resolved merely by restraining religious zealotry. Moreover, India's incentives to find a negotiated solution to the Kashmir problem with Pakistan actually shrink to the degree that Indian and Western perceptions of the problem are expressed in terms of religious militancy and equated simply with "terrorism." The most important implication of this judgment is that the risks of nuclear war between India and Pakistan will remain at a high level because military crises over Kashmir are likely to recur, in the absence of serious trilateral negotiating efforts to achieve a political solution.

As for the changing U.S. role in this region, this paper argues that the military crisis acted as a post-Cold War catalyst that induced U.S. leaders to choose sides between India and Pakistan—on ideological as well as geopolitical grounds. The ideological grounds favored India, given its reputation as a democratic and constitutionally secular state. But the geopolitical grounds were crucial. U.S. interests seemed to mesh with India's vocal opposition to the same international terrorist sources (Arab and Islamic) that are now feared most in the West today.

Pakistan, by contrast, has been stigmatized in the West increasingly, as a consequence of its drift from an essentially secular government before 1977 to one with increments of Islamic content. Its failure to evolve stable democratic institutions, its increasing sectarian violence, its October 1999 lurch back to military rule, and its original sponsorship and continued sympathy for the Taliban in Afghanistan have reinforced an image that does not sit well in the West. In the wake of al-Qaeda's attack on the U.S. homeland and President Bush's mobilization of the global war on terrorism, it was ironic but not surprising that the new U.S. administration would view Pakistan with underlying suspicion and India with greater warmth.<sup>3</sup>

The net effect on the core issue of India-Pakistan relations has been U.S. gravitation toward an Indian perspective on the violence in Kashmir, and away from a clinical understanding of the legal and political origins of the dispute. This further adds to the risks that the subcontinent will be swept up into a holocaust before the Kashmir problem is resolved on a constructive basis.

3. Several ironies surface upon closer inspection of these issues. The rise of Osama bin Laden and the Islamic zeal of the guerrilla warfare against the Soviet Union in the Afghan liberation war of the 1980s were encouraged and partially financed by the United States, along with Saudi Arabia, China, and Pakistan. The sponsorship of the Taliban itself, a successor movement that arose well after the Soviet withdrawal, was not U.S.-inspired, but leading Americans, including some highly placed in the current Bush administration, were advocates of official recognition and normalization of diplomatic relations with an aspiring Taliban regime in Kabul during the mid- and late 1990s.

## **U.S. Policy and Military Operations in Afghanistan: Impact on India and Pakistan**

TO UNDERSTAND THE DEEPER MEANING of the current India-Pakistan military confrontation, it is important to explore the broader geopolitical context. The impact of the U.S. policy reaction to 9/11 on Pakistan and India, and the success of U.S. military operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, did much to define this context. President George W. Bush declared the global war on terrorism to be the primary focus of an American effort abroad for as long as it might take, and challenged every nation to choose sides—to join the United States against international terrorism, or side with terrorism as a U.S. enemy.<sup>4</sup> Then in the cross-hairs, the Taliban leaders in Afghanistan faced the same draconian choice, either to expel Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network, or face the full military force of the United States and its allies, backed by the United Nations.

When Taliban chief Mullah Mohammed Omar rebuffed Pakistani intercession and defied the U.S. demand to expel the Taliban's "honored guests," President Bush's "for-or-against terrorism" demand required Pakistan and India—as well as China and Russia, the Persian Gulf states, and the newly independent Central Asian countries—to choose sides. For most of the other Afghan ethnic factions, especially the Tajiks and Hazaras of the Northern Alliance who had barely beaten back Taliban control over the entire country, the choice was obvious. American pressure on each entity was intense after September 2001, because their choices could either impede or facilitate effective U.S. military intervention and pursuit of al-Qaeda elements hiding in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

4. Since dubbed the "Bush Doctrine," the stark good-versus-evil formula announced by President Bush in his September 20, 2001 speech to Congress said: "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists."

5. While this paper focuses on the post-9/11 dynamics of South Asia, it is crucial to remember that the U.S. response to the terrorist attack on its homeland was comprehensive—politically and financially—using all the tools of diplomacy, intelligence, law enforcement, and finance to pursue, isolate, constrain, and starve the components of the globally far-reaching al-Qaeda terrorist network. The military operations focused in Afghanistan have been the most visible part of the war on terrorism, but are only one part of a long-term, multi-faceted campaign to root out and crush global terrorist organizations, including others that may cooperate with al-Qaeda leaders.

Few governments in the region, however, grasped how quickly and skillfully the United States could employ conventional and unconventional warfare in so isolated and primitive a country as Afghanistan. In the Gulf War, the buildup to drive Iraq out of Kuwait had taken months, with the support of Saudi Arabia allowing the allies to stage forces on its territory. Iraqi forces were heavily equipped, but cumbersome and vulnerable to effective allied air power. Landlocked Afghanistan, however, was a different situation. Taliban leaders apparently believed U.S. long-distance air strikes would be ineffectual against Taliban forces hidden amongst their countrymen in towns, or bunkered down in mountain fortresses and caves. The Taliban fully expected to deliver to American soldiers who ventured on land the same fate Soviet soldiers had suffered at the hands of Afghan mujahideen in the 1980s. Indeed, Pakistanis, Indians, and Iranians probably wondered whether the United States was about to stumble into quicksand and be painfully bloodied by low-tech, guerrilla tactics.

For Pakistan, making the “right choice” as Bush posed it was not really in doubt. The magnitude of President Bush’s commitment to the war against terrorism was conveyed. General Pervez Musharraf came out unequivocally on the U.S. side from the start, abruptly—albeit painfully—abandoning the Taliban. An elected government of Pakistan might well have dithered longer, because the “right choice” was acutely difficult for Pakistani leaders, for a number of reasons. The most important was that such a choice meant abandoning the Taliban not only as a natural ally but also as a creature of Pakistan’s decade-long efforts to pursue stability and lasting influence in Afghanistan following the Soviet expulsion. Fortunately Pakistan did not have a stake in al-Qaeda, and no intimate official ties with Osama bin Laden and his Arab associates.

#### **PAKISTAN’S STAKES IN THE TALIBAN**

As Ahmad Rashid has described so well,<sup>6</sup> the Taliban (Islamic student) movement sprang from Pushtun refugees in Pakistan, concentrated in temporary camps in western Pakistan. Pushtun young men

6. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

who had grown up in these camps were drawn back to the Afghan homeland after the Soviet exit, but under civil war conditions in their country. These youths had been trained in the use of small arms (carrying weapons was a natural legacy of their culture) and taught to believe they could impose a peaceful, Islamic moral order on their country. Most had no deep memory of traditional social life in Afghanistan itself, many had lost their parents and, being displaced, few were accustomed to the valued roles women played in Afghan society. The Taliban religious outlook was a product of the free, but largely Quranic, obscurantist education available to boys in the austere camp environments. Their teachers themselves typically were religious leaders (*maulvis* or *mullabs*) from Deobandi or Wahabi brands of fundamentalist Islam who ran traditional religious schools (*madrassas*) with hostels, frequently using them as recruiting grounds for political ends.

When the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1989, the United States essentially washed its hands of responsibility for the future of that debilitated country. Having defeated Soviet power and installed a weak Islamic republic under Tajik cleric Burhanuddin Rabbani in Kabul, Afghan mujahideen groups increasingly quarreled among themselves on ethnic and tribal lines and most of Afghanistan succumbed to internal warfare. Pakistan's elected, bureaucratic and military leaders could not so easily ignore this turbulence and groped for a strategy that would restore civil order beyond Pakistan's borders in Afghanistan.

Under liberal Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and Interior Minister Naseerullah Babur in 1993, the government of Pakistan worked out a two-fold strategy toward Afghanistan: (a) to support the revival of traditional Pushtun rule in the hope of extinguishing inter-tribal war, suppressing banditry, reopening roads, reviving trade with Iran and Central Asia, and securing Afghanistan for Western-financed pipeline projects that could provide Afghanistan revenue while transporting natural gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and on to India; and (b) to preempt Pushtun revival of the demand for a separate Pushtun state (Pakhtunistan) that had threatened Pakistan's integrity in the north-west tribal belt for many years after Independence, by ensuring the primacy of Pushtun stakes in Afghanistan's future.

The Taliban movement emerging from the refugee settlements provided a natural political vehicle for this Pakistani strategy. It depended

on the cooperation of the Islamist political parties that sponsored the Taliban in the camps. The task merely involved lightly arming and training Taliban cadres, and negotiating their entry through Quetta to join those Pushtun militia leaders inside Afghanistan who deplored the country's internal disintegration and aspired, however crudely, to pacify, reunify and rebuild Afghanistan. The Pakistani military intelligence arm, the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI)—which had served as the main American and Saudi conduit for training, financial support, and transferring arms to the Afghan mujahideen—became the overseers and managers of Pakistan's assistance to the Taliban. This ISI role was secretive, but it was no rogue operation—as some in Pakistan and the United States may now wish to believe. Rather, it was the policy of Pakistan's elected governments from 1993, including that of the Harvard- and Oxford-educated Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first female prime minister.

The Taliban gained a regional foothold around Kandahar in 1994 and then rapidly spread within southern and eastern Afghanistan, seizing Kabul and asserting a claim to govern Afghanistan in 1996, with all but a northeastern tenth of the country falling under their sway by 1998. Some financial support for the Taliban came from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. The Taliban regime was formally recognized by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and United Arab Emirates as the government of Afghanistan. Other governments and the United Nations either continued to recognize the first mujahideen (Rabbani) government even after it fled Kabul, or declined to recognize the Taliban regime, hoping that diplomacy and United Nations relief could patch together a workable, coalition government more representative of the country as a whole.

Almost invisible to Westerners at the start, the Taliban project at first was not considered objectionable in Washington. The Taliban became anathema only later, after word of its brutality spread. Having seized power in Kabul, the Taliban's inhumane governing practices undercut its once positive reputation for disarming warlord factions and bringing peace in one locality after another. From Kabul, the new regime imposed uniquely harsh judicial procedures and tried to force the surviving remnants of Afghanistan's battered urban society to give up music and entertainment. On pain of beating or even execution, men were forced to grow beards and wear traditional clothes, and women to leave jobs and whenever outdoors to wear the head-to-toe

covering known as *burqas*. Western revulsion was aroused by media reports of the Taliban's draconian interpretation of Islamic law, confinement of women, suppression of female education, arbitrary arrests, mutilation or execution as punishments, and intolerance of non-Muslim religious minorities.

However much the Taliban was eventually despised in the West, it was not the offspring of, nor originally associated with, al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden apparently left Sudan in 1996 and moved back to Afghanistan some time in 1997. Thereafter, al-Qaeda gradually extended influence over the Taliban by spending its own resources to win the favor of senior Taliban leaders. Al-Qaeda also provided armed support and guidance to Taliban fighters who were fighting the Northern Alliance forces and other autonomous factions elsewhere in the country. The United States focused only on the significance of the Taliban's grant of sanctuary to al-Qaeda after its bombing of U.S. Embassies in East Africa in 1998.

Toward the end of its tenure, the Clinton administration put considerable pressure on Pakistan to arrange communication with Taliban officials, hoping to persuade them to expel Osama bin Laden and his associates. But the Taliban's counter demand was that it be recognized as Afghanistan's *de jure* government. This price the United States was unwilling to pay. How deeply the Taliban depended on al-Qaeda for military operations against the Northern Alliance was not apparent to ordinary observers until after 9/11. What was clear, however, was that Pakistan had a major stake in the Taliban's claim to govern Afghanistan, was opposed to the Northern Alliance, and could not disengage from those positions in Afghanistan, short of a world-shaking crisis. September 11 brought just that crisis.

This analysis indicates that Pakistan's stakes in the Taliban were not based on a common religion or on matters of Islamic principle, *per se*. Pakistan was interested in geopolitical objectives, not in the religious aims of the Taliban or its parochial justification of a strict Islamic discipline. Pakistan hoped to foster order through a client regime in a war-torn country on its borders. In doing so, it aimed to promote the revival of trade, to link Central Asian energy resources with the subcontinent, and to extinguish any Pushtun impulse to tear part of Pakistan away as a separate Pushtun state.

Exploiting reservoirs of Afghan Islamic fervor was useful to Pakistan (as well as to the United States) against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan,

and useful again to Pakistan in helping the Taliban come to power, but the Taliban movement's Islamic fundamentalist orientation was never for Pakistan's government an end in itself. Only a smattering of individual Pakistanis and fundamentalist groups—mainly Pushtun tribes and Islamic political parties with roots in the Pushtun tribal regions—identified with the Taliban cause emotionally or ideologically. For the Pakistani authorities, the Taliban's religious appeal was only a tool.

Far more basic for Pakistan's government, and painful to abandon, was the aim of Pushtun dominance within Afghanistan as a means of resolving the civil war and opening the way to the trans-Afghanistan energy project. In achieving this aim, to cut off the Taliban even after George W. Bush threw down the gauntlet was tantamount to sacrificing Pushtun interests in Afghan politics and undermining Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan's stability and its own security. Pakistan's view of the power of the Northern Alliance, perhaps mistakenly, was that it jeopardized stability in Afghanistan. Thus, when Pakistani chief Pervez Musharraf turned against the Taliban under U.S. pressure, the decision was acutely difficult. Because Pakistan's strategy toward Afghanistan—and its own security on its western borders—was based on a successful Taliban campaign for power, it required accepting a fundamentally different calculation of Pakistan's national interests.

The new calculation was that Pakistan could not afford to be stigmatized by the West as a terrorist state. Once the Taliban refused to disassociate itself from al-Qaeda, Islamabad recognized that the United States would regard the Taliban as a de facto "terrorist" regime, and a legitimate object of military attack. For Pakistan to be associated with the Taliban political cause after that would not only put Pakistan on a slippery slope toward international ostracism but could be used, potentially, to justify military attack on Pakistan itself. Indeed, it was exactly this sensitivity that India latched onto when it initiated a military confrontation with Pakistan after the attack on parliament in December 2001. But before we examine that crisis, the dramatic progress of the U.S. war in Afghanistan and the potential effects on the Kashmir side of Pakistan's Afghanistan-related entanglement need separate discussion.

#### **MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE TALIBAN AND AL-QAEDA**

Pakistan had to decide very quickly whether it would support the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan. Senior Pakistani officials announced on September 15, *within four days* of the 9/11 terrorist

attacks on the United States, that they had agreed to give “full support” to U.S. efforts to combat international terrorism.<sup>7</sup> President Musharraf’s address in Urdu to the nation three days later informed his people that the United States had demanded military overflight rights, logistical support, and intelligence cooperation against three targets—Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, and international terrorism.<sup>8</sup> Musharraf noted that the United States had won United Nations support and confided to the nation that neighboring India had offered its military facilities to the United States in the hopes of isolating Pakistan and getting it declared a terrorist state. Musharraf made it clear to his countrymen that Pakistan had to assist the United States; otherwise four vital interests of Pakistan would be in jeopardy—its sovereignty, its economy, its strategic (nuclear and missile) assets, and its cause in Kashmir. Musharraf and his advisors

7. See Molly Moore and Kamran Khan, “Pakistan Moving Armed Forces: Focus Shifts from India as ‘Full Support’ for U.S. Is Vowed,” *Washington Post*, A-9, 16 September 2001. Pakistani officials indicated that Pakistan would “provide detailed intelligence information to the United States on bin Laden and the Taliban,” seek “to control illicit fuel and other materials from crossing the border into Afghanistan” [and] “permit U.S. military logistical and technical personnel to operate at Pakistani air bases, ports and some other locations in support of attacks against Afghanistan.” They suggested the United States had not sought permission to bring ground combat forces into Pakistan but that, if asked, Pakistan “would consider a request for a multinational force that included representatives of Muslim nations.” The article reported that the Pakistani “military also was preparing plans to protect the country’s ... nuclear facilities ... from the possibility of a stray missile or other aerial accident.” This last point hinted at a deep Pakistani concern that Indian, Israeli, or even U.S. aircraft transiting from India through Pakistani airspace might use the crisis to damage Pakistan’s military capabilities.

8. “Highlights of President Pervez Musharraf’s Address to the Nation,” *Dawn*, 19 September 2001, online edition. An investigative *Washington Post* article, the “Afghan Campaign’s Blueprint Emerges,” 29 January 2002, provides a colorful and pumped-up account of the senior Bush administration officials’ rush on Musharraf after 9/11. Thinking through what the United States would ask of Musharraf and Pakistan, Secretary of State Colin Powell and his Deputy Richard Armitage put on their list: (1) stop all al-Qaeda operatives at the border, intercept all arms shipments to Afghanistan moving through Pakistan, and end all logistical support for bin Laden; (2) obtain blanket overflight and landing rights; (3) get access to Pakistan’s naval bases, air bases, and borders; (4) obtain immediate intelligence and immigration information; (5) get Pakistan to condemn the 9/11 attacks and “curb all domestic expressions of support for terrorism against the [United States], its friends or allies” (knowing such a demand could not be fulfilled even in the United States); (6) cut off all shipments of fuel to the Taliban and prevent Pakistani volunteers from joining the Taliban; and (7) get Pakistan’s commitment, in the event the evidence strongly implicates Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan, and if the Taliban continues to give him and the network sanctuary, to break diplomatic relations with the Taliban regime, end all support for the Taliban, and assist the United States in the aforementioned ways to destroy Osama bin Laden and his network.

apparently drew the line, however, at inserting Pakistani military forces into Afghanistan.

Despite concerns about a violent domestic backlash from political parties and groups that had links with the Taliban as well as the threat of al-Qaeda or Taliban attacks across the border, Pakistan thus committed itself almost overnight to give the United States valuable flight corridors over its territory and access to stage U.S. search and rescue forces at facilities near Karachi in the south and closer to Afghanistan at the Pakistani military airfield near Jacobabad.<sup>9</sup> Pakistani forces also provided backstopping for U.S. operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban later, by attempting to seal the mountainous borders so as to prevent hostile units fleeing across the border into Pakistan. Pakistani intelligence and security forces also cooperated with covert U.S. forces in efforts to hunt down those al-Qaeda and Taliban elements that succeeded in entering Pakistan to take refuge, or to slip out of the country.<sup>10</sup>

*Operation Enduring Freedom* against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces in Afghanistan began with air strikes on October 7, 2001. Saudi Arabia

9. U.S. access to the Jacobabad airfield reportedly was negotiated as a “semi-permanent” presence. Pakistan agreed to remove from the facility all but liaison personnel from its own air force, and to allow the United States to build air-conditioned barracks for U.S. military units. See Kamran Khan and John Pomfret, “U.S. Extended Presence Agreed to by Pakistan: Air Base to Serve as ‘Key Facility’ in Region,” *Washington Post*, A-57, 14 December 2001. But Pakistan had to reclaim partial use of Jacobabad airfield later in late December and January after India launched its military confrontation. By that time, U.S. access elsewhere, including cities within Afghanistan, reduced its need to depend so heavily on Pakistani facilities. Kamran Khan and Thomas E. Ricks, “U.S. Military Begins Shift from Bases in Pakistan,” *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-9, 11 January 2002. U.S. forces also operated from the Pasni, Dalbandin and Shamsi airfields. Pasni airfield, located at the foot of Baluchistan province on the Arabian Sea coast, ten miles from the Pakistani naval base at Omara, is one of the oldest airfields in the region, having been used during World War II by allied forces. Though small with one major runway, it can handle Boeing 737 jet aircraft. Dalbandin, a small civil airport, is also in Baluchistan, about 230 miles due north of Pasni, and less than fifty miles south of the Afghanistan border. Dalbandin is in use by U.S. forces as a refueling facility for special operations helicopters. Shamsi, in use as a Marine forward operating base, is smaller and in an even more remote part of Baluchistan, near Washki, about fifty miles south of Dalbandin. See the following Global Security.org pages: <http://198.65.138.161/military/facility/pasni.htm>; <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/dalbandin.htm>; and <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/shamsi.htm>.

10. At the height of operations in Afghanistan in December 2001, the number of U.S. military and special operations personnel in Pakistan had reached a reported level of about 1,500. Thomas E. Ricks and Alan Sipress, “Pakistan May Hold Key to Afghan Result: Musharraf Must Decide How to Deal with Al Qaeda Fighters Fleeing across Border,” *Washington Post*, A-20, 20 December 2001.

had vetoed U.S. use of facilities on its soil for the attack and Iran denied access through its airspace. This put a much greater burden on U.S. aircraft carriers and other naval forces that assembled in the Arabian Sea, on bombers that had been flown to Diego Garcia and some that flew all the way from the United States, and on the prodigious use of aircraft refueling capabilities.<sup>11</sup> But to the surprise of most observers, Russian President Putin gave his blessing to the U.S. counterterrorist effort and the leaders of three post-Soviet Central Asian states neighboring Afghanistan—Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan—provided the United States air access and staging facilities near Afghanistan in the north and west. Use of these facilities greatly eased U.S. cooperation with the Afghan Northern Alliance and the Uzbek elements that had reestablished a presence under General Rashid Dostum and that would retake Mazar-i-Sharif.

As a result, not only was the United States able to use its own infiltrated ground spotters and air strikes to destroy exposed Taliban military assets and installations—there were relatively few big targets—but it was also able to use airborne firepower to break down the front lines of the Taliban forces opposite the Northern Alliance, enabling the alliance and the other anti-Taliban forces that reemerged to advance, taking Mazar-i-Sharif, Kabul, Herat and Konduz in succession. Mazar-i-Sharif fell on November 9. Kabul was retaken on November 12, and Herat fell the same day. Konduz, where a combined force of about twenty thousand al-Qaeda and Taliban forces put up a fierce resistance, fell on November 24.

A thousand U.S. marines were airlifted on November 26 into a remote landing strip (dubbed Camp Rhino) fifteen miles southeast of Kandahar to provide protection for a buildup of helicopters, armored personnel carriers, and the entry of additional special operations units. This also provided the United States with a staging area inside Afghanistan to pursue operations in the Pushtun areas to the north and east, including near the border with Pakistan. Coupled with well-targeted air raids, the ground presence of U.S. combat forces helped break the main, residual Taliban resistance in the south, stimulated

11. While U.S. forces dominated, the British provided an aircraft carrier and helicopter ship and committed 4,200 soldiers to the effort. France and Italy also each provided a carrier and naval task group, and Germany, Canada, Australia and New Zealand each made special contributions to the campaign.

defections, and forced the hard core to disperse into hiding. Kandahar fell on December 7.

Aided by the Rome political process of negotiating a new Afghan government, Hamid Karzai's leadership had begun by this time to make significant headway among Pushtun elements in the south and east that could absorb defectors and accommodate the Northern Alliance in forming a new government in Kabul. The U.S.-assisted Afghan meetings in Rome helped negotiate agreed steps to constitute a new, representative government in stages—and made the level of international commitment to rehabilitating Afghanistan clearer.

Special combat operations shifted once Kandahar had fallen to the White Mountains, near Khost, adjoining Pakistan, where al-Qaeda and Taliban forces had taken refuge in fortified and well-provisioned mountain caves and bunkers. The Tora Bora operations heavily bombed the cave complexes and ground units then cleared most of them on the ground by early January 2002. Several hundred al-Qaeda and Taliban prisoners were taken, with many shipped to Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for interrogation. A significant number of the al-Qaeda Arabs at Tora Bora evidently slipped through into Pakistan, however. In March, U.S. and allied forces gathered in Operation Anaconda to attack a well-dug-in al-Qaeda/Taliban force of about 1,500 fighters in the Shah-e-Kot Mountains south of Gardez in northeastern Afghanistan. Anaconda produced the largest number of U.S. casualties in a single Afghan operation, but apparently took a heavy toll on the enemy, killing an estimated four hundred to eight hundred opponents. Again, some of the fighters melted away into Pakistan, although in this case Pakistani forces intercepted and fought small units, capturing and turning over a number of al-Qaeda members to the United States for interrogation.

In roughly six months U.S. and allied military intervention, coupled with the residual anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan, had radically transformed the situation. Momentum increasingly favored the formation of a new Afghan government—although it was clear that such a government would be hard put to establish order throughout the country and develop the capacity, even with international assistance, to conduct a far-reaching economic and social rehabilitation program. Pockets of Taliban and al-Qaeda resistance remained, with a capacity to harass the emerging Karzai government and foment perceptions of disorder, but by summer 2002, these isolated elements no longer held

the capacity to counter-attack the U.S. and allied presence in any major way.

During that military campaign, the radical Islamic backlash that the Musharraf government had feared would erupt within Pakistan launched a handful of demonstrations but then largely subsided during the remainder of 2001. Considerable anti-American feeling and anger with Musharraf's decisions percolated below the surface but potentially massive, violent agitation was contained. Meanwhile, the level of violence in Kashmir rose to a degree. Then on December 13, 2001, halfway through the military campaign, terrorists struck the Indian parliament and precipitated a full Indian military mobilization against Pakistan.

#### **PAKISTAN'S GAINS FROM RENEWED U.S. ATTENTION**

Musharraf's quick and essentially unconditional decision to support U.S. access to Afghanistan through Pakistan's territory and airspace paid important short-term dividends to Pakistan. The United States had been moving away from the sanctions policy toward both India and Pakistan that it had imposed after each country's nuclear tests in May 1998 and used this opportunity to drop many of the provisions affecting financial and non-sensitive material assistance temporarily. The United States also approved a financial aid package for Pakistan that permitted the rescheduling of its international indebtedness, lifting a cloud from its economy.<sup>12</sup> But the most important gain for Pakistan was the sudden U.S. need for Pakistan's military and intelligence support, a reflection of Pakistan's geopolitical importance in pursuing the initial stages of the war against terrorism in Afghanistan—giving Pakistan an unexpected opportunity to get back into the good graces of Washington.

During most of the 1990s, the Clinton administration had courted India assiduously, even before the ascent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the shock of the nuclear tests in early 1998, and continued

12. The United States provided Pakistan a grant of \$600 million in November 2001, after U.S. military operations had begun in Afghanistan. The United States formalized the agreement restructuring Pakistan's \$3 billion debt nearly a year later, at a signing ceremony on August 23, 2002 in Islamabad. The package included loans from U.S. Aid, U.S. Eximbank, and the U.S. departments of agriculture and defense. Also under discussion has been cancellation of Pakistan's \$1 billion U.S. debt. See Farhan Bokhari, "Pakistan Debt Schedule Agreed," *Financial Times*, August 24–25, 2002, 3.

to seek an improved relationship despite the nuclear shocks. Pakistan's covert military operations across the line of control (LOC) in Kashmir near Kargil in May 2001 precipitated a mini-war with India that could have escalated. President Clinton's use of his good offices to persuade Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to end this conflict and withdraw Pakistani paramilitary forces behind the LOC measurably improved Delhi's disposition toward the United States. Much the same trend toward a closer U.S.-India relationship continued in the Bush administration. The increasing tilt toward India and away from Pakistan was in sharp contrast to the special relationship Pakistan had had with Washington during the Cold War years. But the 9/11 crisis showed, at least momentarily, that India's military and intelligence value to the United States in launching the war on terrorism in Afghanistan was less than that of Pakistan's, once it was clear that Pakistan's cooperation was readily available.

In addition to reviving Pakistan's importance, the U.S. military presence within Pakistan, albeit limited and restricted largely to southern Pakistan, could have been construed to have an implicit deterrent value against direct Indian aggression on Pakistan, at least while the tempo of operations in Afghanistan remained high and Pakistan's active cooperation in pursuit of al-Qaeda and Taliban elements who fled into Pakistan was needed. This calculated judgment may have eased Pakistan's initial decisions to shift some military capability away from the east, facing India, to seal the borders and provide a form of backstopping of U.S. and allied operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban forces, raising barriers to cross-border infiltration.

It became clear later, however, that this unspoken deterrence was not comprehensive or robust. It did not dissuade India from mounting a sustained conventional military confrontation in December, and the United States moved rather slowly in 2002—staying far quieter about the risk of nuclear war in the subcontinent than its previous policies would have implied—before it began to press India to unwind the confrontation in June and July. Nevertheless, the operations in Afghanistan gave Pakistan opportunities to put its relationship with Washington on a more productive footing, and to compete for Washington's attention after years of losing ground. If momentum is sustained in repairing this relationship, it could pay very significant dividends to Pakistan over time. It is too early to tell at this juncture whether this will be the case.

Judging by the reaction of its media and attentive public, Indians were greatly outraged by the attention Pakistan got from the United States after Musharraf signaled his support to Bush and U.S. military operations in Afghanistan began. This belied the fact that U.S. efforts to build a broader relationship with India not only stayed in high gear but intensified, drawing satisfaction from India's strong rhetorical support of, and offer of its facilities for use in, the war against terrorism. India's disarmingly positive reception of Bush's decision to withdraw the United States from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, coincidentally announced on December 13, 2001, was received by the Bush administration as an unexpected boon.<sup>13</sup> Thus, while the war against terrorism brought Pakistan back to the foreground, it did nothing to diminish India's growing influence in Washington, although this would not have been apparent to an outsider watching the intense indignation and recrimination portrayed in the Indian press and television.

#### **AFGHANISTAN, ISLAMIC MILITANCY, AND THE NEXUS WITH KASHMIR**

Musharraf's ability, or that of any government of Pakistan, to join the U.S. war on terrorism and cut off the Taliban next door posed two other serious risks to Pakistan's interests. One was that Islamic extremists could destabilize Pakistan domestically, making it hard to govern. The other was that Pakistan's influence with India over the Kashmir question (Pakistan's leaders believed this had been revived by the insurgency that began in Kashmir in 1988–89) would now be neutralized. Pakistan's fifty-year-old claims to that disputed territory might be lost irretrievably. It remains a fundamental tenet of Pakistani politics that no government that makes deep concessions on the future of Kashmir, let alone surrenders it to India altogether, can survive.

13. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell visited India as well as Pakistan in October 2001 to address U.S. needs and the tension between India and Pakistan, and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Delhi in November 2001 to mollify India's irritation over the renewed U.S.-Pakistan military relationship, as well as to discuss the possibility of deepening military-to-military contacts with India and U.S. readiness to expedite specific military sales that had been embargoed earlier due to India's nuclear proliferation. Adding Britain's weight to U.S. efforts to combine Pakistan's and India's contributions in a common front against terrorism, Prime Minister Tony Blair twice visited the subcontinent in the same period.

These two threats were intimately intertwined in the aftermath of 9/11. Musharraf had to face the dilemma that Islamic militancy would be aroused at home by the assault on the Taliban, and extremism could overturn the moderate core and national goals of Pakistan itself. Yet Islamic militancy operating within Kashmir itself, led in part by Kashmiri Muslims, was also viewed as a crucial source of pressure on India to negotiate Kashmir's future. Moreover, Islamic militancy was increasingly being seen abroad as the core of "international terrorism," and this could stigmatize all efforts to free Kashmiris, including native Kashmiri insurgents, as forms of terrorism.

Fundamentalist Islamic political parties and groups emerged in British India long before India and Pakistan became independent and have always been a troublesome undercurrent in Pakistan's modern politics, much as Hindu extremist groups have been in India. Islamic extremist tendencies during Pakistan's early years were restrained or diffused by the conduct of elections and the moderate outlook on Islam that was prevalent in the subcontinent, as well as by the usual bread-and-butter issues of all politics. Islamic fundamentalist parties collectively have won relatively few seats in Pakistan's past national and provincial elections.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, the potency of Islamic fundamentalist parties and the violent propensities of their armed militia formations have increased over time in Pakistan. Contributing factors or stimuli came from the military seizure of power from Zulfikar Ali Bhutto by General Zia ul-Haq in 1977, the shock effects on the wider region of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, and the mobilization of mujahideen groups to carry the Afghan war against the Soviets in the 1980s. In the period since the Soviet withdrawal, the smoldering civil war in Afghanistan, a secular slowdown in the Pakistani economy, stagnation of the public school system, and the initially spontaneous emergence of a liberation struggle in Indian-held Kashmir have given the Pakistani

14. Competition among the various Pakistani Islamic political parties in past elections has split their vote, ensuring that few would win seats against mainstream parties in "first past the post" election districts. In October 2002, the Islamist parties formed an alliance and picked single candidates to compete for most seats, consolidating rather than dividing the vote of religious sympathizers. As a result, in 2002 for the first time, the Islamist parties won a larger number of seats in proportion to their roughly 20 percent share of the actual vote. In this respect the electoral strength of the Islamist parties taken together increased only slightly in 2002 over results of the past.

Islamicist organizations—and not just Islamic extremist groups—additional footholds.

A common theme that has emerged among analysts in the wake of these developments is that a nexus has emerged between extremist Islamic groups and their allegedly terrorist operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir—creating a so-called Kalashnikov culture. While there may be a kernel of truth here, it is also a gross oversimplification to ascribe the aims of these groups and the political linkages that may exist among some of them to the singular design, common inspiration, and coherent direction of Pakistani military and security organizations, notably the ISI. Where official ties with these groups may exist to use them externally, the internal objectives are to play them off against each other and prevent their uniting against the state.

Islamic religious fundamentalism, Islamic political radicalism, and Islamic armed militancy are distinct conceptually, and their organized forms seldom if ever exist under a single roof. There is no homogeneous Islamic fundamentalism, but rather a variety of schools of thought, many cultural variants of each, and even more varieties of styles of Islamic life and behavior—readily visible when moving from one Muslim society or community to the next. “Terrorism” as a generic phenomenon—targeted killing of innocents—is as antithetical to Islamic tenets as it is to the mainstream of any world religion, or to the norms of modern civilization. Political violence frequently has a political context without which it is not properly understood. By understanding political violence in any particular instance, one need not condone it or justify it, or hesitate to pursue means to stop or eradicate it. But neither is it productive automatically to equate “terrorism” with freedom struggles against invaders and occupiers, revolutionary actions against perceived tyranny or oppression, or the use of force in response to force over a historical dispute—whether differences of religion are involved or not.

That said, several Pakistani fundamentalist political groups have not only willingly joined the Afghan wars and the Kashmir insurgency—against “foreign occupiers” as they see it—but have, like the *ayatollah* and *pasdaran* movements against the secular regime of the Shah of Iran—developed revolutionary aspirations vis-à-vis the liberal constitution and representative governing institutions of Pakistan. Their goals are to replace the existing political order with their own concepts of Islamic society.

Naturally, the actual content of their visions of Islamic society varies from group to group, by school of thought and by organizational proclivity. (For an overview of the Islamic political parties and those that have militant offshoots in Pakistan, see “Map of Pakistani Islamic Militant Groups” in the Appendix.) In most cases the vision of an Islamic order is traditional and based on the *shari’a*, but their styles of interpretation of Islamic law and tradition vary. One of Pakistan’s three most prominent Islamicist parties, the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), actually has a modernist idea of Islamic revival that accommodates genuine learning and even natural science, and thus has strong appeal in certain intellectual, professional, and middle class circles. But the JI counterparts in Afghanistan and Kashmir do not necessarily subscribe to the same program or ideas, or draw from the same social base, as does the JI in Pakistan. While the government of Pakistan actively supported the role of these groups in Afghanistan, their efforts in Kashmir are best understood as an extension of their efforts to build platforms for the takeover of political power within Pakistan itself.

Moreover, one should understand the revolutionary aspirations of these Islamic parties not in terms of how many votes or seats they can win in national elections but rather in terms of how they build bastions of local influence, incrementally. This is achieved by the largest and arguably most aggressive of these Pakistani Islamist organizations, the Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI)—which split many years ago into two branches led by Maulana Fazlur Rahman and Maulana Sami-ul-Haq, respectively. The two JUI organizations use intimidation and infiltration of authority, the building of mosques, development of welfare institutions, publication of local language newspapers and magazines, recruitment of supporters, targeting and acquisition of disputed land and property, and accumulation of other resources, at the local levels to aggrandize power and influence in society. JUI leaders pursue these goals in a decentralized way—in districts, towns, and major cities. The armed militias not only provide protection to the leaders and their political activities but also serve as agents in putting the squeeze on vulnerable local property owners and influentials.

Some of these organizations also ruthlessly exploit the sectarian divisions of Islamic society, especially Sunni versus Shia, confusing their ultimate objectives with near-term and situational objectives. The leaders of these organizations are often quite entrepreneurial,

and some of the most successful also receive funds from Islamic groups in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf states. In their defensive and essentially introspective response within Pakistan, Shia leaders and organizations have also received financial help from Iran. The Pakistan-based extremist groups that have been most active in the fighting in Afghanistan, as well as those that have joined the insurgency in Kashmir, are generally Sunni by sectarian affiliation.

Views differ on whether the activities in Kashmir of the Pakistani militants were also actively sponsored by the Pakistan government, or provided official assistance by some cabal of bureaucratic and military officials behind the scenes. But there seems little doubt that successive political and military governments turned a blind eye to the infiltration of these groups into Kashmir to join the insurgency in the early 1990s. It is also possible that even if the militant formations were privately recruited and trained, they found tacit encouragement in Islamabad's official political and military circles. Mujahideen training of Pakistani recruits, and perhaps some combat experiences with groups in Afghanistan, were readily transferable to Kashmir. The influx of light arms and ammunition to support the guerrilla war against the Soviets left stockpiles that could be put to other uses.

The insurgency in Kashmir began spontaneously in late 1989, led by native Kashmiri militant groups that recruited fighters from a younger generation of Muslim Kashmiris who were frustrated with Indian political interference in state elections and government. It was some time, therefore, before groups in Pakistan began to react in an organized way, with the infiltration and support of militants from Pakistani sources broadly welcomed by most politically active Kashmiris in the Vale of Kashmir, especially in the initial years.

In the development of resistance objectives and tactics, several of the Pakistani militant groups developed reputations for taking greater risk and using more aggressive tactics against Indian security forces than did their Kashmiri counterparts, but a majority of these groups shunned wanton terrorism—avoiding direct attacks on civilians and ordinary Kashmiri property. The Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), based essentially in Kashmiris in both Pakistan- and Indian-held parts of Kashmir, for instance, began with a militant approach to Indian security installations (avoiding violence on civilians, and never deliberately terrorist) but changed course later to adopt exclusively political methods.

A handful of Pakistan-origin extremist groups, however, did cross the line during the 1990s to terrorist actions, pure and simple, including capture and execution of foreign tourists, as well as other attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure. Pakistani-origin groups reportedly associated with such activities in the early 1990s included al-Badr (sponsored by the Pakistani JI) and Harkat-ul-Ansar, later renamed Harkat-ul-Mujahideen. (For the denominational and party affiliations of these groups, see “Map of Pakistani Islamic Militant Groups” in the Appendix.) The Harkat-ul-Ansar was the earliest of these militant Pakistani or Kashmiri organizations to be put on the list of terrorist organizations by the U.S. Department of State. The sponsor of the Harkats was the Sami-ul-Haq branch of the JUI in Pakistan; this branch of the JUI is believed to have had closer Afghanistan ties than any of the other Pakistani Islamic parties and is suspected of having early contacts with Osama bin Laden, dating back to the late 1980s during the Afghan war against the Soviets.

In the late 1990s, the Lashkar-e-Toiba (sometimes written Lashkar-i-Tayyaba), sponsored by the politically invisible but Wahabi-dedicated Ahl-e-Hadith, and the Jaish-e-Muhammed, a more recent extremist offshoot of the Sami-ul-Haq branch of the JUI, became active in Kashmir. India pointed to the Jaish-e-Muhammed and the Lashkar-e-Toiba as the source of the attack on parliament in New Delhi on December 13, 2001, claimed that the attackers were Pakistanis, and accused Pakistan of sponsoring their attack. The State Department also added these organizations to its official list of terrorist organizations in December 2001. India began a full-scale military mobilization of seven hundred thousand troops opposite Pakistan—along the entire border and in the Arabian Sea—and made a series of demands, including total cessation of Pakistani-origin infiltration and “terrorism” in Kashmir.

### **Military Brinkmanship: The Indo-Pakistani Confrontation of 2002**

OUR INTEREST IN THE MILITARY CONFRONTATION between India and Pakistan is not merely in the precipitating events but rather its meaning in the larger context of the war on terrorism, Indo-Pakistani relations, and the knotty dispute over Kashmir. India had adopted a higher profile since September 2001 in seeking to brand the insurgency in predominantly Muslim Kashmir as a concerted campaign of foreign

“terrorism” against India—sponsored by Pakistan and possibly linked with al-Qaeda as well. India had thus set the stage for an intense reaction to Pakistan in the event any major terrorist incident inside could be linked to Pakistan and used as a trigger.

Does India's accusation that Pakistan was behind the December 13 terrorist attack on parliament stand up under scrutiny? How did Musharraf respond to India's charges? Why did the confrontation last so long? How close to the outbreak of war did the sides come? If India had launched a conventional attack, would this have started a chain of events that might have culminated in nuclear war? Why did it take so long to defuse this confrontation? Once one steps back from it, how much was this confrontation driven by religious extremism? What lessons does it contain for the future regarding religious radicalism and conflict in that region?

#### **TERRORIST ATTACK ON PARLIAMENT TRIGGERS INDIA'S BRINKMANSHIP**

Indian security guards effectively disrupted the suicide attack by five armed terrorists on India's parliament building before the gunmen could enter the building. The ensuing shootout resulted in the death of all five attackers (one committed suicide by detonating explosives on his person) and of nine security guards and paramilitary troops. No members of parliament were injured, and none, apparently, were even in the line of fire. Indian intelligence agencies claimed through tracing cellular phone calls made by the attackers that they belonged to Jaish-e-Muhammed and Lashkar-e-Toiba, among the most violent of the organizations active in Kashmir and well known to be Pakistani in origin.<sup>15</sup>

Since the attackers were all dead and the cellular phone links to collaborators pointed to Kashmiris on the Indian side, there was no compelling forensic evidence released at that time that the attackers or collaborators themselves were actually Pakistani citizens.<sup>16</sup> But

15. See Rama Lakshmi, “Indians Blame Attacks on Pakistan-based Group,” *Washington Post*, A-23, 15 December 2001.

16. India endeavored to convince the media that the attackers were Pakistanis. It even allowed the three Indian television stations to interview an alleged suspect named Afzal who reportedly told his interviewers in Hindi that the leader of the operation did a reconnaissance of several possible targets “before their boss in Kashmir chose the Parliament as the final target.” This prisoner reportedly told the interviewers that the attackers were from Pakistan and had made calls to their families the night before the attack and informed them they were embarking on a “big job.” See Lakshmi, “India, Pakistan Leaders Rule Out Meeting at Summit,” *Washington Post*, A-26, 21 December 2001.

whether they were Kashmiris from India's side or Pakistanis, the terrorist attack on India's parliament obviously was not in Pakistan's interest. It is hard to imagine a situation that could have been more damaging to Pakistan's interests at that time.

One can safely assume that the two organizations fingered probably were indeed the perpetrators. But what were the actual motives of those who sponsored or carried out the attack? The effect of the attack on India's parliament clearly was a serious blow to Musharraf's leadership and to Pakistan's prestige, whether that was a motive or not. Embarrassing and weakening Musharraf and attempting to get him to back away from his support of U.S. operations could have been one of the secondary objectives of the groups that sponsored the operation, but such a motive would have been more plausible after Musharraf's January 2002 crackdown on extremists. It obviously was a central motive in the kidnapping and assassination of Daniel Pearl in January 2002, and in other attacks on foreigners and Christian institutions within Pakistan that increased in frequency from the spring through the summer and fall of 2002.<sup>17</sup>

Likely, the attackers of India's parliament gave no thought, even if they were Pakistanis, to the stability or welfare of Pakistan's existing government. A more ambitious objective might have been inciting an Indian military attack on Pakistan and provoking war between the two countries. This theoretically could serve the domestic political purposes of the sponsors of Jaish and Lashkar within Pakistan, by enraging and radicalizing the Pakistani population and making them more susceptible to aggressive Islamic leadership. But it is not a convincing explanation for this operation at that time.

Perhaps the most plausible motivation for the attack on parliament was the aim of weakening India's determination to hold on to Kashmir—two militant groups pursuing their own version of the Kashmir freedom struggle—by striking at India's heart. Interestingly even the Indian exhibition of evidence, for what it is worth, suggests

17. This was a more obvious explanation, however, of the January 23 kidnapping and subsequent assassination of *Wall Street Journal* journalist Daniel Pearl in Karachi, six weeks later. It is by no means obvious in the terrorist attack on parliament on December 13. As to increasing incidences of terrorist violence against Christian churches and hospitals and Western embassy or consular facilities in Pakistan, see the list in Kamran Khan, "Attacks in Pakistan Linked: Officials Tie Strikes on Western Targets to Al Qaeda, Taliban," *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-16, 10 August 2002.

that the operation may have been intended to take members of parliament hostage for a few days—an act that could have elevated the media visibility of the Kashmir struggle astronomically.<sup>18</sup>

India's outrage over this assault on parliament was understandable and the fact of terrorism in this incident cannot be trivialized, but the length to which India went in reaction seemed utterly disproportionate to the incident. The proximate terrorist aims of the attackers—to assassinate elected Indian national leaders—were totally foiled by the units assigned to protect the parliament building.

India used this occasion, nevertheless, to accuse Pakistan of sponsoring the attack.<sup>19</sup> Three days after the attack on parliament, the New Delhi police commissioner issued a report that tenuously connected the Pakistani ISI with a collaborator in the conspiracy.<sup>20</sup> India quickly

18. The police suspect named Afzal (see note 16) who claimed to be familiar with the operation, reportedly told his interviewers that: “[The participants in the operation in phone calls home] said the 10-year-long fight in Kashmir had not brought any good results. ... unless Delhi was attacked, the Indian government would not yield. ... Afzal also said the attackers were carrying food in their bags in the hope of holding lawmakers captive inside the Parliament building for a number of days.” If this account is true, it suggests the aim of the operation was not necessarily to kill but rather to seize hostages and, in that case, was completely botched. See Lakshmi, “India, Pakistan Leaders Rule Out Meeting,” A-26.

19. L. K. Advani, Home Minister (responsible for internal security) and apparently now being groomed as Atal Bihari Vajpayee's successor as prime minister, went on record on the day after the attack to claim that “a neighboring country [Pakistan] that has been spreading terror in India” was the source. Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh also announced on December 14 that: “India has technical [and credible] evidence that yesterday's terrorist attack on the seat of Indian democracy was the handiwork of a terrorist organization based in Pakistan, the Lashkar-e-Toiba.” Although he refused to give further details, Jaswant Singh demanded that Pakistan take immediate action against both the Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Muhammed, by arresting their leaders and freezing their assets. Lakshmi, “Indians Blame Attacks.” Prime Minister Vajpayee joined the accusation chorus the next day, saying “a neighboring country was inspiring the terrorists in carrying out subversive acts in India. The sponsors are destined to doom.” Naresh Mishra, “Pakistan on Alert as India Steps Up Criticism,” *Washington Post*, 16 December 2001.

20. The connection made by the New Delhi police commissioner's report in this case offered no evidence that the ISI directed or materially participated in the attack on parliament but merely alleged that a suspect in police custody [apparently Indian-held Kashmir] had admitted he had been trained at an ISI camp in Muzaffarabad in the Pakistani-controlled part of Kashmir. Whether this testimony was voluntary, whether it would stand up in court, and whether it was directly connected with the attack in question or about an experience long in the past, was not subject to public examination. Nevertheless, the police commissioner grandly assured reporters: “The ISI connection is very clear.... The things which have come to notice clearly show that ISI was connected with this, and if ISI is connected with it then Pakistan must know of it.” See “The World in Brief: Asia: Pakistani Agency Accused in Fatal Attack,” citing the Press Trust of India and Reuters, *Washington Post*, A-20, 17 December 2001.

mounted a campaign of “coercive diplomacy” cloaked in the same themes that President Bush used in launching the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, implicitly threatening preemptive war on Pakistan to root out terrorists.<sup>21</sup> India dramatically cut all air, rail, and road links with Pakistan, recalled its ambassador from Islamabad, placed constraints on Pakistan’s ambassador in Delhi, and initiated a mobilization of the bulk of its armored and mechanized military forces along the border with Pakistan and began moving the leading edge of its naval combatants toward the Arabian Sea to hover opposite Karachi.<sup>22</sup> India maintained this war footing for more than six months, and had only partially relaxed this posture as of this writing in late August 2002.<sup>23</sup>

Caught up in the heat of the preemptive war against terrorism in Afghanistan, the U.S. administration ironically was in no position to walk back India’s overreaction, and with the shift in mood in Washington in favor of India, perhaps was not exactly inclined to do so. No doubt, India analysts will claim soothingly, in retrospect, that India was never close to launching war, and perhaps this was the message behind the scenes between Delhi and Washington.<sup>24</sup> But one can

21. Lakshmi, “India Wages a War of Words: Pakistan Again Assailed for Attack, U.S. for Its Response,” *Washington Post*, A-32, 19 December 2001.

22. India also threatened a variety of other measures. India’s deputy foreign minister, Omar Abdullah, said in a December 21 interview that India was considering revoking the bilateral water-sharing treaty with Pakistan—an important milestone of cooperation negotiated in the first decade after Independence, might suspend trade agreements, and could request that the UN Security Council take action against Pakistan under an anti-terrorist resolution. Two days earlier, the Bush administration placed Lashkar-e-Toiba on the list of banned terrorist organizations and froze its assets. See Pamela Constable and Lakshmi, “India Recalls Pakistani Envoy: New Delhi Signals Its Anger over Attack on Parliament,” *Washington Post*, A-12, 22 December 2001.

23. Reporting on the scale of the increasing Indian military buildup, and the Pakistani response, began to appear just before Christmas. By this time, the air in Delhi was thick with reports of India considering military strikes against Pakistan. L.K. Advani talked openly about using “hot pursuit” against terrorist camps in Pakistan as “legitimate under international law.” Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “Pakistan, India Mass Troops: Tensions Escalate as New Delhi Considers Strike,” *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-11, 24 December 2001.

24. That India staged the brinkmanship mainly to force the United States to put additional pressure on Pakistan was reported at the time as a calculated Indian strategy: “Mindful of the consequences of an all-out war, some Indian officials privately concede that the troop movements were not part of an offensive strategy, but rather an effort to get the United States to more forcefully push the Pakistani government to crack down on militant groups that strike India from bases over the border. ‘We are keeping up the warmongering to get the U.S. to put pressure’ on Pakistan, one

hardly look back at the crisis, whether manufactured or not, without recognizing that it is a foreboding precedent for how future terrorist-driven crises in the subcontinent could erupt and then explode into war.<sup>25</sup> At the height of the tension, a second terrorist attack that actually succeeded in killing top Indian leadership or any urban concentration of women and children would certainly have triggered India's opening war at some level against Pakistan.

India set forth a series of escalating demands on Pakistan. In addition to insisting by implication that Islamabad prove it was not responsible for sponsoring the attack, India demanded that Pakistan immediately halt what Delhi had long called "cross-border infiltration" (now redefined in slogan-like fashion as "cross-border terrorism") in Kashmir. India called on Pakistan to ban the organizations and effectively shut down the operations of the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Jaish-e-Muhammed, and extradite to India some twenty persons (almost all listed as criminals by Interpol, mostly Muslims, but hardly any Pakistanis) whom India claimed were guilty of acts of terrorism in India. India also shifted the diplomatic burden of muting its own response to action by the big powers, suggesting that only their pressures on Pakistan to comply with Indian demands could bring hope of Indian restraint.

Underneath this Indian brinkmanship, India's prime objectives were threefold. First, and probably most important, was to capture Western energy then being poured into the war on terrorism to vaccinate India's position on Kashmir irrevocably against international intervention, and to remold international views of the nature of the problem. This Indian position is that the major part of Kashmir that India holds is an integral part of India, and codified in India's constitution; Kashmir is no longer subject to dispute, and Pakistan's claims can be

senior official said." Chandrasekaran, "Pakistan, India Mass Troops." Early in the crisis, Brookings South Asia expert, Stephen P. Cohen, also held this view, calling the Indian moves a "sound and light show" to force the United States to play a stronger role with Musharraf. Peter Slevin, "Pakistan Groups Called Terrorist Organizations: Powell Names 2 in Formal Declaration," *Washington Post*, A-20, 27 December 2001.

25. India's military leadership joined the coercive diplomacy showmanship just before Musharraf made his major conciliatory speech of January 12, 2002. India's new Army chief, General Sundarajan Padmanabhan, made unusually bellicose remarks on January 11; he reportedly said Indian forces are "fully ready" for war and the massive buildup on the border "is for real." Chandrasekaran, "Head of Army Declares India Is Ready for War," *Washington Post*, A-14, 12 January 2002.

relegated to the dustbin of “ancient history.” India sought to project the long-standing unrest in Kashmir as solely a product of terrorism waged against the population of the state as well as against the security forces.

The second and related objective was to seize the opportunity to draw the United States and as much of the West as possible into India’s corner, as a strategic gambit, by being “more Catholic than the Pope” in India’s own approach to the war against terrorism. Indian officials and publicists subtly reinforced international perceptions that the core problem in South Asia, as well as between Israel and its neighbors, is an Islamic one—a malady of a particular desert religion that invariably goes radical (read “radioactive”) when it is ignited by politics. Even Osama bin Laden’s vocation of terrorism against the West is, in this polemical caricature, a natural expression of the belligerent proclivities of Islamic belief, rather than merely a crass manipulation of religion for political ends. Playing judo, India was craftily using the West’s new passion for its own ends.

The third Indian objective is as old as Pakistan and independent India itself: to isolate and marginalize Pakistan in international affairs. India’s resentment of Pakistan is profound. If Pakistan cannot be diminished to the status of a banana republic, India would still like to shrink its relative importance as a thorn in India’s side to Cuba’s level against the United States, a testy and noisy but easily manageable problem.

India’s capacity to isolate Pakistan during the Cold War failed because the East-West struggle gave Pakistan front-line utility in the Western strategy to contain the Soviet Union, even as late as 1989 when the Afghan war terminated. It failed partly because India’s diplomacy never looked for equitable, quid-pro-quo bargains, but rather assumed it should be treated as a unique power with a great destiny. India traded in prestige rather than geopolitical security and stability—brushing aside the deeper interests of others. Only the Soviet Union, as an underdog, got better treatment by India, and even that was hardly a sterling relationship in Delhi.

Once the Cold War was over, India awakened to a different set of imperatives. The most important of these new imperatives were recognition of the greatly decreased importance of Russia as a bargaining instrument against the West, and the acceleration of China’s race to the stature of a great power—especially, but not only, in international

trade. In this context, India finally adopted a pro-Western outlook. In this same context, the war on terrorism is a grand opportunity for India to resume its efforts to marginalize and isolate Pakistan.

Was religion the key driver here? In one sense it was—it is the real divide between India and Pakistan, the basis for Pakistan's (and Bangladesh's) separateness. But the longer one watches the rivalry between these states, the more one sees that age-old struggle for power as the main dynamic, defined now in a national context. It is a culturally imprinted struggle, in which memories of past civilizations, Hindu and Islamic, count for a great deal. But this struggle would exist whether religion were radicalized or not, whether extremist groups had formed or not. What the radicalization of religion does is intensify the propensity toward violence, on both sides.

#### **PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE: CRACKING DOWN ON MILITANT GROUPS**

Musharraf's immediate response to India's brinkmanship was twofold: He put the Pakistan Army on "high alert," and threatened to retaliate with force if India took "any kind of precipitous action."<sup>26</sup> He denied any direct role of Pakistan in the terrorist attack and called on India to provide evidence to support its claims.<sup>27</sup> Musharraf declared emphatically, "We will take action against anybody involved in Pakistan in these acts, *if at all proved*. We would not like Pakistani territory to be used against any country, including India."<sup>28</sup> But Musharraf sought to protect Pakistan's equities in Kashmir by maintaining the position that Pakistan's moral, diplomatic and political support for the political struggle of Kashmiris was legitimate and totally defensible. He refused to be pushed into a corner that would define all militant activity on behalf of Kashmiri rights as terrorism.

Despite the fact that India provided no specific or forensic evidence to Pakistan at all, either informally or through diplomatic channels, Musharraf took bold action by any past Pakistani standards, in a sustained effort to defuse the crisis and reduce the military pressure on Pakistan. On December 24 Musharraf's government

26. Mishra, "Pakistan on Alert."

27. Pakistan's defense spokesman, Major-General Rashid Qureshi, called for a joint investigation of the incident. See "The World in Brief."

28. Mishra, "Pakistan on Alert."

froze the assets of Lashkar-e-Toiba, and the following day announced the detention of Masood Azhar, the Pakistani founder of Jaish-e-Muhammed.<sup>29</sup> Colin Powell's announcement on December 26 that both Jaish-e-Muhammed and Lashkar-e-Toiba had been designated terrorist groups by the United States<sup>30</sup> added impetus to Musharraf's crackdown on extremist organizations. On December 31, Islamabad announced the detention of two dozen Islamic militants, including Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, head of the Lashkar-e-Toiba, and Musharraf announced, "I want to eradicate militancy, extremism, intolerance from Pakistani society. And ... I would like to eradicate any form of terrorism from the soil of Pakistan."<sup>31</sup>

By the first week of January, Pakistan had arrested about two hundred militants in ten days. It also began to arrest Punjabi leaders of the Sipah-i-Sahaba and Tehrik e Jafaria,<sup>32</sup> Sunni and Shia organizations that fought each other with violence on sectarian grounds, neither being deeply involved in Kashmir. Musharraf used the occasion to restrain not only externally oriented extremist organizations but also those that inflicted violence on Pakistanis at home. But the Indian pressures continued to mount. A meeting on the margins of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit in Nepal had not been productive.<sup>33</sup>

Musharraf finally made a carefully prepared speech on January 12. In the context both of the war on terrorism and India's demands, the most significant feature was an explicit, wide-ranging condemnation of terrorism and extremism, both inside and outside Pakistan. He specifically condemned the December attack on India's parliament and the suicide attack some weeks earlier on the Kashmir legislature,

29. Chandrasekaran and Khan, "Pakistan Arrests Islamic Militant: Massood Azhar Led Group India Blames for Attack," *Washington Post*, A-24 and A-26, 26 December 2001.

30. Slevin, "Pakistan Groups Called Terrorist Organizations."

31. Craig Whitlock and Chandrasekaran, "Pakistan Detains Islamic Militants," *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-15, 1 January 2002.

32. Whitlock, "Pakistan Arrests Scores of Islamic Radicals," *Washington Post*, A-18, 5 January 2002.

33. For the early Pakistani interest in holding a summit meeting to reduce the tension, see Lakshmi, "India, Pakistan Leaders Rule Out Meeting," A-26. For Vajpayee's rebuff, see Chandrasekaran, "Pakistani, Indian Leaders Meet, but Tension Remains: Despite Shaking Hands, Vajpayee Cool to Musharraf," *Washington Post*, A-18, 6 January 2002.

and said “no organization will be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir.”<sup>34</sup>

The Pakistani president's declarations and promised action agenda went a considerable distance to meet the substance of India's concerns about acting to prevent terrorist attacks inside India.<sup>35</sup> Musharraf announced a formal ban on Jaish-e-Muhammed and Lashkar-e-Toiba, the two extremist organizations implicated by Delhi in the attack on parliament. Musharraf went further, however, to ban three domestic extremist organizations that had little or nothing to do directly with Kashmir and India. Two were protagonists of sectarian warfare within Pakistan itself, the radical Sunni Sipah-i-Sahaba and the Shi'ite rival, the Tehrik e Jafaria Party. The third domestically oriented group then banned was the Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi, an organization that had channeled misguided Pakistani youth to join the Taliban in Afghanistan in fighting the incoming U.S. and allied forces.

Musharraf also announced that the government would introduce other measures to reign in Islamic radicalism domestically, including new regulations over the madrassas that would require all foreign students to register, establish registration requirements for opening any new madrassa, impose state-designed curricular requirements, and restrict the use of mosques and loudspeakers for political purposes or inciting public protests.

34. See “Mr. Musharraf Speaks,” editorial in *Washington Post*, A-18, 15 January 2002. This editorial further applauded Musharraf's speech as containing “... a breakthrough of potentially deeper consequence ... Pakistan's president passionately denounced the radical Islamic ideology that fuels terrorism in his country and around the Muslim world. He pledged to root out not just terrorists targeted by India or the West but preachers, schools and other institutions that foment religious intolerance [within Pakistan]... The importance of that agenda, if Mr. Musharraf forcefully pursues it, can hardly be overstated: It would not only reverse Pakistan's drift in recent years toward tolerance of Islamic militancy but would also provide an alternative vision to that of government who arrest militants but ignore or even support their ideology.”

35. See report by Whitlock and Chandrasekaran, “Pakistan Bans Groups in Reply to Indian Appeal,” *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-27, 13 January 2002. These crackdown measures against extremist organizations were, incidentally, judicially controversial if not objectionable under the provisions of the constitution. They could be sustained only by a military regime, and then only temporarily—absent evidence that could be presented in court of specific crimes, of murder, assault, treason, or the like. If the shoe had been on the other foot, India would have been hard put to carry out comparable measures itself—absent evidence that could be presented in court, for instance, against the Tamil Tigers, or Hindu extremist organizations such as the Shiv Sena or Vishwa Hindu Parishad—given the individual legal protections under India's constitution. Musharraf clearly caved unilaterally under Indian (and perhaps U.S.) pressure to stave off war, but also to keep Pakistan on the moral high ground with respect to the international war against terrorism.

At the same time, Musharraf emphasized in his speech the crying need for India to sit down and negotiate on the Kashmir problem, as the root cause not only of the conflict between India and Pakistan, but also of the rise of extremist tendencies related to Kashmir, in the Kashmir insurgency itself, and within Pakistan's own Kashmir-oriented Punjabi and Pushtun activist communities.

India's reaction was mixed. While it welcomed the thrust of Musharraf's measures against extremist groups, it ignored the proposals for negotiating on Kashmir. Moreover, the overall Indian response was couched to put Musharraf on notice that his sincerity would be judged by results, a theme also in U.S. official statements but framed there in more positive and encouraging tones.<sup>36</sup> The proof of his intentions would be in how the promises were implemented. India also immediately converted the expectations in Musharraf's speech into a test in Kashmir. Indian officials insisted that the infiltration of Pakistan-based extremist groups into Indian-controlled Kashmir must stop, extremists still operating in Indian-held Kashmir should be called back, and the net results would also be measured by whether the violence there dropped steadily to much lower levels.<sup>37</sup>

In effect, India kept the military confrontation in place for the best part of a year, to squeeze maximum concessions from Pakistan during a time of emergency.<sup>38</sup> India also used missile testing to attract

36. See, for instance, Alan Sipress and Whitlock, "In Pakistan, Powell Encourages Action: Musharraf Praised for Anti-Terror Vow," *Washington Post*, A-20, 17 January 2002.

37. Whitlock and Chandrasekaran, "Pakistan Bans Groups"; Chandrasekaran, "India Builds for Long Haul on Border with Pakistan," *Washington Post*, A-18, 17 January 2002; Sipress and Chandrasekaran, "Powell 'Encouraged' by India Visit: New Delhi Officials Signal Approval of Pakistan Crackdown on Islamic Militants," *Washington Post*, A-19, 19 January 2002.

38. India also exploited its "fugitive list" to keep the spotlight of the investigatory media on Musharraf and on the issue of "terrorism." Otherwise, for India this list probably was a tactical concern. The twenty fugitives were a motley combination of Muslim extremists, Sikh separatists, and organized Indian crime bosses who were accused by Indian law enforcement, in one case or another, of bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, gun-running, and drug smuggling. India claimed all had taken refuge in Pakistan. In this context, India did supply to Pakistan some material evidence regarding the violations of these individuals. Pakistan found that only six of the twenty were Pakistani citizens and insisted that in their cases, if evidence of criminal violations supported it, they would be tried in Pakistani courts. With respect to the rest, Pakistan denied that they were residing in Pakistan. Five of the six Pakistanis on the list allegedly were hijackers of an Indian aircraft used in December, 1999, to force the release of Masood Azhar, who had been imprisoned (without trial) for years by India, for making inflammatory speeches in Kashmir in the early 1990s. Upon his release triggered by the hijacking, Azhar founded the Jaish-e-Muhammed militant organization. See

media attention and to stimulate Western anxiety about the nuclear issue, as a means of escalating the pressure on Pakistan.<sup>39</sup> Between Musharraf's bold January actions against extremist groups and the present, the manipulated and felt risks of nuclear weapons rose and fell, sometimes in agonizing fashion. However, much of the attention after January shifted to the backlash in Pakistan against Musharraf's efforts to corral and suppress the extremist organizations. The key here was the kidnapping and assassination of Daniel Pearl in January–February 2002, followed at intervals by Islamic extremist attacks on foreigners, foreign institutions or Christians—themselves ostensibly as symbols of foreign influence.<sup>40</sup>

For Pakistan, the effect of India's perpetuating the military emergency was to keep it in a vice, trying gamely to support the United States against terrorism on one side (also trying to minimize the injury to the Pushtun peoples from the sustained assault on the Taliban, and to limit Northern Alliance influence in the emerging government). On the other hand, Pakistan was obliged to look over its shoulder at India, and to worry about possible Indian plans to use air strikes against Pakistani installations or assets, or, worst of all, to launch an outright invasion on the pretext of pursuing terrorism in Pakistan.

### THE NUCLEAR DIMENSION

This author has addressed analysis of the nuclear instability inherent in the India-Pakistan relationship more extensively elsewhere.<sup>41</sup> The underlying risks of nuclear conflict almost certainly were exacerbated by the Indian military confrontation with Pakistan. How close to nuclear war during the confrontation did the two countries get?

Chandrasekaran and Lakshmi, "Fugitive List Becomes Central Issue for India: Pakistan Pressed to Hand Over 20 Suspects," *Washington Post*, A-10, 22 January 2002.

39. Lakshmi, "Missile Test by India Raises Nuclear Ante: Pakistan Assails Firing 'at a Time of Tensions,'" *Washington Post*, A-17, 26 January 2002.

40. On the January 23 kidnapping in Karachi of Daniel Pearl of the *Wall Street Journal*, see Molly Moore and Khan, "Pakistani Group Says It Has U.S. Journalist: E-Mail Demands Release of Countrymen," *Washington Post*, A-16, 28 January 2002.

41. See Rodney W. Jones, *Minimum Nuclear Deterrence Postures in South Asia—An Overview*, prepared for DTRA/ASCO, October 2001, <http://www.policyarchitects.org> and [http://www.dtra.mil/about/organization/south\\_asia.pdf](http://www.dtra.mil/about/organization/south_asia.pdf); also by the same author: "Conventional Military Asymmetry and Regional Stability among Emerging Nuclear States: India and Pakistan," *Fourth Nuclear Stability Roundtable: Conference on Strategic Stability and Global Change*, 12–13 March 2002, <http://www.policyarchitects.org>; "Force Modernization Trends—India and Pakistan," *Conventional Arms Modernization in Asia and the Pacific*, Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (forthcoming);

How likely is it that one or another crisis between these two countries will lead to war, and potentially to nuclear escalation? Will religious radicalism increase the risks of hot wars and nuclear use between them?

The key structural factors that inherently pose nuclear instability between India and Pakistan relate to the asymmetries of their overall territorial size, strategic depth, and conventional military forces. Additional factors that are matters of concern in crises—specific sources of potential crisis instability—are inexperience and the technical and personnel shortcomings in their respective nuclear command and control systems, shortcomings in their early warning capabilities, and serious issues of survivability of nuclear assets, especially in Pakistan's case, where its narrow geography leaves fewer secure concealment options than India enjoys.

As a result, the nuclear postures of both sides are also asymmetrical. Pakistan's nuclear deterrence calculations require that nuclear weapons be an immediate backup of its conventional defenses, which are considerably weaker than India's and theoretically could be easily overrun, risking Pakistan's survival as an independent country. Thus Pakistan's nuclear capability is seen not just as a deterrent against the hypothetical possibility of an Indian *nuclear* first strike but also as a deterrent against India's use against Pakistan of its superior *conventional offensive* capabilities. Pakistan's situation is analogous to the NATO nuclear deterrent during the Cold War against the mightier conventional armies of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact.

But the dilemma this presents to the Pakistani leadership, the same dilemma that NATO lived with, is that it requires Pakistan's decision makers to leave open the option of striking India first with nuclear weapons. Presumably this would be contemplated only if Pakistan were under concerted Indian conventional attack and presumably only when Pakistan's situation had seriously deteriorated—considering nuclear retaliation as the use of weapons of last resort. Without such a posture, Pakistan's nuclear deterrent would lack credibility.

"South Asia under the Nuclear Shadow: Is Stable Nuclear Deterrence Feasible?" *The Friday Times* (Lahore), 22–28 February 2002, <http://www.policyarchitects.org>; "Debating New Delhi's Nuclear Decision," *International Security* 24, no. 4 (Spring 2000): 181–87; "Pakistan's Nuclear Posture: Quest for Assured Nuclear Deterrence—A Conjecture," *Spotlight on Regional Affairs* 19, no. 1 (Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, January 2000), 40 pages; reprinted in *Regional Studies* 18 (Islamabad) (Spring 2000): 3–39; "Pakistan's Nuclear Posture: Arms Race Instabilities in South Asia," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 67–87.

With enormous conventional military superiority over Pakistan, India has the luxury of claiming that it will never use nuclear weapons in a first strike, but only in retaliation against an opponent's first use of nuclear weapons.

As long as India does not impose conventional war on Pakistan, the likelihood of authorized nuclear use is very low. But clearly the converse is also true: that India threatening Pakistan with conventional war brings Pakistani preparedness to use nuclear weapons to the surface.

In this regard, the Indian mobilization of the bulk of its military forces to confront Pakistan with coercive diplomacy undoubtedly raised the risks of a nuclear conflict to a fairly high threshold. India may have calculated that it would merely threaten Pakistan for political objectives, such as forcing Pakistan to leash Islamic militant and extremist organizations operating in Kashmir or deeper in India.<sup>42</sup> But this was a situation prone to politically inflamed miscalculation, which could have caused both sides to become trapped in a spiraling loss of control. A really effective extremist attack on Indian political leaders—which could have happened at any time—certainly would have triggered an Indian invasion, quickly bringing the risk of nuclear use to the fore.

Moreover, the flood of hints from within India during the confrontation that it was considering preemptive attacks on extremist training camps in Pakistan nearby Kashmir—and also nearby sensitive Pakistani nuclear installations—had to put Pakistan on a much higher state of nuclear readiness.<sup>43</sup> Prudence in the Indian military establishment would have meant it too must have moved to a higher state of nuclear readiness. This drift, not unlike cocking loaded guns, certainly brought both sides closer to nuclear war. It is worth mentioning, however, that neither side overtly threatened the other with nuclear attack; nuclear options were, for the most part, veiled.

42. For reporting on hard-nosed Indian calculations contrary to the conventional Cold War wisdom, buying instead into the notion that “a conventional conflict would not necessarily spiral into a nuclear exchange,” see Chandrasekaran, “For India, Deterrence May Not Prevent [Conventional] War,” *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-18, 17 January 2002. This report also notes some official Indian views that India could easily ride out a nuclear attack by Pakistan, quoting Indian Defense Minister Fernandes: “We could take a strike, survive and then hit back. Pakistan would be finished.” *Ibid.*

43. Indian military brinkmanship and jawboning reached a particularly intense crescendo on the eve of Musharraf's key speech and new policy initiatives of 12 January 2002. See Chandrasekaran, “Head of Army Declares India Is Ready for War,” *Washington Post*, A-14, 12 January 2002.

What is most surprising given this underlying danger—which U.S. officials did acknowledge publicly—is how relaxed instead of strenuous U.S. efforts were to defuse the confrontation during its early months. The Bush administration evidently encouraged an information campaign against India’s brinkmanship only in May 2002 when it became clear that Pakistan’s concerns about the threat on its eastern border had reduced its capacity to aid U.S. forces in sealing off al-Qaeda exit from Afghanistan.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps U.S. preoccupation with the deterioration of the Israel-Palestinian relationship partly accounts for this extraordinarily “laid back” approach. It was tantamount, however, to turning a blind eye to all dangers in the subcontinent save those of terrorism, in order to achieve the objectives of destroying terrorist operatives and sanctuaries in Afghanistan. The consequences of a major conventional war, or, more horribly, of an India-Pakistan nuclear exchange, would have made everything al-Qaeda and the Taliban have done pale by comparison.

#### **U.S. DIPLOMATIC INTERVENTION: DEFUSING CONFRONTATION**

The United States moved rather late in the game to defuse India’s confrontation with Pakistan. A schedule of visits of senior U.S. officials to the region recently had been planned. The precipitating events for a more decisive intervention may have been a resurgence of violence in Kashmir in May 2002, suggesting renewed infiltration of militants from Pakistan after the usual winter lull. Coinciding with the India visit of U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia

44. Only in the late spring of 2002, as waves of fresh reports appeared on Indian military massing its forces on the borders with Pakistan, did an administration-inspired information campaign regarding the dangers of nuclear weapons get underway, as initial steps to restrain India—because, some alleged, Pakistan could not assist the United States adequately against al-Qaeda in the west when it had to protect against the Indian threat in the east. One form this information diplomacy took was technical briefings on the human and ecological damage that would result from nuclear weapon exchanges on plausible targets. One assessment had found that a small Pakistani nuclear weapon on Bombay could kill up to 850,000 people. Undersecretary of Defense Douglas J. Feith told a conference on American-Indian defense trade on May 13 that the Bush administration was “focused intensely” on the danger posed by the five-month-old mobilization by Pakistan and India and the prospect of nuclear war. His remarks became more significant when a paper by Bruce Riedell, an aide to President Clinton, revealed that during the Kargil conflict U.S. officials believed Pakistan had readied nuclear weapons for use and surprised Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with this disclosure. See Sipress and Thomas E. Ricks, “Report: India, Pakistan Were Near Nuclear War in ’99,” *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-23, 15 May 2002.

Christina Rocca, on May 14, militants attacked a bus and then stormed an Indian Army camp in Kashmir where soldiers had their wives and children present, killing at least thirty and injuring forty-seven, including ten women and eleven children among the dead.<sup>45</sup> Two days later, Pakistan put its military forces in the north on the highest alert, fearing that India was preparing to launch a strike on Pakistan in retaliation for the violence in Kashmir.<sup>46</sup>

Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage's planned visit to India and Pakistan had suddenly gained a new importance, although it was still two weeks off. Indian officials complained that the United States had not adequately brought Pakistan into line, accused Musharraf of betraying his January pledge to stop the infiltration of extremists from Pakistan into Kashmir, and threatened heavy retaliation.<sup>47</sup> India then launched rounds of mortar fire into Pakistan-held Kashmir across the line of control, ostensibly to suppress infiltrators.<sup>48</sup> Pakistan soon responded in kind, following a long-practiced routine. A day later, India announced the expulsion of Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Pakistan's ambassador to Delhi, giving him one week to leave; India had ceased communicating with him anyway since the December 13 attack,<sup>49</sup> but this action hinted that India might break relations with Pakistan altogether—an action that often precedes war.

India announced additional steps signaling the seriousness of its preparation for war. It streamlined the command structure of the armed forces, putting the border security forces under Army control, and the Coast Guard under Navy command. The Navy announced the movement of five warships from the eastern coast to reinforce the western fleet in the Arabian Sea. Vajpayee toured Army camps near the line of control in Kashmir to calm the atmosphere after the assassination of moderate separatist Abdul Ghani Lone, and to boost

45. Lakshmi, "At Least 30 Killed in Raid in Kashmir," *Washington Post*, A-23, 15 May 2002. Pakistan condemned the attack immediately. Two groups, Al Mansoorin and Jamiat ul Mujahideen, claimed responsibility. Indian Home Minister Advani said that Al Mansoorin replaced the Lashkar-e-Toiba when the latter was banned.

46. Karl Vick and Khan, "Pakistan Puts Some Forces on High Alert as India Plans Reprisal," *Washington Post*, A-20, 17 May 2002.

47. Lakshmi, "India Links Pakistan to Attack in Kashmir: Officials Vow to Take Action for Militant Raid," *Washington Post*, A-18, 16 May 2002.

48. Lakshmi, "India and Pakistan Trade Mortar Fire: Exchange on Kashmir Line is Heaviest in Months," *Washington Post*, A-16, 18 May 2002.

49. Lakshmi, "India Orders Expulsion of Pakistan's Envoy," *Washington Post*, A-17, 19 May 2002.

military morale, telling the troops “be ready for sacrifice ... the time has come for decisive battle.”<sup>50</sup>

Once again seeking to defuse India’s brinkmanship and to persuade the United States to lend a hand, Musharraf opened himself to a wide-ranging press interview on May 26 with a senior U.S. journalist.<sup>51</sup> Musharraf made several points. First, he insisted that Pakistan had stuck by his pledges to stop terrorists operating from Pakistan into India or anywhere else: “We will ensure that terrorism does not go from Pakistan anywhere outside into the world. That is our stand, and we adhere to it.” He added that Pakistan’s fight against terrorism included cooperation with the United States against al-Qaeda and had a third component of suppressing Islamic sectarian extremism inside Pakistan itself. He asserted that militant infiltration across the line of control in Kashmir was not occurring, using the same language four times: “I repeat: There is nothing happening across the line of control.”

Second, Musharraf demanded India negotiate on Kashmir, with a dialogue and with a process, and reduce its own atrocities in

50. Lakshmi and Chandrasekaran, “India’s Leader Steps Up War Rhetoric,” *Washington Post*, 23 May 2002. The day before, masked gunmen in police uniforms shot and killed Abdul Ghani Lone in Srinagar. Lone was the senior leader of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, a group of Kashmiri political and religious parties that advocate the separation of Kashmir from the rest of India. Lone himself, in contrast to many of the other Kashmiri independence leaders, favored dialogue with India and had become an opponent of the participation of hard-line militants from Pakistan in the Kashmiri separatist campaign. Lakshmi and Chandrasekaran, “Moderate Separatist Leader Is Assassinated in Kashmir: Muslim Drew Militants’ Ire for Seeking Talks with India,” *Washington Post*, A-26, 22 May 2002. See also Chandrasekaran and Lakshmi, “Indian Leaders Talk of War over Kashmir: No Deadline Set for Pakistan to Move against Militants,” *Washington Post*, A-24 and A-26, 24 May 2002.

51. Steve Coll, “Pakistan Says Raids in Kashmir Have Ended: Musharraf Demands Response from India,” *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-21, 26 May 2002. Steve Coll is managing editor of the *Washington Post* and was seasoned earlier as his newspaper’s correspondent in South Asia from 1989 to 1992. See his trenchant analysis in the same issue, “Between India and Pakistan, A Changing Role for the U.S.,” *Washington Post*, Outlook section, B-1 and B-5, 26 May 2002. In his concise policy recommendations, Coll raises a point that has been brushed aside by virtually every contemporary South Asia expert, that war in South Asia impacts U.S. vital interests negatively and the point must be made in no uncertain terms to India and Pakistan both: “The first challenge facing U.S. negotiators is to convince India to back off from its war threats, while insisting that Musharraf use the breathing space to dismantle the jihadist networks in Kashmir. Such an initiative may require high-level talks, backed by private U.S. guarantees, to help push India and Pakistan away from repetitious border scares and toward sustained political negotiation. It may also require an invocation, whether in public or private, that vital U.S. interests would be jeopardized if either party launches another war.”

Kashmir by withdrawing forces from the towns and cities. Third, he called for a reciprocal de-escalation of the military confrontation on the borders and at the line of control. Fourth, he warned India that it would pay a price for starting war: "Pakistan is no Iraq. India is not United States. We have forces. They follow a strategy of deterrence. [If deterrence fails] we are very capable of an offensive defense ... These words are very important. We'll take the offensive into Indian territory." He made it clear that he was not talking here about using nuclear weapons. Musharraf affirmed Pakistan's interest in peace with honor and dignity. But he also pulled no punches in describing India's approach since December as belligerent "chest thumping." He identified the basic problem as India's unwillingness to accept a strong Pakistan as its neighbor: "They want a subservient Pakistan which remains subservient to them. They are arrogant and want to impose their will on every country in the region."

Coordinated U.S. and British diplomacy finally went into high gear in South Asia in late May and June 2002, to avert the pressure for war by bringing about a more decisive outcome on India's main bone of contention. This required extracting a still more unequivocal pledge from Musharraf, to actively put a stop to armed extremists moving from Pakistan to the Indian-held part of Kashmir. Musharraf apparently believed he would receive in exchange "international assurances that India would also take significant steps to end the decades-old stalemate over Kashmir."<sup>52</sup> President Bush, on tour in Europe, finally took the stand himself to urge Musharraf personally to "show results" in stopping incursions into Indian-controlled Kashmir.<sup>53</sup> But escalation of tension mounted, with additional violence in Kashmir, missile testing, and a Musharraf speech on May 27 that was both conciliatory and defiant but that riled the Indian establishment. Thus, in advance of Armitage's visit, to be followed by that of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, the U.S. State Department, the United Nations, and a number of advanced nations urged their citizens and foreign nationals to leave India and

52. Sipress and Khan, "U.S. Presses Pakistan on Incursions: Tensions with India Dangerously High," *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-28, 25 May 2002.

53. Dana Milbank, "Bush Presses Pakistan on Kashmir Raids," *Washington Post*, A-14, 27 May 2002.

Pakistan—hinting obviously at the rising concern that war could begin and lead to nuclear war.<sup>54</sup>

Musharraf and Vajpayee both attended the sixteen-nation Asian security summit convened by Kazakhstan in Almaty on June 4, where Russian President Vladimir Putin and China's President Jiang Zemin each attempted to take the two South Asian leaders aside while trying to mediate, but Vajpayee stonewalled Musharraf on any direct dialogue.<sup>55</sup>

The Armitage visit to Pakistan on June 6 and New Delhi the following day, bolstered by Rumsfeld's visit beginning on June 11 in Delhi, appeared to finally soften the India-Pakistan deadlock and allowed a basis for unraveling the military crisis by stages. Armitage evidently found the formula in Washington's employing the key word "permanent" to clarify the nature of Musharraf's pledge to "end" cross-border transit of militants from Pakistan to Kashmir. In New Delhi, Musharraf's pledge would be understood to mean, by virtue of U.S. assurance, bringing infiltration of militants to a "permanent end," but it would not have been publicly stated that way in Islamabad itself—a "blue smoke and mirrors" act of diplomacy. In exchange, Musharraf could count on India's de-escalation and on the United States to urge India to enter dialogue on Kashmir. In addition, the doors that had been closed by sanctions to trade and even military procurement would be opened somewhat wider.<sup>56</sup>

While Pakistan could find some satisfaction in this outcome as a way of making the best of a difficult situation, the real benefits to Pakistan are not anything like Indian undertakings to move toward a solution of the Kashmir problem on terms meaningful to Pakistan. But they probably do add up to the opportunity to begin moving toward some form of normalcy in relations with India, and go a long

54. Chandrasekaran, "U.N. to Evacuate Families of Staff: Pakistan Plays Down Talk of Nuclear War," *Washington Post*, A-17, 2 June 2002. Since most non-essential foreign nationals had already been evacuated from Pakistan months before, this action hit India relatively severely for the first time, by causing a drop in confidence that affected a wide range of international economic activity.

55. Peter Baker and Sipsess, "Kashmir Foes Apart at Meeting: India Declines Pakistani's Offer to Meet as Pressure Mounts," *Washington Post*, A-1 and A-12, 4 June 2002; see also "Russia Fails to Persuade Pakistan, India to Budget: At Summit Rivals Trade Accusations, Not Handshakes," *Washington Post*, A-17, 5 June 2002.

56. Glenn Kessler, "A Defining Moment in Islamabad: U.S.-Brokered 'Yes' Pulled India, Pakistan from Brink of War," *Washington Post*, A-1, 22 June 2002.

way to allow Pakistan to count on more positive international relations more generally, especially with the West and with the United States. The nature of this arrangement sidestepped Pakistani humiliation but there was no doubt that it requires a rather fundamental shift in Pakistan's outlook about the likely future of Kashmir—where the use of violence must not only be avoided but Pakistani volunteers who would resort to it must be prevented from doing so. From the standpoint of any Western observer, such a shift, coupled with the long-term dividends that the other mentioned opportunities could yield for Pakistan, would seem to be a highly valuable outcome in the long term.

## Epilogue, November 2002

INDIA FINALLY BEGAN TO WIND DOWN its confrontation with Pakistan in October and November of 2002, standing down a portion of the seven hundred thousand armored and mechanized troops it had mobilized in Punjab and Rajasthan to exert military pressure on Pakistan. It did so after further visits by Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Secretary of State Colin Powell to both countries in August and September—to tamp down another spike in tension between both countries that arose in August, while furthering the agenda of the war against international terrorism in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. It became clear in retrospect that India had maintained its pressure on Pakistan partly to enhance its chances of minimizing violence in Jammu and Kashmir while it conducted state elections there in September and October, 2002. The Kashmir elections were not without violence but nevertheless were relatively free and unrigged, and displaced the long-ruling National Conference.<sup>57</sup> The elections brought to power in Srinagar a coalition of the new Kashmiri People's Democratic Party (PDP), which favors a lifting of the oppression and greater

57. The chief minister of the new government in Kashmir, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, was selected from the PDP and sworn in on November 2. See reporting on the Kashmir elections in Lakshmi, "Kashmir's Ruling Party Defeated at Polls," *Washington Post*, A-28, 11 October 2002; Ashok Sharma, "Indian Parties Try to Form Coalition in Kashmir," *Washington Post*, A-26, 27 October 2002; Lakshmi, "Kashmiri Politics at 'Crucial Stage': New Government Raises Region's Hopes," *Washington Post*, A-25, 17 November 2002.

autonomy within the Indian union, and the Congress Party, formerly the ruling party of India and the main opposition to the BJP in New Delhi. This outcome potentially sets the stage for negotiations between Kashmiris and New Delhi over a new disposition for Jammu and Kashmir, although steps in that direction seemed slow to emerge as of this writing in November.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, national elections were held on October 10, 2002, resulting in a division of seats among the Pakistan Muslim League, Quaid-e-Azam faction (PML-Q), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and an alliance of six Islamist parties known as the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA). No party won a clear parliamentary majority.<sup>58</sup> The religious alliance, however, won power at the provincial level in the two provinces adjacent to Afghanistan, the Northwest Frontier Province and Baluchistan.

After weeks of negotiations, a coalition government with a narrow parliamentary majority was formed between the PML-Q, smaller parties, independents, and PPP defectors. Zafarullah Khan Jamali, from Baluchistan, was selected as prime minister. This Jamali coalition, in contrast to the MMA—which is severely critical of Musharraf's relations with the United States in the war against the Taliban and the restrictions on militant movement into Kashmir—is likely to support the broad outlines of Musharraf's foreign policy.

Although time will tell, the Jamali government may also be more amenable to a Musharraf-led, step-by-step reduction of tensions in the relationship with India than one in which the Islamicist opposition figures more prominently. However, the increased strength of the Islamicists at the national level is likely to circumscribe Musharraf's domestic options, especially in social and reform policy. Imposing controls over the militant Islamic organizations and the reservoirs of militant education in madrassas affiliated with the JUI will prove difficult. Thus, the objectives of setting Pakistan on a moderate and secular governmental course will remain challenged.

58. For Jamali's emergence as prime minister and the Pakistani national election results, see John Lancaster, "Musharraf Ally is Named Prime Minister of Pakistan: Election by Legislators Signals Emergence of Ruling Coalition," *Washington Post*, A-30, 22 November 2002; John Lancaster, "Musharraf Struggling for Ruling Coalition: Pakistan's Religious Parties Emerge from October Elections as Power Brokers," *Washington Post*, A-22, 11 November 2002; John Lancaster, "Islamic Parties' Gains May Be West's Loss in Pakistan Vote," *Washington Post*, A-22, 12 October 2002.

## Conclusions

THE U.S. CAMPAIGN against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan was a defining moment for Pakistan and India both. It created new strategic opportunities for both, but these played more easily to India's advantage. It also imposed new strategic burdens. In the first instance, these fell primarily on Pakistan. In the aftermath, they could also fall on India as well, on its approach to Kashmir, and in its future handling of nuclear affairs. How this will play out remains to be seen, but is of great importance for the future stability and peace of the region.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, Pakistan's advantages came to the fore. Its geographic position made Pakistan indispensable, especially in the early stages, for U.S. military access to Afghanistan. Pakistan's intimate ties with the Taliban (who also sheltered al-Qaeda) meant that Islamabad's approach to the war on terrorism also could be pivotal to how the United States applied its military and political options. Musharraf's quick and relatively unconditional agreement to provide the United States logistical access through Pakistan, and to cut off ties with the Taliban, reopened a relationship with Washington of great near-term benefit, and potentially long-term benefits as well.

Pakistan's ready availability to the United States also sidelined India as far as the immediate military effort in Afghanistan was concerned, much to India's chagrin. India, nevertheless, expressed its full support for the U.S. operations in Afghanistan, a position it never would have contemplated during the Cold War and actually had withheld during the Afghan war against the Soviet intervention in the 1980s. The warming of U.S. relations with India that had been given impetus by the Kargil episode in 1999 and by U.S. moves to relax the nuclear-related sanctions, however, gained momentum after September 11. India too had made clear its readiness to offer the United States the use of its own military facilities should they be needed. This had weighed on Pakistan and may have speeded its own decisions. Musharraf alluded to this in explaining the necessity of Pakistan's decision to cut off the Taliban.

While the agitational backlash in Pakistan from religious parties and extremist groups against his regime did not immediately rise to an unmanageable level, as had been feared, the animosity against Musharraf was clear. Musharraf attempted to strike a balance in his

support for the United States between his actions on Afghanistan and Pakistan's policies toward India. While dropping the Taliban, he steered away from imposing any new constraints on the religious parties and their affiliated militants that would affect their access to the insurgency in Kashmir.

Islamic extremist groups continued their own operations in Kashmir. In retrospect, it seems clear that the most aggressive of these organizations also attempted to provoke India by carrying terrorist operations beyond Kashmir into the heart of India. The motivations of the Jaish-e-Muhammed organization in preparing the December attack on India's parliament are still far from clear (and the same may be said for the Lashkar-e-Toiba, if it was actually part of the same conspiracy). India's own forensic investigations provided hints that the attack on parliament was not thoroughly pre-planned (other targets in Delhi apparently had been surveyed and considered), and that the rationale of the participants had been to carry the Kashmir insurgency to Delhi because their efforts within Kashmir had not borne fruit in forcing India to negotiate. The founder of Jaish-e-Muhammed had also been imprisoned by India and may have had motivations of personal revenge. Also, although no direct evidence of this has surfaced, one cannot rule out the possibility that those who engineered or directed the attack from a distance may have hoped that it would arouse India to undertake efforts to destabilize Musharraf's regime.

Whatever the exact motivation, it is clear that the *effect* of the attack on parliament was to provoke India to consider going to war against Pakistan, or at least to retaliate with a major show of force. The Bush Doctrine and the war on terrorism in Afghanistan provided a precedent that Indian leaders instinctively embraced—that acts of terrorism could be pursued to their origin and rooted out by military force. Since India alleged that the perpetrators killed in the incident were Pakistanis, the effect of the terrorism in Delhi was to provoke a response that would threaten Pakistan directly, and, given the context, indirectly threaten the Musharraf regime.

India was handed a strategic opportunity on a platter. Rather than squander this opportunity on a quick, punitive action against terrorist training camps or Pakistani military installations along the line of control (such action would have been militarily ineffectual and probably politically counterproductive as well), India mounted a major military

confrontation against Pakistan for coercive diplomacy. This effort was well designed to put simultaneous pressure on the United States to use its influence with Musharraf, and direct pressure on Musharraf himself to get him to condemn terrorism and block the emigration of extremist groups into Kashmir. By Indian calculations, this could seal off Indian-held Kashmir from Pakistan's influence and terminate the anti-Indian unrest there. The confrontation could have led to Indian military actions, too, if circumstances convinced India's leadership of their utility or necessity.

Caught in a vise between the United States pursuing the war against the Taliban to the west in Afghanistan, and India threatening war from the east, and under pressure from Islamic political parties at home, Musharraf faced more than the ordinary dilemma. Condemning the attack on India's parliament was easy enough but did nothing to relieve the pressure. Musharraf's problem was to show Pakistan's commitment to suppress terrorism on one hand without undercutting Pakistan's Kashmir policy. His initial attempts to do this by the measures announced in his January 12 speech. These banned the two extremist groups that India had fingered, confined members of those groups in temporary detention, and declared that Pakistan would not allow the migration of terrorism from Pakistan's soil anywhere outside. This was greeted with skepticism by India. India did not budge from the confrontation. In effect India pocketed Musharraf's promises, but insisted they would have to be monitored before India could adjust its position.

While the confrontation remained in place, the winter weather cut down movement from Pakistan to Kashmir, a regular occurrence, and a modest drop-off in the level of violence in Kashmir followed. But India revived the crisis of war threats to a high pitch in mid-May when a bloody attack on an army camp coincided with Christina Rocca's visit. India insisted that Musharraf had betrayed his January pledges. Anger in India was accentuated by the communal riots in Gujarat, which took an exceptionally heavy toll on Muslims and BJP's anxiety as it ran up to certain state level elections. U.S. concerns were augmented by Musharraf's trimming of military support against al-Qaeda groups slipping into Pakistan. Nuclear threats were hinted at indirectly by testing missiles (India earlier, and Pakistan later), during this timeframe. The magnitude of the tension set the stage for a more active U.S. intervention with Armitage and

Rumsfeld, Armitage carrying the ball diplomatically, and Rumsfeld giving personal impetus to promises of continued military cooperation.

Attacks on Americans and other foreigners within Pakistan had increased after Musharraf's January actions. The Daniel Pearl murder and the killing of French technicians in Karachi received exceptionally intense attention from the international media. This helped mobilize U.S. pressure, too. Thus, under concerted U.S. pressure, and with the additional challenge of staying in power while preparing the ground for national elections scheduled for October, Musharraf became a measure more pliable.

Armitage's principal contribution in visiting Pakistan and India in succession was to nail down more definitively Musharraf's pledge to stop emigration of extremists into Kashmir, adding the word "permanent" in front of the word "stop." Armitage evidently had some assurances from India that he could convey to Musharraf in return, together with additional promises of U.S. support for Pakistan, if Musharraf adhered to his word. This intervention did begin to thaw the tension between India and Pakistan, although India made it clear that it would draw down its military confrontation in steps as it monitored Pakistan's performance.

India won the lion's share of the benefits that U.S. intervention and media attention awarded in the coercive diplomacy exercise. India successfully focused the crisis on extremist infiltration into Kashmir and related terrorist acts in other parts of India. It not only got U.S. assistance in defining any terrorist problem linked to Pakistan in India's own way, but a more substantial U.S. sympathy toward India's own position on Kashmir. India made considerable headway in shifting international perceptions of these problems in the direction of stigmatizing Pakistan.

On the role of religion and religious extremism, or radicalism, in this South Asian set of security problems, one must conclude that the real issues are deeper social and political grievances, which makes it possible to use religion as a tool. The more radical the operators, the more terrorism comes into play. Religious hatred and extremism are not new to the region; they have been endemic. The Islamic world has more than its share of this problem, but the fires of Hindu extremism are being fanned by politics in India, too.

With two countries possessing nuclear weapons in this region, neither can afford to stoke up deeper conflict. Both must turn to resolving real problems, economic, political, and those of fundamental security. But Kashmir as a core problem stares any objective observer in the face. Apart from the campaign against terrorism, efforts to rehabilitate Afghanistan and with Musharraf's crackdown on extremism, the most hopeful development during the India-Pakistan confrontation was the dawning realization in the international community that the process of resolving the Kashmir problem must begin soon.

# 13

MOHAN MALIK

## **The Stability of Nuclear Deterrence in South Asia: The Clash between State and Anti-state Actors**

**T**he September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland have transformed calculations about the threats posed by non-state actors, especially those who are inspired largely by a global, anti-state ideology such as al-Qaeda's pan-Islamist vision. Post-September 11, the old threat of nuclear holocaust has acquired a new dimension, i.e., the possible possession and use of nuclear weapons by terrorists and extremist movements. In Afghanistan, structural designs for nuclear weapons and other such materials were confiscated from underground hideouts of the al-Qaeda terrorist group. Much has been said about the stability and instability of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan since the late 1980s. The proponents of nuclear deterrence in South Asia, who argue that the introduction of nuclear weapons has prevented the outbreak of a large-scale conflict between India and Pakistan, generally belong to the "state-as-a-rational-actor" school of thought. On the other side are those who worry about the new threat posed by the intrusion of non-state actors, or perhaps, more accurately, "anti-state actors," and their agendas, which are widely perceived as "irrational" in their ideological orientation

(Wahabism today as was Maoism in the 1960s).<sup>1</sup> Since their ultimate stated objective is the destruction of the modern international system based on nation-states, they should, therefore, be described as anti-state actors in nature and purpose.

Why should we pay greater attention to the role and perspective of anti-state actors in our discussion of the stability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia? Non-state or anti-state actors have twice brought nuclear-armed Pakistan and India to the brink of a war since September 11, which could have escalated to the nuclear level. Despite recent efforts at de-escalation, the danger of war remains high as Islamist militants in Kashmir and elsewhere have the potential and reasons to re-ignite tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad by doing something so outrageous and provocative that India would feel compelled to retaliate.<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, India has now appropriated the Bush administration's doctrine of preemption. A number of recent developments—such as the emergence of pro-Taliban Islamic parties as the third-largest force in Pakistan's October 2002 parliamentary elections, Islamabad's seemingly half-hearted efforts to tackle the al-Qaeda menace, revelations of Pakistan-North Korea nuclear/missile proliferation nexus, and last but not least, the Indian government's growing disillusionment with Washington's reluctance to get tough with Pakistan for fear of destabilizing the Musharraf regime—suggest that the conditions surrounding the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff are likely to worsen over the next few years.<sup>3</sup> The two nuclear-armed countries have also embarked upon an arms-buying spree, preparing themselves for the next war.

1. For most Wahabis, the ideal Islamic state was the one in Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban, where women were subjugated, laughter and song forbidden, and only an intolerant, absolutist form of Islam permitted. See Craig S. Smith, "A Movement in Saudi Arabia Pushes toward an Islamic Ideal," *New York Times*, 9 December 2002, 1.

2. In a recent interview with British Broadcasting Corporation's *Hardtalk* program, India's National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra warned that "if something big were to happen..." India would not hesitate to hit back. See "Pak's Done Absolutely Nothing, U.S. Promised More: Mishra Hardtalk," *Indian Express*, 28 November 2002, 1; C. W. Dugger, "India-Pakistani Tensions Subside, but Nuclear Fear Is Far from Over," *New York Times*, 20 June 2002, 1; Rory McCarthy, "Dangerous Game of State-sponsored Terror that Threatens Nuclear Conflict," *The Guardian* (London), 25 May 2002, 1.

3. David W. Jones, "India Hits West on Terror Tactics," *Washington Times*, 14 November 2002, 1; Sudha Ramachandran, "India: US Credibility on the Line," *Asia Times Online*, 27 July 2002, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/archive/7\\_27\\_2002.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/archive/7_27_2002.html).

A nuclear war between India and Pakistan would signal not only the failure of nuclear deterrence but would also mean the victory of anti-state actors and could result in the collapse of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Indeed, many security specialists have argued that the main risk of terrorists obtaining deadly weapons comes from individuals and groups acting outside state control, people such as scientists and technicians with extremist Islamist beliefs in Pakistan or criminals and traders in the former Soviet Union.<sup>4</sup> There is a growing consensus that Islamist militants in the region with close ties to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network pose a great danger to their governments, and a credible threat to both regional and global security. Operations against al-Qaeda in Pakistan clearly have been less than successful, and General Musharraf's ability to control *jibadi* groups is severely limited. An important objective of the global anti-terrorism campaign is to keep nuclear weapons and nuclear explosive material out of the hands of anti-state actors such as terrorist organizations, rogue regimes, and violent sub-national groups.<sup>5</sup>

This paper focuses on the linkage between religious radicalism and nuclear deterrence in South Asia from the perspectives of both state and anti-state actors. It begins with outlining the conditions of stable nuclear deterrence and examines the presence or absence of those conditions by highlighting the growing gulf between the state-centric perspective and the perspective of anti-state actors, which makes nuclear deterrence highly unstable in South Asia.

## Definitions and Some Caveats

BEFORE OUTLINING IN DETAIL what this paper is about, it will be useful to state at the outset what it is not about. This paper is not about the effects of a nuclear war in South Asia, nor will it focus on the nuclear weapons capabilities of India and Pakistan. Nor does it outline different scenarios of a nuclear war in South Asia that have been

4. Paul Richter, "Pakistan's Nuclear Wild Card," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 2001, 1; Brad Knickerbocker, "Nuclear Attack a Real, if Remote, Possibility," *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 October 2001; David C. Isby, "When the Last Taboo Is Broken," *Washington Times*, 13 August 2002, 17.

5. Elizabeth Neuffer, "A U.S. Concern: Pakistan's Arsenal," *Boston Globe*, 16 August 2002, 1; Rose Gottemoeller and Thomas Graham Jr., "Dampen Nuclear Dangers in India and Pakistan," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 November 2001.

extensively discussed elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> However, there will be some discussion of possible scenarios of anti-state actors gaining hold of nuclear weapons in the context of instability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia.

What is an anti-state actor? An anti-state actor is defined as a religious extremist ideology or movement with political objectives that seeks to establish regional and/or global supremacy and advocates the destruction of the modern state system through unconventional warfare, including the use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The phenomenon of weak and failing states in parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East and the inability of governments in many countries to prevent their territories from serving as sanctuary to terrorists and criminal syndicates, have created a fertile ground for anti-state actors to engage in terrorism, acquisition of WMD, illegal drug trafficking, or other illicit activities across state borders. For the purposes of this paper, the term anti-state actor is preferred because non-state actors might imply benign actors, sometimes also seen as do-gooders. Above all, non-state actors, by and large, accept the primacy and legitimacy of the nation-state actor in the international system. Anti-state actors such as al-Qaeda, on the other hand, do not accept the legitimacy of the international system based on nation-states. Their belief in the sovereignty of Allah and the pre-eminence of the *Ummah* (Islamic community) over the nation-state overrides the primacy of the people's will, the government and the state. The state level is "bypassed and ignored" because, as Olivier Roy argues, "Islamists do not care about the state—they even downgraded Afghanistan by changing the official denomination from an 'Islamic State' to an 'Emirate.' Mollah Omar [did] not care to attend the council of ministers, nor to go to the capital ... This new brand of supranational neo-fundamentalism is more a product of contemporary globalization than of the Islamic past."<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, "Islamists see Islam not as a mere religion, but as a *political ideology* that should be integrated into all aspects of society (politics, law, economy, social justice, foreign policy, etc.). This form

6. For example, see Andrew C. Winner and Toshi Yoshihara, "India and Pakistan at the Edge," *Survival* 44, no. 3 (Autumn 2002): 69–86; James Manor, "How a War Could Go Nuclear," *International Herald Tribune* [hereafter *IHT*], 27 May 2002.

7. Olivier Roy, *The Changing Patterns of Radical Islamic Movements*, CSNS Policy Paper 2 (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, November 2002), 15.

of Islamism is de-territorialized, supranational...[and does] not care about borders and national interests.”<sup>8</sup> Arguing that Islam is not only the only true religion but is also the very antithesis of nationalism, Islamists demand the establishment of one universal Islamic Emirate, ruled by a single Caliph.<sup>9</sup> Their rhetoric of universal Islamic brotherhood is one that transcends national boundaries and, indeed, seeks to portray nation-states as un-Islamic.<sup>10</sup> This is so because the ultimate goal of these anti-state actors is to wage *jihad* (holy war) to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate (religious political order) throughout the world by working with allied extremist groups to overthrow governments they deem “non-Islamic” and by expelling non-Muslims from Muslim territories or converting them to Islam. A pan-Islamic Caliphate is supposed to “recreate the golden age of the first decades of Islam and supercede tribal, ethnic and national divides, whose resilience is attributed to the believers’ abandonment of the true tenets of Islam or to colonial policy.”<sup>11</sup> To Islamists, since “the ummah is one,” the present division of the Muslims into many nation-states is unacceptable. Therefore, “armed jihad must continue until Islam, as a way of life, dominates the whole world and until Allah’s law is enforced everywhere in the world.”<sup>12</sup> Obviously, there is nothing holy about the holy war being waged by anti-state actors such as al-Qaeda, International Islamic Jihad and International Islamic Front.<sup>13</sup> The fact that extremist, totalitarian ideologies have never had much popular appeal does not seem to discourage these groups and movements. That is why Russian President Putin recently dismissed the idea of World Islamic Caliphate as “crazy” as Hitler’s idea of global dominance.

8. Ibid., 2.

9. It should be added, however, that their opposition to nationalism does not stop the Islamists from creating more Islamic states. If anything, they see the creation of more Islamic states as a prelude to a grand unity of all Muslims that will eventually lead to the establishment of a global Islamic Caliphate.

10. “Democratic System versus Islamic Polity,” <http://www.dawacenter.com/magazinevoiceofislam/feb00/democracyvsislam.html>, cited in Yoginder Sikand, “Islamist Militancy in Kashmir: The Case of the Lashkar-I-Tayyeba.” Unpublished Paper, 2002, 7.

11. Roy, *The Changing Patterns*, 2.

12. *Jihad: The Foreign Policy of the Islamic State*, <http://www.dawacenter.com/magazines/voiceofislam/sept99/jihad.html>, cited in Sikand, “Islamist Militancy in Kashmir.”

13. See Robert G. Wirsing, “Political Islam and ‘Unholy War’ in Asia” (paper presented at the Conference on Growth & Governance in Asia, sponsored by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Honolulu, Hawaii, 12–14 March 2002).

Yet another reason for the usage of the term anti-state actors is that “non-state actor” implies that the actor is either independent or outside the control of the state. The so-called non-state actors in South Asia have long enjoyed the direct or indirect support of the governments of the day and military establishments. As so often happens in such cases, many of these non-state actors gradually developed their own agendas and eventually turned against their own mentors, thereby assuming the character of anti-state actors. It is worth remembering that unprecedented terrorist attacks on the U.S. military and economic citadels on September 11 would not have occurred if Pakistan’s government had shown zero tolerance for bin Laden and al-Qaeda’s activities on Pakistani soil and from Afghanistan. The multinational *Mujabideen* force, which the United States had supported against the former Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, has now transformed itself into a multinational hydra-headed Islamist fundamentalist monster. The successive Pakistani governments—civilian as well as military—created, nourished, maintained and encouraged the *Lashkar-e-Toiba*, *Jaish-e-Muhammed*, *Harkat-ul-Mujabideen*, Markazdawa, *Dawat-ul-Irshad*, *Taliban*, *al-Qaeda’s* International Islamic Front, and a dozen other terrorist outfits on its soil to wage proxy wars in Afghanistan and Kashmir.<sup>14</sup> Pakistan military’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is widely believed to have helped engineer the unholy alliance of pro-Taliban, pro-al-Qaeda Islamic radicals during the October 2002 elections who now control two provinces bordering and half the seats in the Pakistani Senate.<sup>15</sup> These radical organizations have played a destructive role in Pakistan’s nation- and state-building process. They simultaneously pursue anti-state or transnational activity on behalf of Islam, activity that “blurs the identity and the frontiers of the nation-state.”<sup>16</sup> Whether one calls them an anti-state actor or transnational actor or supranational actor or a virtual state, the nature of the threat they pose to two nuclear-armed belligerents with disputed histories and disputed borders cannot be underestimated.

14. As one senior Pakistani bureaucrat had observed in 1999: “Unfortunately our policy towards Afghanistan has become intimately linked to our policy to Kashmir. It’s difficult to see how we can disengage from one without harming the other.” Cited in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 November 1999.

15 See Stanley A. Weiss, “Which Islam? Reformers Need the Military,” *IHT*, 19 December 2002.

16. Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2002), 145.

An important caveat is that the followers of Islam live in a world of independent but increasingly interdependent states with competing global and domestic interests, as well as religious and cultural diversity. It is acknowledged that the foreign policies of Islamic states are influenced more by geopolitics than by their religion. Even Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran had emphasized that interests of the state precede the interests of Islam. A pan-Islamist movement has never taken root nor is it likely to do so in an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. The notion of monolithic Islam is oxymoronic. The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) is a divided house, more often at war within than without. The world Islamic community (the Ummah) is neither monolithic nor a cohesive political force. The overwhelming majority of Muslims are moderate, peace-loving, and law-abiding and they do not support the radical Wahabi/Salafi/Deobandi/Barelvi version of intolerant/absolutist/totalitarian/obscurantist/anti-modern Islam. Nor is there a single interpretation of the Quranic teachings. More and more Muslims are criticizing radical Islamic groups such as the Taliban and al-Qaeda and accusing them of “hijacking” their religion in order to further destructive political goals. Arguing that “the genius of early Muslim-Arab civilization was its multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic diversity,” a prominent scholar Ahmed Rashid attributes “the stunning and numerous state failures ... in the Muslim world today” to the abandonment of “that original path, that intention and inspiration ... either in favor of brute dictatorship or a narrow interpretation of theology.”<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the moderates in the last half-century have been progressively relegated to the intellectual and political margins of Islamic society by Wahabi Islam. The Wahabis are crude literalists in matters of religious interpretation and promote a simplistic and utopian vision of Islam as “authentic,” and perceive most of the political and social values of modernity to be antithetical to Islam. It is a well-known fact that poor governance, autocratic rule, denial of fundamental freedoms and lack of education and employment opportunities in the Islamic societies with growing populations are being exploited by radical movements offering their perverted version of “Islam as the only

17. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 212.

solution.”<sup>18</sup> If we are to avoid a real clash between civilizations as prophesied by Samuel Huntington, it is important that the clash within Islamic civilization that has pitted fundamentalists, theocrats, exclusivist and mono-cultural radicals, obscurantists, traditionalists, clerics and political fanatics on the one hand and progressives, democrats, secular, inclusivist, multi-cultural and pluralist Islamic forces and modernizers on the other hand, is won by the latter. Unlike Christianity, Judaism and Hinduism, Islam has never undergone any update, reformation or enlightenment from within since its inception in the seventh century.<sup>19</sup> Since the main source of Islamist extremism is the ideological and financial support provided by the House of Sauds and other Gulf Sheikdoms, socio-political reform and liberalization of political culture would be a harbinger of growth and prosperity in the Middle East and South Asia.

And finally, while looking at the impact of Islamist extremist forces on the stability of nuclear deterrence in the Indian subcontinent, it is very difficult to ignore related developments in the Middle East and Central Asia. In fact, the links among these areas have become so strong in recent years that limiting our discussion to South Asia alone

18. Nearly all Muslim societies without exception have undemocratic, totalitarian and fascist regimes representing various shades of social, cultural and intellectual deprivation. Militants are using the language of Islam to challenge the state. The weakness of the state in responding to the challenges posed by radical movements has led to the hollowing out of institutions. Even countries that claim to be “moderate Muslim countries” have serious fundamentalist problems (e.g., Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh). The phrase “moderate Muslim countries” says it all. There is no parallel with “moderate Christian country” or “moderate Hindu country” or “moderate Buddhist country.” Those who oppose the Islamists argue that there is a cultural precondition for democracy, including individualism, civility, tolerance, and willingness to compromise in the interest of harmony, and that Islamists lack these basic essential qualifications. Eric A. Vas, “The Muslim World and Globalisation,” *Journal of the United Services Institution of India* 130, no. 539 (January–March 2000): 138–41.

19. Thomas L. Friedman, “An Islamic Reformation,” *New York Times*, 4 December 2002. A powerful antidote to Islamist Wahabism could be Islamic Protestantism, which would rescue Islam from mullahs, mosque and madrassas. “Like Christianity, Islam is a universal faith that envisions the ultimate transformation of the world in its image. But unlike large parts of Christianity in our time, Islam has yet to consider the option of religious pluralism based on the equality of faiths. For Islam, only two options exist: to dominate or be dominated. Islam’s challenge is to balance its vision of itself as a faith that dominates the world with humility that concedes the need for religious restraint in a world threatened with nuclear destruction,” writes Yossi Klein Halevi, “Islam’s Outdated Domination Theology,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 December 2002.

may not be appropriate and we need to find new terms to describe them. However, what distinguishes South Asia from the Middle East is the presence of nuclear weapons by *both* the combatants: Pakistan and India. The nuclear weapons capabilities of India and Pakistan invariably have an impact on the security environment of the Middle East and Asia, and are, in turn, influenced by the developments in the secret-and-not-so-secret WMD programs of Israel, Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup>

That said, the objective of this paper is a fairly modest one, that is, explaining the key arguments of those who doubt the stability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia primarily due to the emergence and intrusion of anti-state actors whose survival depends on the destruction of states to establish a global Islamic Caliphate based on their pan-Islamist vision.

### **The Conditions of Stable Nuclear Deterrence**

IN A STUDY PUBLISHED at the end of the Cold War, Lewis Dunn identified a set of conditions, broadly divided into political, technical and situational conditions, which contributed to the non-use of nuclear weapons and stable deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era.<sup>21</sup> He compared the situation prevailing in conflict-prone regions such as South Asia and the Middle East, and pronounced his verdict: the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Asia will not lead to stable deterrence between combatants. (See Table 1 on the following page.)

Let us take the *political conditions* first. If the stakes are limited, nuclear deterrence can work. If the stakes are too high, for example, if the survival of the nation-state is at stake, as, for example, in Israel's case, then nuclear deterrence cannot work. As for political accountability and stable leadership, in a democracy nuclear weapons remain under the control of the civilian leadership but nuclear decision making still takes place in a closed circle. However, in dictatorial, military-dominated regimes, military leaders sometimes have a tendency to link their personal well-being or regime survival with national survival and could sometimes be prepared to "go down with their state" rather

20. See, for example, Anwar Iqbal, "U.S. Studies Pakistan, Saudi N-ties: Report," *Dawn* (Karachi), 2 August 2002, 1.

21. Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling Nuclear Proliferation* (London: IISS, Adelphi Paper no. 263, winter 1991). Discussion in this section is based on this study.

**Table 1.** Conditions of stable nuclear deterrence

	USA	USSR/ Russia	South Asia
<i>Political</i>			
Limited stakes	Yes	Yes	No
Political accountability	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
Institutional restraints	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
Stable leaders	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
Predictability	Yes	Yes	No
Low risk taking	Yes	Yes	?
<i>Technical</i>			
Stable peacetime operations	Yes	Yes	?
Survivable force	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
High accident proofing	Yes	Yes	?
Effective command and control	Yes	Yes	?
Operational effectiveness	Yes	Yes	?
Less provocative alert/exercise procedures	Yes	Yes	Yes/No
<i>Situational</i>			
Bipolarity	Yes	Yes	No
No common borders	Yes	Yes	No
Gradual deployment	Yes	Yes	?
Nuclear learning	Yes	Yes	?

Source: Adapted from Lewis A. Dunn, *Controlling Nuclear Proliferation* (London: IISS, Adelphi Paper no. 263, Winter 1991), 24.

than accept the loss of power and military defeat. Predictability of opponent's capabilities, intentions and policies is more difficult and open to misinterpretation in newly emerging nuclear powers. Long histories of confrontation, lack of communication, hatred and dislike at the leadership level, desire for revenge and dangerous notions of religious/racial superiority could lead to misunderstandings, misperceptions and miscalculations.

Second are *technical requirements*. There are many questions regarding the new nuclear powers' ability to meet the technical requirements of stable nuclear deterrence. Lack of technical skills, effective command and control, survivability, safety, untested procedures and plans, and lack of financial resources could be problematic in achieving stable nuclear deterrence.

And finally, the *situational context*. Nuclear deterrence during the Cold War worked in a bilateral setting. The future of nuclear confrontations in South Asia or the Korean Peninsula may not be limited to just two parties and would certainly involve China. Managing a tri-lateral nuclear power balance could be very complex and potentially unstable. In other respects also, the situational context in the case of India and Pakistan differs sharply from that between the two nuclear superpowers. With common (and disputed) borders, limited crises have the potential to escalate to threaten national survival. The new nuclear powers also may not share the view of the old nuclear states that nuclear weapons are of little use in wresting political or military concessions from others or in changing the territorial status quo.

Though Lewis Dunn did not take into account the role of anti-state actors such as al-Qaeda or the freelance factor of terrorism when he outlined his conditions of stable nuclear deterrence in 1991, he nonetheless provides a sound theoretical framework and a useful benchmark against which to measure the stability and instability of nuclear deterrence in South Asia from the perspectives of both nation-state and anti-state actors.

### **The State-centric Perspective: Nuclear Peace**

THE PAST BEHAVIOR of India and Pakistan shows that there is little or no danger of either side firing a nuclear weapon in anger or because of miscalculation. Past Indo-Pakistani wars have been described as "gentlemanly wars." In all the three wars, both sides avoided wars of attrition or deliberate targeting of population and industrial centers. Despite their penchant for inflammatory and bellicose rhetoric, no sane leader would willingly commit national suicide. The leaders in both capitals insist that nuclear weapons are only for deterrence and are not weapons of war. Besides, history shows that nuclear weapons are usable only against an opponent that does not have the ability to

retaliate in kind (e.g., the United States against Japan in 1945). The only exception to this rule might be the case of a state that faced total, imminent destruction. It is conceivable that Pakistan could use nuclear weapons if faced with total defeat by India. But Indians argue that they have no interest in destroying the Pakistani state and incorporating another 140 million Muslims into the Indian state. One Indian analyst argues that, “since the 1980s, Indian military doctrine has moved away from the seizure of Pakistani territory in recognition of the less significant role played by landmass in modern estimates of strategic strength. Not only does India not have any territorial ambitions on Pakistan, [India is] prepared to permanently concede Pakistan-occupied Kashmir to Islamabad, and would accept the ‘line of control’ in Kashmir as the international boundary.”<sup>22</sup> And if New Delhi goes to war with Islamabad, the war will be over Kashmir, not over the existence of Pakistan. In short, it is claimed that the stakes are limited and the political conditions are conducive to the maintenance of stable nuclear deterrence in South Asia. Many Indians claim the West has consistently and deliberately promoted the idea of a nuclear flashpoint to get India and Pakistan to establish a nuclear risk reduction regime while beginning a sustained dialogue on Kashmir as well as meeting their non-proliferation agenda. Pakistan has long subscribed to this idea and publicly articulated its intention of using nuclear weapons in case India were to launch a conventional attack across the Line of Control in Pakistani Kashmir.

The presence of nuclear weapons certainly makes states exceedingly cautious; notable examples are China and Pakistan’s post-nuclear behavior. The consequences of a nuclear war are too horrendous to contemplate. That policymakers in New Delhi and Islamabad have a sound understanding of each other’s capabilities, intentions and policies—and more importantly, red lines, and are careful not to cross them—has been repeatedly demonstrated since the late 1980s. Despite the 1999 Kargil War and the post-September 11 brinkmanship, both of which illustrate the “stability-instability” paradox that nuclear weapons have introduced to the equation in South Asia,<sup>23</sup> the

22. M. D. Nalapat, “Outside View: Indo-Pakistan Nuclear Myth,” *Washington Times*, 1 September 2002.

23. For details on the stability-instability paradox and new nuclear states, see Peter Lavoy, “The Strategic Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation,” *Security Studies* 4, no. 4 (summer 1995): 739–40.

proponents of nuclear deterrence in Islamabad and New Delhi believe that nuclear deterrence is working to prevent war in the region. They point to the fact that neither the 1999 Kargil conflict nor the post-September 11 military standoff escalated beyond a limited conventional engagement due to the threat of nuclear war. So the stability argument is based on the reasonable conclusion that nuclear weapons have served an important purpose in the sense that India and Pakistan have not gone to an all-out war since 1971.<sup>24</sup> It is pointed out that just as nuclear deterrence maintained stability between the United States and the U.S.S.R. during the Cold War, it can induce similar stabilizing effects in South Asia as well.

With regard to the technical requirements of stable deterrence, questions about command and control and safety procedures continue to be raised. However, both Pakistan and India claim to have maintained tighter controls over their arsenal. More importantly, it is not in their own interests to see anti-state actors gaining control of nuclear technology. Finally, both countries have publicly declared moratoriums on further nuclear tests, and India's adherence to No-First-Use (NFU) posture and confidence-building measures (such as pre-notification of missile tests and an agreement not to attack each other's nuclear installations) promotes crisis stability. Devin Hegarty argues that this is responsible behavior that is in stark contrast to U.S.-Soviet nuclear options, including "deployment of tens of thousands of nuclear warheads, bombers flying on 24-hour alert status, and the nuclear safety lapses that characterized the superpower arms race."<sup>25</sup> Post-September 11 measures to promote greater security and control over nuclear weapons and materials have been accorded the topmost priority. India's nuclear arsenal is firmly under the control of civilian leadership while the Pakistani army has always retained the real authority over the nuclear weapons, regardless of who is head of state. Pakistan's military chain of command appears intact despite internal turmoil and reshuffling at the top of the government.<sup>26</sup> The United States is reportedly considering offering assistance to assure

24. Martin J. Wojtysiak, *Preventing Catastrophe*, Maxwell Paper no. 25, Air War College (Alabama: Maxwell Air Force Base, August 2001), 19–20.

25. Devin Hagarty, "South Asia's Nuclear Balance," *Current History* 95, no. 600 (April 1996): 169.

26. Steven Mufson, "U.S. Worries about Pakistan Nuclear Arms," *Washington Post*, 4 November 2001, 27.

the physical protection of nuclear assets, such as vaults, sensors, alarms, tamper-proof seals and labels, and other means of protecting sensitive assets, ensuring personnel reliability, and secure transport of sensitive items.<sup>27</sup>

As for the situational context, a slow but steady process of de-Talibanization of Pakistani state and society is now underway with the banning of extremist organizations and somewhat greater control over the *madrassas* (religious schools) that had proliferated during the jihad against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The proponents of the “Pakistani-state-as-a-rational-actor” point out that Pakistan’s nuclear chain of command is imbedded within the higher levels of the military—which tend to be well-educated, moderate, and secular—and involves rigid and stringent controls. As George Perkovich observes: “The weapons are their crown jewels, after all. It would take more than a couple of bad actors to upset that process.”<sup>28</sup> One of the four reasons given by General Musharraf to explain his U-turn on the Taliban after the September 11 attacks was his desire to protect Pakistan’s “strategic assets.” Seemingly bellicose rhetoric notwithstanding, there is absolutely no wisdom in sacrificing the well-being of Pakistan’s 140 million Muslims for the sake of three million Muslims in Kashmir, claim the Pakistanis.

In short, Indian and Pakistani policymakers and strategic analysts see nuclear weapons as essential to maintaining state security and ensuring state survival. From their perspective, nuclear deterrence prevents conventional wars, keeps peace and brings warring parties to the negotiating table. (The Lahore [1999] and Agra [2001] summits are good examples.) The history of post-World War II international relations is a testimony to the fact that every state that has ever created a nuclear arsenal has come to a sobering realization of what it possesses, and has established extraordinary levels of security to protect those weapons and India and Pakistan are no exception to this rule.<sup>29</sup> Long-time South Asia-watchers believe the risk of a nuclear

27. Nayan Chanda, “Urgent Worries about Pakistani Nuclear Material,” *International Herald Tribune*, 2 November 2001, 1.

28. Cited in John J. Fialka and Scott Neuman, “Weapons Experts Agree Nuclear Arsenal in Unstable Pakistan Is a Major Concern,” *Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 2001, 1.

29. See James Kitfield, “Nuclear Nightmares,” *National Journal*, 15 December 2001.

holocaust is deliberately overstated in some quarters, partly to induce Islamabad and New Delhi to reach a negotiated settlement on the Kashmir issue. So it is argued that there is no reason to believe that Indian and Pakistani leaders are less rational and responsible with their nuclear weapons than are their American, Russian and Chinese counterparts.

### **The Perspective of Anti-state Actors: Nuclear Jihad**

HOWEVER, IN SHARP CONTRAST with the optimism and confidence of the “Indian-and-Pakistani-states-as-rational-actors” proponents, the anti-state actors could care less if nuclear deterrence breaks down and results in large-scale and unprecedented death and destruction. To understand their perspective in its proper context, a brief historical overview is in order before we examine the views and impact of anti-state actors on nuclear deterrence in South Asia.

Much like other global ideologies, Islam and its followers also divide the world into two regions: the world of believers, *Dar-ul-Islam*, or the House of Islam, and *Dar-ul-Harb*, or the House of Infidels and non-believers containing all territories ruled by non-Muslims, against whom no-holds-barred jihad is to be waged by the believers (true followers of Islam) who are destined to dominate and rule over the non-believers.<sup>30</sup> Such concepts promote ideas of “us versus them” and generate hatred, hostility, enmity and a permanent state of war. Interestingly, this concept of continuous struggle (holy war against non-believers) bears remarkable resemblance to Mao’s concept of permanent revolution against his perceived enemies—rightists and capitalists—during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1967–76) in China. The division of the world into two blocs is also similar to the one made by the followers of other totalitarian ideologies—Fascism and Communism—which ruled out peaceful coexistence with other belief systems. As Cathy Young observes: “Perhaps every belief system that lays claim to the ultimate truth carries the seeds of violent fanaticism and intolerance. This is true not only of religions but of secular ideologies such as Communism.”<sup>31</sup> The

30. Yossi Klein Halevi, “Islam Must Challenge Its Dark Doctrines,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 September 2001. Discussion in this section is based on informal conversations and discussions with Pakistani and Indian scholars and policymakers since 1998.

31. Cathy Young, “Does Islam Foster Extremism?” *Boston Globe*, 19 August 2002, 11.

Islamists see the growing economic interdependence, globalization, Western cultural penetration, and the notions of liberty (freedom of speech, expression, and movement) and equality (especially equality of religions and sexes) as posing a serious threat to the basic tenets of Islam.

Historically, jihad in the Indian subcontinent was primarily waged against Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists and later against the Christians during and after the British rule. In the nineteenth century, Sayyid Ahmad Bareilvi took the struggle one step further and launched an “eternal jihad” against *kafirs* (infidels) with his call to Muslims: “Fill the uttermost ends of India with Islam, so that no sounds may be heard but Allah Allah Allah!” The long-term objective of Islamists is to spread the frontiers of Islam eastward to the whole continent of Asia and beyond. During the 1980s and 1990s, Afghanistan and Pakistan became the jihadis’ destination of choice, as Islamist warriors coalesced in the two countries to battle the enemies of the faith (first the Soviet Union, then the United States, Israel, and India). As noted earlier, Saudi Arabia, in its self-appointed mission to protect and promote Islam, especially the puritanical Wahabi version, has been providing much of the financial and ideological support to religious schools, charities and organizations around the world at which students are taught to develop their hatred for non-believers such as Christians, Jews and Hindus. They are taught that Islam cannot co-exist with other religions and that to kill in the interests of Islam and the Shariat is a religious obligation and not a sin, even if the killing involves the use of WMD.<sup>32</sup> Verse 191, Sura 2, of the Holy Quran explicitly enjoins upon the Ummah to punish enemies of the faith in this fashion: “And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out.” Coupled with “the Medina Syndrome” (the perception that Islam is perennially in danger from powerful enemies), the only answer for pious Muslims in despair is “unity, faith and war.” To put it simply, solidarity for jihad and jihad for solidarity. As Therese Delpech observes:

32. B. Raman, “Why Must Kashmir and India Bleed?” *The Pioneer*, 16 August 2002; Ehsan Ahrari, “Whither Saudi Arabia?” *Asia Times Online*, 6 August 2002, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/DH06Ak02.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/DH06Ak02.html).

Their declared ambition is to annihilate not just religions other than Islam (the destruction of the ancient Bamiyan's Buddhist statues in February 2001 is an eloquent testimony), but also anyone who does not accept its perverse version of Islam (bin Laden's people have burnt Shi'ites alive in Afghanistan)...No concession, however great, would be enough to end [their] "mission" because, unlike many previous terrorist organizations, *it does not intend to create a state nor does it wish to introduce political reforms. Its objective is metaphysical: a titanic struggle between "good" and "evil" forces, in which any means can be used to achieve the end.*<sup>33</sup>

In the India-Pakistan context, the Islamists argue that Kashmir is a symbol, not the root cause of the India-Pakistan conflict. They point to General Parvez Musharraf's<sup>34</sup> statement made as the Chief of Army Staff in April 1999: "Even a settlement of the Kashmir issue will not usher in peace in the region. Low intensity conflict against India will continue because India is a large hegemonic power."<sup>35</sup> This reinforces the view that the India-Pakistan conflict is rooted in history, religion, culture, and the politics of revenge, epitomizing clashing worldviews and a divide along religious, civilizational fault lines. Many Islamists are convinced that India, like its erstwhile friends, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, is doomed to further partition and Balkanization.<sup>36</sup> In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse in the early

33. Therese Delpech, "The Imbalance of Terror," *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (winter 2002): 31. Italics mine.

34. Interestingly, a secular and moderate General Musharraf is a veteran of the Afghan conflict and was to a great deal responsible not only for the establishment of close links between the al-Qaeda/Taliban militia and the Pakistani army but also for the Afghanization of the Kashmir dispute and the Talibanization of Pakistan. Also see Isabel Hilton, "The General in His Labyrinth," *New Yorker*, 12 August 2002, 42.

35. *Dawn*, 10 April 1999, 1. Arguing that "Kashmir is not the central issue in Indo-Pakistan relations—it is the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," a noted Indian columnist agrees, "Kashmir is no longer the cause of Indo-Pak problems, but its pretext. Pakistani support to terrorism did not begin with Kashmir and does not end there. It began with Punjab in the early eighties and is now an all-India effort to break up India into a 'manageable' size." Manoj Joshi, "Agra Flawed from Start: Pakistan Is the Real Core Issue," *The Times of India*, 26 July 2002, 1. Also see Hafiz Muhammed Sa'eed, "No More Dialogue on Kashmir," *Voice of Islam* (Lahore), September 1999.

36. "Sadly, there are elements within Pakistan's military and intelligence circles who subscribe to the devilish theory that once Kashmir is wrested away, the whole edifice of multi-ethnic, multi-religious India will collapse into a chaos of warring fiefdoms over which Pakistan will somehow prevail," writes Christopher Kremmer, "Sub-continent Fights Forces of Darkness," *The Age* (Melbourne), 29 December 2001, 1.

1990s, there was great optimism in Pakistan about “the coming collapse of India,” which would enable the creation of a large Islamic state in Central and South Asia with Pakistan as its core. The leader of *Jamaat-i-Islami* Pakistan, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, speaking in Rawalpindi in February 1992, declared, “a great Islamic State spreading from Kashmir to Central Asia would emerge after the independence of Kashmir.”<sup>37</sup> Islamists contend that Prophet Muhammed is said to have singled out India as a special target for jihad—the land of idol worshippers: “Slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them” (Sura 9:5). “Whosoever will take part in jihad against India,” *Markaz* leader Muhammad Ibrahim Salafi claims that the Prophet had declared, “Allah will set him free from the pyre of hell.”<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, notwithstanding their conflicting perspectives and interests, both Hindu and Islamist fundamentalists seem to have an identical interpretation of Indian history: that the ultimate game plan is not limited to “liberating Kashmir” but to subsume “Hindu India” into Islamic civilization. In this context, they point out that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto’s threat in 1971 of a thousand-year war with Hindustan (repeated by his daughter at the height of the 1990 crisis) was not hyperbole.<sup>39</sup> Since the beginning of the second millennium, Hindu India has been subjected to repeated invasions by the armies of Islamic faith. As a result of Islam’s eastward march over the last one thousand years, ancient India has already been successfully broken up into four states—Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. Hopefully in another one thousand years, so the argument goes, the objective of either an Islamic India or the creation of more Islamic states will be achieved by the end of the third millennium.

37. See Rashid, *Taliban*, especially chapter 14: “Master or Victim: Pakistan’s Afghan War,” 183–95. Pakistan’s military ruler General Zia-ul Haq “had dreamed like a Mogul emperor of ‘recreating a Sunni Muslim space between infidel ‘Hindustan,’ ‘heretic’ [because Shia] Iran and ‘Christian’ Russia. He believed that the message of Afghan Mujaheddin would spread into Central Asia, revive Islam and create a new Pakistan-led Islamic bloc of nations,” writes Rashid, *Taliban*, 195.

38. <http://www.dawacenter.com/ijtimah/Isalaf-e.html>, 1, cited in Sikand, “Islamist Militancy in Kashmir,” 10.

39. See Mohan Malik, “Pakistan: Frontline, Faultline,” *The World Today* 56 (London), no. 2 (February 2000): 14–17; and “Dynamics of Pak Hostility,” *The Hindustan Times*, 21 September 1999, 13. “In Lashkar discourse, the conflict in Kashmir... is portrayed as only one chapter in a long struggle between the two that is said to have characterized the history of Hindu-Muslim relations for the last 1,400 years ever since the advent of the Prophet Mohammed.” Sikand, “Islamist Militancy in Kashmir,” 10.

Indians counter this by saying that their country, one of the oldest civilizations in the world, has not only survived but thrived during millennia of invasions, whereas Pakistan could not survive the first twenty-five years of its existence and is unlikely to survive over the next twenty-five years if it continues with its self-destructive policies. The Islamists respond by saying that Ghauri and Ghaznavi may have lost war several times but they won eventually to subjugate Hindu India. Likewise, Pakistan may have lost to India in 1971 and 1999 but that does not mean the end of their attempts to expand Islam's frontiers eastwards. Islam, *if not Pakistan*, will eventually prevail. To this end, "pro-jibadi cells" armed with weapons are being established throughout India's minority regions ready to unleash terror and communal bloodbath at an appropriate time in the future when India is faced with a series of domestic crises and/or external aggression and is headed by a weak leader (in the mold of Indonesia's B. J. Habibie) unable to resist international pressure. Islamists also note that Pakistan still draws inspiration from the medieval period when Muslim warriors from Afghanistan used to invade ancient India, evident by the fact that all of its nuclear-capable ballistic missiles—Ghauri, Ghaznavi and Abdali—are named after the three prominent Afghan warlords who attacked India frequently between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries in an attempt to expand their empires.<sup>40</sup> As Zaffar Abbas notes: "[T]he symbolism highlights the official mindset in the country. For Islamabad, the present conflict with India is a continuation of the battles of the past, wars that are described in Pakistani history books as the just causes of Muslim invaders against infidels."<sup>41</sup>

From the perspective of Hindu nationalists, nothing could be more provocative than Pakistanis (including Bhattys, Chaudharys, Dhillons, Khokars, Naiks, Ranas, Shahs, Sethis, among others) seeing themselves as "direct descendants" of Muslim invaders and plunderers (such as Ghauris, Ghaznavis, Abdalis and Babbars who looted Lahore, Multan, and laid waste to the cities in Sindh—all now in Pakistan) and wanting to wage a no-holds-barred holy war. In

40. This would be like Japan naming its China-specific ballistic missiles after General Tojo and Germany developing Israel-specific missiles and naming them after Hitler and Goebbels.

41. Zaffar Abbas, "What's in a Name?" *The Herald* (Karachi), June 2002, 25.

Hindutva's discourse, Islamic religion and civilization are portrayed as intolerant, hostile to Hindu values, proselytizing, expansionist, repressive, and violent. The Indian response is articulated by a former chief of the Indian Army: "If a nuclear war can bring an end to the thousand years of invasions of India by the armies of Islamic faith, so be it. Let's fight a nuclear war and destroy Pakistan once and for all."<sup>42</sup> Apparently, both countries have become infected with the virus of religious-based nationalism, increasing the "death or glory" spirit within their armed forces. For their part, right-wing Hindu nationalists have also not given up their dream of regaining the "lost territories" ("the sacred lands of Hinduism and Buddhism lost to Islam during the second millennium," as the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* or World Hindu Council puts it) and restoring the Hindu supremacy over the entire *Akhand Bharat* (Undivided India). The growing ascendancy of Hindutva forces in Indian politics is an indication of the radicalization of Indian society as a result of a two-decade long, Pakistan-backed proxy war.

Meanwhile, Islamist extremism continues to haunt Pakistani state and society. Pakistan is, in the words of former Italian foreign minister Gianni De Michelis, "the fuse of the world."<sup>43</sup> The provinces close to the Afghan border and home to the U.S. military bases are now controlled by Islamist parties that created the Taliban and are openly sympathetic to the aims and ideals of al-Qaeda. The concern is that the radical Islamist worldview of groups like the *Jamiat Ulema Islam*, which is supportive of both the Taliban and al-Qaeda, could become the country's leitmotif. Violence levels in Indian Kashmir also continue to rise. Many observers believe that Washington may have to rethink its strategy vis-à-vis Islamabad if the war on terrorism is to be won decisively.<sup>44</sup> The complete dismantling of the al-Qaeda terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan seems unlikely because of the apprehension within Pakistani military that doing so would devalue Pakistan's importance in the U.S. security strategy and once again make the

42. See the websites of extremist organizations, notably <http://www.taliban-news.com>.

43. Cited in Francesco Sisci, "Mega-NATO: China out in the Cold," *Asia Times Online*, 24 May 2002, <http://www.atimes.com/china/DE24Ad01.html>.

44. George Bruno, "Post-Election Pakistan Unreformed, Unstable," *Baltimore Sun*, 13 December 2002, 10; "Pakistan is the new Afghanistan, a privileged sanctuary for hundreds of al-Qaeda fighters and Taliban operatives," writes A. de Borchgrave, "The New Afghanistan," *Washington Times*, 2 September 2002, 1.

United States turn its back on the country and make the country vulnerable to Western pressure and sanctions over Islamabad's WMD proliferation activities. It would also deprive Pakistan of invaluable Western aid and leverage vis-à-vis Washington and New Delhi.<sup>45</sup>

As long as anti-state actors subscribe to the "Islamic Caliphate" and Pakistan to the two-nation theory, and as long as political power in Pakistan is exercised by the army, the mullahs, and the feudal lords in the name of jihad, Islam, and Kashmir, there cannot be peace in the region. A noted author and commentator, M.J. Akbar, in his book, *The Shade of Swords*, concedes that Pakistan's anger against India is larger than the problem over Kashmir, but contends that the anger of the "Muslim Street" is not merely socio-economic, as some are positing,<sup>46</sup> Muslim anguish is essentially about departed glory, contrasted to Hindu resurgence after one thousand years and Jewish revival after two thousand years backed by the secular, but Christian, West.<sup>47</sup> As has often happened in the past, Muslim radicals have latched on to certain enemies to explain the current decay because they need someone to blame, apart from themselves. This partly explains why and how Pakistan, a homeland for Muslims, "turned jihad into an instrument of state policy from its inception and became the breeding ground for the first international Islamic brigade in the modern era."<sup>48</sup> The fall of the Taliban has transformed the frontline state of Pakistan in the war on terrorism into its next battlefield, as fleeing al-Qaeda/Taliban jihadis and their supporters take refuge in Pakistan's Wild West with many slipping down into the cities, using networks of associated groups and sympathizers to reorganize to fight another battle another day.<sup>49</sup> The Islamist fundamentalist groups have repeatedly demonstrated their power with a series of terrorist attacks in

45. For Pakistan, the jihadi network represents an invaluable "fifth column" able to tie down hundreds of thousands of Indian security forces in Kashmir.

46. M. J. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords: Jihad and the Conflict between Islam and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2002), 162.

47. Charles Krauthammer agrees: "Underlying most of the grievances is a sense that Islam has lost its rightful place of dominance, the place it enjoyed half a millennium ago. This feeling of a civilization in decline—and the adoption of terror and intimidation as the road to restoration—is echoed in a recent United Nations report that spoke frankly of the abject Arab failure to modernize." See Charles Krauthammer, "Violence and Islam," *Washington Post*, 6 December 2002, 45.

48. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords*, 198.

49. Ralph Joseph, "Pakistan Acknowledges Presence of al-Qaeda Fugitives," *Washington Times*, 12 August 2002, 1.

India and Pakistan seen as warnings to Musharraf that abandoning militants in Kashmir and siding with the infidel West would have disastrous consequences. In the worst-case scenario, radical Islamic extremists, especially those who sympathize with al-Qaeda in the military establishment, could gain control of the nuclear weapons and delivery systems and launch nuclear strikes. The threatened use of nuclear weapons by irrational anti-state actors will carry greater credibility than the threatened use of nuclear weapons by nation-states. India's nuclear deterrent can deter neither nuclear attacks nor cross-border terrorism conducted by anti-state actors. Interestingly, one perceptive commentator has argued that in Pakistan's destruction lies al-Qaeda's salvation because anti-state actors can survive and thrive only in failed, collapsed and war-torn states:<sup>50</sup>

[Since] al-Qaeda has long used Pakistan as an ongoing base for its command and control and training functions, it has a deep interest in Pakistan's future. Paradoxically, al-Qaeda's and Pakistan's national security interests are not at all the same. From al-Qaeda's point of view, a war with India—even one that led to the destruction of an independent Pakistan—would be highly desirable for three reasons:

1. As al-Qaeda sees it, the government of President Pervez Musharraf has become a tool of the United States, supporting U.S. efforts to destroy al-Qaeda in Pakistan. While Musharraf's support has been far from wholehearted, al-Qaeda is aware that Musharraf cannot be relied upon to protect the network, particularly while under heavy pressure from the United States and India.
2. A stable Pakistan with a strong central government poses a threat to al-Qaeda's security [because] a strong government is less manipulable ...[and] less predictable. It can turn its power against al-Qaeda quite easily. *A Pakistan whose military has been smashed and whose government ceases to function creates a situation in which al-Qaeda can stake out and defend remote areas of the*

50. Stratfor, "The Al Qaeda Threat and the Indo-Pakistani War," *Stratfor.com*, 3 June 2002, [http://www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis\\_view.php?ID=204684](http://www.stratfor.com/standard/analysis_view.php?ID=204684).

country from encroachment. From a geographic point of view, India has the ability to smash Pakistan. Occupying and pacifying the country, particularly the regions that al-Qaeda uses for its bases, is far more difficult...With an Indian army stretched to the limit and no meaningful Pakistani force to face, al-Qaeda becomes more secure. Even U.S. operations against al-Qaeda in remote areas without Pakistani collaboration would become extremely difficult.

3. Al-Qaeda has, as its core argument, the idea that Islam is under attack from other religions. *If India were to attack Pakistan, al-Qaeda would be able to make the argument—convincingly in the Islamic world—that the Jews, the Christian West and the Hindus have allied to strangle Islam.* The plausibility of this argument would, al-Qaeda hopes, galvanize the Islamic world into united resistance. That unification is al-Qaeda's goal.

From al-Qaeda's viewpoint, an Indian attack on Pakistan would be highly desirable. *Even an attack involving nuclear weapons would be acceptable...That is why Pakistani-based Islamic militants aligned with al-Qaeda have persistently exacerbated the crisis between the two countries. In the long run, they see a war, even one that is ruinous to Pakistan, as an acceptable price to pay for their ultimate goals.* What is unacceptable is a settlement between India and Pakistan that would leave the United States in a dominant position in both countries as broker and arbiter. Islamic militants have done everything possible to foment a conflict.<sup>51</sup>

As shown in Table 2 (below), there exists a wide gulf between the perspectives and interests of state and anti-state actors and this, in turn, makes India-Pakistan nuclear deterrence highly unstable. In fact, the two frameworks are so markedly different that mere institution of confidence-building measures alone will not address the problem. None of the political, technical or situational conditions identified by Lewis Dunn apply to anti-state actors. Thus, the entry of anti-state actors makes the situational context vastly different from that of the Cold War era. Undoubtedly, the greatest disruption to the equilibrium

51. Ibid. Italics mine.

**Table 2.** State versus the anti-state: Divergent perspectives on nukes

<b>Statist Perspective</b>	<b>Anti-state Actor's Perspective</b>
State security and survival is paramount. One of the main prerogatives of state actors is to ensure the maintenance and preservation of their territorial integrity.	Islam's spread and survival are of paramount importance. The state security or national survival is irrelevant because the very idea of separate nation-states is an anathema to anti-state actors.
Nuclear weapons are meant to ensure territorial integrity and national independence.	The nation-state is not indispensable. The destruction of the modern state system may well be a pre-requisite to the creation of <i>Dar-ul-Islam</i> .
Nuclear weapons are to be acquired when the very survival of the nation-state is seen as at stake.	"It is the religious duty of all Muslims to acquire nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to terrorize the enemies of God" — <i>al-Qaeda</i>
Nuclear weapons are weapons of deterrence, not weapons of war.	All weapons, including WMD, are useable weapons to achieve victory over non-believers and enemies of the faith.
Nuclearization brings an end to map-making exercise and freezes the territorial status quo. Nuclear weapons may be of little use in wresting politico-military concessions from others.	Nuclearization paves the way for waging low-cost, low-intensity conflict without fear of retaliation and can help in settling territorial disputes on favorable terms via coercion, subversion and blackmail.
The resolution of the Kashmir dispute will lead to peace, prosperity and stability in South Asia.	The Kashmir dispute is not about territory; it's about religion and history and its separation from India will bolster the cause of Islamist forces in the region and eventually lead to the unraveling of the Indian state and pave the way for the creation of a pan-Islamic Caliphate.
Pakistan's nuclear weapons are India-specific only and are designed to act as a force equalizer to overcome conventional weaknesses vis-à-vis India.	Pakistan's "Islamic bomb" should be used to defend the broader interests of the entire Muslim world.
Nuclear weapons are the "crown jewels" and symbols of a strong state.	Anti-state movements and actors such as al-Qaeda are not concerned with the status symbols of nuclear weapons; they need weak, failing and war-torn states to thrive and accomplish their objectives.
A nuclear war must never be fought. The taboo on the non-use of nukes must not be broken.	There is absolutely nothing to fear from a nuclear war.

of the nuclear balance of terror emanates from anti-state actors that may come to acquire “a level of power and technological sophistication once associated only with nation-states.”<sup>52</sup> The multinational mercenary terror network that al-Qaeda and others have assembled could be regarded as a malignant and mutated form of the “virtual state” that requires a reconsideration of conventional strategies of deterrence based on retaliation.<sup>53</sup> The traditional theories of deterrence may apply to other states but certainly do not apply to anti-state actors and rogue regimes. Nuclear weapons were never meant to deter transnational terrorists. Religious zealots bent on martyrdom have turned on its head a nuclear doctrine that was based on the deterrent value of mutually assured destruction.

### **Why Nuclear Deterrence May Not Work in South Asia: Ten Reasons**

THE PRECEDING ANALYSIS of the perspectives of anti-state actors shows that deterrence in South Asia may not work in the context of asymmetric and unrestricted warfare based as it is on surprise, shock and deception and waged by those who have little or nothing to lose, particularly when suicide is used as a weapon.<sup>54</sup> The instability argument points to the following reasons:

1. The history of four wars, and the intensity, duration and complexity of the animosity, coupled with growing domestic pressures in each country for action against the other, make nuclear deterrence unstable. The war on terrorism has encouraged brinkmanship on both sides with both seeing the U.S. presence in the region as a safety net. The next nuclear confrontation could be even more dangerous if the two sides follow the Cold War-era U.S.-Soviet standoff model—with nuclear missiles on alert, aimed at each other and ready to launch on warning. As Lee Butler, former head of the U.S. Strategic Command, has said, it was “no thanks to deterrence, but only by the grace of God” that the United States

52. James Kitfield, “Nuclear Nightmares,” *National Journal*, 15 December 2001.

53. See Philip Bobbitt, “The Front Line: The First Terrorist War of the World,” *Financial Times* (London), 13 July 2002, 2.

54. Delpech, “The Imbalance of Terror,” 34.

and the Soviet Union survived their crises.<sup>55</sup> India and Pakistan may not be lucky next time.

2. Whereas the Cold War was ideological, the India-Pakistan conflict is historical and religious. More than disputed borders, India and Pakistan share disputed histories. The United States and the Soviet Union never engaged in direct military conflict with each other. Nor did they have a history of military conflict or animosity prior to the 1940s. Nonetheless, they still came close to war more than once.
3. Territorial disputes and the sharing of a border are rooted in the deep religious divide going back one thousand years, for example, to the desire to re-establish Islamic or Hindu supremacy over the entire subcontinent. Indians and Pakistanis have bitter memories and highly emotional issues too long to list: invasions, partition, three wars, religious and border disputes, volatile political cultures, inflammatory media, and two decades of low-intensity conflict. In contrast, none of these factors existed as potential fuses to light the nuclear powder keg during the U.S.-Soviet nuclear standoff. The United States and Soviet Union never shared common or disputed borders. The geographical proximity also means lack of adequate time to rectify a mistake or for early warning of an accidental missile launch.
4. Neither India nor Pakistan possesses accurate intelligence or warning systems, nor do they have the ability to assure a second strike. The fear of a decisive first strike “use it or lose it” option, with short distances, poor warning systems, and small stockpiles amidst the talk of “nuclear jihad,” makes deterrence very unstable. As a result, the possibility of a nuclear conflict in South Asia—by design or accident—cannot be entirely ruled out. Their weak, untested command and control systems and relative inexperience in managing nuclear weapons, plus a lack of knowledge about each other’s military processes, means the “line in the sand” could be crossed unintentionally. For example, Islamabad has made it clear that it will use nukes first and in the early stages of conflict, hoping this threat will prevent an Indian attack across the Kashmiri

55. Cited in Zia Mian, R. Rajaraman and Frank von Hippel, “Nuclear Role Models,” *Washington Post*, 6 August 2002, 15.

Line of Control. While India follows a no-first-use policy, a number of strategic analysts during the recent military standoff called for a reconsideration of the NFU policy in the context of Pakistan.<sup>56</sup> Others claim that India's armed forces are "prepared to try to destroy Pakistan's nuclear capability before it is used, and seek their own capability to launch a nuclear attack if they believe that enemy nuclear missiles are armed and ready for launch or already on the launch pads or are in booster phase. Pakistan, in turn, may seek to preempt such a situation by using its nukes even earlier in a conflict rather than losing them."<sup>57</sup> There are also serious concerns over lax security controls in that part of the world.

5. Crisis stability based on deterrence does not apply to South Asia, where brinkmanship and one-upmanship is part of political life. The United States and the Soviet Union painstakingly avoided issuing either open or veiled threats over nuclear weapons—even though the U.S. nuclear doctrine implied a willingness to do so. (The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 was the sole exception.) In contrast, Pakistan has publicly flexed its nuclear muscles on four occasions in recent history—in 1987, 1990, 1999, and again in 2002. Likewise, India has repeatedly warned that it would survive a nuclear war but Pakistani would surely disappear from the world map. (The world has not heard such a threat since the 1950s when Mao Zedong argued that enough Chinese would survive a nuclear confrontation with the United States to usher in a communist revolution.) In short, neither periodic threats of nuclear annihilation nor nuclear blackmail bode well for stable nuclear deterrence.
6. The conventional military imbalance, or the lack of prospects for victory, did not seem to deter Pakistan from initiating three wars, all of which resulted in clear and quick Indian victories. While India is a *status quoist* power, Pakistan is the revisionist power, extremely dissatisfied with the territorial status quo and frustrated

56. Major General (ret.) Ashok K. Mehta, "Beyond the Lull," Rediff.com, 1 August 2002, <http://www.rediff.com/news/2002/aug/01ashok.htm>; Brahma Chellaney, "Need for Flexible No-first-use," *The Hindustan Times*, 25 May 2002.

57. M. McKinzie, Zia Mian, M. V. Ramana, and A. H. Nayyar, "Nuclear War in South Asia," *Foreign Policy in Focus Report*, June 2002, [http://www.fpif.org/papers/nuclearasia\\_body.htm1](http://www.fpif.org/papers/nuclearasia_body.htm1).

and resentful for lacking the means to overturn it. Emboldened by its nuclear deterrent since the late 1980s, Pakistan believes it can undertake such confrontations without risking severe Indian punishment. Besides, there is a view in military circles that India no longer enjoys a decisive military edge that it did a decade or two ago. The idea of a limited nuclear war may be embedded in Pakistani nuclear thinking but not in Indian strategic planning. If Pakistan's military keeps multiplying provocations as in the past, a weak and unpopular regime may well stumble into a war that neither wants.

7. There is no greater fallacy than the hope that Pakistan can continue to engage in low-intensity conflict while relying on its nuclear capabilities to deter the Indian retaliation. Post-September 11, India believes that it has every right to launch pre-emptive strikes—much like the United States—against the terrorist bases and jihadi infrastructure. But many in the Pakistani military are convinced that “Hindu India” would continue to bark but never bite. This could lead to miscalculation and misperception resulting in a catastrophe. A “failing state” or a collapsing regime may not behave like a responsible, rational nuclear weapon state—an essential prerequisite for successful nuclear deterrence. One can imagine a scenario in which the so-called “Kashmiri freedom fighters,” armed with a couple of nuclear weapons provided by disgruntled Pakistani army officers, threaten to nuke New Delhi if Indian security forces are not withdrawn within forty-eight hours, and set off a nuclear device in the Himalayas for demonstration effect. The nightmare scenario that we must consider is a collapsing Pakistani state that might have someone with a finger on the nuclear trigger and a fanatical desire to destroy its enemies. A loss of control of either Pakistani or Indian nuclear weapons could be a potential trigger of a wider nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan. Alternatively, “clashes between security forces and hostile groups at nuclear installations might even result in release of nuclear material or even conceivably a partial nuclear detonation.”<sup>58</sup>

58. Lewis A. Dunn, “The South Asian Nuclear Conundrum: U.S. Interests and Choices” (paper presented at Strategies for Regional Security conference, organized by the Stanley Foundation, Virginia, 25–27 October 2001). Also see PTI, “India May Militarily Intervene if Islamists Gain Pak N-Weapons,” *The Hindustan Times*, 18 October 2002, 1.

8. At the “anti-state actor” level, individuals or groups may violate security rules for reasons of profit, settling a grudge or religious and ideological motives. They may try to transfer sensitive items to some anti-state actors. Two retired Pakistani nuclear scientists with alleged al-Qaeda connections are currently under custody.<sup>59</sup> The possibility of a civil war fought with nuclear weapons in the Indian subcontinent cannot be completely ruled out. Another concern is the possibility of yet another coup in Pakistan. In conditions of civil war and internal chaos in a nuclear weapon state, nuclear materials could conceivably be used as bargaining chips in a struggle for internal power, or as negotiating leverage with external powers. If there were two rival claimants to the government in Islamabad, for example, we would be inclined to support the side that claims to control that country’s nuclear forces. The scenario of Pakistan in splinters, with one piece becoming a radical Muslim state in possession of a nuclear weapon, is a concern, should al-Qaeda/Taliban declare jihad against Pakistan—the weakest ally in the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition. Furthermore, the breakup of states creates the danger of WMD falling into the hands of separatists and religious fanatics. In short, power struggle and instability in Pakistan also could lead to attacks on the Pakistani military’s nuclear arsenal by anti-state actors and the theft of nuclear weapons.
9. The freelance factor of terrorism changes the situational context completely in the sense that anti-state actors may have vested interest in provoking a war between India and Pakistan. With relatively little radioactive material, obtained from low-level waste from a power plant or medical facility, terrorists could easily construct a “dirty bomb” using simple explosives. Such devices, hidden in a truck or ship-borne cargo container headed for Karachi or Bombay, could inflict considerable casualties followed by widespread radiation poisoning.
10. Finally, the China factor further adds to unpredictability, complexity, and instability in the subcontinental nuclear power balance. China has long been the most important player in the India-Pakistan-China triangular relationship. The Sino-Pakistan military

59. Douglas Frantz, James Risen and David E. Sanger, “Nuclear Experts in Pakistan May Have Links to Al Qaeda,” *New York Times*, 9 December 2001, 1.

alliance (in particular, the nuclear and missile nexus) is aimed at ensuring that the South Asian military balance of power is neither pro-India nor pro-Pakistan but pro-China. Most war-gaming exercises on the next India-Pakistan nuclear war end in a Chinese military intervention to prevent the collapse of Beijing's most allied ally in Asia.<sup>60</sup> For Beijing, the most worrisome scenario would be one which brings the United States and Pakistan on a collision course, with or without India acting as a U.S. partner.

### Concluding Observations

THIS PAPER HAS HIGHLIGHTED THE DANGERS posed by anti-state actors (primarily religious extremist organizations with political agendas) to the stability of nuclear deterrence between India and Pakistan. It demonstrates that conditions of the Indo-Pakistani conflict are qualitatively different from those that existed during the Cold War. The risk of a nuclear war remains high because of miscalculation and misperception owing to growing religious radicalism in both countries. Should the India-Pakistani conflict escalate into a nuclear one, neither the geopolitical nor the radioactive fallout will remain limited to Southern Asia. Once the nuclear taboo is broken either by state or anti-state actors, it will no longer be business as usual. There is an urgent need to think about the ways and means of countering the possible use of WMD by anti-state actors (acting with or without the support of state actors) primarily because established theories of deterrence do not apply to them. While one can be confident in the Indian and Pakistani states' capacity to maintain stable nuclear deterrence, the challenge posed by anti-state actors falls in an entirely different category and should be a matter of concern to all. An appropriate politico-military strategy that deals with the challenge of religious radicalism will go a long way in promoting crisis stability and in preventing the use of nuclear weapons. In a sense, the task before the international community in the twenty-first century is the same as it was in the twentieth century: that is, to thoroughly defeat totalitarian ideologies, such as Wahabi/Salafi/Deobandi militant Islam, and consign them to the dustbin of history as were the other two totalitarian ideologies of Fascism and Communism.

60. For details, see Mohan Malik, "China, Pakistan and India: Nervous Neighbours," *The World Today* 58 (London), no. 10 (October 2002): 20–23.

# 14

HUSAIN HAQQANI

## **Pakistan's Terrorism Dilemma**

**F**or more than a decade, Pakistan has been accused of supporting terrorism, primarily due to its support for militants opposing Indian rule in the disputed Himalayan territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Until September 11, 2001, Islamabad was also the principal backer of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Although Pakistan has now become a key U.S. ally in the war against terrorism, it is still seen both as a target and staging ground for terrorism.

General Pervez Musharraf's military regime abandoned its alliance with the Taliban immediately after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. U.S. forces were allowed the use of Pakistani air bases for operations in Afghanistan. Pakistani intelligence services provided, and continue to provide, valuable information in hunting down Taliban and al-Qaeda escapees. The Pakistani military is currently working with U.S. law enforcement officials in tracking down terrorists in the lawless tribal areas bordering Afghanistan.

In a major policy speech on January 12, 2002, Musharraf announced measures to limit the influence of Islamic militants at home, including those previously described by him as "Kashmiri freedom fighters." "No organizations will be able to carry out terrorism

on the pretext of Kashmir,” he declared. “Whoever is involved with such acts in the future will be dealt with strongly whether they come from inside or outside the country.”<sup>1</sup>

Musharraf’s supporters declared his speech as revolutionary.<sup>2</sup> He echoed the sentiment of most Pakistanis when he said, “violence and terrorism have been going on for years and we are weary and sick of this Kalashnikov culture ... The day of reckoning has come.”

After the speech, the Musharraf regime clamped down on domestic terrorist groups responsible for sectarian killings.<sup>3</sup> But there is still considerable ambivalence in Pakistan’s attitude toward the Kashmiri militants. Officially, Pakistan denies that it provides military support or training for terrorists. But in an interview published in the *Washington Post* on June 23, 2002, Musharraf repeated the argument for making a distinction between terrorists and freedom fighters, leaving the possibility open for supporting the latter.<sup>4</sup>

General Musharraf’s switch of support from the Taliban and Islamic militants to the United States has infuriated the Islamists. They are now threatening his life as well as targets in Pakistan with increasing ferocity. There has been at least one major terrorist act in Pakistan almost every month since the beginning of 2002.

The kidnapping of *Wall Street Journal* reporter Daniel Pearl in January was followed by his murder the following month. A suicide bombing at an Islamabad church in March killed two U.S. citizens. A car bomb killed eleven French naval engineers in Karachi in May, followed by the June car bombing outside the U.S. consulate in the same city resulting in the deaths of twelve Pakistani passersby.

Terrorist attacks in Indian-controlled Kashmir have also continued unabated. An attack on the Indian parliament last December brought India and Pakistan to the brink of war, as did the May 14 massacre of Indian soldiers’ families at a military camp. It is apparent that the

1. English Rendering of President General Pervez Musharraf’s “Address to the Nation” (January 12, 2002), [http://www.pak.gov.pk/President\\_Addresses/presidential\\_addresses\\_index.htm](http://www.pak.gov.pk/President_Addresses/presidential_addresses_index.htm).

2. See, for instance, “President’s Steps, Views Have Full Support: Gov. Sindh,” *Business Recorder*, 14 January 2002. The address even caused a rally on the Pakistani stock market. (“Pakistani Stocks Rise 2.4% on Musharraf’s Speech,” *Agence France-Presse*, 14 January 2002.)

3. For a few examples of the extensive coverage of this crackdown, see “Offices of Banned Groups Sealed: Over 100 Militants Held in Crackdown,” *Dawn*, 14 January 2002; “State Bank to Freeze Assets of Militant Organizations,” *Dawn*, 15 January 2002.

4. “Musharraf: Here’s What I’ll Do,” *Washington Post*, B-11, 23 June 2002.

terrorist groups are defying General Musharraf's new policy of cooperating with the West against terrorism and may even be trying to provoke war between India and Pakistan. The government, on the other hand, is engaged in a balancing act between fighting terror and keeping Kashmiri resistance alive.<sup>5</sup>

The complex relationship between the state and the Islamists in Pakistan makes it difficult for the government to fulfill its promise of eliminating terrorism even if it had the will to stop all groups. India, in particular, argues that General Musharraf is willing to fight anti-U.S. terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda only to the extent of securing U.S. assistance. From New Delhi's point of view, Pakistan is still unwilling to clamp down on jihadi groups that it sees as allies in its long-standing conflict with India.<sup>6</sup>

Pakistan became a center for Islamic militants when it served as the staging ground for the West's war against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan beginning in 1979.

During the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance, militants from all over the Muslim world passed through Pakistan to participate in the Afghan Jihad.<sup>7</sup> They were, at the time, supported by the intelligence services of the West as well as Islamic nations. Some of them created covert networks within Pakistan, taking advantage of poor law enforcement and the state's sympathetic attitude toward pan-Islamic militancy.

Now that al-Qaeda and the Taliban have been uprooted from Afghanistan, they are using their former transit station as a temporary staging ground for terrorist operations.<sup>8</sup> Domestic terrorist groups remain active, and at least some of them have developed tactical or strategic alliances with each other as well as with foreign groups.<sup>9</sup>

Pakistan has paid a price for not confronting the terrorists in the past. They brought their battles to Pakistan, while holding out the promise of helping in Pakistan's conflict with India. Even before the current wave of attacks, al-Qaeda's ally, Egyptian Jihad, bombed and

5. Sumit Ganguly, "Back to Brinkmanship," *American Prospect* 13, no. 12 (1 July 2002): 18–19.

6. Celia W. Dugger, "A Nuclear Question Mark: India and Pakistan Face New Pressures for War, and Peace," *New York Times*, 21 October 2001, 4–3; "Do We Have a Deal?" *Economist*, 15 June 2002, 39.

7. On Pakistan's relation to the jihadi phenomenon, see Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

8. Husain Haqqani, "Al-Qaeda's New Enemy," *Financial Times*, 8 July 2002, 19.

9. Douglas Jehl, "Groups Banned by Musharraf Join Forces for Attacks, Officials Say," *New York Times*, A-12, 1 March 2002.

destroyed the Egyptian embassy in Islamabad on November 19, 1995. A few months earlier, on March 8, 1995, two employees of the U.S. Consulate in Karachi, Gary Durell and Jacqueline Van Landingham, were killed in a terrorist attack on a consulate van.

On April 22, 1996 explosive devices were hurled on the U.S. Information Service building in Lahore. Four Americans and two Pakistanis working with the Union Texas Oil Company were killed on November 12, 1997, again in Karachi. On November 12, 1999 rocket attacks targeted offices of the United States government as well as the United Nations in Islamabad.

AT THE HEART of Pakistan's past support for Islamists is its conflict with India arising out of the dispute over Kashmir. Pakistan seeks implementation of UN resolutions for an internationally supervised plebiscite to determine the future of Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir, which India claims as its integral part. India and Pakistan have fought twice over the territory since their independence in 1947.<sup>10</sup>

Even while announcing what was billed as a break from the past, Musharraf's January 12 speech highlighted Pakistan's pre-occupation with Kashmir. "Kashmir runs in our blood," Musharraf said. "No Pakistani can afford to sever links with Kashmir.... We will continue to extend our moral, political and diplomatic support to Kashmiris. We will never budge from our principled stand on Kashmir."<sup>11</sup>

By 1989, protests over a rigged state election in 1987 in Indian-controlled Kashmir had transformed into an insurgency. By all accounts, the insurrection was indigenous in its initial phase and represented Kashmiri frustration with Indian rule.<sup>12</sup> India has also been held responsible for massive violations of human rights in Kashmir, which Pakistan sees as the instigating factor in the continued militancy.<sup>13</sup>

10. For a thorough history of the conflict over Kashmir, see Alastair Lamb, *Kashmir: A Disputed Legacy, 1846-1990* (Hertingfordbury, Hertfordshire: Roxford Books, 1991).

11. Musharraf's "Address to the Nation."

12. Victoria Schofield, *Kashmir in the Crossfire* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 231-34.

13. For several recent examples of this complaint, see Shaikh Azizur Rahman, "Officials Admit Army Killed Kashmir Civilians; Report Cites Efforts to Cover Up Attacks," *Washington Times*, A-13, 2 August 2002; "Pakistan Accuses India over Muslim Bloodshed in Kashmir," *Agence France-Presse*, 2 September 2002; Praveena Sharma, "Indian Police Kill Alleged Militant, Family Claims Execution," *Agence France-Presse*, 22 October 2002.

International media and human rights groups have been denied access to the disputed region by New Delhi, which limits the potential for agitating Kashmiri rights through political means. India's refusal to discuss Kashmir's future with Pakistan has been accompanied by international indifference over the issue. This in turn has led to the belief in Islamabad that militancy and violence may be the only means of internationalizing the core issue in the India-Pakistan dispute.

Soon after the beginning of the uprising, Pakistan started applying the experience gained during the orchestration of anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan to the Kashmir insurgency. In addition to Kashmiri refugees, training was provided to Pakistani and international volunteers who sympathized with their Muslim brethren.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Kashmir's indigenous struggle for self-determination became linked with the global jihad of the Islamists.

The United States has been alarmed by Pakistan's involvement with the Kashmir insurgency since its earliest days. In May 1992, the Bush Senior administration threatened to designate Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism. The focus of U.S. concerns was the activities of Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate (ISID), which had been the CIA's counterpart in providing weapons and training to the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance.

U.S. Ambassador to Islamabad Nicholas Platt delivered a letter from Secretary of State James Baker to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif saying, "we have information indicating that ISID and others intend to continue to provide material support to groups that have engaged in terrorism."<sup>15</sup>

Ambassador Platt added verbally, "we are very confident of our information that your intelligence service, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, and elements of the Army, are supporting Kashmiri and Sikh militants who carry out acts of terrorism."

"This support takes the form of providing weapons, training, and assistance in infiltration ... We're talking about direct, covert Government of Pakistan support. There is no doubt in our mind about this ... Our information is certain. It does not come from the

14. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 186–87.

15. This paragraph, and the five that follow, are based on the correspondence viewed by the author during his years in the Pakistani government.

Indian government. Please consider the serious consequences to our relationship if this support continues.”

Prime Minister Sharif responded to the U.S. demarche with assurances that any covert support to militants fighting India would be discontinued. But he also listed Pakistan’s grievances with India over Kashmir and asked for an active U.S. role in resolving that dispute. The United States did not carry out its threat, though Pakistan was subjected to numerous sanctions over its nuclear program and, after Musharraf’s coup in 1999, for its lack of democracy.

Ten years later, little has changed in Pakistan’s basic stance. The government denies direct involvement in supporting the militants, emphasizes the indigenous character of the Kashmiri resistance and holds private citizens and groups responsible for any support mobilized in Pakistan for the Kashmiris. Like Sharif in 1992, Musharraf, too, links the end of militancy to the resolution of the Kashmir question even after the changed circumstances since September 11.<sup>16</sup>

Over the years, the connection with Kashmir has provided social respectability to the jihadi movement, which has ambitions beyond Kashmir and Pakistan. The state apparatus, particularly the Pakistani military, looked upon the jihadis as low-cost foot soldiers who could tie down large numbers of Indian troops in Kashmir. In the process, the jihadis managed to lay the foundations of a vast infrastructure that includes newspapers and magazines, Islamic charitable trusts, and religious schools (madrassas). Tolerance and covert support of extremist groups have allowed them to spread their tentacles throughout Pakistani society and to mobilize large sums of money for their operations.<sup>17</sup>

Ideologically motivated religious extremists have also developed links with organized crime, especially in the city of Karachi.<sup>18</sup> At times, this underworld alliance appears to command greater means than those of the country’s police or intelligence services.

16. “Musharraf, Here’s What I’ll Do.”

17. For a treatment of this phenomenon since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, see Rashid, *Taliban*, 88–91. On the continuing tolerance of extremism after September 11, see John F. Burns, “America Inspires Both Longing and Loathing in Muslim World,” *New York Times*, 16 September 2001, 1–4; Douglas Frantz, “Sentiment in Pakistani Town Is Ardently Pro-Taliban,” *New York Times*, B-1, 27 September 2001.

18. On the Karachi criminal underground, see Ghulam Hasnain, “Karachi’s Gang Wars,” *Newsline*, September 2001.

It is also difficult for some members of the law enforcement machinery to look upon Islamists as enemies of the state, after almost two decades of treating them as national heroes. One of the accused in the kidnapping and murder of Daniel Pearl was an employee of the Special Branch of Karachi police. A member of the paramilitary Rangers has been charged with plotting to murder Musharraf in concert with the group responsible for the car bomb attack at the U.S. Consulate in Karachi.

Pakistan has looked upon militant Islam as a strategic option for at least three decades, going back to the Bangladesh war with India in 1971. The anti-Soviet Afghan resistance fortified the relations between Islamists and the Pakistan military, which had already been formed.

During the 1971 war against India and the people of Pakistan's then eastern wing, Pakistan's military rulers had helped create volunteer militias of Bengali Islamists to fight the pro-Bangladesh militia and Indian troops. India had backed Bangladeshi fighters, though the trouble in then East Pakistan had started with Pakistani leaders' refusal to accept the prospect of Bengalis leading a united Pakistan after the general election of 1970. Instead of accepting political negotiations with Bengali politicians who secured a majority in that election, the West Pakistan-led military chose to define the issue as a religious war between Islamic Pakistan and Hindu-backed Bangladesh.

The *al-Badr* and *al-Shams* Islamist militias could not help Pakistan retain control of Bangladesh. The Pakistani military saw the bifurcation of Pakistan as the result of collaboration between secular nationalists and India. This led to the belief that Islamists were the most dependable political allies of the Pakistani state, especially in resisting Indian ascendancy in South Asia. This belief was strengthened during the anti-Soviet phase of the Afghan resistance. It also manifested itself in the form of Pakistan's support for the Taliban as well as the Kashmiri militants.<sup>19</sup>

Pakistan's involvement with the jihadi groups and its tolerance of armed extremist religious groups have contributed to generally ineffective law enforcement in the country. Musharraf himself has

19. On the East Pakistan crisis, see G. W. Choudhury, *The Last Days of United Pakistan* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1974), especially chapters 6–8. On anti-Soviet resistance in South Asia, see Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

acknowledged that “Pakistan has become a soft state where law means little, if anything.”<sup>20</sup> Sectarian and ethnic murders as well as unexplained bombings have been a common occurrence for the last several years. At least five million small arms are in private hands in Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> The most notable of these is the Kalashnikov assault rifle that served as the weapon of choice during the anti-Soviet Afghan resistance.

Even if General Musharraf decides finally to root out Islamic militancy, it will be years before the terrorist networks are completely eliminated. Resources of the police and intelligence-gathering agencies are over-stretched as the military government uses them to stay in power and not just to keep crime and terrorism in check. The terrorists know that and take advantage of the state’s weakness.

General Musharraf has clamped down on groups directly linked with al-Qaeda, and his government has helped the United States in apprehending foreign fighters, including high-ranking al-Qaeda figures.<sup>22</sup> But Pakistan will have to completely abandon using Islamic militants as an instrument of policy if terrorism is to be rolled back effectively.

India mistrusts Pakistani intentions, while Pakistan demands guarantees of dialogue over Kashmir before completely closing the chapter on Kashmiri militancy. India’s refusal to withdraw the threat of military force, initiated after the terrorist attack on parliament last December, was cited in Pakistan as an argument against reversal of policy. Supporters of the insurgents within Islamabad’s policy-making circles said that Islamic militants would serve as an important fifth column for Pakistani soldiers, sabotaging the much larger and better-equipped Indian army, in case of war.<sup>23</sup>

More than two thousand members of Islamic militias were detained after General Musharraf announced the ban on five militant groups

20. Musharraf’s “Address to the Nation.”

21. Tara Kartha, “Pakistan and the Taliban: Flux in an Old Relationship?” *Strategic Analysis* 24, no. 7 (October 2000); International Centre for Peace Initiatives, *The Future of Pakistan* (Mumbai, 2002), 63.

22. See, for example, Karl Vick and Kamran Khan, “Raid Netted Top Operative of Al Qaeda,” *Washington Post*, A-1, 2 April 2002; Susan Schmidt and Dan Eggen, “Suspected Planner of 9/11 Attacks Captured in Pakistan after Gunfight; Two Other Al Qaeda Members Killed, Several More Arrested,” *Washington Post*, A-1, 14 September 2002.

23. Vick and Khan, “Pakistani Ambivalence Frustrates Hope for Kashmir Peace,” *Washington Post*, A-18, 29 June 2002.

in his January 12 speech. Of these, 1,800 were released after signing pledges of good conduct. The government announced another crackdown in May, though it is likely that the four hundred militants detained this time around were part of the batch that had earlier been released.<sup>24</sup>

The government has arrested some leading militants, and several sectarian terrorists have been killed in police encounters.<sup>25</sup> But Pakistan remains far from the stage of a complete break with its past covert support for Islamic militants.

The halfway approach to tackling terrorism has left Pakistan vulnerable to pressure from both the Islamists and the international community. General Musharraf's continuing war against domestic political rivals and the ongoing confrontation with India give the terrorists an advantage. They have nothing to protect, only targets to destroy. Musharraf, by contrast, must safeguard Pakistan's interests in addition to keeping himself, and the military, in power.

Recent clashes between Pakistani forces with al-Qaeda fighters in the country's remote tribal areas indicate that there may be no turning back from General Pervez Musharraf's decision to join the international coalition against terrorism. Even if Pakistan wanted to nuance its position on the issue, making distinctions between terrorists targeting the United States and Pakistan and terrorists opposed to India, neither its international friends nor the terrorists would allow such distinctions.

Pakistan must now bravely complete its U-turn and end its reputation as a militant-infested nation. This can be accomplished if three conditions are met:

First, Pakistan's relations with India must move toward normalization. The tactical deployment of Islamic militancy as a means of combating Indian military advantage was the starting point of Pakistan's involvement with the jihadis. In the absence of peaceful relations with India, it is unlikely that Pakistan will be able to completely close the option of calling upon Islamists in case of a confrontation with its traditional rival.

24. Ian Bruce, "Radical Groups Join Forces in Jihad; CIA Claims Consulate Car Bomb Was Work of Terror Alliance," *The Herald* (Glasgow), 17 June 2002, 10.

25. "Wanted Sectarian Activist Killed in Encounter," *Dawn*, 5 April 2002; "Police Make Public Arrest of Sectarian Activists," *Dawn*, 2 July 2002.

From Pakistan's point of view, normalization of ties with India would involve the beginning of a process of dialogue about the future status of Jammu and Kashmir. The international community can encourage such a process, even without an immediate resolution of the dispute.

Second, decision making in Pakistan must revert to elected civilian leaders rather than being vested in the military. Over the last ten years, the intelligence-military complex in Pakistan has retained control of key decision making over matters relating to national security. As a result, conduct of diplomacy by civilians has been hampered by covert operations run by the military. Civilian leaders have often been vilified or undermined for seeking to change the course of the country's Afghan and Kashmir policies.

Since 1999, direct military rule has also subordinated Pakistani decision making to military biases. Given the history of the last thirty years, in particular, it is clear that Pakistan's military looks upon the Islamic militants as its allies against India. Mainstream civilian politicians, on the other hand, are generally secular and less strident about confrontation with India. Political and economic factors have weighed more in the calculations of civilians than have the strategic doctrines propounded by the military.

PAKISTAN'S ISLAMISTS had never been able to do well in electoral politics until the legislative elections of October 10, 2002 when they won a significant number of seats in parliament and control of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) provincial assembly with only 11 percent of the popular vote.<sup>26</sup> Their strength in recent years has been the direct result of covert state patronage and the military's decision to assign them a role in its regional strategy. Even their recent election success resulted from the military's efforts to weaken mainstream

26. Although Islamists won only 11 percent of the vote in Pakistan's October 10 parliamentary elections, the Muttahida Majlis-i-Amal (MMA) was able to capture 52 of 272 seats in the national parliament and an absolute majority in the North West Frontier Province, thanks to low voter turnout and government interference in the election cycle. Nevertheless, the MMA fared substantially better in 2002 than in 1997, when it captured two national seats. For detailed results from the 2002 parliamentary election, see <http://www.heraldelections.com>. For an analysis of the significance of the 2002 elections, see Ron Moreau and Zahid Hussain, with Michael Hirsh, "A Big Vote for Jihad," *Newsweek*, 21 October 2002, 39.

political parties. In the long run, however, a democratic political process is likely to contain Islamist influence, making it easier to isolate and eliminate extremist groups.

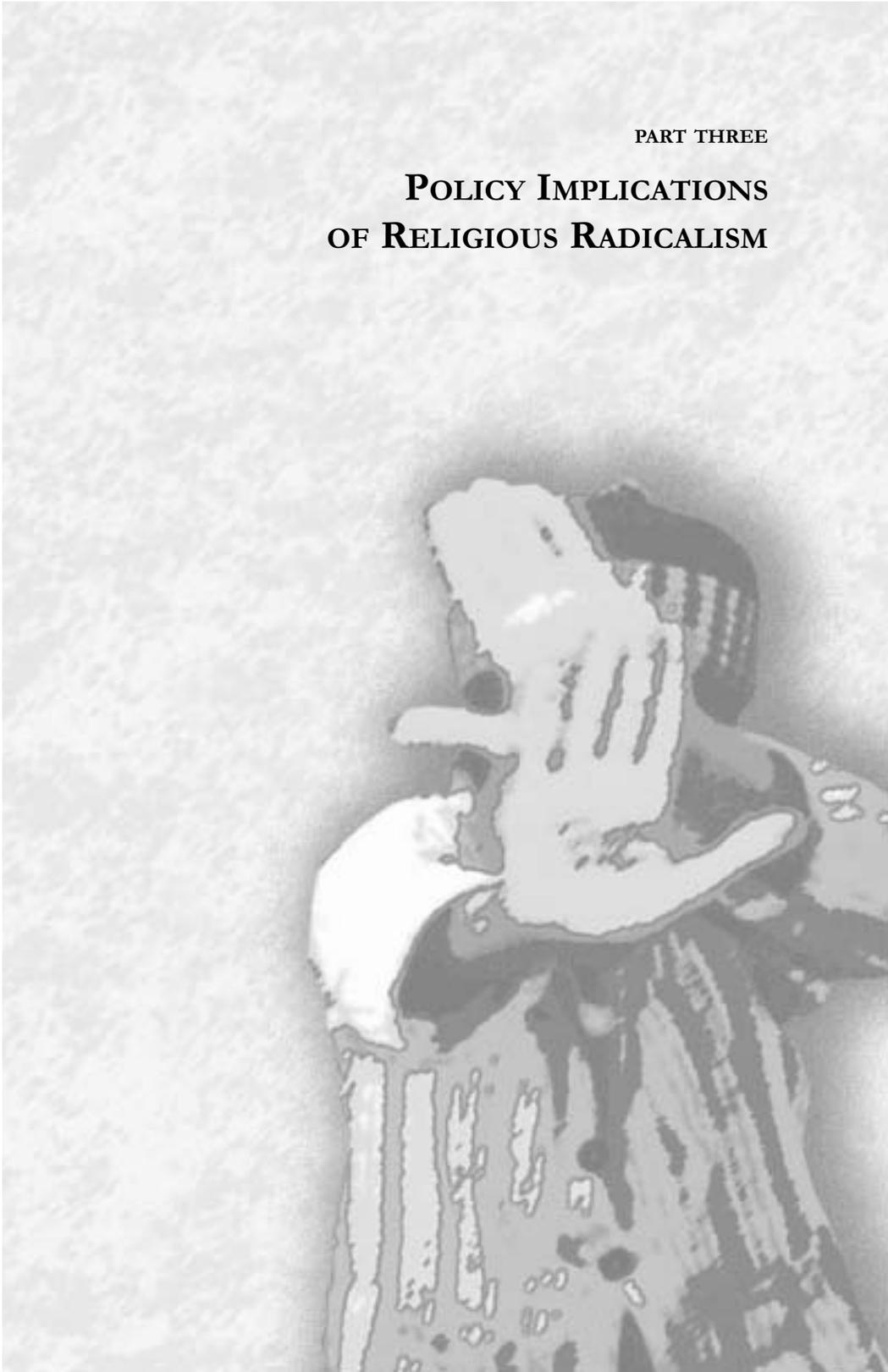
Third, Pakistan must disarm all militias and dismantle the jihadi infrastructure. The international community should use all means at its disposal to ensure this is done with broad national consensus within Pakistan.

So far, the military regime has not sought the cooperation of legitimate Islamic groups or mainstream political parties. Instead, it has antagonized traditional religious and political parties and allowed the war against terrorism to be cast as a U.S. war being fought with Pakistan's help. Domestic political disputes have prevented any scheme of disarming local militias. For terrorism to be defeated, Pakistan would have to make a serious effort in re-orienting its national priorities from military power and militancy toward modernity and development.

Pakistan needs to roll back terrorism to secure its own future. But that objective cannot be attained through half-hearted measures or without a paradigm shift in the Pakistani military's worldview. In the absence of a constitutional democratic government, Pakistan's ruling elite seeks acceptance through Islamic rhetoric and confrontation with India. Until that changes, terrorists will continue to feel emboldened to challenge the inefficient state apparatus that lacks both legitimacy and broad public support.

PART THREE

**POLICY IMPLICATIONS  
OF RELIGIOUS RADICALISM**



# 15

RAVI NAIR

## **Religious Radicalism and State Policies of Democratic Governance and Human Rights**

**T**he domain of security in South Asia, more conventionally if not somewhat proudly referred to as “national security,” has come under pressure from several directions in recent times. A current significant influence comes from the vigorous practice of political and religious majoritarianism, one that has contributed to the growth of conflict and instability in almost all of the South Asian states.

Since decolonization of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, South Asia has witnessed numerous internal armed conflicts across the region. Even Nepal and Bhutan, which escaped British colonialism, have witnessed armed conflict in the recent past. Most of the conflicts arise from the states’ inability to ensure the necessary democratic institutional mechanisms to resolve key political problems. The inherent flaws in the state- and nation-building process have been accentuated by authoritarian governments that often function beyond the limits of even the unlawful national security laws they enact.

The large number of low-intensity, internal armed conflicts across South Asia is testimony to the failure of South Asian states to fulfill the aspirations of their citizens. The origins of these conflicts range

from the demand for right of self-determination to radical changes in the state apparatus. Movements such as the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in Sri Lanka, Samjukta Jana Morcha (United Peoples Front) popularly known as the Maoists in Nepal, the Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM; formerly known as the Mohajir Quami Movement) in Karachi and many of the armed opposition groups in the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir, Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh are illustrative of the ongoing problem. In Sri Lanka the conflict in the north and east of the country has resulted in the loss of more than fifty thousand lives<sup>1</sup> and the displacement of more than a million people both internally and externally. Another concern is the continuing arrest and detention of political activists in southern and eastern Bhutan and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

The response of governments in South Asia, irrespective of their geographical boundaries, political stripes or forms of governance to the radical groups and the civilians who live in these internal conflict situations, has been similar. The reaction took the form of brutal suppression of political dissent and the violation of various national and international human rights laws and international humanitarian laws by security forces. Impunity provided to law enforcement officials has only encouraged further human rights abuses.

Since September 11, 2001, the ruling dispensations all over South Asia seem to have identified their own "axis of evil." In Sri Lanka, Sinhalese dominant right-wing "nationalism" is seen as a threat to the newly signed peace document. In Nepal, democracy and freedom of expression have been throttled in the name of curbing Maoist attacks. The influx of Bangladeshi Hindu minorities into India due to repression by the Muslim majority in Bangladesh and the migration of Bangladeshis in search for lebensraum have been devastating for the indigenous peoples in northeast India. In Bhutan, people of Nepali origin are facing the danger of forcible expulsion. The hundreds of thousands of refugees living in conditions of great neglect and suffering in Nepal seem to be nobody's concern. Similarly, the international community has watched in silence the growth of political and religious fundamentalism in Pakistan.

1. UNICEF, "Children and Women Affected by Armed Conflict in Sri Lanka, 2000–2001" (Colombo: UNICEF, September 1999).

## Pakistan

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM in Pakistan can be traced back to 1974 when a constitutional amendment declared the Ahmadis<sup>2</sup> a non-Muslim minority. The Ahmadis have suffered discrimination and persecution ever since. In 1977, devoid of a democratic constituency, General Zia ul-Haq turned to right-wing Islamic elements for support. This move subsequently coalesced with the goal of building linkages with the Afghan *mujabideen* after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979.<sup>3</sup> The role of Pakistan as a frontline state, serving American interests in the war against the Communist Soviet Union, had major consequences for Pakistan and its society. The combination of easy availability of arms and a growing, motivated cadre resulted in the rapid spread of violence that continues till the present.

Religious and ethnic organizations representing their respective communities are increasingly using violent methods, including terrorism, to achieve the ends that they have set for themselves, leading to a spurt in incidents of violence and terrorism in the last decade. The authoritarian character of the state has led to the control of state institutions in the hands of a select elite. The failure of successive regimes in fulfilling their stated development agendas has fueled ethnic tensions and made the state more dependent on Islam as a binding force for society and polity.

In the past ten years, an important factor in the internal strife in Pakistan has been the impact of the Afghan war. Its ramifications include the growth of various Islamic groups accused in running feuds between the Sunni and Shia organizations, and the drug mafia operating in Pakistan. These pose a threat to state security in the long run.

In the last few decades the MQM in Pakistan has made considerable strides in consolidating its cause and has since grown into a strong party aiming to further the rights of those who migrated from India in 1947. Over the years, it “has demonstrated a willingness to use violence to further its objectives.”<sup>4</sup> Since its inception, it has

2. The Ahmadis are members of a religious group founded in the fourteenth century by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian. They consider themselves to be Muslims but maintain a different view on the finality of the word of the Prophet Muhammed.

3. Ajay Behera, “Pakistan’s Strategic Vision: With or without the Taliban,” *Asia Times*, 22 March 2002.

4. U.S. Department of State, “Pakistan” in *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1999* (U.S. Department of State, April 2000).

“generated income through extortion and other forms of racketeering.”<sup>5</sup> Although the modern MQM has legitimized its means and worked within the political system, it has been unable to shed its violent and unlawful reputation. As a result, members of the MQM are continuously at odds with law enforcement agencies and are often arrested without cause and tortured.

## India

IN INDIA, the activities of some armed opposition groups in north-east India, the state of Jammu and Kashmir, and parts of Andhra Pradesh have become virtually indistinguishable from those of criminals. These groups sometimes commit armed robbery, drug trafficking and extortion, while giving these acts a political cloak. As a consequence of these activities, endemic crime and a generalized breakdown of law and order has occurred in states such as Bihar,<sup>6</sup> causing severe human rights violations.

Flawed state practices throughout the region contribute to fundamentalist activities. India is a case in point. First, by turning a blind eye to the perfidious activities of upper-caste Hindu fundamentalist and communal (i.e., sectarian) organizations such as the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad—collectively, the sangh परिवार—and regional chauvinist political parties such as the Shiv Sena, and by ignoring the acts committed by private armies of feudal landlords in Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, the government has indirectly endorsed the aims and methods of these organizations.<sup>7</sup> Second, the state has a direct role in funding and arming its own auxiliary militant groups in areas such as Jammu and Kashmir in

5. Ibid.

6. “The Fleshless Face of Bihar,” *The Hindu*, 29 March 1998 (noting that no matter what party is in power, gangsters in Bihar are better armed than police, far better protected, and have been made multi-millionaires through their extortion rackets and arms deals); “Lawlessness in Lalooland,” *The Hindu*, 1 March 1998 (noting that the violence in Bihar leads political parties, without exception, to brazenly play the caste card, court and field criminals, and resort to malpractices and violence); “Peaceful End to Repolling in India’s Most Lawless State,” *Agence France-Presse*, 30 March 1998 (documenting election-related violence in Bihar and calling Bihar India’s most lawless state).

7. Amnesty International, *AI Report 1997: India*, <http://www.amnesty.org/ailib/aireport/ar97/ASA20.htm> (accessed 16 April 1998) (concluding that in some parts of India armed militants carry out killings, abductions, and rapes with the apparent connivance of government security forces).

India.<sup>8</sup> In the Indian state of Kashmir, the work of the security forces has been augmented through an insidious strategy of the government—the use of “reformed” or “renegade” militants as part of the counter-insurgency effort. These pro-government counter-militants are former separatists who have surrendered to the government but retain their arms and are usually involved in killings and abductions of suspected militants. Their exact number is undetermined but the official figure ranges between 2,500 and 3,000. They are funded by the government, which also exchanges intelligence with them and directs their operations, but at the same time they operate totally outside the purview of the law. Put differently, “their existence traverses law, crime and legitimate politics but crime is [their] idiom from start to finish.”<sup>9</sup> These irregulars have been responsible for many of the abuses perpetrated on innocent civilians, and yet with the patronage of the security forces, they remain free and operational, a sort of Frankenstein created by the government, which it is unwilling or unable to control. Indeed, during the last election campaign Farooq Abdullah, current chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was fairly vocal in speaking out against the atrocities committed by these groups. However, since he has been in power he has implemented a policy directly contradicting his stated position.

New insecurities have been experienced by minorities in the region in general and in the Muslim minority in India in particular. India has one of the largest Muslim populations in the world, second only to Indonesia. Of the many perceptions of nationalism, the one that has risen to political rhetorical prominence in India bears the unmistakable stamp of a municipal parochialism, which is not very different from the cosmopolitan parochialism of the post-September 2001 Western world. The convergence of views on the “war” against “Islamic terrorism” has now been made a part of the official business of the rest of the world. As a result, executive functionaries in the world’s largest democracy have felt themselves a lot freer to use administrative machinery they command to renew their attacks on Muslim life, property and freedom.

8. U.S. Department of State, “India Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1996” (1997) (affirming credible reports that government agencies fund, exchange intelligence with, sponsor, and direct operations of counter militants in areas such as Jammu and Kashmir).

9. Institute of Kashmir Studies, “Counter-insurgency in Kashmir,” April 1998.

The continuing violence in the Indian state of Gujarat and the enactment of new “anti-terrorism” legislation (Prevention of Terrorist Act, 2002, which even before its ratification by parliament had been invoked with sectarian selectivity against Muslims) do not just coincide with the new global offensive against Islam. These measures follow on the heels of the mindset that views all Muslims as “anti-national,” “the enemy within, potential subversives, and infiltrators” and as “owing their allegiance to the ubiquitous elsewhere of a militant Islam.”<sup>10</sup> The global onslaught has merely provided an indulgent climate in which exceptional violations of fundamental democratic rights can take place. Domestic electoral compulsions are seen to supply the immediate and sufficient impulse for both the riots and stereotyping, which raises ominous questions about the trajectory of Indian democracy.

Scratch a Muslim and a fanatic is revealed, goes the argument laid down with supreme self-assurance by the nationalistic Hindu, laboring under imagined victimhood. Proof of this was on display in Gujarat recently, where good, middle-class Hindus, having done their armchair posturing, finally got a chance to go out and throw rocks at their Muslim neighbors because it was time “they” were “taught a lesson.”

The state is partly responsible for the reinforcing of stereotypes, as demonstrated some months ago by the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. At a public rally in the state of Goa, Mr. Vajpayee was reported as saying that wherever there are Muslims in the world, there is strife. “Once Islam meant tolerance, truth and compassion—from what I see now, it has come to mean forcing their opinion through terror and fear. Islam is run on *jehad*.”

As the statement made its way through the media, drawing criticism and making Indian diplomats squirm at international forums, the Indian government sought to put a spin on it, claiming the prime minister had been quoted out of context. But the message was clear. “We were secular even in the early days when Muslims and Christians were not here,” Mr. Vajpayee had said in the latter part of his speech. “We have allowed them to do their prayers and follow their religion.”

State-endorsed bigotry raised its ugly head in the corridors of power yet again when in April 2002, Gujarat Civil Supplies Minister Bharat Barot sent a letter to Gujarat Minister of State for Home

10. *The Week* (New Delhi), 7 April 2002.

Gordhan Zadaphia seeking to dismantle three relief camps in his constituency, Dariapur-Kazipur, in the city of Ahmedabad. The camps shelter more than six thousand survivors of the murderous violence in the city. Hindu residents said they felt insecure because of the large numbers of Muslims in the camps.”<sup>11</sup> Barot’s plea, however, was turned down, thanks to vehement criticism of the state government’s obvious disinclination to suppress the rioting.

For many in the ruling establishment, including the prime minister, Muslims are most definitely “the other.” Furthermore, “they” must live according to the diktat of “us,” the majority. Several others think no differently. In a press interview, Dr. Pravin Togadia, general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) or the World Hindu Council, proclaimed: “The Indian polity has become a slave to jihadi vote bank [sic].” This sentiment was reiterated in the latter part of the interview, in which Dr. Togadia said that Muslims would “have to prove their credentials if they want to live in peace.”<sup>12</sup>

Add to this the paranoia that has been needlessly evoked by state authorities at the highest level and which has predictably, and menacingly, percolated down to the lower levels of the state hierarchy. The state theory—scratch a Muslim and you’ll find a terrorist—got a boost after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in the United States and the December 13, 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament. These incidents led to focused as well as random targeting of individuals suspected of having committed, or about to commit acts of terrorism. Well-meaning individuals have been dubbed “pseudo-secularists” and criticized for helping the ninety thousand refugees across the state of Gujarat, most of whom are Muslim.

However, political manipulation and state apathy are not the only factors responsible for the rise of religious radicalism. The complicity of the state apparatus, as was evident during the recent rioting in Gujarat in India, has ensured that those who targeted Muslim citizens will have no qualms about taking up arms again at the first opportunity. In the case of Gujarat, the state did not even pretend to be neutral.

Attempts to deal with the perceived “enhanced security threat” have resulted in bizarre, and often tragic, incidents. In January 2002,

11. Ibid.

12. “The New Untouchables” (interview) in *The Week* (New Delhi) April 2002, 36.

three young Muslim men were detained at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport after they were "reported" by a person sitting next to them. The three men, who had come from Rampur in Uttar Pradesh to pick up their teacher, were speaking Urdu. Their conversation was about the general problems faced at airports, the Urdu word for "problem" being *masa'il*. Struck by the thought that the three bearded men were talking about missiles, a man sitting next to them reported the matter to the police, who promptly took the three men into custody.<sup>13</sup> It took the policemen and the Intelligence Bureau officials twelve hours of interrogation to realize their mistake and set the men free.

In the same month, police in the northern Indian city of Lucknow arrested two Jordanians and a Palestinian for possessing false documents and overstaying, both valid grounds for arrest. However, the police went a step further. The men were declared as Hamas activists. Officials in the Ministry of External Affairs later clarified that not only did the three men have no links to the Palestinian organization, but Hamas was also not on India's list of watched terrorist organizations. The paranoia, as it turns out, is not confined to the lower levels of the administration. As a newspaper reported recently, a paper prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs to justify the ban on the Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) claims, "SIMI has maintained links with international organizations like [the] Muslim Students Union, a pro-Hamas Union of Palestinian Students in India and Pakistan." The ministry does not explain why the alleged association is a crime in the first place. There is no ban on the groups SIMI mentions in its paper; the so-called link therefore is not a justification.<sup>14</sup>

Another instance was the arrest of left-wing university students distributing pamphlets denouncing the American campaign in Afghanistan. Six members of the Democratic Student's Union and the All-India People's Resistance Forum in New Delhi were arrested on 8 October 2001 for distributing pamphlets against the U.S. bombing on Afghanistan. The police justified its actions saying that it wanted to pre-empt any communal tension that may have arisen on account of the contents of the pamphlets. The students were arrested and remanded to ten days' judicial custody. Conscientious protest is a

13. *Times of India* (New Delhi), 16 January 2002.

14. *Times of India* (New Delhi), 1 February 2002.

cornerstone of democracy, which is further protected in India under Article 19(1) (a) of the constitution (freedom of speech and expression). The obsession with “national security,” however, is being carried to absurd lengths, stifling democratic dissent and jeopardizing the right to life and liberty.

It is clear that the enforcing of stricter guidelines has been restricted to Muslims, presumably because of the widespread misconception that all Muslims are terrorists or anti-nationals. The hostile mood of the times has been exacerbated by the Indian government’s aggressive posture on the matter.

For example, a typical reaction to a terrorist strike, or the threat of a strike, involves police raids on areas where minority communities are concentrated. Following the attack on the Indian parliament, an “extensive exercise” was launched to “verify the antecedents” of the three thousand-odd Kashmiri woolen garment traders staying in the city.<sup>15</sup> The traders arrive in the city every winter and return to Kashmir after the snow in the Kashmir Valley melts. Many of them claimed they had been asked to leave the capital immediately, a charge denied by the police. Any freeze on their businesses, the traders said, would deprive them of an entire year’s earnings since there were few employment opportunities available in the valley.

While any attack on the seat of government would call for enhanced security measures, the near-reflexive targeting of certain sections of the population has become routine. Being overcautious or paranoid about finding a terrorist in every Muslim or in every peaceful protestor is no different from the Salem witch-hunts or the McCarthy-era targeting of communists. Such targeting not only casts unfair aspersions on the targeted group, but also amounts to a tacit rejection of the rights of protest and free speech of other groups and communities.

A recent attempt to bring *madrassas* (Islamic seminaries) under scrutiny has been driven by the assumption that these institutions are partly responsible for fomenting “anti-national” activities using funds received from Islamic countries, most notably Saudi Arabia. However, somewhat predictably, governments have shown little interest in promoting economic development projects where madrasa graduates can find gainful employment.

15. *The Tribune*, 16 December 2001.

There is no denying that a sharp dualism characterizes Muslim education in South Asia today. On one hand are the madrassas, still relatively impervious to change, barring minor, local-level experiments. On the other hand there are modern, Western-style secular schools. The Islam the former teach leaves little room for creative interpretation, and it is from this tradition that many political tendencies in the subcontinent, including the Taliban, have emerged. An overwhelming majority of the madrassas in South Asia carry on by merely teaching the compendium of medieval commentaries. Few, if any, have dared to depart from the traditional focus on jurisprudence or have even attempted to come up with new ways of understanding Islam in the light of modern conditions. Nor is there any indication of a widespread desire to break the shackles of “blind conformity” (*taqlid*) to medieval Islamic jurisprudence, itself a product of the medieval Arab world. If other religions are taught, it is merely for polemical purposes and to prove them “false.”

Given the worthlessness of madrassa education as far as jobs are concerned, it is not surprising that few middle class Muslim families send their children to madrassas for higher education. Most are content with the basic religious education the *maktab* (part-time primary mosque-school) provides to young children if at all they choose to send their children there. Madrassas were once the preserve of the Muslim elite, providing them an education that trained them to take up posts in the courts of the erstwhile princely rulers. Today most madrassa students come from families that can ill afford the cost of modern education for their children. To make matters worse, few madrassas, if any, have any facility for vocational training for their students. A visitor to the grand Dar-ul-Ulum, Deoband, would be appalled to discover that the only vocational training provided in the largest madrassa in South Asia involves book-binding, calligraphy and watch-repairing classes—all three declining trades with little or no scope for large-scale employment. Not surprisingly, many unemployed madrassa graduates have gone on to become ready fodder for fundamentalist Islamist groups. Given the sort of education they receive, madrassa graduates may be equipped to work as *imams* (preachers) in mosques and teachers in madrassas, but little else, and even these positions are limited. The bulk of the students are probably led to join the ever-growing mass of the unemployable unemployed.

Leading South Asian Muslim scholars who do not identify themselves with any particular school of thought or system of jurisprudence, such as Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, Nejatullah Siddiqui and Asghar Ali Engineer, have argued for a more thorough revamping of the madrassa curriculum to make it consonant with modern demands. However, their voices are barely heard. In his recent book, *Dini Madaris: Masa'il Aur Taqazey* (Religious Schools: Problems and Demands), the well-known Islamist scholar and leading Jamaat-i-Islami ideologue, Nejatullah Siddiqui, writes that the madrassa system desperately needs to be revamped if it is to have any relevance in the modern context.

Today, all over South Asia, perhaps barring Afghanistan, Muslims are increasingly advocating reforms in the madrassa system to make it more relevant to modern times. Some see reform as the only way to prevent the madrassas from emerging as breeding grounds of Taliban-style militants. Several madrassas are now experimenting with new methods of teaching, including using computers in instruction and encouraging access to the Internet. Some madrassas have now begun teaching “modern” disciplines, including English, mathematics, science and history. Several have introduced texts and tracts by modern Muslim thinkers. Efforts are underway to develop a standardized syllabus and evaluation procedures for the madrassas, but given the sharp sectarian divisions, this seems to be an uphill task. Rumblings of change are now being heard even within the seemingly impregnable walls of the Deoband Madrassa. The madrassa now has a computer section and a website of its own, modern technology being pressed into the service of a time-tested theology.

Despite these changes and absence of any clinching proof of the connection between madrassas and Islamic militancy, the suspicion and paranoia persist. In a recent interview, Rajnath Singh, the former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh—a state where anti-madrassa tirades have been at their shrillest—admitted that there was no evidence yet of madrassas being hotbeds of Islamic militancy. “We are not looking at every madrassa with suspicion,” Singh claimed, “though it is true that we are getting some complaints from the border.” However, he added, “we don’t have clinching proof as yet.”<sup>16</sup>

16. *Times of India* (New Delhi), 21 February 2002.

The atmosphere of distrust was not helped by an earlier pronouncement by Prime Minister Vajpayee that extraordinary measures were necessary because of the “undeclared state of emergency” the country found itself in. With this statement, made in the context of the ongoing confrontation with Pakistan, the prime minister unwittingly echoed the point that an undeclared state of emergency prevails in the country. A necessary step following such an assertion is to formally acknowledge—and give notice of—a state of emergency through the relevant domestic and international mechanisms. Barring that, extraordinary measures cannot be justified. None of this, however, has been forthcoming.

In the absence of a formal process of declaring a state of emergency and abiding by the requirements of such a declaration, bald assertions such as the one made by the prime minister serve only to reinforce the general feeling of insecurity. The injudicious, off-hand use of such terms such as “emergency measures” gives a trivial slant to a matter that may have crucial implications for the protection of fundamental liberties.

It should be recalled that there has been no evidence that Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in Afghanistan had any Muslims from India in their ranks. Nor have Indian Muslims been involved in Kashmir militancy in any significant manner. Instead, they have become a victim of both Muslim and Hindu fundamentalism. Demonization of a group makes it easy for—and gives reason to—security forces to act against that group with impunity. State officials at the lower levels must be made aware of the need to adopt an approach based on research and intelligence information in the countering of terrorist activities. The unthinking targeting and harassment of “suspects” will serve only to alienate the targeted groups, leading to resentment and raising the prospect of a violent response to state atrocities.

While Islamic madrassas are being targeted, the state has maintained a disturbing silence on the role and functioning of the institutions run by Hindu fundamentalists such as the VHP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Though there are inherent differences, the aims of the RSS-run *shakhas* (training cells) and Saraswati *shishu mandirs* (kindergartens) are strikingly similar to, and no less dangerous than, the madrassas all over Pakistan and Afghanistan, which spawned the Taliban.<sup>17</sup>

17. Arundhati Roy, “Democracy: Who Is She When She’s at Home?” *Outlook India*, 28 April 2002.

The VHP is a key element of India's right-wing Hindu fundamentalist movement. It runs camps that purport to teach Hindu philosophy, polemics, yoga, physical fitness and other Indian systems for physical well-being,<sup>18</sup> but evidence points to a more radical use of these camps. In 2000, "The VHP ... completed a week-long training camp on target practice, held at its headquarters in Ayodhya ... The site was closed off to all outsiders and the daily schedule has been kept secret, though some Bajrang Dal sources submit that it was modeled along the lines of Israel's Mossad."<sup>19</sup> Members said the training was intended to counter the growing influence of both Pakistani intelligence and anti-social elements within the society.<sup>20</sup> Before the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, the VHP and Bajrang Dal had trained their volunteers on pulling down old but strong structures. According to some Bajrang Dal insiders, at least half of the training programs in Ayodhya within the last two years involved "constructive programs" that taught volunteers how to tear down old buildings and build new temples.<sup>21</sup>

The VHP agenda is largely imparted through "moral education" and "general knowledge" texts that focus on "Hindu" consciousness and "pride in being a Hindu." In government-run schools in BJP-ruled states and in the twenty thousand-odd schools and shishu mandirs all over the country, the prescribed syllabus presents Indian culture as Hindu culture, totally denying its pluralistic character and the contribution of the minorities to the creation of the Indian identity. Everything Indian is shown to be of Hindu origin; minorities are characterized as foreigners owing their first allegiance to political forces outside this country.

In 2000, several sangh parivar members visited six thousand (official estimate; unofficial estimate fourteen thousand) schools to present books to classrooms.<sup>22</sup> Seemingly harmless, there are hidden dangers

18. Venkitesh Ramakrishnan, "Busy at Karsevakpuram," *Frontline* 17, no. 13 (24 June – 7 July 2000).

19. See "Beyond the Church Burnings and Priest Killing: Attacks on the Christian Minorities in India," Human Rights Feature (HRF/25/00), Joint Initiative of South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center and Human Rights Documentation Center (28 August 2000).

20. *Ibid.*

21. Ramakrishnan, "Busy at Karsevakpuram."

22. Apratim Mukarji, "How to Rewrite History, RSS-style," *The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 5 June 2000.

in such acts. Historical facts cited in textbooks are being altered by the sangh parivar. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, along with the usual subjects taught to schoolchildren, five additional subjects dealing with Hindu or Hindutva philosophy are taught.<sup>23</sup> In 1998 in the state of Uttar Pradesh, the *Saraswati vandana* (a hymn to goddess Saraswati) was made compulsory at all state-funded schools in contravention of Article 28 of the constitution.<sup>24</sup> Muslim children have been forced to sing it, and have, moreover, been humiliated for not singing it right.<sup>25</sup>

In 2000, the ruling coalition government dominated by the BJP introduced sweeping purges in all centrally funded research institutes, such as the Indian Council of Historical Research, the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research, the Indian Council of Philosophical Research and the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. Breaking most institutional norms and rules, these bodies have been cleansed of subject experts and renowned scholars, and packed with men distinguished by RSS sympathies. This would not be a great cause for worry if the RSS-BJP and its sibling organizations had within their ranks men and women capable of articulating their ideology. But the problem for the RSS-BJP is that they do not have any credible ideologues. Some of their chosen mouthpieces, such as Professor M.L. Sondhi (former member of the BJP's national executive committee), are now accusing the party of pushing the country toward obscurantism.<sup>26</sup>

Elsewhere too in the South Asian region, the ruling political leadership appears bent on suppressing those who dare oppose its theories of culture and civilization. The speed and ferocity with which political leaders are diminishing the civil and political rights of their constituencies indicates that South Asia is in for a prolonged period of turmoil.

23. C. Shamsheer, "Left to Counter Saffron Teaching in HP Schools," *The Indian Express* (New Delhi), 17 June 2000.

24. Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions. (1) No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of state funds.

25. Tanika Sarkar, "Hindu Rashtra or Secular State," *The Hindu*, 24 November 1998, [www.mnet.fr/aiindex/tsarkar.html](http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/tsarkar.html).

26. HRD Ministry—His Master's Voice; *The Hindu*, 29 April 2001.

## Bangladesh

DESPITE ITS COMMITMENT to secularism, the Bangladesh government has tended to protect the interests of the Muslim majority. Several discriminatory and racist aspects of the law, development approaches and programs, and the education system remain in effect. The state appears to be powerless, or at least weak, in its effort to combat religious extremism, to the detriment of Hindus and other minorities. Since the elections of October 2001, and the installation of a new right-wing regime headed by Begum Khalida Zia, and backed by the fundamentalist Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), communal tensions and Islamist extremist mobilisation have risen dramatically. The militant and pro-Pakistan Jamaat-i-Islami has sixteen members elected to the Bangladesh parliament. The Jamaat has two ministers in the new government. During the election campaign, the Islamist organizations had declared that if voted to power, they would make sure Bangladesh was made an Islamic state. There has also been a sudden escalation in atrocities against minorities in Bangladesh since the BNP came to power, leading to increased distress migration into the Indian state of Tripura. The Hindu-dominated areas in Barisal, Bhola, Pirojpur, Gazipur and Chittagong in Bangladesh have been the worst hit.

The new government has adopted a lame duck approach to the violence. The government's insensitivity to any scrutiny of its treatment of minorities is indicated by the detention of Shariyar Kabir, an independent documentary filmmaker. Mr. Kabir, who was returning from Kolkata after investigating the condition of Bangladeshi refugees in India, was detained for being "in possession of documents which can endanger the stability of the country."<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Kabir told the BBC that his group, the South Asian Coalition against Fundamentalism, had collected evidence from the victims who had fled the country, and would publish its findings soon. Mr. Kabir was charged under Special Powers Act, 1974, a national security legislation.<sup>28</sup>

27. "Vested Interest: Dhaka Legalizes Dispossession," Human Rights Features (April 2002); Asia Pacific Human Rights Network, special weekly edition for the duration of the 58th Session of the Commission on Human Rights (Geneva: April 2002).

28. Ibid.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is now not only sanctioning attacks on Hindu minorities in her new regime, but has made these attacks a part of the backlash on the minorities for having supported the Awami League in the elections. School texts are being rewritten to serve sectarian ends. Women's rights are being seriously compromised in view of the ruling party's alliance with fundamentalists in the new political regime. The current plight of minorities is at its worst since Bangladesh's formation as an independent nation. Though, in theory, the Constitution of Bangladesh is secular and provides for religious plurality, in practice this is not so. The government is sensitive to the consciousness of the Muslim majority; it is Islam that exerts a powerful influence on the politics.

Attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh are not a new phenomenon. The community has suffered discrimination and harassment since the 1947 Partition of India. In 1965, following the Indo-Pakistan war, the then Pakistan government introduced the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II of 1965. The Defense of Pakistan Rules identified the minority Hindus in then East Pakistan as enemies and dispossessed them of their properties.

On 9 April 2001, the parliament of Bangladesh passed the Vested Properties Return Act 2001 (VPA), intended to return the vested properties to their original owners. However, in all probability, it will merely serve to legalize the omissions and commissions committed under a patently discriminatory law.

The consequences of the continuation of the VPA have been devastating. The Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), a Dhaka-based non-governmental organization (NGO), estimates that a total of 1,048,390 Hindu households have been affected by the VPA, and estimates that 1.05 million acres of land have been dispossessed. About 30 percent of the Hindu households (including those that are categorized as missing households), or ten out of every thirty-four Hindu households, are victims. These estimates, although based on various plausible assumptions, should be considered as sufficiently indicative of the gravity of the situation.

With Dhaka's consistent refusal to acknowledge the fact of discrimination against its minorities, and in view of its record on ameliorating their condition, it is also highly improbable that a regulation—and a flawed one at that—such as the VPA will be implemented in the near future.

## Sri Lanka

THE SITUATION IN SRI LANKA is no different. The over-centralized state of Sri Lanka seems to be far removed from the day-to-day existence of its citizens. Being overwhelmed by two contrary forces—Sinhala Buddhist majoritarianism and Tamil separatism—the state has used most of its resources in augmenting its military machine. The social structure and moral fabric at all levels of society have suffered considerable damage. Fear and insecurity pervade all segments of the population, as torture, rape and murder have become customary weapons of war in bouts of violence and retaliation.<sup>29</sup>

The civil war has placed the nation's minorities in dire situations. While the Sri Lankan government generally respects the rights of religious minorities—namely the Hindus (15 percent),<sup>30</sup> Muslims (8 percent)<sup>31</sup> and Christians (8 percent)<sup>32</sup>—the continued discrimination against the Ceylon and Indian Tamils has trickled down to the minority religious groups. Religious and ethnic minority groups such as the Tamils, Muslims, Christians, Burghers and Veddhas are all feeling the trickle effect of the war; arbitrary arrest, detention, extrajudicial killings, rape and torture continue.

While the brutal tactics used by the LTTE have undoubtedly caused a great deal of resentment and tension between the Tamil people and the Sinhalese majority, the social response has only abetted discrimination and intolerance toward the Tamil people. The government's severe anti-terrorism legislation effectively enabled a nationwide pogrom of Tamils in Sri Lanka. The systematic absence of investigation, either civil or military, into violations of the right to life has left security officers unaccountable for their actions. Investigations are rarely conducted, and when they are, they do not lead to the appropriate convictions or penalties.<sup>33</sup> While civilians who peacefully exercise

29. National Peace Council (NPC) of Sri Lanka, "The Economic, Socio-political and Human Cost of the War in Sri Lanka" (Colombo: National Peace Council Press, January 2001).

30. See the Religion Around the World website at [http://atheism.miningco.com/religion/atheism/library/irf99/bl\\_irf\\_srilanka99.htm](http://atheism.miningco.com/religion/atheism/library/irf99/bl_irf_srilanka99.htm).

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. United Nations Economic and Social Council: "Extrajudicial, Summary of Arbitrary Executions: Report of the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Bacre Waly Ndiaye, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1997/61—Visit to Sri Lanka, para. 120.

their fundamental civil and political rights are charged and sentenced to years of imprisonment, soldiers and policemen who flagrantly violate the rights of innocent civilians suffer minimal consequences.<sup>34</sup>

While it is understandable that the Sri Lankan government is focusing its attention on finding a solution to end the ethnic strife, it is using the conflict as an excuse to place the minorities at the margins. In the 1972 Sri Lankan Constitution, Buddhism was given a primary place as the country's religion, further antagonizing the Hindu, Muslim and Christian minority groups; most of these minorities are not ethnically Sinhalese.<sup>35</sup> The importance of Buddhism was again emphasised in Sri Lanka's 1978 Constitution and Article 9 of the current 1993 Constitution, which accords Buddhism the "foremost place" and mandates the state to protect and foster the *Buddha Sasana* (rule of Buddha).<sup>36</sup>

Sri Lanka's post-independence electoral system offers few mechanisms through which the country's minorities can protect their rights against the Sinhalese majority, thereby ensuring that Sinhalese-dominated governments remain in power. Some nine hundred thousand upcountry Tamils were disenfranchised in 1948. The system of territorial representation gives Sinhalese political parties two-thirds of the government seats.<sup>37</sup>

Governments portray an international image of equal treatment to both communities, such as the Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka, but it is clear that there are strong biases. Rather than keeping their image in the international community clean and untarnished, cosmetic policies and behavior have had the opposite effect. Under the guise of national security, armed forces are misusing the powers they have obtained from the Emergency Regulations and Prevention of Terrorism Act, thereby annulling all other national and international legislation that protects the rights of minorities. These laws enable political and security officials at all levels to participate in a visceral and illogical counter-campaign of terror, oftentimes more brutal and inhumane than the war waged by their counterparts.

34. *Ibid.*, para. 145

35. "Timeline: Sri Lanka," BBC News, 1 March 2001, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south\\_asia/newsid\\_1166000/1166237.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/world/south_asia/newsid_1166000/1166237.stm).

36. Law and Society Trust, *Sri Lanka: State of Human Rights* (London, 1993), 310.

37. S. D. Muni, *Pangs of Proximity: India and Sri Lanka's Ethnic Crisis* (New Delhi, 1993).

The government has been contradictory in its approach to dealing with the conflict. Despite stressing its willingness for a peaceful solution and compromise, the government issued a statement in July 2001 warning of an imminent “full-scale war,” leading many to wonder whether the Sri Lankan government believes the only way to end the country’s long-running Tamil insurgency is through violence.<sup>38</sup> The large body of ruthless anti-terrorism and emergency legislation in force suggests that the government is willing to go to all lengths—and even carry out further suppression of fundamental human rights—to defeat the Tamils by force. The most recent set of emergency regulations issued in May 2000 grants more unbridled and unchecked powers to security officers and adds to those already in place. This trend does not bode well for hopes for a peaceful solution to Sri Lanka’s woes.

In the name of national security and the war, the Sri Lankan government has misused its powers, annulling all other rights protected by national and international legislation. Concerted efforts are needed by the Sri Lankan government, the LTTE and the international community to curb the further degradation of human rights. Until substantial changes take place, discrimination and consequent violence, insecurity and human rights violations will remain a fact of life for minorities in Sri Lanka.

A closer examination of the dynamics of the modern nation-state in the South Asian region provides the key to understanding how the politics of the region together with state mechanisms have produced insecurity for its people. The arbitrary functioning of the states has created an economic and social crisis, which is not an aberration but a malady.

Most South Asian countries are at the very bottom of the world league in social and human development. Economic deprivation, illiteracy, and unemployment have spawned intolerance and extremism. Cuts in subsidies on health and education and other welfare expenditures have eroded subsistence levels, which have contributed in no small measure to the creation of fertile ground for sectarian propaganda and the manufacture of storm troopers for sectarian killings.

Nepal is a case in point.

38. In an official statement to the LTTE, the government stressed, “It is the duty of the government to defend the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka. It will do so by every means at its command.” See CNN News, “Sri Lanka Wars Tigers of Full-scale War,” <http://asia.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/south/07/02/srilanka.tigers/index.html>.

## Nepal

NEPAL IS CURRENTLY STRUGGLING with a strong undercurrent of social and political instability, with no clear end in sight. The advent of democracy in 1990 brought about a new constitution full of assurances of freedom and equality, but brought few changes for the common villager. Poverty, a lack of social services, and weaknesses in basic sanitation and water resource infrastructures remain pressing problems for rural and indigenous peoples, though economic development and poverty alleviation have been the primary objectives of the Nepali budget in recent years. In the past fifty years, millions of dollars in aid have been dispensed to Nepal, yet very little of this money has led to direct improvement in the lives of Nepali citizens. While there is almost no limit to the reasons why aid has had such a limited impact in Nepal, topping the list is the overemphasis of aid efforts on the Kathmandu Valley, corruption, patronage, and a lack of accountability. Moreover, there has been a rise of a violent Maoist movement in which more than 1,700 people, including civilians, police and rebels, have died. The insurgency, proclaimed a “people’s war” by the rebels, appears far from over.<sup>39</sup>

The Maoist war has contributed to tensions between the minority ethnic groups and low-caste peoples in rural areas and the upper-caste Hindus who maintain a weakening control of the country. The movement has continued to grow, aggravated by the response of the government to the problem mainly involving authoritarian policies, arbitrary arrests and torture of innocent people. The “encircle and kill” policy of the police often targets innocent people.<sup>40</sup> Sixty-eight of the seventy-five districts in the country come under this policy.<sup>41</sup> This has led to heightened scepticism of the government and its policies.

Although the government frequently speaks of its development agenda, “[d]evelopment work has come to a near complete halt in the hills of Nepal, and even basic delivery programs have been affected in large parts of the country.”<sup>42</sup> While many of the people who most need development help are in Maoist-affected districts (specifically

39. Kulchandra Neupane, “Maoists Escalate Violence, Kill 5 Policemen in Tanahun,” *The Kathmandu Post*, 1 July 2001.

40. Chitra K. Tiwari, “Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Internal Dimensions,” South Asia Analysis Group, paper no. 187 (20 January 2001).

41. *Ibid.*

42. “Day of the Maoist,” *Himal* (May 2001), 19.

the western hills and mountains), the government programs have tended to avoid these areas.

The warfare mentality and the apparent sanction of the state to murderers and extortionists to act as they wish, as part of a central government counter-insurgency strategy in Nepal, are not helping the image of the state machinery in the eyes of the civilian population. Dissatisfied with the government, the people frequently look to the Maoists for justice and change.<sup>43</sup> The Maoists appeal to them by criticizing the government, making broad demands for reform, and cultivating a Robin Hood-type image by distributing spoils taken from raids.<sup>44</sup> It comes as no surprise then that the Maoist movement gains its strength from the discontent of the common people, particularly members of the lowest castes and sub-castes (Kami, Sarki, Damai and others), as well as ethnic *janajati* people (Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar, Tamang, etc.).<sup>45</sup>

## Conclusion

SOUTH ASIA is currently struggling with social and political instability, with no end in sight. There is a growing realization that separatist tendencies arise when people feel disconnected from the structures of power.

It is important to remember that there are no quick-fix solutions to the complex peace and security problems facing South Asia today. Overemphasis on the extent of these security problems provides little guidance with regard to the proper course for future policy. The causes of these problems must be understood more fully, including the degree to which the government itself contributes to disorder and decline.

It is essential that the vision of good governance go beyond rhetoric. For such a vision to really connect with people, it must be embedded in the essential “Ds” of stable governance: democracy, dialogue, development, devolution, and disarmament. A new phase of development and reconstruction that addresses the multitude of educated unemployed would ensure greater participation and accountability and a greater stake in political normalcy and economic stability.

43. See *Human Rights Yearbook 2001* (Kathmandu: INSEC, April 2001), 13; “Mao in the Mountains,” BBC News, 5 April 2001.

44. See “Nepal: Maoist Insurgency,” *South Asia Monitor*, 1 March 2001, [www.csis.org/saprog/sam31.htm](http://www.csis.org/saprog/sam31.htm); “Day of the Maoist,” 11; Pamela Constable, “Maoist Insurgency Gaining Strength in Nepal,” *Washington Post*, 1 May 2001, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) (noting the gratitude of some rural Nepalis who see the Maoist campaign as one against immorality and injustice).

45. Tiwari, “Maoist Insurgency”; “Day of the Maoist.”

# 16

CHARLES H. KENNEDY

## **The Creation and Development of Pakistan's Anti-terrorism Regime, 1997–2002**

**T**he purpose of this paper is to examine the policies of Pakistan relevant to its goal of combating terrorism during the past five years. Regardless of how one defines “terrorism,” Pakistan is a particularly appropriate case study when one approaches policies of “anti-terrorism.” First, the political history of Pakistan is rife with policies designed to combat terrorism in its various guises. Clearly, the Ayub Khan regime was no stranger to the use of policies to justify the suppression of domestic opposition as it PRODA’ed and EBDO’ed its way through periods of guided democracy. One should also not forget Z.A. Bhutto’s contribution to the craft. His Suppression of Terrorist Activities Ordinance, 1975 held the field in the Sindh and Punjab until its repeal in 1997 and remained the law in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Baluchistan until August 2001. Zia ul-Haq was not averse to the use of the extra-judicial device to counter “threats to the state,” and the democratic tag team of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif transformed the use of the ad hoc special court into an art form to combat each other and each other’s political supporters from 1989–97.

Second, Pakistan has had its share—perhaps more than its share—of domestic violence. The ethnonational violence that eventually occasioned the horrors of the Bangladesh civil war is a case in point. But, one should not forget the Baloch nationalist movement (*really* “civil war”), nor the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) disturbances, nor the bloody Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM)-Sindhi riots. Each of these conflicts raised issues similar to those raised during the past five years—the state was challenged by violent opposition; civil order was threatened; the state needed latitude to respond; departures from “normal” legal practice were justifiable, if not required.

Despite these earlier events, however, the post-1997 policies of Nawaz Sharif mark a qualitative departure in the nature of Pakistan’s policies. Nawaz Sharif was the first Pakistani decision maker to craft an “anti-terrorism” strategy.<sup>1</sup> Heretofore, successive Pakistani decision makers had adopted policies designed to target political opponents or to address ethnonational conflict. Such policies, at times, departed from the norm—they were justified as “necessary” or as meeting “emergencies”—and, at times, the targets of such policies were labeled “terrorists.” But, such decision makers did not create an ideology that justified such departures from the norm, they did not create permanent institutions that dealt with “terrorism,” and they did not construct an “anti-terrorism regime.”

### **Constructing the Regime: Nawaz Sharif as “Anti-terrorist”**

ON 18 JANUARY 1997 Mehram Ali, a foot soldier of the Shia militant organization Tehrik Nifaz Fiqh-i-Jafaria (TNFJ), planted a remote-controlled pipe bomb in the grounds of the district court complex in Lahore. He detonated the bomb. When the debris settled the bodies of twenty-three victims were found, including those of Maulana

1. It is important to note that Nawaz Sharif had earlier introduced an anti-terrorism strategy, through the vehicle of the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, which added Article 212-B to the document. The latter amendment allowed for the “establishment of Special Courts for the trial of heinous offenses.” Constitution (Twelfth Amendment) Act, 28 July 1991. This device was designed as a temporary expedient that would stand repealed, if not confirmed by the parliament, three years after its enactment. Accordingly, the Twelfth Amendment and Article 212B expired on 28 July 1994.

Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqi and Maulana Azam Tariq, both members, the latter the chairman, of the Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), a militant Sunni organization. The latter victims had been brought to the Additional Sessions judge's office from the Kot Lakhpat jail where they were serving sentences related to their earlier anti-Shia crimes. Fifty-five others were also injured in the blast. Mehram Ali was caught at the scene but his trial before the Sessions court dragged on. The case generated considerable press coverage and provided the context, perhaps pretext, for the government's introduction of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997, which came into effect on 20 August. The Mehram Ali case was transferred to the newly constituted special Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) in late August, where Ali was awarded a death sentence, convicted for twenty-three counts of murder, and various other sentences related to the bombing. He filed an appeal before the newly constituted Anti-Terrorism Appellate (ATA) Tribunal, also in Lahore. The ATA upheld his conviction. The petitioner then filed a writ petition before the Lahore High Court claiming, among other things, that the formation of the special courts violated provisions of the constitution. The Lahore High Court claimed jurisdiction to hear the appeal, but held that the conviction should still stand. Mehram Ali then filed an appeal to the Supreme Court of Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

The Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 was the brainchild of the Nawaz Sharif administration, which had been returned to power in February 1997 following a landslide victory that left Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League, with an overwhelming majority in the national assembly. The motives for the introduction of the Anti-Terrorism Act were mixed. Clearly, Pakistan had suffered from very significant communal and sectarian violence for the past several years, and the regular criminal justice system had not been able to curb such violence. In this context, the ATCs, with their "promise" of speedy justice, unencumbered by the procedural niceties of the regular court system, would serve as a deterrent to would-be terrorists. Also, Nawaz Sharif and his political allies may have seen merit in establishing a parallel judicial

2. This account is drawn from *Mehram Ali versus Federation of Pakistan* PLD 1998 SC 1445 and S. M. Zafar, "Constitutional Developments in Pakistan, 1997–99," in Charles H. Kennedy and Craig Baxter, eds., *Pakistan: 2000* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 14–15.

system in which the numerous ongoing trials of his political enemies (especially prominent officials of the Pakistan People's Party [PPP]) could be transferred for speedy disposal. In any case, the Anti-Terrorism Act was a bold departure from the normal legal system.<sup>3</sup>

First, the 1997 act broadly defined "terrorism" to include:

Whoever, to strike terror in the people, or any section of the people, or to alienate any section of the people or to adversely affect harmony among different sections of the people, does any act or thing by using bombs, dynamite or other explosive or inflammable substances, or firearms, or other lethal weapons or poisons or noxious gases or chemicals or other substances of a hazardous nature in such a manner as to cause, or to be likely to cause the death of, or injury to, any person or persons, or damage to, or destruction of, property or disruption of any supplies or services essential to the life of the community or displays firearms, or threatens with the use of force public servants in order to prevent them from discharging their lawful duties commits a terrorist act.<sup>4</sup>

Crimes included within the purview of the act were: a) murder; b) the malicious insult of the religious beliefs of any class; c) the use of derogatory remarks in respect of the holy personages; d) kidnapping; e) and various statutes relating to "robbery and dacoity."<sup>5</sup> Clearly, terrorism as defined by the act was in the "eyes of the prosecutor," that is, the terms of the act could be interpreted to include virtually any violent act, or encouragement of the commission of a violent act.

Second, the act created special "anti-terrorism" courts. Such courts would be established by the government in their discretion and would be headed by a judge of a Sessions court, or an additional Sessions judge, or a district magistrate, or a deputy district magistrate, or an advocate with ten or more years of experience appointed by the government. Such judges would have no specific tenure of office, serving at the discretion of the government. Strict time constraints would

3. Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 (20 August 1997). *PLD* 1997 Central Statutes (unreported) 535.

4. Section 6, 537.

5. Schedule, 547–48.

govern the procedures of such special courts—the prosecution would be given seven days to complete the investigation and the court would be given seven days to try the case. The recalling of witnesses would be prohibited and no adjournments, beyond two days, would be countenanced. Those accused of crimes could be tried in absentia if adequate notice concerning the dates of the trial were published in the press. Appeals against conviction and acquittal of such courts would lie *only* with special ATA Tribunals, also constituted at the discretion of the government. Such tribunals would have seven days from receipt of the appeal, which would have to be filed within three days of conviction to render a decision. The decision of the Appellate Tribunal would be final; no further appeal could be entertained. Such special courts would also have the power to have cases pending before other courts (regular courts—Sessions courts, magistrate courts) transferred to its jurisdiction, without the necessity of recalling witnesses.<sup>6</sup>

As stated above, Mehram Ali's case was transferred from a Sessions judge to a special Anti-Terrorism court wherein he was convicted and awarded a death sentence; he appealed to the relevant ATA Tribunal where his conviction was upheld; he then appealed to the Lahore High Court, which claimed standing to hear the appeal despite the terms of the Anti-Terrorism Act, but still upheld the conviction; and then finally he filed an appeal before the Supreme Court. In its decision, *Mehram Ali versus Federation of Pakistan*,<sup>7</sup> the court upheld Mehram Ali's conviction and he was later executed, but the court declared the bulk of the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act to be unconstitutional.

Although the court found nothing inherently unconstitutional in the establishment of special courts for specific and pressing needs of the government, such courts would nonetheless be subject to the rules and procedures of the existing constitutionally established judicial system. That is, (1) judges of such courts would have a fixed and established tenure of service; (2) such special courts would be subject to the same or similar procedural rules as regular courts, including rules of evidence, etc.; and (3) the decisions of such special courts would be subject to appeal before the relevant constitutionally mandated regular courts. Namely, appeal against the decisions of the special courts

6. Sections 12, 14, 19, 24–5, 29, and 31.

7. *Mehram Ali versus Federation of Pakistan*.

would lie with the respective High Courts and ultimately with the Supreme Court. As Ajmal Mian, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court found, the supervision and control over the subordinate judiciary (including the special courts) vests with the High Courts. Moreover, no parallel legal system can be constructed that bypasses the operation of the existing regular courts. Despite this finding the Supreme Court evinced sympathy for the government's avowed intent to speed justice. In a concurring opinion Justice Irshad Hasan Khan stated:

[The] speedy resolution of civil and criminal cases is an important constitutional goal, as envisaged by the principles of policy enshrined in the constitution. It is therefore, not undesirable to create Special Courts for operation with speed but expeditious disposition of cases of terrorist activities/heinous offenses have to be subject to constitution and law.<sup>8</sup>

In light of this finding, the Nawaz Sharif government had no recourse but to amend the Anti-Terrorism Act and incorporate the changes ordered by the Supreme Court. Accordingly, on 24 October 1998 the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 1998 was issued.<sup>9</sup> The new act met all of the objections raised in the *Mehram Ali* case. Therefore, Special Anti-Terrorism courts remained in place but the judges of such courts were granted tenure of office (two years, later extended to two and one-half years); the special Appellate Tribunals were disbanded, appeals against the decisions of the Anti-Terrorism courts would henceforth be to the respective High Courts; and restrictions were placed on the earlier act's provisions regarding trial in absentia to accord with regular legal procedures.

Unfortunately, civil order in Pakistan, particularly in Sindh province, continued to unravel. On 17 October 1998, Hakim Muhammad Said, one of Karachi's most well-known citizens, a former governor of Sindh and founder of the Hamdard Foundation (*Hamdard Islamicus*) and Hamdard University, was murdered. Under increasing pressure

8. *Ibid.*, 1497–98.

9. Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 1998 (24 October 1998). *PLD* 1999 Central Statutes 143.

from within his own political circle—and most likely from the military—to do something to curb such lawlessness and violence, Nawaz Sharif chose to impose Article 232 and declare a state of emergency (Governor's Rule) in Sindh Province. The purpose of the order, as expressed in the order itself, was to empower the governor to take all necessary actions “to create a peaceful environment in which ordinary citizens can conduct their day-to-day affairs in accordance with their constitutional rights and entitlement within the province.”<sup>10</sup>

Such laudable ends, however, led to an invitation to the military, acting in its capacity of “aid to civil power,” to take over law and order duties in Sindh Province. The result was the introduction of a form of martial law that was imposed on the province as a whole, but most enthusiastically implemented in Karachi. Perhaps understandably the military, asked to assume functions beyond its normal duties, desired a free hand in its mission. Standing in its way were the civilian courts, with their procedures and processes and their alleged corruption. The remedy, they insisted, was the creation of military tribunals. Nawaz Sharif complied.

The result, the Pakistan Armed Forces (Acting in Aid of Civil Power) Ordinance, 1998,<sup>11</sup> is a remarkable document. Promulgated on 20 November 1998, the ordinance, which had application only to Sindh Province, extended broad judicial powers to the military. The ordinance granted military officers at the rank of Brigadier and above the right to “convene as many courts as may be deemed necessary to try offenders.” Such courts could try civilians. Appeals against conviction by such courts would lie only with such appellate tribunals as the military authorities deemed necessary to establish. Moreover, cases pending before other courts (regular courts and ATCs) could be transferred to such newly established military courts. The courts would have jurisdiction to award sentences, including the death penalty, for specified crimes. The ordinance also created a “new crime” punishable with a penalty of up to seven years of rigorous imprisonment—the crime of “civil commotion.”

10. Constitution of Pakistan (1973) Article 232 (30 October 1998). *PLD* 1999 Central Statutes 202.

11. Pakistan Armed Forces (Acting in Aid of Civil Power) Ordinance, 1998 (20 November 1998). *PLD* 1999 Central Statutes 156.

“Civil commotion” means creation of internal disturbances in violation of law or intended to violate law, commencement or continuation of illegal strikes, go-slows, lock-outs, vehicle snatching/lifting, damage to or destruction of State or private property, random firing to create panic, charging bhatha [protection money/extortion], acts of criminal trespass, distributing, publishing or pasting of a handbill or making graffiti or wall-chalking intended to create unrest or fear or create a threat to the security of law and order....<sup>12</sup>

On 30 January 1999, the jurisdiction of the ordinance was extended to the whole of Pakistan. Also, the ordinance was amended so that accused “absconders” from justice could be tried in absentia by any military court established in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the government’s claims that this ordinance was temporary and necessary given the breakdown of law and order, there was considerable public opposition to the establishment of the military courts. Political opponents of Nawaz Sharif were particularly hostile to the implementation of the ordinance as it gave his government almost unlimited power to harass and imprison opponents. The invention of the crime of “civil commotion,” particularly subject to implementation by military courts, was very troublesome—many of the activities defined as “crimes” could also be interpreted as “normal” political behavior. Numerous constitutional petitions were filed before the superior courts challenging the validity of the ordinance—the Supreme Court consolidated such petitions and heard the petitioners. The result was the landmark decision—*Liaquat Hussain versus Federation of Pakistan* issued on 22 February 1999.<sup>14</sup>

The *Liaquat Hussain* decision is one of the most unequivocal, if not harsh, decisions ever rendered by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. It wholly repudiates the impugned ordinance, declaring the Pakistan Armed Forces (Aid to Civil) Act “unconstitutional, without legal authority, and with no legal effect.” Furthermore, the court, as per the unanimous decision of the nine-member full Bench, rejected the

12. Section 6, 158.

13. Pakistan Armed Forces (Acting in Aid of Civil Power) (Amendment) Ordinance, 1999 (30 January 1999) *PLD* 1999 Central Statutes 241.

14. *Liaquat Hussain versus Federation of Pakistan* *PLD* 1999 SC 504.

government's contention that the act was designed to be temporary in duration and/or limited only to Sindh Province. Indeed, it uses the evidence of the aforementioned 30 January amendment to the act to prove the government's bad faith. The court also rejected the government's contention that the ordinance was expedient, and defensible under the so-called "doctrine of necessity."

It may be stated that it seems to be correct that after taking over of the executive power by the Governor in Sindh, commission of crimes has been reduced including the acts of terrorism.... Be that as it may ... if the establishment of the Military Courts is not warranted by the constitution, simpliciter the fact that their establishment had contributed to some extent in controlling the law and order situation or the factum of delay in disposal of the criminal cases by the Courts existing under the general laws or under the special laws ... would justify this Court to uphold their validity. In my humble view, if the establishment of the Military Courts under the impugned Ordinance is violative [sic] of the constitution, we cannot sustain the same on the above grounds or on the ground of expediency.... The Doctrine of Necessity cannot be invoked if its effect is to violate any provision of the constitution, particularly keeping in view Article 6 thereof which provides that "Any person who abrogates or attempts or conspires to abrogate, subverts or attempts or conspires to subvert the constitution by use of force or show of force or by other unconstitutional means shall be guilty of high treason."<sup>15</sup>

The court also found the ordinance to be unconstitutional in that: a) civilians cannot be tried by military courts; b) the special courts cannot perform parallel functions to those assigned to regular courts; and c) the military's powers with regard to "aid to civil authority" do not extend to the creation of courts or the exercise of judicial functions.

The court, and particularly the lengthy concurring opinion of Justice Irshad Hasan Khan,<sup>16</sup> was sympathetic with the dilemma facing the

15. *Ibid.*, 595–96.

16. *Ibid.*, 681–853.

government caused by the breakdown of law and order. But, the remedy was in following the advice of the *Mebram Ali* decision. The court also ordered as a procedural amendment to the *Mebram* procedure that cases be assigned to special courts one at a time until the case is decided—that is, that the ATCs should not have a docket of pending cases.

Given the forcefulness of the Supreme Court's verdict, Nawaz Sharif capitulated. On 27 April 1999, the Armed Forces (Acting in Aid of Civil Power) was repealed—however, “civil commotion” was made a crime under the Anti-Terrorism Act.<sup>17</sup> On 27 August the Sharif government made its last revision of the anti-terrorism regime when it further amended the Anti-Terrorism Act to allow for the establishment of ATCs in any province of Pakistan.<sup>18</sup>

On 12 October Nawaz Sharif was removed from power by means of a military coup—General Parvez Musharraf as a result inheriting the anti-terrorism regime from his predecessor.

## **Musharraf's Anti-terrorism Regime**

### **IMMEDIATE CONCERNS**

Parvez Musharraf assumed power in October 1999 saddled with several domestic and international liabilities. Within the previous sixteen months (since May 1998) Pakistan had tested nuclear weapons (thus flaunting the long-standing strictures of the non-proliferation regime and inviting international sanctions), and had initiated a dangerous war (the so-called Kargil Operation) with India, which arguably risked the use of the nuclear weapons earlier tested. Moreover, Pakistan's much-heralded “democratic transition” had been tarnished by successive governments' perceived incompetence and malign neglect. The capstone, however, was the military coup itself. The coup belied the assumption that Pakistan's political system had “evolved” into a permanent democratic form; it also challenged the belief that the “democratic wave” so popular with Western journalists was a universal phenomenon.

17. Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 1999 (27 April 1999). *PLD* 1999 Central Statutes 289.

18. Anti-Terrorism (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 1999 (27 August 1999). *PLD* 2000 Central Statutes 2.

In a practical, albeit Machiavellian sense, the new self-styled “Chief Executive” faced two policy imperatives: (1) he had to deny, finesse, downplay, spin, and/or otherwise confuse the issue of his assumption of power by “martial law”; and (2) he had to legitimize the actions he had taken to seize power—that is, to construct a brief for why the military (read Musharraf) had no choice but to dismiss an elected prime minister.

Accordingly, Musharraf’s first action after seizing power was to promulgate the “Provisional Constitution Order” (PCO). The intent of this document was to deny that Musharraf’s seizure of power constitutes the imposition of martial law. Given the facts, this was a hard sell. Indeed, the vehicle for the argument *was* a “martial law pronouncement” (the PCO), which denied that martial law had been imposed. The PCO claimed that the constitution had remained intact save for those provisions, which contradicted actions taken by the new “Chief Executive”:

Notwithstanding the abeyance of the provisions of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, hereinafter referred to as the constitution, Pakistan shall, subject to this Order and any other Orders made by the Chief Executive, be governed, as nearly as may be, in accordance with the constitution. Subject as aforesaid, all courts in existence immediately before the commencement of this Order, shall continue to function and to exercise their respective powers and jurisdiction provided that the Supreme Court or High Courts and any other court shall not have the powers to make any order against the Chief Executive or any other person exercising powers or jurisdiction under his authority.<sup>19</sup>

It is important to note that Musharraf was careful to give himself the title of “Chief Executive” as opposed to the more traditional “Chief Martial Law Administrator” adopted by his predecessors.

Few bought this martial *hiyal*, but it soon became apparent to the chief executive that only Pakistan’s superior judiciary had standing to call his hand. This occasioned the introduction of the 31 December

19. Provisional Constitution Order no. 1 of 1999 (14 October 1999) *PLD* 1999 Central Statutes 446.

Ordinance that required superior court justices to take a fresh oath of office under the terms of the PCO, *not* the constitution.<sup>20</sup> Six justices of the Supreme Court and nine High Court judges refused to take the new oath and stood retired.<sup>21</sup> The reconstituted and now ostensibly more user-friendly Supreme Court quickly consolidated the numerous writ petitions that had been filed challenging the constitutionality of the military coup and on 12 May 2000 issued its landmark finding—the *Zafar Ali Shah* decision.<sup>22</sup> The decision, among other things, provided legal cover for Musharraf’s actions. It also granted the regime a three-year grace period (until 12 October 2002) to hold general elections and to restore the national and provincial assemblies. When the dust settled following the decision, the military regime (and the chief executive) had held the field. First, Musharraf’s seizure of power had not been defined as constituting an act of “martial law.” An adverse finding would have occasioned a variety of domestic and international problems. Second, the military coup was defined as regrettable but justifiable. Finally, Musharraf’s regime had been granted legitimacy and given “extra-constitutional” cover, for at least three years. That is, Musharraf had accomplished his first policy imperative—to confuse the issue of his assumption of power by martial law.

The accomplishment of the second policy imperative—to discredit the civilian regime he had replaced and to therefore provide justification for the military coup—required the use of Nawaz Sharif’s anti-terrorism regime itself. On 2 December 1999, Musharraf introduced two amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance. The first extended the schedule of offenses cognizable by the Anti-Terrorism courts to include several other provisions of Pakistan’s criminal code. The courts’ extended jurisdiction would now include: (1) Section 109—abetment of offense; (2) Section 120—concealing a design to commit an offense; (3) Section 120B—criminal conspiracy to commit a crime punishable by death or with imprisonment greater than two years; (4) Section 121—waging or attempting to wage war against

20. Oath of Office (Judges) Order, 1999 (31 December 1999) *PLD* 2000 Central Statutes 38.

21. Those refusing to take the oath in the Supreme Court were Chief Justice Saeduzaman Siddiqui, and Justices Mamoon Kazi, Khalilur Rehman Khan, Nasir Aslam Zahid, Wajihuddin Ahmad, and Kamal Mansur Alam. Justice Irshad Hasan Khan, who took the new oath, became the new chief justice.

22. *Zafar Ali Shah versus Parvez Musharraf, Chief Executive of Pakistan* *PLD* 2000 SC 869.

Pakistan; (5) Section 121A—conspiracy to commit certain offenses against the state; (6) Section 122—collecting arms with the intent to wage war; (7) Section 123—concealment with intent to facilitate waging of war; (8) Section 365—kidnapping; (9) Section 402—being one of five or more persons assembled for the purposes of committing dacoity; and (10) Section 402 B—conspiracy to commit hijacking.<sup>23</sup> The second, 2 December amendment established two new special courts, one to be located at the Lahore High Court, the other at the Karachi High Court. Each of these new courts would be headed by a High Court judge and each would have the power to “transfer, claim, or readmit any case within that province.” These courts would also serve as Appellate Tribunals for the ATCs.<sup>24</sup>

With these two amendments in place, the government turned its attention to the disposal of the case brought against Nawaz Sharif and his co-conspirators. The government’s case against the former prime minister was designed to bring criminal charges against Nawaz Sharif, which if successful would effectively end his political career, and to absolve Chief Executive Musharraf from any liability associated with staging the military coup of 12 October. The actual charges brought by the government, to an outside observer, seem a bit unusual, if not bizarre. Essentially the facts presented were that Prime Minister Sharif had made the decision to remove General Musharraf from his position of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) but delayed the execution of that decision until Musharraf was away from Rawalpindi. Therefore, when Musharraf went to Colombo, Sri Lanka to attend a conference, Nawaz Sharif struck. Allegedly, Sharif was hopeful that by the time Musharraf had returned the unpleasantness associated with the dismissal of the COAS would have subsided. However, Nawaz Sharif’s plans were foiled when key elements of the military remained loyal to Musharraf and refused to accept the actions of the prime minister. When Nawaz Sharif learned that his dismissal of Musharraf was encountering resistance, and in light of Musharraf’s imminent return to Karachi (the latter had boarded a PIA commercial flight destined for Karachi), Musharraf struck. He ordered that the flight not be allowed to land in Pakistan. Various offi-

23. Anti-Terrorism (Second Amendment) Ordinance, 1999 (2 December 1999) *PLD* 2000 Central Statutes 8.

24. Anti-Terrorism (Third Amendment) Ordinance, 1999 (2 December 1999) *PLD* 2000 Central Statutes 78.

cials of PIA and the airport authority cooperated with the prime minister's directive, while others failed to cooperate with the directive, but in any case, the aircraft, carrying not only General Musharraf but also more than one hundred other passengers, was diverted from its original flight path. This diversion, in turn, "threatened the lives" of the passengers as the aircraft was running out of fuel and could not comply with the directive to land outside of Pakistan. Eventually, the relevant airport authorities relented, perhaps owing to the involvement of military personnel who had in the meantime occupied the Karachi airport. The plane landed, its passengers inconvenienced and scared, but safe.

Therefore, given the charges that were to be brought against the ex-prime minister, the 2 December amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance were crucial. The crimes for which Nawaz Sharif would be charged (Sections 109, 120B, 121, 121A, 122, 123, 365, and 402B) were not cognizable before the ATCs prior to the amendments. Ostensibly, then, without the amendments such charges would have had to be filed with the regular courts. Moreover, the apparent venue of such a prospective trial would have been Lahore, *not* Karachi (Lahore is Nawaz Sharif's hometown). That is, the aforementioned amendments were designed to improve the probability of the timely conviction of Nawaz Sharif. Accordingly, one of the main defense strategies of Nawaz Sharif's attorneys was to challenge the standing of the Karachi Anti-Terrorism court, to which his case was assigned. This petition was rejected on 12 January 2000, and the trial was held. On 6 April the Karachi ATC court announced its verdict—Nawaz Sharif was convicted of conspiracy to hijack the PIA flight and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Charges against his seven co-defendants were dropped.<sup>25</sup>

One could speculate that if this case had been brought before the regular court system the result may have been different. The thread of evidence linking Nawaz Sharif to the "hijacking" was weak, at best. Certainly, a trial conducted through the regular courts would have taken far longer to complete. In any event, Nawaz Sharif appealed the decision to the Appellate Tribunal of the Sindh High Court. But the appeal was never heard; while the appeal was pending, the govern-

25. The trial was covered extensively by the major Pakistani dailies. See on-line editions of *Dawn* and *The News* (Jang group).

ment struck a deal with Nawaz Sharif and his family. In December 2000 Nawaz Sharif and his family were allowed to leave the country for Saudi Arabia. It was reported that the Sharif family was fined more than Rps. 20 million (\$400,000) and agreed to the forfeiture of property worth in excess of Rps. 500 million (\$10 million) as part of the deal.<sup>26</sup> It is generally acknowledged that this exile effectively ended Nawaz Sharif's political career. Indeed, neither he nor any of his immediate family members were allowed to contest the October 2002 general elections. Therefore, Musharraf's second policy imperative—to legitimize the military coup—had been accomplished.

With this "mission" accomplished the Musharraf regime turned its attention to other matters that rarely involved the anti-terrorism courts. And, as time passed, such courts became increasingly integrated into the legal structure of Pakistan. The ATCs began to assume the characteristics, both good and ill, of regular courts. The process of adjudication as specified in the Anti-Terrorism Act, which had established that cases should be investigated within one week and that cases once accepted should take no longer than seven working days to be disposed, was largely ignored. Also, ignored in practice was the *Liaquat Hussain* directive that anti-terrorism courts would be assigned only one case to dispose of at a time. Indeed, by mid-2001 some anti-terrorism courts had very significant dockets; delays of several months in the disposition of cases were the norm rather than the exception.<sup>27</sup>

An extreme example of this tendency is provided by tracing the history of the Hakim Muhammad Said case. As mentioned above, the murder of Hakim Said, on 17 October 1998, had led to Nawaz Sharif's declaration of the state of emergency in Sindh Province. The suspects in the case, nine activists in the MQM, were arrested and their case was tried before an anti-terrorism court in Karachi. They were convicted and sentenced to death on 4 June 1999. The conviction was appealed to the respective ATA, but before the case could be disposed it was transferred to the newly created military courts. There the case stayed until the military courts were disbanded as a consequence of the *Liaquat Hussain* decision. The case was accordingly

26. See *Dawn*, 10 December 2000 (online edition).

27. Hundreds of cases were pending before ATCs in August 2001. *Dawn* reported on 31 August that 451 cases were pending in the three Sindh-based ATCs. *Dawn*, 31 August 2001 (online edition).

transferred to the Anti-Terrorism Appellate branch of the Sindh High Court, which finally disposed of the appeal by acquitting all nine accused on 31 May 2001. The court accepted the defense contentions that the original trial court had violated numerous provisions relating to the gathering and presentation of evidence—including falsifying relevant evidence. The Hakim Said case belied the intentions of the framers of the Anti-Terrorism Act—to provide speedy and effective justice. Not only did the case take nearly three years to be disposed, but the state had accused and convicted the wrong people, while those who actually committed the murder remain unknown and at large.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps Pakistan's anti-terrorism regime would have eventually expired, the victim of bureaucratic inattention, but international political events revived the regime in the late summer and fall of 2001.

#### **THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF “ANTI-TERRORISM”**

Although Parvez Musharraf had largely dealt with immediate domestic threats to his regime, Pakistan—and more specifically his government—was still viewed by the international community, and particularly the United States, with concern and suspicion. Pakistan still suffered from the economic effects occasioned by the sanctions imposed on the government following its nuclear weapons testing. Pakistan was also less than a favorite of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), human rights groups, and financial institutions owing to its non-democratic government. Also, Pakistan was viewed as unstable, subject to internal disturbances, and generally a bad business risk. Moreover, the Pakistan military and its shadowy (if seemingly all-powerful) institutional ally, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), were generally acknowledged as responsible for the creation and sustenance of the Taliban to the west and “cross-border” terrorism to the east.

It is in this context that Chief Executive Parvez Musharraf presented his 14 August 2001 Pakistan Day address to the nation. The address was extraordinary both with regard to its content as well as its

28. This account is drawn from a reading of *Dawn* relevant dates. Also see Shamimur-Rahman, “Sindh High Court Acquits All Accused in Said Murder Case” *Dawn*, 1 June 2001 (online edition).

emotional delivery. In the speech and in his subsequent actions, Musharraf outlined the adoption of a bold, perhaps revolutionary, plan to restructure Pakistan's political and administrative institutions—the Devolution Plan, 2001.<sup>29</sup> But, he also outlined a plan to deal with lawlessness and sectarian violence in the state. The latter plan directly involved the use of the anti-terrorism courts and introduced a significant amendment to the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Act, 2001 issued on 15 August greatly expanded the scope of cases falling under the purview of the terrorism courts. As per the amended act, an act can be defined as “terrorism” if:

- a) it involves the doing of anything that causes death; b) it involves grievous violence against a person or grievous bodily injury or harm to a person; c) involves grievous injury to property; d) involves the doing of anything that is likely to cause death or endangers a person's life; e) involves kidnapping for ransom, hostage taking or hijacking; f) incites hatred and contempt on religious, sectarian or ethnic basis to stir up violence or cause internal disturbance; g) involves stoning, brick-batting or any other form of mischief to spread panic; h) involves firing on religious congregations, mosques, imanbargahs, churches, temples and all other places of worship, or random firing to spread panic, or involve any forcible takeover of mosques or other places of worship; i) creates a serious risk to safety of the public...; j) involves the burning of vehicles or any other serious form of arson; k) involves extortion of money [bhatta] or property; l) is designed to seriously interfere with or seriously disrupt a communications system or public utility service; or n) involves serious violence against a member of the police force, armed forces, civil and armed forces, or a public servant.”<sup>30</sup>

Even more significantly, the amended act empowered the federal

29. See Charles H. Kennedy, “Pakistan's Devolution Plan, 2001” (paper presented at South Asian Conference, Madison, Wisconsin, September 2001).

30. Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 2001 (14 August 2001). As quoted in *Dawn*, 24 August 2001 (online edition).

government to proscribe an organization if it has “reason to believe that the organization is concerned in terrorism.” “Concerned in terrorism” is defined as an organization that “a) commits or participates in acts of terrorism; b) prepares for terrorism; c) promotes or encourages terrorism; d) supports and assists any organization concerned with terrorism; e) patronizes and assists in the incitement of hatred and contempt on religious, sectarian or ethnic lines that stir up disorder; f) fails to expel from its ranks or ostracize those who commit acts of terrorism and present them as heroic persons; or g) is otherwise concerned in terrorism.”<sup>31</sup>

In the days that followed the government implemented this amendment by proscribing two organizations: the Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), and the Sipah-i-Muhammed Pakistan (SMP), militant offshoots of the Tehrik Nifaz Fiqh-i-Jafaria and Sipah-i-Sahaba, respectively. It was reported that hundreds of the members of these institutions were arrested.

One fruit of this flurry of activity was the announcement made by officials of the World Bank in late August that Pakistan would be granted several million dollars to implement its administrative and political reforms. “Anti-terrorism” has its benefits—then came September 11.

### **ANTI-TERRORISM AND CONSEQUENCES OF SEPTEMBER 11**

The Musharraf administration was confronted with both a threat and an opportunity as a consequence of the horrific acts of September 11 and the resultant U.S. response. Pakistan was “asked” to comply with the U.S. interpretation of the causes of, and remedies against international terrorism. In exchange, Pakistan would be “cut a break” with respect to its lingering “issues.” To be more precise, Pakistan was asked to: 1) cut its ties with the Taliban government in Afghanistan; 2) be helpful with respect to U.S. plans to attack Afghanistan; 3) counter the anticipated extremist fallout likely to occur from the above within Pakistan; 4) reduce sectarian violence within Pakistan; and 5) curb alleged Pakistani state support for jihadi and/or terrorist activities related to the Kashmir issue. In exchange, the United States would be supportive of Pakistani attempts to improve its standing in the international community (particularly with

31. Section 11-A.

respect to international financial institutions),<sup>32</sup> and the United States would not put too much official pressure on the military regime to “democratize.” The United States also held out the “promise” that it would at least look with fresh eyes with regard to the Kashmir issue. Of course, underlying this implicit arrangement the United States “promised” not to target Pakistan (as a facilitator or harbor for international terror) if it complied with the U.S. anti-terrorism regime.

Any rational decision maker, military or otherwise, would have quickly accepted the U.S. conditions. Indeed, the conditions were none-too-onerous to accept. As demonstrated above, the Musharraf government was already concerned with sectarian violence within the state. Moreover, it had inherited an intact “anti-terrorist” regime from its predecessor—it did not have to start from scratch—and international support for such a regime would now help to insulate the regime from domestic human rights concerns. And, most Pakistani decision makers (even in the military) had for years been looking for a face-saving way to disassociate themselves from the support of the Taliban. Musharraf’s decision was obvious. But, for domestic and international consumption it was portrayed as difficult, a bitter pill to swallow. Such imagery was also encouraged by U.S. policymakers eager to show that the United States had adopted a no-nonsense approach and was being proactive. The United States was “putting the screws” to Pakistan, and Musharraf was “bowing to U.S. pressure.”

In any case, it proved relatively easy for Musharraf to comply with coalition-friendly policies. With regard to anti-terrorism courts, the government moved quickly to increase the number of anti-terrorism courts and to establish such courts in the NWFP and Baluchistan. Ostensibly, the government was gearing up for the anticipated increase in the caseload of such courts once the crackdown on terrorism went into high gear.<sup>33</sup> Also, the government was quick to arrest

32. The United States waived sanctions and resumed bilateral aid following such actions. Subsequently, Canada, the EU, Japan and multilateral financial institutions followed suit. This change has proven beneficial to the Pakistani economy—Pakistan’s foreign exchange reserves were valued at \$700 million in September 2001; in August 2002 the value was more than \$7 billion. See International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: Transition to Democracy” (Islamabad/Brussels: 3 October 2002), 16.

33. Curiously, the government had decided to close five ATCs before the events of September 11—two in Baluchistan and three in Punjab owing to the “lack of terrorism cases.” *Dawn*, 14 September 2001 (online edition). During September and October eleven new ATCs were established, seven in the NWFP and four in Sindh. By the end of October 2001 Pakistan had forty-one ATCs. *Dawn*, various reports (online edition).

and to publicly announce the arrests of hundreds of members of the outlawed LJ and SMP. Also, there was considerable reportage of the arrest of “jihadi elements” as well. One discordant note deserves attention, however. In late October 2001, at the height of U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan, Pakistani paramilitary and police were inattentive to the thousands of “volunteers” crossing the border to fight with the Taliban. Most notably, the Malakand-based Sufi Mohammad, leader of the Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM), with perhaps as many as ten thousand “lashkars” crossed the border with little or no opposition from Pakistani authorities. Many of these volunteers, perhaps thousands, were killed in Afghanistan, or at least have never returned to Pakistan. Indeed, some of the families of the missing staged highly publicized protests and demanded that action be taken against Sufi Mohammad for enticing their sons into this hopeless struggle. Under such public pressure Sufi Mohammad was arrested and tried before a tribal jirga (a special court of another kind) in Kurram Agency and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment in April 2002.<sup>34</sup> If one were cynical, one might opine that Pakistani officials turned a blind eye to the TNSM Afghan jihad because they assumed an unhappy end for the jihadis.

Musharraf was also obliged to turn his attention to the madrassa system in Pakistan. It had long been the contention of critics of Pakistan’s Afghan and/or Islamization policy that Pakistan’s madrassas (some of which received state support and funding) were breeding grounds for sectarian violence and jihadi training. After the United States declared war against the Taliban, it became a nearly consensual view that the madrassas in Pakistan were directly responsible for the creation of the Taliban.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the policy implications were clear—Pakistan had to “clean up” the madrassas. Again, this was a policy the Musharraf government was not particularly reluctant to entertain—indeed, it perhaps gave the government the political cover it needed to apply political restrictions and regulations to the operation of the heretofore largely autonomous madrassa system. It also allowed the government to proscribe other Islamist groups—declaring them, like the LJ and SMP, to be “terrorist” institutions, and their

34. *Dawn*, 17 January 2002; 23 April 2002 (online editions).

35. It is hard to overestimate the influence of the works of Ahmed Rashid on this view.

respective madrassas (although none of the proscribed groups actually operated madrassas) to be subject to intense government control. Accordingly, by January 2002 Pakistan had added six new groups to the proscribed terrorist list: 1) Jaish-e-Muhammed (JM); 2) Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP); 3) Lashkar-e-Toiba (LT); 4) Tehrik-i-Nifaz-i-Shariat Muhammadi (TNSM); 5) Tehrik Nifaz Fiqh-i-Jafaria (TNFJ); and 6) Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HM). The government also adopted three other related policies toward the madrassa system. First, the policies introduced reforms to make the curriculum more “modern” or “scientific.” Second, they placed the madrassas (depending on the size of the madrassa) under federal, provincial or district control. Third, they placed additional conditions on visa requirements and related matters concerning foreign (non-Pakistani students). None of these conditions were inherently unwelcome to the government—indeed, curriculum reform could be (and soon was) pitched as an important, perhaps vital, target for additional international financial assistance.<sup>36</sup>

The Musharraf government was also happy to join in the international war against terrorism by placing relatively severe restrictions upon political party activity. As seen above, Musharraf’s government was put under a “deadline” by the Supreme Court in the *Zafar Ali Shah* case to hold elections to the provincial and national assemblies by 12 October 2002. Accordingly, the government was obliged to set up the procedures for the prospective election, including rules regarding political party activity. In this vein the government promulgated the Political Parties Order, 2002 on 28 June.<sup>37</sup> The order substantially changed the rules of the political game in Pakistan; for the purposes of this paper, the following sections are particularly relevant. Section 3 of the order prohibits any political party from: “c) promoting sectarian, regional, or provincial hatred or animosity; d) bearing a name as a militant group or section... or e) imparting any military or paramilitary training to its members or other persons.” Section 4 also requires that every political party maintain an official manifesto (“constitution”). And Section 15 provides for the dissolution of a political party if it is “foreign-aided” or is found “indulging

36. For details, see International Crisis Group, “Pakistan: Madrasas, Extremism and the Military” (Islamabad/Brussels: 29 July 2002).

37. Political Parties Order, 2002 (28 June 2002). (National Reconstruction Bureau website).

in terrorism.” If a political party is dissolved, members of that party cannot, among other things, hold political office for a minimum of four years. They are also subject to criminal prosecution if warranted. The ostensible target of such provisions is not the institutions proscribed above (they are not political parties) but rather political parties likely to be opposed to a continuation of military-dominated politics in the state—most notably parties such as the Jamaat-i-Islami, the Jamiat Ulema Islam; and the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM). If one “stretches” the ban against “regional parties” one could also contend that the order may be designed to put pressure on the mostly Sindhi-based PPP.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the events of September 11 and its aftermath provided the Musharraf government with the political cover it required to further amend the Anti-Terrorism Act. On 30 January 2002 the government announced yet another amendment to the act—the Anti-Terrorism (Amendment) Ordinance, 2002. The most important amendment contemplated by this ordinance is the conversion of the heretofore single-person bench of the ATC to a three-member bench. The newly constituted ATCs would still have, as in the original courts, a judge who is a High Court, Session Court, or Additional Sessions court judge as a member, but they would also each have a second member who would be a judicial magistrate first class and a third member who would be an officer of the Pakistan Army not below the rank of Lt. Colonel.<sup>39</sup> Ostensibly, the rationale for the revision to the courts is related to the general perception (or at least the perception of the generals) that the ATCs have not worked very well at all—and certainly not the way they were intended to work. By increasing the size of the courts, the courts will be better equipped to deal with their caseload. By placing a military officer in each court, the civilian members of the courts would be more directly seized with the urgency of their mission (i.e., would be intimidated) into speeding up the process and punishing terrorists. The order mandates that the existing one-member ATCs would be disbanded by 30 November 2002.

38. If this was the intent the policy failed, as the Islamist parties contesting the election under the banner of the MMA did surprisingly well in the October 2002 general elections.

39. Rafaqat Ali, “Army Officers to Be Part of New ATCs: Law Amended to Expedite Terrorism Cases” *Dawn*, 1 February 2002 (online edition). Also see articles in *Dawn*, 13 February and 20 February 2002 (online editions).

This amendment has drawn considerable flak from affected groups. Dozens of bar associations lodged protests against the act, there was a boycott of the courts by aggrieved lawyers in Lahore, numerous petitions challenging the constitutionality of the ordinance were filed with the Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan, and NWFP High Courts, and the ordinance was largely and loudly decried by members of all major political parties and human rights groups.<sup>40</sup> Even Amnesty International wrote a special note decrying the amendment.<sup>41</sup> Eventually the Supreme Court called for the petitions filed with the four High Courts and consolidated the case in March. The decision of the Supreme Court remains pending.

One can only speculate as to why the Musharraf government, usually fairly prudent, so blatantly challenged so many domestic interests with regard to the January 2002 amendment. One factor may have been the Daniel Pearl murder case, which at the time was moving fitfully through a Karachi ATC.<sup>42</sup> Clearly, there are many flaws with the ATC system. Generally, it has not improved the speed of disposition of cases. Also, the new courts have until recently been strapped for funds, understaffed, and perhaps overworked. The ATCs are also not immune from the difficult environment that bedevils the regular judicial system in Pakistan—incompetence and corruption abound in the police and legal establishment of Pakistan. Moreover, the most highly publicized cases concerning the ATCs in Pakistan have involved cases in which the respective appellate tribunal has overturned decisions of the courts of original jurisdiction. Therefore, the ATC system is both relatively ineffective and is perceived as relatively ineffective within Pakistan. It is clearly not perceived as delivering justice. The Musharraf government, therefore, was and perhaps remains, fed up with the system.

On 20 October 2002, during the interim following the general elections but before the national assembly was convened, Musharraf's federal cabinet promulgated yet another amendment to the anti-terrorism ordinance. The Anti-Terrorism (Second Amendment)

40. Numerous relevant articles in *Dawn*, February–April 2002 (online edition).

41. Amnesty International, "Pakistan: New Anti-Terrorist Courts Breach Fair Trial Norms" (Amnesty website: 2 April 2002).

42. On 19 July 2002 a Karachi ATC convicted Omar Sheikh and three accomplices of the kidnap and murder of Daniel Pearl. Omar Sheikh's conviction is currently under appeal before the Sindh High Court. A full text of the ATC judgment is found in *Dawn*, 16 July 2002 (online edition).

Ordinance, 2002, gives the police wide latitude to detain anyone listed on the government's "terrorism list" (activists, office bearers of proscribed groups) for up to one year without filing specific criminal charges. The amendment also prohibits such suspected terrorists from visiting "schools, colleges ... theaters, cinemas, fairs, amusement parks, hotels, clubs, restaurants, tea shops ... railway stations, bus stands, telephone exchange, television stations, radio stations...public or private parks and gardens and public or private playing fields" without the written permission of relevant police officials.<sup>43</sup>

It is likely that the 2002 amendments will make the system even less effective. Since the existing ATCs will ostensibly be disbanded in November 2002, the proceedings of these courts (never a model of efficiency and expedition) have been disrupted. Also, one may assume that the Supreme Court, when it finally renders a decision with respect to the January 2002 amendment, will not wholly accept the government's position. The Supreme Court has a history of jealously guarding its turf; the introduction of military officers as "judges" within the courts will be resisted as strenuously as the courts are able given the realities of the political system at the time. The draconian October 2002 amendment is also likely to be challenged before the Supreme Court as well.

## Conclusions

IF THE PURPOSES of establishing an anti-terrorism regime are to lessen terrorism, punish terrorists, improve the efficiency of the legal system, and dispense speedy justice, Pakistan's anti-terrorism regime has been a complete failure. Conversely, if the purposes of an anti-terrorism regime are to improve one's position relative to one's domestic political opponents, or to improve public relations, or to rehabilitate one's standing with the international community, then Pakistan's anti-terrorism regime has generally been a success.

What can one learn from Pakistan's experience? If a decision maker's true goal is to improve the delivery of justice—the last thing such a decision maker should do is to weaken the regular judicial system. If a decision maker's true goal is to protect the lives and liberties

43. Rauf Klasra, "Sweeping Powers for Police to Curb Terrorism" *The News*, 20 October 2002 (online edition). The article includes the full text of the amendment.

of its citizens—the last thing a decision maker should do is to adopt laws and policies that challenge and limit the rights of its citizens. The tortured history of Pakistan's anti-terrorism regime should give pause to prospective latecomers to the process (e.g., the United States, Britain, EU, Australia). If Pakistan's experience is a guide, anti-terrorism regimes may be expected to cause more problems than they solve.

BERTIL LINTNER

### **Religious Extremism and Nationalism in Bangladesh**

**W**hen East Pakistan broke away from the main western part of the country to form Bangladesh in 1971, it was in opposition to the notion that all Muslim areas of former British India should unite in one state. The Awami League, which led the struggle for independence, grew out of the Bangla language movement and was based on Bengali nationalism, not religion. At the same time, independent, secular Bangladesh became the only country in the subcontinent with one dominant language group and very few ethnic and religious minorities.

It is important to remember that a Muslim element has always been present; otherwise what was East Pakistan could have merged with the predominantly Hindu Indian state of West Bengal, where the same language is spoken. The importance of Islam grew as the Awami League fell out with the country's powerful military, which began to use religion as a counterweight to the League's secular, vaguely socialist policies. (Many hard-line socialists, however, were opposed to the idea of a separate Bengali state in Bangladesh, which they branded as "bourgeois nationalism.") The late Bangladeshi

scholar Muhammad Ghulam Kabir argued that Maj. Gen. Zia ur-Rahman, who seized power in the mid-1970s, “successfully changed the image of Bangladesh from a liberal Muslim country to an Islamic country.”<sup>1</sup> M.G. Kabir also points out that “secularism” is a hazy and often misunderstood concept in Bangladesh. The Bengali term for it is *dharmā mirapekshata*, which literally translates to “religious neutrality.” Thus, the word “secularism” in a Bangladeshi context has a subtle difference in meaning from its use in the West.<sup>2</sup>

In 1977, Zia dropped secularism as one of the four cornerstones of Bangladesh’s constitution (the other three were democracy, nationalism, and socialism, although no socialist economic system was ever introduced) and made the recitation of verses from the Quran a regular practice at meetings with his newly formed political organization, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which became the second-largest party in the country after the Awami League. The marriage of convenience between the military—which needed popular appeal and an ideological platform to justify its opposition to the Awami League—and the country’s Islamic forces survived Zia’s assassination in 1981.

In some respects, it grew even stronger under the rule of Lt. Gen. Hossain Muhammed Ershad (1982–90). In 1988, Ershad made Islam the state religion of Bangladesh, thus institutionalizing the new brand of nationalism with an Islamic flavor introduced by Zia. Ershad also changed the weekly holiday from Sunday to Friday, and revived the Jamaat-i-Islami to counter secular opposition. The Jamaat had supported Pakistan against the Bengali nationalists during the liberation war, and most of its leaders had fled to (West) Pakistan after 1971. Under Zia, they came back and brought with them new, fundamentalist ideas. Under Ershad, Islam became a political factor to be reckoned with.

Ershad was deposed in December 1990 following anti-government protests and was later convicted of a number of offences and jailed. But this did not lead to a return to old secular practices. Zia’s widow and the new leader of the BNP, Khaleda Zia, became prime minister after a general election in February 1991. This was a time when the

1. Muhammad Ghulam Kabir, *Changing Face of Nationalism: The Case of Bangladesh* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1994), 201.

2. *Ibid.*, 189.

Islamic forces consolidated their influence in Bangladesh, but it came to a halt when the Awami League, led by Sheikh Hasina Wajed, the daughter of Bangladesh's founding father, Sheikh Mujib ur-Rahman, won the 1996 election. Five years later, an electoral four-party alliance led by Khaleda Zia's BNP came to power—and the new coalition that took over included for the first time two ministers from the Jamaat, which had emerged as the third-largest party, capturing seventeen seats in the three hundred-strong parliament.

The BNP rode on a wave of dissatisfaction with the Awami League, which many perceived as corrupt, but the four-party alliance was able to win a massive majority—191 seats for the BNP and 23 seats for its three allies—only because of the British-style system with one winner per constituency, and the alliance members all voted for each other. The Awami League remains the single biggest political party in Bangladesh with 40 percent of the popular vote, but it secured only 62 seats, or 20.66 percent of the members of parliament (MPs) in the election (it now has 58 seats because four were relinquished due to election of MPs from more than one seat).<sup>3</sup>

Expectations were high for the new government, which many hoped would be “cleaner” than the previous one. In June 2001, the Berlin-based organization Transparency International had in its annual report ranked Bangladesh the world's most corrupt country.<sup>4</sup> But since the new government took over in October 2001, very little has changed in that regard. Further, violence has become widespread and much of it appears to be religiously and politically motivated. The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), a well-respected Bangladeshi non-governmental organization (NGO), quotes a local report that says non-Muslim minorities have suffered as a result: “The intimidation of the minorities, which had begun before the election, became worse afterwards.”<sup>5</sup> Amnesty International reported in December 2001 that Hindus—who now make up less than 10 percent of Bangladesh's population of 130 million—in particular have come under attack. Hindu places of worship have been

3. *The Eighth Parliamentary Elections 2001* (Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development for Coordinating Council for Human Rights in Bangladesh, March 2002), 2.

4. <http://www.transparency.org/cpi/2001/cip2001.html>.

5. *Eighth Parliamentary Elections 2001*, 161.

ransacked, villages destroyed and scores of Hindu women are reported to have been raped.<sup>6</sup>

While the Jamaat may not be directly behind these attacks, its inclusion in the government has meant that more radical groups feel they now enjoy protection from the authorities and can act with impunity. The most militant group, the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami (HUJI, or the Movement of Islamic Holy War), is reported to have fifteen thousand members. Bangladeshi Hindus and moderate Muslims hold HUJI responsible for many of the recent attacks against religious minorities, secular intellectuals and journalists. In a statement released by the U.S. State Department on May 21, 2002, HUJI is described as a terrorist organization with ties to Islamic militants in Pakistan.<sup>7</sup>

While Bangladesh is yet far from becoming another Pakistan, Islamic forces are no doubt on the rise, and extremist influence is growing, especially in the countryside. According to a foreign diplomat in Dhaka, “in the 1960s and 1970s, it was the leftists who were seen as incorruptible purists. Today, the role model for many young men in rural areas is the dedicated Islamic cleric with his skull cap, flowing robes and beard.”<sup>8</sup>

## The Return of the Jamaat-i-Islami

THE IDEA THAT the Muslim-dominated parts of British India should become a separate country was articulated for the first time in a short essay written in 1933 by Rahmat Ali, an Indian Muslim student at Cambridge. He even proposed a name for the new state—Pakistan—which was an acronym based on the nations that would compose it: the Punjab, Afghan (the Northwest Frontier), Kashmir, Indus (or Sindh) and BaluchiSTAN. The new name also meant “the Land of the Pure.”

However, the acronym did not include India’s most populous Muslim province, East Bengal, and, at first, most Islamic groups opposed the idea of religious nationalism. The most prestigious

6. Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Attacks on Members of the Hindu Majority* (Amnesty International, December 2001).

7. Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001* (Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, 21 May 2002).

8. Bertil Lintner, “Is Religious Extremism on the Rise in Bangladesh?” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, May 2002.

Islamic university in the subcontinent, the Dar-ul-Ulum, was located at Deoband in Saharanpur district of what now is Uttar Pradesh in India, and its leaders strongly supported the Indian nationalist movement led by the Congress. The Jamaat-i-Islami, which was founded in 1941 by Maulana Abul Ala Maududi and had grown out of the Deoband Madrassa (as the university became known), went to the extent of “alleging that the demand for a separate state based on modern selfish nationalism amounted to rebelling against the tenets of Islam.”<sup>9</sup>

But gradually, the Muslim League, led by Muhammed Ali Jinnah, won support for the Pakistan idea, and when India became independent in August 1947, two states were born: the secular but Hindu-dominated Union of India—and the Islamic state of Pakistan, which consisted of two parts, one to the west of India and the other to the east. The Jamaat became one of the strongest supporters of the Pakistan idea, and, somewhat ironically, the Deobandi movement through its network of religious schools, or madrassas, developed into a breeding ground for Pakistan-centered Islamic fundamentalism. Over the years, the Deobandi brand of Islam has become almost synonymous with religious extremism and fanaticism.

The Deobandis had actually arisen in British India not as a reactionary force but as a forward-looking movement to unite and reform Muslim society in the wake of oppression the community faced after the 1857 revolt, or “Mutiny” as the British called it.<sup>10</sup> But in independent Pakistan—East and West—new Deobandi madrassas were set up everywhere and were run by semi-educated mullahs who, according to Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid, “were far removed from the original reformist agenda of the Deobandi school.”<sup>11</sup> Much later, it was from these madrassas that Afghanistan’s dreaded Taliban (“Islamic students”) were to emerge.

The Jamaat was from the beginning inspired by the Ikhwan ul-Muslimeen, or the Muslim Brotherhood, which was set up in Egypt in 1928 with the aim of bringing about an Islamic revolution and creating an Islamic state.<sup>12</sup> When they had come to accept Pakistan as

9. Kabir, *Changing Face of Nationalism*, 99.

10. For an excellent account of the rise of the Deobandis, see Salahuddin Babar, “Rise of the Right,” *Probe Newsmagazine* (Bangladesh), 1–15 March 2002.

11. Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: The Story of the Afghan Warlords* (London: Pan Books, 2001), 89.

12. *Ibid.*, 86.

that Islamic state, Bengali nationalism was totally unacceptable. The Jamaat's militants fought alongside the Pakistan army against the Bengali nationalists. Among the most notorious of the Jamaat leaders was Abdul Kader Molla, who became known as "the Butcher of Mirpur" (a Dhaka suburb that in 1971 was populated mainly by non-Bengali Muslim immigrants).<sup>13</sup> Today, Molla is the publicity secretary of Bangladeshi Jamaat and, despite his background, was granted a U.S. visa to visit New York in the last week of June 2002. In 1971, Molla and other Jamaat leaders were considered war criminals by the first government of independent Bangladesh, but they were never prosecuted as they had fled to Pakistan.

The leaders of the Jamaat returned to Bangladesh during the rule of Zia and Ershad because they were invited to come back, and they also saw Ershad especially as a champion of their cause. This was somewhat ironic as Ershad was—and still is—known as a playboy and hardly a religiously minded person. But he had introduced a string of Islamic reforms—and he needed the Jamaat to counter the Awami League and, like his predecessor Zia, he had to find ideological underpinnings for what was basically a military dictatorship. The problem was that the Jamaat had been discredited by its role in the liberation war—but, as a new generation emerged, that could be "corrected." Jamaat's Islamic ideals were taught in Bangladesh's madrassas, which multiplied at a tremendous pace.

The madrassas fill an important function in an impoverished country such as Bangladesh, where basic education is available only to a few. Today, there are an estimated sixty-four thousand madrassas in Bangladesh, divided into two kinds. The Aliya madrassas are run with government support and control, while the or Deoband-style madrassas are totally independent. Aliya students study for fifteen to sixteen years and are taught Arabic, religious theory and other Islamic subjects as well as English, mathematics, science and history. They prepare themselves for employment in government service or for jobs in the private sector, similar to any other college or university student. In 1999, there were 7,122 such registered madrassas in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup>

The much more numerous Deobandi madrassas are more "traditional"; Islamic studies dominate, and the students are taught Urdu

13. Ahmed Salim, "Murders Most Foul," *Newsline* (Pakistan), 29 November 2000.

14. Babar, "Rise of the Right."

(the national language of Pakistan), Persian and Arabic. After finishing their education, the students are incapable of taking up any mainstream profession, and the mosques and the madrassas are their main sources of employment. As Bangladeshi journalist Salahuddin Babar points out, “passing out from the madrassas, poorly equipped to enter mainstream life and professions, the students are easily lured by motivated quarters who capitalize on religious sentiment to create fanatics, rather than modem Muslims.”<sup>15</sup>

The consequences of this kind of madrassa education can be seen in the growth of the Jamaat. It did not fare well in the 1996 election, capturing only three seats in the parliament and 8.61 percent of the votes.<sup>16</sup> Its election manifesto was also quite carefully worded, perhaps taking into consideration the party’s reputation and the fact that the vast majority of Bangladeshis remain opposed to Sharia law and other extreme Islamic practices. The twenty-three-page document devoted eighteen pages to lofty election promises, and only five to explaining Jamaat’s political stand. The party tried to reassure the public that it would not advocate chopping off thieves’ hands, the stoning of people who had committed adultery, or banning interest—at least not immediately. According to SEHD: “The priority focus would be alleviation of poverty, stopping free mixing of sexes and thus awakening the people to the spirit of Islam and then eventually step by step the Islamic laws would be introduced.”<sup>17</sup>

It is impossible to determine how much support the Jamaat actually had in the 2001 election, as it was part of an alliance whose various members voted for each other against the Awami League, but its seventeen seats in the new parliament—and two ministers in the government—suggest a dramatic increase. Its youth organization, Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS), is especially active. It is a member of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations as well as the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and has close contacts with other radical Muslim groups in Pakistan, the Middle East, Malaysia and Indonesia. One of its main strongholds is at the university in Chittagong, and it dominates the Deobandi madrassas all over the

15. Ibid.

16. Society for Environment and Human Development, *The Reporter’s Guide: Handbook on Election Reporting* (Dhaka: Society for Environment and Human Development, 2001), 101.

17. Ibid.

country, from where it draws most of its new members. The ICS has been implicated in a number of bombings and politically and religiously motivated assassinations.

On April 7, 2001, two leaders of the Awami League's youth and student front were killed by ICS activists and on June 15, an estimated twenty-one people were killed and more than one hundred injured in a bomb blast at the Awami League party office in the town of Narayanganj. Two weeks later, the police arrested an ICS activist for his alleged involvement in the blast.<sup>18</sup> A youngish Islamic militant, Nurul Islam Bulbul, is the ICS's current president, and Muhammed Nazrul Islam its general secretary.

For many years the mother party, the Jamaat, was led by Gholam Azam, who had returned from Pakistan when Zia was still alive and in power. He resigned in December 2000, and Motiur Rahman Nizami took over as the new *amir* of the party amid wide protests and demands that he be put on trial for war crimes he committed during the liberation war as the head of a notorious paramilitary force, the al-Badr. In one particular incident on December 3, 1971, some members of that force seized the village of Bishalikkha at night in search of freedom fighters, beating many and killing eight people. When Nizami's appointment was made public, veterans of the liberation war burnt an effigy of him during a public rally.<sup>19</sup> In October 2001, Nizami was appointed minister for agriculture, an important post in a mainly agricultural country such as Bangladesh. His deputy, Ali Ahsan Muhammed Mujahid, became minister for social welfare.

The terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 occurred during the election campaign in Bangladesh, when the country was ruled by a caretaker government. The outgoing prime minister, the Awami League's Sheikh Hasina and then opposition leader Khaleda Zia of the BNP, condemned the attacks and both, if they were elected, offered the United States use of Bangladesh's air space, ports and other facilities to launch military attacks against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Many Bangladeshis were moved by the loss of as many as fifty of their countrymen in the attacks on the World

18. "Bangladesh Assessment 2002," *Southeast Asia Terrorism Portal* (Indian website, 2001); [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

19. *Bangladesh Broadcasting Service*, 8 December 2000.

Trade Center. While some of them were immigrants working as computer analysts and engineers, most seem to have been waiters at the Window on the World restaurant who were working hard to send money back to poor relatives in Bangladesh. A Bangladeshi embassy official in Washington branded the attacks “an affront to Islam ... an attack on humanity.”<sup>20</sup>

Jamaat’s stand on the “war against terrorism,” however, contrasts sharply to that of the more established parties. Shortly after the U.S. attacks on Afghanistan began in October 2001, the Jamaat created a fund purportedly for “helping the innocent victims of America’s war.” According to the Jamaat’s own announcements, 12 million Bangladeshi taka (\$210,000) was raised before the effort was discontinued in March 2002. Any remaining funds, the Jamaat then said, would go to Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Rise of the Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami and Other Extremist Groups**

THE GROWTH OF THE JAMAAT during the Ershad regime paved the way for the establishment of even more radical groups when the BNP returned to power in 1991. According to Bangladeshi journalists, in the early 1990s Bangladeshi diplomats in Saudi Arabia issued passports to Pakistani militants in the kingdom to enable them to escape to Bangladesh.<sup>22</sup> Other extremists from Pakistan—and perhaps also Afghanistan—appear to have been able to enter Bangladesh in the same way during that period.

These men were instrumental in building up HUJI, which was first formed in 1992, reportedly with funds from Osama bin Laden.<sup>23</sup> The existence of firm links between the new Bangladeshi militants and al-Qaeda was proven when Fazlul Rahman, leader of the “Jihad Movement in Bangladesh” (to which HUJI belongs), signed the official declaration of “holy war” against the United States on February 23, 1998. Other signatories included bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri (leader of the Jihad Group in Egypt), Rifa’i Ahmad Taha (aka Abu-

20. <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/01100321.htm>.

21. *Holiday* (Bangladesh), 8 March 2002.

22. Communication with a Bangladeshi journalist who has requested anonymity, April 2002.

23. *Southeast Asia Terrorism Portal*; [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

Yasir, Egyptian Islamic Group), and Sheikh Mir Hamzah (secretary of the Jamiat Ulema Pakistan).<sup>24</sup>

HUJI is headed by Shawkat Osman (aka Maulana or Sheikh Farid) in Chittagong and, according to the U.S. State Department, has “at least six camps” in Bangladesh.<sup>25</sup> Similar to the ICS, HUJI draws most of its members from the country’s Deobandi madrassas and has shown it is capable of extreme violence. Bangladesh’s Islamic radicals first came to international attention in 1993 when author Taslima Nasrin was forced to flee the country after receiving death threats. The fundamentalists objected to her critical writings about what she termed outdated religious beliefs. Extremist groups offered a \$5,000 reward for her death. She now lives in exile in France.

While Nasrin’s outspoken, feminist writings caused controversy even among moderate Bangladeshi Muslims, the entire state was shocked when, in early 1999, three men attempted to kill Shams ur-Rahman, a well-known poet and symbol of Bangladesh’s secular nationhood. During the ensuing arrests, the police said they seized a list of several intellectuals and writers, including Nasrin, whom Bangladeshi religious extremists had branded “enemies of Islam.”<sup>26</sup>

Bangladeshi human rights organizations openly accuse HUJI of being behind both the death threats against Nasrin and the attempt to kill Rahman. The U.S. State Department notes that HUJI has been accused of stabbing a senior Bangladeshi journalist in November 2000 for making a documentary on the plight of Hindus in Bangladesh, and the July 2000 assassination attempt of then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.<sup>27</sup>

As with the Jamaat and the ICS, HUJI’s main stronghold is in the lawless southeast, which includes the border with Burma. With its fluid population and weak law enforcement, the region has long been a haven for smugglers, gunrunners, pirates, and ethnic insurgents

24. See ERII *Daily Intelligence* report, ERII Risk Assessment Service, vol. 4 (11 June 1998), 162. The full text of the 1998 *fatwah* is also available on <http://www.ict.org.il/articles/fatwah.htm> and <http://www.fas.org/irp/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>.

25. Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*.

26. Turkaya Atav, *Kashmir and Neighbours: Tale, Terror, Truce* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2001), 150.

27. Coordinator for Counterterrorism, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001*.

from across the Burmese border. The past decade has seen a massive influx of weapons, especially small arms, through the fishing port of Cox's Bazaar, which has made the situation in the southeast even more dangerous and volatile.<sup>28</sup>

The winner in the 2001 election in one of the constituencies in Cox's Bazaar, BNP candidate Shahjahan Chowdhury, was said to be supported by "the man allegedly leading smuggling operations in [the border town of] Teknaf." Instead of the regular army, the paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles were deployed in this constituency to help the police in their electoral peacekeeping. This was, according to SEHD, "criticized by the local people who alleged that the Bangladesh Rifles were well connected with the smuggling activities and thus could take partisan roles."<sup>29</sup>

In one of the most recent high-profile attacks in the area, Gopal Krishna Muhuri, the sixty-year-old principal of Nazirhat College in Chittagong and a leading secular humanist, was gunned down in November 2001 in his home by four hired assassins who belonged to a gang patronized by the Jamaat.<sup>30</sup> India, which is viewing the growth of Bangladesh's Islamic movements with deep concern, has linked HUJI militants to the attack on the American Center in Kolkata (Calcutta) in January 2002, and a series of bomb blasts in the state of Assam in mid-1999.<sup>31</sup>

On May 10–11, 2002, nine Islamic fundamentalist groups, including HUJI, met at a camp near the small town of Ukhia south of Cox's Bazaar and formed the Bangladesh Islamic Manch (Association). The new umbrella organization also includes one purporting to represent the Rohingyas, a Muslim minority in Burma, and the Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam, a small group operating in India's Northeast. By June, Bangladeshi veterans of the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan in the 1980s were reported to be training members of the new alliance in at least two camps in southern Bangladesh.<sup>32</sup>

28. *Small Arms Survey 2001: Profiling the Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2001), 181.

29. *Eighth Parliamentary Elections 2001*, 99.

30. Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Majority*.

31. *The Hindu*, 23 January 2002. See also Subir Bhaumik, "The Second Front of Islamic Terror in South Asia" (paper presented at an international seminar on terrorism and low-intensity conflict, Jadvpur University, Kolkata, 6–8 March 2002).

32. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 11 July 2002.

## The Plight of the Rohingyas

THE ARAKAN AREA OF BURMA was separated from the rest of the country by a densely forested mountain range, which made it possible for the Arakanese—most of whom are Buddhist—to maintain their independence until the late eighteenth century. Contacts with the outside world had until then been mostly with the West, which, in turn, had brought Islam to the region. The first Muslims on the Arakan coast were Moorish, Arab and Persian traders who arrived between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries. Some of them stayed and married local women. Their offspring became the forefathers of yet another hybrid race, which much later was to become known as the Rohingyas. Like the people in the Chittagong area, they speak a Bengali dialect interspersed with words borrowed from Persian, Urdu and Arakanese.<sup>33</sup>

There is no evidence of friction between Rohingyas and their Buddhist neighbors in the earlier days. Indeed, after 1430 the Arakanese kings, though Buddhists, even used Muslim titles in addition to their own names and issued medallions bearing the *kalima*, or Muslim confession of faith.<sup>34</sup> Persian was the court language until the Burmese invasion in 1784. Burmese rule lasted until the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824–26, when Arakan was taken over by the British along with the Tenasserim region of southeastern Burma.

When Burma was a part of British India, the rich ricelands of Arakan attracted thousands of seasonal laborers, especially from the Chittagong area of adjacent East Bengal. Many of them found it convenient to stay since there was already a large Muslim population who spoke the same language and, at that time, there was no ill feeling toward immigrants from India proper—unlike the situation in other parts of Burma, where people of subcontinental origin were despised. At the same time, Buddhist Arakanese migrated to East Bengal and settled along the coast between Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. The official border, the Naf River, united rather than separated the two British territories.

But the presence of a Muslim minority in Arakan became an issue after Burma's independence in 1948. The Buddhist and Muslim

33. For a comprehensive account of the Rohingyas and other Muslim communities in Burma, see Moshe Yegar, *The Muslims of Burma: A Study of a Minority Group* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1972).

34. *Ibid.*, 19.

communities had become divided during World War Two; the Buddhists had rallied behind the Japanese while the Muslims had remained loyal to the British. Some Muslims, fearing reprisals from the Buddhists once the British were gone, rose up in arms, demanding an independent state, and the Burmese army was sent in to quell the rebellion. Predominantly Buddhist Burma never really recognized the Arakanese Muslims—who in the 1960s began to refer to themselves as “Rohingya,” a term of disputed origin—as one of the country’s “indigenous” ethnic groups. As such, and because of their different religion and physical appearance, Rohingyas have often become convenient scapegoats for Burma’s military government to rally the public against whenever that country has been hit by an economic or political crisis.

In March 1978, the Burmese government launched a campaign code-named *Naga Min* (Dragon King) in Arakan, ostensibly to “check illegal immigrants.” Hundreds of heavily armed troops raided Muslim neighborhoods in Sittwe (Akyab) and some five thousand people were arrested. As the operation was extended to other parts of Arakan, tens of thousands of Rohingyas crossed the border to Bangladesh. By the end of June, approximately two hundred thousand Rohingyas had fled, causing an international outcry.<sup>35</sup> Eventually, most of the refugees were allowed to return, but thousands found it safer to remain on the Bangladesh side of the border. Entire communities of “illegal immigrants” from Burma sprang up along the border south of Cox’s Bazaar, and a steady trickle of refugees from Burma continued to cross into Bangladesh throughout the 1980s.

The immensely wealthy Saudi Arabian charity Rabitat al Alam al Islami began sending aid to the Rohingya refugees during the 1978 crisis and also built a hospital and a madrassa at Ukhia, south of Cox’s Bazaar. Prior to these events, there was only one political organization among the Rohingyas on the Bangladesh-Burma border, the Rohingya Patriotic Front (RPF), which was set up in 1974 by Muhammed Jafar Habib, a native of Buthidaung in Arakan and a graduate of Rangoon University. He made several appeals—most of them unsuccessful—to the international Islamic community for help, and maintained a camp for his small guerrilla army, which operated from the Bangladeshi side of the border.

35. For an account of the 1978 refugee crisis, see Lintner, *Burma in Revolt: Opium and Insurgency Since 1948* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 1999), 317–18.

In the early 1980s, more radical elements among the Rohingyas broke away from the RPF to set up the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO). Led by a medical doctor from Arakan, Muhammed Yunus, it soon became the main and most militant faction among the Rohingyas in Bangladesh and on the border. Given its more rigid religious stand, the RSO soon enjoyed support from like-minded groups in the Muslim world. These included Jamaat-i-Islami in Bangladesh and Pakistan, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami in Afghanistan, Hizbe-ul Mujahideen in Kashmir and Angkatan Belia Islam sa-Malaysia (ABIM), the Islamic Youth Organization of Malaysia. Afghan instructors were seen in some of the RSO camps along the Bangladesh-Burma border, while nearly one hundred RSO rebels were reported to be undergoing training in the Afghan province of Khost with Hizb-e-Islami Mujahideen.<sup>36</sup>

The RSO's main military camp was located near the hospital that the Rabitat had built at Ukhia. At the time, the RSO acquired a substantial number of Chinese-made RPG-2 rocket launchers, light machine guns, AK-47 assault rifles, claymore mines and explosives from private arms dealers in the Thai town of Aranyaprathet near Thailand's border with Cambodia, which in the 1980s emerged as a major arms bazaar for guerrilla movements in the region. These weapons were siphoned off from Chinese arms shipments to the resistance battling the Vietnamese army in Cambodia, and sold to anyone who wanted—and could afford—to buy them.<sup>37</sup>

The Bangladeshi media gave quite extensive coverage to the RSO buildup along the border, but it soon became clear that it was not only Rohingyas who underwent training in its camps. Many, it turned out, were members of ICS and came from the University of Chittagong, where a “campus war” was being fought between Islamic militants and more moderate student groups.<sup>38</sup> The RSO was, in fact, engaged in little or no fighting inside Burma.

There was also a more moderate faction among the Rohingyas in Bangladesh, the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF), which was set up in 1986, uniting the remnants of the old RPF and a handful of

36. Lintner, “Tension Mounts in Arakan State,” *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 19 October 1991. The story was based on interview with Rohingyas and others in the Cox's Bazaar area in 1991. I also visited a Rohingya army camp near the border with Burma.

37. *Ibid.*

38. Interviews and observations I made when I visited the border in 1991.

defectors from the RSO. It was led by Nurul Islam, a Rangoon-educated lawyer. But it never had more than a few dozen soldiers, mostly equipped with elderly, UK-made 9mm Sterling L2A3 sub-machine guns, bolt action .303 rifles and a few M-16 assault rifles.<sup>39</sup> In 1998, ARIF became the Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO), maintaining its moderate stance and barely surviving in exile in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar.

The expansion of the RSO in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and the unprecedented publicity the group attracted in the local and international media, prompted the Burmese government to launch a massive counter-offensive to "clear up" the border area. In December 1991, Burmese troops crossed the border and attacked a Bangladeshi military outpost. The incident developed into a major crisis in Bangladesh-Burma relations, and by April 1992 more than 250,000 Rohingya civilians had been forced out of Arakan.

Hardly by coincidence, this second massive exodus of Rohingyas occurred at a time when Burma was engulfed in a major political crisis. The pro-democracy National League for Democracy (NLD) had won a landslide victory in a general election in May 1990, but the country's military government refused to convene the elected assembly. There were anti-government demonstrations in the northern city of Mandalay, and the ruling Burmese junta was condemned internationally.

The Rohingya refugees were housed in a string of makeshift camps south of Cox's Bazaar, prompting the Bangladeshi government to appeal for help from the international community. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) came in to run the camps and to negotiate with the Burmese government for the return of the Rohingyas. In April 1992, Prince Khaled Sultan Abdul Aziz, commander of the Saudi contingent in the 1991 Gulf War, visited Dhaka and recommended a Desert Storm-like action against Burma, "just what [the UN] did to liberate Kuwait."<sup>40</sup>

That, of course, never happened, and the Burmese government, under pressure from the United Nations, eventually agreed to take most of the refugees back. But an estimated twenty thousand destitute

39. *Jane's Defense Weekly*, 19 October 1991.

40. For an account of the 1991–92 Rohingya refugee crisis, see Lintner, *Burma in Revolt*, 397–98.

refugees remain in two camps between Cox's Bazaar and the border. In addition, an undisclosed number of Rohingyas, perhaps as many as 100,000 to 150,000, continue to live outside the UNHCR-supervised camps. There is little doubt that extremist groups have taken advantage of the disenfranchised Rohingyas, including recruiting them as cannon fodder for al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and elsewhere. In an interview with the Karachi-based newspaper *Ummat* on September 28, 2001, bin Laden said, "there are areas in all parts of the world where strong jihadi forces are present, from Bosnia to Sudan, and from Burma to Kashmir."<sup>41</sup> He was most probably referring to a small group of Rohingyas on the Bangladesh-Burma border.

Many of the Rohingya recruits were given the most dangerous task in the battlefield: clearing mines and pottering. According to Asian intelligence sources, Rohingya recruits were paid 30,000 Bangladeshi taka (\$525) on joining and then 10,000 taka (\$175) per month. The families of recruits killed in action were offered 100,000 taka (\$1,750).<sup>42</sup> Recruits were taken mostly via Nepal to Pakistan, where they were trained and sent on to military camps in Afghanistan. It is not known how many people from this part of Bangladesh—Rohingyas and others—fought in Afghanistan, but it is believed to be quite substantial. Others went to Kashmir and even Chechnya to join forces with Islamic militants there.<sup>43</sup>

In an interview with CNN in December 2001, American "taliban" fighter, John Walker Lindh related that the al-Qaeda-directed *ansar* (companions of the Prophet) brigades, to which he had belonged in Afghanistan, were divided along linguistic lines: "Bengali, Pakistani (Urdu) and Arabic," which suggests that the Bengali-speaking component—Bangladeshi and Rohingya—must have been significant.<sup>44</sup> In early 2002, Afghanistan's foreign minister, Dr. Abdullah, told a Western journalist that "we have captured one Malaysian and one or two supporters from Burma."<sup>45</sup>

41. See also Jim Garamone, "Bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda Network," *American Forces Press Service*, 21 September 2001: "Al-Qaeda has cells in Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Dagestan, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Azerbaijan, Eritrea, Uganda, Ethiopia, and in the West Bank and Gaza."

42. *Jane's Intelligence Review*, May 2002.

43. Bhaumik, "The Second Front."

44. *Transcript of John Walker Interview*, CNN, 21 December 2001.

45. Lintner, "A Recipe for Trouble," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 4 April 2002. The comment was made to Michael Vatikiotis, editor of the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

In January 2001, Bangladesh clamped down on Rohingya activists and offices in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar, most probably in an attempt to improve relations with Burma. Hundreds were rounded up, and the local press was full of reports of their alleged involvement in gun- and drug-running. Rohingya leaders vehemently deny such accusations and blame local Bangladeshi gangs with high-level connections for the violence in the area. But the Rohingyas were forced to evacuate their military camps, which had always been located on the Bangladesh side of the border. Recent reports from the area suggest that HUJI and other Bangladeshi Islamic groups have taken over these camps, with the main base being the one the RSO used to maintain near the Rabitat-built hospital in Ukhia.<sup>46</sup>

#### **Attacks on Secular Muslims and Religious Minorities**

What now is Bangladesh—and initially East Bengal and then East Pakistan—has undergone dramatic demographic changes during the past sixty years. According to the 1941 Census of India, Hindus made up 28 percent of the population of then East Bengal. Twenty years later, when East Pakistan was well established, the number had decreased to 18.5 percent. More left during the liberation war in 1971, when the Pakistani army targeted Hindus specifically. By 1974, only 13.5 percent of the population of independent Bangladesh was Hindu. According to the latest estimate, the figure is now down to 9 percent.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, large numbers of Buddhists from the Chittagong Hill Tracts—Bangladesh's other main religious minority—have fled to India.

The fall of the Awami League and the murder of Mujib-ur Rahman in August 1975, followed by the military takeover by Maj. Gen. Zia in November of that year, ushered in a new era of Bangladeshi nationalism, where the religious and ethnic minorities had little or no place. Mujib's immediate successor, Khondkar Mushtaq Ahmed, who was a senior member of the Awami League but known for his Islamic and pro-Pakistan leanings, began to conclude his speeches with *Bangladesh Zindabad* (long live Bangladesh, but “zindabad” is a Persian word)

46. I visited the area, including Ukhia, in March 2002.

47. The figures are based on information from Bangladesh's Ministry of Planning, Bureau of Statistics. See also Jaideep Saikia, *Islamic Resurgence in Bangladesh* (paper disseminated by bangladesherdak@yahoo.com, May 2002).

rather than the war cry of the liberation struggle, *Joi Bangla* (both words being Bengali). This soon became common practice in government announcements and radio broadcasts.

A shift in foreign policy was also noticeable. Bangladesh's first government had emphasized friendship with India and the Soviet Union. Zia's government steered Bangladesh closer to Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia.<sup>48</sup> Pakistan's intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), became active in Bangladesh again, working closely with its local counterpart, the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI). Pakistan never fully recovered from the loss of East Pakistan, and never forgave India for the role it played in the birth of Bangladesh by sending troops to fight the Pakistani army.

The idea of Bangladesh rejoining Pakistan was out of the question after the extremely bloody liberation war, in which millions died. But Pakistan was determined to regain its influence over its former eastern part and, especially, to keep Indian influence there to an absolute minimum. Zia's policies, including allowing the Jamaat to return, served these interests, and the Pakistanis, quite naturally, emphasized the main bond that united the two countries: Islam.

Historian M.G. Kabir argues that Zia's propagation of a new brand of Bangladeshi nationalism was a scheme "to simultaneously consolidate feelings of nationhood, provide a series of symbols for unifying the country, contribute to the enthusiasm with which nation-building activities are pursued, and, ultimately maintain the identity and integrity of Bangladesh as a nation-state independent of India."<sup>49</sup> In a posthumously published article written by Zia, he lists seven factors that he considers to be the bases of Bangladeshi nationalism: territory, people irrespective of religion, Bengali language, culture, economic life, religion, and the legacy of the 1971 liberation war.<sup>50</sup> There is an obvious contradiction between "people irrespective of religion" and "religion," and that has since been the dilemma for Bangladesh's non-Muslim population. Ershad's declaration of Islam as the state religion made it clear that "religion" in a Bangladeshi context means Islam.

Bangladesh's Islamic identity has grown stronger over the years, and after the October 2001 election there has been a marked increase in

48. Kabir, *Changing Face of Nationalism*, 196–97.

49. *Ibid.*, 199.

50. *Ibid.*

the number of attacks on non-Muslim population groups. These attacks appear to have been prompted by a desire to build a real “nation-state,” free from minorities, and motivated by political revenge. Amnesty International reported in December 2001: “Hindus in Bangladesh have tended to vote for the Awami League. They have therefore been the target of a political backlash by supporters of parties opposing Awami League.” In Ziodhara, one of the worst affected villages, several hundred Hindu villagers left the area. In another village, Deuatala Bazaar, gangs of young men wielding sharp weapons reportedly went from door to door telling Hindus to “go away.”<sup>51</sup> In Chandaikona Bazaar another youth gang damaged Hindu statues and looted the temple.<sup>52</sup>

The Amnesty report continues: “Human rights organizations in Bangladesh believe over 100 women have been subjected to rape. Reports persistently allege that the perpetrators have been mainly members of the BNP and its coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami.”<sup>53</sup> As a result, thousands of Bangladeshi Hindus have fled to India, often leaving their belongings and land behind. The exact number of refugees is uncertain, as they tend to blend in with the largely Hindu population of the Indian states of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura.

Other religious minorities have also been targeted. In December 2001, a Bangladeshi newspaper reported that young women from fifty Christian families in Natoore were living in fear of hoodlums who would roar past their huts on motorcycles at night. The hoodlums demanded ransom of 10,000 to 20,000 Bangladeshi taka (\$175–350) from men in the village—or their daughters. The villagers had also had their crops taken away after the October election.<sup>54</sup> In April 2002 a well-known Buddhist monk, Ganojyoti Mohasthobir, was murdered by a group of thugs who demanded he paid them “infidel protection tax.”<sup>55</sup>

But moderate Muslims have also become victims. On November 22, 2001 prominent journalist and writer Shahriar Kabir was arrested at Dhaka International Airport on his return from Kolkata. He had

51. Amnesty International, *Bangladesh: Attacks on Hindu Majority*.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. Human Rights Congress for Bangladesh Minorities, *Give Ransom or Girl, Order Hoodlums: 50 Christian Families of Natoore Subjugated by Nightmare*, 8 December 2001.

55. *The Daily Janakantha* (Bangladesh), 23 April 2002.

been to India to cover the plight of the Hindus who had fled persecution in Bangladesh and had his video tapes, film and camera confiscated by the police at the airport. He was held in custody for nineteen days before he was released on bail. In March 2002 two staff members of the NGO Proshika (“a Center for Human Development”), Omar Tarek Chawdhury and Ajhar-ul Hoque, were arrested on allegations that they had been in possession of “documents” relating to attacks against Hindus.<sup>56</sup>

Their arrest came only weeks after the Danish and German ambassadors in Dhaka had asked the Bangladesh government to “take immediate steps to stop all sorts of repression and attacks on the country’s religious and other minorities.”<sup>57</sup> But there are no signs that this is about to happen. On the contrary, the future of the country’s religious and ethnic minorities appears bleak, as “Bangladeshi nationalism” is becoming synonymous with a stronger Muslim identity, and Islamic groups are becoming increasingly fierce in their public statements and actions.

## Conclusion

IN DECEMBER 2001 Maulana Ubaidul Haq, the *khatib* (cleric) of Bangladesh’s national mosque, Baitul Mukarram, and a Jamaat associate publicly condemned the U.S. war on terror and urged followers to wage a holy war against the United States. “President Bush and America is the most heinous terrorist in the world. Both America and Bush must be destroyed. The Americans will be washed away if Bangladesh’s 120 million Muslims spit on them,” the cleric told a gathering of hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi Muslims, which included several high-ranking officials in the new government that took over in October 2001.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the virulent rhetoric, it is highly unlikely that Bangladesh’s 120 million Muslims would spit on the Americans, or wage a holy war against anybody. Bangladesh’s secular roots are holding, at least for the time being. But the country’s Islamic extremists are becoming

56. Amnesty International, *Press release ASA 13/005/2002*, 15 March 2002.

57. News from Bangladesh, 8 March 2002. <http://www/bangladesh-web.com/news/mar/08/08032002.htm>.

58. *Muktadbara*, “a website for Bengalis,” <http://members.tripod.com/scohel/page03.html>.

more vocal and daring in their attacks on “infidels,” a worrisome sign in what is basically a very tolerant society. And it is not the number of extremists that matters—even a small group can spread fear and terror—but how well organized and dedicated they are.

Bangladesh’s Islamic extremists are becoming better organized, as the May meeting at Ukhia of nine militant groups shows. The proliferation of small arms and an ensuing increase in violence of all kinds, especially in that part of the country, are also a growing concern. These factors have prompted the country’s donors, who met in Paris in March 2002, to tag aid to an improvement in the law and order situation. In mid-2001, the estimated number of illegal arms in Bangladesh was 250,000, of which only 5,481 were recovered during a crackdown in the lead-up to the general election in October 2001.<sup>59</sup> In early 2002, three leading local human rights groups in Bangladesh reported that a total of 258 people were murdered in March alone, of which thirty-nine were political killings. In the month of February, the number of murders was 336, including a journalist, according to the Institute of Democratic Watch, a Bangladeshi NGO.<sup>60</sup>

A culture of violence, especially among the young, is emerging, and many young Islamic militants are now armed. The role of the madrasahs in shaping the next generation of Bangladeshis also cannot be underestimated. By including the Jamaat in her cabinet, Khaleda Zia is playing with fire. On the other hand, Bangladesh remains heavily dependent on foreign aid and cannot afford to antagonize its most important donor countries, mainly Japan and the West. It should, therefore, be in the government’s interest to contain the spread of Islamic extremism. But so far, very little has been done to counter the propaganda and activities of the extremists, and Khaleda Zia has publicly—and angrily—stated in response to the inclusion of two Jamaat ministers in her cabinet that “there are no talibans in my government.”<sup>61</sup> By contrast, even in the streets of Dhaka, activists of the Jamaat, ICS and HUJI used to proudly identify themselves as “Bangladeshi talibans,” although they stopped using that label, at least in public, following the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York and Washington.

59. *Eighth Parliamentary Elections 2001*, 17.

60. *The Hindu* (India), 2 April 2002.

61. *Ibid.*, 11 January 2002.

Some Western diplomats in Dhaka also tend to downplay the extremist threat, viewing local militant Islamic movements as rather insignificant fringe groups. During a breakfast meeting in May 2002 in Washington sponsored by the U.S.-Bangladesh Advisory Council, Mary Ann Peters, the ambassador of the United States to Bangladesh, rejected reports of a growing extremist threat. She termed a report in the April 2, 2002 issue of the *Wall Street Journal* as “an example of lack of understanding on the part of journalists covering the country’s political and social structure.” She went on to criticize a similar story in the April 4, 2002 issue of the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and called the reporter “lazy” for not working hard enough on the subject and for his failure to give any “clue” in the article that might help make further investigations. She also asserted that media reports about violence against the Hindu community were “exaggerations of facts on the ground.” The U.S. embassy in Dhaka had sent its officers to verify the media reports, and in all cases it was found that the actual situation was less worrisome than what they appeared to be, she said.<sup>62</sup>

It is uncertain whether the U.S. ambassador’s statements were motivated by a desire to be overly diplomatic, or if they were based on poor intelligence. But such denials will only exacerbate what undoubtedly is a growing problem. It is also important to emphasize that the rise of religious extremism and intolerance in Bangladesh is not just a side effect of military politics. According to Eneyetullah Khan, editor of the Bangladesh weekly *Holiday*, the issue reflects the struggle of a young and fragile nation to find a national identity: “We’re having a bit of an identity crisis here. Are we Bengalis first and Muslims second, or Muslims first and Bengalis second? This is the problem. And when Muslim identity becomes an Islamic identity we’re in real trouble.”<sup>63</sup>

As Indonesia—another country that until recently was considered a moderate Muslim state—has shown, an economic collapse or political crisis can give rise to militants for whom religious fanaticism equals national pride; and a way out of misrule, disorder and corrupt worldly politics.

62. A summary of Peters’s talk was posted on the internet (bangladesherdak@yahoo.com) shortly after the event. I was the author of the articles in both the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*.

63. Enayetullah Khan, interview by author, Dhaka, 15 March 2002.

## Appendix 1.

### Main Islamic Groups in Bangladesh

#### **Jamaat-i-Islami**

A political party that dates back to the British colonial era and the (East) Pakistan period (1947–71). It supported Pakistan against the Bengali nationalists during the liberation war, and most of its leaders fled to (West) Pakistan after Bangladesh's independence in 1971. Its then *amir*, or leader, Gholam Azam, fought against the freedom fighters in 1971, but returned to Bangladesh a few years later. In December 2000, Motiur Rahman Nizami, another former pro-Pakistani militant, took over as *amir* of the Jamaat. In the October 2001 election, the Jamaat emerged as the third largest party with seventeen seats in the parliament and two ministers in the new coalition government. The Jamaat's final aim is an Islamic state in Bangladesh, although this will be implemented step by step.

#### **Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS)**

Jamaat's youth organization. Set up in 1941, it became a member of the International Islamic Federation of Student Organizations in 1979. ICS is also a member of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth and has close contacts with other radical Muslim youth groups in Pakistan, the Middle East, Malaysia and Indonesia. One of its main strongholds in Bangladesh is at the university in Chittagong, and it dominates privately run madrassas all over the country. ICS has been involved in a number of bomb blasts and politically and religiously motivated assassinations. Nurul Islam Bulbul is its current president and Muhammed Nazrul Islam is the secretary general.

#### **Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ)**

A smaller Islamic party that in 2001 joined the four-party alliance led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), which won the October 2001 election. The IOJ secured two seats in the parliament, but did not get any cabinet posts. The fourth member of the alliance, a faction of the Jatyio Party led by Naziur Rahman Manzur, has no obvious Islamic profile.

**Harkat-ul-Jihad-al Islami (HUJI)**

Bangladesh's main militant outfit. Set up in 1992, it now has an estimated strength of fifteen thousand and is headed by Shawkat Osman (aka Maulana or Sheikh Farid) in Chittagong. HUJI's members are recruited mainly from students of the country's many madrassas, and until 2001 they called themselves "Bangladeshi Taliban." The group is believed to have extensive contacts with Muslim organizations in the Indian states of West Bengal and Assam.

**"The Jihad Movement"**

Osama bin Laden's February 23, 1998 *fatwah* urging jihad against the United States was co-signed by two Egyptian clerics, one from Pakistan, and Fazlul Rahman, "leader of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh." The Jihad Movement is not believed to be a separate organization but a common name for several Islamic groups in Bangladesh, of which HUJI is considered the largest and most important.

**Arakan Rohingya National Organization (ARNO)**

A political group among Rohingya migrants from Burma who live in the Chittagong–Cox's Bazaar area and claim to be fighting for an autonomous Muslim region in Burma's Arakan (Rakhine) State. ARNO was set up in 1998 through a merger of the Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) and the Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO). Within months, however, the front fell apart. The leader of what remains of ARNO, Nurul Islam, is considered a moderate. He also led the ARIF before the merger in 1998.

**Rohingya Solidarity Organization (RSO)**

Following the breakup of ARNO in 1999–2000, three new factions emerged, all of them reclaiming the old name RSO. Traditionally, the RSO has been very close to Jamaat-i-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. In the early 1990s, RSO had several military camps near the Burmese border, where cadres from the Islami Chhatra Shibir were also trained in guerrilla warfare.

# 18

RADHA KUMAR

## Religious Radicalism and Minorities in South Asia

**T**he South Asian subcontinent has never been regarded as a particularly stable part of the world. But its instabilities were largely seen as local, or at worst regional, with a limited capacity to affect the rest of the world. This view changed abruptly in the closing decades of the twentieth century, when the India-Pakistan nuclear tests and the 9/11 attacks in the United States put the subcontinent squarely on the map of global “hot spots.” In the wake of these two events, South Asia suddenly acquired the potential to affect not only its wider neighborhood, both to the west and southeast, but well beyond.

While the chief area of concern in both cases is Pakistan—a military regime that secretly exported nuclear materials to North Korea,<sup>1</sup> home to out-of-control jihadis, with “mad mullahs” now in government—and perhaps *because* the chief area of concern is Pakistan, India has come under pressure as well. A recent opinion poll by the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs shows that India has jumped 20 points as an area of U.S. strategic concern in American

1. “Pakistan’s North Korea Deals Stir Scrutiny,” *Washington Post*, 15 November 2002.

public perception, and this jump is largely because India is seen as at risk of war.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the high level of hostility between India and Pakistan since the Kargil conflict and General Musharraf's coup of 1999, followed by the war on terrorism, has fed into Pakistan's rapid plunge downhill. The Islamic right, which gained steadily through the 1980s, rose sharply again in the late 1990s, this time with India as an avowed target. If the standoff between the two countries continues, as it has done over the past four years, Islamic radicalism will grow exponentially in Pakistan. Peace with India, on the other hand, could give Pakistan the chance to stabilize itself and turn its intelligence services and religious activists to reform.

But peace with India is harder to achieve today than it was five years ago. India too has been radicalized by the years of mounting hostility. The escalation of Islamic militancy in Kashmir,<sup>3</sup> backed and increasingly manned by Pakistan, as well as its spillover into terrorist attacks in other parts of India, including the capital, Delhi, has given Hindu nationalism an enormous spur. Thanks to the end of state controls over the media and the rapid growth of Internet communication, millions of Indians are now familiar with the Islamists' hate speech against India and in particular against Hindus. As a result, Hindu xenophobia seems less wild to many Indians than it did earlier.

The Pakistan government's politics of denial and increasingly offensive allegations that terrorist attacks in India are engineered by the Indian government and security forces ("to give the mujahideen a bad name") have further fanned Hindu grievance. They have also contributed to a wider, or perhaps more open, wariness toward Islam, which has increased after 9/11 and permits quite unrelated issues to be linked, such as Pakistan-backed terrorism in India and the February 2002 pogrom against Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat.

2. Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, "Worldviews 2002," a public opinion survey of U.S. and European attitudes on foreign policy, [www.c CFR.org](http://www.c CFR.org).

3. Government figures for people killed in Kashmir-related conflict since 1990 have shot up from around thirty-five thousand in 1998 to about sixty thousand today. While the jump might also reflect a shift from under-reporting earlier (as widely alleged by human rights groups), a rough newspaper survey of the period does indicate a sharp rise since the Kargil conflict of summer 1999 till today, with an average of nine to ten people dying per day. Further, more than 50 percent of the militants are from Pakistan and Pakistan-held Kashmir, and since the mid-1990s Islamic fundamentalist groups have dominated the militancy.

The Gujarat pogrom, in which more than a thousand Muslims were killed in a state-tolerated—perhaps even sanctioned—revenge for the brutal slaying of fifty-eight Hindus, came as a considerable shock both domestically and internationally. India's Hindu nationalists, the general belief was, had moderated with experience in government. The contentious issues that led to the 1993 Hindu-Muslim riots had been shelved by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the center, and they would control their more radical Hindu partners. India, after all, was poised to be a regional and maybe global power.

In the wake of the Gujarat riots, many concluded that this was an optimistic assessment. The BJP government at the center might have put aside contentious issues, such as the campaign for a Hindu temple on the site of a mosque that Hindu radicals destroyed in 1992 (the Babri Masjid),<sup>4</sup> but it was unable to restrain its radical wings in the states. The BJP-led Gujarat government revived the temple agitation when its allies tried to bury it; at the same time, Gujarat's extremist chief minister, Narendra Modi, made great play on Pakistan-backed terrorism in India.<sup>5</sup> Gujarat's Hindus and Muslims were polarized, and one of Gujarat's previous hot spots, Godhra, erupted when Hindu temple activists came to blows with local Muslims at the railway station. Muslim radicals set fire to a carriageload of men, women and children, killing fifty-eight. Revenge riots broke out across Gujarat, many of them led by Hindu activists affiliated with the Gujarat government. The state government failed to stop the riots until more than a thousand Muslims were killed, some literally torn apart.

The Gujarat government's policy of "turning a blind eye" to the carnage, and the central government's decision to opt for pressure on

4. The campaign to build a temple to the widely worshipped Hindu figure Ram on the site of a seventeenth-century Muslim mosque in northern India was launched in the late 1980s. The mosque was destroyed by Hindu mobs in December 1992, followed by Hindu-Muslim riots in western India (where extremist Hindu organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Shiv Sena have a strong presence). When the BJP came to power at the center in coalition with a number of regional parties, the temple campaign was put on a back burner, but when the BJP came to power in Gujarat under the leadership of Narendra Modi the campaign was revived—once again followed by Hindu-Muslim riots.

5. Because the Gujarat border has been relatively peaceful, most observers tend to forget that Gujarat has an ongoing dispute with Pakistan on the Rann of Kutch, and that Pakistani authorities regularly arrest Gujarati fishermen for straying into Pakistani waters. There are more than 250 fishermen in Pakistani custody at present.

the state government instead of dismissing it and placing the state under Governor's rule, allowed more than a thousand preventable deaths. Muslims continued to be harassed after the violence subsided. It looked as if India was beginning to undergo the same process of religious radicalization as so many of its neighbors—and with potentially worse consequences for its minorities, especially the 120 million-plus Indian Muslims (by virtue of scale).

The Bush administration especially criticized for not having reacted to the Gujarat pogrom more strongly than it did. The Europeans, who *had* reacted strongly, were under pressure to do more. Were not the Hindu xenophobes of Gujarat on par with Islamic fundamentalists? the U.S. and European administrations were asked, in parliament and by many civil society groups (especially in Britain where the Gujarati Muslim diaspora is strong). Should Hindu xenophobes not be considered as much a security threat as Islamic militants in Pakistan?

Domestically, Hindu xenophobes in India can be put on par with Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan and Bangladesh, or Buddhist extremists in Sri Lanka and Bhutan. But they do not export terrorism, as do radical Islamists in Pakistan, nor have they been supported by Indian security and intelligence services, as are Islamic militants in Pakistan. In this sense Hindu xenophobia does not constitute a security threat to the world—and certainly not to the United States or U.S. interests. Indeed, many Hindu xenophobes believe that U.S. and Hindu interests converge in the “clash of civilizations” that the 9/11 attacks tried to precipitate.

In a wider sense, however, the threat that Hindu xenophobes pose to Hindu-Muslim coexistence in India is of considerable security concern to the United States. The U.S.-India relationship has strengthened steadily over the past five years, as it was fated to after the end of the Cold War. Though it is still largely concentrated in diaspora-homeland ties, and the two countries will take time to overcome the estrangement of the Cold War years, the U.S. administration has worked hard with the Indian administration to chart steps toward a long-term alliance on several levels, including security and trade. The U.S. interest, therefore, is in a stable and prosperous India.

It is in this context that the Gujarat pogrom raised fears that India might be becoming less rather than more stable. It underlined the vulnerability of Muslims in India at a time when India's Muslims were beginning to be considered a beacon for the country's open society.

Indian Muslims did not support al-Qaeda or the Taliban, nor did they believe the 9/11 attacks were justified in light of U.S. support for Israel against the Palestinians. Though there was enormous anxiety about the air campaign on Afghanistan, public protests were few.

In fact, Indian Muslims were beginning to emerge from a partly self-imposed isolation following the terrible violence that accompanied the partition of India in 1947, the three India-Pakistan wars that ensued, and the 1992–93 Hindu-Muslim riots that were sparked by the temple agitation. Over the past decade, Indian Muslims had begun to enter the mainstream in larger numbers than before. In several southern Indian states, a government policy to rapidly increase the proportion of Muslims in the civil services generated enthusiasm and spurred Muslim enrolment in educational institutions. India produced South Asia's first Fortune 500 Muslim billionaire. It looked as if Indian Muslims were beginning to seek benefits from India's new economic opportunities.

The Gujarat riots dealt a body blow to this process. Ironically, Gujarat's new assembly and service sector opportunities (after economic liberalization in the 1990s) drew a wave of Muslim immigration from poorer regions, in particular to the state capital, Ahmedabad. Many of these economic migrants died in the riots; others were forced to return to the poverty-stricken villages they had left in search of a new life.

As subsequent events show, however, Gujarat is an aberration rather than the norm. Hindu-Muslim violence tends to be heavily localized in India—the bulk of it takes place in five out of India's twenty-one states and in a handful of cities—and it only rarely spreads to other parts of the country. The Gujarat riots did not trigger violence across India; in fact, 80 percent of the deaths occurred in Ahmedabad alone.

After the riots, India's elephantine government slowly lumbered back to rule. The BJP government at the center acknowledged the "blot" the riots had stained India with, partly under pressure from their allies in the ruling coalition. Important watchdog institutions stepped in to pressure the Gujarat government. The National Human Rights Commission indicted the state government for its failure to stop the riots, and the Indian Election Commission forced the state to restore order by setting benchmarks for an assembly election. There was, too, enormous domestic outcry against the center's reluctance to intervene directly in the state to stop the violence.

Human rights and women's groups combined humanitarian aid with investigative reports. The media called for immediate government intervention to stop the riots. Religious groups—in particular, the Hindu priests who called the Hindu nationalists to account—disavowed the Gujarat xenophobes and led peace initiatives with Muslim leaders. Business groups such as the Confederation of Indian Industries expressed their concerns collectively as well as through individual members. And finally, India's new President Abdul Kalam Azad, himself a Muslim, brought a healing touch when he chose Gujarat for his first presidential visit within a week of his inauguration.

Perhaps for these reasons, Gujarat survived a second test peacefully when terrorists killed some thirty-five Hindu, Muslim and Sikh worshippers at the Akshardham temple in September 2002. This time the Gujarat government deployed security forces around all vulnerable areas. More important, there were no mobs baying for blood. Instead, Gandhians reported crowds of two thousand at their peace meetings.

It would be over-optimistic to conclude from this sequence of events that Gujarat has turned to lasting peace. The state has suffered from periodic outbreaks of Hindu-Muslim violence since the late 1970s—a period that is also marked by the rise of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat. Gujarat's Muslim-bashing chief minister shows little signs of post-conflict moderation. Much depends on how the December 2002 Gujarat assembly election turns out.

What we can conclude, however, is that the Indian government and elites, even under the leadership of Hindu nationalists, realize the danger of perpetuating Hindu-Muslim violence and will be more vigilant if another Gujarat is in the offing. Whether they are ready to take the larger lessons of Gujarat on board, however, is another matter.

The literature on ethnic conflict shows that multiethnic societies are most stable when they have achieved some degree of integration between their different communities—and the most potentially unstable when earlier integrative networks are in decline. Hindu nationalism rose in Gujarat as its once-flourishing textile industry gave way to the power loom sector, and the Textile Labor Association, one of India's most powerful trade unions, shriveled.<sup>6</sup>

6. Asutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Recent research shows that even small steps toward integration can keep the peace. India's south, where a large proportion of Indian Muslims live, is largely free of violence. This is chiefly due to a combination of government and civil society initiatives, such as minority education funding and open reading rooms, avenues that have crumbled in the five states where Hindu-Muslim violence recurs.<sup>7</sup> Gujarat has become one of the most highly segregated states in India.

In other words, we now know what India can do to prevent riots such as the ones in Gujarat from recurring, and the task is not Herculean. Indeed, the majority of Hindu-Muslim deaths occur in a handful of cities. It is only a few areas that require concerted effort. We also know that the two most important avenues of integration are education and employment. Both are highly segregated in India and there is as yet limited readiness for change among educators and employers. The issue has, however, begun to be discussed by businessmen, partly thanks to India's modest information technology billionaire, N. Ramamurthy, who ruefully disclosed that there were no more than six Muslims among his thousands of employees. The Reliance Group, too, has just announced a new program to link all Gujarat's villages through the Internet. They have yet, however, to announce a policy to increase minority jobs.

Where education is concerned, the chief culprit is government. Most primary and secondary schools are government funded, as are most universities in India. A proactive policy by schools and university boards to increase the enrolment of minority candidates could make a great deal of difference. India has in any case shown new commitment to education programs such as universal literacy. Civil society too can play a useful role here, through pushing for de-segregation initiatives at the local level.

But whether these policies will be undertaken is an open question. The fact that Hindu-Muslim violence is concentrated in a handful of areas in the north and west of India is both good and bad news. It is good news because it indicates that India is unlikely to go the way of the former Yugoslavia. It is bad news because many of these states are especially vulnerable to India-Pakistan hostility, either because, like Gujarat, they border Pakistan, or because they are politically powerful at the center.

7. Ibid.

In the immediate term it is difficult to imagine India-Pakistan hostilities decreasing. The Pakistan-based jihad groups opposed the Kashmir election of September–October 2002, which was marred by a series of terrorist attacks. More than eight hundred people died during the three weeks of the election. The Pakistan election that followed hard on the heels of the Kashmir election yielded significant gains to the Islamists, who now have a critical mass in parliament. Their demands include the release of several militant leaders who were arrested between January and March 2002. In late October the Pakistan government released the chief of the banned Lashkar-e-Toiba group, Hafiz Saeed, and placed him under house arrest.<sup>8</sup> Soon after, two alleged Lashkar-e-Toiba militants were killed while trying to attack a crowded shopping mall in Delhi.

These indications that Pakistan is continuing to lift the curbs that were imposed on militant groups following the attack on India's parliament in January 2002 have already rung alarm bells in India. Most Indian policymakers believe there will be more rather than fewer attacks in Kashmir and in the rest of India in the months to come—and the bulk of them will be by Pakistan-based jihad groups.

Yet few Indian policymakers are counting the domestic costs of this escalation. If, as this paper argues, there has been a general rise in Hindu-Muslim insecurity during the years of India-Pakistan hostility, then this trend is likely to continue with more terrorist attacks forecast. How will the Indian government deal with this rise in tensions—by waiting for another outbreak of rioting and praying it will not be for another ten years? (The previous outbreak of Hindu-Muslim rioting was in 1992–93.) Or by adopting proactive strategies of containment and prevention, such as rapid reaction to the first signs of impending violence, and investment in integration?

It is too early to say yet. But the signs are mixed. The Indian government has shown readiness to take considerable risks in pursuit of peace with Pakistan (first at Lahore in 1999, and then at Agra in 2000). But it has not shown the same readiness to make Muslim integration

8. In fact, the Pakistani government released Hafiz Saeed on March 31, 2001, and his first act was to call on all the subcontinent's Muslims to launch a jihad against India to avenge the Gujarat pogrom. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, "Jihad Is the Best Defense for Oppressed Muslims," [www.markazdawa.org](http://www.markazdawa.org). Under Indian and U.S. pressure he was taken back into custody in April 2002 but has not been charged with any offences.

a priority—as it should have—given the sharp escalation of India-Pakistan hostility. As long as this hostility continues Pakistan is bound to, and will, support Muslim disaffection in India. It is in India's vital interest, therefore, to prevent sources of disaffection. The Indian government is supporting proactive steps in Kashmir, where the newly elected state government has released separatist leaders from prison, counter insurgency is being rolled back, and economic reconstruction and devolution top the agenda. A peace process has begun in the state and could be strengthened if Pakistan were to support it.

There is too, as stated earlier, new awareness of the need to prevent Hindu-Muslim tensions India-wide in both government and civil society—though it would appear to flicker where government is concerned. As an ally with a large Indian American diaspora and a large Pakistani American diaspora, the United States could play a useful role in supporting Indian preventive action and encouraging Pakistan to do so as well. Indian government and civil society have been more receptive to international aid and ideas in the last decade, especially so to the diaspora. U.S. investments in India are low, but they could still be combined with support for minority and gender employment, as well as desegregated education (an area where the United States has learned its own hard lessons). International institutions, especially global trade organizations, could work with Indian partners to write minority employment and integrated education into programs for economic growth.

Much depends, however, on whether Pakistan can be persuaded to aid rather than hinder India in these efforts. Anti-Indian sentiment has multiplied exponentially in Pakistan since the 9/11 attacks and the international spotlight on Pakistan's role in Kashmir-related terrorism in India that ensued—which Pakistanis blame on India's stationing of a half a million troops on the border.

Though the two countries took the major step of troops' withdrawals after the Kashmir and Pakistan elections, it was accompanied by a rise in shrill rhetoric that frittered away its confidence-building potential. Pakistan has added Gujarat to its litany of Indian crimes, a move guaranteed to raise Indian hackles further given the sorry state of Hindus and Christians in Pakistan (indeed, the Gujarat chief minister has already used Pakistan's statements on the Gujarat pogrom in his election campaign). More worrisome, there appear to be fresh Pakistani initiatives to court anti-Indian lobbies in Bangladesh, whose Hindu population has more than halved since 1947.

India can, and I hope will, take unilateral steps to prevent serious domestic fallout from hostility with these two Muslim neighbors. But the political will and resources are likely to be uneven as long as the threat of Islamic terrorism is high, given that India's institutions of governance are already unable to keep pace with population growth and the rapid social and economic change that is taking place. Here again the United States could play a helpful role in working with the Pakistan government to control and eventually decommission and rehabilitate radical groups, as suggested by several other chapters in this volume. Sad as it is, especially for Indians who believe their numbers, territorial size and democracy insulate them from their smaller and weaker neighbors, the subcontinent's minorities and majorities impinge on each other across borders.

After Pakistan abolished separate electorates for the 2002 election, a Hindu friend from Karachi commented bitterly, "Why doesn't India welcome this as a positive step for Pakistani Hindus?" The Pakistani government could take a leaf from his book. Though it does not trigger it, arming and sending Islamic militants into India compounds the vulnerability of Indian Muslims. This is one more reason for the United States, increasingly embroiled in Pakistan and more closely involved with the two countries than before, to support preventive action in each country as well as at a regional level. At the moment, and for the near future, containing Pakistani militancy and strengthening Indian democracy are key, especially as the two impinge on each other.

# 19

RASUL BAKHSH RAIS

## **Islamic Radicalism and Minorities in Pakistan**

**I**n the past, as well as in our times, religion in multi-religious and ethnic societies has polarized more than unified societies. Even within a single religious denomination one may find numerous strands that never tie up. Doctrinal differences, political contestation for power, material gains and territorial space can make the religion itself—and the question of authenticity—quite explosive. The political question of majority versus minority becomes salient and troublesome even in a society with one dominant religion. This question is a greater divisive force in states where religion is the source of political legitimacy or the basis of a state's identity. Religion turns out to be a dangerous political weapon when the majority religious communities attempt to shape culture, social institutions and the state itself according to a specific belief system. It was not without some learning from history of bitter religious feuds that the neutrality of the state became the central element of theorizing about the modern nation-state. The Western community of nations has accepted secular liberalism as the defining ideology of state, and this concept has found a considerable following even in the post-colonial states. But in some states, such as

Pakistan, the role of religion is not a settled issue, which greatly impacts the statecraft, the status and rights of minorities, and the larger question of internal peace and security.

Complex historical and social factors have shaped the interaction between religion and politics in Pakistan. Islam was at the heart of the political struggle for the creation of Pakistan and has remained at the center of post-Independence political discourse. Controversy about the role of Islam in politics continues to trouble the political landscape of the country. Even after half a century, the relationship between religion and state is still as unclear as the nature and direction of the democratic enterprise. The question of what type of polity Pakistan should be—liberal democratic or Islamic—evokes different responses from different social sectors and political interests. Military leaders, mainstream political parties, and Islamists have all attempted to define this relationship according to their vision of democratic development and the role of religion in society and state affairs.<sup>1</sup> Among the three main forces in the country, the quest for shaping the Pakistani state has added yet another dimension to religious and political polarization in Pakistan. As a consequence of this unending conflict of interests and expedient coalitions, the autonomy of the civil political sphere and the general question of civil liberties and minority rights have suffered a severe setback. The central argument of this paper is that the common political strands of identity politics, state formation processes, and Islamic radicalism have caused marginalization of religious minorities.

True representative democracy and constitutional politics are the best institutional tools to protect and advance the interests of religious minorities in any set of social conditions. For various reasons, Pakistan has never applied any of these tools during most of its history. The problem lies in the state formation process, in which the balance of power shifted toward the statist elites, the army and the civil bureaucracy.<sup>2</sup> Historical and geopolitical factors have determined this shift. At the moment, the army is once again restructuring the political system; the indications are that this will further institutionalize the

1. Anwar Syed, *Pakistan: Islam and National Solidarity* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 1984), 74–100.

2. Hasan-Askari Rizvi, *Military, State and Society in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan Press, 2000), 1–16.

army's power. The disjointed nature of democratic practice and its structural problems, which is a result of the army-dominated state formation process, has not produced a social change capable of empowering minorities and other disadvantaged groups in society. Their marginalization is as much a result of the failure of democracy as it is due to deep-seated social and religious attitudes against them.

Another important aspect of the state formation process in Pakistan is the contested issue of its identity—whether the state would be neutral among different religious communities or be Islamic.<sup>3</sup> Answers to this fundamental question continue to generate religious conflict and political confrontations in Pakistan. To explain this dilemma, it is necessary to touch upon the Pakistani theory of the state. The movement for the creation of Pakistan, among other things, was aided by the acceptance of the demand of the Muslims as a religious minority. Since Muslims were a substantial minority—about 25 percent of the population in undivided India—the objective was to have proportionate representation in the elected assemblies under the British rule. For this, they demanded and achieved a system of separate electorates under which Muslims electorates voted only for the Muslim candidates. Among other social and economic forces that influenced the growth of Muslim nationalism in British India, the separate electorates further distanced Muslims from integration with the majority community on the basis of secular Indian nationalism.

While separate electorates worked to the advantage of Muslims in undivided India—at least in getting larger numbers of their representatives in the elected assemblies—it was politically divisive and created a bigger wedge between Congress and the Muslim League. After the creation of Pakistan, the issue of separate electorates became enshrined in the character of the Pakistani state. Even though Muslims became a majority, the state had a formidable task of reassuring religious minorities and integrating them into mainstream national politics. In the 1956 Constitution, and later in the amended 1973 Constitution under the Zia ul-Haq regime, Pakistan practiced separate electorates against the will of minorities. The following sections explore minority discrimination and marginalization by examining the

3. Ayesha Jalal, "Ideology and the Struggle for Democratic Institutions," in Victoria Schofield, ed., *Old Roads New Highways: Fifty Years of Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 121–38.

legal regimes that sustain discrimination, as well as informal social structures, values, and culture. The rise of Islamic radicalism during the past two decades has equally put religious minorities under tremendous social and political stress, in some cases provoking violence against their members.

### **Identity Politics and Marginalization of Minorities**

UNTIL THE RECENT CHANGES in elections laws, Pakistan had a system of separate electorates that was introduced by the military government of Zia ul-Haq in 1979. But the political roots of separate electorates go back to the pre-Partition Muslim politics in the subcontinent and also to the early debates after the creation of the country about how to best protect minority rights. One of the most important planks of Muslim politics under British rule was to ensure that Muslims scattered around the length and width of India have representation in the elected councils proportionate to their numbers. For this, Muslims demanded separate electorates, meaning they would be allocated seats in the local, provincial, and central legislative bodies according to their percentage in the population, and that only Muslims would vote for Muslim candidates. The British in the Minto-Marley Reforms of 1909 for India, though vehemently opposed by the Indian National Congress, finally accepted this demand.<sup>4</sup> Muslims were in fact accorded dual voting rights: to elect their own representatives and to cast their votes in the general constituencies. All elections after the introduction of these reforms were held according to this system. Some historians have rightly argued that the establishment of separate electorates further strengthened the Muslim separatism that led to the creation of Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

After Independence, some leaders of the Pakistan movement continued to press for continuation of separate electorates; others pushed for ideological consistency, while still others aimed to ensure adequate representation of minorities in the elected bodies of the country. The question of separate electorates was one of the focal points of debate and controversy in the Constituent Assembly of

4. Khalid bin Sayeed, *Pakistan: The Formative Phase 1857–1948*, 2d ed., (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 28–33.

5. See, for instance, Ishtiaq Husain Qureshi, *A Short History of Pakistan* (Karachi: University of Karachi, 1988).

Pakistan when the first post-Independence constitution was under discussion. On the issue of separate electorates, the views of leaders of East Pakistan, where there was a sizeable Hindu minority, were different from those of the leaders of West Pakistan. While the West Pakistanis stressed the need for separate electorates, the East Pakistanis insisted on joint electorates. Members of the minority communities were also of the view that separate electorates would cast them off the mainstream national politics. They demanded equal political, civic and legal rights that could be guaranteed only under the joint electorate system.

It is important to probe the reasons for support of the separate electorates. Why did post-Independence Muslim leaders support separate electorates for minorities? Was the move to protect their democratic interests? A scant look at the arguments presented reveals that most Muslim leaders thought separate electorates would be consistent with the two-nation ideology of Pakistan.<sup>6</sup> This theory was at the heart of political struggle that resulted in the creation of Pakistan. Conservative religious leaders—and even some members of the Muslim League (the dominant political party at that time)—did not favor the idea of granting equal rights and status to non-Muslims in the Islamic polity they wished to establish.<sup>7</sup> Some of these leaders even questioned the loyalty of the Hindu minority to Pakistan and expressed their distrust of them openly. The religious parties and their supporters in the assembly refused to accept minorities as equal citizens with equal constitutional rights.

One wonders how separate electorates would have strengthened the foundation of Pakistan ideology, promoted national integration and made Pakistan a progressive, moderate and liberal Islamic nation that its founder, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah wanted to make it. It is pertinent to mention here the famous and oft-quoted statement of the founder of Pakistan before the Constituent Assembly: “You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state. We are starting in the days when there is no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are

6. See the views of the ulema (scholars of Islamic religion) in Sharif Al Mujahid, *Ideological Orientation of Pakistan* (Karachi: National Book Foundation, 1976).

7. Government of Punjab, *Report of the Court of Inquiry Constituted under Punjab Act II of 1954 to Inquire into the Punjab Disturbances of 1953* (Lahore: Superintendent of Government Publications, 1954).

starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizens and equal citizens of one state. You will find that in the course of time, Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the state.”<sup>8</sup>

There cannot be a more lucid and forceful expression of the founder’s political ideology than this address to the Constituent Assembly. The occasion of entrusting the assembly with framing a constitution—and the forum itself—makes Jinnah’s intent very clear about the direction and nature of Pakistan’s polity. The liberals and minorities in Pakistan have taken this statement as the fundamental principle of the country’s political structure. Those who believe in liberal, secular and democratic values cite this historic address to support their vision of Pakistan.

Others have taken a long u-turn in reading the history of the Pakistan movement and have reached opposite conclusions about the political character of the post-Independence Pakistani nation and state. In the formative phase of the country, some members of Jinnah’s own party began to present a distorted, illiberal and retrogressive political map for the country. The argument that minorities could not be treated as equal citizens in the Islamic republic found a lot of support among the lawmakers from West Pakistan, many of whom hid their ideological bias in pleading that in a system of joint electorates minorities might not get representation in the national parliament and provincial assemblies. The members of the Constituent Assembly from East Pakistan vociferously contested this view.<sup>9</sup> They were right in arguing that separate electorates would leave minorities in both wings of the country disenfranchised, and that the system would work against national integration.

The Constituent Assembly, in the very contentious atmosphere of framing the 1956 Constitution, failed to reach any agreement on whether to have separate or joint electorates. After ascertaining views of the provincial assemblies, the assembly left the matter for the future parliament to settle. The issue kicked up lot of public debate

8. *Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: Speeches as Governor-General of Pakistan 1947–1948* (Karachi: Pakistan Publications, n.d.), 8–9.

9. The members of the Constituent Assembly from East Pakistan had vehemently argued in support of joint electorates, a political battle they later won.

and controversy, and lines were drawn between liberal politicians and regional parties on one side and religious parties on the other. The Jamaat-i-Islami (Islamic party) and its founder and prominent leader, Maulana Abul Ala Maududi, were at the forefront of opposition to the joint electorates.

Other religious political parties and, as mentioned above, some sections of the Muslim League, also supported separate electorates. Their reasons were as diverse as the leaders and groups themselves. They argued that some pro-India parties and groups would capture power with the support of the Hindu minority in a system of single-member electoral constituencies, mainly in East Pakistan. In their judgment, more Hindus would get elected to the provincial assembly in East Pakistan and to the national assembly than would be justified under joint electorates. They also argued that with the influence of Hindu lawmakers and their prominence in the political arena, Bengali nationalism would gain strength, undermine Pakistan's position on Kashmir and gradually erode the country's ideological foundations.<sup>10</sup>

These arguments were flimsy, unconvincing and evasive of the real issues. The central principle of democracy is equality among all citizens with equal rights and duties. But a true democracy based on such principles was the last thing on the minds of many of these politicians, who were more interested in how to prevent religious minorities from becoming equal citizens and how to exclude them from electoral politics.

Why the religious and political parties wanted to build a political system in Pakistan where minorities would be marginalized and alienated is a question that has bothered true democrats from the beginning of the controversy to its end in 2002. All the major political parties in then East Pakistan supported joint electorates, except for the Muslim League, which had lost its influence there since the 1954 provincial election. After the adoption of the 1956 Constitution, when the issue was referred to the two provincial assemblies (East and West), a different resolution was passed: East Pakistan for joint electorates and West Pakistan for separate electorates. The national assembly, feeling the political pulse and opposition from East

10. For details, see M. Rafique Afzal, *Political Parties in Pakistan, 1947–58*, vol. 1 (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1986), 185–89.

Pakistani parties, decided to approve two different methods: joint electorates for East Pakistan and separate electorates for West Pakistan.

When elections were about to be held under the 1956 Constitution, the military imposed martial law for the first time in the country, abrogated the constitution and set out to make a new one that would be “appropriate to the genius” of the people of Pakistan. The issue of separate or joint electorates lingered on in political debates. The commission that was set up to frame the 1962 Constitution recommended separate electorates for minorities. General Muhammed Ayub Khan, the military ruler, did not accept the recommendation and decided for joint electorates. Pakistan held all subsequent elections under joint electorates, and formal marginalization of minorities in elections ended.

After the breakup of Pakistan in 1971, Parliament framed a new constitution more or less along the same lines as the 1956 Constitution, putting an end to the presidential system that Ayub Khan had earlier introduced. Pakistan was back to the parliamentary system but this time around, even in the face of opposition from the religious parties, procedures for joint electorates were adopted. After the separation of East Pakistan, the population of religious minorities shrank to nearly 5 percent of the Muslim population. The new government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto introduced additional safeguards into the 1973 Constitution for representation of minorities in national and provincial assemblies. Six seats were reserved for minorities in the national assembly. For provincial assemblies, five seats were reserved in Punjab, two in Sindh, two in Baluchistan, and one in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). However, minority legislators were not elected directly, but by the electoral college of their provincial assemblies. To further prove to the world that minorities were well represented in the power structure of Pakistan, the Bhutto administration—and almost all subsequent governments—recruited from the minority community for at least one federal minister of some unimportant ministry. With this system, minorities had a better sense of participation but were far from being treated with equality as discrimination continued in many other forms.

## **A New Religious Minority**

AHMADIS WHO CLAIM to be Muslims are a relatively new religious minority. Mainstream Muslims—both Shia and Sunni—do not accept Ahmadis within the fold of Islam. The controversy over the Ahmadi sect is about one hundred years old. At the turn of the twentieth century, Muslim cleric Mirza Ghulam Ahmad from Qadian in Punjab declared himself a new prophet of Islam. He made many other controversial assertions, such as the claim that he was Jesus Christ resent to reform the world. People generally regarded Ahmad as an insane person and ignored him. When the ranks of his followers began to swell in numbers, mainly after his death, the leaders of Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind (Association of the Islamic Religious Scholars of India) took serious notice of the new prophet from Punjab. Maulana Shabbir Ahmad Usmani, a noted religious scholar, wrote one of the first comprehensive theses against the Ahmadi sect in 1935. He declared Mirza Ghulam Ahmad a false prophet and an apostate and said any person who accepted him as a prophet, or even a religious a heretic, was liable to be stoned to death. After his decree a number of Ahmadis were stoned to death in the NWFP. The Deobandi ulema (religious forefathers of the Taliban) launched a nationwide movement against the Ahmadis by declaring them as non-Muslims and barring them from using Islamic symbols.

After the creation of Pakistan, the efforts of the Deobandi ulema gained considerable steam, particularly in Punjab, which had begun to emerge as the center of Ahmadi preaching. The Majlis-i-Ahrar (council for liberation) and the Majlis e Khatme Nabuwat (council for the finality of prophethood) were at the forefront of this movement. They put forward three demands to the government in 1951 when the constitution of the country was being debated: (1) that Ahmadis be declared as non-Muslims in Pakistan's constitution; (2) that Sir Zafarullah Khan, the first foreign minister of Pakistan, be removed from his position because he was an Ahmadi; and (3) that no Ahmadi be allowed to retain any key position in the country because Pakistan is an Islamic state. So strong was this movement that Mr. Daultana, a Muslim League leader and chief minister of Punjab, endorsed these demands. As the central government was unwilling to accede to these demands, the anti-Ahmadi groups began to agitate in the streets of

Lahore. The state of lawlessness and violence in 1953 provoked the city's first occurrence of martial law. Although the movement was suppressed, it continued to propagate against the Ahmadi sect in the following decades. A more violent form of the controversy revisited the country in the early 1970s.

Among the many controversies created by the Bhutto government, one of the most crippling was the move to declare the Ahmadi sect as non-Muslims via constitutional amendment. The events during the debate in the national assembly and later in the cities, towns, and remote villages would not make any Pakistani proud. While the national parliament was determining the religiosity of a community whose following was gaining in strength, the religious parties and groups pounced on the known Ahmadi families and prominent figures, burning down their houses and businesses. With the state taking the lead in branding a section of the population as non-Muslims, the religious groups became emboldened to the point of physically attacking, harassing and persecuting the suspected Ahmadis. Thousands lost their lives, and Pakistan created yet another marginalized community despite that community's following of millions and well-funded, well-organized religious and social networks. The Ahmadis' mosques were closed down and they were debarred from congregational prayers or showing any sign of being a Muslim in their places of worship. Ahmadis were added to the list of minorities—along with Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs—and were required by law to declare their status as Ahmadis in all official documentation.

Although the anti-Ahmadi movement is a perennial problem that has occasionally led to civil disturbances, the real persecution of this community started with the declaration that Ahmadis were non-Muslims. Since then, Ahmadis have been barred from naming their places of worship as mosques or even making them look like mosques. They are not allowed to make prayer calls or to display Islamic symbols or Islamic religious inscriptions in places of worship. These measures marked the beginning of official religious intolerance.

Persecution of religious minorities—particularly against Ahmadis—increased with late general Zia ul-Haq's Islamization project. A pervading sense of Islamic revival in the country fueled another anti-Ahmadi wave around 1984. To placate the religious right of the country and keep them on his side of the country's political divide, Zia further amended the Pakistan Penal Code by adding sections 298-B

and 298-C. These provisions made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to pose as Muslims, to preach or propagate by words (either spoken or written) and to use Islamic terminology or Muslim practices of worship. Once again, the state took the lead in implementing the political agenda of the religious political parties. In doing so, Pakistan has ignored its commitments to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and violated its social contract with the minorities that supported the Pakistan movement.<sup>11</sup>

The wave of religious bigotry and extremism began with Zia courting the religious constituency for political support and legitimacy.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan and the Mujahideen resistance based in Pakistan were also factors that influenced the growth of religious militancy. The flow of arms and money from the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries to the Islamic madrassa (religious school) network further contributed to the power and influence of religious organizations.

**Table 1.** Population and minorities in Pakistan

	Number	Percent
Total population	132,352,279	100
Muslims	127,433,409	96.28
Christians	2,002,902	1.58
Hindus	2,111,271	1.60
Ahmadis	289,212	0.22
Scheduled castes	332,343	0.25
Others	96,142	0.07

Source: Government of Pakistan, Statistics Division, No. SD. PER.E (53)/99-449, Islamabad, 16 July 2001.

11. Tayyab Mahmud, "Protecting Religious Minorities: The Courts' Abdication," in Charles H. Kennedy and Rasul Bakhsh Rais, eds., *Pakistan: 1995* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 84.

12. Mumtaz Ahmad, "Revivalism, Islamization, Sectarianism and Violence in Pakistan," in Craig Baxter and Charles H. Kennedy, *Pakistan: 1997* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 118.

## Separate Electorates

AFTER HANGING an elected prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Zia appeared desperate to cultivate a support base among the religious groups to end his political isolation. He took two drastic measures at that time to bring himself closer to the religious groups: separate electorates and blasphemy laws, two demands voiced by the religious groups for some time. Zia's actions are partly explained by his political need to have religious allies with street power on his side. Equally important is the fact that his vision of Pakistan was not much different from that of most religious political parties. Zia had plans to remain in power; his only bit besides the military was the religious establishment of the country. Zia gave the personal image of a pious, God-fearing, patriotic Pakistani. His Islamization agenda of the Pakistani state would have little credibility without acceding to the long-standing demands of the religious right for making provision for a separate system of elections for minorities. As an unchallenged military ruler, Zia began to give an altogether different orientation to Pakistan's political system, which was Islamic in the most conservative tradition. His ordinances, laws, actions, and acts of omission and commission were passed through the Eighth Amendment into the Constitution when the national assembly convened after the 1985 non-party elections. This way the separate electorates became part of the 1973 Constitution.

The Zia regime increased the number of seats for minorities in the national assembly from five to ten, but maintained the same numbers in the provincial assemblies. There was also a change in how seats in the legislatures would be filled. The entire country was divided into ten constituencies for minorities, which made it utterly impossible for them to effectively contest or cast their votes. Since religious minorities are dispersed throughout the length of the country, drawing long territorial constituencies reduced the exercise of separate electorates to a mockery. A few influential, wealthy and well-connected minority figures could win in such a rough and unlevelled electoral field.

After the restoration of democracy in the country with the death of General Zia ul-Haq and fresh elections in 1988, leaders from the mainstream political parties did not bother to address the issue of marginalization of minorities in electoral politics. Even with the unanimous removal of some parts of the Eighth Amendment

through the Thirteenth Amendment in 1997, the issue of joint electorates was not touched. Most politicians have not been keyed in to the issue or have never felt the need to understand the plight of religious minorities. Another reason could be the hesitation to offend the clamorous religious groups or to kick up a fresh controversy over an issue that to them seemed politically insignificant.

### **Blasphemy Laws**

NO OTHER LAW has had as grave of social and psychological implications for religious minorities as have the blasphemy laws. These laws have wide-blanket coverage of acts that may fall within the offences of blasphemy, the violation of which carries long prison sentences and death by hanging. Offences include injuring or defiling places of worship with the intent to insult the religion of any class; deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs; defiling a copy of the Holy Quran; use of derogatory remarks with respect to the Holy Prophet of Islam; uttering words with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings; use of derogatory remarks with respect to holy personages; misuse of epithets, description and titles reserved for certain holy personages and places; a person of the Qadiani group or Ahmadi calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith. In almost all cases, the law does not require any solid written proof, just the offensive remarks and few witnesses to get a conviction. More draconian is the procedure to file a complaint against an accused person. In addition to the state functionaries, any private person can file a case in the police station against any person under these laws. For this reason, blasphemy laws have been repeatedly misused against religious minorities and Muslims. In almost all cases the complainants have been private individuals with a personal grudge or religious zeal.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) monitored the blasphemy cases registered from January to October 2000. The commission's newsletter listed fifteen cases against the Ahmadis, five against Christians and eighteen against Muslims.<sup>13</sup> Common accusations against Ahmadis included posing as Muslims, preaching, possessing Ahmadi literature, and building minaret in the place of worship.

13. HRCP Newsletter 11, no. 4 (October 2000): 13–14.

Christians and Muslims were booked for making derogatory remarks about the Prophet of Islam, writing provocative slogans on the walls, desecrating Holy Quran or claiming to be prophets. The case of M. Yusuf Ali from Lahore is worth mentioning. Ali was sentenced to death in March 1997 for claiming to be a prophet. While his appeal to higher courts was still pending, a man convicted of sectarian terrorism and on death row himself shot Yusuf Ali dead in May 2002. This is not the first time a person accused of blasphemy has been murdered. The blasphemy laws have not only increased religious intolerance but have failed to provide any legal or institutional safety net for religious minorities.<sup>14</sup>

### Religious Intolerance and Violence

THE RISE OF ISLAMIC RADICALISM in Pakistan has greatly contributed to the growth of religious intolerance even among various sects of the Islamic faith, and more so against non-Muslims, particularly Ahmadis and Christians. In recent years, religious extremists based in the country and outside Pakistan have also questioned the Islamic religious identity of the Isamelis or Agha Khanis. These extremists send out derogatory material insulting the community and its leader, Karim Agha Khan. It is interesting to note that only the Deobandi faction of the Sunni Islam in Pakistan has raised militant outfits such as Lashkar-i-Jhangvi, and Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP). The Shia sect responded to the sectarian challenge of the SSP by organizing Sipah-i-Muhammed (SP). Both have been brutally murdering religious scholars, political activists and young professionals of the rival sect. Thousands of Pakistanis have perished in the sectarian violence.

Both the SSP and SP have exclusivist religious imagination and conflicting interpretations of the history of Islam and its doctrines.<sup>15</sup> Both question the religious authenticity of the other, each proclaiming the other is out of the pale of Islam. The majority of the members of the Shia and Sunni communities have watched the sectarian killings with awe and disgust. But the frequency and persistence of sectarian violence during the last fifteen years cannot be explained

14. See, for instance, I. A. Rehman, "A Critique of Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws," in Tarik Jan et al., *Pakistan Between Secularism and Islam: Ideology, Issues and Conflict* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1998), 196–204.

15. Qasim Zaman, "Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalization of Shia and Sunni Identities," *Modern Asian Studies* 32, no. 3: 689–716.

without sympathy and support of some influential members from each community. Sectarian violence that includes murdering fellow Muslims worshipping in the mosques or in religious congregations speaks volumes about religious hatred and intolerance. In a comparative sense, more Muslims have fallen victim to religious intolerance of the rival sects than have members of religious minorities; however, this comparison may not be fair due to the smaller numbers of minorities in the population.

More than numbers, the rise in Islamic radicalism confronts the religious community with a sense of exclusion, inferiority, discrimination and above all, insecurity and fear. Ahmadis, because of their breaking away from the mainstream Islam and their resourcefulness and organizational strength, have been the major target of intimidation and violence. Although Ahmadis have faced hatred and exclusion for a long time, never were they subjected to mass killings until their declaration as non-Muslims in the early seventies. Even after that brief but troublesome period, Ahmadis lived in harmony with their neighbors in villages and towns. It is only in recent years that the incidences of murders, mostly in places of worship, have increased against the Ahmadis.<sup>16</sup>

No other non-Muslim religious community has contributed more to the social sector development of Pakistan than the Christians have. Both missionaries and local members of the Christian community have built splendid educational institutions, hospitals and health facilities throughout the country. They have been peaceful even in the face of the worst provocation. Poor Christians have faced social exclusion and discrimination in both the urban and rural areas of the country. They have endured social inferiority and humiliation with grace and patience, hoping things would change with modernization and development. While Christians have yet to achieve social and economic mobility, they have increasingly become the victim of religious intolerance and terrorism; something this community had previously been spared.

Christians are the new target of terrorism in Pakistan. Lashkar-i-Jhangvi terrorists attacked Sunday Mass in the Dominican Church on 28 October 2001 in Bahawalpur and massacred twenty-nine worshippers, representing the worst case of terrorism against the

16. Amnesty International, *Pakistan: Use and Abuse of Blasphemy Laws* (New York: Amnesty International, 1994), 6–7.

Christians to date. In February 2002, terrorists attacked a church service mostly attended by foreigners in the diplomatic enclave in Islamabad. On 5 August 2002 terrorists attacked a Christian school in the Murree hills, killing six persons.

How can one explain the rise of violence against the minority Shia sect of Islam, the Ahmadis and the Christians? Is it due to declining capacity of the state?

The state's declining capacity is part of the problem; while religious bigots have been preaching hatred and violence against minorities, the state has remained silent. Participatory politics and civic culture with a focus on citizenship rights have suffered gravely due to the repeated failure of the democratic process in Pakistan. In this democratic vacuum, religious extremism—riding on the wave of jihad in Afghanistan and with transnational connections with similar groups—has taken strong roots in society. The war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda, along with President Pervez Musharraf's policies to root out religious extremism, has produced a new wave of anti-Western feelings. This sentiment, however, is not new. Muslims thinkers such as Maulana Maududdi and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt, the two powerful ideologues, shrouded Islamic revival in historical grievances of Muslims and Western barbarism.<sup>17</sup> This ugly sentiment, cultivated among the Muslim youth, was manifested in the killings of thousands of innocent people in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. In Pakistan, anti-Westernism has been turned against foreigners and local Christians. Christians in Muslim societies are generally affiliated with foreigners and are regarded by many as an extension of Western religious influence.

## Conclusion

NATION AND STATE BUILDING in any country, including Pakistan, is not about establishing a majority rule or simply holding elections (which in Pakistan have been few and mostly controversial), but laying a true foundation of democratic polity and society. For any student of democratic thought, nation and state building includes fundamental principles such as institutions and systems, citizenship,

17. Amir Taheri, "The Death of bin Ladenism," *New York Times*, 11 July 2002.

equality, inalienable fundamental rights, and empowerment of all individuals without any discrimination. In most post-colonial states, ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities have found themselves at the receiving end of political distribution. Some saw their decline as a privileged group, while others found themselves reduced in number or branded as a new minority in the redrawing of boundaries. The example of Muslims in India and Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan fits this description. In Pakistan, the voice of minorities has never touched the heart or mind of politicians. The tormenting experience of communal violence, transmigration of religious populations and the young and strident Muslim nationalism further muted the voice of minorities. In the bouts of political struggle for power, even liberal politicians remained silent on the issue of separate electorates. What could be more discriminatory than the classification of the citizen along religious lines? Most of the political parties decided to push the issue, while the religious groups feared a reversal of separate electorates would create a backlash. But the vision of democracy for such politicians was confined to getting to the assemblies, obtaining ministerial positions and making fortunes, not laying the foundations for true democracy.

Formal and informal discrimination against minorities has gone hand in hand; one has encouraged and deepened the other. Separate electorates have been more than separate electoral constituencies for religious minorities; they have amounted to the disenfranchisement, further marginalization and deepening sense among minorities of being second-class Pakistanis. Mainstream political parties have no interest in courting minorities and embracing prominent members and leaders of these groups because they could not vote for them. Minorities were left to form their own parties, if they so wished. Only the Christians set up some loosely organized parties. Other minorities have notable figures but no political organizations.

In a traditional Islamic society such as Pakistan, non-Muslims hardly enjoy equality of social or religious status. Officially, placing non-Muslims in another category in the electoral politics further deepened their alienation. Minority groups never supported separate electorates and have, for decades, struggled with whatever meager political capital they had to restore the joint electorates. In a large number of urban constituencies where mainstream political parties have traditionally close contests, the balance held by minorities would make a major difference in joint electorates.

Minorities kept the issue alive via the press, seminars and publications. The explosion of civil society organizations in Pakistan and the presence of the foreign press and human rights organizations have maintained a gentle pressure by questioning the authenticity of Pakistan's electoral democracy. In the past few years, two issues in Pakistan have received a lot of foreign attention: the status of women and the plight of minorities. In examining both these issues, one cannot escape the conclusion that both of these groups have been widely discriminated against, have hardly any representation in the power structure of Pakistan, and that there is official as well as society-based discrimination against both groups. Self-image has become a big problem in the globalized world media, and Pakistan has found its image badly battered on many counts.

The contention of this paper is that the practice of separate electorates was the worst case of disenfranchising religious minorities in the name of having representation in the Parliament and in the provincial assemblies. The present government has reversed the practice of separate electorates.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, national elections in October 2002 were held on the basis of joint electorates. The constitutional amendments inserted by the chief executive have also provided for reserved seats for the religious minorities in the Parliament, as well as in the provincial assemblies. This is the first and most important step toward empowering minorities and bringing them back into mainstream national politics.

Another aspect of discrimination against minorities is informal, or social, which is subtler than the legal, formal process of barring minorities from the political arena. Pakistan has a long way to go toward integrating minorities into electoral politics. The next general elections scheduled for October 2002 will be the first in a quarter of a century where Muslims and non-Muslims will vote together for the same candidates. It is a sad commentary on Pakistan's democracy that in the 1970 and 1977 elections, which were held on the basis of joint electorates, not a single member from the minority communities won any seat. Given the social climate of the country, no political party in Pakistan in the October 2002 elections offered any ticket to any member of the minority community to contest elections on general seat.

18. See Chief Executive's Order No. 7 of 2002.

Social prejudice is so strong that no party would like to appear to be supporting a non-Muslim candidate against a Muslim candidate of a rival party.

The remedy lies in affirmative action and in maintaining reserved seats for minorities in the provincial and national assemblies. In addition to this formal political process, much more needs to be done at the social level. Pakistan has to stem the tide of Islamic extremism through reforming the madrassa network, cultivating civic culture, promoting democracy, and reorienting the political discourse on Islam, state, and national identity. This is a tall order, but these issues must be faced if Pakistan is to protect its society against indiscriminate violence, instability and chaos.

# 20

AMENA A. MOHSIN

## **Religion, Politics and Security: The Case of Bangladesh**

**T**he issues of religion, politics and security became intertwined in South Asia, more often than not with negative consequences for human security since the colonial period as the latter maintained its power on the basis of divide and rule between the Muslim and Hindu communities of colonial India. The Partition of the Indian subcontinent, based on the two-nation theory (which claimed that Hindus and Muslims were two different nations based on religion), added new dimensions to the issue. On the one hand, the Partition increased animosity between the people of the two states and impacted the inter-state security of the two new independent states. On the other hand, it affected the security of the minorities within the states concerned. This paper argues that the intertwining of religion and politics in the context of South Asia is inextricably linked with the processes of nation building and modes of governance. In other words, it is a problem of politics, not religion. The above contention is substantiated in this paper through an analysis of the nation-building process and the predicament and plight of minorities in the state of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is a predominantly Muslim-populated state. According to the population census of 1991, Muslims formed 88.3 percent, Hindus 10.5 percent, Buddhists 0.59 percent, Christians 0.32 percent and other communities 0.26 percent of the population.<sup>1</sup> Minority communities of Bangladesh dispute these figures and maintain that their number is higher than those projected in the census. For instance, according to the census of 1991, the ethnic population of Bangladesh is 1.2 million, which constitutes 1.13 percent of the total population of Bangladesh. Gaps, however, exist between the official figures and private estimates. Maloney has pointed out that according to the *Monthly Statistical Bulletin of Bangladesh* (March 1981) the ethnic population in the five districts in Rajshahi division was sixty-two thousand, but various Christian missions in private censuses found the number to be double that.<sup>2</sup> Members of these communities also dispute the official figures and see such statistics as a government mechanism to establish them as numerical minorities.

Bangladesh has both ethnic and religious minorities. In most instances the former belong to the latter category as well. In the case of the religious minorities such as Hindus and Christians, many of the followers are ethnically Bengalis. The focus of this paper is the religious minorities, specifically the Hindu population of Bangladesh. This, however, is not to suggest that other minority communities do not suffer within the state; the selection has been made purely on methodological considerations which, among other factors, include the fact that Hindus are the most significant minority both in terms of numbers and also for political and historical reasons. The Hindu-Muslim divide has been constructed and is being played upon and exploited by the political elite of the country most effectively and almost in a routinized manner for their own benefits in the name of “nation” and “state.”

This paper is divided into four sections. The first examines the use of religion for nation building through instituting religious ideals into the state structure and system. The second section examines discriminatory laws. The third probes the rupture of human security of the

1. Ain ‘O Shalish Kendra, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust and Odhikar, *Human Rights in Bangladesh, 1997* (Dhaka: University Press, 1997), 116.

2. C. T. Maloney, “Tribes of Bangladesh and Synthesis of Bengali Culture,” in M. S. Qureshi, ed., *Tribal Cultures in Bangladesh* (Rajshahi University: Institute of Bangladesh Studies, 1984), 8.

Hindu community and inter-communal relations as a consequence of state ideals and laws. Finally, the paper looks into community responses to address and redress the above.

## Religion and the Nation

THE MODERN STATE is predicated on the idea of nationalism. The post-colonial states, in their endeavor to create a nation or homogeneous population, often undertake state-sponsored models of nationhood, which adopt various elements such as culture, language, and religion as tools of homogenization. These elements are more often than not the attributes of the dominant or majority community. The state of Bangladesh has experimented with two such models: Bengali and Bangladeshi. In both instances minority communities have been marginalized and alienated. The following clarifies this point.

Though the state of Bangladesh started its journey on a secular basis of nationhood, religion soon became an important component. The nationalist movement of the East Bengalis was predicated on Bengali nationalism, which had a distinct secular orientation based on Bengali language and culture. Seeds of this nationalism were sown in 1948 when Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the father of the nation, declared in Dhaka that Urdu would be the state language of Pakistan. The new state of Pakistan also used religion as a tool for constructing Pakistani nationhood. Bengali language and culture were alleged to be influenced by Hinduism. Thus, in 1949 the central minister for education openly proposed the introduction of Arabic script for Bengali. It was argued that:

Not only Bengali literature, even the Bengali alphabet is full of idolatry. Each Bengali letter is associated with this or that god or goddess of Hindu pantheon ... Pakistan and Devanagari script cannot co-exist. It looks like defending the frontier of Pakistan with Bharati soldiers! ... To ensure a bright and great future for the Bengali language it must be linked up with the Holy Quran ... Hence the necessity and importance of Arabic script.<sup>3</sup>

3. Anisuzzaman, *Creativity, Reality and Identity* (Dhaka: International Center for Bengal Studies, 1993), 107.

East Bengalis perceived this use of religion as a tool of domination. To counterpoise this “Islamic” nationalism, a secular nationalism emerged in East Bengal that was militant in its emphasis on the Bengali language and culture. The Language movement, which continued from 1948 to 1952, acquired an emotional and politicized content for the Bengalis on 21 February 1952 when Pakistan authorities opened fire on students in Dhaka when they were protesting the imposition of Urdu as the state language, resulting in the death of four. By the mid-1960s the Bengalis had moved on to the demands for economic and political autonomy as discrimination and domination of the West Pakistani ruling elite over the Bengalis were evident in all spheres of life.<sup>4</sup>

The new state indeed based itself on a secular plank. The constitution of Bangladesh, adopted by the Bangladesh Parliament on 4 November 1972, in its preamble paragraph 2 accepted “nationalism,” “socialism,” “democracy” and “secularism” as state principles. In the context of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, defined it in the following words:

Secularism does not mean the absence of religion. Hindus will observe their religion; Muslims will observe their own; Christians and Buddhists will observe their religions. No one will be allowed to interfere in others’ religions. The people of Bengal do not want any interference in religious matters. Religion cannot be used for political ends ...<sup>5</sup>

To implement the above, Article 12 of the constitution stated that the principle of secularism shall be realized by the elimination of:

- Communalism in all forms;
- The granting by the state of political status in favor of any religion;
- The abuse of religion for political purposes; and
- Any discrimination against, or persecution of persons practicing a particular religion.<sup>6</sup>

4. For details, see Rounaq Jahan, *Pakistan: Failure in National Integration* (Dhaka: University Press, 1972).

5. Government of Bangladesh, *Parliament Debates, October 12, 1972* (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1972), 20.

6. *The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*, Ministry of Law (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1972), 5.

Article 38, paragraph 2 of the constitution further states:

No person shall have the right to form or be a member or otherwise take part in the activities of, any communal or other association or union, which in the name or on the basis of any religion has for its object, or pursues a political purpose.<sup>7</sup>

As suggested earlier, in the construction of nationhood in Pakistan, religion had been used as the main tool of domination of the Bengalis by the Pakistani regime. In 1971 the Pakistani regime again employed the rhetoric of religion in carrying out one of the worst genocides of history. Secularism was therefore a logical outcome of the Bengali nationalist movement. It would thus appear that the new state was set for a secular start. However, the new state, being a modern or nation-state, has within its very construction the quest for homogenization, which propels it toward the majority community. Nationalism's inherent bias toward the majority community compelled Mujib to compromise on the question of religious secularism. It is true that Bengali nationalism, as it emerged in East Bengal, was secular in its content, but that was the logical outcome of a situation where Bengalis were being oppressed in the name of religion. Culture and language at that moment were the symbol of unity among the Bengali population of East Bengal, which differentiated them from "Muslim" West Pakistanis. But once the hegemony of West Pakistanis was removed with the creation of Bangladesh, the Muslim identity of Bengalis again came to the fore. India's role during the liberation war of Bangladesh and the Awami League's overt association with India had revived fears among the general people of Hindu domination. Furthermore, according to a noted political scientist of Bangladesh, "secularism in Bangladesh did not reflect its societal spirit."<sup>8</sup> Even in 1971 during the course of the war, people in general sought the intervention of the Divine to succeed. The Awami League had won the elections of 1970 on the basis of its Six-Point formula, which was a program for political and economic emancipation of Bengalis. In

7. *Ibid.*, 13.

8. Talukdar Maniruzzaman, "Bangladesh Politics: Secular and Islamic Trends," in Rafiuddin Ahmed, ed., *Religion, Nationalism and Politics in Bangladesh* (New Delhi: South Asia Publishers, 1990), 69.

1969 the Awami League had pledged that its Constitution for Pakistan would be based on the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah.

In most of the post-colonial states, mass media and education (being state-controlled) are two important sectors manipulated and used by the state for constructing its brand of nationalism. In Bangladesh the State Radio and Television discontinued the practice of Pakistan days of opening the programs with recitations from the Holy Quran and substituted it with a program of “Speaking the Truth” based on secular ethics. Sheikh Mujib discontinued this religious neutrality of the mass media. He adopted the policy of equal opportunity for all religions and ordered citations from the Holy books of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity at the start of the broadcasts by the State Radio and Television. Citations from the Hindu Holy Book and coverage of Hindu religious festivals created a backlash among the Muslims.<sup>9</sup>

The policy of secularism also backfired in the education sector. During the Pakistan period in the primary and middle stage of education (Class VI to VIII) *Islamiyat* (religious education) was made a compulsory subject. After Independence the Education Ministry continued with the same policy. The Mujib government, however, set up an Education Commission in 1972, which submitted its interim report in May 1973. The Commission recommended the separation of religion from education. However, the report was submitted before public opinion on the issue had been elicited through the distribution of questionnaires. Subsequently, the questionnaires showed that secular education was acceptable to about 21 percent of the most educated section of the people of Bangladesh. About 75 percent opined that religious education should be an integral part of general education. These findings revealed the gap between the opinions of Bangladesh society and those of Sheikh Mujib’s secular polity.<sup>10</sup> A perceptible shift emerged in Bangladesh politics. On 28 March 1975, Mujib revived the Islamic Academy (which had been banned in 1972) and elevated it to a Foundation. The Mujib regime was brought to an abrupt end through his gruesome murder by a group of army officers on the night of 15 August 1975.

With the change of regime, nationalism in Bangladesh also took an explicit turn toward religion. The coup leaders obviously wanted to

9. *Ibid.*, 70.

10. *Ibid.*, 71–73.

capitalize on the existing public mood, which was increasingly enthusiastic about the adoption of Islamic values. The coup leaders therefore used Islam to secure—and to a certain extent legitimize—their position. It is therefore not surprising that the coup of August 1975 was declared in the name of the “Islamic Republic of Bangladesh.” But Khondokar Mushtaque Ahmed (a cabinet member of the Mujib regime), who was appointed as the president by the coup leaders, tried to balance the situation. His first public address on 15 August was made in the name of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. The speech, punctuated with Islamic expressions, evidenced the course that the Bangladesh polity was about to take. Bangladesh thus shook off its garb of secularism and began to move toward Islamization.

Following a number of coups, Major-General Zia ur Rahman emerged as the strong man in government. Zia—a fervent nationalist and freedom fighter—represented the spirit of the liberation war of Bangladesh. But Zia was quick to realize that Mujib’s nationalism in post-independent Bangladesh was guided by its perception of pre-independent Bangladesh. Zia therefore opted for a different model of nationhood for the Bengalis. In this new construction he chose to emphasize the element of nationalism that would have appealed most to the majority/dominant community at that moment. The element turned out to be religion, and the new model of nationhood came to be known as Bangladeshi nationalism. It must be stressed here that this shift was primarily made by Zia to secure and consolidate his own position. In order to remain in power he needed the support of two sections: the people and the military. The move toward Islamization was obviously aimed at appeasing the dominant/majority community of the state. Moreover, through the adoption of Bangladeshi nationalism, Zia could distinctly disassociate his regime from the Awami League, which was necessary to secure support from military.

A manifesto from the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP, the political party floated by Zia) defines Bangladeshi nationalism as follows:

Religious belief and love for religion are a great and imperishable characteristic of the Bangladeshi nation ... the vast majority of our people are followers of Islam. The fact is well reflected and manifest in our stable and liberal national life.<sup>11</sup>

11. *Ghoshonapatra* [manifesto] (Dhaka: Bangladesh Nationalist Party, 1978).

Proponents point out that Bangladeshi nationalism is territorial—it draws a line between the Bengalis of Bangladesh and Bengalis of West Bengal of India. This gives it a totality, which is precisely lacking in Bengali nationalism. This, however, is a mere exercise in semantics; Bengali nationalism explicitly had a territorial dimension. Bangladeshi nationalism, as it evolved in 1975, was in essence a reassertion of Muslim identity for Bengalis in Bangladesh. Accordingly, changes were brought about in the mass media, the education sector and the constitution to expedite and legalize the process of this new construction.

The change was first apparent in the mass media. Simultaneous recitals on radio and television from the holy books of different religions continued as before, but the time allotted to the reading from the Holy Quran (the Holy Book of the Muslims) increased from five minutes to fifteen minutes. While no religious citation had been made at the closing of the programs during the Mujib regime, the programs now closed with recitations from the Quran only. Moreover, quotations from the Quran and the Hadith (the Prophetic Tradition) were now frequently broadcast between programs.<sup>12</sup> Education too acquired an Islamic orientation. Islamiat was introduced to class I to VIII as a compulsory paper for Muslim students only and from class IX to X as an elective subject.

Islamic ideals were also incorporated into the constitution. By the proclamation of Order no. 1 of 1977, the ideal “Bismillah-ar-Rahman-ar-Rahim” (In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful) was inserted at the beginning of the constitution above the preamble. Through the same proclamation, Article 8, clause 1 was substituted by

the principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, together with the principles derived from them ... shall constitute the fundamental principles of state policy.<sup>13</sup>

12. Maniruzzaman, “Bangladesh Politics,” 74.

13. Government of Bangladesh, *The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Government of Bangladesh, 1991), 9.

Thus the principle of secularism, as set forth in Article 8 as one of the state principles, was dropped from the constitution. Article 12, through which communal political parties were banned in Bangladesh, was also dropped from the constitution, as was Article 9, which stressed the lingual and cultural unity of Bengali nationalism. Article 6 clause 2 stated that citizens of Bangladesh were now to be known as Bangladeshis instead of Bengalis. These changes were given effect through the Fifth Amendment to the constitution on 5 April 1977.

Changes were apparent in administrative policies as well. The Second Parliament of Bangladesh met on 21 May 1979 and started its session with recitation from the Quran only; previously, citations were made from the holy books of all religions. Zia also encouraged the use of certain non-Bengali words and slogans. The Bengali slogan "Joi Bangla," which was akin to the Indian slogan "Jai Hind," was replaced by "Bangladesh Zindabad" (Zindabad is an Urdu word that means long live), which is closer to "Pakistan Zindabad." Friday, a holy day for Muslims was declared a half-holiday. The above measures helped Zia to consolidate his power base, for Mujib had been accused of being too close to India. The pro-Islamic leanings were interpreted as a distancing of the country, which has a predominantly Muslim population from "Hindu India." The policies therefore were made to please the majority community in Bangladesh. This entrenched the hegemony of Bengali Muslims, for under the new brand of nationalism of Bengalis and Islam, the Bengali cultural heritage too was patronized. Zia had based his Bangladeshi nationalism on the following elements: race, the war of independence, the Bengali language, culture, religion, land (geographical area) and economy.

Zia was assassinated in May 1981 by a group of army officers. His death brought another change in the contours of state nationalism, which moved from the "liberal Islamic nationalism" of Zia toward "Islamic nationalism" under General H.M. Ershad, who assumed power through a bloodless coup in March 1982 by overthrowing the elected BNP government of Justice Abdus Sattar.

Ershad accepted the Bangladeshi model of nationhood but made it more rigid and totalitarian by giving it a totally Islamic orientation. This move was ostensibly taken to secure and legitimize his own power base; unlike Zia, Ershad was not a freedom fighter and, more importantly, he was generally considered to be a usurper of power. Ershad de-emphasized the "Bengaliness" (unlike Zia) of the

Bangladeshi nationalism and instead attempted to consolidate the Islamic contours of this model of nationalism. February 21, which stands as the very epitome of secular Bengali nationalism, was given an Islamic twist by Ershad. In early 1983 he declared that the drawing of “Alpana” (painted designs) on the premises of the Shaheed Minar was an un-Islamic practice and should be substituted with recitations from the Holy Quran. Referring to the significance of February 21 he declared: “This time the movement is for the establishment of an Islamic state.”<sup>14</sup> This stand negated the very spirit of the day, as it symbolized the struggle of Bengalis to fight the hegemony of West Pakistanis in the name of Islam. The policy could not be implemented due to strong opposition from the entire Bengali community, which cherishes its Bengali heritage as much as its religious beliefs. But it did suggest the course that the polity was about to take. Ershad based his policy of Islamization on two planks: (1) mosque-centered society, and (2) Islam as the state religion.

#### **MOSQUE-CENTERED SOCIETY**

In 1986 Ershad raised the slogan of building a mosque-centred society in Bangladesh. The government officially encouraged the grant of funds to mosques. The government also encouraged foreign assistance for the development of mosques. He made it a regular practice to address the Friday congregations at different mosques and regularly visited different *pirs* (Muslim religious leaders).

#### **ISLAM AS THE STATE RELIGION**

Through the Eighth Amendment to the Constitution of Bangladesh on 7 June 1988, Islam was declared as the state religion of Bangladesh (Article 2, Clause A) with the provision that other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in the republic.<sup>15</sup> Islam was thus adopted as a cardinal feature of Bengali’s nationalism. Ershad was using Islam to consolidate his position, for it is a matter of fact that the very concept of Islam as a state religion is contradictory, as Justice Kamaluddin Hussein has pointed out:

14. Partha Ghosh, *Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia* (Dhaka: University Press, 1989), 71.

15. Government of Bangladesh, *The Constitution*, 5.

The question is fundamental, can Islam be the state religion even in a Muslim-dominant polity? And can a sovereign state have Islam as state religion? ... If Islam is the state religion then it becomes the sovereign power, it cannot be subordinate to the sovereignty of the state ... a religion like Islam ... cannot be controlled by the state, and again a sovereign nation-state cannot be dictated by the canons of Islam ...<sup>16</sup>

Ershad also attempted to bring about changes in the education sector. In 1983 he announced that along with Islamiyat, Arabic (the language of the Quran) would also be studied as a compulsory subject. This could not be implemented due to opposition from the students and political parties. However, he encouraged *madrassa* (Islamic schools) education and put it on par with the corresponding level of general education. The government also introduced the Imam (Muslim religious teachers) Training Program in 1979, whose objective was to encourage imams to engage in national development efforts.

Changes were brought about at other levels, too. Friday was declared a full holiday. The name of the Red Cross was changed into Red Crescent. The country saw a proliferation of political parties with Islamic affiliations. Ershad was ousted from office in December 1990 through a popular uprising in which all political parties of the country participated. This opposition, however, was not based on any ideological contention. The issues involved were Ershad's usurpation of power from a civilian regime and widespread corruption at all levels. The political parties had agitated for his ouster from power and for the restoration of democracy in the country. This, however, was a contest among the Bengali elites for securing and consolidating their own power. This became evident in the election of 1991, when all the major political parties made liberal use of religious symbols. The Awami League, long considered to be the champion of secular Bengali nationalism, also resorted to the manipulation of religious symbols. Even the Communist Party held religious gatherings in its office premises. These moves attest to the bias of these parties toward the majority/dominant community.

16. Cited in Anisuzzaman, "Dharma Rashtra, Dharma Nirepokkhota 'O Rashtra Dharma'" (Theocratic state, secularism and state religion), in Muhammad Delwar Hussein, ed., *Bangladesher Rajnitite Dharma 'O Dharma Nirepokkhota* (Religion and secularism in the politics of Bangladesh), (Dhaka: Prerona Prokashoni, 1993), 27.

## Discriminatory Laws

THE PARTITION OF INDIA along religious lines (i.e., Hindu-Muslim) and the subsequent emergence of two nation-states turned out to be ominous for the religious minorities of the two states. Despite India's secularism and Jinnah's assurance that Pakistan would not be a theocratic state—and that in the new state of Pakistan Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims under the rubric of Pakistani nationalism—the divisions became more pronounced and politicized as the state embarked on its policy of nation building. The new state was based on the ideology of Islam. The state's attempt to weave its ideology into the state apparatus and give it an institutional form through various laws and state principles alienated and worried the non-Muslim population, especially Hindus. This sense of insecurity intensified as the state formulated specific laws that marginalized non-Muslims in a systemic way. These were later inherited and retained by the state of Bangladesh. The Hindu community in Bangladesh feels economically and politically marginalized by these laws. The exposition below will make this clear.

The Enemy Property Act, which was subsequently renamed Vested Property Act by the Bangladesh government, is the main cause of economic marginalization of the Hindu community. It has its origins in a number of laws and by-laws promulgated by the Pakistani authorities. These originated in the East Bengal (Emergency) Requisition of Property Act (Act XIII of 1948). In the aftermath of Independence in 1947, the then provincial government was faced with an abrupt and acute problem of accommodation for the numerous government offices and public servants. Under those circumstances the said act was passed for a period of three years. The act gave the government power to acquire, either on a temporary or permanent basis, any property it considered needful for the administration of the state.<sup>17</sup> Hindu members of the East Bengal Assembly opposed the bill on the grounds that it would make the properties of the Hindu community more prone to acquisition.<sup>18</sup> Their apprehensions turned out to be

17. Abul Barkat and Shafiquzzaman, *Political Economy of the Vested Property Act in Rural Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Association for Land Reforms and Development, 1997), 27.

18. Meghna Guhathakurta, "Politics in South Asia and the Hindus of Bangladesh," in Lipi Ghosh and Moniruddin, eds., *Minorities, Nationalities and Identity Formation in South Asia* (forthcoming, Kolkata).

true. The proceedings of the East Bengal Assembly of 1951 evidenced the fact that the act was widely used against religious minorities.<sup>19</sup>

In 1951 the East Bengal Evacuees (Administration of Immovable Property) Act, 1951 was passed. According to the government, this act was necessary due to the massive exodus of Hindus in the aftermath of the partition and the communal violence that accompanied it. Under the act the government, through the Evacuee Property Management committee, could take the charge of property of an evacuee person either on the basis of application from such person or on its own motion. The committee had the authority to grant lease or to let out such properties as it deemed necessary. The act also restrained the authority of the Civil Court or High Court to call in question any order passed or any action taken under this act. It has been alleged that in many instances, properties of Hindus still living in East Bengal were also requisitioned as evacuee property. The Hindu elites and zamindars (landlords) were mostly affected by this act.

Following the Hindu-Muslim riot in 1964, the East Pakistan Disturbed Persons Rehabilitation Ordinance was passed in 1964. The validity of the ordinance was extended from time to time until 1968. The ordinance was supposed to bring about speedy rehabilitation to persons affected by the communal violence. It also introduced restrictions on the transfer of any immovable property of a minority community without prior approval of a competent authority. Most common people did not have easy access to these competent authorities, which created many problems for minority communities, especially the Hindus. In essence, between 1964 and 1968 Hindus were deprived of their ownership of property right, as the two basic components of ownership—the right to ensure the title of their property and the right to transfer—were void during that period.<sup>20</sup>

The Defense of Pakistan Ordinance (Ord. XXIII of 1965) was promulgated following the outbreak of the India-Pakistan war in September 1965. It authorized the government to take special measures to ensure the security, public safety, interest and defense of the state. An emergency was also proclaimed. Under the provisions of emergency powers and the Defense of Pakistan Ordinance, the government framed the Defense of Pakistan Rules (DPR) under which

19. Barkat and Shafiquzzaman, *Political Economy*, 24.

20. *Ibid.*, 29–31.

the government made an executive order on September 9, 1965 named the Enemy Property (Custody and Registration) Order II of 1965. The Enemy Property Act consisted of the following major parts:

1. India was declared as an enemy country.
2. All interests of the enemy (i.e., the nationals/citizens of India, those residing in the territory occupied/captured/controlled by India) in firms and companies, as well as in the lands and buildings situated in Pakistan, were to be taken over by the custodian of Enemy Property for control or management.
3. The benefits arising out of trade, business, or lands and buildings were not to go to the enemy, so as to not affect the security of the state of Pakistan or impair its defense in any manner.<sup>21</sup>

Though the war came to an end in September 1965, the above law had a distinct communal bias and was kept in operation through various proclamations. In a circular issued it was specified that Muslims residing in India, including Indian citizens, would be excluded from the category of “enemy.” (Though the act had explicitly stated that all citizens of India would be regarded as an enemy.) The circular also pointed out that the properties of such Muslim owners would be handed over to them or their legal heirs upon demand. But for a member of the minority community, once the property is enlisted as “enemy,” his or her ownership right would be lapsed forever. It was not only a clear case of discrimination, but also an explicit demonstration of the lack of confidence and trust of the state in its Hindu population. Paradoxically, the Bangladesh government retained the same act. On 26 March 1972, the Bangladesh government enforced the Bangladesh Vesting of Property and Assets Order (Order 29 of 1972). By this order, the properties left behind by Pakistanis (non-Bengalis, Biharis who left for Pakistan) and the erstwhile enemy properties were combined into a single category; thus all the properties of the “enemy” remained with the Bangladesh government under the banner of Vested Property.

21. *Ibid.*, 31–35.

The above law was a clear violation of the spirit of the Bangladesh liberation war. Secularism was adopted as one of the state principles, yet the state retained this communal act. More importantly, the act was also out of context and time as Bangladesh itself was liberated with India's active assistance, and the two countries were signatories to a Treaty of Peace and Friendship. Under the terms of the act, one had to assume that Bangladesh was in a state of war with India.

A parliamentary sub-committee was set up under the Ministry of Land to recommend the repeal of the Vested Property. The sub-committee formulated a draft bill to this effect. This bill, however, had several loopholes. For example, it recommended that properties that were not legally vested in the ownership of the government—as well as those that had been declared as enemy or vested property after 16 February 1969—not be considered as vested property under the proposed law. In fact, most Hindu property had been declared as vested property after this period. The proposed bill further stipulated that nothing contained in the proposed law would affect the proprietorship status of the vested property if it had been taken over by the government, a government institution, any other institution or individual, or if it had been sold or handed over permanently by the government by court directive. These cases could not even be questioned in court. This paper argues that these provisions negate and defeat the spirit and objectives of the repeal of the Vested Property Act. The law also states that the original owners must produce land documents to the tribunal within 180 days of the promulgation of the law, or the land would be taken over as government property. The 180-day time period is considered to be insufficient by members of the community. Besides, it also provides that in the absence of the original owner, the property would be passed on to the successor according to Hindu inheritance laws. In such an instance the provision would be discriminatory toward women, as the present Hindu law deprives women of any right to inheritance.

The Vested Property Act was repealed by the previous regime in April 2001 as the Vested Property Return Bill 2001. This bill deals only with those vested lands that are now under the government's control or possession. Claimants must prove their "unbroken and permanent citizenship" to qualify for ownership of vested property. Tribunals would be set up in all sixty-four districts of Bangladesh, where valid owners would be asked to place their claims within ninety

days. The tribunals would have to settle the cases within 180 days. As per the bill, property not claimed by anyone in the tribunals, or claims that could not be validated, would go to the government for sale or lease. Property earlier released from the Vested Property list or for which a decree was obtained from higher court, or permanently leased out by the government to any authorized person or agency, or acquired for public interest, would not be included in the new Vested Property list.<sup>22</sup> It thus appears that the anomalies existing in the bill proposed earlier have not been rectified. Most members of the Hindu community, however, feel the repeal is insignificant because land alienation and land-grabbing of the Hindu community still continues through coercion since the state system is biased toward the majority community. Hindus also allege they face discrimination in business, employment and education sectors. There is a deep conviction among members of the community that preference in the above sectors would invariably be given to Muslim members.<sup>23</sup>

### **Security Rupture and Inter-communal Relations**

THE HINDU COMMUNITY of Bangladesh feels insecure both politically and economically. Their insecurity and vulnerability were evident following the Babri Masjid (mosque) incident in India. For the first time since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, an anti-Hindu riot took place on a national scale—first in 1990 then in 1992. In December 1992, reprisals took the form of attacking temples (and the premises and properties surrounding them) as well as *pūja mandaps* (worship altars) all over the country. Sultana Nahar<sup>24</sup> provides a detailed account of the attacks that took place in Dhaka, Savar, Manikganj, Mymensingh, Narsingdi, Gopalganj, Faridpur, Gazipur, Narayanganj, Rajbari, Sherpur, Kishoreganj, Madaripur, Chittagong, Coxesbazaar, Teknaf, Sylhet, Habiganj, Comilla, Laxmipur, Feni, Chandpur, Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Sunamganj, Moulvi Bazaar, Habiganj, Bhola, Pirojpur, Satkhira, Barisal, Jhalkathi, Patuakhali, Khulna, Magura, Barguna, Sirajganj, Pabna, Kushtia, Natore,

22. *Daily Star* (Dhaka), 10 April 2001.

23. For details, see Sultana Nahar, *A Comparative Study of Communalism in Bangladesh and India* (Dhaka: Dhaka Prokashon, 1994).

24. *Ibid.*, 260–73.

Thakurgaon, Rangpur, Bogra, Nogaon, and Dinajpur. This long list suggests the riots were national in scale and not sporadic or isolated incidents. It has been alleged that the acts were politically instigated. The Ershad regime, facing pressure from the opposition coalitions for a free and fair election under a caretaker government, found it politically expedient to divert attention by letting “communal forces” take the upper hand and by trying to patch up things after most of the damage was done. This seriously undermined the confidence of the Hindu community in the state apparatus. Their physical security was at stake, and

The physical security of the minorities is almost always closely linked to the vulnerability of the minority women, since they become easy targets of sexual harassment of the dominant community. It is little wonder therefore that any member of the minority community will first think of sending their sisters and daughters to safety.<sup>25</sup>

The out-migration process has a direct fallout on Bangladesh-India relations. It provides fuel to the anti-Muslim propaganda of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which further communalizes the political environment in India. The repercussion on Muslims in India has an adverse impact on the Hindu population in Bangladesh. This further endangers their physical security, as evidenced by the Babri Masjid incident.

The Vested Property Act had been one of the main sources of economic insecurity and has had an adverse impact on the Hindu population. Due to the joint ownership property concept, many Hindus have been dispossessed of their property; Hindus regarded it as a “Black” law that not only marginalized them economically but also turned them into second-class citizens. The law was considered a major cause of Hindu out-migration. “The estimated size of such out-migration during 1964–1991 was 5.3 million, or 538 persons each day, since 1964, with as high as 703 persons per day during 1964–1971.”<sup>26</sup>

25. Guhathakurta, “Politics in South Asia,” forthcoming.

26. *Ibid.*, 3.

It had been alleged that due to the above act, the minority community was discouraged from acquiring new land and was compelled to sell off property at cheap prices. The procedure of declaring minority-owned land as enemy or abandoned property was also carried out through fraudulent practices. Government documents substantiate these allegations.<sup>27</sup> According to one estimate, one million acres of land belonging to the minority community (of the country's total of twenty-one million acres of arable land) have been subjected to transfer from minority owners to the dominant sections of society.<sup>28</sup> The repeal of the act, as suggested earlier, did not bring much respite for the Hindu community, since land-grabbing continues through coercion. Furthermore, the violence of the October 2001 elections (discussed below) has eroded Hindu confidence in the state apparatus as a provider of security.

Minorities, especially Hindus, became victims of majoritarian violence during the October 2001 parliamentary elections. Democracy—a laudable ideal and principle—has in effect turned into an instrument of oppression of minorities. Based on the principle of majority rule, politics has turned into a game of numbers. Individuals and communities, instead of being viewed as human beings, are viewed as “vote banks” by the political parties. Political parties and their supporters inflicted violence and coercion upon individuals in a bid to either “win over” the vote banks or to stop them from exercising their voting rights. The institution of majoritarian democracy also does not allow a minority voice in the national parliament. There is hardly any scope for meaningful representation of minorities in the parliament. The Bangladesh parliament is a three-hundred-member body. Previously, thirty seats were reserved for women nominated by the elected members. This reservation, however, expired in April 2001. In the last parliament (June 1996 to June 2001) there were only eight members from the Hindu community and three from the Chakma community. Of the eleven elected members, ten were from the then ruling party, the Awami League (one independent candidate joined the Treasury Bench after his election), and one was from the BNP. The

27. Khan Md. Lutfur Rahman, “Minorities of Bangladesh and Their Alienation: Causes and Implication,” *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh* 41, no. 2 (December 1996): 305.

28. Guhathakurta, “Politics in South Asia,” forthcoming.

Awami League nominated three minority women to the reserved seats. Two of these women were Hindu and one was Rakahine. In the October 1, 2001 elections, seven minority candidates were elected, five of whom are from the Hindu community, with three from the Awami League and two from the BNP. Two Hill people, one from the Chakma and the other from Marma community, were elected from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), one of whom is from the Awami League and the other from the BNP.

It has been suggested earlier that majoritarian democracy has turned politics into a game of numbers. Human beings and communities have been turned into vote banks and constituencies. This dehumanizing of politics took an extremely ugly form in the October 1, 2001 elections in Bangladesh. Minorities, especially the Hindu community, were targeted. The reasons for this violence are not limited to communal factors; rather, the main factors behind such actions are purely political and structural. Hindus are regarded as vote banks of the Awami League, so they were targeted by supporters of the BNP and its alliance partners. In some instances, Awami League supporters had also attacked, thinking the local Hindus did not vote for them as had been expected. In some instances, terrorists took advantage of the situation and indulged in extortion and looting.<sup>29</sup>

The violence started fifteen days prior to the October 1 elections and continued till about October 27, which ruined the Durga Puja, the most important religious festival of the Hindu community in Bengal. From the scanning of ten dailies (*Prothom Alo*, *Jonokontho*, *Jugantor*, *Sangbad*, *Banglabazar*, *Inqilab*, *Dinkal*, *Daily Star*, *Ittefaq* and *Bhorer Kagoj*), about 330 reports of violence against the Hindu community were reported between 15 September and 27 October. The violence included rape, killing, physical torture, plunder, damage of property, bomb throwing, arson, and extortion.

The predicament of Hindus in Bangladesh is most regretful, for they also had to bear the major brunt during the liberation war. Pakistani authorities tried to communalize the war; it was termed an Indian/Hindu conspiracy to destroy the unity of a Muslim nation. Hindus and members of the Awami League were prime targets of Pakistani authorities. Consequently, about 90 percent of Hindu

29. *Star* (weekend magazine, Dhaka), 26 October 2001, 16.

households were affected.<sup>30</sup> Most of them had to flee to India. In August 1971 the communal composition of the refugees figured 6.71 lakhs and 5.41 lakh Hindus.<sup>31</sup>

## Community Responses

MINORITY COMMUNITIES, especially Hindus, were alarmed at the Islamization of the constitution and other consequent changes. The shift from Bengali to Bangladeshi nationalism, with its emphasis on Islam and the use of the India factor in national politics, created a sense of insecurity among the latter. Minority communities perceived the passage of the Eighth Amendment to the constitution, which declared Islam as the state religion, as a severe blow. In the aftermath of this the first organized protest of the Hindu community took place. The minorities of Bangladesh organized themselves under the banner of *Hindu, Boudha, Christian Oikya Parishad*. Though the movement started as a protest against the Eighth Amendment, it gradually demanded the abolition of all discriminatory practices and laws (e.g., the Vested Property Act).

The print media played an important role in publicizing the violations of human rights of minorities in the October 2001 elections. Such publicity began appearing in the newspapers about fifteen days prior to the elections and continued till the end of October. This helped in creating a general awareness about the violations, both at the national and international level. Some of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations sent investigation teams into the affected areas. A joint team consisted of members from Ain ‘O Shalish Kendra, Sammolito Samajik Andolon, Nijera Kori, Bangladesh Nari Progoti Shongho, Nari Uddyog, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, and the Society for Environment and Development. Several organizations of the investigation team—Ain ‘O Shalish Kendra, Nijera Kori, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad and Sammolito Samajik Andolon—attended a press conference held on October 17. Through the press

30. Ibid.

31. Imtiaz Ahmed, “Refugees and Security: The Experience of Bangladesh,” in S. D. Muni and Lok Raj Baral, eds., *Refugees and Regional Security in South Asia* (Colombo: Konark Publishers, 1996), 128.

conference these organizations appealed to government, political parties and civil society members to take measures to rehabilitate persons affected by human rights violations. Suggested measures included the immediate release, proper compensation and rehabilitation of those who had been arrested by the police and the Bangladesh Rifles (a paramilitary force) while attempting to flee the country due to violence. The organizations also suggested that the government immediately publish any reports acknowledging the violence, and that legal measures be taken against the perpetrators. Furthermore, long-term measures should be adopted to win the confidence of the minority community and to provide them with a sense of security. Finally, the organizations observed that the tendency to target and victimize the minority community for no valid reason during different political situations should be immediately stopped and resisted.<sup>32</sup>

Another investigation team sent by Shocheton Nagorik Samaj held a press conference on 21 October. Sammolita Samajik Andolon and Bangladesh Mohila Parishad also undertook rehabilitation programs in the affected areas. Students of different universities, under the banner of Shocheton Chatra Samaj, organized a hunger strike to protest the violence on minorities in the Central Shaheed Minar.<sup>33</sup>

Ain 'O Shalish Kendra also made a writ petition at the High Court on 21 November to stop this situation. It argued that the government and the inspector general of the police had failed to provide security to the Hindu community and thereby failed to guarantee the citizens rights provided in the Articles 27, 28, 31, 32, 35 and 42 of the Bangladesh Constitution. The High Court directed the home secretary and the inspector general to submit their report regarding the measures they had taken by 15 January 2002.<sup>34</sup>

32. Press Conference, "Nirbachonottor Shohingshota 'O Shonkhaloghuder Opor Akromon Shoho Shamprotik Poristhiti 'O Bhubisshot Koronio Proshonge" (Violence in elections, attack on the minorities, the communal situation and future options), Sangbad Shommelon, October 17, 2001. Organized by Ain 'O Shalish Kendra, Nijera Kori, Bangladesh Mohila Parishad, and Sammolita Samajik Andolon.

33. *Prothom Alo* (Dhaka), 15 October 2001.

34. Urmi Rahman, "Shonkhaloghu Nirjatoner Biruddhe Ain 'O Shalish Kendra Mamla" (The legal case of Ain 'O Shalish Kendra against attacks on the minorities), *Bulletin*, Ain 'O Shalish Kendra, (Dhaka: December 2001), 10.

## Conclusion

THIS PAPER DEMONSTRATES that seeds of violence against the minority community are inherent within the processes and structures of the modern state system, which has led to the dehumanization of humans and politics. Humans have been boxed into identities that either privilege or marginalize them through discriminatory laws and principles. In the name of politics, the system of majoritarian democracy has threatened individual autonomy and turned human beings into vote banks and vote constituencies. Lack of accountability and transparency of the state machinery only makes the situation worse.

In other words, the state has failed to provide human security to its minority communities. The repeal of the Vested Property Act has done little to assuage the grievances of the minority community, since the principles and ideology of the state privilege the dominant community. To escape this vortex of violence, the structures of state and society have to be democratized in the true sense of the word. The Bangladesh state must recognize the plurality of its culture and people. This paper has argued that the political elite whips up religious fanaticism for its own vested interests. This, I am positing here, is not done out of love for religion.

These issues need to be brought to the fore through community movements, seminars, dialogues, workshops, and change in academic curricula. Undoubtedly, in civil society the media has the most important role to play in this respect. A politically and humanely conscious citizenry can provide the best safeguard for its own security by compelling the government to democratize itself and make itself people-oriented.

# 21

NEERA CHANDHOKE

## Security in Times of Hindutva?

If we begin our discussion by assuming that security denotes more than just the absence of conflict, more than just political stability, more than military might, and more than negotiating with, or staving off separatist demands, we just might manage to shift the focus of the concept somewhat. The shift may prove profitable, for it will allow us to turn our attention to the ways in which ordinary human beings can live their rather ordinary but nevertheless valuable lives, in some degree of freedom from the shackles of pervasive uncertainty and shuddering fear. This is of course not an original turn in thinking on security, for the expanded and expansive concept of human security, which has made its appearance on the agenda of international relations in the last two decades,<sup>1</sup> is concerned with precisely the everyday lives of people. It is preoccupied with the way individuals can live out their lives the best they can, without being constantly threatened by physical suffering, material deprivation, and affronts to human dignity.

1. This followed the publication of Barry Buzan's seminal work on *People, States, and Fear: The National Security Problem in International Relations* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). For a critique of Buzan, see Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity, and Interests* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

And this it seems to me is of the utmost import for two reasons. One, the life of every individual has to be free of fear or trepidation as a matter of his or her right. This is the foremost obligation that any state owes its people. In fact, the very legitimacy of state power is premised on this assumption—that the state will protect its people from any kind of threat, whether material or physical. If this reason can be considered as falling within the domain of normative and prescriptive thinking on the state, the second reason is pragmatic. Unless people are guaranteed a life emancipated from any sort of intimidation or turmoil, any given society will be troubled with apprehension, discontent, and unrest, all of which can translate easily into armed conflict. In India this is more than apparent in the many struggles that dot the political landscape. From the militancy in Kashmir that casts a constant shadow over India-Pakistan relations, to the Naxalite movement, the insurgency in the Northeast, and the battle against big development projects such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan, the country is rocked by both conflict and insecurity.

If one aspect of security is negative—security as the absence of conflict—the second aspect of security is positive and normative: the creation of conditions for individual flourishing. The two facets of security are both interdependent and co-terminus inasmuch as when the citizens of a state live lives that are relatively free of fear or terror, the possibility of conflict that can wreck states—consider the case of Sri Lanka for instance—is rendered less, not more. Conversely, when the political biography of a state is relatively free of conflict, it can turn its attention to the basic needs of its people and provide them security in vital fields of human existence. It can, in other words, see to matters of material distribution and deepening of democracy through political participation. Correspondingly, when states lapse in these primary tasks we see the onset of insecurity, dread and panic.

And no one can deny that the kind of individual and collective insecurity that follows from (a) physical intimidation and (b) flawed policies of redistribution, re-settlement, and social justice, is both ubiquitous and deep-rooted. It has to be redressed through the adoption of just and protective measures and by the provision of primary needs such as shelter, food, income, education, health, clean drinking water, and a sound environment, as a matter of urgency. Any state that avows democratic credentials cannot be unaware of this, for a democratic

state's first obligation is toward the well-being of the people, who are, after all, the source of its power.

There is, however, another kind of insecurity experienced by large masses of people across the world that has proved to be more intractable. In India as in many other countries, physical, social, and economic insecurity has been supervened onto a second and perhaps basic form of insecurity—the insecurity of belonging to a group that possesses a religion or a culture or a language, which is not that of the majority. To put it differently, today members of religious groups in an India that happens to be marked by the ascendancy of Hindutva, suffer multiple injustices, multiple deprivation, and multiple insecurity, simply because they happen to belong to a minority. This is more than evident in the aftermath of the Gujarat carnage. But we find it in other parts of the subcontinent of South Asia as well—Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Bangladesh—as much as we find it in Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia and Kosovo. Groups that speak languages other than English are rendered insecure when state governments in the United States legislate “English only” policies. The indigenous people and the Quebecois in Canada are insecure because they are overwhelmed by the majority culture. And the Asians in Britain, as much as Islamic groups in France, and the Turkish people in Germany, are insecure because of racial discrimination that pervades civil society.

Such multiple injustices are unbearable if dominant groups in civil society terrorize religious minorities. But they are even more unbearable when they bear the imprimatur of the state. There can be no greater insecurity than when states that are supposed to deliver security practice discrimination against their own citizens simply because they happen to be in a minority.<sup>2</sup> The irony is that it is precisely these states that make a fetish out of security. The Indian State in the recent past for instance, has sidelined any attempt to hold it responsible for atrocities against the minorities in Gujarat in the first half of 2002, by launching a veritable diatribe against “international terrorism” in

2. Whereas the concept of minority generally refers to numbers (or the lack of them), it in the main refers to (a) groups that possess a well-defined religion or culture they wish to preserve; (b) the fact that this is viewed as unacceptable to the majority, which demands conformity; and (c) the fact that the symbolic representations of this religion or culture are inadequately reflected in the public sphere of the country. This definition of minority and majority is relational. Both concepts are of course political constructs, for numerical superiority or inferiority does not by itself constitute what is euphemistically termed the majority/minority problem.

general and Pakistan in particular. Resultantly, what preoccupies the security expert in the country today is political stability, national integrity, and the defense of the state through military and nuclear might.

In the process, the idea that the foremost task of the state is to provide security for the ordinary human being is completely marginalized. Security in sum becomes identified with the state, legitimizing thereof the adoption of repressive legislation. Even as peremptory measures become the index of a predominantly insecure polity, we witness the onset of a peculiar paradox: *the state that is supposed to provide security becomes itself the source of insecurity*.<sup>3</sup> India is not alone in this. The same insecurity stalks non-Urdu speakers in Pakistan as much as it stalks the Tamil population in Sri Lanka. (Of course, this does not exonerate the Indian state from its acts of omission and commission when it comes to minorities.)

It is precisely this generic paradox, which has come to be the concern of recent international relations theory that now speaks of “human security.” And this is welcome, for at last we find an enmeshing of dominant strains of international relations theory and the eternal concerns of political philosophy. International relations theory has finally moved away from its state-centric paradigm and become normative in its orientation.

However, at this very point let me insert a word of warning. Despite the fact that the shift from state to human security is a desirable development in international relations, the very proliferation of works on human security causes some unease. It causes unease simply because the concept of security has now been widened to such an extent that it may risk implosion through overuse. This of course seems to be the general fate of concepts that attract the imagination of political practitioners and scholars—take the case of “governance” or “civil society.” But the employment of a concept that has come to be privileged in contexts that call for another concept altogether may do our pet concept no good.

For instance, consider that what has been normally thought of in political theory as a *right* to food, income, and well being, is now being

3. “If the state,” asks Buzan, “becomes a major source of threat to its citizens, does it not thereby undermine the prime justification for its existence?” Buzan, *People, States, and Fear*, 21.

conceptualized as *security* of food, income, and well-being. Certainly nothing prevents us from conceptualizing rights *to* and security *of* as synonymous; let me suggest, however, that there is a major conceptual difference between the two. Though rights and security can be legitimately regarded as *companion* concepts, they are not synonymous, they cannot be used interchangeably, nor can they be collapsed into each other. We need to focus on the conceptual distinction simply because it may help us to focalize the human condition.

Security, let me suggest, cannot be collapsed into rights because it is a *property* that is attached to a *specific state of affairs*—that of confidence, assurance, and freedom from fear. And people are free from fear when a state respects their fundamental rights. To put it differently, I am secure if I know that my rights to life, liberty, and dignity are recognized and respected by the state, which in turn protects me both from its own coercive institutions and from armed groups in civil society as a matter of my right. *Security, in short, is supervened upon respect for human rights.*

Let me elaborate on this. Firstly, every human being has a set of fundamental rights simply because she is human. At this point in history, we do not need to draw upon any profound philosophical argument to convince ourselves or others that human beings have rights by virtue of being human.<sup>4</sup> The idea has gained wide currency today simply because the morality of the proposition—human beings have rights by virtue of being human—is self-evident. Therefore, those who believe that human beings do not have rights are responsible for proving their case; the onus of justifying this particular proposition rests on them.

Secondly, the assertion of a right places a corresponding *obligation* on the state to guarantee whatever human beings have rights to—life, freedom, justice, equality, and satisfaction of material needs. When the state does so, and when we are reasonably confident that the police will not come knocking at our door at midnight and arrest us

4. I am thinking of Thomas Hobbes's exploration into a hypothetical state of nature to establish the inviolability of individual rights, or Kant's insistence that human beings have to be treated as ends in themselves. Today human rights do not need to be justified; they are the assumptions with which we begin our investigation into the human condition. Human rights are simply there as components of a good society along with democracy, freedom, justice, and equality, all of which human beings have rights to.

without any justification, we are *secure* in the possession and exercise of our rights. Note that the state does not make us secure in the possession of our rights as a matter of benevolence. It does so because rights have been asserted, and when rights are asserted they compel obligation. *Security is therefore is both supervened upon and is a co-relate of rights.* Individuals have rights, and states deliver security when they respect these rights.

I argue in this essay that minorities are insecure in India, because the consolidation of religious radicalism or the rise of Hindutva has systematically violated their fundamental rights. Hindutva has had serious spin-offs. It has (a) compromised the democratic credentials of the country, (b) violated the rights of citizens, (c) delegitimized the state and created suspicion about its intentions, and (d) fragmented the national vision. The excesses of Hindutva have produced collective fear and neurosis instead of self-confident citizens. All of us who live and work in the country are today enmeshed in the hermeneutics of suspicion and cobwebs of malevolence. Nobody in contemporary India is secure—neither the majority fearing a backlash from the forces of “international terrorism,” nor the minority trembling under the onslaught of perverse and demeaning stereotypes and systematic pogroms that the state is complicit with. And this causes some sadness. For at one point in history, Indians could argue with a justifiable amount of pride that India had led the world in the democratic experiment of multiculturalism and minority rights. We preen no longer.

### **Security and the Fundamentals of Human Rights**

I HAVE SUGGESTED that instead of treating security as synonymous with rights, we conceptualize security as a co-relate of and supervened upon rights. If this suggestion is acceptable, then arguably the concept of security is supervened onto three kinds of rights. Firstly, security is a co-relate of political and civil rights. Individuals are secure when their right to freedom and their right to participation in the political life of the country are made secure through codification of political and civil rights. Secondly, security is a co-relate of social and economic rights. Individuals are secure when their basic needs of shelter, food, education, health, and income are satisfied by the state, when they are not left destitute and impoverished, and when they are not stripped of dignity because they have to beg for what is rightfully

theirs. Thirdly, security is a co-relate of the right to one's community and culture.

The third set of rights—the right to community and culture—is a comparative newcomer in the political terrain of rights talk. It has emerged as a response to two distinct developments in the global arena, one of which is political, and the second of which is cognitive. Politically, the issue of the right to culture emerged in direct response to the exigencies of building nation states in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural societies. By the end of the twentieth century it was clear that the nation state happens to be one of history's most serious mistakes. For almost everywhere the bid to construct a *hyphen* between the state and the nation has led to majoritarianism on the one hand, and the marginalization and often the oppression of minorities on the other. Recollect, for instance, that majorities in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and India have pre-empted the state in the name of numerical superiority and the majority religion and language. They have tried to hammer minorities into conformity with what is euphemistically termed the national culture—one language, one religion, or one ethnicity. In Pakistan and Sri Lanka minorities have witnessed the first kind of discrimination in matters of language. In other countries minorities have been physically targeted and sought to be exterminated, as in the recent riots in the state of Gujarat. In effect, most of the countries in the region of South Asia are marked by intractable, vicious, and perhaps un-resolvable conflicts between the majority and the minority.

The enormity of the problem can be gauged when we look at the findings of a research project at the University of Maryland termed "Minorities at Risk." The findings indicate that 222 minorities in the world suffer from discrimination and oppression. Out of this number, seventeen (7 percent of the total number) are located in the four largest countries of South Asia. The findings of the research project further indicated that fifty of the 233 minorities identified were involved in serious ethno-political conflicts in the years 1993–94. Seven out of these fifty cases happen to be located in the region of South Asia.<sup>5</sup> Further, it is more than obvious that it is precisely those people who live in areas marked by violent conflict who are deprived

5. See Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 94.

of civil, political, social and economic rights.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, minorities experience massive and overlapping insecurity, as denial of cultural rights, or targeting of minority cultures, leads to a denial of political, civil, social, and economic rights. What is more worrying is that the fundamental right to life of members of the minority community is at stake. It is of immediate urgency that scholars and practitioners of politics turn their attention to the protection of the rights of minorities, particularly their right to their religion, language, and culture. It is only then that minorities can be secure.

Secondly, the idea that people have the right to their culture and community has been catapulted onto the scene of political theory by a major shift in the way we conceptualize the individual. Recollect that since the onset of modernity, individualism was to consolidate itself as a dominant analytical, rhetorical, and political apparatus, available both for understanding society as well as dealing with it. The idea that individuals are owners of their bodies and souls, of their labor and thoughts, of their ideas and acts, follows from the assumption that they are governed by the dictates of self-determining rationality. For the maxims that modern philosophers gave to us were two: *nosce te ipsum*—"know yourself," and *sapre aude*—"use your own judgement." To know ourselves is to coherently narrate our specific histories, our plans and projects, our aspirations and our faults, in abstraction from others. Because we are the source of cognition and values, we do not have to look outside the archives we have fashioned for ourselves to interpret and evaluate. "I know my soul hath power to know all things," wrote Sir John Davies in a supreme tribute to self-fashioning individuality. We are the authors of our own narratives; we are equally the judges of these narratives.

Imaginations of this self, who is unique inasmuch as it is unknown in previous history, shaped poetry, art, literature as much as it shaped politics in the West. From there the idea of individualism was transplanted to the colonized world. Consequently, for the modern theorist, society

6. The ability of the state to engage in redistribution is in effect paralysed. It is not surprising that in the period from 1990 to 1995, fifty-seven countries that had experienced violence and conflict were ranked low in the human development index. Fourteen of these countries were ranked high, and thirty-four were ranked medium. The causal link between material deprivation, conflict, and further deprivation cannot be easily ignored. See D. Smith, *The State of War and Peace Atlas* (London: Penguin, 1997), 48.

is nothing more than an aggregate of individuals pursuing their unique and individual plots and plans. This also means that individuals are distinctive and separable from each other. Each individual plots her own life plan; each individual undergoes experiences that are specific to her alone. Each of us does so, because only we have access to our distinctive states of consciousness. Consequently, we are divided from each other by our specific experiences and states of consciousness—“No matter how empathetic I am, only you have your pains; no matter how much I worry about you or advise you or accompany you, only you can live your life.”<sup>7</sup>

By the 1980s however, this idea had run out of steam. For scholars had realized under the influence of the communitarian school<sup>8</sup> that individualism was both epistemologically as well as ontologically flawed. The idea of the disembedded individual was exposed as a convenient fiction,<sup>9</sup> for in the real world individuals cannot but be bearers of a specific history and tradition. Individuals are in other words embedded in specific cultures, religion, and languages. Moreover, any picture of the individual choosing out of thin air her values and her ways of life cannot be persuasive, for this individual *will have no way of knowing what is valuable and what is not*. The resources that shape personal understanding are not conjured out of nowhere or anywhere. Only our culture can allow us to appraise phenomena as valuable and valueless, worthwhile and worthless, moral, immoral and amoral. In this sense, culture gives us the wherewithal to *think with*.

It follows that if individuals are deprived of their culture, if this culture is attacked, or disparaged, or dismissed as non-valuable, individuals lose their identity, their sense of the self, and their dignity. Deprive individuals of access to their culture and we deprive them of

7. Brian Fay, *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Science: A Multicultural Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 30.

8. See Avashai Margalit and Moshe Halbertal, “Liberalism and the Right to Culture,” in *Social Research* 61, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 491–510; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Alisdair MacIntyre, “The Spectre of Communitarianism,” review article in *Radical Philosophy* 70 (March 1995): 34–35; Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

9. I use “convenient,” for modern theory was to emancipate itself from earlier notions of status based on one’s birth in society. For this purpose, Thomas Hobbes, arguably the first theorist of modern political theory, was to construct the individual in the image of the monad, his individual was simply disembedded in any language or a culture or a tradition.

self-hood; deprive them of access to their meaning systems and we have so many diminished individuals on our hands.

Whereas the idea that individuals should have access to their culture as a matter of right is a universal maxim, the argument itself has been harnessed to the protection of minorities in multicultural societies. For multiculturalism by no means rules out the fact that any given society will be composed of majorities and minorities.<sup>10</sup> It is a given that in such societies the majority will have no problem in securing its right to culture, but minorities will be vulnerable. They are at risk in two ways: first, if a minority culture is subjected to neglect, howsoever benign that neglect may be, it is possible that it will atrophy or die out. And members of the group suffer because they no longer have access to their systems of meaning. Secondly, as experiences of the last half of the twentieth century have told us, it is precisely members of minority cultures that are both physically and emotionally targeted by majoritarian groups as in contemporary India.

In a society like India, where the political community contains a number of cultural or religious or language communities, minorities are especially insecure in two ways. One, their beliefs and practices have been subjected to debased archetypes, which are in turn fashioned by majority prejudices. And as suggested above, if cultures are debased and insulted, individuals lose both their confidence and self-respect. Secondly, their very basic right to life is rendered vulnerable when practices in a communal mode dominate civil society and the state. If on the one hand minorities are pressured to conform to the majority culture and their culture<sup>11</sup> is denigrated and dismissed as of no value, on the other hand their very distinctiveness renders them vulnerable to attacks by the so-called cultural nationalists.<sup>12</sup> Obviously, deep and pervasive insecurity stalks minorities in India, and this is a matter for anxiety. For the credibility of any

10. This does not diminish the personal autonomy of the individual, for no Communitarian would subordinate the individual to community. See Neera Chandhoke, *Beyond Secularism: The Rights of Religious Minorities* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982).

11. I am aware of the difference between culture and religion; however, for the purpose of this argument I collapse religion into the generic concept of culture.

12. I make the routine distinction between civic nationalism, which is based on citizenship rights for all, and cultural nationalism, where a majority seeks to dominate all interstices of the nation and renders it exclusive and narrow.

democratic state rests upon the way it treats its minorities. Democracy is after all not only about majority rule, it is about the rights of each and every citizen, about her equality, freedom, justice, and rights. If the rights of a section of its people—even if they are in a minority—are compromised or violated, if the people are denied justice, equality, and freedom, the claims of the state to democracy are compromised.

### **The History of Minority Rights in India**

WRITING IN THE AFTERMATH of the attacks on Christian missionaries by the sangh parivar, Malini Parthasarthy asked the following insightful question: “As the gruesome and searing images of Christian missionaries being burnt alive and churches being set on fire etch themselves on our collective consciousness, with their irrefutable connection to the earlier patterns of brutal destruction directed at the Muslim community, can we as citizens of this democratic republic dodge the hard question as to how did we get here?”<sup>13</sup> This very question crops up repeatedly to worry our minds, for it was not always so in India.

The rights of minorities to their religion and culture had been expressly recognized by the leadership of the freedom movement ever since the 1920s. Even as the mass base of the freedom movement expanded, and even as Mahatma Gandhi tried to fashion a coalition out of groups that had little social interaction with each other, the need to assuage the fears of minorities that they would be swamped in a majoritarian India was recognized. One reason for the recognition of minority rights was thus pragmatic: it rested on the basic need to forge a mass freedom struggle. Accordingly, the 1928 Motilal Nehru Constitutional Draft recognized the right of minorities to their culture.<sup>14</sup> But this does not mean the recognition of minority rights was not underlined by normative considerations—the recognition that cultures and religions are important to their adherents. For instance Jawaharlal Nehru, writing a note on minorities in *Young India* on 15 May 1930, was to state that

13. Malini Parthasarthy, “Fascism on the Rampage,” *The Hindu*, 26 January 1999.

14. In large part, minority rights in the 1928 draft were posited as an alternative to the demand for separate electorates.

The history of India and of many of the countries of Europe has demonstrated that there can be no stable equilibrium in any country so long as an attempt is made to crush a minority or force it to conform to the ways of the majority. There is no surer method of rousing the resentment of the minority and keeping it apart from the rest of the nation than to make it feel that it has not got the freedom to stick to its own ways.... It matters little whether logic is on its side or whether its own particular brand of culture is worthwhile or not. The mere fact of losing it makes it dear. Therefore we in India must make it clear to all that our policy is based on granting this freedom to the minorities and that under no circumstance will any coercion or repression of them be tolerated ... we can also lay down as our deliberate policy that there shall be no unfair treatment of any minority. Indeed we should go further and state that it will be the business of the state to give favored treatment to minority and backward communities.<sup>15</sup>

In a parallel vein, the Karachi Charter on Fundamental Rights of 1931 acknowledged the right of minorities to their religion and the freedom to profess and practice any religion. It further laid down that the state should be neutral in regard to all religions (Clause 2 and 9 of Article 1). A fresh addition to the list of minority rights in the charter was the right of minorities to cultural autonomy and equal access to educational facilities (Clause 3). During the second session of the Round Table Conference, a memorandum on the “Congress Scheme for a Communal Settlement,” authored by Mahatma Gandhi, was presented before the Minorities Committee on 28 October 1931.<sup>16</sup> The scheme provided for the protection of culture, language, script, education, profession, and practice of religion and religious endowment. It also provided for the protection of personal laws, as well as for a proportionate share in the legislature for all communities through joint electorates, protection of minority interests in the central and

15. Jawaharlal Nehru, “Note on Minorities,” in *Jawaharlal Nehru Selected Works*, vol. 4, ed. S. Gopal (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund), 259–60.

16. Iqbal A. Ansari, ed., *Readings on Minorities Documents and Perspectives*, vol. 2 (Delhi: Institute of Objective Studies, 1996), 145–50.

provincial cabinets, and a fair share for the minorities in the public services.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, the report of the Sapru Committee, which was set up by the non-party conference in November 1944, represented a major attempt to examine the minority question. It recommended full religious tolerance, non-interference in religious beliefs, practices and institutions, and protection of the language and cultures of all communities. The Sapru Committee also recommended political representation. However, this particular recommendation created so much controversy that the report could not be adopted.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, when the members of the Constituent Assembly deliberated over the need for minority rights, they could not agree that minorities should have special political rights. The reluctance makes sense when we remember that the Constituent Assembly met in the shadow of the partition of the country on religious lines. However, most members agreed that the historical pledge to honor the protection of cultural rights should be respected. This agreement formed the substance of Article 29 and 30 of the constitution. These two articles, popularly represented as “minority rights,”<sup>19</sup> have to be read along with Articles 25–30 to comprehend the fullness of the right to religion granted by the Indian Constitution.

Given the charged political situation of the time—Partition, the civil war that overwhelmed northern India, the communalized

17. This would be mediated by considerations of merit.

18. The Sapru Committee recommended that 10 percent of the seats in the Union legislature be reserved for special interests. The remainder of the seats would be distributed among the religious communities. These communities would also be represented in the Union Executive. In the interests of national unity it was proposed that Muslims be persuaded to opt for joint electorates with reserved seats. The committee recommended that the reservation of seats for religious minorities in the Central Assembly be at par with those of the Hindus, despite the great disparity in popular strength.

19. Article 29 (1) of the fundamental rights chapter lays down that “any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.” This constitutional provision has two dimensions. One, it recognizes that different groups have different cultures; that these linguistic and religious cultures are valuable for their members; that members of minority cultures can face disadvantages in a majoritarian society; and that, therefore, these members need to be given explicit rights to their own culture. Secondly, the right to culture is an individual right, i.e., individuals are granted the right to their culture. No provision is made for those cases where the culture itself may be under threat of dissolution, or where it may be subjected to calls for assimilation. Despite this drawback, this article along with Article 30, which guarantees that all religious and linguistic minorities are given the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice, constitute cultural and educational rights.

atmosphere, the felt need to prevent another such earthshaking political event, and the need to build a strong nation where considerations of religion would be marginalized—the recognition that minority cultures should be protected against majoritarianism can be considered a landmark provision in the constitution. Justice Venkatarama Ayyar J. was to acknowledge as much when he delivered the advisory opinion of the Supreme Court in the Kerala Education Bill.

It is well known that during the Middle Ages, the accepted notion was that Sovereigns were entitled to impose their own religion on their subjects, and those who did not conform to it could be dealt with as traitors. It was this notion that was responsible during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries for numerous wars between nations and for civil wars in the Continent of Europe, and it was only latterly that it came to be recognized that freedom of religion is not incompatible with good citizenship and loyalty to the State, and that all progressive societies should respect the religious beliefs of their minorities. It is this concept that is embodied in Articles 25, 26, 29 and 30 of the constitution.<sup>20</sup>

Matters are different today, for we live in the days of Hindutva. And Hindutva has insistently and deliberately unravelled all the threads that were fashioned to knit multi-linguistic and multi-religious India together, pitted community against community, and destroyed spaces where people belonging to different religious persuasions had learned to live together. If the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) meeting after the Gujarat massacre could state brazenly that minorities have to gain the good will of the majority if they want to live in the country, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has gone a step further and stated that minorities should be condemned to living in refugee camps as they do in strife-torn Gujarat. What is more problematic is that members of the Hindutva brigade can terrorize minorities, deny them their rights, exterminate them, and the state and the central governments acquiesce by their silence. Contrast this with the commitment made by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharal Nehru. "It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for 'secular,'" he said on

20. In re Kerala Education Bill. A.I.R 1958. Supreme Court 1956, 990.

one occasion. “Some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state that honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; that, as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion.”<sup>21</sup>

### The Excesses of Hindutva

“THE COURSE OF AFRICAN HISTORY,” writes Achille Mbembe, “is said to be determined by the combined action of a diabolical couple formed by an enemy—or tormentor—and a victim. In this closed universe, in which ‘making history’ consists of annihilating one’s enemies, politics is conceived of as a sacrificial process, and history, in the end, in seen as participating in a great economy of sorcery.”<sup>22</sup> Mbembe could well have written these words for the Hindutva project. How and why did this happen? This is the tormenting question that most of us have asked ourselves since the late 1980s.

There are various reasons that we can employ to explain the success of the politics of Hindutva in our civil society. Here I just highlight some of them. For one, the country has passed through troubling times in the last half of the twentieth century. The challenge to the territorial integrity of India in Kashmir, the Northeast, and earlier in the Punjab, has created a climate of intolerance toward any kind of cultural difference in the country. Secondly, the rise of regional parties with specific agendas and the articulation of demands for regional autonomy have further highlighted the fragility of the national consensus. Thirdly, India’s position in the world has noticeably receded. As Indians are seeing other countries of Asia—and increasingly China—outstrip their own economy, as Indian society is mired in caste and religious wars, as the state has to devote more and more of its energy to these cases as well as to cases where people demand self-determination, as integration into the world market underscores India’s underdevelopment and powerlessness in the global arena, the response of India’s middle classes has taken the form of aggressive intolerance. Fourthly, the weakening of the Nehruvian secular,

21. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology*, ed. Sarvepalli Gopal (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 330.

22. Achille Mbembe, “African Modes of Self-Writing,” trans. Steven Randall in *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 252.

socialist, and democratic vision, the collapse of the Congress system, the presence of deep-rooted poverty, deprivation, and frustration, and the lack of a foresighted leadership that could tap collective aspirations and longings have had expected consequences.

By the late 1980s, a gigantic vacuum pervaded the political space—an impoverished political vision, little political wisdom, and bankrupted statesmanship. This vacuum was filled in by the return of the religious idiom, banished from the scene by the secular commitment of the first-generation leadership in the country from the 1950s onward. The scene for the revival of religion in politics had already been set by the Congress leadership itself, by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the later Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who responded to general dis-spiritedness and exhaustion by the visible employment of the Hindu card. In 1989, Rajiv Gandhi, beginning his electoral campaign from Ayodhya, stated that the objective of the government was to build a *Ram Rajya* or kingdom of Rama, signifying truth and wisdom. He thus neatly appropriated a theme that had already been brought to the forefront of public attention by the sangh parivar. The 1980s, in effect, saw the final dissolution of the secular spirit that had been carefully drafted and institutionalized by the first generation of leaders in India, and its replacement by the idioms, the grammar, the symbolism and oratory of religious identification. This was the precise moment in which narratives of Hindutva carefully forged by the sangh parivar erupted to occupy imaginations and harness the political passions of a disheartened people.

Hindutva can be read in many terms, but mainly it is an ideology. Yet it is an ideology like no other, because it has relentlessly and insistently tapped the intangible and the incorporeal properties of the collective psyche of the Hindus in some deep and unfathomable way. It has excavated memories of “Hindu” loss, of betrayal, and of humiliation,<sup>23</sup> which had perhaps been buried under layers of other memories, and catapulted them into the open. To put it differently, the Hindutva agenda has been constructed along one main pivot: what psychiatrists call the “recovered memory syndrome.” But not any

23. Of course not all Hindus feel this way, and many have protested and challenged the narrative. What counts is that the narrative has proved powerful because increasing numbers of the majority community subscribe to notions of historical victimhood.

memory, let me hasten to add, will do—the entire narrative of memory has been forged out of remembrance of victimhood. Narrative after narrative coming to us from the parivar, was to speak of the historical mortification of the majority community and of its current helplessness.<sup>24</sup>

Consider, for instance, the narrative that did the rounds at the time of Ayodhya. Arguably, the power of the narrative lay in the tale it told, somewhat ironically, of the victimization of the majority community: “Yes, for too long I have suffered affronts in silence. My numbers have dwindled. As a result, my adored motherland has been torn asunder. I have been deprived of my age-old rights over my own hearths and homes. Afghanistan, NWFP, Sindh, Baluchistan, half of Punjab, half of Bengal, and a third of Kashmir—all these have been usurped from me ... My temples have been desecrated, destroyed. Their sacred stones are being trampled under the aggressor’s feet. My gods are crying.”<sup>25</sup>

The phrase, “My gods are crying” referred obviously to Mathura and Varanasi, where it was alleged that Mughal rulers had destroyed temples and built mosques over the sites. But it referred more to Ayodhya, which by the mid-eighties has become *the* leit motif of the Ramjanambhoomi/Babri Masjid movement launched by the affiliate organizations of the sangh parivar.<sup>26</sup> What is interesting is the way in which the narrative of Ayodhya was to constitute the site of the Babri mosque as double-coded memory. On the one hand, the site served to evoke memories of violation, destruction, desecration, and

24. For instance, *Prajna Pravah*, the intellectual forum of the RSS in a letter to the prime minister on 23 June 2000, complained about the Christian churches. Defending the Vishwa Hindu Parishad against the charge of spreading hate literature against the minorities, the letter said: “VHP booklets and pamphlets increasingly prove how the activities of Christian fundamentalists are aimed at destabilizing the Hindu society and the state.” Considering that the Christian community constitutes a little more than 2 percent of the population, the allegation may prove laughable, if it did not possess serious consequences.

25. “Angry Hindu! Yes Why Not?” *Organiser*, 14 February 1988. This was later published as a pamphlet and distributed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad during the Ramjanambhoomi agitation.

26. The sangh parivar, or the extended family of the groups, consists of a complex of organizations with overlapping memberships bound together by a commitment to Hindu nationalism. It consists of the RSS, which is the root of the family, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the Durga Vahini, and sundry other groups that come up periodically to support the parivar. The parliamentary wing of the parivar is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has controlled the central government since 1999.

illegitimate occupation of sacred sites by Mughal rulers. It signified the chagrin of the Hindus even as they had had watched helplessly as their temples had been destroyed and their Gods rendered homeless by the “invader” in the past. On the other hand, as the site of the proposed Ramjanambhoomi temple, Ayodhya became the referral of the proposed Hindu *rashtra* or nation. It simply represented a space where a mortified and outraged people would redeem history, erase memories of shame, recover agency, and forge a future for the Hindus and by the Hindus. The narrative of Ayodhya, in other words, was a narrative that aspired to power in the near future; it was a narrative that was to prepare the ground in civil society for the control of the state by the forces of Hindutva.

The attempt to control the future to repaint the past, and to repaint the past to control the future was manifest, even as the Ayodhya narrative rapidly and dextrously juxtaposed two narratives: narratives of shame and victimhood, and narratives of intent to reclaim history. And for this very purpose, the Ramjanambhoomi narrative proclaimed a closure onto other memories of Ayodhya.<sup>27</sup> For though the sangh parivar was to capitalize upon the Babri mosque/Ayodhya as memorializing humiliation, it is equally true that other narratives of and on Ayodhya existed in popular memory, through anecdotes, stories, and mythologies. Let us for a moment glance at these memories and see thereby how the site had been constructed in other memories and in other narratives.

Ayodhya, historians tell us, became a major center of spiritualism for Vaishnavites in the seventeenth century when it was first mentioned as a place of pilgrimage in the treatises on sacred places or the *tirthashastras*.<sup>28</sup> The tale of Shri Rama had become popular in the fifteenth century through the story of the *Ramayana* narrated by Tulsidas. By the sixteenth century, the *Ramayana* became a part of the collective psyche and rural folklore through myth and legend, storytelling and enactment of Tulsidas’s *Ram Charitra Manas* by the Vaishnav Ramanandi sects or Bairagis. Historians also tell us that the Bairagis fought a long and protracted battle with the Shaivites for the control of holy places in Ayodhya. The moot point is that for pilgrims,

27. I have dealt with this at length in *The Conceits of Civil Society* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

28. See Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque: A Historical Inquiry* (Delhi: Vistaar, 1991).

Ayodhya came to be on par with Benaras and Hardwar as a holy place fairly late in the day, though the latter two were certainly more popular as destinations for people in the twilight of their lives.

Now historians have invested a great deal of intellectual and political energy in debating whether Shri Ram was born at the precise place at which the Babri Masjid stood. Much ink has equally been spilt over the issue of whether the Mughal Emperor Babur's lieutenants had in fact razed the temple to the ground and built the masjid over it. Several valuable insights into the production of historical narratives have been generated in these polemics. However, apart from the fact that scientific evidence on both sides is inconclusive, we will have to acknowledge that matters of faith are seldom proved or disproved by such evidence. Whether Shri Ram was born in Ayodhya or not, or whether there was or was not a temple prior to the mosque, is of little consequence when it comes to belief.

But it is equally true that popular belief held that it was not only the Babri Masjid, but the whole of Ayodhya that had been seen by the *tirthashastras*, or even by the pilgrims as the *Ramjanamsthan* or the birthplace of the God. Or that two other sites in Ayodhya—the platform or the *Ramchabutra* outside the Babri Masjid, and another temple—were also popularly thought of as the birthplace of Lord Ram. It is equally true that if some narratives told us that Babur had sacked the Ram mandir and built the masjid, other narratives spoke of innumerable instances of Hindu-Muslim amity. Avadh was known for its rich multireligious culture and Ayodhya has historically been a holy site not only for Hinduism, but Buddhism, Jainism, and Islam as well. Temples in the town were open to all, all festivals were celebrated by all the inhabitants, several well-known *mazaars* were visited both by Hindus and Muslims believing in the same *peer* or saint, and Hindus participated in the *urs* at the *mazaar* of Syed Salaar Masud with great devotion.<sup>29</sup> Only the festival of Muharram was patronized by the Nawabs of Avadh.<sup>30</sup> And who can forget the scene in Satyajit Rays' memorable film *Sbatranj ke Khilari* when on the eve of the British invasion of Avadh in the mid-nineteenth century, the Muslim Nawab Wajid Ali Shah takes on the role of Krishna and dances with the Gopis.

29. See Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedi, Shail Mayaram, and Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanamboomi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

30. Srivastava, *Disputed Mosque*, 20.

There is more. As the four authors of *Creating a Nationality* point out, Muslim craftsmen had traditionally fashioned the thrones and the crowns for the Gods in the temples. Muslims wove flowers into garlands that were offered at the temples, and a Muslim looked after at least one temple in the town. The temple of *Hanumangarbi* was built with the help of a land grant from Nawab Safdar Jang (1739–54) to the *mahant* of Nirvani Akhada- Abhayramdas. The *Khaki Akhada* was built on the basis of another land grant by Nawab Shuja ud Daulah. The authors cite Peter Van der Veer's work to show that Ayodhya became an important pilgrimage center as a consequence of the patronage of the Courts of the Nawabs. Other stories told of how Ayodhya was gifted by Babur to *Acharyas* of the *Vaishnav* sect. It was popularly believed that one Muslim philanthropist donated everything he owned to a temple and lived forewith on donations of the temple.<sup>31</sup> In fact, temples in Ayodhya were open to all. All these beliefs had also formed the stuff of collective memory, which had held popular sway for years.

### Consequences of Memory Recovery

BUT MEMORY-BASED NARRATIVES of the sangh parivar carried their own dynamics, exclusions, and inclusions. The teleological limits of the narrative form emerge clearly here; the purpose of the narrative simply predetermines the kind of explanation that is offered. This is perhaps intrinsic to memory-based narratives, for memory itself is plural, contingent, and unstable. All of us know that different recollections of the same time, day or year can hardly be packaged neatly into little boxes, tied with different colored ribbons, and put away in the compartments of memory. Multiple, complex, overlapping, and conflicting, memories of the past slide beneath, over, and into each other like the proverbial shades of a kaleidoscope. It becomes simply impossible to differentiate or disentangle one recollection from another. Composed of multiple and often contradictory recollections that not only merge into each other but constitute each other, memory is notoriously too rickety a foundation on which we can build the present or the future.

This really means that memory has to be mediated, in Fredric Jameson's words, through "prior textualization" in order to acquire

31. Nandy et al., *Creating a Nationality*, 2.

basic coherence.<sup>32</sup> In effect, it is only when we narrativize memory that the past becomes both accessible as well as comprehensible to us.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps the past cannot be accessed in any other way, for as Munslow suggests, it “exists and will exist as knowledge transmitted to us according to the basic principles of narrative form.”<sup>34</sup> I am by no means suggesting that the progress from experience to memory to narrative is sequential; it is simultaneous, for human beings are essentially story-telling animals. We tell stories to ourselves and to others, and we hear stories from others, simply to make our worlds comprehensible.

And the desire to make our individual and collective worlds legible constitutes perhaps the first and the primal need of human beings. For unless the world is intelligible to our senses, our perceptions and our cognition, we would stumble through life exactly as we would stumble through a dark room, claustrophobically groping our way among unfamiliar objects we cannot give a name to, because we have no memory of them. But most of us yearn to make our lives coherent; we therefore, perhaps unthinkingly, but inexorably, plot not only our experiences, but also memories of those experiences into a narrative. We thereby become, as Ricoeur suggests, the readers as well as the writers of our own lives.<sup>35</sup>

32. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981), 35.

33. Roland Barthes suggests there is a narrative structure in almost everything we are involved in. Narrative is simply there, like life itself, for Barthes. It is present in “every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind, and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative.” We find narrative, he argues, in myths, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, and conversation. See Roland Barthes, “Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives,” in Susan Sontag, ed., *A Barthes Reader* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), 251.

34. Alan Munslow, *Deconstructing History* (London: Routledge, 1997), 4. This is not to suggest that the past is not constituted by objective referrals. After all, no narrative can tell us that India was *not* colonized. The point is that colonialism is accessible to us through and in narrative.

35. Paul Ricoeur, in his three-volume study of *Time and Narrative*, tells us that the making of narrative is a basic human desire. Drawing upon Aristotle, Ricoeur suggests that the narrative is mimetic, i.e., the activity of imitating or representing something. In the process, it fulfils an aesthetic need for form and structure in subjective experience. “I,” argues Ricoeur, “am calling narrative exactly what Aristotle calls *muthos*, the organization of the event.” Employing the term “plot” or “emplotting” for what to Aristotle is *muthos*, Ricoeur suggests that through the order it imposes in the form of emplotment, the narrative offers a response to the contradictions inherent in human experience of time—what he calls “discordant concordance”—even as it brings order out of chaos. Therefore, narrative indicates possibilities for future action in this world. Indeed, to be able to give a narrative is to visualize a future. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vols. I and II, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (1983, 1984); vol. III, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

But the narrative form is not only about telling a story linearly, it is about making *causal* connections between things that may otherwise seem random, contingent, and independent of each other in time and space. Narratives of memory are not about summoning up a long forgotten or a hazy past, or about a “technique of recall”; they are about making causal connections between things. As a complex exercise in connection and thereby interpretation, the narrative—never wholly real but neither wholly imagined—will always be more than a sum of events that the narrator recounts to us. Certainly, narratives perform what Aristotle calls a mimetic function since their referral will be historical or empirical. But there is more, for by bringing together events, agents, purposes, causes and consequences, as well as memories of all this, narratives integrate them into a complete and intelligible story. In the process, narratives act as power mechanisms to tame plural memories of an unruly past.

All of us are in a way storytellers, but arguably there is something special about professional storytellers, something that distinguishes their narratives from the everyday stories we tell ourselves and others: their skill at telling a story, their ability to persuade, their rhetorical deftness perhaps. Therefore, it is not surprising that they become, as Ben Okri says in “The Joys of Storytelling,” the repositories of the people’s wisdom and follies. They become the living memory of a people. “Often, conscripted by Kings, they became the memory of a people’s origins and carried with them the long line of ancestors and lineages.”<sup>36</sup> Storytellers, suggests Okri, are the true magicians. Going down deep into the “seeds of time, into the unconscious, into the unchartered fears,” they have to see clearly and make things more real to us than our most ordinary or our most frightening experiences do.

If they can see things and make them more real than our own experiences, then arguably storytellers—whether they are professional historians, novelists, dramatists, playwrights, painters, musicians, or neighborhood *natak mandalis*<sup>37</sup> that stage the epic *Ramayana* every October—who recount tales about our origins wield great power over us. They wield power because they give us a sense of our own moorings. And by doing so they influence imaginings and fantasies, desires,

36. Ben Okri, *A Way of Being Free* (London: Phoenix, 1997), 37.

37. Amateur drama groups.

dreams, ideas, identities—in short, they affect the fate of the very society of which they tell tales. Without them, we would be searching desperately for some toehold in the damp, mouldy, slippery, and treacherous quagmire of our everyday life.

Narrators however, do not only wield power because they tell us of the past; they wield power because their narrative invites the audience to imagine that “this” or “that” occurred in *this* and not *that* way. As argued above, narratives by making causal connections simply mediate between the experience/occurrence and the audience. But that would mean that the narrator invariably employs his or her own criteria of judging what is relevant and what is not, what is to be included and what left out. In other words, the narrator pounds otherwise untidy and overlapping events and memories into shape according to his or her understanding of what is significant. Consequently, as narrators sift through events/memories, selecting those he or she considers consequential, and relegating the inconsequential to the margins of consciousness, we realize that the narrative form is not only about mapping order but that it is also about power.

This happens in personal lives, it happens in historical and political life, and it happens when narratives about histories and politics are forged. That is why the past is never written once and for all and then written off. It is constantly being taken out of the closet, dusted, repainted, its dullness glossed over, and its contours reshaped in accordance with the ideological predisposition of the narrator. Narratives are simply in the business of privileging one meaning over another. *Therefore, narratives create an entirely new field of cognition, and entirely new story out of memories of the past.* Even as narrators make causal connections between various events and allot significance to some, we realize that narratives possess an inescapable *cognitive* dimension.<sup>38</sup> Even as the narrative “fixes” otherwise capricious, uncertain, discordant, and antagonistic memories of events into a semblance of order, it proclaims a *closure* onto plural memories, which left to themselves, would naturally be unstable.<sup>39</sup>

38. Narrative, etymologically, is after all derived from “gnarus,” or knowing the world.

39. It is not surprising that following Lyotard's attack on “Grand Narratives,” many postmodern critics chastise the narrative form for its exclusions and marginalizations, and for its neglect of the contingent and the “unrepresentable.” More importantly, the narrative is critiqued for its evasions and erasures of the way any event can occupy a multiplicity of locations at the same moment in time.

And in the process, other explanations and interpretations are sidelined and marginalized. For instance, historian Srivastava tells us the idea that Babur had built a mosque over the temple was unknown until the nineteenth century. In that period the “Babri” Mosque was known as *Jami Masjid* or *Sita Rasoi Masjid*. In mid-century the *Bairagi* sect of *Hanuman Garbi* came to disseminate the view that Lord Rama was born at the site of the mosque, and that he subsequently moved his capital to Saketa. Ayodhya subsequently vanished into the mists of time. But the Ramjanamsthan remained, to be discovered by the King Vikramaditya via a miracle. He subsequently built a glorious temple there, which was later demolished by Mir Baqi, a lieutenant of Babar. The entire idea that a Ram temple pre-existed the Babri Masjid, suggests Srivastava, was a product of nineteenth-century British Orientalism, which tended to interpret every Hindu-Muslim clash as a religious one.

Srivastava tells us that Montgomery Martin, a British official charged with collecting information on Eastern India in 1838, observed: “the destruction [of the Hindu temples] is very generally attributed by the Hindus to the furious zeal of Aurangzeb, to whom is also imputed the overthrow of the temple at Benaras and Mathura. What may have been the case in the two latter, I shall not now take upon myself to say, but with respect to Ayodhya the tradition seems unfounded.” Matters were different twelve years hence. By 1850 P. Carnegie, a British officer of the Bengal civil service, was to write thus: “The Janamsthan was in Ramkot and marked the birthplace of Rama. It seems that in AD 528, Babur visited Ayodhya and under his orders this ancient temple was destroyed and on its site was built what came to be known as Babur’s mosque.” The British may have invented this myth, argues Srivastava, in order to legitimize their annexation of the province of Avadh.<sup>40</sup>

This is another story, and for the purpose of this argument we can note that a number of narratives can be constructed out of Ayodhya—narratives of toleration, narratives of inter-religious faith,

40. Srivastava, *Disputed Mosque*, 26–27. For related arguments see the collection of articles in S. Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ramjanambooni Issue* (Delhi: Viking, 1991). For an account of archaeological findings after the demolition, see D. Mandal, *Ayodhya: Archaeology after Demolition: Tracts for the Times* (Hyderabad: Orient Longmans, 1993), 5.

narratives of how people belonging to diverse religious persuasions had managed to carve out regions of belonging. This narrative could have equally told of the tyranny of colonial constructions in the Saidian vein, which served to categorize and divide colonial subjects. The narrative of the sangh parivar, however, deliberately marginalized all this. By focalizing the victimhood of the Hindu community, the narrative set in motion a gigantic process of mass mobilization that was to culminate in the demolition of the mosque. This narrative was to leave a trail of communal tension and rioting, bloodshed and destroyed wrecks of communities that had learned to live together. It was also to build the base for the BJP to come into power in the late 1990s at the central government. From that time onward we have seen that both the Indian state and civil society feed upon each other to legitimize Hindutva. The complicity of the state in the project of targeting minorities was more than evident in the attempts to defend the chief minister of Gujarat and the refusal to dismiss him in the wake of the Gujarat riots.

## Conclusion

ALL THIS HAS HAD somewhat deleterious consequences for civil society in India. For if narratives of victimhood possess one property, it is that of complete narcissism; they simply happen to be completely self-referential. Narcissism means that they see only themselves and their own unique suffering in the mirror of history. Even as it injects rampant emotionalism in public life, narcissism climaxes in what Nietzsche was to call *ressentiment*. The role that resentment has come to play in the modern marketplace of Indian politics is beyond belief. It has become the self-justifying ideology of the victim who reasons that he or she is entitled to vengeance simply because he or she has been victimized in history even if historical facts prove otherwise.

Expectedly, even as the majority group tries to monopolize the symbols and the vocabularies of suffering, as it eagerly rushes to claim the status of victim, and as narratives of victimhood dominate civil society, politics in the sphere has become completely self-centered. But there is more: resentment articulates, sharpens, and ultimately translates perhaps unacknowledged prejudice into communal actions, by constructing the subject as the historical victimizer. Unravel the story told by the Hindutva brigade and we will see immediately

how the targeted community is depicted as a proximate and corporeal threat to the identity, to the dignity, and to the traditions of the members of community that is host to this construction. That all this leads to the politics of what has been termed the “new tribalism”—the politics of violence, vendetta, and attrition—is predictable.

The narrative of victimhood itself, promising as it does clear and determinate solutions—that of cultural nationalism—caught the imagination of a people starved of political visions and passions. The power of the narrative stems from its ability to intimate multiple messages which, spinning out from each other, created fields of cognition and regions of recognition. As both an exercise in displacement of other narratives, as well as an exercise in synthesis, the narrative has proved powerful for it has given a new kind of referential power: the power to redescribe reality, the power to restructure the semantic field. In the process, it created both fear and insecurity in the minds of the people of the country, an insecurity so deep-rooted that at this time in history the idea of building a country where minorities will feel secure is a remote dream. It is insecurity, not security, that stalks every Indian today.

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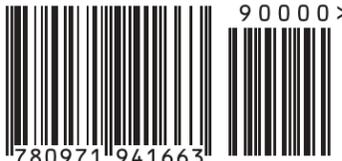
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