21

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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,[1] 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.[2] 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.*[3] 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 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.[4] 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.[5] 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.[6] 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.

Imaginings 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."[7]

By the 1980s however, this idea had run out of steam. For scholars had realized under the influence of the communitarian school[8] that individualism was both epistemologically as well as ontologically flawed. The idea of the disembedded individual was exposed as a convenient fiction,[9] 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 Avaishai 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.[10] 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[11] 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.[12] 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?"[13] 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.[14] 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.[15]

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.[16] 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.[17] 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.[18]

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,"[19] 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 16th and 17th 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.[20]

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."[21]

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."[22] 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. Jawaharal Nehru, *Jawaharal 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,[23] 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.[24]

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."[25]

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.[26] 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.[27] 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*.[28] 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.[29] Only the festival of Muharram was patronized by the Nawabs of Avadh.[30] And who can forget the scene in Satyajit Rays' memorable film *Shatranj 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 Ramjanambhoomi 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 *Hanumangarhi* 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.[31] 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.[32] In effect, it is only when we narrativize memory that the past becomes both accessible as well as comprehensible to us.[33] 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."[34] 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 storytelling 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.[35]

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 Ricouer, in his three-volume study of *Time and Narrative*, tells us that the making of narrative is a basic human desire. Drawing upon Aristotle, Ricouer 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 Ricouer, "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*, Ricouer 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."[36] 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*[37] 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 contors 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.[38] 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.[39]

38. Narrative, etymologically, is after all derived from "gnarus," or knowing the world.

39. It is not surprising that following Lyotards 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 side-lined 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 Garhi* 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.[40]

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-Ramjanambhoomi 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 ressentiment 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: ressentiment 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.