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The Shifting Saliency of Religion in the Construction of Nationalism: The Indian Experience

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In this paper I propose to argue that religion cannot provide authentic content to nationalism, particularly in a society featured by religious diversity. Yet, quite a few religious collectivities advance the claim that they are 'Nations'. The claim to nationality/nationhood can succeed only if the religions under reference press into service a domain assumption, an ideological tenet and two strategies, all of which are logically linked. The domain assumption is that there is a co-terminality between religion and territory, the ideological tenet is homogenisation of the society by imposing the lift style associated with the religious collectivity asserting or aspiring to nationhood, that is, establishing hegemony over the dominated religious collectives. The strategies pursued to achieve the goal are communalisation and relativisation, which are logical corollaries of territorialization and homogenisation, respectively.

My concern in this paper is with the articulations of religious nationalisms in India. I shall desist from the temptation of tracing the trajectory of these religious nationalisms – Hindu, Muslim and Sikh – not only because they are well-known and well-documented but also due to limitations of space. Instead, I will endeavour to show that the assumptions, ideologies and strategies invoked by these religious communities to buttress their claim are not sustainable. It may be noted here in passing that the other varieties of nationalisms in India based on language and tribe are qualitatively different because they meet the critical minimum conditions for nation formation. That is, they are territorially anchored speech communities.

Some conceptual clarifications

It is necessary to indicate at this juncture that there are only two basic conditions for the formation of nations: a territory on which the inhabitants have a moral claim either because it is their original homeland or because they come to identify with it as their homeland though they are migrants, colonisers or ever conquerors (cf. Hertz 1945:146-51). Generally one is apt to reject the claims made by conquerors and colonisers as immoral and/or illegal if this happened in the recent past. But one should not fall victim to the prevailing instant contemporisation of social reality. There are numerous instances in history when in a short span of time, say, a few hundred years or so, colonising populations have completely identified themselves with the territory into which they moved as their homeland. On the contrary, even after several centuries of expatriate existence, persecuted peoples returned to their homeland with alacrity.

Therefore the point at issue is not the length of time involved as such, though a critical minimum period is often necessary for nativisation, but the attitude of the colonising people to the new territory and the legitimacy they acquire. If a people do not identify with the land into which they migrate, they remain an ethnie.

The second condition for the formation of a nation is a common instrument of communication, a language. This language need not be a highly developed one but good enough to transact the business of everyday life such as conducting administration, processing disputes, imparting elementary education, undertaking worship, expressing affection and love. Admittedly, a nation, which wants to 'modernise' itself, should either develop its own language and/or adopt another developed language to absorb and communicate modern knowledge. This, however, does not mean that the adopted language should necessarily displace the 'national' one.

It is important to note here that these two objective conditions need not always lead to the crystallisation of nationalism, the subjective consciousness a people develop about their common history, experience and destiny. That is, even as a concrete nation is a prerequisite for the emergence of nationalism, it is not a sufficient condition. Often it is the sense of deprivation, objective or subjective, which provided the prerequisite for the emergence of nationalism. Further, there is no inherent tendency for a nation to establish its own state, although this is taken to be axiomatic based on the limited European experience (see, Weber 1948). A multi-national state is not only a viable project under certain conditions but often an imperative. However, there are several instances in history when a 'nation' is sought to be established invoking religion, ignoring the crucial importance of a common language and a contiguous territory. These religious nationalisms are unsustainable in the long run, as exemplified by the division of Pakistan in 1971.

It follows from the above that a multinational state is pluri-lingual and each of the nations encapsulated within it would have its own specific territory and language. That is, the constituting elements of a multi-national state are nations without states. The notion of nation-state implies a situation of controlled and restricted spatial mobility beyond state boundaries. Nations today are characterised by frayed edges and loose textures and they are constantly exposed to alien influences through communication and migration. This calls for a link language and not necessarily a 'national' language in the case of multinational states, as there would be several national languages in such a state. And only those who are in constant interaction with people, agencies and organisations located outside their nations, need to know the link language, the common instrument of communication. To insist on a *lingua franca* for the whole population of a multi-national state is unnecessary and irrational, usually the starting point for the emergence of nationalism within state societies. (cf. Gellner 1983).

Territorialization

By territorialization I am referring to a tendency on the part of a religious collectivity to claim that a specific territory is its exclusive homeland. To start with, it may be noted that such a claim is logically untenable in the case of proselytizing religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. (This is not to deny that these religions have sacred sites and cities, even city-states). These religious collectivities have been dispersed to vast territories far beyond the lands of their origin through conquest and colonialism. The project of christianising the world and the notion of universal Islam rebels against territorialization. In fact, the main anchorages of proselytizing religions are in alien lands. Thus, while there are several Buddhist majority nations in the world, those who profess Buddhism constitute a mere 0.70 per cent of the population in India. The biggest two enclaves of Islam are South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) and Indonesia. Christianity was appropriated by Europe and then spread to Latin America, Africa and Asia.

However, the conterminality between territory and religion is logically sustainable in the case of non-proselytizing religions such as Judaism and Hinduism. In fact, ancient Israel was a nation in that it was a people with its own homeland (Speiser 1960: 157-63). After a thorough analysis of the Biblical sources, Grosby concludes that the above notion was "facilitated by the beliefs that the land of Israel was the land of Yehweh and that the people Israel, the putative descendants of the Abraham-Issac-and-Jacob were chosen by "Yehweh to inhabit that land" (Grosby, 1991-241).

There are two specific problems with Grosby's argument with regard to ancient Israel. First, the descendants of Abraham are distributed across all the three semitic religions. Second, Yehweh, the God of Abraham, is the God of Israel who is acknowledged not only by Jews but also by Christians and Muslims. Therefore, Israel cannot be the exclusive land appropriate only for one religious collectivity.

As I have suggested earlier, the disjuncture between territory and culture leads to the ethnification of a people but they could and usually do acquire nationhood by eventual identification with the new homeland, a course open to the Jews too. The argument that because of discrimination, persecution and genocide, the Jews could not identify with their new homelands is not applicable to all situations. For examples, the Jews were not persecuted or discriminated against in India and yet they left for Israel in the wake of the Zionist movement. On the other hand, it is not true that all the Jews who returned to Israel were equally successful in identifying with Israel as their homeland. Racial and linguistic factors often came in the way of blocking their claim. Clearly, religion could not provide authentic content to nationhood even in the case of Jews.

Hinduism, as noted above, is also a non-proselytizing religion and the notion of Hindu Rashtra (nation) is very much in vogue today. But a moment's reflection makes it amply clear that the concept of Hindu nation is not sustainable. The contemporary notion of Hinduism is a product of a long process of encounters between dissenting sects professing diverse beliefs and with other religions, particularly Islam and Christianity. While the British colonial policy did partially contribute to the emergence of the new Hindu and Muslim identities in communal/national terms (see, Pandey 1990) Miller's conclusion appears to be cautious and careful.

"By their educations, legislation, administration, judicial codes and procedures and even by that apparently simply operation of 'objective' classification, the census, the British, unwittingly imposed dualistic 'either or' oppositions as the natural normative order of thought. In a multitude of ways, Indians learned that one is either this or that one cannot be both or neither or indifferent. The significance of identity thus became a new paramount concern an orthodoxy of being was gradually replacing a heterodoxy beings (1991:169)."

It is important to insist that the Hindu identity is neither entirely new nor completely old; it is a conjoint product of both contemporary construction and the legacy of the past. The cultural symbols and the values, which embody them, have a recognisable trajectory, some of which are newly constructed to cope with the challenge posed by the semitic religions. On the other hand, some of these values and symbols are activisation of old ones, indeed revivals. It is this past-present linkage, which imparts the new identity its vibrancy and vitality, on the one hand, and its ambiguity and ambivalence, on the other. This is evident from the differing boundary

demarcations of Hinduism, which fall on a continuum. That is, there are a series of Hindu identifies and not just one ideal type. Let me list the three most prominent ones.

First, Hindus are simply the original and obvious inhabitants of Hindustan, that is India, "Hindu society living in this country since times immemorial is the national society here. The same Hindu people have built the life-values, ideals and culture of this country and, therefore, their nationhood is self-evident" (cited in Goyal 1979:40). Further, "..we, Hindus, have been in undisputed and undisturbed possession of this land for over eight or even ten thousand years before the land was invaded by any foreign race". (Golwalker 1939:49). Viewed thus, Hindus are simply a people who occupy their homeland and share a life style. This all-embracing definition does not have a religious content, Hindus being a people of a designated land, as the Germans or the Greeks are.

Second, Hindus are all those who pursue religions of Indian origin, including the primal vision. Thus, Savarkar contends: "Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion or the religions that are peculiar or native to this land" (1949:104). "It should be applied to all the religious beliefs that the different communities of the Hindu people hold (1949:105)."

In this conceptualisation, the inextricable linkage between the community of faith and the country of residence is taken to be the essence of Hindu nation. But such a proposition would be rejected by the 'non-Hindu' religions of Indian origin and some had openly challenged it (e.g. Sikhs) and hence the following clarification:

"Sikhs are Hindus in the sense of our definition of Hindutva and not in any religious sense whatever. Religiously, they are Sikhs as Jains are Jains, Lingayats are Lingayats, Vaishnavas are Vaishnavas; but all of us racially and nationally and culturally are a polity and a people. We are Sikhs and Hindus and Bharatiyas (Indians). We are all three put together and none exclusively (Savarkar 1949:125)."

Clearly this studied ambivalence and cultivated ambiguity is a political project designed to avoid possible wedges and potential conflicts between religions of Indian origin. Be that as it may, this definition of Hindu is both inclusive (all those who profess religions of Indian origin) and exclusive (all those who profess religions of 'alien' origin).

The third conceptualisation of Hindu is more restrictive and substantially exclusivist. It includes (a) only twice born: Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Viashyas or, at best, also ritually clean Shudras and (b) of Aryabhumi, that is, North India. It excludes the Panchamas (those of the fifty order) that is, the ex-untouchables currently counting a hundred million, the Adivasis (the original inhabitants), presently accounting for fifty million and Dravidian Hindus of South India, numbering around two hundred million. This con-ceptualisation questions the internality of a substantial proportion of 'Hindus'; they are rendered 'outsiders' (Oommen 1990:9A043-66). Clearly, such a definition of Hindus falls short of the requirements of a political project; it divides the Hindus of India into different 'nations'.

To avoid the extreme exclusivist orientation of this conceptualisation, non-Hindu reformers have attempted to accommodate non-Hindus through Shuddhi (ritual purification). But the innovation is applicable only to (a) ritually unclean untouchables, (b) the tribal communities, that is, Vanvasis

(forest dwellers) who claim primal vision as their religion, and (c) those who have been converted into 'alien' religions. But for the Dravidian clean caste Hindus Shuddhi is irrelevant. Thus once again one encounters the ambiguity of boundary and ambivalence of attitude in defining Hindu and Hinduism. The caste and linguistic factors invoked in defining Hinduism erode the saliency of religion.

Hindu is thus defined at least in three different ways invoking different variables: territory, religion and caste/language. And all of them pose problems in defining Hindu as a nation and/or nationality and I shall list them presently.

It is true that 83 per cent of Indian population is classified as Hindu in the census.

To begin with, it may be noted that the claim that India is the Hindu homeland was made with reference to undivided India in which the proportion of Hindus was much less than that in divided India. On the other hand, undivided India had the largest Muslim congregation in the world. Even after partition, India remains the second biggest Muslim country in the world. Similarly, 80 percent of the world's Zoroastrians live in India. Hindu nationalists counter this point by suggesting that these people are outsiders (see, Oommen 1990 (a) 43-46), which in turn brings in the question as to the time-span required for the nativisation of a people in a country.

The Zoroastrains are in India since the eighth century. The Muslims came to the Kerala coast as early as the seventh century. The Syrian Christians of Kerala claim to be converts since 52 A.D. At any rate, an overwhelming majority of Muslims and Christians are converts from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the original inhabitants of India. Therefore, if one takes the criterion of nativity seriously, a majority of the Muslims and Christians have a better claim to be Indian nationals because the Aryan Hindus, who claim to be the original inhabitants, came to India only some 3,500 years ago.

The attitude of Hindu nationalists varies enormously in regard to the different religious categories, viewed in terms of their sources of presence and modes of incorporation. All religions of Indian origin are considered as Hinduism according to one of the conceptualisations. However, this expansionist orientation in defining Hindus is resented by some, the most obvious case being that of the Sikhs in independent India, as they too claim to be a nation based on the criterion of religion. The Hindu-Sikh conflict, then, is to be viewed as the competing claims of two religious nationalisms.

Generally speaking, Hindu nationalists have an attitude of indifference and even tolerance towards the 'migrant' religions-Jews, Zoroastrians and Bahai's – not solely because their numbers are very small and hence they do not pose any threat but also because they have not claimed any part of the Indian territory as their homeland and have not indulged in proselytizations. However, the Hindu nationalists have had an uneasy relation and hostile attitude towards Christians and Muslims, although it has varied in intensity. The negative attitude to Indian Christians was part of the hostility towards British rulers as both were co-religionists and hence an instant object of suspicion. The persisting hostility towards Christians after the exit of the British could be traced to

the continuing missionary activities often geared to proselytization. But this hostility is moderated by two factors. First, Indian Christians never defined themselves as a nationality and have not even demanded any special benefits from the state on the basis of religion. (However, Christian converts from the Scheduled Castes and their spokespersons do demand such benefits now, as conversion has not improved their material conditions).

The Hindu nationalists, attitude to the Muslim is very negative for several reasons. First, they number over a hundred million and constitute perhaps the single-most important vote bank against Hindu nationalism. Second, the presence of two Muslim majority states-Pakistan and Bangladesh – as immediate neighbours makes the relationship between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority uneasy, ambivalent and even tricky. Third, Hindu nationalists hold the Muslims responsible for the vivisection of India, the sacred and ancient land of the Hindus. Fourth, Indian Muslims have not entirely given up the claim to nationality even after partition, although they are territorially dispersed. The effort to consolidate Muslims as a nationality is pursued by projecting (although wrongly) Urdu as the exclusive language of Muslims. Finally, the claim by Kashmiri Muslims that Kashmir is their exclusive homeland, the secessionist movement in Kashmir believed to be abetted and sustained by Pakistan, the special privilege conceded to Kashmir under article 370 of the Indian constitution, have all soured the relationship between Hindu nationalists and Indian Muslims.

The Hindu nationalist's hostility to other religions is thus not simply based on their 'alien' origin but anchored to the proclivity they unfold in claiming that they too are nations. Thus inter-religious hostility in independent India is most pronounced between Hindus, on the one hand, and Sikhs and Muslims, on the other, both of whom define themselves as nations/nationalities. It is important to recall here that Sikhism is the youngest religion of Indian origin. Further, the definition of Hinduism preferred by the Indian Constitution, the Hindu Code Bill and Hindu nationalists includes Sikhism along with Jainism and Buddhism.

Hinduism, although not proselytizing, is migratory. At least twelve million Hindus live outside the Indian subcontinent (see, Jain 1989: 299-304) the traditional sacred land of Hinduism. In some of the countries (e.g.Fiji, Surinam, Mauritius) they constitute majorities. Would it be correct to say that those Hindus who have settled down outside the Indian subcontinent cease to be Hindus because they do not live in their ancestral homeland? The absurdity of the question is patent but it emanates from the assumptions made by Hindu nationalists. At any rate, where does one put agnostics, rationalists and secularists in the scheme of Hindus Rashtra, or for that matter, in any nation constructed on the basis of religion? Finally, the Hindu nationalist claim implies the annexation of Nepal, the Hindu majority neighbour, as a part of consolidating the Hindu nation.

It is also not true that only Islam and Christianity have colonised new territories and in that process either annihilated or marginalised the native populations. The dominant religions of Sri Lanka are Buddhism and Hinduism (both of Indian origin) and the original inhabitants of the country, the Veddas, constitute just one percent of Sri Lankan population today. In the process of Aryanising India, the native population was stigmatised Buddhism has been vigorously proselytizing and Hinduism acutely assimilative. Therefore, religion-territory conterminality is not axiomatic even in the case of religions of Indian origin. The Hindus belong to a multiplicity of speech communities, that is, there are several Hindu nations. To grapple with this problem, Hindu nationalists project Sanskrit as the common ancient language of all Hindus and Hindi written in

Devnagri script as the national language of India. But they encounter several difficulties and severe resistance in this context (see, Oommen 1990 (a): 43-66).

First, Sanskrit is not a living language and is today spoken only by a handful of people. Second, it is not true that Sanskrit is the exclusive heritage of Hindus; it is a common Indian heritage cutting across religious categories. While Sanskrit was an ancient and highly developed language of ancient India, so were Pali and Tamil. (Of these three languages only Tamil is a living vibrant language). Given the above, Sanskrit is at best identified with Aryan Hinduism, Pali with Buddhism and Tamil with Dravidian Hinduism. Consequently Sanskrit is not even the common heritage of all Hindus. Third, Hindi, even as it is expansively defined to include several languages and dialects, is spoken by only 38 percent of the Indian population. Fourth, several of the Indo-Aryan languages (e.g., Bengali, Marathi) and all the major Dravidian languages are equally if not more developed as compared with Hindu and these non-Hindi speech communities do not accept Hindi as the exclusive 'national language, relegating their own mother-tongues to the background. Finally, there are a dozen highly developed languages in India with ten million or more speakers; in fact, some of them have as many as fifty million speakers. There is no possibility of these nations abandoning their languages in favour of Hindi just to facilitate the establishing of a Hindu nation.

The fallacious claim about religion-territory conterminality is also implied in the claims advanced by Muslims and Sikhs that they are nations. As hinted above the alien migrant element in the Muslim population of South Asia is negligible and the overwhelming majority of Muslims are converts from local castes and tribes. Therefore, the claims of Muslims for that particular area of the Indian subcontinent are their homeland is legitimate and authentic because they have a moral claim on these territories, although not as Muslims. If the Muslims were not natives and mere migrants eager to return to their homeland (as the Jews did in the wake of the Zionist movement) they would not have succeeded in staking their claim. But there are several difficulties in advancing the claim that Muslims *qua* Muslim constitute a nation.

First, none of the areas claimed by the Muslims as their homeland (as in the case of other religious groups) was populated exclusively by them even after substantial transfer of Hindu and Sikh populations from these areas. Therefore, the claims that these areas were/are Muslim homelands is not tenable not because Islam is an 'alien' religion but because nativity and nationhood cannot be defined in terms of religious faiths and affiliations. The so-called Muslim homeland is as much the homeland of non-Muslims of that region.

Second, even if a section of the Muslims are migrants to India to the extent that (a) the migration occurred several centuries ago and since (b) they identify with the territory presently inhabited by them as their homeland, the claims ought to be accepted as legitimate. This is no concession to the alien elements in the Muslims population because there are several alien elements among Hindus-Kashmiri Pandits, Maghi Brahmins, Rajputs to mention but a few – whose nativity is not questioned by Hindu nationalists.

Third, Pakistan, which emerged in 1947, although populated predominantly by Muslims, could not be sustained as non-political unit for long because of the absence of geographical contiguity and

cultural uniformity. In fact Islam became an irrelevant variable in maintaining the unity of Muslim Pakistan, leading to its split mainly based on territory and language.

Fourth, the Hindi speaking Muslims, popularly referred to as Bihari Muslims, instantly became alien elements in Bangladesh, the state of the Bengali speaking Muslims. Even the Hindi/Urdu speaking Muslims who migrated to Pakistan from India are not accepted as natives and remain Mohajirs, the stigmatised outsiders. Thus Muslims nationalist deny nativity even to co-religionists who are migrants from outside.

Fifth, the predominantly Muslim but multi-lingual Pakistan continues to have serious tensions and conflicts between its different linguistic groups-Punjabis, Sindhis, Baluchis, etc. that is, the nations which constitute the state of Pakistan. Each of these collectivities defines their respective linguistic regions as their homelands. Thus it is clear that homeland can only be anchored to speech communities and not to faith communities.

Once India was partitioned, no territory within India could be claimed as Muslim homeland, save the Kashmir valley. However, this claims is ambivalent because of two reasons. First, Kashmir itself is partitioned and apportioned between India and Pakistan for geopolitical reasons. Second, there are others in Kashmir (e.g. Kashmiri Pandits) who stakes their claim with equal intensity and authenticity that Kashmir is their homeland too. In such a situation the only route available to those who falsely claim that the Kashmir Valley is an exclusive Muslim homeland is to intimidate, terrorise and flush out those who make counter-claims. In the current exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir what one witnesses is the inevitable consequence of the perverse notion that there exists conterminality between territory and religion, that is, territorialisation of religion.

After partition, the Muslims of India did not have decisive majority in any part of India except in the Kashmir valley and the Laccadives and Minicoy Islands. But Muslims constituted about 12 per cent of India's population counting around seventy million in the 1950s. That is, while their absolute number was substantial they were thinly dispersed all over the country. This situation was susceptible to their getting assimilated within the linguistic regions (nations), which they inhabit. This necessitated the invention and maintenance of new symbols to preserve their socio-religious identity. Urdu, written in Persian-Arabic script, is the most important symbols the Muslims invoke to highlight their cultural specificity and nationality within India. But the project remains ineffective in investing nationhood on Muslims on an all India basis because the principle of geographical contiguity is imperiled.

The language of the majority of Muslims in India in not Urdu; it is only in two provinces – Uttar Pradesh and Bihar – that one finds Muslims who are also Urdu speakers. These two states account for only one-third of the Muslim population and one-half of the Urdu speakers in India. In Jammu and Kashmir, though the official language is Urdu, the Urdu speakers of the state count a meagre 0.27 per cent. On the other hand, the majority of the Urdu speakers are from states where the proportion of Muslims is very low. This disjuncture between Urdu and Islam has further muted the possibility of Urdu nationalism emerging as an authentic force in independent India (cf. Brass 1974).

The Sikh claim to nationhood too assumes religion-territory conterminality. But the Punjab, claimed to be the Sikh homeland, was a Muslim-majority province before India's partition with 51

per cent Muslims in 1921. By 1961, although the Muslim population was reduced to a mere two percent in the Indian Punjab (both because of re-allocation of territory and migration), the Sikhs constituted only 33 percent and the Hindus were still in majority with 64 percent. As religion was not accepted as the basis of constituting politico-administrative units in independent India, the only hope was to carve out a Sikh majority province by invoking language as the criterion. The Sikh leadership therefore staked their claim for a separate province based on Punjabi language. A separate Punjabi-speaking state was formed in 1966 in which the Sikhs constituted only a thin majority of 53 percent. Thus, in spite of two successive partitions in 1947 and 1966, the Punjabi Suba cannot be viewed as the exclusive homeland of Sikhs; they do not constitute a decisive demographic majority. And the remaining 47 percent of non-Sikh population too considers Punjab as its homeland. But a fatal error by Punjabi Hindus in disclaiming their real mother-tongue, namely, Punjabi and on falsely insisting that Hindi is their mother-tongue provided a thin veneer of legitimacy to the crystallization of the idea that the Punjab is the Sikh homeland (see, Nayyar 1966).

There is another reason why the Sikh claims to Punjab, as their homeland is untenable. Although 78 percent of Sikhs of India live in Punjab, the remaining 22 percent are dispersed all over India. This demographic dispersal of Sikhs may be traced to two factors. First, in the wake of partition substantial proportion of the Sikhs who migrated to India settled outside the Punjab. Second, the Sikhs are an enterprising migratory community in search of economic opportunities. The logical corollary of insisting that Punjabi is the exclusive homeland of the Sikhs is to render instantly the Sikhs outside Punjab and the non-Sikhs inside Punjab aliens, outsiders and refugees.

The point I want to make is this. Claims to nationhood by a people are based on their moral claim on a specific territory as their homeland. Such a claim cannot be sustained by a religious collectivity because of the disjuncture between religion and territory. Pursuantly, the claim to nationhood by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs based on the assumption and the argument that the whole of India or specific parts of India constitute their exclusive homeland is untenable. Viewed thus, religious nationalities are indeed imagined communities (cf. Anderson 1983).

Communalisation

Once the untenable assumption that a religious collectivity in a nation is accepted, an appropriate strategy, namely, communalisation of politics, has to be invoked. Communalism is positive as well as a negative referrent. In South Asia, communalism is invariably viewed as a negative force as it is juxtaposed against nationalism; it may be defined as the tendency on the part of a religious collectivity to claim that it is a political community (Dumout 1970).

It is necessary and useful to distinguish between at least three different variants of communalism as a political force as they fall into a hierarchy of threat to the state (see, Oommen 1990 (a) 112-123). First, a religious community defines itself as an autonomous political community, that is, an entity entitled to have its own state. This implies secession from the state to which it is currently attached and hence may be designated as secessionist communalism. The Muslim demand for Pakistan and the Sikh demand for Khalistan are examples of this variety of communalism.

The second variant of communalism is the proclivity on the part of the religious collectivity to define itself as a nation, that is, as a cultural entity with a territorial base. This is often articulated in the argument that in order to maintain its cultural specificity the nation should have a separate politico-administrative arrangement, which could be a district or a province within the federal polity. The demand for a separate Punjabi Suba, although couched in linguistic terms, was essentially a demand for a separate Sikh province within India. To the extent that the demand if geared to preserve the cultural specificity of a religious collectivity, and a separate province is viewed as a tool to achieve that end, this type of communalism may be designated as separatist communalism.

The third variant is the demand by a religious collectivity to be recognised as a specific entity suffering from material deprivations, the eradication of which could be met through measures such a political representation, employment quota, distribution of land, industrial licenses, etc. In this context, mobilisation of the religious collectivity is attempted as an interest group geared to the welfare of its members. Therefore, this variety of communalism may be labelled welfarist communalism.

I am persuaded to distinguish between these three types of communalisms because their implications vary vastly for the state, the nation and the religious community. The three types of communalism can be organised on a continuum of hierarchy of threat to the state and consequently state responses differ radically in each case (see, Oommen 1990 (b) 193-209). Generally speaking, the state would oppose tooth and nail secessionist communalism and would spare no effort to liquidate the movement.

This can be easily discerned in the response of the Indian state and Hindu nationalists to secessionists' movement in the Punjab and in Kashmir.

The opposition to separatist communalism is less virulent. If the mobilisation by the concerned religious community is massive and visible and if the counter-mobilisation by the opposing community is weak, the state in all probability would concede the demand. The formation of the Punjabi Suba exemplifies this pattern of response. Finally, governments of multi-religious democratic societies are compelled to allow religious collectivities to function as interest groups and concede the demands they make. And this response pattern is called for either because the demands made are perceived as legitimate or because the political clout of the community as a vote-bank is substantial. The state response to the demands made by religious minorities in the context of the policy of protective discrimination (e.g., bringing the neo-Buddhists under the purview of the reservation policy), providing the requisite recognition to languages claimed by religious minorities as a part of their cultural heritage (e.g., the recognition given to Urdu) or 'protecting' the minorities from possible dictations of the state legal system (non-implementation of uniform civil code) are examples of the Indian state recognising religious collectivities as 'legitimate' interest groups.

Of the three communalisms listed above, two imply religion-territory association. Thus secessionist communalism is geared to the establishment of an exclusive state for the religious collectivity, which implies its legal claim over its presumed homeland. In the case of separatist

communalism, the claim over the homeland by the religious collectivity is essentially moral in that the 'nation' is to function within the territorial boundaries of the multinational state of which of it is a part. However, a religious community operates merely as an interest group when it recognises the impossibility of carving out a separate state or nation for itself because it cannot stake and sustain any legal or moral claim on a contiguous territory. Generally speaking, the interest group orientation and demographic dispersal of a religious group within the territory controlled by the state coincide. The point to be noted is that the nature and content of communalism is inextricably bound up with the religious collectivity's territorial base and spread.

Homogenisation

The claims to nationhood or nationality by a religious collectivity willy-nilly implies the process of cultural homogenisation, that is, evolving and imposing a common life style. In independent India this has been articulated in different contexts and forms. I shall pursue the present discussion with special reference to Hindus and Sikhs, and this for two reasons. First, the claim to nationhood by these religious collectivities has not yet been realised unlike in the case of the Muslims in the Indian sub-continent. Second, the Hindus and Sikhs where, and to a certain extent even today are, sharing a common life style and yet every effort is made to overemphasise their specificities ignoring the commonalities.

The Hindu advocacy of homogenisation has been articulated in different ways. If in the 1960s and the 1970s the preferred phrase was 'Indianisation', now it is 'Hindutva' Hindu nationalists insist that the advocacy is disassociated from the devoid of any narrow religious context and content but refers to a life style common to the people of India as a whole, and hence a Hindu is one who follows this life style.

If life style includes matters of dress, food, worship styles, artforms, marriage and family patterns, there is very little common even to the Hindus of different regional-linguistic areas, not to speak of the different religious communities of India. This however is not to deny that there exists a civilisational unity encompassing the multiplicity of the collectivities inhabiting India, but this envelops the people of South Asia as a whole and is not confined to the Indian state-society. Perhaps an example will lend clarify to the point I am making. Brahmins constitute the only pan-Indian Varna/Caste and even they differ vastly in, say, food habits. Thus if the majority of Brahmins traditionally were vegetarians, the Bengali Brahmin was a fish-eater and the Kashmiri Pandit a meat-eater. That is, vegetarianism is not common to all Hindus, not even to Brahmins. But beef is a taboo for believing Hindus and they do not consume it. (The fact that beef was not taboo in ancient India and it constituted a part of the regular diets is not relevant here.)

Against this background it is important to recall here that there have been several mobilisations against cow slaughter in 'secular' independent India, emphasising the fact that the cow is a sacred animal for Hindus. But beef is no taboo for Muslims and Christians who together constitute a staggering one hundred and twenty million in India. Thus, not only that a common life style for the entire population of India is advocated but through that advocacy only Hindu beliefs and sentiments are sought to be preserved and imposed on others.

There is another context in which the advocacy of homogenisation surfaces in India, namely, that of a common civil code. It should be noted here that a common civil code for Indian citizens is a constitutional promise and liberals, secularists, rationalists, atheists, etc., also support its implementation. But when a uniform civil code is advocated by Hindu nationalist, the conservative elements among the religious minorities perceive in that a threat in preserving their cultural identity. It is useful to remind ourselves that the Hindu conservative had resisted tooth and nail the introduction and implementation of the Hindu Code Bill because they feared that the Bill would erode the specific cultural identity of the Hindu community (see, Smith 1963). On the other hand, the very fact that a commonly applicable Hindu Code Bill was required to be formulated points to the very diversity of Hinduism as it existed in different regions and among various communities of India.

Religious diversity begets legal pluralism. In those state-societies, which are uni-religious and uni-denominational, it is relatively easier to implement a uniform civil code. The resistance to religious reforms in such societies comes from the conservatives of the same religious collectivity. And let it be emphasised that there is a qualitative difference in the conflicts between 'conservatives' and 'reformers' drawn from the same religious community and the confrontations between the people of two different religious collectivities whatever may be the content of the contentious issue. Here in lies the problematic content of cultural homogenisation being advocated by the Hindu nationalist through the implementation of a uniform civil code in a multi-religious society like India.

There is another aspect to the implementation of a uniform civil code by the state in a multi-religious society, which is that it endorses, perhaps unwittingly, the definition of state as an entity commanding terminal loyalty from its citizens, a definition in tune with the reality of mono-religious states. Insofar as all citizens of a state belonged to the same religious collectivity such a formulation did not pose much of a problem. In western nation-states, to the extent that there is an agreed division of labour between the state and the Church, the notion of terminal loyalty is understood as political loyalty. For example, in matters religious, the Catholics who are distributed into numerous state-societies may have their terminal loyalty to the Catholic Church and its ecclesiastical order headed by the Pope and not to the secular authority of the state of which they are citizens.

To those religious communities whose co-religionists are distributed across different state-societies and who have a common religious authority, the idea of terminal loyalty to the state, particularly when the state is not governed by their co-religionists according to the injunctions of the religious texts, would be an anathema. Here in lies the source of rupture in the Hindu nationalist's advocacy of a uniform civil code and its resistance by conservative elements, particularly among Muslims and Christians. It may be recalled here that the state in independent India has not yet mustered sufficient courage to introduce the constitutionally promised Uniform Civil Code but it did implement the Hindu Code Bill in spite of the resistance from conservative Hindu elements. This only reinforces the points I made above, namely, that there is a qualitative difference between the resistance encountered from conservative co-religionists and that emanating from those of other religious faiths.

The Hindu nationalist project of homogenisation is caught in a trap of Hinduism's internal contradiction because homogenisation implies not only uniformity but also equality. The Hindutva

version of homogeneity, however, while appealing to the non-Hindu minorities to shed their cultural identity, assimilate with the mainstream and become full-fledged Indians, is either reluctant or even ambivalent, to grapple with the institutionalised inequality within the Hindu social system as embodied in the institution of caste. Indeed, several strategies are invoked to manage this tension and camouflage this contradiction.

First, denying that caste system and particularly untouchability are parts of traditional Hinduism and insisting that these are latter day accretions resulting from praxio-logical aberrations rather than imperfect doctrines. Second, conceding the need to scissor away these negative accretions through gradual piecemeal reformism. Third, organising reformist collective actions and mobilisations (e.g., inter-caste dining, collective worship) to fraternalise the deprived and sap them of their protest orientation. However, given the fact that the constituency of the Hindutva ideology is largely confined to the twice-born Hindus of the Hindi-belt, it has failed to gain the confidence of the Dravidian Hindus, the Other Backward Classes, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, together constituting the majority of the Indian population. Thus the Hindu project of homogenisation is bound to remain limited in its scope unless it frontally grapples with the issue of institutionalised inequality within Hinduism.

The Sikh project of cultural homogenisation is more successful because, (a) the Sikhs are a minority, (b) they are uni-lingual, and (c) Sikhism is more egalitarian in its value orientation. And yet the attempt at homogenisation faces, and is likely to face, several obstacles. First, the dominant agent of Sikh nationalism is the Jat peasantry anchored in rural areas. In the event of Sikh religious nationalism succeeding in wresting a state for itself, the 'protection' now available particularly to the Mazbhi (Scheduled Caste) and the Nirankari (a sect not recognised by the Sikh ecclesiastical authority) Sikhs, from the Indian state as well as from the all-India political parties will disappear. Understandably, the Sikh segments which are likely to perceive the emergence of a Sikh state as a sure invitation to Jat domination are likely to put obstacles in the process of homogenisation.

Second, the Sikh project of homogenisation would inevitably mean the current elasticity of permissiveness available to Sahajdharis (shaven ones) would diminish. Not only that the insistence on being Keshdharis (unshorn ones) will intensify, but in all probability brute force would be pressed into service to transform the 'deviants' into conformists. In fact, available evidence suggests that even Keshdharis will be forced to follow a more rigorous and puritan life stile (e.g., abjuring smoking). Inevitably, organised resistance to such codes of conduct would eventually crystallise when the insistence on homogenisation become more intense.

Third, the urban, secular, middle class professionals, bureaucrats and intellectuals (both Keshharis and Sahajharis) are likely to be indifferent, if not hostile, to the efforts to introduce a more uniform life style. Pushed to the wall they may even articulate their opposition. These spokes in the wheel of homogenisation may abort the fructification of Sikhs religious nationalism.

Apart from the specific factors listed above to demonstrate the untenability of homogenisation pursued by the Hindu and Sikh nationalists there are several general reasons why homogenisation cannot be pursued particularly in a democratic and cultural plural society. I shall list just three of them (Oommen 1992 (a): 154). First, to homogenise invariably means to establish the hegemony of the dominant collectivity, annihilation of the weak and minority collectivities or at best their assimilation into an artificially contrived cultural mainstreams, leading to the eclipse of their

identity. Second, most state-societies, as they are constituted, draw their population from diverse sources. Therefore, assimilation and annihilation endanger the principle of diversity and block the task of developing pluralism. Third, contemporary societies are constantly exposed to alien influences and hence characterised by frayed edges and loose textures. The ongoing process of globalization is bound to intensify this trend. In such a situation the only viable option is to celebrate diversity, foster pluralism and nurture inter-groups equality.

Realtivisation

It is fairly clear by now that cultural realtivism is a necessary corollary of homogenisation. Realtivisation is the tendency to rehabilitate traditions in its totality in terms of original vision and purity. It often provides justification to all kinds of inhuman and disparaging practices (see, Redfield 1957) be it Sati (the practice of the Hindu wife committing suicide by jumping into the funeral pyre of her husband), untouchability, maintenance of particular diets, dress patterns, etc., all of which are justified in the name of religion. Thus cultural realtivism in the context of religion has two dimensions. First, it advocates values and practices, which are patently inhuman and/or irrational in the contemporary context. Second, it insists on practices, which are incongruous and anomalous in modern society. And these practices are justified invoking religious texts formulated and injunctions adumbrated in an entirely different context. This is often referred to as religious fundamentalism, which may be defined as the tendency to adhere to the text ignoring the context. The Hindu conservative elements often justify and legitimise practices such as Sati and untouchability in the name of tradition and values of pristine Hinduism. The Sikh adherence to the keeping of the five 'K's – Kesh (unshorn hair and beard). Kanga (Comb), Kachha (knee-length pair of breeches), Karah (steel bracelet), and Kirpan (sword)- also smacks of religious relativism.

The ideology of homogenisation, then, is not only geared to the standardisation of values, norms and practices but it also implies (a) the revival of obsolescent traditional values, norms and practices which are not relevant to the present and, (b) the imposition of those values on others, both 'deviant' co-religionists and religious minorities. This is so because the reference point of homogenisation advocated by religious nationalists invariably relates to the original vision and practices of their founding fathers! That is, religious nationalism carries with them the inevitable tendency of revivalism. Further, religious nationalists endeavour to create a societal ethos buttressed by the values of the dominant religion. Neither Hindu nor Sikh nationalism is an exception to this inherent tendency. And therefore they are not likely to survive in a modernising world, like other religious nationalisms.

Conclusion

The gist of my argument is that religious nationalism as a project is bound to fail because its domain assumptions, namely, that there is conterminality between religion and territory and that a religious collectivity is a political community, are wrong and empirically unsustainable. The process of cultural homogenisation is a prerequisite to encapsulate and contain all the religious groups within the ken of religious nationalism. This in practice means imposing the life style of the majority over the minority religious groups. Further, given the fact that the frame of reference of religious nationalism is invariably anchored to what is believed to be the original vision of the founding fathers, it necessarily prompts realtivism, that is, reviving and preserving the traditional beliefs and rituals even as they are embedded in unjust and inhuman values. Admittedly, religious

nationalism carries with it the seeds of religious fundamentalism. For these reasons, religious nationalism is not sustainable in a fast globalising world.