4 Spectres of partition
Religious nationalism in post-colonial south Asia

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Introduction
The election of Narendra Modi in May 2014 as Indian Prime Minister with a landslide majority has raised once again the spectre of religious nationalism in South Asia. Although relations with India’s neighbours in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) appear to remain unaffected, the commitment of Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to the principle of Hindutva remains undiluted – at least at grass-roots level – by the exigencies of ruling 1.25 billion people of diverse faiths, languages, and regional identities. As a form of cultural nationalism, Hindutva may be seen as a discourse of ‘Hindu-ness’ which interpellates all Indians as belonging to a Hindu civilization based on a common pan-Indian Hindu national identity. The BJP point out in their Web site that Hindutva is a ‘nationalist, and not a religious or theocratic, concept’ (Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP], 2014).

It, therefore, can be contrasted with Hinduism, the polytheistic and multivalent faith of almost a billion people in South Asia. The violence that occasionally has been carried out in its name should thus be seen as more ‘cultural’ than religious in inspiration since it is motivated by a desire to assimilate – or, in the words of one of its most important advocates, M. S. Golwalkar, ‘digest’ (Sharma, 2011:176) – India’s ethno-religious ‘Others’ into the Hindu ‘Self’.

It is in its desire to assimilate the ‘Other’ by violence if necessary that Hindu nationalism closely mirrors the more explicitly religiously based nationalism in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Although the emergence of Hindu Nationalism and the Islamization of both Muslim-majority states in South Asia may be seen as recent phenomena, the origins of what are termed ‘communal’ identities in the subcontinent lie in British colonial rule. In particular, colonial policies of classification and enumeration (Kaviraj, 2010) through the Census (Cohn, 1996) and subsequently the introduction of separate electorates facilitated the development of ‘communal’ consciousness in colonial India (Pandey, 1990). This will be discussed in the first section of the chapter that explores the impact of colonial policies on the construction of ‘religion’ as a category in South Asia. However, as argued in the second section, the genocidal violence unleashed by Partition and the manipulation of its memory by self-serving political elites have left South Asian societies in the grip of a nationalist imaginary increasingly articulated in a religious idiom that makes ‘secular’ rule problematic. Despite the ‘secular’ credentials of the subcontinent’s post-colonial elites, both India and, especially, Pakistan could not help but be imagined by its new citizens primarily in terms of its dominant ethno-religious traditions. Partition cleansed Pakistan of its Hindu and Sikh minorities and transformed Indian Muslims effectively into second-
class citizens whose loyalty to the nation-state was continuously questioned in times of conflict with their northern neighbour.

Spared the trauma of Partition, its spectres haunt the island of Sri Lanka in a different way. Colonial policies of divide and rule that favoured the Tamil minority led to a consolidation of a Buddhist-infused communal sentiment among the Sinhala majority. Post-colonial Sri Lankan politics became characterized by ‘ethnic outbidding’ between two rival Sinhalese political parties (DeVotta, 2004). Ethnic outbidding refers to an auction-like process whereby political parties compete to outbid their rivals in adopting anti-minority stances in order to capture the majority vote. In Sri Lanka, this resulted in the progressive Sinhalization of the state. The Tamil minority, mainly located in the North and East, were increasingly marginalized and subject to institutionalized linguistic discrimination. The communalization of Sri Lankan politics led to civil war, raising the spectre of a further partition of the subcontinent. Although the eventual victory of the Sri Lankan state after more than a quarter of a century of war appeared to have allayed those fears, the wounds of the civil war remain raw, and the spectre of nationalist violence continues to haunt the island.

**The colonial construction of ‘religion’**

The concept of ‘religion’ in the post-colonial world was an imported cultural category imposed upon indigenous societies by the colonizing power. The colonial state facilitated the imagination of collective indigenous identities, including the Indian nation, through the introduction of modern scientific techniques of classification and enumeration that transformed the political landscape of South Asia and continue to shape its politics today. The introduction of the Censuses in particular transformed previously ‘fuzzy’ into ‘enumerated’ communities (Kaviraj, 2010). Traditional South Asian society was characterized by the coexistence of a plethora of potentially contradictory identities as seen through the ‘modern’ colonial lens, meaning complexities were lost in the process of categorization. Examples include localized jati\(^3\) identities and forms of religious affiliation, such as Bhakti and Sufism that cut across religious boundaries.

The Census, introduced in 1872 and carried out on a decennial basis from 1881, facilitated the emergence of essentialized identities. Almost half a million people, most of whom were volunteers, collected basic information about not only the age, residence, and occupation but the caste, ethnicity, and religion of each individual Indian. As Bernard Cohn points out, ‘What was entailed in the construction of census operations was the creation of social categories by which India was ordered for administrative purposes’ (Cohn, 1996:8). The Census objectified religious, social, and cultural differences. The categories of caste and religion were seen as homogenous and mutually exclusive – it was deemed as irrational for someone to claim to be both from the Kshatriya and Vaishya caste as to profess Sikhism and Hinduism as one’s religious affiliation despite the ‘fuzziness’ of caste and religious boundaries in the colonial Punjab. Furthermore, the colonial state facilitated the enumeration of these communities through the inauguration of a process of statistical counting and spatial mapping. Enumeration facilitated the transformation of local caste or ethno-religious into national political communities. As local communities were mapped by the Census, the terms ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ lost much of their religious and philosophical significance and became markers of distinct, homogenous, and potentially conflictual political identities at an all-India level through the formation of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha.
The result is that for many in South Asia as in other parts of the post-colonial world, the concept of ‘religion’ continues to define subjectivity even though it is not an indigenous category. Colonialism, in short, contributed to the thinning out of religious identities by encouraging identification on the basis of loosely defined yet mutually exclusive categories but did not ‘invent’ these identities. The enumeration of these categories through the census further facilitated the politicization of religious identities. Sixty-five years after the trauma of Partition, the ghosts of colonialism continue to haunt modern South Asia in the form of essentialized religious identities that have yet to be exorcized by state-led ‘nation-building’ projects.

Partitions

The partition of South Asia into two new successor states, India and Pakistan, may be seen as one of the most violent processes of ethnic cleansing in recent history and foreshadowed contemporary genocidal conflict in the Balkans and central Africa. More than 12 million people were dislocated in one of the ‘greatest human convulsions of human history’ (Brass, 2003: 75). In Punjab alone, 1.5 million Muslims and 4.5 million Sikhs and Hindus were forced to move to either side of the Radcliffe line, and an estimated 0.5 million died in the organized communal riots that swept like wildfire through the province during the summer and fall of 1947. In Bengal, where ‘communal’ violence erupted in August 1946 in Calcutta, a similar number may have perished, yet in the absence of verifiable figures, most estimates continue ‘to bear the stamp of rumour’ (Pandey, 2001: 91).

According to Gyanendra Pandey, three different conceptions of partition can be identified (Pandey, 2001: 21–44). The first was reflected in the Muslim League demand for a Muslim-majority state in a loose, federal structure. Pakistan’s founder, the Quaid-i-Azam, Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), believed that South Asia’s Muslims constituted a separate ‘nation’ with a single culture and language. In the Lahore session of the Muslim League in March 1940, Jinnah claimed that Islam and Hinduism were ‘not religions in the strict sense of the word’ but were ‘different and distinct social orders’. Since both communities belonged to ‘two different religious philosophies, social customs, and literatures’, any attempt to ‘yoke together two such nations under a single State, one as a numerical minority and the other as a majority, must lead to a growing discontent and the
final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state’ (Jinnah, cited in Jaffrelot, 2002:12).

The second conception of partition involved splitting up the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. Support for this British designed ‘partition’ came from the main organization of Hindus, the Hindu Mahasabha, and the Sikh leadership under Master Tara Singh. Initially ‘partition’ was opposed but then finally accepted by the Muslim League in 1947. This agreement (with significant pressure from the United Kingdom) became the basis for the ‘official’ Partition. By offering Jinnah a ‘mutilated and moth-eaten’ Pakistan, the borders of which, shorn of non-Muslim populations in East Punjab and West Bengal, were not known until after independence, both the British and the Indian National Congress (INC) under Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) were able to achieve their objective of ejecting Jinnah and the ‘communal’ Muslim League from the centre, clearing the way for a strong, unitary, centralized state as favoured by Nehru. From Nehru’s point of view, ‘it was better to enjoy an unimpeded monopoly of power in the larger part of India than to be shackled by having to share it in an undivided one’ (Anderson, 2012: 14).

The final ‘partition’ was the violence associated with the ‘official’ partition: the massacres, the nightmares, ‘those other partitions that people would have to live with for decades to come’ (Pandey, 2001:35). Violence was central to Partition and differed from the periodic inter-religious ‘communal violence’ of the colonial period. It was dominated by national discourses and issues of state formation and bore the imprint of the Westphalian world order of territorialized nation-states. A ‘new’ national discourse emerged to challenge the ‘old’ multi-ethnic discourse of co-existence amongst Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs and became a driving force for the violence (Hansen, 2002: 29). The violence, in turn, permitted the construction of national boundaries between the two new states and legitimized their claims to state sovereignty.

Secular versus religious nationalism in post-colonial India

Partition continues to haunt the two newly independent states in the form of periodic communal violence between ethno-religious communities and strained regional relations. Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan have been to war three times since Partition in 1947, and relations have been exacerbated by alleged Pakistani support for militant groups suspected of carrying out terrorist attacks on Indian soil. In India, the secular settlement imposed upon a deeply ‘religious’ society by a modernizing nationalist elite under Jawaharlal Nehru appeared to suggest that the state was committed to implementing ‘the same civilizing mission that the colonial state had once taken upon itself vis-à-vis the ancient faiths of the subcontinent’ (Nandy, 1998: 323). The secularization of Indian society by the state led to the exclusion of religion (as faith) from the public sphere. This in turn created space for the politicization of religious identities by non-state actors alienated by the perceived neo-colonial attitude of the Nehruvian leadership and, in particular, it facilitated the development of an explicitly Hindu nationalist discourse through the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

Initially suppressed by the state in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of Mohandas ‘Mahatma’ Gandhi (1869–1948) by an ex-member, the RSS has since its inception in 1925 provided the institutional infrastructure for the articulation of a Hindu nationalism. It has done so through the establishment, first in 1964, of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) which seeks to mobilize Hindus throughout the world; and second in 1980, of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political wing of the RSS. The BJP has in
recent years successfully contested elections at a state and national level through the articulation of an explicitly Hindu nationalist ideology. A middle-class, high caste project of ‘cultural homogenization’ (Appadurai, 1996), Hindu nationalism seeks to create a unified, homogenous Hindu political identity out of the multiplicity of different faith, ethnic, regional, linguistic, and caste-based identities that characterize multiethnic India. Central to the Hindu nationalist project is the concept of *Hindutva*, one that stands in sharp contrast to the ‘pseudo-secular’ nationalism of the Indian National Congress (INC). Associated with Veer Savarkar (1883–1966), leader of the *Hindu Mahasabha*, the term *Hindutva* refers to an *ethnicized* Hindu identity. For Savarkar, the Hindus ‘are not only a nation but a *jati* (race), a born brotherhood’ (Savarkar, 1923: 89). *All* Indians, including those professing other religions, are considered Hindus with the exception of Muslims and Christians. The concept of *Hindutva* was explicitly adopted by the BJP in its election manifesto of 1996 as ‘a unifying principle which alone can preserve the unity and integrity’ of India (BJP, 1996) and has remained the party’s guiding philosophical principle ever since.

Although the BJP appears to dilute its *Hindutva* ideology once in power, it presided over – and was deeply implicated in – one of the worst ‘communal’ (i.e., ethno-religious) massacres of post-Partition India in Gujarat. The mass pogrom of Muslims in Godhra in 2002 appears to offer a tragic illustration of what Paul Brass has termed an ‘institutionalized riot system’ at work. In Gujarat, more than 2,500 were brutally murdered by Hindu mobs and 200,000 families displaced as the BJP-led state government under current BJP leader and current Prime Minister Narendra Modi refused to intervene. Brass has argued that the ‘organizations of militant Hindu nationalism’ affiliated to the RSS are ‘deeply implicated’ in the organization and production of Hindu-Muslim violence (Brass, 2006: 4). This can be clearly seen in the RSS-instigated ‘communal riots’ of 1992–1993. Following the destruction by RSS, *kar sevaks* (volunteers) of the *Babri masjid* mosque in Ayodhya, organized pogroms of Muslim communities were carried out by armed mobs of militant Hindu nationalists throughout India, leading to an estimated 3,000 deaths (Talbot and Singh, 2009: 150). In Bombay, Shiv Sena, a regional party based in Maharashtra espousing a particularly virulent form of Hindu nationalism under the leadership of Bal Thackeray, systematically planned mob attacks upon Muslim individuals and businesses in India’s financial capital, Mumbai (Bannerjee, 2001). The riots form the backdrop to Danny Boyle’s Oscar-winning film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) based on a 2005 book by former Indian Foreign Service officer Vikas Swarup.

Responsibility for communal violence, however, is not limited to militant Hindu nationalists affiliated to the Sang Parivar. Arguably, the mass pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi in November 1984 following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, directed by senior members of the INC such as Jagdish Tytler, provided the template for future attacks upon ethno-religious minorities. However, the post–9/11 international climate combined with the periodic attacks by Islamic insurgents backed by Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) did much to create an environment in which the indiscriminate murder of Muslims could both take place and be condoned by India’s current political leaders.

**Linguistic versus religious nationalism in Pakistan**

For a Pakistan purged of significant religious minorities, two competing forms of nationalism emerged: a religious state-based nationalism in the nominally Urdu-speaking West and an ethno-linguistic nationalism in the Bengali-speaking East, which resulted
in a further partition, no less violent or traumatic than the one that gave birth to the two successor states of the British Empire in the first place. Jinnah and the Muslim League argued that Muslims in South Asia constituted a distinct nation and laid claim to territorial sovereignty on the basis of religion, yet sought to simultaneously deny its salience to the construction of the new nation. This was evident in his speech of 1947 when he told the Constituent Assembly not only that the citizens of Pakistan were free to belong to any religion and creed but also that ‘in the course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense…but in the political sense as citizens of the state’. Constitutionally and legally, Pakistan has subsequently struggled to resolve this fundamental ambiguity: failing to either separate or combine the secular and religious dimensions of the Muslim nationalism that gave birth to the new state. When a constitution was finally agreed upon almost a decade after the establishment of Pakistan, it declared the new state to be an Islamic Republic where no law repugnant to the Qur’an and the Sunnah could be enacted, yet did not make Islam the official religion of the state. Indeed, Islam became the state religion of Pakistan only after the more populous East Wing (now known as Bangladesh) had seceded following a bloody and intense civil war marked by the use of systematic brutality by the mainly West Pakistan army against Bengali-speaking supporters of the Awami League.

The Awami League, led by the charismatic Sheik Mujibur Rahman (1920–1975), campaigning for East Bengal autonomy in the 1970 elections, won a majority of seats in the Pakistan National Assembly. Although Bengalis comprised more than half of the population of Pakistan, they had been politically and economically marginalized in the West Pakistan–dominated Islamic state. Successive campaigns for linguistic autonomy and for a fair share in the profits accrued from the export of jute had been denied by their rulers in far-off Karachi and later Islamabad, sparking varying degrees of repression. However, the democratic mandate given to the Awami League in 1970 to seek greater autonomy within Pakistan raised the spectre of a second Partition. After all, as Jalal (1985) pointed out, the genesis of Pakistan lay in precisely the same demand for greater autonomy for Muslims within an all-Indian context. Pakistan’s military rulers, under General Yahya Khan, decided to crush the Awami League by all means necessary. This included not only launching a military crackdown on the regime’s opponents but orchestrating systematic ethnic cleansing in East Pakistan, targeting its Hindu minority by mobilizing Islamist ‘volunteers’ (razakhar, Talbot and Singh, 2009: 148). An estimated 10 million refugees were thus forcibly displaced from their homes and crossed the border into India, leading Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to militarily intervene in December 1971. The third Indo-Pakistani war since Independence resulted in a crushing victory for India and the birth of the new state of Bangladesh. However, the violence that accompanied this second partition was no less traumatic than the official Partition of 1947. As in Partition, there are no reliable casualty figures, with estimates varying from 300,000 to 3 million dead in a little over 6 months of fighting. The difference this time was that the violence was perpetrated by co-religionists in the name of ‘national’ unity against fellow citizens divided by ethnicity and language. A humiliated Pakistan shorn of its East Wing was forced to question its entire raison d’etre, while the traumatic birth of the Bangladesh continues to haunt both nations in the twenty-first century. Muslim nationalism successfully mobilised the Muslim masses behind the movement for a territorially defined Muslim homeland within South Asia, yet once the goal of Pakistan was achieved and the new state established, it was difficult to maintain a sense of national identity on religious grounds alone. With the subsequent disintegration of the
‘moth-eaten’ state separated by ethnicity, language, and more than 1,000 miles of hostile territory, Jinnah’s dream of ‘two nations’ defined by religion living side by side in South Asia was shattered. However, Islam continues to provide South Asians from different ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds with a coherent and cohesive politico-religious identity. Part of the tragedy of the Muslim League’s position in seeking to territorialize Muslim identity through the demand for a homeland in Pakistan was that it ostensibly divided the very community it sought to represent, leaving those Muslims most in favour of a separate Muslim state trapped in a Hindu dominated India as a permanent minority.

After the secession of East Bengal, Pakistan enjoyed a short-lived experiment with democracy under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1928–1979) that was brought to an end by a military coup. General Zia, who led the coup, selectively imposed Shari’ia laws on what Jinnah had envisaged as a secular state while at the same time supporting the jihad of the Afghan Mujahadeen against the Soviet Union. Relying upon the support of the Jammat-e-Islami, an Islamic political organization, Zia’s policies led to an increasing Islamization within Pakistan. In the first place, members of the Ahmadiya sect that had been declared ‘non-Muslim’ by the Bhutto government were prohibited under Ordinance XX from ‘posing as Muslims’. This meant that the Ahmadis, who consider themselves to be Muslim and practice its tenets, could be arrested for practicing what the state has determined to be a heretical version of Islam preached by a ‘false’ prophet. Second, the institutionalization of Sunni legal codes led to increased insecurity for the Shi’ia minority in Pakistan who found themselves ‘othered’ and excluded from their nation by the majority mainstream Sunni Islam and subject to increasing attacks by militant groups. Zia’s death in a mysterious plane crash and the return to civilian rule under, first, Benazir Bhutto (1953–2007), Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s daughter and leader of the Pakistan People’s Party, and current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of the Muslim League, did little to stem the tide of Islamization of Pakistani politics. Indeed, following the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the ISI recruited and funded the Taliban from the madrassas of the Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam, the more fundamentalist and sectarian of Pakistan’s Islamist parties, at a time when the nation was ostensibly returning to democracy.

Since the Taliban were ousted from Afghanistan, the ‘War on Terror’ has largely been fought in Pakistan. As a frontline state in the war against Al-Qaeda militants espousing a strict Jihadi-Salafist ideology that is a marked contrast to the syncretic and tolerant Sufi traditions that long prevailed, Pakistan has borne a heavy price with almost 50,000 casualties since 9/11 (Raja, 2013). The ‘War on Terror’ has provided a legitimizing narrative for the use of indiscriminate violence by Sunni Islamic extremists affiliated with the Pakistani Taliban, on the one hand, and state repression on the other. This makes a separation between ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ forms of nationalism problematic since both the state and the Taliban are waging a war in the name of Islam.

Ethno-national conflict in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, the divisive colonial legacy was ethno-linguistic rather than religious between the majority Sinhala and minority Tamil communities. The global ‘War on Terror’ provided the Sri Lankan government led by former President Mahinda Rajapaksha with the opportunity to seek a military solution to end the intractable 30-year conflict with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). As elsewhere in South Asia, the origins of Sri Lanka’s civil war lay in the failures of the post-colonial state, dominated by the Buddhist Sinhalese majority, to recognize the ethno-linguistic, religious, and cultural distinctiveness
of the Tamil minority (Tambiah, 1992; De Votta, 2004; Stokke, 2011). After Independence, the United National Party and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) dominated Sri Lankan politics with both pandering exclusively to the majority Sinhalese community. The ‘ethnic outbidding’ (DeVotta, 2004) between the two parties resulted in the Sinhalization of the main institutions of the Sri Lankan state and marginalization of the Tamil minority. The misrepresentation of legitimate Tamil grievances such as linguistic autonomy as a threat to the territorial integrity of the state and the instigation of riots against Tamils by militant Sinhala organizations, often with the involvement of Buddhist monks (Tambiah, 1992), led to the emergence of the LTTE, which advocated violent armed struggle in an attempt to create an independent Tamil state in the North and East (Tamil Eelam). The LTTE had fewer than fifty members before the outbreak of the civil war following anti-Tamil riots in 1983, yet extended its control over most of the Tamil majority areas in the North and East after the riots. Although it did so by coercive means, developing into a quasi-fascistic terrorist organization pioneering the use of female suicide bombings and specializing in the recruitment of child soldiers, it enjoyed substantial popular support amongst the Tamil community within Sri Lanka and the diaspora. At its peak, the LTTE constituted a state within a state; it ruled a fourth of Sri Lanka and had a conventional army of 20,000 militants complete with navy and air force. The LTTE managed to keep the Sri Lankan forces at bay and even withstood the Indian army’s intervention between 1987 and 1990. (de Votta, 2009). A peace process leading to recognition of the de facto partition of the island along ethnic lines appeared to be the only realistic option for peace and security on the island. However, the SLFP leadership had different ideas. Haunted by the spectre of the official Partition of the subcontinent, Rajapaksha embarked upon his own ‘War on Terror’ that resulted in an overwhelming victory over the LTTE and decimation of its leadership. The military crushing of the LTTE did help to restore peace and security to the island but at considerable human cost to Tamil civilians. It is estimated that 280,000 people were displaced in the latter stages of the war and at least 7,000 civilians killed, according to UN figures, in a ‘no fire’ zone in the North-Eastern tip of the island. Unofficial estimates put the figure far higher – at between 30,000 and 40,000. These ‘credible allegations’ are being investigated by the UN Secretary-General’s Panel of Experts on Sri Lanka, who have warned that, if proven, they would ‘amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity’ (United Nations, 2011). A U.S.-tabled resolution was subsequently passed in the Human Rights Council asking the government of Sri Lanka to take credible and independent actions to address these alleged violations of international humanitarian law. The fundamental causes of Tamil grievances, and therefore of their insecurity, however, remain unaddressed. In 2015, President Rajapaksa was ousted from power, and his successor immediately embarked on various reform and reconciliation initiatives while promising a full reckoning regarding the alleged war crimes. The communal divisions between the Sinhalase and Tamils remain volatile, and overcoming the trauma of prolonged civil war remains a daunting challenge.

Conclusion: The spectres of partition

On winning the 2014 election after his party had secured 282 of 543 seats in the biggest landslide in 30 years (Election Commission of India, 2014), the former tea-seller turned Prime Minister–elect, Narendra Modi, promised to make the twenty-first century ‘India’s century’ (Burke, 2014). His election victory was welcomed by markets impressed by his pro-business policies that promise to reinvigorate India’s economy. However, if this is to
happen, Modi will need to shed the baggage of Hindutva and pursue policies which will result in inclusive economic growth for all of India’s population including her religious and caste minorities. The same challenge awaits the leaders of the Government of Sri Lanka after their victory in the civil war.

The violence that minorities throughout India experience is not merely from threats of physical violence but is also structural and cultural in nature. Structural violence, according to Galtung, is when structures of unequal power militate against the realization of an individual’s potential. Violence is here defined as ‘the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual’ (Galtung, 1969: 168; italics in the original). Cultural violence is what ‘legitimizes violence in its direct or structural form’ (Galtung, 1990: 291). Almost a decade since the Sachar Report commissioned by the then–Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (himself from a minority Sikh background), Muslims continue to be among the poorest and least represented groups within India (Sachar, 2006) and suffer from structural violence. Heavily concentrated in urban areas, Muslims have disproportionately low levels of employment (particularly in the public sector) and education, measured in terms of literacy rates and years of schooling. However, India’s 177 million Muslims – constituting 14.6 percent of the population – do have relatively high fertility rates, and India is expected to have the world’s largest Muslim population in two decades time (The Economist, 2013c).

For RSS members and their sympathizers, the growing Muslim population constitutes a threat: an ‘internal Other’ that compromises national security. The cultural violence of Hindutva ‘legitimizes’ the violence carried out by extremists affiliated with the RSS and the continued socio-economic marginalization of the Muslim community within India. Muslims consequently face the same choice as they arguably did at Partition: either remain and become good citizens of an India explicitly imagined as Hindustan or face exclusion from the nation. In any case, the ‘idea of India’ (Khilnani, 1997) as an inclusive, secular nation as envisaged by Nehru at Independence was compromised by the violence of Partition that rendered his dream still-born.

Across the border, the dream of a secular homeland for Muslims in South Asia has long since died. Jinnah’s ‘two-nation’ theory was disproved by the bloody secession of Pakistan’s Eastern Wing on ethno-linguistic grounds. The cultural glue of a common religion proved insufficient to unite two peoples divided by ethnicity, language and, most insurmountably, geography. After the establishment of Bangladesh, the ‘spectres’ of Partition continue to haunt Pakistan and Bangladesh in the form of sectarian violence against religious minorities and a civil war that threatens to fragment the state. The cultural violence of Islamism poses a threat to both the physical and ontological security of minority sects such as the Shi’ia and the Ahmadiyas as well as women in general. The ‘Talibanization’ of not only the Pashtun-speaking areas in the North-West but of the Punjabi heartland (Siddiqa, 2013) is a further concern not only for Pakistan’s minorities but also for her regional neighbours. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, South Asia demonstrates that the volatile melding of Islamic militancy with nationalist grievances has international repercussions that cannot be contained by secure borders or nuclear weapons. Such risks in the nuclear age mean that the ‘spectres of Partition’ continue to haunt us all.

Notes

Giorgio Shani in the following book: 大串和雄編集『21世紀の政治と暴力』晃洋書房. I am grateful to Kazuo Ohgushi for his very helpful comments and suggestions.

2 The term ‘interpellates’ was used by Louis Althusser to explain the process by which ideology constructs subjects through a process of ‘hailing’. For Althusser, ‘all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects’. (Althusser 1971: 115; italics mine). The use of interpellation here implies that nationalism constructs subjects as belonging to a ‘nation’. Therefore, Hindu nationalism constructs ‘ethnicized’ Hindu subjects in the same way as Indian nationalism creates ‘secular’ Indian subjects.

3 A jati is a localized sub-caste group, usually organized around occupation.

4 The line dividing India and Pakistan was drawn hastily by a civil servant with no experience of South Asia, Cyril Radcliffe, barely 5 weeks before Partition. Radcliffe was immortalized in W. H. Auden’s poem Partition (Auden, 2003).

5 Basing his figures primarily on British reports, Brass, however, estimates that ‘only’ between 200,000 and 360,000 died as a direct result of partition violence (Brass, 2003: 75). This contrasts with Butalia’s higher figure of 1 million (Butalia, 2000: 3).

6 The term ‘Sikh’ refers to the learners or disciples of the first Guru of the Sikh community or panth, Guru Nanak (1469–1539). The panth was transformed by the final human Guru, Gobind Singh (1666–1708) into the Khalsa’ meaning literally community of the pure and follow a holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, instead of worshipping a human Guru. Most orthodox (male) Sikhs live in the Punjab and wear five external symbols making them a readily identifiable group (See Shani, 2007: 17–40).

7 An estimated 2,000 Sikhs were killed in organized ‘riots’ between October 31 and November 4 1984. See Shani (2007a: 94–98) for more on the Delhi riots and their impact upon the development of a Sikh ‘national’ consciousness.

References


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