

## 'Majorities' and 'Minorities' in Modern South Asian Islam: A Historian's Perspective

Mushirul Hasan

Over the years Marxist and subaltern historians have introduced some major methodological departures in their writings on the Muslim communities in India. Yet their impact has not been profoundly felt in academic circles. The dominant trend, illustrated in part by the curriculum followed in most colleges and universities, is to dwell on the so-called Muslim mind, detail the 'Muslim outlook', and construe a unified 'Muslim identity' around the symbols of Islam. Many people still believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that the ulama represent 'true' Islam, and that liberal and modernist currents are either secondary or peripheral to the more dominant 'separatist', 'communal' and 'neo-fundamentalist' paradigms. Time and time again one is reminded of the pervasive impact of Islam on its followers, their enduring pan-Islamic links, and their unflinching devotion to the Quran and other religious texts. We are told that Muslims attach greater value to their religio-cultural habits and institutions; hence they are prone to being swayed by the Islamic rhetoric. In other words, 'Islam' is seen not just as a religion but a total way of life, providing a complete identity, explanation and moral code for Muslims' action. The mere fact of people being Islamic in some general sense is conflated with that of their adherence to beliefs and policies that are strictly described as 'Islamist' or 'fundamentalist'.

What these approaches share is the analytic primacy of culture and ideology and the privileged place assigned to Islam. It is thus commonly assumed, both in India and elsewhere, that Islam is not only distinctive but also inherently incompatible with Western ideals of democracy and secularism. Islam as a religion is considered to be essentially different from all the others in that the concepts of beliefs and political rule are fused through the unity of *din wa dawla*, the Prophet having both revealed a religion and founded a state. Predicated on this statement is an assumed resistance to secularism.

In reality, the commitment of some Muslim groups to specifically Islamic ideas and Islamic symbols does not indicate a unified structure of consciousness or community acting in unison. What should not be assumed is a monolithic conception of Islamic ideology and practice or teleology dictating the actions of the Muslims or a general acquiescence in the actions of few. We must bear in mind that the Muslim communities, like their counterparts in any other religious community, have multiple

identities, with many acts to perform and many diverse roles to play. This explains why they, while remaining true to the faith, relate to the more immediate and pressing socio-economic needs in broadly secular terms and have greater affinity with members of their class or caste and not just with their co-religionists. The debate on the depth and nature of this interaction would go on, but one should not at any rate be guided by the contemporary experiences of Hindu-Muslim relations. Equally, one should guard against a discussion centred around the notion of an absolute Muslim/Islamic consciousness and steer clear of the reification of Islam in the realm of political ideas. We should, instead, consider what political/social ideas particular group of Muslims hold, and the relations between these and their social conditions and practice. The scholar Aziz al-Azmeh has pointed out:

The very premises of Islamic studies are radically and thoroughly unsound; their very foundation, the identification and the construal of relevant facts, is based upon a political and cultural imagination.... Any proper writing of Islamic history has to rest on the dissolution of Islam as an orientalist category...It has to liberate itself from Islam, and scrutinize Islamic histories, societies, economies, temporalities, cultures and sciences with the aid of history, of economics, of sociology, critical theory and anthropology. Only then will Islam be disassociated, and reconstituted as historical categories amenable to historical study.<sup>1</sup>

Who, then, are the Muslims? What, if any, specific identity is associated with them? Is it divinely ordained or related to features that have always been characteristic of Islamic governments and societies? How important is the community's own self-image which is subtly moulded by a combination of 'internal' factors and external interventions? Is it the outcome of colonial images, of treating Muslims as an undifferentiated religious category? To what extent has the post-colonial state, too, viewed Muslims as a religious collectivity, who are also presumed to represent a separate political entity?

First of all, identities in South Asian history and politics have seldom been unified; in colonial India they were increasingly fragmented and fractured. Indeed, they were not singular but multiple, and thus difficult to capture on a single axis. Constructed across different, intersecting and antagonistic sites, discourses, and practices, they are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of making and unmaking.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly enough, when the first all-India census was tabulated and analysed in 1881, the enumerators found that Muslims numbered only 19.7 percent of the

population. They uncovered a geographically dispersed aggregate of Muslims forming neither a collectivity nor a distinct society for any purpose, political, economic and social. Out of a total population of about 50 million (or one-fifth of the computed total population of 'British India'), the Muslims in Bengal spoke Bengali and those in Punjab used largely Punjabi as their language. Those living in Tamil Nadu spoke Tamil; those settled on the Malabar coast, mostly Mapillas, spoke Malayalam. They found Muslims whose religious rituals had a very strong tinge of Hinduism and who retained caste and observed Hindu festivals and ceremonies. As the historian Peter Hardy pointed out, the entry of Muslims in South Asia by so many and separated doorways, their spread over the subcontinent by so many different routes, over a period of centuries, and the diffusion of Islam in different forms from one area to the another, ensured that this religion would present itself to the peoples of South Asia in many different epiphanies seen from different angles. Neither to its own adherents nor to non-Muslims in South Asia has Islam seemed monochromatic, monolithic or indeed mono-anything. It has indeed been said that Islam in South Asia has been united only by a few common rituals and by the aspirations of its scholars. 3

Islam came to the subcontinent not in a single time span, but in succession divided unevenly in different periods; consequently, its diffusion took place in a variety of forms from class to class and from one area to another. The difference in the phases in which people 'experienced' Islam brought with it variations in the nature of challenges facing its followers in different regions. In its local and regional specificity, therefore, the 'essential' core of Islam, so to speak, was not immune to changes by historical influences. Ordinary Muslims were not, as one is often led to believe, members of a monolithic community sitting sullenly apart, but were active participants in regional cultures whose perspectives they shared. They took their commitment to Islam not only as one among other values, but also as something which was itself differentiated internally into a number of detailed commitments.

The noteworthy point is how, in the aftermath of independence and partition, the secular and democratic regime rather than the Islamic dimension provided the overarching framework to the religio-political leadership of the Muslims to forge new alliances and electoral coalitions. Those holding the reins of leadership located problems and found answers to contemporary dilemmas within the democratic and secular paradigms and sought adjustments not as members of a larger collectivity. They accepted state laws without insisting on the application of the Islamic law, except in the case of marriage, divorce and inheritance. Although the obstinacy of resistance to this simple truth is in itself a matter of more than passing significance, it is nevertheless necessary for social

scientists to spell out the nature and implications of these internal differentiation and the negotiated commitments flowing from them.<sup>4</sup>

## II5

The political scientist Rajni Kothari observed that 'one way to think about India is as a people and a land made up of a series of minorities.' A recent book---India's Agony Over Religion--talks of the process of 'religionization' in a great variety of cultural and social environments and into a great variety of movements and traditions that do not appear to be 'religious' in the pre-theoretical, conventional sense but, in fact, are profoundly 'religious' in a critical, theoretical sense. <sup>6</sup>

In a sense, one can trace the origins of the majority versus minority debate to the 1880s, when the Indian National Congress demanded a share in governance. This fact in itself heightened the anxieties of the Muslim elites in north India, who wanted, as exemplified by the career of Syed Ahmad Khan and the establishment of the Muslim League in December 1906, their interests as a 'minority' to be safeguarded in the power structures. The cornerstone of Muslim politics was to secure weightages, or some kind of parity, for Muslims in the Muslim-minority provinces.<sup>7</sup> This was stoutly resisted in the rank and file of the Congress and the Hindu Sabhas. So that the majority-minority debate, translated into formal constitutional arrangements in the 1919 Act, ran its full course over the next four decades. Its most tangible outcome was the country's partition on 14-15 August 1947.<sup>8</sup>

In effect, the critical issue, even in a great variety of social configurations, has been the size of a community. True, leaders like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad questioned the standard definition of a 'minority'. They also argued that 'their heads are held so high that to consider them a minority deserving special concessions, makes no sense' and that 'such a vast mass of humanity' can have no legitimate fears in a free and democratic India. <sup>9</sup> But their perspective could not obscure the fact that the strength of the Muslim population and its dispersal throughout the subcontinent mattered most to the raj in its imperial calculations. The government's response to the Simla deputation (October 1, 1906), as indeed the introduction of separate electorates in 1909, was in recognition of the fact that major concessions had to be made to so large a community. The need to do so became all the greater with the growing success of the nationalist movement. Thus the 'majority'-'minority' categories, though interpreted differently in political quarters, were pure political inventions and did not, in any significant way, reflect the

nature of inter-community relations in pre-colonial India. What I wish to argue, though, is that notion of a Muslim 'minority', as reflected in the colonial and nationalist discourses, flowed from a certain understanding of the histories of the Muslim communities in South Asia and their perpetuation by the Muslim elites to legitimise their own claims.

Any numbers of scholarly studies are replete with instances of Islam's representation as a hostile and aggressive force, of Muslim societies being caricatured as rigid, authoritarian and uncreative. British Orientalists, some occupying high government positions, perpetuated a repertoire of such images, construing Islam as an emblem of repellent otherness, 'the faith of a body of savage marauders and conquerors, who swept over the land ... in a series of cruel raids, bringing rapine and destruction in their train.' Travellers, missionaries, administrators and ethnographers, too, portrayed Islam as static and dogmatic and its adherents as conservative, haughtily rigid, utterly contemptuous of things 'modern', and influenced by an obsolete system of education. Assumed that Islam in the subcontinent was indelibly stamped by its early history, particularly by its original social carriers, they pointed to those Islamic values being inherently hostile to the West and the British government. The call to wreak a special vengeance upon Muslims, especially in the wake of the 'Wahabi' movement and the 1857 revolt, demonstrated how things 'Islamic' was construed, located, categorised and connected.

Quite a few British civil servants knew that many of their observations or reflections were not accurate. Yet they created myths and conjured up images of peoples and countries as part of the imperial design to fortify the ideological edifice of the Empire. Therefore, much of the knowledge and understanding derived from the field experience was not reflected in concrete political decisions or translated in constitutional decrees. In fact, the colonial view was reflected in two major decisions---the legitimacy accorded to a deputation of thirty-five Muslims who met the Viceroy at his summer capital in Simla on October 1, 1906, and the legislative enactments of 1909, 1919 and 1935. The Viceroy did not ask them to establish their credentials. He merely assumed that the deputation expressed the 'views and aspirations of the enlightened Muslim community of India.' In effect, the crucial issue is not whether the Shimla deputation was a 'command performance' but the political consequences of acknowledging and decisively encouraging the *nisus* towards a separate Muslim personality.

The Act of 1909, enacted to defuse the Congress demand for a greater share in administration and decision-making, was a calculated masterstroke. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) was designed to serve the same objective, while the Act of

1935 implicitly endorsed the hitherto hazy notion of an incipient Muslim nation. Indeed if the British were to incline overmuch towards the Muslim League in the early forties, it was in part because their own political and institutional frameworks left them with little choice except to depend on its leaders. At another level, the structures of governance created by the British offered the League the Muslim League much greater space for articulating communitarian interests. Separate electorates, reservations and weightages gave birth to a religio-political entity in the colonial image of being unified, cohesive and segregated from the Hindus, and created space for reinforcing communitarian identities, a process which was, both in conception and articulation, profoundly divisive. Muslims were homogenised like 'castes' and 'tribes' and suitably accommodated within political schemes and bureaucratic designs. Self-styled leaders were thus emboldened to represent an 'objectively'-defined community and contend with others for patronage, employment and political assignments. In effect, the legislative enactments from 1909 onwards challenged those assumptions, which guided many nationalists to cultivate a pan-Indian identity, and undermined, through a judicious mixture of concessions and guarantees, the multireligious foundations of Indian nationalism. The ideological contours of the future Pakistan were, thus, delineated by British opinion and policy-makers long before Mohammad Ali Jinnah burst upon the political scene with his insistence on having a Muslim nation.

The Muslims in the Congress were, on the other hand, awkwardly placed because their conception of nationhood had no place in the constitutional blueprint. The overall thrust of British policies led to their political isolation. A man of Dr. M.A. Ansari's stature was virtually prevented from attending the Round Table Conferences in London (1930-33), convened by the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald to resolve the political deadlock in India. Rank communalists, on the other hand, were feted, greeted with broad smiles and welcomed with open arms. People like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were 'the wrecking horse', just because Jinnah, whose own status was far from assured, insisted on their exclusion from the important Simla Conference, held on June 25, 1945. Jinnah's plea, not unheeded in official quarters, was that no one but a Muslim Leaguer could represent the Muslims. This moment in history must have been relished by the surviving architects of the 1909, 1919 and 1935 constitutions.

In the final analysis, the colonial government bequeathed to the Indian Republic a truncated nation, a distorted perspective, a series of blurred images, and a number of vague and undifferentiated categories. If, therefore, the history of the inter-community relations is to be rewritten, it has to steer clear of colonial paradigms and be freed from the stranglehold of an intellectual tradition, orientalist or otherwise. Likewise, the

individual and collective experiences of Muslims, need to be located in the subcontinent's history and viewed afresh, not in the light of abstract and arbitrary categories, but on the strength of irrefutable evidence of their complex but long-standing, day-to-day interactions with various groups and communities.

### III

A rounded view of the vast and amorphous 'nationalist' literature reveals the uncritical acceptance of colonial constructions, their political legitimisation through pacts, accords, 'unity' conferences, and the inner religious and cultural tensions within the nationalist paradigm. In tangible terms, themes on communal amity and understanding, shorn of their rhetorical value, hardly constituted the major reference points in creating or articulating a truly national consciousness. This requires elaboration.

First and foremost, the intellectual probing was in themselves sketchy, superficial, and marred by a Hinduised perspective. The upper castes, convinced of their own superiority in the realm of ideas and thought, considered Islam as a rather crude approach to the problems of philosophy and metaphysics. There were, consequently, no serious interpreters of Islam. Moreover, many nineteenth century writers and reformers, who accepted the knowledge derived from medieval chroniclers, selectively translated by British historians, regarded the Muslim intrusion as an aberration or a break in the continuity of Brahmanical traditions. They equated Indian culture with Vedic culture, Indian philosophy with Vedanta, Puranas and the Upanishads, and Indian religions with Hinduism. Most accounts focused on Muslim ruling elites, their military exploits and glittering durbars and ignored the subtle fusion of 'Little' Traditions at the Sufi shrines particularly, and in the rural hinterland generally. No attempt was made to detail how the Islamic dogmas and tenets were gradually incorporated into regional and local belief structures and rituals; how most Muslims, who were converted to Mohammad's religion at different points of time and for different reasons, were closely integrated with the rest of the population. Islam was mistakenly viewed as part of the 'Great Tradition'--codified, rigid, unchanging, insular and close to external influences. Whether converted or not, its followers were cast in a specifically Islamic mould and their identity was understood, defined and described, regardless of economic status, caste, language or region, in strictly textual terms.

Islams militancy and inflexible doctrinal structure was a major concern for Swami

Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj. He was a relentless critic, his text, *Satyarth Prakash*, the basis of anti-Islamic polemics in Punjab. Major literary writers, though by no means all, contrasted the glory of pre-medieval India with the oppressive character of 'Muslim' dynasties and commented on the overall degradation of Hindus and the pernicious influence of Islam on their social life. They represented medieval rule as a story of rape and abduction of Hindu women, the slaughter of sacred cows and the defilement of temples. Thus the Bengali writer Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) looked upon medieval India as a period of bondage, and interpreted the Hindu chieftain's resistance to the Mughals as national resistance. Muslim rule, according to him, brought neither material nor spiritual improvement to India. He saw in Islam a quest for power and glory, devoid of spiritual and ethical qualities, irrational, bigoted, devious, sensual and immoral, and a complete antithesis of his 'ideal' religion. Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1909), who wrote a major expose of the British economic policies, disclaimed the familiar portrayal of Muslims as innately wicked and bloodthirsty. Nevertheless, the picture of Muslims as alien emerges just as strongly in his novels and fictions. They were not quite 'one of us'; they were enemies of 'our' country and religion.

In general, the Bengali intelligentsia read and absorbed the spirit of such writings. 'Nothing was more natural for us', commented Nirad C. Chaudhuri, 'than to feel about the Muslims in the way we did'. They were told, even before they could read, that the Muslims had ruled and oppressed the Hindus, spread their religion with the Quran in one hand and the sword in another, abducted Hindu women, destroyed temples and polluted sacred places. 'As we grew older we read about the wars of the Rajputs, the Marathas, and the Sikhs against the Muslims, and of the intolerance and oppression of Aurangzeb.' Bengali thinkers and reformers, according to Nirad Chaudhuri, based their life-work on the formula of a synthesis of Hindu and European currents. Islamic trends and 'Muslim sensitivities' did not touch the arc of their consciousness. They stood outside as an 'external proletariat'. If they wanted to enter the Bengali cultural world they could do so 'only after giving up all their Islamic values and traditions.' In this way, the new Indian/ Bengali culture of the nineteenth-century built a perimeter of its own and put specifically Muslim influences and aspirations beyond the pale. According to Chaudhuri, 'we became conscious of a new kind of hatred for the Muslims' during the swadeshi movement. A cold dislike for them 'settled down in our heart, putting an end to all real intimacy of relationship.'

Such representations of Muslims did not augur well for the nationalist agenda of welding various communities into a unified nation. For this reason, Nehru rightly observed that 'only by thinking in terms of a different political framework--and even

more so a different social framework--can we build up a stable foundation for joint action.' Yet despite Nehru's attempts, many nationalists, particularly those in the Congress, assumed that Muslims constituted a separate religious and political entity. They dealt with their 'leaders' accordingly, and legitimised their status as the spokesmen of the 'community'. In so doing, they perpetuated the communal categories created by the colonial government, aided a potentially divisive process, jettisoned their own moral authority to challenge the assumptions outlined in the Acts of 1919 and 1935, and created the space for certain strident sectional claims to be accommodated in the political agenda. In fact, the political language within which the Congress sought accommodation with Muslim political activists or the basis on which the Mahatma established an entente with the pan-Islamic leaders during the Khilafat movement in the early 1920s had far-reaching consequences. The energy derived from recognising Muslims as a distinct religious and political unit implied that the basic terms of reference precluded any lasting solution of the communal tangle.

The Congress was sensitised to this reality after the Muslim outcry over certain policies adopted by its ministries (formed under the Act of 1935 during 1937-39) in the United Provinces, Bihar and Bombay. But it was too late in the day to retrace its steps. Various political currents, which could have been managed earlier and harnessed for nationalist goals, developed their own independent energy and began to flow in several different directions. The Congress agenda could no longer be written afresh in the post-war years without the Muslim League, the votaries of a Hindu nation, and the British who still held the scales. There were not just 'two parties', as Nehru haughtily announced in 1937, but as many as four parties in the fray. The Muslim League, having burst on the political scene in 1940 with its demand for a separate Muslim nation, was one of them.

Nature political observers would have expected the majority-minority issue to be settled in 1947; the histories of India and Pakistan over the last five decades suggest that this was not to be. Pakistan, created on the strength of Muslim solidarity, gave birth to its own minorities, the Bengalis in the East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), the muhajirs in Sindh, the Baluchis and Pathans in the North-West Frontier Province. Each of these collectivities defines its linguistic regions as its homeland. Regional and linguistic diversities have provided, through much of Pakistan's turbulent history, the highest common denominator of the multi-faceted grievances of the people of Pakistan, denied as most of them have been of basic, much less equal, rights of citizenship. The declaration of the Ahmadiyyas as a 'minority' in the 1970s served to create a precedent for exclusion, exposing the Pakistani state's claim of inclusionary nationalism.

Exclusive nationalism, argues Ayesha Jalal, is no substitute for nationalism based on equal citizenship rights which is the nation state's main claim to legitimacy. The real problem in Pakistan, she points out, is that the structures inherited from the colonial state were not realigned with the dominant conceptions which had fired the Muslim struggle for equality, solidarity and freedom. So that Mohammad Iqbal's lofty equation of Islam and civil society had been lost sight of in the litany of confusion surrounding conceptions of national identity and state sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> Notice, the following lament by a leading Pakistani writer:

...Pakistan meant more than just territory, more than a defined area with boundaries. Pakistan meant a culmination of a Muslim movement rooted in history, the quest for a mystical homeland, a Pakistan, a land of the pure. That is why the reality of the violence, corruption, nepotism, mismanagement and materialism of Pakistan in the 1990s is so painful. Mosques are not sacred, public places, private homes, nowhere are safe especially in its main city Karachi.<sup>11</sup>

What next? Ayesha Jalal calls for sustained debates on citizenship rights towards forging a collective ethos as a nation state, and a national dialogue to create the necessary consensus to begin rebuilding anew. At present, with a General holding power, it may not be easy for a consensus to emerge in Pakistan society.

India's problems are of a different nature, but there are some long-standing problems that have not been addressed with any degree of seriousness. For example, successive governments have failed to resolve the Kashmir issue or diffuse the growing disaffection in the north-east. Today, more than five decades after the Republic, the minorities---Muslims, Sikhs and Christians---are concerned over their future in an otherwise democratic and secular polity, while the majoritarian view, stridently expressed by the sangh parivar, threatens to undermine the national consensus envisaged by the founding fathers of the constitution. The real dangers stem from the 'ideology of homogenisation'; advocated by religious nationalists,<sup>12</sup> as also from the century-old debates over minority rights that may take an ugly and violent form in a country with scarce resources. Today, the stakes are much higher now than ever before. At a time when majorities are becoming more self-aware, a sense of territorial nationalism is heightened among both among majorities and selected minorities. If, as some argue, education is increasing aspirations, economic growth is enlarging economic opportunities, and political democracy is increasing politicisation, then one can expect more, not less, competition among India's 'majority' and the minorities.<sup>13</sup>

Already, serious moves are afoot among some Muslim groups, in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Delhi, to launch not just one but several Muslim political parties. Who knows, the bubble may burst sooner than later. If not, this may turn out to be an ominous trend. My fears are based in part on past experiences and, in part, on present-day social and political realities. Among other things, I recount the fate of the Majlis-i Mushawarat (in the 1960s) in Uttar Pradesh and the imminent collapse of similar outfits that surfaced thereafter. For one, democratic institutions though easy to work with, do not always lend themselves to being effectively used or manipulated by religious collectivities. Second, the Muslim share of the votes is small in most constituencies, though they can still tilt the balance in some parliamentary and assembly seats. So that Muslim political activists, regardless of their tall claims, have not carried much influence in decision-making processes. Nor have they succeeded in acquiring the profile of the backward caste leaders in Uttar Pradesh or Bihar. The caste configuration in these states has not only altered the political landscape but also ensured that Muslims play second fiddle to the more dominant caste alignments. Although politicians of all hues, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have tried courting Muslims for electoral gains, the steady decline of the Congress has gradually diminished the value of the 'Muslim vote'.

In effect, Muslim leaders, unless tied with progressive political formations, would remain minor players in any electoral or political arrangement at the Centre or the states. What they can do best, more so after the collapse of the Congress hegemony, is to make their choices from a large number of secular options available in the political marketplace and hitch their fortunes with secular combinations. This strategy is workable and has paid off in recent decades, though perhaps not to everybody's satisfaction. All said and done, Urdu has earned its rightful place in Bihar, despite the lukewarm approach of the Congress and the stout opposition of the BJP. A Urdu University was set up in Hyderabad by the United Front government. Similarly, non-Congress governments in several southern states have initiated various compensatory programmes, including reservation in certain sectors, and backed various community initiatives in education.

The broad-based alliances with secular parties in Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, though periodically strained, have paid rich dividends. The moral of the story is that the Muslim communities must work out, as they did soon after independence, cross-community linkages, not community-based ones. In other words, the secular and democratic regime rather than the Islamist dimension must provide the overarching framework to build new political networks. Taking refuge in or drawing sustenance from fundamentalist organisations, some of which are unwittingly perpetuating the

community's backwardness through their ill-conceived Islamist agenda, is a recipe for disaster. Their visibility in certain areas, such as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala, is alarming: their activities must be curbed by the collective will of the community before they get out of hand.

The scholar Fazlur Rahman had pointed out in the early 1980s that the slogan, in Islam religion and politics are inseparable, is employed to dupe the common man into accepting that, instead of the state serving the long-range objectives of Islam, Islam should come to serve the immediate and myopic objectives of party politics.'

Nobody takes exception to the pursuit of one's faith. Nobody objects to Muslims starting schools and college, including madaris, reforming charitable endowment (auqaf), improving the status of Muslim women, generating employment and energising many of the defunct Muslim institutions. Such activities have been successfully carried out by the Al-Ameen Educational Society in Bangalore, the Islamic Foundation in Madras, the Muslim Education Society in Kerala and the Hamdard Foundation in Delhi. Ideally, many more such groups should surface elsewhere and learn a lesson or two from the constructive engagements of several Christian missions, the Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission.

One is, surely, aware of the growing role of ethnic mobilisation in several developing and developed countries,<sup>14</sup> yet the demand for cultural rights or socio-economic empowerment cannot be fulfilled by an exclusive Muslim political front. Serious and fundamental issues of poverty, education and social emancipation afflicting the Muslim communities cannot be resolved by flexing one's muscles. Generally speaking, it is risky to foreground community-based politics, for it carries seeds of discord and dissension.

1 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islams and Modernities* (London, 1996, 2nd edn.), pp. 181-2.

2I have discussed this point in my edited book, *Islam, Communities and the Nation: Muslim Identities in South Asia and Beyond* (Delhi, 1998).

3 Peter Hardy, 'Islam and Muslims in South Asia', in R. Israeli (ed.), *The Crescent in the East: Islam in Asia Major* (London: Humanities Press, 1982), pp. 39-40.

4 Akeel Bilgrami, 'What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16-23 May 1992.

5 Some parts of the following two sections are based on my *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence* (London: Hurst, 1997). The references to various statements are cited therein.

6 Gerald James Larson, *India's Agony Over Religion* (Delhi: OUP, 1997).

7 See my *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930* (Delhi: Manohar 1991).

8 See Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930* (Delhi: Manohar, 1991), and the collection of essays in Mushirul Hasan (ed.), *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilisation* (Delhi: OUP, 1994).

9 Congress Presidential Address, in Syeda Saiyidain Hameed (ed.), *India's Maulana: Abul Kalam Azad* (Delhi: Vikas, 1990), p. 159.

10 Ayesha Jalal, 'Ideology and the Struggle for Democratic Institutions', in Victoria Schofield (ed.), *Old Roads New Highways* (Karachi: OUP, 1997), pp. 135, 136.

11 Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin* (Karachi: OUP, 1997), pp. xviii

12 On this point, see the incisive discussion in T.K. Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity* (London: Polity Press, 1997), pp. 83-90.

13 Myron Weoner, 'India's Minorities: Who are They? What Do They Want?', in (ed.), Partha Chatterjee, *State and Politics in India* (Delhi: OUP, 1997), p. 459.

14 On this point, see Jyotirindra Das Gupta, 'Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development in India: Assam in a General Perspective', in Atul Kohli (ed.), *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1988), pp. 144-168.

??

