A Historical and Theoretical Investigation into ‘Communalism’

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by

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Declaration

I, Sufiya Pathan, do hereby declare that this thesis entitled **A Historical and Theoretical investigation into 'Communalism'** contains original research work done by me in fulfilment of the requirements for my Ph.D. degree in Cultural Studies from the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society and that this report has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma in this or any other institution. This work has not been sent anywhere for publication or presentation purpose.

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Certificate

Certified that this thesis entitled **A Historical and Theoretical investigation into 'Communalism'** is a record of bonafide study and research carried out by Ms. Sufiya Pathan under my supervision and guidance. The report has not been submitted by her for any award of degree or diploma in this or in any other university.

Dr. Vivek Dhareshwar
(Supervisor)

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INTRODUCTION

A GENEALOGY OF 'COMMUNALISM'

Is it possible to speak of 'communalism' without studying the partition or conflicts that have come to be called 'communal riots' or without reference to *hindutva*? A thesis which seeks to do so seems immediately to require some justification. Studies of 'communalism' have purportedly been driven by a search for answers to these problems. However, rarely do we find a study that addresses these problems directly. Answers to questions about partition, 'communal riots', *hindutva* or several other phenomena seem to get diverted through the prism of an all-encompassing problem, 'communalism'. So in a strange sense, we do not study 'communalism' in order to understand these phenomena, we seem to study these phenomena only in so far as we think they will lead us to answers about 'communalism'. If that is the case, then this study should not be considered eccentric, for it does address the question of 'communalism' directly, even if it does not address most of the phenomena that one has come to associate with the term.

When one examines contemporary scholarship on 'communalism' one notices a pattern that has gone largely unacknowledged. Our scholarship on 'communalism' has basically been concerned with the *lack* of acquisition of some crucial learning goal or other that keeps Indian society or polity 'communal'. Thus, our studies of 'communalism' have always tried to teach us something.

They have implicitly believed that they were participating in a project of reform. Even where learning goals (such as secularism or nationalism), were not explicit, these studies have been propelled by a sense of their own pedagogic importance. This thesis does not attempt to teach something, but rather to uncover what it is that we have been seeking to learn and whether we can ever reach those learning goals. Could there ever be a time when we would not be 'communal'? From where have we derived these learning goals and to what end do we seek to fulfil them? And what is the nature of these goals such that neither the process of learning nor the criteria of success can be clearly formulated? These questions provide the guiding threads of the thesis. In order to seek an answer to these questions this thesis undertakes a genealogy[1] of communalism.

Genealogy vs. history

In essence, studies of 'communalism' have always treated it as a self-evident fact. They have asked the 'when' and 'how' of 'communalism' without answering the question 'what'. What is 'communalism'? This is not simply a definitional question. It involves an understanding of what discursive and historical conditions give rise to this concept. We have no account of this kind[2]. Thus, in some ways the thesis attempts to trace the birth of 'communalism'. However, this 'birth' is to

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[1] Used crucially in the way that Nietzsche (1989) and Foucault (1977) use the term.
[2] Gyanendra Pandey partially attempts such an account but remains caught in the earlier patterns of lesson learning and teaching. See Pandey (1992).

be distinguished from a search for *origins*, to a search for *pre-conditions*. In other words, this is a genealogy rather than a history.

Perhaps the distinction between the two is best captured by Nietzsche in his 'Preface' to *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1989: 16) where he traces his quest from asking the question, "where our good and evil really *originated*" to "under what conditions did man devise these value judgments good and evil? *and what value do they themselves possess*?" (17 emphasis original). Nietzsche's answer to the first question was necessarily located within Christianity. He recounts how at the age of thirteen, his first attempt to understand the problem of good and evil was couched within the question of its 'origin' and the answer had to be 'God' (17). This answer, he says, or perhaps even the question itself, was a result of his "*a priori*" (16). But, with a little "historical and philological schooling" Nietzsche soon arrived at the second question, of the value of these 'values'.

> Let us articulate this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called in question* – and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed (morality as consequence, as symptom, as mask, as tartufferie, as illness, as misunderstanding; but also morality as cause, as remedy, as stimulant, as restraint, as poison), a knowledge of a kind that has never yet existed or even been desired. One has taken the *value* of these "values" as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing "the good man" to be of greater value than "the evil man," of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general (the future of

> man included). But what if the reverse were true? What if a symptom of regression were inherent in the "good," like-wise a danger, a seduction, a poison, a narcotic, through which the present was possibly living *at the expense of the future?* (Nietzsche 1989: 20)

This second question brought into being a fresh perspective and opened up an entire field of investigation for Nietzsche[3]. It is extremely instructive to see the shift in his questions (and therefore answers) that come with his shift out of the discourse of Christianity. This new approach gives us a means of assessing the work that these concepts do[4], what and who they serve and what kinds of thought and judgment they make possible. Similarly, this thesis seeks out the conditions under which 'communalism' was devised and the consequences of this *device*[5]. It asks of 'communalism' as does Nietzsche of morality, its *cause*. Cause here does not mean a bid to find the reasons that 'communalism' as a supposed *phenomenon* came into being, but rather the conditions that bring the *concept* 'communalism' into being. Nietzsche points out that the cause of the existence of morality is not God but a history of religion (first Judaism and then

[3] "Thereupon I discovered and ventured divers answers; I distinguished between ages, peoples, degrees of rank among individuals; I departmentalized my problem; out of my answers there grew new questions, inquiries, conjectures, probabilities – until at length I had a country of my own, a soil of my own, an entire discrete, thriving, flourishing world, like a secret garden the existence of which no one suspected" (Nietzsche 1989: 17).

[4] A goal in the study of concepts that Quentin Skinner (1978; 2002) points us towards. Skinner has proposed that a theorist is best studied not simply in terms of his own text but in terms of the context within which he writes. His approach seeks to understand what the author was *doing* by writing a particular text rather than merely studying what arguments the author was presenting. Similarly, a concept may be studied in terms of what it *does* rather than simply what events or objects it refers to (Skinner 1978).

[5] Recognising a concept as a device and not just a description would be crucial in enabling a study of this kind. Otherwise, we are constantly left threatened that objective phenomena are being belied when really a conceptual investigation is all that is undertaken. This may change our perspective on phenomena, but does not directly address them at all. See Skinner (1978; 2002).

Christianity) which seeks to justify itself against the noble classes[6]. Just as Nietzsche turns morality on its head, to take away from it its *a priori* positive evaluative force, this thesis seeks to dissociate 'communalism' from its *a priori* evaluative framework. What this would involve first and foremost is the ability to investigate 'communalism' without getting entangled in the pedagogic reform missions that have been the functional premise underlying all scholarship on 'communalism'. For, these gain force purely from the self-congratulatory idea of combating a negative force just as morality gains its *a priori* positive force from the assumption of God. This is the first step towards dispassionately investigating our past.

The distinction between a history and a genealogy lies at the root of what is required in order to understand the special nature of a concept like 'communalism'. Nietzsche provides a good model for genealogy, its method and its goals. However, Foucault has been more explicit in explaining the distinction between history and genealogy[7].

> I don't believe the problem [of the constitution of an subject within history] can be solved by historicizing the subject as posited by the phenomenologists, fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history…One has to dispense with the constituent subject,

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[6] "It was the Jews who, with awe-inspiring consistency dared to invert the aristocratic value equation (good=noble=powerful=beautiful=happy=beloved of God) and to hang on to this inversion with their teeth, the teeth of the most abysmal hatred (the hatred of impotence), saying 'the wretched alone are the good'…with the Jews there begins the *slave revolt in morality*: that revolt which has a history of two thousand years behind it and which we no longer see because it – has been victorious" (1989: 34).

[7] Also unlike Nietzsche's partially fictionalized genealogy, Foucault's genealogy draws on historical material.

> to get rid of the subject itself, that's to say, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, **a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges**, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its **empty sameness** throughout the course of history (in Rabinow ed. 1984: 59 emphasis added).

Foucault's work *History of Sexuality* is a case in point. This three-volume study examines the constitution of a new concept which gains coherence in several discourses such as psychoanalysis, law and medicine. However, when we undertake a history of sexuality in the usual way, "fabricating a subject that evolves through the course of history" we make two kinds of mistakes. First, we transform a historically contingent concept into a neutral, universal category that has always existed and captures the same set of phenomena across time and cultures. But, as Foucault demonstrates in *Use of Pleasure* (1992), this cannot be true since this concept is simply not available amongst the Greeks for instance. They do not isolate a domain of 'normal sexual practice' that may be dubbed sexuality, but loosely associate several different practices with pleasure which include the dietary as much as different sexual practices. Second, a historical study of sexuality in what Foucault describes as the "phenomenologist" mode misses the wood for the trees so to speak. For this approach constantly seeks differences or similarities in evolution or simply expression of 'sexuality' as if the category once constituted becomes expressive of some important set of human behaviours and thought across time. However, what makes this idea

important and 'true' at a particular time in history tells us much more about shifts in intellectual and juridical domains of self-definition than about human practices of pleasure. This is where genealogy is useful. According to Foucault the subject of genealogy is not truth per se, but the excavation of how something comes to be constituted as 'true'. While history treats its subject as true in and of itself, genealogy recovers the conditions of thought that make for our contemporary truths. That is what Foucault refers to as history's inability to account for the "constitution of knowledges".

By now practically no intellectual perspective treats history as an assortment of 'facts'. We recognize how political agendas or narrativisation affect historical accounts[8]. However, we still often fail to recognise that history tends to *access* 'facts' via certain categories. These categories themselves are historically constituted and are not 'natural'. Thus, if history is a means of *understanding* our past, the constitution of our categories deserves much more attention than 'facts' themselves. Foucault's case study of 'sexuality' is a means of understanding this. While history attempts to map 'sexuality' in its "empty sameness" through time, as Foucault says, it ignores the fact that the category 'sexuality' itself is constituted by a set of discourses that were not available to us before the 19th century. In fact, the implications go even further since the constitution of those intellectual and juridical discourses that give birth to the category 'sexuality' also institute notions of 'normalcy' and relatively new conceptions of the 'self'. History

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[8] Hayden White (1987) was responsible more than anyone else for establishing the major trend of looking at historiography as 'narrative'.

simply perpetuates the category ‘sexuality’ as if it is ‘natural’ and universal thereby masking these new discourses. It is only through the contrasting case study of Greek notions of pleasure or the ‘self’ that Foucault excavates its historical contingency.

The role of colonial discourse

If genealogy is an investigation into the value of our ‘values’, then a genealogical investigation into ‘communalism’ cannot take for granted definitions or evaluations because these are generated from within the discourse that generates the concept itself. For instance, the positive evaluation of morality is generated from within religion. We do not see its source any more because, as Nietzsche says, it has a history of two thousand years and has been victorious (Nietzsche 1989: 34). Similarly, ‘communalism’ has been generated within the discourse of colonialism. It seems strange to say that this discourse has also been victorious when we live in an ‘independent’ post-colonial state. However, colonialism was by no means simply a political entity. And post-colonial studies have accepted the perpetuation of this discourse, even though they are not always able to account for it. Thus, the fundamental proposition that sets off this genealogy is that ‘communalism’ as a concept emerges and remains embedded within colonial discourse.

However, simply understanding ‘communalism’ as a symptom of the perpetuation of colonial discourse does not say anything significant about it. For, we have no particular characterisation of colonial discourse that will help us understand what this perpetuation really entails[9]. Thus, the first step towards a genealogy involves a theory of colonial discourse. Colonial discourse, I propose, is a network of *normative inferences*. I coin this term ‘normative inference’ in order to characterise the dominant structural feature one may observe in this discourse. This feature may be described as the recurrent use of inferences which are often disguised as positive[10] statements or assertions about the native[11] purportedly based on observation. Further, these inferences are peculiar in that they are deduced not from facts but from norms. These normative inferences therefore, basically propose a description of the native law, culture or polity in terms of the consequences of the *absence* of a norm that is predominant in the colonial normative framework[12]. This has serious consequences for the ‘knowledge’ generated. This ‘knowledge’ is by no means a *description* of native society; it is a judgment on it. Thus, colonial discourse is a set of judgments about native society. These judgments become the means of generating learning goals for the

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[9] Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is the only study we have that attempts to account for the “redoubtable durability” (as he calls it in his Introduction to the book), of the discourse about the East generated by the West. For Said, colonialism was an extension of orientalism, it was a political domination made easier because of the intellectual superiority already inscribed in orientalist discourse. In chapter 3 I discuss in more detail where I agree and disagree with Said’s thesis.

[10] Here positive is used not in contrast to negative but to mean an assertion or a knowledge claim.

[11] This term is used throughout the thesis in order to speak of the Indian subject. I do not intend any pejorative connotations to attach to the term. It allows for a certain accuracy of reference from within colonial discourse which ‘Indian’ does not, given the three states that came out of the same colonial administrative territory.

[12] This thesis does not define exactly what a normative framework entails. It relies therefore on Skinner’s (2002) description of the ‘descriptive-evaluative framework’ of a people as the equivalent of a ‘normative framework’ though in my conclusion I express some reservations about this.

native population by the colonial authorities. However, since normative inferences, by their very nature, can only be neutralised by the complete adoption of the normative framework of the coloniser, the native always expresses a *lack* of learning or development. Since it is impossible for a society to simply adopt an entire normative framework, we are caught in the ironic situation where we continue to strive towards the learning goals the coloniser set for us. We therefore recreate the judgments and the 'knowledge' about ourselves generated within colonial discourse.

This insight is crucial to our mode of understanding history. So far we have looked for the implications of colonialism in the same way that one tries to understand the implications of a prejudice or a political position. Thus, colonial knowledge is suspect only in so far as it seems to replicate an attitude of superiority vis-à-vis the native. The implications of looking at it as a network of normative inferences is that we can then demonstrate that colonial knowledge does not have its basis in *observation* and therefore has no real bearing on the object of this knowledge (the colonised). This frees us from the notion that some kind of transformation of culture or subjectivity is produced by colonisation[13]. Instead of assuming a transformation, we are faced with the substantial task of investigating how the native received colonial learning goals, what was the response these goals generated and what did we actually learn? This approach identifies a constitutive principle of colonial discourse. If we identify the normative

[13] Post-colonial theory has not generated an argument to *prove* this stand. It is always treated as self-evident. I deal with this in more detail in my conclusion.

inferences and the learning goals they generated, we can finally dismantle colonial discourse. Thus, we do not have to be doomed to ‘colonial subjectivity’ while at the same time attempting rather haphazardly to find means of de-colonisation. This allows us a much more concrete characterisation of what de-colonisation would involve and makes it a goal within our reach.

A genealogy of ‘communalism’

To explicate what may have remained implicit in the foregoing analysis, we know that where the subject of history has been constituted in a self-perpetuating discourse, in this case colonialism, history seems almost unable to then take the next logical step and dissolve the subject itself. Instead, it perpetuates the subject by mapping its evolution to multiple referents in the present. This genealogy then, I hope, would “dispense with the constituent subject” as Foucault says, or allow for the dissipation of the concept ‘communalism’. That would not mean that we would be left with no problems in the present. What it would make possible, however, is to break free of a history which can only explain the present in terms of a past defined through colonialist grids.

My central claim is that ‘communalism’ by virtue of being a product of the mechanism of *normative inference* which structures colonial discourse, did not,

and by extension cannot, serve as an *explanation*[14] of historical phenomena. More crucially, an inference from within a normative framework cannot be an observation on or an explanation of the colonised culture or society. This does not in any way deny the existence of some of the phenomena which have been referred to through 'communalism' and which may require not only explanation but in some cases, definite political solutions. The most pressing problems which have been discussed under the description of 'communalism' have been incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims (as well as other groups both of religious and political denominations), which are said to date back to the late 19th century. Since my thesis proposes that 'communalism' cannot serve to *explain* anything, the question that follows is, what alternative explanation do I propose in relation to these problems? It may seem rather strange to all of us who are used to associating only certain kinds of discussions around the theme of 'communalism' that this thesis does not seek to explain these incidents of violence. My limited claim related to this question would be that my thesis would serve to show that the incidents of violence which have been clubbed together under 'communalism' have no particular homogeneity and therefore could not possibly be accounted for within *one* hypothesis. I hope that once the explanatory crutch of 'communalism' is finally broken down, we will be able to come up with a better understanding of such phenomena and categorise them much more accurately or appropriately. Similarly, this thesis has not undertaken an examination of either the literature or the politics of *hindutva* and therefore

[14] Explanations are necessarily drawn in order to account for or characterize phenomena in the world whereas 'communalism' is primarily a 'value judgment'. See chapter 2.

should not be taken as either a defence or an attack on the same. But I do propose that work which seeks to understand it as ‘communalism’ has served to obscure rather than clarify matters. What questions *hindutva* as a political movement or philosophy has raised or why it was successful remains a matter of investigation in spite of the large amount of material that has been generated on the subject because we have been unable to classify it or dismantle its claims except by way of making the general accusation of dubbing it ‘communalism’. In fact all the various phenomena that are dubbed ‘communalism’ as if it were an explanation have actually had explanations deferred. That is precisely why the obliteration of this concept is so crucial: not because there is nothing to explain or be concerned about, but because we have deferred explanation by its use.

In my first chapter I examine definitions and theoretical approaches available to us so far on the question of ‘communalism’. The examination of definitions of ‘communalism’, one invariably finds, generally ends in an evaluation rather than a viable definition. This is because several phenomena with dissimilar characteristics are often categorised as ‘communal’ while certain phenomena with similar characteristics do not fall into the same category. Thus definitions seem unstable. However, the evaluation of ‘communalism’ is always stable as a negative idea irrespective of political or definitional perspectives. The lack of a stable definition then leads me to investigate available theories in order to find out if we have a stable theoretical explanation if not definition of ‘communalism’. I provide a classification of the theoretical approaches to ‘communalism’ available

to us so far into colonialist, nationalist, Marxist, constructivist and anti-modernist perspectives. Each of these perspectives is examined and the patterns and peculiarities of each of these approaches are investigated. These approaches show certain common characteristics. For instance, the nationalist and the Marxist are for all practical purposes almost indistinguishable. The nationalist and colonialist, which one would imagine to be at opposite ends of the spectrum strangely share most closely fundamental ideas about ‘communalism’.

That leaves the constructivist and the anti-modernist. The former is by far the most influential approach today and is taken up for further investigation in the second chapter while the latter, represented only by Ashis Nandy, is examined for some possible echoes it may have with the current investigation. This chapter leads to the conclusion that while these theoretical approaches share certain characteristics, all of them claim to be different from the colonialist approach. Their greatest legitimacy is drawn from this primary notion of their difference. They claim that a purported epistemological shift has occurred from an essentialist approach characteristic of the colonialist understanding of ‘communalism’ to a historicist approach in their own scholarship.

In chapter two I examine this purported epistemological shift. If the post-colonial legitimisation of their own understanding of ‘communalism’ is based on a shift away from ‘essentialism’, then there must be clear epistemological divergences between their explanations and the colonial explanations for ‘communalism’.

However, while one finds differences in causal explanations, there is no larger an epistemological shift. This is evident since one finds that the characteristics of colonialist knowledge that post-colonial scholarship decries are replicated in their own claims as well. For instance, the mapping of multiple phenomena to one cause, the persistence of particular descriptions that end up characterising native society as stagnant and unchanging and the implication that native society will be forever communal[15] are all replicated in historicist accounts of 'communalism' as well. Thus, this chapter examines what it means to call colonialist accounts 'essentialist' and thereby questions whether the problem with colonial descriptions of 'communalism' lie in its so-called essentialism. Then it considers whether the shift to so-called 'historicist' accounts solves the problems that are raised in colonial accounts. I propose that the problems are not solved because of our fundamental misunderstanding of *what* it is that we are dealing with when we deal with 'communalism'. It is referred to as both concept and phenomenon interchangeably, but it is only when it is investigated as a concept that one can make progress. Our studies so far have adopted a sort of shorthand to try and address matters such as the riots of the 20th century without investigating the theoretical framework of the concept they deploy to address these problems. The last section of the chapter attempts to show the consequences of this shorthand for Indian history. It coins another term, 'truncated history' in order to describe the incomplete history that has been written such that phenomena are recorded and

[15] In colonialist accounts this is explicit. In post-colonial accounts this idea is explicitly rejected but implicitly held true. For, none of these accounts enable us to envisage a point in time when the colonized would *not* be 'communal'. As long as there is any prejudice, violence or inequality, we are doomed to being 'communal'. One might dare say that such a perfect society is yet to evolve anywhere in the world.

explained away by the concept ‘communalism’ without any stable understanding of what that concept itself has meant. This phenomenological[16] history divorced from the conceptual history it requires in order to clarify what ‘communalism’ is, leads to the persistence of features from colonial ‘essentialism’ to post-colonial historicism. This persistence is nothing but the persistence of colonial discourse. Therefore, the next chapter investigates whether we can evolve a more productive theory of colonial discourse which would help us explain concepts like ‘communalism’ and their persistence.

Chapter three therefore scrutinises the nature of ‘colonial discourse’ and proposes the idea discussed above that it is a network of normative inferences. The advantage of this characterisation is that a number of colonial ‘descriptions’ are clearly shown to be (disguised) evaluations rather than descriptions. This frees our historical investigations from constantly garnering evidence in order to refute colonial claims about Indian history. For instance, characterisations like ‘despotism’ and ‘degeneracy’ become most clearly relegated to the realm of normative inferences, thereby rendering all historical investigation into these ideas completely unnecessary. This leaves us free to locate and investigate the more significant formative ideas of the past rather than grappling with phenomenological refutations of colonial discourse.

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[16] To borrow the term Foucault uses above to describe the same problem (in Rabinow ed. 1984: 59).

This brings us to a history of colonial discourse. Once the genealogy has done its work, a straightforward archival investigation reveals the central ideas that shape colonial history. I propose that the central concept that one must grapple with in order to understand this history is that of ‘sovereignty’. When the British come to understand their sovereignty in India as a ‘trust’ which is to institute processes by which a ‘people’ worthy of bearing their own sovereignty are to be created, then an entire machinery of discourse and policy which mutually uphold the goals of this trusteeship is created. The greatest impact of this ‘trusteeship’ is felt in three areas: education, history and politics. Institutions of education are now geared towards producing the ‘citizen’ rather than the skilled bureaucrat; histories of former degeneracy, present social backwardness and the goal of future ‘maturity’ are established and proliferate as the template for all historical understanding; and politics becomes centrally defined by the ever-receding goal of native ‘maturity’ which hinges on a more and more complex set of coordinates.

Although this opens up a number of avenues for investigation around the issue of colonialism and its conceptual history, the thesis returns to the question of ‘communalism’ in order to reconstruct this problem in the light of the above theory and history of colonialism in the final chapter. I draw a direct link between the discourse of sovereignty that marks colonialism and the idea of ‘communalism’. The central problem for the colonial state was to establish a ‘people’ on whom sovereignty may then be appropriately bestowed. However, the ‘people’ must be equal or represented equally. The real history of

'communalism', the history that one is enabled to write once we have freed the category from its multiple referents into its most stable and coherent reference, is not the history of 'religious antagonism' but the bid to establish 'equality' by the colonial state. 'Communalism' is a normative inference derived not from the lack of toleration[17] but from the lack of equality in native society. The norm of equality referred to here is substantially different from the empirical notion of equality that the native invoked in his addresses to the colonial state in the 19th century[18]. The source of 'communalism' therefore is the evolution of a representational system which would be *equal* and representative of religious and other communities. This bid for equality, however, conflicted with the notion of the neutral citizen. We are thus able to identify the colonial double bind that really generates and fuels the idea of 'communalism'. The double bind is that the native was 'communal' because he had not yet matured into the neutral citizen; but the native could not be the neutral citizen because the colonial state marked him through *communal representation*. This was the *only* form of representation available to the native. To give up on communal representation was to give up on the ideal of equality itself. 'Communal' representation included categories of representation that we do not any longer recognise as available within the description of 'communalism'. For instance, the 'zamindars', the 'agriculturists', the 'rural' and the 'urban' were all at one time the contested or actual categories of representation within

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[17] As is established in chapter 3.
[18] I describe this distinction as a shift from patronage to participation in chapter 5.

'communal representation'[19]. These categories seem incongruous to us only today when discussed under the rubric of 'communal representation'. However, we know that historically they were very much part of this system of representation and were as easily comprehended as the representation of religious communities. What is not clear is why a pejorative connotation is attached to 'communal' when it was simply a system of representation and how that pejorative sense comes to be attached only to the plane of 'religious' representation. The allegation of 'communalism' attached to only a particular sub-set of representational identities seems then to be related to two aspects of this representation. First, that it was the plane of religious representation that successfully made a bid to nationalism[20] and second, that the rise of the idea of the 'secular' citizen laid a much greater pejorative sense on the bid for representation on religious grounds rather than any other (for instance occupational) grounds. This new notion of the 'secular' citizen as the learning goal to be reached by the native then becomes the means to continue a pejorative connotation to 'communalism'.

History as it has been written so far has always suggested this bid for representation as the formation of an identity. This 'communal identity' which expressed itself in the bid for nationalism is then mapped backwards to

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[19] See the variety of petitions for representation of interests made to the Indian Statutory Commission (1930), commonly called the Simon Commission. Vols. XVI and XVII consist of 'Selections from memoranda and oral evidence by non-officials' which show a plethora of different regional, occupational and religious groups petitioning the government for special representation.

[20] Thus, the pejorative sense is carried over only because of the persistence of nationalist discourse.

movements[21] or events in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, there is a sense in which communal representation which corresponded to well-developed identity formation is what created the problem while other categories of communal representation were simply bids to further self-interest and not quite identities of a solid nature. The implications of this historical reconstruction lead to a blame placed on the native for either inadequacy or malevolence. Why was the native unable to develop a neutral secular identity instead of this 'communal' identity? This is puzzling since the 'secular' or 'neutral' identity of the citizen without the marker of community was never available to the native. Did the citizen in the West become 'secular' without the state offering that status to him? How then is the native to take on an identity which actively denies the very status that the state confers on him? Once we reconstruct this history the above claim is rendered absurd. Then what is it that we are to blame ourselves for when we decry 'communalism'?

The last chapter and conclusion propose that the native response to the learning goals set within colonial discourse has not been a straightforward acquisition. Instead, it seems fairly clear that ideas like 'nation' or 'secular' derived from colonialism generate a great deal of conceptual dissonance in the native context. They are marked by a multiplicity of meanings that cannot be reconciled. This is

[21] The struggle over official language for instance. The opposition to change from Persian to vernacular becomes the same as the Hindi-Urdu controversy and other phenomena such as the anti-cow-slaughter movement all become amalgamated as movements generating or furthering 'communal identities'.

what I call the semantic ‘tower of Babel’[22] that marks the political struggles of the early twentieth century. The thesis proposes therefore that history is set with a clear task. This task is not to decry the lack of acquisition of learning goals. Rather, it is the investigation into the conceptual framework from which these learning goals are derived and the excavation of the native response to these learning goals. The startling discovery this thesis reaches is that the violence that we are constantly struggling against has perhaps much less to do with the behaviour of irreconcilable groups and their demands, than irreconcilable conceptual differences. If this is the case, then the dissolution of colonial discourse as a whole is the first solution to the violence which we think ‘communalism’ causes.

[22] This phrase is used not in any pejorative sense but merely as a metaphor which serves so aptly that it is difficult to replace.

CHAPTER I

‘COMMUNALISM’: PRESENT COMPULSIONS, PAST PRISMS

In the chronicles of his travels in Asia and Africa, 14th century traveler, Ibn Battuta, gives a brief but striking description of the Malabar and the status of the Muslims there. The following is his account of the road that had to be taken in order to travel through the region.

> The road over the whole distance runs beneath the shade of trees, and at every half-mile there is a wooden shed with benches on which all travellers, whether Muslims or infidels, may sit. At each shed there is a well for drinking and an infidel who is in charge of it. If the traveller is an infidel he gives him water in vessels; if he is a Muslim he pours the water into his hands, continuing to do so until he signs to him to stop. It is the custom of the infidels in the Mulaybar lands that no Muslim may enter their houses or eat from their vessels; if he does so they break the vessels or give them to the Muslims. In places where there are no Muslim inhabitants they give him food on banana leaves. At all the halting-places on this road there are houses belonging to Muslims, at which Muslim travellers alight, and where they buy all that they need. Were it not for them no Muslim could travel by it (Battuta 1992: 231).

He arrives at the following assessment based on his observations.

> I have never seen a safer road than this….Indeed we sometimes met infidels during the night on this road, and when they saw us they stood aside to let us pass. Muslims are most highly honoured amongst them, except that, as we have said, they do not eat with them or allow them into their houses (Battuta 1992: 232).

For any contemporary reader of these accounts this is a curious paradox, for, descriptions of similar inter-community practices today would be read extremely differently. Ibn Battuta, a Muslim traveller with his sympathies quite clearly lying with his co-religionists sees “honour” where contemporary views would see, at the very least, “discrimination” or “prejudice”.

How does one understand this difference in assessment? What are, in fact, the bases of assessment that make us come to such conclusions? And how is this difference significant in the present? I use this anecdote as a point of departure for reconsidering our understanding of ‘communalism’. Although we use the term as a well-established concept within the social sciences to understand a variety of political and sociological phenomena, there seem to be certain peculiar problems that emerge when we subject it to a historical and conceptual analysis.

What is ‘communalism’?

Going by its widespread use ‘communalism’ is not one of the most complicated terms one could pick to define. The term is so familiar to us that to ask of its meaning, seems almost absurd. Let me list some common understandings: It is a prejudice against certain communities often displayed in terms of sharing of food and space, or in the stereotypes generated about them. It is an ‘ideology’ that propounds one’s religious community as the fundamental social and political

category to which one belongs and thrives on pitting itself against another community. It is a series of conflicts well known as ‘religious riots’, which have acquired a history of their own. It is a political position vis-à-vis the minorities, often called majoritarianism. This may be allied to communalism as ideology but is often associated more with ideas of a majoritarian ‘nationalism’ since it often hinges around the generation of particular kinds of histories. ‘Communalism’ is also considered a lack of education or rationality which seems to display itself in an ‘excess of religiosity’ and hence intolerance to other groups.

Yet, a term which means all of these various things is never satisfactorily described by any one of these various definitions. In fact, several peculiarities emerge when we examine these definitions. Communalism as a set of social prejudices for instance is difficult to conscribe as a phenomenon peculiar to India or to a particular community. Prejudices seem to flourish in all human societies and find several planes along which to define themselves. Most social prejudices come packaged with their own set of stereotypes (ranging from the ‘stingy Sindhi’ to the ‘stupid Sardarji’ or the ‘cold British’ and the ‘sexy French’!). Yet all of these prejudices are not termed ‘communalism’. Thus, ‘communalism’ must be something more than simple prejudice.

That leads us to the idea that ‘communalism’ is an ‘ideology’ which is rather unique to India. This ideology propounds the religious community as not simply the fundamental social group to which every individual belongs, but also

mobilizes religious community as the fundamental political group. This brings communities in conflict with one another. But what distinguishes the right of people to organize politically along any other ideology and this one? The answer would probably be that the religious community as a fundamental political group is an expression of 'false consciousness'[23]. By the classical Marxist definition all mobilization that is not based on class should be reflective of false consciousness. However, that is not the stand that is consistently taken. For instance, the rise of the Samajwadi Party in India is based on what is popularly called 'caste politics'. This 'caste politics' presents a mobilization of the 'lower' order caste groups whose interests are pitted against the 'higher' castes. This political mobilization is not however, considered 'communal'. Yet, all the features of 'communal ideology' are shared by this political mobilization. They consider community (in this case particular castes) as the basic block of political mobilization and explicitly pit themselves against other communities/castes. However, the two 'ideologies' are never equated and a definite distinction is asserted between them. Two phenomena which we find share the same characteristics have two radically different assessments. The former (communalism) is regressive while the latter (caste politics) is liberatory. If one were to question why 'communalism' should be considered 'regressive' the very question would be rebuffed with a host of stories of violence and murder that 'communalism' has produced.

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[23] A fuller discussion of this approach is taken up with a review of Bipan Chandra and the Marxist approach to 'communalism' later in the chapter.

Thus, on preliminary examination one sees that two peculiar shifts happen when 'communalism' is brought under scrutiny. **When pushed to locate communalism in a conceptual frame, we seem to end up instead in an evaluative frame**. Irrespective of *what* it may or may not be, what characteristics it may share with other phenomena, 'communalism' is regressive and dangerous. This latter characterization, of communalism as being dangerous is of course related to the history of 'communal' riots. Thus, **whenever we seek definitional clarity we get two responses: one, an evaluative one and the second, a historical narrative of violence.**

Violence itself, however, does not allow us a definition. In fact, although violence seems to be the most concrete of the phenomena that 'communalism' is used to refer to, almost all scholarly positions would agree that it is not simply in the riot that the phenomenon may be located. In fact most studies would propose that 'communalism' seems to express itself in riots when it gets entangled with other provocations to conflict like land relations or urban strife. In any case, the riots are usually seen as erratic and discontinuous points of eruption which have diverse sets of immediate causes while 'communalism' is an underlying cause. If asked to characterize this *underlying* cause of violence, we would probably arrive at a nebulous 'consciousness' of antagonism between communities[24]. So communalism becomes deeper than an ideology, it is a consciousness. Thus,

[24] Generally those who seek to understand 'communalism' not as political ideology but as 'identity' or 'nationalism' also invoke 'communalism' as a certain kind of consciousness.

from prejudice to ideology to consciousness, **communalism seems to get deeper and deeper, eluding all attempts to capture it through definition**[25].

Further, there are a variety of contradictory descriptions of the phenomenon: It is a modern phenomenon which is the result of colonialism[26] or one which can be dated back to age-old conflicts between the Hindus and Muslims since the medieval era[27]. It is a product of modernity[28] versus a remnant of 'primitivism' in modern India[29]. It has been considered the nemesis of secularism[30] or the means to achieve secularism[31]; a lack of secularism[32] as well as an excess of it (Nandy 1985). 'Communalism' is the result of the failure of education[33] or the regrettable success of Western education (Sen 1993). It is majoritarianism, but politics of a similar characteristic have been expressed by minorities as well. In fact, most writers on 'communalism' seem to suggest that 'Muslim communalism' and 'Hindu communalism' are not two separate phenomena, but two sides of the same coin as it were. Thus, it is majoritarianism and minoritarianism at the same

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[25] Once one has arrived at the characterization of something as a 'consciousness' it seems only fair to allow it to escape definition!
[26] A position first propounded by the nationalists and continues to be the most popular view.
[27] This is the classic colonial position which has found echo in the work of later writers like C.A.Bayly (1998) and Christophe Jaffrelot (1999) though in slightly different ways in both.
[28] Nandy's writings on secularism beginning with his very first piece, 'An Anti-Secularist Manifesto' (1985).
[29] Most prominently held by Nehru (1934).
[30] Most political scientists have insisted on the need for secularism in India as an effective means to combat 'communalism'. See Rajeev Bhargava ed. (1998), Vanaik (1997), Cossman and Kapur (1999) or P.R. Ram ed. (1998).
[31] See for instance *Communal Road to a Secular Kerala* by George Mathew (1989).
[32] For instance, Khushwant Singh and Bipan Chandra call for a mass educational programme against communalism, that will make people realise they are essentially "secular and healthy" and that communal attitudes do not go with their "personality and ideology" (Singh and Chandra 1985: 62).
[33] Amartya Sen in 'The Threats to a Secular India' (1993).

time. It is a phenomenon peculiar to India[34] or one that is particularly visible in a variety of forms and goes by a variety of names from ethnic violence to 'tribalism' in South Asia[35].

The term has generated a great deal of scholarship from various disciplines and yet remains fuzzy. This section does not seek to trivialize any of the definitions offered of 'communalism'. Rather I would like to propose that the kinds of obstacles one faces when trying to define the phenomenon provide **diagnostic tools** towards identifying what 'communalism' really is. These characteristics are extremely important in trying to further our understanding of this concept and it is only through an examination of these problems that we can hope to move further.

Thus, to rehearse the problems I have outlined so far:

a) 'Communalism' seems to suffer from contradictory characteristics. These are not simply contradictions between different theoretical standpoints[36] but also contradictions within one theoretical strand of thought[37].

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[34] Sarvepalli Gopal in his 'Introduction' to *Anatomy of a Confrontation* (1991).

[35] Most likely first expressed by Kenneth W. Jones (1968) in his article 'Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution' when he first proposed that 'communalism' was a particular kind of identity which was peculiar to the "South Asian experience". It has become quite common since Benedict Anderson's work *Imagined Communities* (1991) to suggest that 'communalism' or 'ethnic violence' or 'identity politics' is a product of Asian or Eastern nationalism. Several edited volumes on the subject of violence in Asia suggest that there are common elements between what is called 'communalism' India and the riots witnessed in other South Asian countries. The Veena Das (ed.) *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (1990) was the first amongst several others to come. See also Weidemann (ed.) *Nationalism, Ethnicity and Political Development: South Asian Perspectives* (1991) and Paul R Brass and Achin Vanaik (ed.) *Competing Nationalisms in South Asia* (2002).

[36] Those who consider 'communalism' as a lack of secular outlook for instance would disagree with Nandy's formulation of secularism and therefore the contradiction is accountable.

[37] Those who would use the concept of majoritarianism for instance face the consequence of conceding 'minoritarianism' as well.

b) Definitions of communalism seem to locate the problem in deeper and deeper realms almost to the point where it becomes inaccessible to definition itself.

c) When definitions are probed deeply, most often explanations of ‘communalism’ end up invoking evaluative frames rather than providing consistent definitions.

d) And if one questions the basis for these evaluative frames, a long toll of violence is invoked as evidence for the need of a negative evaluation. Thus, in effect what is said is that given whatever similar features other phenomena seem to share with what we call ‘communalism’, the latter has the property of always leading to violence and therefore it is to be abhorred. However, it is important to understand that this is *not* an explanation. Let me employ an analogy to express the kind of mistake involved in this reasoning. To explain the idea of ‘mass’ we cannot simply assert that different objects have different weights. Certainly it is to be observed that different objects have different weights. However, that is neither a definition of ‘mass’ nor an explanation for weight. It would be as easy to build a correlation between size and weight for instance. (Given the same material, larger objects are heavier than smaller objects.) This statement is a correct observation but is not an explanation.
Similarly, it is correct to say that there is historical evidence for violence in Indian society. But before we understand what ‘communalism’ is, how do we know it is something that produces violence? How and why it would

produce violence are questions even further from explanation. Thus the evidence of violence does not establish either its relationship to 'communalism' or shed any light on the *concept* of 'communalism'. This feature marks a strange interchangeability between concept and object. When one asks for conceptual definition or explanation, one is only given more and more object level 'evidence'.

e) This concept-object swapping leads to a strange evidence loop in our historical accounts as well. Our accounts of 'communalism' are circular in the sense that past conflict is cited as an explanation of the present situation and present conflict as evidence of the problem's existence in the past. In effect therefore, we are 'communal' today because we were 'communal' in the past and we must have been 'communal' in the past since we are 'communal' today. 'Communalism' is simultaneously cause and effect, evidence and explanation in this conceptual quagmire.

For instance, it is argued that partition was the result of 'communalism'. Present day 'communalism' is now fuelled by memories (Pandey 2001) or political and sociological legacies of partition. Thus, partition is both cause and effect of 'communalism'. This reasoning has often obstructed serious investigation into the specific contexts of historical phenomena under scrutiny. Similarly, there have been a large number of studies that seek to understand the rise of '*hindutva*'. Most of these have taken the historical route and assert that the rise of 'Hindu nationalism' in the nineteenth

> century is the naissance of '*hindutva*' itself. In this scheme, proof of 'communalism' in the nineteenth century is the rise of *hindutva* in the 20th century. And the proof that the nineteenth century 'Hindu nationalism' is to be rejected as 'communal' thought is the rise of 20th century '*hindutva*'. Thus, instead of establishing a causal link between 19th century philosophical ideas and 20th century political movements, each of them is linked to 'communalism' and thereby their inter-connectedness is sought to be proved. This study hopes to show that our understanding of either '*hindutva*' or nineteenth century 'Hindu nationalism' is severely curtailed by this conceptual 'short-cutting', as it were, through the idea of 'communalism'[38].

As I have proposed above, these characteristic difficulties that the attempt to define 'communalism' produces, seem to be symptoms that ought to give us a clue towards understanding the problem with the category 'communalism'. The incomplete and inconsistent explanations and the terminological ambiguity seem to indicate a problem in the way we have been either understanding the term or situating the problem. Thus, recent studies have been marked by a certain

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[38] This assertion should not be read as an attempt to 'rescue' from negative evaluation either '*hindutva*' or the nineteenth century intellectual movements that are considered disturbing. Evaluation is either secondary or not important at all to our *understanding* of these movements. I merely wish to make a bid for a historical and conceptual revaluation of these ideas in their particular contexts. It seems implausible to me (though I have carried out no investigation into the matter) that the nineteenth century thinkers who were placed so starkly within the context of colonization could be equated with '*hindutva*', a twentieth century movement which may invoke these thinkers (though even that is done only marginally!), but has a completely different set of political parameters within which to operate.

ambivalence towards definitions[39]. However, definitional difficulties do not necessarily indicate that we do not have any sound theoretical perspective on 'communalism'. It is possible that we have simply not been able to arrive at a consistent definition though we do have a competent theory of 'communalism'. Or perhaps it is simply a matter of identifying the correct theory and rejecting the others since the contradictions may be a result of an unnecessary clash of theories. Thus, it is important to sift through the large body of work on the subject in order to identify what basic theoretical or explanatory positions are available to us on the question of 'communalism'. This chapter attempts such a survey of literature. However, when one sets out to survey literature on the subject of 'communalism' the problem that one is faced with is the wide diversity of studies it encompasses. There are several historical and political accounts of partition for instance[40]; studies of nineteenth century conflicts along the plane of language

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[39] Most of the large number of works that study communalism side-step the need for a definition of the term. In fact, as I point out in chapter 2 there are only two basic definitions of 'communalism' and they both come from within the colonial theoretical framework.

[40] Pandey's *Remembering Partition* (2001) seems to suggest that the memories of Partition continue to play a crucial role in the violence that has ensued ever since. Hasan's *Legacy of a Divided Nation* (2001) suggests that the Indian Muslim who remains socially very close to the Hindu community has been left weakened and vulnerable to Hindu Right wing attack, which has led to the greater rise of 'communalism'. Thus, partition is invoked either in psychological or in political explanations of 'communalism'.

Several works examine the literature of partition in order to understand partition better. For a good selection of such essays see *Reading Partition/Living Partition* edited by Jasbir Jain (2007).

There is also a host of other literature like Seervai's analysis of how the Congress was responsible for Partition in *Partition of India: Legend and Reality* (1989), which examines the political negotiations pre-partition and attempts to identify the 'culprits' of the disaster. But these studies are also part of every single history text written post-independence India that has sought to recount the 'freedom struggle'.

There are also several regional level studies of riots and disturbances leading up to partition like Kanchanmoy Mojumdar's *Saffron versus Green: Communal Politics in the Central Provinces and Berar, 1919-1947* (2003). Several studies examining most crucially of the nine provinces: Bengal, UP and Punjab are available. See Suranjan Das' *Communal Riots in Bengal* (1991), Anita Inder Singh's *The Origins of the Partition of India 1936-1947* (1990) for a description of the political changes in Punjab, Pandey's *Constrution of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1992) which focuses on the UP. And for a study of communalism in the princely states, especially Hyderabad, see Copland (1988)

and literature[41]; a large body of literature analyzing the rise of '*hindutva*' or 'rightist' politics in India[42]; several works devoted to a documentation of pre and post-independence riots in India[43]; several treatises which examine popular media output from the perspective of 'communalism'[44]; those that examine 'communalism' as Hindu nationalism[45]; yet others that study it as ethnic conflict[46] and new perspectives on the study of violence from ethnological[47] or affective[48] perspectives are also encompassed by 'communalism'.

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[41] Sudhir Chandra's *The Oppressive Present* (1992) and Sudipta Kaviraj's *The Unhappy Consciousness* (1998) are good examples of scholarly works that suggest that literature of the 19th century reflects the rise of a certain 'consciousness' that is responsible for 'communalism'. Other works trace historical conflicts like the Hindi-Urdu controversy and set up these conflicts as being crucial to the rise of 'communalism'. See Christopher King's *One Language, Two Scripts* (1994).
[42] Ludden's *Making India Hindu* (1996), Jaffrelot's *The Hindu Nationalist Movement* (1999), Van der Veer's *Religious Nationalism* (1994), Pandey's *Hindus and Others* (1993), Achin Vanaik's *Communalism Contested* (1997), several essays in Wilkinson's (ed.) *Religious Politics and Communal Violence* (2005).
[43] Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.) *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (1984), *Lifting the Veil* (1995) and several other volumes produced or edited by Engineer. Salil Misra's *A Narrative of Communal Politics: Uttar Pradesh, 1937-1939* (2001); Kanchanmoy Mojumdar's chapter 'Raging Riots' in *Saffron versus Green: Communal Politics in the Central Provinces and Berar, 1919-1947* (2003), Madhu Kishwar's *Religion at the Service of Nationalism and other Essays* (1998).
[44] Ayesha Jalal's *Self and Sovereignty* (2001) takes the newspaper as the site for the study of popular politics in the lead up to partition, Arvind Rajagopal's *Politics after Television* (2001), Siddharth Varadarajan's 'The Ink Link' in *The Concerned Indian's Guide to Communalism* (Panikkar ed. 1999), Peter Manuel's 'Cassettes and the Contemporary Hindu-Muslim conflict' in *Cassette Culture* (Manuel 1993). 'The Iconography of Rama's Chariot' by Richard H. Davis, 'Mass media: Images, mobilization, and Communalism' by Victoria L.Farmer and other similar essays in *Making India Hindu* edited by David Ludden (1996).
[45] Most studies of 'communalism' as Hindu nationalism overlap with studies of *hindutva*. However, since that is not the only perspective taken on the politics of *hindutva* and since other kinds of conflicts like the 1984 Sikh riots have also been considered a product of nationalism, it bears mentioning some names of texts for reference: Jaffrelot (1999), Van der Veer (1994), Kishwar (1998).
[46] See for example, Ashutosh Varshney (2002) and 'Religion, Reservations and Riots: The Politics of Ethnic Violence in India' by Sunita Parikh in *Community Conflicts and the State in India* (Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli ed. 1998).
[47] See Beth Roy's *Some Trouble with Cows* (1994). More recent volumes that take an ethnological approach to the study of violence as a whole have come up from a collective headed by Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman. See Das and Kleinman ed. (2000; 2001).
[48] See Deepak Mehta (2007) and his essay 'Writing the riot : between the historiography and ethnography of
communal violence in India' in Chatterjee and Ghosh ed. *History and the Present* (2002).

However, my objective is to examine ‘communalism’ as a concept and understand what theories or explanations of it we have available to us. Thus, I only examine those positions that attempt to pose an explanation for ‘communalism’, what it is or how it came about. I categorize available positions roughly along five axes. These categories are partly chronological and partly dependent on the political or theoretical framework within which they emerge. Thus, the study of ‘communalism’ may be aligned along the axes of a) **colonialist,** b) **nationalist,** c) **marxist** d) **constructivist** and e) **anti-modernist**. These labels are provisional. I use them merely to lend some coherence to positions related to ‘communalism’. This categorization of the various kinds of theories of ‘communalism’ will hopefully provide a certain order along which to examine available positions on ‘communalism’ as well as to understand what elements these theories hold in common or in opposition to each other.

Tracing positions

Colonialist

There is some difficulty in identifying the kinds of positions that must be studied under this classification. The British seemed to see ‘Hindu-Muslim antagonism’ much earlier than the term ‘communalism’ emerged and this would open up a large amount of literature over two centuries, for review under this single category. However, since the objective is to understand available theories of

'communalism' I have therefore made the term itself central to the selection of work to be reviewed here[49]. The term emerged in the 1920s and the earliest colonial work on 'communalism' seems to have emerged in the early 1930s.

One of the first essays on 'communalism' by a colonial authority seems to be that of Hugh McPherson entitled 'The Origin and Growth of Communal Antagonism, Especially between Hindus and Muhammadans, and the Communal Award'. McPherson's stand on 'communalism' is one that would be echoed by almost all colonial thinkers after him and had no doubt been expressed by others, without the benefit of the term 'communalism', much before him[50].

> The differences which separate Hindu and Muslim are essentially religious. They may be reinforced by historical tradition, by political rivalries, or by economic contrasts, but for the great masses of the population **it is the religious issue alone that counts**. The Hindu has many gods in his universe; he reverences the Brahmin; he venerates the cow; and he makes joyful music at his festivals. The Muslim is monotheistic; he is a follower of the Prophet; he reverences the Koran; he excludes music from the mosque. Once a year at the Bakr-Id festival he sacrifices a cow. The slaughter of kine excites the Hindu, and has been the proximate cause of communal rioting in nine cases out of ten. Disturbances of mosque prayers by passing bands of Hindu processionists rouses the darkest passions of Muslim worshippers and has been a frequent preliminary to serious disorder, especially in the larger cities during the last twenty years. Disputes regarding the sites of sacred buildings have been another source of trouble, and a still more fertile cause has

[49] Since the thesis takes up a detailed investigation of colonial discourse in coming chapters, we need here only a representative section of mature colonial thought on 'communalism'.
[50] James Mill (1826) for instance, who has most often been credited with the 'religious' interpretation of Indian history would most likely have agreed with McPherson on all counts.

> been the clash of rival processions. By reason of their different calendars the dates of important Hindu and Muslim festivals coincide in cycles of years, and the possibilities of hostile collision are then greatly increased. (in Cumming ed. 1932: 109 emphasis added)

McPherson rejects the idea that 'communalism' is "a modern invention, the product of recent political developments", which refers specifically to the politics of separate electorates. In order to prove his point McPherson cites the Benares riots of 1809 and the testimony of a "landholder of Bengal"[51] to the age-old animosity between Hindus and Muslims which dates back to the Muslim invasion of India. McPherson emphasizes that "the religious basis of communal dissension" began to be "reinforced by political factors" with Tilak's establishment of the 'Anti-Cow-Killing Society' in 1893, which he suggests was designed to "stimulate the militant spirit of Hinduism and establish its domination of the Indian political world" (111).

McPherson's basic thesis therefore, may be re-stated as: Hindu-Muslim antagonism dates back to the Muslim invasion of India for which the Hindus bear resentment against the Muslims; the Muslims on the other hand bear contempt for the Hindu on religious grounds and on the basis of erstwhile political superiority. This was not a hostility that was always evident but it would come to

[51] Maharajadhiraj Bahadur of Burdwan from whose *The Indian Horizon* McPherson quotes the following: "Mahmud [of Ghazni]…sowed the seeds of hatred and religious animosity which have survived through the ages, bringing a bitterness between Hindus and Mohammedans which breaks out at any moment" (in Cumming ed. 1932:111).

the surface at any point of time with any other trigger which could be political or economic.

> In previous years religious disputes had been the chief causes of collision, but the tension had not become so great that the most trivial incidents sufficed to start trouble. The demon of unrest was abroad; the spirit of lawlessness had been aroused by the non-co-operation movement; and the communal disorder had become the dominant factor of Indian political life (in Cumming ed. 1932: 115-116).

Thus even the non-cooperation movement (which is generally characterized as marking Hindu-Muslim cooperation), served as a trigger to give expression to this ‘deep-seated conflict’. Although McPherson earlier asserts that it is the religious issue in itself that is the major cause for conflict “for the great masses of the population”, he goes on to say that the simple village folk are less prone to communal conflict since they lead a simple life in partnership with each other within the village community.

> The great masses of the rural population, whether Hindu or Muhammadan, are simple cultivators, who at all normal times live in peace and amity. Their chief preoccupations are the timely arrival and seasonal distribution of the annual rains, the tillage of their fields, the gathering of their harvests, their dealings with their landlords and their money-lenders. Religious festivals are one of their few excitements. If these occasionally lead to strife and bloodshed, normal relations are resumed as soon as the lava flow of passion subsides. The urban masses are more prone to communal strife, because life is more complicated in the towns. Here political friction often stimulates religious antagonism;

> temples and mosques are closer together; there is more danger of collision in the narrow streets, and a larger admixture of the rowdy turbulent elements that love disorder for its own sake and for its opportunities. The educated classes of both communities, when their vision is not temporarily clouded by some communal issue, work harmoniously together in all walks of life (in Cumming ed. 1932: 118-119).

This is a rather strange contradiction which recurs in most colonial accounts. The 'masses' to whom religion matters most are not the most significant source of violence, even though it is religion itself that is the root of the problem. Another factor that McPherson seems unable to resolve is why the phenomenon, when expressed in political terms as the problem of minorities and majorities should be a special problem in India when it has been encountered everywhere in the modern nation-states.

> The adequate protection of minorities against unfair treatment by the majority is now recognized to be a matter of international concern. General rules for securing the rights of minorities are becoming part of the international law of Europe and are embodied in the constitutions of at least ten States.
>
> In many respects, however, the Indian communal problem stands alone and has no parallel elsewhere. The various communities have lived together for many generations. Their fundamental rights have been declared in Royal Proclamations on several historic occasions during the last century, and are taken for granted. But now that the British Government have declared their intention of conferring upon India a large measure of responsible self-government the struggle of the various communities is for political power;

> for adequate representation in the public services, in the legislatures, in local bodies and in the provincial and central executives (in Cumming ed. 1932: 123).

McPherson's claim about what makes the minority-majority struggle in India unique, implicitly relies on the idea of Hindu-Muslim age-old religious animosity. He rejects the nationalist claim that this impasse is a problem generated by British political manipulation. If anything, he asserts, the two communities had come closer to each other during British rule than in all the preceding centuries. By this logic then, we are left in the rather ironic position of dubbing one of the most contentious periods in Hindu-Muslim relations as also being one of greatest 'unity' between them. Thus, in McPherson's account, although religion is the primary motivation for this conflict, it is expressed least by those to whom religion matters most and the period of greatest Hindu-Muslim proximity and cooperation, is also one of greatest Hindu-Muslim conflict. If these contradictions were enough ground to reject McPherson's ideas, they certainly did not seem so to other colonial writers who echoed the same formulations even if with differing inflections.

The first book-length study of 'communalism', Manshardt's *The Hindu-Muslim Problem in India*, dubbed 'communalism' an "attitude" or "mind-set having behind it the customs and prejudices of many generations". Manshardt's basic position was again rooted in the hostility of the Hindu against his invader.

> Though the Hindu out-numbers the Muslim in practically every province of India, he still seems to fear him. Recalling the days of Muslim domination, he is unwilling to run any risks of present-day Muslim political supremacy. The Muslim on the other hand, remembers his glorious past and looks to the future. …Many today talk glibly of inter-communal unity, but the changing of men's attitudes cannot be wrought by talk (Manshardt 1936: 33).

Once this 'deep hostility' is posed as the source of ever-growing and ever-changing animosity, the domains of its expression or exacerbation become endless. Thus, Manshardt explores in detail in his book various domains within which this hostility finds expression and which in turn fuel this hostility. For instance, some of the factors he lists that keep the 'communal' flames raging are: The two communities generated differing visions of history (heroes for one community were villains for the other); socially they followed extremely different traditions; the repugnance of inter-marriage deepened social isolation; their ignorance of each other was compounded by the abhorrence of each others' languages[52]; both shared a tendency to generalize of the community as a whole rather than see individuals within the community; and the success of a section of the press that continued to appeal to "narrow communalism" had compounded

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[52] This is perhaps a surprising claim to make. Very few colonial theorists went so far as to say that the two communities did not share a language. In fact, it was often a matter of confusion, that the two communities had shared languages so closely. However, for Manshardt, the 'culture' of the two communities resided in their classical languages and it was these that the two did not share. "A Muslim or Hindu may learn a language or dialect other than his own for business purposes, but he seldom seeks to acquire sufficient proficiency to acquaint himself with the literature of that language. It is the rare Muslim who will study Sanskrit for cultural purposes, but he seldom seeks to acquaint himself with the literature of that language" (36). Apparently, sharing a classical language is crucial to harmony!

the problem many fold. However, even in his account, basic to ‘communal’ conflict was religious resentment.

> Differing religious practices are perhaps the most immediate causes of communal disorders. While the Hindu reverences the cow, the Muslim practices cow-slaughter in connection with Bakr Id (Manshardt 1936: 40).

There is little to distinguish Manshardt from McPherson except his deployment of a more psychological approach to ‘communalism’ as a deep-seated ‘attitude’. Other than that, both rely on religious differences and the Muslim history of invasion as the primary causes for ‘communalism’. While McPherson was more or less satisfied with a clear statement of religious differences, Manshardt and many to follow would add several different ‘factors’ that contributed to the basic formula of ‘Hindu-Muslim antagonism’ in order to generate ‘communalism’. These ‘factors’ became an endless list which could be compounded arbitrarily on either local, national, linguistic, class or caste bases. Thus the cause-effect swapping that we encounter in attempting definition is clearly visible here as well. Given the stable supposition of religious antagonism, differences were both cause and effect of ‘communalism’. For instance, the Hindus and Muslims did not intermarry because of antagonism; because they did not intermarry, the antagonism deepened.

While Manshardt’s account seems easy to recognize as inflated by arbitrary factors of all kinds, others seem more convincing. One of the most influential late

colonial studies of the question offered by W.C. Smith (1985, first published in 1946), which becomes a reference point for most Indian studies[53], attempts a slightly different explanatory framework. Smith developed an analysis of 'communalism' which remained most influential almost up to the 1990's. His basic proposition was that 'communalism' was a problem unique to India. It was rooted primarily in the "religiosity" of the Indian people but also that the problem had manifested itself in an acute form because of British political policy and class conflict in India.

> Communalism in India may be defined as **that ideology which has emphasised as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and has emphasised the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups**; the words "adherent" and "religion" being taken in the most nominal sense.… We say 'communalism has been' rather than 'communalism is' because no definition of what communalism is could remain long valid. For **the situation is highly dynamic; the thing defined changes and develops**.…[R]ecently the phenomenon called 'communalism' has developed into something for which 'nationalism' now seems a better name. The above definition, however, is proffered as applicable at least for the period until about 1942 (Smith 1985: 187 emphasis added).

Here we have the first expression of 'communalism' as an ideology. Smith's formulation of 'communalism' as underdeveloped or developing nationalism was

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[53] Smith did not seem to become very popular with other colonial writers. Thus, it is rather ironic to put him in this category. However, as I attempt to point out, there is a certain affinity he bears with other colonial accounts.

also to gain a great deal of currency[54]. Smith seems to take on a very novel approach to the problem. However, when one examines his analysis of ‘communalism’ as a problem of ‘religiosity’, irrespective of his strong critique of colonial policy, we confirm that the real emphasis of the critique has not shifted in colonial discourse. Smith explains the religious roots of the problem much more explicitly than the others.

> Religiously, it [communalism] is a reversion to tribalism: group solidarity is one of the sources of religion and vice versa. Through the centuries, religion has developed to serve many other functions besides that elemental one of expressing the life of a closed fraternity; and the great world religions had thought to outgrow such restrictedness. But in today’s embattled world, men readily press their religion again into the service not of its highest ideals but of the immediate interests of their own group (Smith 1985: 188)….
>
> Hinduism has never outgrown its tribalism; has never aspired or claimed to be anything higher than the religion of a group, or rather a series of sub-groups eternalised in the caste system. To the Hindu, every Indian who is a Muslim is an outcast out-caste, an Untouchable with whom dealings must not be so intimate as to transgress certain formal rules. This exclusion is religious; but with Hinduism, “religious” means “social” in a highly evolved traditional way.
>
> These facts therefore have presented India with a communal situation throughout the centuries. It has been sometimes less, sometimes more, a problem; has raised issues sometimes of acute, sometimes of devastating, import; sometimes it has raised no issues at all (Smith 1985: 189-90).

[54] Dumont (1970) was responsible for popularising this description to a great extent.

There are two points to note here. One, that the situation is obviously one that displays the deep under-development of the Indian society and religion. It is more over rooted in the peculiar underdevelopment of Hinduism as a religion unlike the "great" religions, read the Semitic religions. Secondly, the problem is one that has been constant through the history of India and is a characteristic feature of that society. It seems to change and mutate with the particular historical situation but will keep manifesting itself in some form or another. And *"one may argue forcefully that the real welfare of India will wait until the country has been religiously purged"* (190).

Smith concedes that though the Hindus and Muslims had been at that point emphasizing their differences, "at times…the two groups have also had much in common, and have accepted their differences calmly" (190). He explains this with the proposition that communalism was mild until the twentieth century but was made acute by capitalist and political forces unleashed by British imperialism.

> The government's method of encouraging communalism has been to approach all political subjects, and as many other subjects as possible, on a communalist basis; and to encourage, even to insist upon, everyone else's doing likewise. The principal political technique is separate electorates: making the enfranchised Muslims, and the enfranchised sections of many other groups, into an increasing number of separate constituencies, so that they vote communally, think communally, listen only to communal election speeches, judge the delegates communally, look for constitutional and other

> reforms only in terms of more relative communal power, and express their grievances communally. Even the British government has admitted on occasions that the system serves to keep India from gaining independence by political means: “Division by creeds and classes means the creation of political camps organized against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens….We regard any system of communal electorates, therefore, as a very serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle.” [Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State for India and Lord Chelmsford, Viceroy, *Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reforms*, given in Mukherji, *Indian Constitutional Documents*, vol I p.516] And as this same statement goes on to say, the principle works so well that once it has been firmly established, it so entrenches communalism that one could hardly then abandon the principle even if one wished to do so (Smith 1985: 216-217).

The passion with which he attributes the problem to colonial policy makes it a little strange to categorize him with other colonialist thinkers. McPherson was categorical in his denial that British policy had contributed to the problem. Smith is categorical in his denunciation of British policy as being the prime reason for the acuteness of the problem. However, one must bear in mind that for both, the problem was not *generated* by British policy itself, but was the expression of the ‘religiosity’ of the Indian people.

Smith supplements his critique of British political policy with a theory of unequal economic development. He cites W.W. Hunter’s (2002, first published 1871) popular explanation of Muslim disaffection towards the British and their

consequent economic decline in the late 19th century[55] in order to explain the growing competition between the two communities. Another source of economic lag between the two communities Smith attributed to the fact that it was the lower classes who had converted to Islam[56]. Under such unequal circumstances, capitalism had benefited only a particular class which comprised predominantly of Hindus. This had resulted in widening the gulf between the two communities[57].

The thesis of 'Muslim backwardness' based on W.W. Hunter's report has been discredited.[58] However, here I will not enter into an argument in relation to Hunter's work, which will come up for discussion elsewhere in the thesis. Instead I would like to emphasise that when one looks for the essential elements in Smith's theory one finds the characteristic of 'over-explanation'. That is, a theory of capitalism in India is simply not required in order to understand the proposition that once the colonial government disbursed jobs along community lines,

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[55] W.W. Hunter's *The Indian Musalmans* (2002, first published in 1871) based its observations only on the region of Bengal while proposing that Muslims were under-represented in government positions and educationally backward as well.

[56] Richard Eaton ably critiques this historical explanation for the spread of Islam in Bengal: "It can be said that by juxtaposing what it perceives as the inherent justice of Islam and the inherent wickedness of Hindu society, the Religion of Social Liberation theory identifies motives for conversion that are, from a Muslim perspective, eminently praiseworthy. The problem, however, is that no evidence can be found in support of the theory. Moreover, it is profoundly illogical. First, by attributing present-day values to peoples of the past, **it reads history backward**. Before their contact with Muslims, India's lower castes are thought to have possessed, almost as though familiar with the writings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau or Thomas Jefferson, some innate notion of the fundamental equality of all humankind denied them by an oppressive Brahmanic tyranny. In fact, however, in thinking about Islam in relation to Indian religions, premodern Muslim intellectuals did not stress their religion's ideal of social equality as opposed to Hindu inequality, but rather Islamic monotheism as opposed to Hindu polytheism" (Eaton 2000a: 117 emphasis added).

[57] He also gives a geographical reason for this based on the contrast in the spread of power of the British and the areas of Muslim population saying that the earliest areas of British domination were areas of low Muslim populations which was why they had access to administrative power and modern learning later than the Hindus. This theory is quite clearly dubious. Almost all the early acquisitions of the British in India (Bengal, Mysore, Oudh) had large Muslim populations.

[58] See Bimal Prasad's 'Introduction' in Hunter (2002).

competition for employment would take place along community lines. That is a fairly simple and straightforward observation. **What is not clear is the relationship this 'communal competition' bears to 'under-developed nationalism' or 'religiosity'**. Smith's complex account of the factors that compound the 'communal' situation, seem to resemble Manshardt's various domains where the problem of 'communalism' finds expression. They multiply extensively while the central thesis may be distilled into Indian 'religiosity'.

What perhaps becomes the clearest point of contradiction in Smith's work is his explanation for religious riots. He created two categories of 'communalism' – middle and lower class communalism. Smith asserted that class and religion came together in quite arbitrary a fashion in order to create this conflict. That is, conflict generated by the lower class confronting the higher feudal class over matters of economic deprivation turns into communal conflict only because of the confluence of class and community. Thus, if the upper class in some regions was predominantly Muslim and the lower class Hindu, or vice versa, a communal tinge would result. This was 'lower class communalism', which was sporadic and relations would normalise after an outbreak. This communalism he thought had been slightly misrepresented.

> Yet the riots have been essentially incidents, occasioned by some disturbing factor other than religion. All careful observers, even when British and conservative, recognise that this disturbing factor is economic. In fact, (as in the pre-British period), communal riots

> have been isolated instances of class-struggles fought in communal guise (Smith 1985: 209).

He goes on to say,

> The religious interpretation given to these conflicts may be uppermost in the minds of the men involved, arising from the fact that religion is the most obvious or most emotionalising distinction between them and the persons they are fighting….Or the interpretation may be implanted in their minds by propagandists intent on arousing communal antagonism….Again**, the religious interpretation given to the struggles may occur only in the newspaper accounts that are subsequently published, or in the propaganda of the India Office in its attempts to persuade the rest of the world and even itself that British rule in India is morally justified** (Smith 1985: 210 emphasis added)

Thus he acknowledges that British formulations of 'communalism' are largely engineered to further colonial politics. He also quite firmly says that it is class struggle that is working itself out but it is labelled 'communalism' either by vested interests or by propagandists or by those who have come to understand all conflict only through this frame. In spite of this, he sees 'middle-class communalism' as continuous and dangerous since it marked competition within a class. This he explains was the result of "circumscribed capitalism" which was bound to produce group discord in some form or another and for which he held the colonial government responsible.

> The communalist technique is introduced into economics as well as into politics. Unemployment, as we have said, is rife among the middle classes; and the government dispenses its few but most attractive posts on a strictly communal basis. Each Muslim who does not secure employment is led to feel that he might well have done so if only the Muslim community had more communal power, the Hindu less. It is usually only on communal terms that he can get a job at all; and within an economic system which provides employment for only a fraction of its society, the only hope of more positions is a communalist hope (Smith 1985: 216).

How does this analysis fit in with his beginning which clearly poses ‘communalism’ as an issue that Indian society has always been grappling with and which is rooted in religious antagonism? This raises the same question asked earlier. If government jobs arranged along community quotas create discord, how does that make a case against religion itself? He also later maintains that though ‘communalists’ perceive their problems in terms of religion they should be told the answers to their problems are not religious but political and economic. How does this follow from his own analysis of the problem being rooted in religiosity?

The colonialist accounts therefore, whether simple (like McPherson’s) or complex (like Manshardt’s and Smith’s), seem to pose one clear equation. The necessary condition for ‘communalism’ is ‘religiosity’. They differ only in their propositions for the sufficient conditions. For McPherson it is the history of Muslim invasion. For Manshardt it is a variety of factors from language to inter-marriage to the

competition for representation. For Smith, it is class struggle and the British policy of ‘divide and rule’. As a consequence, ‘communalism’ in all colonial accounts becomes a problem that cannot be addressed by resolving either political or economic issues of discord. In fact, in the colonialist conception the ‘problem’ becomes irremediable since to purge India of its ‘religiosity’ would be to purge it of its very ‘culture’.

Nationalist

Again, it is a little difficult to define which positions ought to be characterized as nationalist. The selection here represents only the Congress position on this question[59]. Logically, one would expect that the nationalist position ought to be one in complete opposition to the colonialist. While opposition on some counts we do find, there is also strangely, a great deal of concurrence in the two positions. Smith’s proposition that ‘communalism’ was a stunted nationalism often found corroboration from the nationalists. In fact, even ‘primitivism’ and ‘religiosity’ still featured as explanations. However, it is ‘divide and rule’ that takes centre-stage.

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[59] There is no clear axis along which claims to ‘nationalist thought’ may be made. The Muslim League in its anti-colonial phase may also be dubbed nationalist. But on the question of ‘communalism’ it would create a great deal of confusion to club the two parties in one category. I hope that the later chapters of this thesis will help clear some of that confusion. For now, I only investigate the position as it emerged in what has been considered the dominant nationalist frame, that of the Congress party. Even within this position I do not go into Gandhi’s views on the question of ‘communalism’ which are quite different from the other nationalist positions. In fact, for many years Gandhi chose not to speak at all on the matter of the ‘Hindu-Muslim problem’ because he confessed that he could not understand it.

One of the first statements of the Congress on the issue of 'communalism' is the report of the Congress committee on the Kanpur riots of 1931. Although the committee was to investigate the Kanpur riots, the report was used instead as an opportunity to give extensive expression to the Congress position on 'communalism'[60].

> The prevailing impression is that the Hindu-Muslim problem in its present form is an age long problem and that the two communities have, in their different religions and cultures, a source of inexhaustible and ineradicable antagonism which has made their mutual relations bitter, distrustful, and hostile from the very outset. This is an extremely wrong impression, created by interested parties through deliberate misrepresentations, about the propagation of Islam in India, about the nature and incidents of Muslim rule, and generally about the relations which subsisted during this period between the Hindus and Musalmans….
>
> This [communal] problem is a problem arising out of the mutual distrust and the real or supposed conflict of rights and interests of the two major communities of India. In its very nature, it implies the presence in each community of a separate collective consciousness as well as of separate collective communal motives under which each can as a single unit act and re-act against the other. The Hindu-Muslim problem, therefore, in its present

[60] Purshottam Das Tandon, one of the members of the committee, expressed his disagreement with his colleagues on the "scope" of the report. "My view has been that the Congress did not contemplate that we should compass the whole range of the Hindu-Muslim problem, analyze the relations of the two communities in ancient and modern times, discover the beginnings of the present discord, trace its development, and finally recommend permanent measures for the solution of the problem. It seems to me that the object in view at the time was that the members of the Committee should quickly get into touch with Kanpur, bring about a cessation of hostilities and a restoration of peace and goodwill between the two communities, so that the discord might not spread further" (*Report of the Committee appointed by the Indian National Congress to enquire into the Kanpur Riots of March 1931* (1933) 2005: 212). This was far from what the committee actually did. In fact, the evidence from the Kanpur Congress workers was featured only very partially and was reduced to a section which one of the members specifically chose to introduce in the Supplementary notes.

> form, could only arise when each of the two communities has developed this separate collective consciousness, and such motives and objectives. This stage of development is reached in Indian history only after 1857. Throughout the Muslim period no All-India communal consciousness and corresponding motives and objectives are patently perceptible either in the Muslims or in the Hindus, and the political and economic relations of the two communities are found to be almost altogether free from communal bias or bigotry. Communalism in India develops as a concomitant to Indian Nationalism and is nothing but Nationalism driven into religious channels. In Hindus, it has allied itself to a territorial sentiment because of confinement of Hinduism to this country. In Musalmans, it has got deflected towards Pan-Islamism because of the action of the divisive British policy, the foreign origin of Islam, and the existence of Muslims in other countries where Islam is politically regnant (*Report of the Committee appointed by the Indian National Congress to enquire into the Kanpur Riots of March 1931*[61] (1933) 2005: xv-xvi).

'Communalism' as 'nationalism driven into religious channels' or as 'incomplete nationalism' or 'illegitimate nationalism' will be common and recurring characterizations that we will come up against. The greatest distinction between the colonialist and the nationalist position is hinged on one specific claim which is demonstrated above. **For the colonialist, 'communalism' is a pre-colonial problem which is irremediable. For the nationalist, 'communalism' is a colonial problem** (the authors of the report and most other nationalists would insist it arose after 1857) **with its remedy being nationalism**[62]. The nationalists

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[61] Hereafter referred to as *Congress Report (1933)*.

[62] The idea of 'communalism' as religious *nationalism* subsisted side-by-side with the two terms also acting as antonyms. This is reflected in the formulation of the idea of the 'nationalist Muslims' (as against the 'communal Muslims') to refer to those Muslims who supported the Congress Party.

attributed it to distortions in self-perception that were the result of colonialism, its politics and its historiography. That is why, instead of an examination of the riots themselves, the committee reviews the entire history of Hindu-Muslim relations in India and proposes an alternative reading of this history as one of its major remedies to the problem of ‘communalism’.

> Such perversions of our history are designed to create a contempt for our past, a feeling of abject impotence, and an atmosphere of unshakeable inferiority. Here we are concerned with the Hindu-Muslim problem, and we feel constrained to say that nowhere the design to demoralize and denationalize us through historical perversions is more pointedly and more extensively used than in the treatment of the Muslim period.
>
> The example in this respect has been set by great but interested and prejudiced English historians, and it is being followed by others unconsciously or consciously from a variety of motives. The Muslim period is represented as the darkest period of Indian history, during which the national life of India was deflected from the normal course of its evolution and plunged into a social and religious chaos from which it is difficult for it to extricate itself (*Congress Report (1933)* 2005: 69)….
>
> We have rapidly traversed the whole period of Muslim rule and indicated some lines of thought which go to show that such a view is not warranted by our history. In fact, though the differences between the two religions were obvious, the fundamental unity of the lives of their followers in India and the compelling necessity of their common destiny were even more obvious and more real. And out of this grew that atmosphere of co-operation and goodwill, of tolerance and reverence for each other’s sentiments which, inspite of temporary set-backs, settled them down as brothers to solve together the common problems of their lives. Their union was a marvel for its age, and it took interested

> agencies quite a long time to shake it seriously. Before it was shaken it had made many achievements in the social, religious and political fields (*Congress Report (1933)* 2005: 70).

This report sets a trend that seems to take over all nationalist accounts of ‘communalism’. Almost every single subsequent work was compelled to look at ‘communalism’ in historical perspective. Their central dilemma seems to have been that in a land where Hindu-Muslim synthesis finds as much evidence as Hindu-Muslim strife, what is the ‘true’ nature of this relationship? Constantly, evidence of conflict would be balanced by evidence of syncretism; evidence for invasion would be balanced with evidence of political partnership; evidence for ‘intolerant’ Muslim monarchs (usually Aurangzeb) would be balanced by evidence of ‘tolerant’ and ‘enlightened’ ones (usually Akbar). In this situation, the reason that the nationalists chose to characterize the relationship as one that had been one of synthesis rather than discord, was really quite arbitrary and may be understood either as an act of good will or as political expedience[63]. Difficult as this may be to accept, the point remains that there never could be any decisive evidence that could clinch this argument[64].

One way for the nationalists to resolve this issue was to recognize both tendencies in history but to claim one was more dominant than the other. Thus,

[63] The political expedience rested in the nationalist proving to the colonialist that a history of cooperation had existed before and therefore, a single cooperative nationalism was possible to achieve in the present as well. It also discredited claims of a ‘communal’ nature which would soon develop into what has been characterized as the ‘two-nation theory’.

[64] See chapter 4 for why relying only on historical evidence fails to answer these questions.

in *The Communal Triangle in India*, Asoka Mehta and Achyut Patwardhan propose that the Hindu and Muslim communities had “evolved an attractive pattern of co-operation, not unmixed, naturally, with occasional notes of discord” (Mehta and Patwardhan 1942: 52). However, the notes of discord were occasional in a largely symbiotic relationship. Speaking of the history of Muslim invasion and eventual assimilation in India the authors comment,

> Grace and dignity become the hall-mark of this new synthesis which is the Hindu-Muslim culture. The history of a thousand years supplies more evidence to prove this than to prove the opposite tendency of wars and conflicts. What is surprising in the Hindu-Muslim contact is not the fact that it resulted in conflicts and antagonisms – those were inevitable as the later struggle for power between the Indians and the British. The important and significant fact, often forgotten, is that the Hindus and Muslims composed their antagonisms and evolved a new culture” (Mehta and Patwardhan 1942: 10).

This ‘new culture’ is what processes of economic and social change unleashed by colonisation had destroyed.

> The Government policies destroyed the village as a unit, and thus disintegrated the social cohesion it signified. With the decay of arts and crafts, the traditional guilds too lost all meaning. **While the Government snapped the ancient threads that wove the people together, it gave them no new social ganglion**….In this surrounding darkness of blight and frustration, where avenues of politics, education, the services were closed to the common man, the only ray of light, the only point of contact, the only straw to which the average Indian clung with the desperation of a drowning man were caste and communal

> loyalty. **Here was something that he knew and understood, something too which offered contact and cohesion in a disintegrating world.**"…
>
> So the popular ferment caused by British rule found two contradictory expressions. One, an all-embracing nationalism which could offer nothing but blood, sweat and toil, always facing the determined opposition of the government and making slow and painful progress through the tangles and thickets of communal rivalries and religious antagonisms. The other, easier and in the situation created by the British rule almost natural, through communal channels (Mehta and Patwardhan 1942: 99-100 emphasis added).

The narrative of 'divide and rule' is supplemented here with a narrative of confusion and social disintegration in a colonized India. Thus, the social cohesion of pre-colonial India was eroded and replaced by a deceptively 'familiar' caste and communal politics. However, in this account, nationalism was also a response to the same social disintegration. There is a certain irony in the authors' claims that the "British arm" of the communal triangle kept the "popular will" of India divided while actively centralizing the State. For, the idea of an 'Indian popular will' seems to rest as much on notions of India as a singular unit as does a 'centralized state'. In the first case, that unity is one that is seemingly stronger[65] though not expressed by administrative categories. Then what makes the formation of administrative categories of the state the source of violence? Mehta and Patwardhan seem to offer one interesting proposition. That the Hindus and Muslims in India had expressed conflict and violence before, but had evolved

[65] Since it refers to 'cultural syncretism or synthesis'.

cultural ways of living with each other. What they are unable to answer satisfactorily is what colonialism or the bid for a centralized state does that dissolves these ways of living in harmony.

One suspects that the centralization of the Indian state was in any case more a nationalist idea than a colonial reality at this point. India remained a set of provinces and princely states in the colonial conception[66]. In the nationalist conception however, it was a centralized state which shared a distinctive but singular culture. For the nationalist, while both nationalism and 'communalism' were responses to colonialism, the former was the 'right' response and the latter, the wrong one. However, the nationalist conception of India as a centralized state and a unitary culture were far from uncontested notions. Although these gave legitimacy to nationalism, they did not explain why 'communalism' was illegitimate[67]. The nationalist projection of a unitary and symbiotic culture of historic co-operation between Hindus and Muslims also did not serve to explain why political representation on community lines within the state was problematic. Surely, if the two communities had shared a cultural unity of this kind, political representation along community lines would simply be one means of representation and not a 'divisive' means of representation.

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[66] Or at least the colonial conception at this point stressed this idea in order to rebut the nationalist/congress assertions of nationhood.
[67] See Jalal's *Self and Sovereignty* (2001) for a rejection of the binary opposition between 'nationalism' and 'communalism'. Jalal insists that in the nationalist account 'communalism' procures a pejorative connotation of being bigoted and illegitimate while the former is rational and inclusionary. However, there is no real basis for this distinction.

Jawaharlal Nehru, one of the most prolific exponents of the idea of a synthetic[68] culture that India had evolved with Hindu-Muslim interaction, provides some clues to this deadlock, not by his advocacy of this synthesis but rather by his later scepticism toward it. Irrespective of what synthesis this culture brought, Nehru also supported the 'primitivism' and 'antagonism' that were prominent features of the colonial characterization of Indian culture. In a speech in the Lok Sabha on September 3, 1960, he said:

> [Indian culture] is a culture of tolerance undoubtedly. But as compared to, let us say, European culture, as it shows itself in European history, it is a tolerance of conscience that we always had. But where it strikes our social habits, we have been and are intolerant. A person may believe in God or believe in the negation of God, and you put up with him. In other countries he might have been dealt with very harshly. Here, you can believe anything you like, but you must abide by the social rules that have been laid down by your caste. If you do not, you get into trouble. You are not only pushed out and excommunicated but you are pursued in a hundred ways. This may not happen so much in cities like Delhi and Calcutta where things are different, but caste is a mighty power in the villages even today.
>
> This mixture of the widest catholicity of thought or of philosophy which has made us great in many ways and a narrowness in social life is a curious mixture. Of course, we are outgrowing this narrowness to some extent. But it continues to affect our political life. When we bring in democracy and open the door of opportunity to everyone this narrow

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[68] He used the word in order to describe a society built on synthesis rather than conflict. He built on this idea in several of his works. As an example see 'The idea behind India' in (Gopal and Iyengar ed. 2003: 14).

> outlook brings about group conflict. The so-called nationalism of one group comes up against the so-called nationalism of the other.
>
> What is communalism itself? You may well have described Hindu communalism as Hindu nationalism and Muslim communalism as Muslim nationalism and you would have been correct. They were different nationalisms. They came into conflict with each other (Nehru 1975: 8).

Thus, according to Nehru, ‘communalism’, was a form of nationalism. But it was one that was backward, destructive and not as “deep” as “true nationalism”. It is surprising that Nehru equated the two at all since most nationalists relied on a complete and absolute opposition between the two ideas. But he most clearly echoed colonialist perspectives like that of W.C. Smith in his formulation of ‘communalism’ as primitivism.

> Communalism is the badge of a backward nation, not of the modern age. People have their religion and they have a right to hold firmly to it, but to import religion into politics and to break up the country is something which was done in Europe 300 or 400 years back. We in India have to get rid of it.
>
> We have declared that we will fight communal organizations in every way, whether they are Muslim organizations or Hindu organizations or Sikh or any other. Nationalism cannot exist together with communalism. Nationalism does not mean Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism or Sikh nationalism. As soon as you speak of Hindu, Sikh or Muslim, you do not speak for India. Each person has to ask himself this question: What do I want to make of India, one country, one nation or 10, 20 or 25 nations, a fragmented and divided

> nation without any strength or endurance, ready to break to pieces at the slightest shock? Each person has to answer this question. Separateness has always been the weakness of India. Fissiparous tendencies, whether they belong to Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians or others, are very dangerous and wrong tendencies. They belong to petty and backward minds. No one who understands the spirit of the times can think in terms of communalism (Nehru 1975: 12).

Again and again Nehru would reprimand the nation for its 'primitive communal' attitudes[69]. For instance, in a speech in 1953 he said:

> It amazes me that while might problems are cropping up in the world, mighty forces are at work and tremendous technological changes are taking place, change that I find in our country, is on the communal plane which is fantastic nonsense to me. It shows the utter immaturity of the individual or the group that talks and argues in that way. It has no relation to the present-day world, I mean the talks about Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communalism. It just shows that they are completely backward in their thinking, in their minds. They never grasp the march of events in the centuries past and in the era they live in. Our country as a whole will be doomed and will continue to be a backward country as in the past while other countries go ahead.
>
> Everybody will agree, even the rank communalist, that we must be technologically advanced, we must have a modern, up-to-date army, we must have the latest aeroplanes, even the atom bomb. But it is not realised that the latest types of aeroplane and armies are the outcome of a certain mind, of a certain mental approach. You cannot

[69] Not only 'communalism' but also the 'caste system' was often characterised by Nehru as a force of backwardness that had stunted the progress of the country. See for instance, 'The Will of the Nation', Nehru's speech of May 1948, in Gopal and Iyengar (ed.) Vol. I (2003: 47-49) and 'Communalism and Casteism' (193).

> have the medieval mind and have the latest type of aeroplanes too. You cannot have modern development, modern technology with a medieval mentality behind it, which is represented in many ways in India but which is represented more than in anything else, by what is called the communal outlook. (in Gopal and Iyengar ed. Vol.II 2003: 537)

There is no appreciable difference in Smith's and Nehru's charge of 'communalism' being a product of the 'primitivism' of the Indian people. For Smith, Hinduism was primitive in its inability to pose a universal community of all its members since it was ridden by caste affiliations. For Nehru, religion itself was primitive in its inability to pose a national community of members, the citizens of the State. In fact, Nehru seems to suggest that even the 'synthetic culture' of the past would have to make way for a new culture that is "secular" and would pave the way for greater "social justice". There is thus little to distinguish him from the colonial theorists of 'communalism' since even the oldest of colonial formulations – religiosity – makes a return as the 'real' cause of 'communalism' in Nehru's thought. He seemed troubled even by the idea of nationalism itself later in his life. He adopted instead the idea of 'internationalism'[70] in order to escape the problems that versions of (Hindu, Muslim and possibly even linguistic) nationalism in India seemed to bring with them.

[70] This idea was first articulated fairly early in his career for instance in an article called 'Social Fabric of a Nation' (in Gopal and Iyengar ed. Vol.II 2003: 5) where he saw internationalism as an inevitable outcome of industrialisation. However, later internationalism seemed to take on not simply the connotations of inter-dependence of nations but also as a positive expression of 'progress' in itself. See 'Nationalism and Internationalism' (566).

What Nehru is contesting then is all notions that seem to oppose the neutral category of 'citizen'. Even his advocacy of internationalism seems firmly based on a notion of national partnerships rather than dissolution of nations themselves. Thus, he is not proposing 'world citizenship' but rather partnership and equality between citizens across the world. This neutral status of citizenship then should abolish all other differences that are the root of discord. Nehru had much to battle on the front of achieving this neutral citizenship, and much of his battle he clearly lost[71]. But what made religion 'primitive' in Nehru's accounts? What made 'communalism' 'regressive' and not just destructive or generative of violence in the present? These judgments are not accounted for within his explanations. I would contend that the nationalist condemnation of 'communalism' certainly rests on political positions that fuelled Indian nationalism[72], but it is also covertly informed by the colonial condemnation of Indian 'religiosity'. That is precisely why 'religiosity' becomes primitive and regressive rather than, as was the case with Gandhi's characterization of religion, the source of right action.

Marxist

From this point on it is difficult to find any study that does not work within these nationalist frames for a long time. While I make a separate category for Marxist perspectives on 'communalism', the most notable Marxist theorist on 'communalism', Bipan Chandra, who wrote *Communalism in Modern India* in

[71] The linguistic re-organization of states is a case in point.
[72] Again here it is important to keep in mind that we are dealing with only one nationalist vision, that of the Indian National Congress once it became a dominant political party.

1984 works very clearly within nationalist frames[73]. Chandra states his presuppositions in his preface itself:

> I have of course, assumed both secularism and national unity to be valid and desirable values and goals for which we as a people have to strive. **Not only the national movement but any nation-wide movement would require wider unity and suppression of communal and other divisive tendencies**. Communalism has therefore been studied in the context of the struggle against it. At the same time, I have accepted that secularism and national unity and our struggle around them must have an objective basis rooted in scientific and factual analysis. Effort has therefore been made to understand communalism even while criticising and deploring it (Chandra 1984: x-xi emphasis added).

Chandra's naturalisation of the category of nation as something that was politically, geographically and historically somehow a given would be considered suspect today but it does make for an honest clarity in his position. Since he clearly takes on an advocacy of a nationalist position, he rejects other planes along which popular politics may have been aligned. This is reflected in what his delineation of the problem under study. Chandra distinguishes between communal tension and communal politics and chooses the latter for analysis.

[73] Randhir Singh in his article 'Communalism and the Struggle against Communalism: A Marxist View' (1990) criticized the tendency of all analyses of communalism to revolve around the nationalist view of the problem. "The ideological error which has virtually pre-empted the entire field of thought or study on communalism in this country, lies in understanding communalism from the stand-point of nationalism" (4). However, Singh's Marxist analysis explains communalism, regionalism, the women's question etc. as all interconnected problems that are the result of 'weak capitalism'. This analysis does not go any further than Marx's own characterization of India as a feudal capitalism. Singh's analysis essentially boils down to the conspiracy theory that the feudal ruling classes deployed a variety of tools including religious mobilization in order to safe-guard their political power.

> Communalism emerged as a consequence of the emergence of modern politics which marked a sharp break with the politics of the medieval or ancient or pre-1857 period. Communalism, as also nationalism and socialism, could emerge as politics and as ideology only after a structural break had occurred in the nature of politics, that is, after politics based on the people, politics of popular sovereignty, politics of popular participation and mobilization, politics based on the creation and mobilization of public opinion had been introduced, even if the term people was defined narrowly (Chandra 1984: 8).

Chandra and other Marxist-Nationalist historians emphasise that the phenomenon of 'communalism' is a 'modern' one and could not have existed before colonialism. Clearly, since any form of 'popular' politics could not have existed before the British advent, Chandra is right in attributing what he calls 'communal politics' to colonial origins. "It was", Chandra says, "**a *modern ideology* that incorporated some aspects and elements of the *past ideologies and institutions and historical background* to form a new ideological and political discourse or mix**" (6).

However, what is not clear in this work is what a Marxist perspective is to add to his overtly nationalist stand. In his emphasis that 'communalism' was not "mono-causal" and requires a "hierarchy of causes" (viii) to be understood, Chandra seems to replicate the colonial tendency of 'over-explanation'. While he wishes to complicate the terms of understanding 'communal politics' as not simply rooted in religion he is unable to provide either evidence or explanation for why a congruence between religious groups and classes existed. He also admits that

the congruence between class and religion differed from region to region. Then what gave 'communalism' its cohesiveness? If it were class, then class developments on an all-India basis would be required to explain this congruence. In some senses then, the Marxism in Chandra's analysis does not go beyond labelling 'communalism' a 'false consciousness' or 'ideology' and ascribing an understanding of class conflict as a major factor in its growth.

Further, Chandra asserts that labels like 'Muslim communalism' and 'Hindu communalism' make no sense since both these terms refer essentially to the same attitude or political disposition and are inter-dependent. However, he goes on to say that Hindu communalism was weaker before independence because of a weaker sense of 'religiosity' amongst the Hindus as a result of the divisions that prevailed due to the caste system. If this is true, then why turn to class for any kind of explanation at all? Religion would clearly suffice. And therefore, colonial explanations of communalism, which Chandra vociferously rejects, would also suffice. This is reflected in the fact that Chandra's definition of 'communalism' basically echoes Smith's formulation of the problem[74].

> Simply put, communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have, as a result, common social, political and economic interests (Chandra 1984: 1).

Chandra's explanation for communalism basically is:

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[74] Pandey also points this out in his book, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1992).

> Communalism before 1947 was a product of the colonial society and…communalism today is the product of capitalism which is not able to develop the society fast enough to meet the needs of that society (Chandra 1984: 44).

He goes on to say,

> Communalism was not a partial or sectional view of the social reality; it was its wrong or unscientific view. Communalism was not narrow or false because it represented only one community but because it did not do either. The communalist not only failed to represent national interests, he did not represent even the interests of the 'community' it claimed to represent (Chandra 1984: 17).
>
> Nationalism represented the struggle for national liberation from the colonial state and for the formation of an independent state. It was historically valid at the moment as it provided a real solution to a real problem – national liberation as against colonial domination (Chandra 1984: 22).

Clearly there is a definite contrast between these two phenomena which Chandra is trying to draw out. Communalism as a false problem with false solutions and nationalism as a real problem with real solutions. However, Chandra never quite grapples with why communalism did not genuinely serve the interests of the community and whether nationalism did anything but serve the interests of another kind of community. He says communalism only catered to short term goals like jobs or reservations; however, in terms of cultural or human rights could make no significant contribution. Clearly this is dubious if one considers

that at least two states – Pakistan and Bangladesh – continue to thrive though established on what Chandra would be forced to classify as communal ideals.

Constructivist

The above positions would be considered ones that are most easily rejected today. Colonial and nationalist (and by extension the Marxist-nationalist position) explanations of 'communalism' seemingly do not enjoy much credit today. Most contemporary work on 'communalism' would be dubbed constructivist[75]. The fore-most in this section is Bernard Cohn. However, Cohn's brand of constructivism has seen several tributary developments[76]. While Cohn's basic argument was that the coloniser's structure of administration generated sociological categories that often became the source of conflict in India, his supporters and followers have found a variety of reasons besides colonial administration to prove that the coloniser succeeded in implementing not only sociological categories through administrative techniques but identities, consciousness and nationalisms also emerged through the prism of the colonial knowledge system. And that these have come to fruition in post-colonial India.

[75] Not all of those I consider as part of this section would voluntarily take on the label of constructivists. For instance Bernard Cohn's work precedes the popularization of the constructivist approach in the social sciences.

[76] Ronald Inden (1990) and Nicholas Dirks (1992) have been closely associated with Cohn's tradition of thought. However, while Cohn's thesis fundamentally relied on the establishment of administrative categories and their impact, Inden and Dirks seem to equate conceptual categories like 'caste' and 'nation' and their establishment in India, to Cohn's administrative categories.

Most of the theorists in this category believe, like Cohn, that something that the colonial state or colonial knowledge generated has come to fruition in contemporary India. However, there are a few like Jaffrelot (1999) who focus largely on what may loosely be termed '*hindutva*' or 'Right wing' politics in India, as a particular 'construction'[77] of identity or nationalism, but would not corroborate the role of colonialism in this 'construction'. The constructivist position requires greater analysis and will be taken up in more detail in the next chapter. Here I choose to examine only one, though perhaps the most important representative, of this category.

Gyanendra Pandey (1992) is one of the best representative scholars of this category. His approach to the question of communalism presents the first departure from the Marxist-Nationalist treatment within the discipline of History. Pandey treats 'communalism' as a product of nationalism. However, he seeks to distinguish his stand from those who have considered communalism as 'deviant' or 'under-developed' nationalism. According to Pandey:

> Everywhere in the world the formation of modern nationalism has been propelled by contradictory forces. Yet these contradictions seem to stand out far more in India than in parallel European cases (Italy or Germany, for example), a consequence that is attributable to the size and diversity of the country and the particular historical circumstances in, and against, which Indian nationalism arose. Colonial India saw the persistence of many pre-capitalist economic forms and the attendant social diversities. It

[77] The implication is that it is therefore illegitimate. For the implications of the charge of 'construction' see Ian Hacking (1999).

> contained a vast range of regional conditions, cultures and interests. And its people now experienced a peculiar combination of 'modern' (colonial) and 'medieval' (colonial as well as pre-colonial) modes of domination and exploitation. In this context a new cohesion developed around existing foci of loyalty such as caste, language and religious community, even as a new national consciousness arose. This is where the concept of communalism came into play (Pandey 1992: 3).

Taking up Dumont's position of colonialism as a deviant form of nationalism, Pandey criticizes this characterization.

> What the focus on communalism does, even in his [Dumont's] subtle analysis, is to typify the subcontinent as essentially different. What it tends to do much more obviously in other cases is to *reduce Indian history to a deviation from the model*. The specificities of the Indian experience have little chance of being explored thoroughly in such a strait-jacket….Communalism in India is another characteristic and paradoxical product of the age of Reason (and of Capital) which also gave us colonialism and nationalism. It derives its meaning precisely from the political discourse which arises in that particular age, in this particular country (Pandey 1992: 4-5)

Therefore, what is required is:

> …to explore the history of the 'problem' of communalism through an examination of the discourse that gave it meaning. It is … an attempt to examine what we accomplish when we apply the term 'communalism' to this history, what remains hidden behind the term and what if anything, it illuminates. **'Communalism'… is a form of colonialist knowledge**. The concept stands for the puerile and the primitive – all that colonialism, in its own reckoning, was not (Pandey 1992: 6 emphasis added).

Pandey proposes that communalism is a product of Indian nationalism in particular circumstances. Yet, he also goes on to say that communalism is a concept embedded in communal discourse. These two claims ought to be mutually incompatible. If communalism is to be treated as a concept that was used in colonial discourse in order to justify itself, how is it also to be treated as a political/sociological entity brought into being by nationalism in India? In one characterisation it is a flawed concept. In the other, it is a historico-political situation. Yet Pandey seems to stand by both claims simultaneously. Once more this demonstrates the same concept-object swapping discussed earlier.

His attempt to bridge these two claims is a little difficult to follow. While Cohn sought to trace the trajectory of the generation of a certain kind of colonial knowledge chronologically followed by its sociological consequences, Pandey offers no explanation for how discursive concepts are transformed into social phenomena. Pandey's argument very ably traces the colonial generation of a certain narrative of the 'communal riot' which posed the Hindus and Muslims as ancient enemies but does not show how this narrative generates violence. Instead he proposes that local histories by local communities would provide alternatives to colonial histories as well as 'Hindu' histories. At the same time, the narratives of the 'Hindu community' in India, he sees as a mobilization which transformed "the very sense of 'community' and redefine[d] it at every level" (158). He deploys Kaviraj's argument and characterizes local communities as

'fuzzy' while the Hindu community as a whole would be 'enumerated' (Kaviraj 1998). Since all levels of community categorization post-census would be 'enumerated', Pandey's distinction does not stand. The census *was* enumeration. Thus, Pandey and Kaviraj would be forced to take the position that only community categorizations that did not feature as census categories could serve as alternative models to 'communal mobilization'. Yet, Pandey would be hard-pressed to explain why local community histories that traced the community trajectory in terms that were most often self-glorificatory as well as antagonistic to other communities ought to be considered an alternative to the mobilization of the 'Hindu community'. Thus, here we reach the same kind of impasse we saw in our discussion of definitional confusions. **Two phenomena with similar characteristics are considered different purely on evaluative rather than definitional terms.**

The basic conundrum in the constructivist strand is that they attribute to colonial discourse the concepts under scrutiny but also posit a transformation of Indian society based on the acquisition of those concepts[78]. Although such conceptual learning may well have taken place, this would require historical proof and is not a matter of course. The re-alignment of Indian society along colonial administrative categories is one thing, and its transformation *into* colonial conceptual categories of analysis is quite another. This position of taking for granted the institution of colonial categories into Indian thought, society, culture

[78] 'Communalism' in this case, but see similar studies on 'caste' by Dirks (1992) and Susan Bayly (1999). For a critique of these see Balagangadhara (1990; 1998).

and politics resembles the same problem we encountered with the ‘evidence loop’ discussed above. I will take up this question further in the next chapter. Here it is enough to say that so far, we have examined three available theoretical positions on communalism. The first three seem to share one basic trait, over-explanation. Their fundamental explanation for ‘communalism’ is ‘religiosity’ and all others are allied or subordinate explanations. However, we have no concrete reason to view ‘religiosity’ as a problem in itself unless viewed from the perspective of the neutral citizen. But this still does not explain why religiosity would be primitive or regressive. This only proposes one self-definition over another. What gives one definition (the citizen) such positive evaluative force and another (communal self-definition) such negative evaluative force is not clear.

Anti-modernist

The last section is essentially devoted to the work of only one scholar who speaks not of ‘communalism’ so much as an analysis of ‘secularism’. It is perhaps ironic that one can see the problem in greater clarity in his work. In his ‘The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance’ (Nandy 1998), Nandy begins by explaining why one needs to examine the “category” of secularism. His proposition is that “post-colonial structures of knowledge in the third world” are often characterised by a “peculiar form of imperialism of categories” which hegemonize a “conceptual domain” so effectively that the original domain vanishes from our awareness and is replaced by a concept that

is produced and honed in the West (Nandy 1998: 321). His project then is to recover the domain of ‘religious tolerance’ which is the question relevant to South Asia, from the hegemonic discourse of ‘secularism’.

He goes on to suggest that traditional India had answers to questions of religious tolerance which are not accessible to modernity and the monsters (to put it crudely) that modernity brings with it, namely secularism. Nandy gets so caught up in questions of tradition/modernity and faith/ideology, that he does not answer the one question that is implicit in his formulation of the problem. He quite acutely points out how colonialism has subjected certain knowledge domains to an imperialism of categories such that all traces of the original problem disappear. Given this proposition, his investigation of the concept of secularism is well founded. However, he does not answer why he sets out to rescue ‘religious tolerance’ from the domain of secularism. Was secularism an answer to religious intolerance in India? And what was communalism in the Indian context? Was it a religious problem?

Nandy traces a trajectory of the concept of ‘secularism’ in Indian politics but ignores the fact that the word gained legitimacy in colonial India. Secularism, I want to propose, was not an answer to inter-religious violence. It was instead used as an answer to the politics of representation. The Congress posited itself as the secular and therefore the legitimate representative of all ‘Indians’ whereas the other parties represented only particular communities/religious allegiances.

Thus Nandy's problem itself seems a little skewed. He presumes that there was peace within traditional society and that this peace was connected to religious tolerance and it is this traditional religious tolerance that he wants to recover. Instead one could ask whether tolerance had anything to do with religion at all. Similarly, did violence have anything to do with religion? Was partition the result of Hindu-Muslim religious violence or unassimilable demands/formulations of political representation?

An examination of Nandy's formulation of 'secular riots' helps isolate the strengths as well as the weaknesses of his argument.

> While religious violence was certainly not unknown in pre-modern or non-modern India, the kind of 'rational', 'managerial' intercommunal violence we often witness nowadays can only be a by product of secularisation and modernisation. Only a secular, scientific concept of another human aggregate or individual – only total objectification – can sanction the cold-bloodedness and organisation which have come to characterise many of the riots in recent times (Nandy 1985: 22).

Further,

> In matters of riot, rationality is now used to generate violence – to rob, to burn, to kill – while the passions are used to sustain the idea of a moral world where the robbery, the arson and the murder are not arbitrary acts of God but are deserved punishments for the acts of some members of the victims' community. **In this sense, we are now witnesses to primarily secular riots, justified later on in non-secular terms for the benefit of the victims and the instruments of violence** (Nandy 1985: 23 emphasis added).

Nandy is right that the violence is not 'religious violence' but that religion is invoked in order to justify/explain it afterwards. I am not sure why he says then that 'religious violence' was not unknown in pre-modern or non-modern India. It may serve to highlight that India has not been a stranger to conflict, but that there is a new element that needs to be accounted for when one looks at questions of conflict in the recent past. In Nandy's account that new element is modernity. With modernity also comes secularism and the state. I think the latter two, secularism and the state, provide real clues to the problem without recourse to questions of modernity. In fact, Nandy's opposition between, on the one hand, religion-tradition-tolerance and on the other, rationality-modernity-intolerance seems rather arbitrary.

The concept of 'secular riots' could be re-routed from Nandy's thesis of rational violence (as against religious violence) to processes of the nation-state. That is, it would be possible to say that it was not 'communalism' that was the root of heightened conflict but secularism, since it was the latter that served to force under the carpet genuine problems of diversity and representation in the formation of the nation-state. However this hypothesis could provide an explanation of conflict around the forging of nation-state but we would still need to look at conflict thereafter to assess the role of the discourse of secularism and processes of the state.

Recurring peculiarities

After we examined the definitions of ‘communalism’ we also examined a few peculiarities that seemed to go into the study of ‘communalism’. Our examination of the theories of ‘communalism’ ought to clarify some of those peculiarities. We may find some answers. For instance, perhaps the reason that definitions of ‘communalism’ always become enmeshed in evaluative frames is because of the greater preponderance of nationalist perspectives on the study of ‘communalism’. However, this does not explain why ‘communalism’ was negatively evaluated even in the colonial perspective, since Indian nationalism also was considered with great scepticism in this discourse. Besides, in later perspectives that do not consider nationalism as a necessarily positive phenomenon such as among the constructivists, we still find the same evaluative frames. In fact, in this case it is even more curious since two phenomena that share the same characteristics are evaluated differently,[79] but the negative evaluative force the term ‘communalism’ wields is never given up.

There are other peculiarities as well. For instance, the ‘concept-object’ swapping that constantly seems to take place or the ‘evidence loop’ discussed above. The persistence of similar peculiarities through all the various positions on ‘communalism’ suggests that these theories seem to simply rearrange a set of ideas in relation to ‘communalism’ and perhaps place emphasis on different

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[79] As demonstrated in Pandey’s (1992) characterization of ‘local’ histories and ‘communal’ history.

factors but do not attempt fresh explanations. The ‘new’ theories either use or reject elements from older ones but do not quite investigate the roots of the original theory itself. Thus, I would propose, colonial discourse seems to be re-hashed in a variety of ways even within the theories that are explicitly anti-colonial.

In an essential sense, there seems to be an inversion of the colonial problem in these positions. The colonialists reached the conclusion that ‘communalism’ was a characteristic feature of Indian society based on a series of presuppositions – religiosity, primitivism and age-old antagonism. To the post-colonial, the presupposition is ‘communalism’ and they try to explain other phenomena through it.[80] It seems likely that the other peculiarities of ‘communalism’ described above, are a result of treating ‘communalism’ as a presupposition. In the next chapter I hope to provide a means of explaining these peculiarities a little further and suggesting a means of breaking out of this conceptual deadlock.

[80] For instance, ‘identity’ is always sought to be explained through ‘communalism’. I take up the question of ‘identity’ in the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

ESSENTIALISM TO HISTORICISM: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HAVE A THEORY OF ‘COMMUNALISM’?

In the previous chapter I have outlined certain peculiarities of ‘communalism’. First of all, ‘communalism’ has been situated in deeper and deeper realms such that it seems almost impossible to look at ‘communalism’ as an object of explanation. This cavernous embedding in human society or psyche makes ‘communalism’ such a ‘complex’ idea or phenomenon that it seems to defy explanation. As already stated in the previous chapter, more and more accounts of ‘communalism’ simply side-step definition or explanation and explore instead facets or consequences of this almost pre-ordained category. Thus, a variety of modern day phenomena become the *result* of ‘communalism’ while the concept itself remains obscure. However, assigning an idea complexity should not make for the perpetuation of obscurity. In order to arrive at some conceptual clarity, I reviewed definitions and classified theories of ‘communalism’ available to us so far in the earlier chapter. An examination of these also yields some peculiar results. When we examine available definitions of ‘communalism’ we find that phenomena which share the same fundamental description as ‘communalism’ are evaluated very differently. For instance, the idea of ‘caste-politics’ shares every definitional feature of ‘communalism’ but is considered healthy while the latter is condemned. Another example was that of ‘community histories’ and ‘communal history’ which share similar features but again the former are

considered positive while the latter negative[81] (Pandey 1992). By extension one may predict that even when definitional frames of 'communalism' shift, the evaluative frames will remain constant. This evaluation of 'communalism' as negative and leading to violence creates a consensus in use and understanding of the term that the definition does not seem to provide. This suggests that definitions of 'communalism' require primarily the evaluative frame while the explanatory frameworks become secondary.

The theories of 'communalism' also show certain peculiar features. In chapter one I outlined two recurring features, 'over-explanation'[82] and 'concept-object swapping'[83]. The theories also suffer from internal contradictions. I suggest that the problems we encounter with the theories of 'communalism' have something to do with the nature of 'communalism' and what it would mean to have a theory of 'communalism'. Thus, this chapter fundamentally considers two questions. **Why is it that 'communalism' seems to be caught only in evaluative frames? And what does it mean to have a theory of 'communalism'?** I begin with an examination of the second question since it has bearing on the first. This

[81] This evaluation, in Pandey's work is independent of the 'truth' or otherwise of the histories themselves. Pandey associates community histories with the 'local' and by an extension of the now current logic of anti-globalisation considers this as positive in itself.

[82] I explain this feature of accounts of 'communalism' in relation to the discussion on W.C.Smith (1985) in chapter 1. This feature basically refers to the tendency to relate 'communalism' to various distinct causal factors. While there is no attempt to draw any co-relation between the causal factors, we find that any one causal factor also suffices as an explanation for 'communalism'. Thus distinct events/ideas (in Smith's case 'religiosity', 'communal' competition for government jobs, stunted capitalism and nationalism) become connected to the presence of 'communalism' in Indian society without any demonstration of connection between the events/ideas themselves while each one in itself is a sufficient condition for 'communalism' (and by extension none are necessary conditions, except perhaps 'religiosity').

[83] They refer to 'communalism' interchangeably and without distinction as both concept and as diverse object-level phenomena such as riots or political mobilizations. See Hacking (1999) for the distinction between object and concept.

question explores three issues: one, does ‘communalism’ refer to one set of phenomena which may be fruitfully classified together? Two, do the problems in classification arise because ‘communalism’ has been shifting meaning or is a problematic *term*? And finally, does the shift from ‘essentialism’ to ‘historicism’, which marks all contemporary scholarship on ‘communalism’, constitute a significant epistemological shift in the study of ‘communalism’. I arrive from this discussion to a tentative proposal for what a theory of ‘communalism’ would involve and attempt to demonstrate what problems arise in the writing of history without such a theory.

Theories of ‘communalism’ have largely involved causal explanations. Thus, ‘communalism’ is caused by the ‘divide and rule’ policy of the British according to the nationalist theory or by the ‘religiosity’ of the Indian as per colonial theory or by class struggle which is defined along religious communities as per Marxist theory or by forces of modernisation and urbanisation as per the anti-modernist theory[84]. Causal theories must address a particular phenomenon that they wish to explain. One cannot have a causal theory of a concept for instance. The concept-object swapping pointed out in the first chapter becomes important here. Quite often ‘communalism’ is both concept and object. However, causal theories do not address a concept. A concept requires an evaluation of the theoretical framework within which it operates. I examine both of these aspects separately, first ‘communalism’ as phenomenon and then as concept.

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[84] The constructivists do not give straight forward causal explanations and I will consider them in more detail later.

Since several causal theories predominate in the study of ‘communalism’ let us examine whether it is a historical *phenomenon*. While we try to answer this question through object level evidence of violence we see that we get caught in the concept-object swapping that creates obscurity. Let us examine the question then through two sub-questions. **Does ‘communalism’ refer to one unified phenomenon which has common elements even if expressed through distinct events in history? And two, does an explanation of one event serve to enlighten us on the other events that are classified under this phenomenon?** If the answer to both of these questions is positive then ‘communalism’ would be a phenomenon and we need only think of which causal theory accounts for it most efficiently. In undertaking to answer the above questions a historical survey would be almost impossible because of the variety of events and ideas that are encompassed in ‘communalism’. Thus, I take a route that would allow for a shortcut through history. Since there is a consensus, not on definition, but on the evaluation of ‘communalism’ as a problem, I examine ‘communalism’ through the major answers or ‘cures’ posed for this problem. This allows us to address the same question but through a more practical approach.

The ‘communal’ condition

‘Communalism’ has very often been likened to an ailment or a particular disease within Indian society. This ‘condition’ has had several diverse ‘cures’ prescribed

over the years. However, the ‘condition’ itself is supposed to be the same. It has never changed substantially. Thus, ‘communalism’ is considered one root problem or one identifiable ailment, which throws up a variety of symptoms depending on the social and political moment. It is assumed that our maturation and a greater understanding of the condition have led to changes in prescriptions against it. Older prescriptions were discarded as failed experiments in curing the condition and we went on to test the newer ones within the ‘laboratories of academia’ as it were. However, the case is slightly different. Certain cures have gained greater favour at certain points in time. However, none of these cures disappear as failed or inappropriate solutions but rather remain embedded within the discourse of ‘communalism’ in extremely intriguing ways.

These ‘cures’ should serve as clues to understanding what it is that the ‘condition’ itself is. Here I will examine only three of the cures for ‘communalism’ that have been proposed at different times: nationalism, secularism and pluralism. The objective for this examination is to understand more about this condition called ‘communalism’ and to see if the condition remains the same, or in other words, whether it is one phenomenon across time that we are attempting to understand.

Nationalism

Though it is rare for us to think of nationalism as a cure for communalism today, the idea did serve as a definite antonym and still survives in common parlance[85] though perhaps less so in academic discourse[86], as a 'cure' for 'communalism'. For instance, in several historical accounts, there is a common distinction drawn between the "nationalist Muslim" and the "communal Muslim" in the late nineteenth century[87]. This is used to refer to the differences between the Muslims who joined the Indian National Congress and those who staunchly advised against it. The two positions are embodied in the figures of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and the Congressman Badruddin Tayabji[88]. It may be debated that nobody called Sir Syed 'communal' at that time. This is because the term did not gain popularity until the 1920's. However, there is no dearth of scholarship which either calls Sir Syed's stand against the Congress 'communal' or puzzles over his 'conversion' from being an advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity to his distrust of the Hindus or the Congress as a 'Hindu organization'[89]. However, the essence of Sir Syed's position is not simply a distrust of a Hindu Congress but an opposition to *politics* itself. Sir Syed made this clear in his famous speech at Lucknow in 1887.

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[85] In remarks such as the once very popular "If only the Muslims were more nationalist and supported the Indian cricket team rather than the Pakistani cricket team, there would be no communal antagonism".

[86] Bipan Chandra, in his work on communalism has admitted to considering as its foundation the idea that both nationalism and secularism are desirable goals to work towards. As the excerpt from his 'Preface' to *Communalism in Modern India* (1984) quoted in chapter 1 indicate.

[87] Barbara Metcalf (1985) traces the term 'nationalist Muslim' to the 1920's and also clarifies that the term is a matter of political allegiance to the Congress more than any other attribute.

[88] It would be worthwhile re-assessing and understanding the ideas and work of Sir Syed once we are able to put into place the problems that the category 'communalism' has introduced into our historical accounts. Chapter 5 makes a small beginning towards understanding the debate between Sir Syed and Tayabji.

[89] Most 'nationalist' or at least Congress-sympathetic historians make such an assessment. See for instance, B.R. Nanda's (1989) work on Indian nationalism and the Muslim participation in the movement.

> I am not given to speaking on politics, and I do not recollect having ever previously given a political lecture. My attention has always been directed towards the education of my brother Mohamedans, for from education I anticipate much benefit for my people, for Hindustan, and for the Government….The object, gentlemen, of this lecture is to explain the attitude which the Mahomedan community ought to adopt with regard to the political movements of the time. (Khan 1982: 26)

Sir Syed's opposition against the Congress was based on the concern that the native population as a whole (with the exception of the first colony of the British, Bengal), was insufficiently mature or educationally qualified in order to seek political involvement in colonial government. Thus, if native involvement in politics would be encouraged, the Muslims (as well as several other communities) would find their chances thwarted in competition against the English-educated Bengali. He advised the Muslims to remain under the tutelage of the British and pursue education (such that they would finally be able to compete with the Bengali when the time came) rather than join in the demands for any significant participation in governance[90]. Thus, 'communalism', as applied to this position, describes a state of 'political diminution' or immaturity. It is a political conservatism based on the idea that the uneven educational and social development that characterized the different communities in India[91] would result

[90] Sir Syed would support the Muslim bid for government jobs but that was completely different from the claim to participate in *politics*.

[91] It is important to note that even Sir Syed did not consider merely the Muslims as politically backward. In fact, his claim was that no community in India would stand a fair chance in political participation against the Bengalis.

in great political divide, if representational modes of government were to be introduced.

In Sir Syed's case, when nationalism is posed as a 'cure' for his 'communal' stand, nationalism refers to the sentiment in favour of political participation. Since nationalism was not equated with anti-colonialism yet, demands for political participation were not a challenge to colonial dominion but were situated rather safely within it. Thus Sir Syed's 'communalism' cannot be equated with the Muslim League being dubbed a 'communal' party, for instance. While the Muslim League being referred to as 'communal' also refers to a form of political diminution which is to be cured by nationalism, Sir Syed's mode of political diminution is quite distinct. Here the political diminution is not to do with what is judged too narrow a political mobilisation (as is the case with the Muslim League), but is in fact against political mobilisation and participation itself[92].

Secularism

Secularism has been the dominant cure proposed for 'communalism' from time to time. Let us examine this cure at two distinct points of time, one in the 1930's and one in the 1990's. Secularism in the West was a characteristic of the State. A secular state is one that distinguishes its powers from those of the Church. It

[92] Thus, this position is not to be confused with those that describe 'communalism' as an under-developed politics and nationalism as its true or well-developed form which was first proposed by Smith (1985) then popularised by Dumont (1970) and is also echoed by contemporary scholars like Freitag (1990).

leaves the Church only the domain of religious influence and takes on for itself the domain of regulation of land, private property and politics. Almost all scholars of secularism in India have asserted that in India 'secularism' is to be defined differently. Instead of the separation of Church and State, it is to refer to the equal treatment of all religions by the State. We seem to have used secularism in the way that the West used toleration. In the west, it was toleration that secured the rights of different religious groups within a State, not secularism. Secularism secured the rights of the State against the Church. However, as mentioned in the first chapter, secularism was first conceived in India not as a description of the State but as a description of a political party, the Indian National Congress.

The Muslim League (and other parties which sought to represent particular community interests) would be considered a 'communal' party. The Congress distinguished itself from these parties generally by calling itself a 'national' party as against these 'communal' parties. At the second Round Table Conference for instance, Gandhi defined the Indian National Congress as "It is what it means – national. It represents no particular community, no particular class, no particular interest. It claims to represent all Indian interests and all classes" (in Mukherjee ed. 2007: 110).

But the problem the Congress was increasingly faced with was to distinguish itself from parties like the Muslim League which were also 'national'. National by now had come to mean two things, all-India and anti-colonial. However, both of

these descriptions it shared in common with the League and yet, the Congress bid to represent the various communities in India hinged on its ability to establish and legitimate a difference,[93] otherwise it would be a national but 'Hindu' party[94]. This difference was conveyed by way of its 'secularism'[95]. Here secular meant a party that could represent all the various interests within the State and was not bound by notions of self-representation of communities[96]. By 1929, the Round Table Conferences, which were to come up with a constitutional model for India, had taken off. At this point there were no 'anti-nationalist' or 'insufficiently nationalist' parties in the sense of the word I have just discussed above in the nationalism section, since all the representatives were quite clearly in favour of political participation through representation. The central question here was the nature of 'representation'. The Congress deployed secularism in order to claim its legitimacy to represent 'all Indians' rather than any particular community. 'Secularism' was the answer to the well-entrenched system of separate electorates. The Congress was thus claiming it could represent any interest in India since it was 'religiously neutral', while the other parties represented only sectional/communal interests. There was never any question that the Congress would demand other parties also take the route of 'secularism'. In other words, the Congress did not make the claim (as we often hear made today towards

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[93] Achin Vanaik also recognises this as the fourth of several meanings of the term 'secularisation' "In a context where the values associated with liberal democracy and nationalism were imported, secularism was perceived as the unifying principle mediating between and collating different religious communities in order to forge a common struggle for national liberation." (Vanaik 1997: 67)

[94] As was constantly used as an allegation by Jinnah against the Congress in the 1940s.

[95] It seems like the term itself was not used until after independence, but the Congress policy of 'separation of politics and religion' formulated by Nehru in 1928 conveyed the same principle.

[96] I investigate this history in some detail in chapter 5 and in the conclusion.

parties such as the BJP), that the Muslim League was ‘communal’ and must reform itself and become ‘secular’ in order to be a ‘good’ political organization. This would be inconceivably absurd. The Muslim League was by its very nature ‘communal’ and would always remain so. The Congress could form coalitions with this ‘communal’ party without any moral implications, as it did attempt for instance in 1920.

However, by the time the BJP is dubbed a ‘communal’ party in the 1990’s and the Congress a secular party which is the answer to this problem, the term is much more a pejorative description than it used to be. Here ‘communal’ refers not simply to the representation of particular community interests. It seems to now refer to the nature of the State or particular State policy prescribed by a political party. A ‘communal’ party will build a ‘communal’ State, which seems to refer to the greater persecution of minorities. Thus, ‘secular’ came to refer from nature of political party to State policy vis-à-vis its minorities and is often also used to describe individuals. Individuals can purportedly be taught to be ‘secular’ and thus ‘saved’ from being ‘communal’. Here ‘communal’ is a prejudice against a particular community. Thus, from political party to State to individual, ‘communalism’ and ‘secularism’ seem to refer to several problems and several solutions.

Pluralism

It is perhaps most difficult to understand what it is that pluralism is to cure. It seems best characterized as a response to the perceived failure of secularism as a cure of 'religious conflict' in India (Kothari 1992). However, this religious conflict is not simply the continuation of 'religious riots' as we have seen off and on in post-independent India. There is apparently a difference in that the object of criticism is different. Pluralism as a term that becomes popular only in the 1990's is used to criticise the 'movement' or mobilization often characterized as '*hindutva*'[97]. Pluralism gains strength in answer to this movement, which sought purportedly to semitise[98] Hinduism or to replace the multiple and mixed strands of practices and faiths available in India with one hegemonic Hinduism. Kothari draws the distinction between 'communal' politics that has existed before and this hegemonisation of Hinduism and clearly recognises the latter as much more potentially destructive.

> Also, there is a world of difference between playing the 'communal card' within the system (using Punjab-and the Sikhs-as a foil) and letting loose religious frenzy against the Muslims (against whom an undercurrent of suspicion and animosity had in any case existed among large segments of Indians) and in the process shifting the very basis of politics. From pluralism to hegemony, from multi- ethnicity to mono-theism, from an affirmation of diversity to an assertion of uniformity and the centrality of one faith and one

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[97] This also most probably contains within it several strands that would require separation, however it is not possible to investigate this problem here.
[98] Kothari uses this description though it comes in for criticism by some others who consider it a slur on Semitic religions.

> belief system presented in the framework of a dominant 'religion'. More like what happened in semitised societies of the west before the Reformation and in Islamic theocracies (Kothari 1992: 2696)

Pluralism, unlike secularism, is not about the representation of interests[99]. Rather, it is about the essential nature of religion as a traditional means of harmonizing relations between communities.

> The great thing about the basic 'Hindu' heritage is not only that it is itself pluralistic but that it imparts this plurality to other ('non- Hindu') communities too. What the VHP and latter-day BJP presents to Indians is so un-Indian, indeed so un-Hindu (Kothari 1992: 2696).

Thus pluralism is a feature of ‘Hinduism’ or Indian religions which is eroded by *hindutva*. The voice most clearly associated with this perspective, Ashis Nandy, relies on a division between religion as faith and religion as ideology, proposing the former as a solution that traditional Indian society always had against conflict and the latter as a modern day phenomenon which is responsible for the erosion of this value (Nandy 1985). The recovery of the traditional mixed and eclectic religious traditions, he asserts, will automatically disarm the forces of ‘communalism’. Thus, in this case pluralism as a cure for ‘communalism’ becomes a matter of either recovering or protecting practices that leant Indian culture its inherent toleration.

[99] There is also the use of pluralism in order to indicate the attitude of the State to its minorities. In this use it is identical to the use of ‘secularism’ as a safe-guard for minorities. See Iyer (2002) for pluralism as the protection of minority rights in India.

Towards a diagnosis

When we compile the various problems we have so far elucidated which share the description of ‘communalism’ we must return to our original questions. Does ‘communalism’ refer to one unified phenomenon which has common elements even if expressed through distinct events in history? And two, does an explanation of one event serve to enlighten us on the other events that are classified under this phenomenon? In order to answer these questions let us review what characterisations of ‘communalism’ we have so far. ‘Communalism’ refers to: an unwillingness to participate in representational politics and thus remain in a state of political diminution; an assertion that religious communities form the primary interest groups of the state and therefore must have exclusive self-representation; a state policy that is oppressive towards minorities; the prejudice of an individual against other groups of people and a hegemonisation or semitisation of the essentially syncretic character of Indian religions in order to replace it with ‘fundamentalist’ and ‘exclusivist’ strands. Thus, one is hard-pressed to understand these phenomena as one common phenomenon. However, let us examine the second question. Does an answer to one problem serve to enlighten us on the others?

It does not seem like the Congress solution to representational politics in India has anything to say to the essentially syncretic character of Indian religions. If these seem the most dissimilar of the problems addressed by ‘communalism’ let

us examine two that seem linked. The Congress problem with ‘communal’ parties followed only by about three decades the opposition they faced from Sir Syed. However, even these two phenomena were not the same or similar. While the latter was a concern that only ‘communal representation’ was considered legitimate, the former was a concern that the growth of participatory politics itself was curtailed by the support figures like Sir Syed provided to the colonial regime. Even the two phenomena that seem closest to each other, the use of secularism as a solution to the Congress problem of representation in the 1930s and the problem of the BJP in the 1990s seem to have little to learn from one another. It is ironic that the BJP itself has always actively sought the label of a secular party and condemned the Congress as ‘pseudo-secular’. The Congress bid to secularism in the 1930’s was a bid for a *capacity* to represent minorities. This cannot be the BJP problem since they do not face odds like separate electorates and do not seem to care to represent minorities in the first place[100].

The BJP bid for secularism today is a bid for a state that is ‘genuinely majoritarian’. We may reconstruct their position thus: if a state is genuinely secular, that is, unaffected by religious denominations within the state, then it should reflect the majority voice, whatever that may be. The BJP proposes that India’s majority is a religious majority which suffers from under-representation not

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[100] Stray attempts at appeasement aside, the BJP political identity is based on the idea that the minorities have had benefits that the majority has lacked. Thus, their general policy is geared towards the ‘true’ representation of majority concerns.

in terms of numbers but in terms of its interests[101]. The Congress bid for secularism today is also no longer the *capacity* to represent minorities but the recognition of religious minorities as special participants in political process who require special rules in order to safe-guard their participation. The BJP calls this vote-bank politics. The Congress calls it secularism. Thus the BJP promotion of majorities is 'communalism' while the Congress promotion of minorities is 'communalism'. This discussion should not be seen as the endorsement of either one of these points of view. There is little, in fact, to commend either of these in and of itself. However, what the above conundrum does show is that opposite strategies have been evolved to treat the same problem - a just representational system that is suitable for a country like India. This is a most peculiar situation when *opposite* representational strategies still deploy the same terminology of 'communalism' and 'secularism' in order to describe their positions[102].

Let us return to our question. Does one 'cure' have bearing on any of the other problems referred to as 'communalism'? The last example is particularly peculiar because we see two opposite 'cures' for the same 'problem' which are in turn dubbed 'communalism' and 'secularism' depending on which political perspective one chooses. But other than that, the rest of the problems are not different because of the political perspective one chooses. Thus, it seems fairly clear that varied multiplicities of problems are all dubbed 'communalism', but the search

[101] There are certainly some intriguing questions raised by such a position especially in light of the discussion on 'interest groups' taken up in chapter 5. The colonial state attempted to satisfy 'interests' only through proportionate numerical representation. What is the difference in the notion of 'interest' the BJP uses such that numerical representation does not satisfy it? This question merits investigation elsewhere.
[102] See Gehlot (ed. 1993) for the so-called 'communal' or 'right-wing' deployment of 'secularism'.

always seems to be for one answer or solution. However, if one ‘cure’ has absolutely no bearing on another problem of the same category, what ‘condition’ are we trying to treat?

Furthermore, ‘communalism’ is perhaps a unique condition that has taken as its causes the very cures that have been proposed. At various points in time all of the cures I have discussed here have been considered the prime motivations behind ‘communalism’. That is, the religious traditions of India, its essentially religious nature and the nature of that religion being based “more in superstition” rather than the ideals of “higher” (read Semitic) religions, has been held responsible for the condition (Smith 1985). This however, has become the cure within pluralist perspectives. ‘Hindu nationalism’, as the early expressions of nationalism in the 19th century are often dubbed today, have been held responsible for breeding exclusivist identities, which are seen as the source of current day conflicts[103]. And of course, secularism has been the source of the “secular riots” of the late twentieth century (Nandy 1985). Thus we are faced with a peculiar situation where it seems as if the condition absorbs its cures and somehow gains further strength from them[104].

Thus, several different phenomena and several different cures come to be clubbed together under this category. How does one understand this as a single

[103] Sudhir Chandra’s *The Oppressive Present* (1992), Sudipta Kaviraj’s *The Unhappy Consciousness* (1998), Tanika Sarkar’s ‘Imagining a Hindu Nation’ (1994) are dominant examples but a plethora of other such literature is available.

[104] This is one more peculiarity to add to the others highlighted in chapter one -- the cause-effect or concept-object swapping that is typical of ‘communalism’.

phenomenon? I may be accused of being unnecessarily dramatic in characterizing these phenomena in terms that make them seem completely unrelated. It may be said that while these characterizations may be technically correct, they deliberately miss out on an essential characteristic that serves to unify these phenomena. The only possible essential characteristic that unifies these phenomena is the view that each of these is really based on suspicion and antagonism between two religious groups[105] which has found expression in different ways over the ages. However, this is the one view which all Indian scholarship on 'communalism' has fought tooth and nail to refute. For this is the classic colonial vision of Indian society which requires only one cure – that it be purged of religion altogether. This colonial view has been rejected as 'essentialist' and self-serving. However, we are caught in a bind here. Either the colonialist was always right or all subsequent Indian scholarship on 'communalism' has been significantly wrong somewhere. If 'communalism' is not one phenomenon but several, then we should have several causal theories that tackle individually these different phenomena. But what is 'communalism' then?

If 'communalism' is not one unified phenomenon then we must examine the concept more carefully. What makes this concept seem to refer to object-level phenomena of such diverse character? A theory of 'communalism' must explain these peculiar features we have observed. Thus, it would involve not a particular

[105] This characterization, however, does not directly explain questions within the third class of phenomena to be 'cured' by pluralism. The problem with *hindutva* for instance was not simply that it was anti-Muslim but also that it sought to do something to 'Hinduism' which is perceived as dangerous.

causal theory of one or two phenomena but a theory of the *concept* which would depend on excavating the theoretical framework which gives this concept its meaning and force. However, before we can examine whether we have such a theory, we must eliminate one possible explanation for the diversity of phenomena encompassed by 'communalism' and a further claim that the problem of 'communalism' may be simply terminological rather than conceptual.

Meaning and reference

It may well be argued that my demonstration of the different phenomena associated with 'communalism' and its cures discussed above simply indicates that the term has been shifting meaning. After all, meanings are fluid and change over time. Therefore, it is neither novel nor cause for alarm for a term to refer to many different phenomena over time. However, **the reason that one cannot assert it has changed meaning is because it *continues* purportedly to describe all of these different phenomena *at the same time***. As long as meanings change and their older divergent referents either die or gain other corresponding terms there is no problem. However, when a term changes and yet refers to all the older divergent referents as well, then we cannot make a case for change of meaning.

There are two things to glean from the above discussion. One, that the phenomena described above are sufficiently diverse to be rendered absurd if

referred to as the same phenomenon. And two, that the term itself is rather peculiar since it seems to change, but it does not discard any of its earlier referents thus expanding illimitably. As a consequence, ‘communalism’ does not change meaning but does demonstrate ingenious malleability of reference. Does this change in reference in itself constitute a change in meaning?

In order to answer the above question let us first consider what it is about ‘communalism’ that does not change. We know that it always retains a negative evaluative force. Since we keep coming up against one particular feature of ‘communalism’, that it is not simply a neutral description but has *evaluative* force and its negative evaluative force is in fact more stable than its referents, let us then look at ‘communalism’ as an “appraisive term”[106]. The question of whether appraisive terms change meaning by an expansion of reference is well-answered by Quentin Skinner’s critique of Raymond Williams. Skinner distinguishes between ‘words’ and ‘concepts’ and demonstrates that the class of words of which Williams attempts to trace the semantic evolution are not words but concepts (Skinner 2002: 159). Therefore, the change of meaning would require not simply a change in use but in the distinctions that the word allows us to make and sometimes perhaps even its evaluative force.

Skinner (2002) isolates three aspects of appraisive terms that would be considered to constitute their meaning. The first is the “nature and range of the

[106] Skinner uses Raymond Williams’ own definition of ‘cultural keywords’ as a class of terms that are “strong” and “persuasive” and “involve ideas and values” (2002: 161).

criteria in virtue of which the word or expression is standardly applied….[including] criteria that serve to mark the word off from similar and contrasting adjectives" (161). The second is its "range of reference". That is, a "sense of the nature of the circumstances in which the word can properly be used to designate particular actions or states of affairs. The concept of reference has often been taken to be an aspect or feature of the meaning of a word. But it is perhaps more helpful to treat the understanding of the reference of a word as a consequence of understanding the criteria for applying it correctly. To grasp these criteria is to understand the sense of a word, its role in the language, and thus, its correct use"(161). Third, the "range of attitudes the term can standardly be used to express" (162).

The first refers loosely to the definition of the word, the second to the appropriate circumstances of its use and the third to whether it is evaluated as a positive or negative attribute. Disagreements about any one of the three levels at which the meaning of the word operates could occur and these would have implications for our understanding of the social world. Thus, studying the change in definition or application of appraisive terms may give us "insights into changing social beliefs and theories; into changing social perceptions and awareness; and into changing social values and attitudes" (171-172). Considering that it is the second level, the agreed range of use that changes in the case of 'communalism' we should be able to generate some understanding about "changing social awareness and perceptions" in relation to 'communalism'. While this is true this is still not a

change in meaning. This is also substantiated by the fact that without the core sense of the ‘condition’ itself, (which, as I pointed out above can only be distilled into the problem of religiosity or Hindu-Muslim antagonism), there is no sense to be made of the various references or ‘symptoms’. Thus, even if referents shift, the core definition is stable. Further, the third criterion, which is the range of attitudes the word can express remains constant, since it always expresses a negative attribute. This again emphasizes the importance of the evaluative frame in order to understand ‘communalism’. Thus, ‘communalism’ is a concept that seems most closely linked to its evaluative framework, has an underlying definitional stability which most scholarship has sought to deny and has a wide range of reference which renders obscure many of the objects it is used to characterise.

A related concern: is ‘communalism’ a problematic term or concept?

We may well say now that the term ‘communalism’ is problematic. It is non-specific and misleading. However, though this is true, the problem of ‘communalism’ is not a terminological one. This is clear when one examines an attempt to break away from the term while trying to hold on to the concept. Pandey’s bid to re-name ‘communalism’ as ‘sectarianism’ is one such attempt.

Pandey begins his investigation with the intention to “explore the history of the ‘problem’ of communalism through an examination of the discourse that gave it

meaning” and adds that “’Communalism’… is a form of colonialist knowledge. The concept stands for the puerile and the primitive – all that colonialism, in its own reckoning, was not.” (1992: 6) He points out that there is no parallel term in pre-capitalist Europe where “religiosity was no narrower and strife between members of different religious persuasions not rare” (7).

Thus, unlike earlier positions which disagreed only with the causes of the problem, Pandey in effect very clearly states that 'communalism' was not an objective description of a state of affairs the British saw in India but rather that the concept is part of colonial self-conceptions. Thus, Pandey should be able to provide us with a theory of ‘communalism’ that “illuminates” the “discourse that gave it meaning” (6). He seems to set out to explain why colonial discourse creates a category like ‘communalism’, how it functions and why colonial history of India takes religious bigotry as its defining feature. However, one finds that though Pandey begins with a different conceptualization of the problem of ‘communalism’; that is, ‘communalism’ not as an event or phenomenon but as a colonialist form of knowledge and understanding of Indian society; he does not provide us with a theory of the discourse that gave ‘communalism’ meaning. In stead, he arrives at the same task – its transformation into a phenomenon. While he is conscious of the baggage that the term ‘communalism’ carries, he wishes to use it none-the-less in order to critique a particular phenomenon, what he calls recent exclusivist trends in Indian politics.

> Two words of explanation are perhaps necessary at the beginning of this book. One about why I continue to use the term ‘communalism’, with or without inverted commas, in spite of my argument that it is loaded and obfuscating. The answer is that the needs of communication, and of a convenient shorthand, have dictated this. The term has passed into the political and historiographical vocabulary in India: and while we can, and in my opinion must, question its use, finding other ways of talking about the experiences and ideas sometimes described as ‘communalism’ is not very easy. I have spoken in this book of ‘sectarian politics’ and ‘sectarian strife’, but it would have seemed precious to use ‘sectarianism’ for ‘communalism’ as a description of those sectarian and exclusivist trends that have been so evident, and dangerous, a feature of recent Indian history. What I would emphasise, however, is that the use of the term ‘communalism’ remains a heuristic device; that both the term and the politics and attitudes that it seeks to encapsulate have a history which can be charted; and that the boundaries separating these attitudes and politics from others existing at the same time are not as clear as has generally been supposed (Pandey 1992: viii)

In his 'Introduction', he objects to 'communalism' at the conceptual level, yet, he reduces this objection to a terminological dissatisfaction. He in effect says that 'communalism' was part of the British imagination of India and should therefore be rejected. However, if we use ‘sectarianism’ to replace ‘communalism’ we have the advantage of asserting that we are not party to a unique problem; the history of almost every European nation is also riddled with sectarian violence[107]. Thus having established a “universal” term we are no longer subject to colonial prejudice. This form of freeing ourselves from colonial discourse would have to

[107] He does, however, replace ‘communalism’ with ‘sectarianism’ in his article ‘In defense of the Fragment’ (1992a).

mean that we now re-baptise our problems into well-established European Social Science categories. Let us leave aside the question of whether Western Social Science has indeed efficiently come up with universal neutral categories which would fit human experience anywhere in the world. Instead let us focus on the way Pandey characterises the problem. If indeed the problem is a terminological one, then the problem was born simultaneously in Indian and colonial discourse in the 1920s.

If one examines the Home and Home Political files of the Indian National Archives, we see that the use of the term 'communal tension' appears first in 1924 and refers to a question and answer session in Parliament related to the instrumentality of the vernacular press in inciting Hindu-Muslim clashes. Before 1924, the word 'communal' seems to appear only to speak of 'communal representation' which is a large category of entries every year since 1906. There are of course entries on “riots” and “disturbances” up to 1924 which are not called 'communal' but include incidents which did come to be called 'communal' once the term gained currency. In 1923 for instance, under 'riots' there are a large number of entries on ‘Hindu-Muslim clashes’ along with entries on the 'salt riots'. In 1925 there is a sudden spurt in the use of the term, with the Home Political files for that year containing three categories: 'communal disturbances', 'communal riot(s)' and 'communal tension'. This seems like Pandey is right; 'communalism' was indeed 'born' in the mid-1920s. Pandey himself cites a 1924 Minority Report which makes one of the first uses of the term. But this 'birth' is

merely the *spread* of a certain terminological currency, as Pandey himself recognizes. In his second chapter, however, 'The Colonial Construction of the Indian Past', he says that by the end of the 19th century the dominant strand of colonialist historiography took religious bigotry as the defining feature of India.[108] He criticizes the unvarying "communal riots narrative" as he calls it for its lack of any real historical grounding. He goes on in that chapter to do an extremely fascinating study of the Banaras riots of 1809 and to critique the pre-determined narrative structures one could expect in colonial records of riots, with little or no bearing on the historical facts of the matter. Surely then, the problem of these pre-determined narrative structures is not rooted in terminology. As is clear, before the term, 'communalism' emerged, there was a vast body of writing that embodied the concept and if the term had never actually emerged, this body would still clearly have grown[109].

Thus, if the problem is not, even by Pandey's own account, merely a terminological one, then what would a terminological change cure? While Pandey does not endorse the colonial conception of 'communalism' he finds the term useful to critique "those sectarian and exclusivist trends that have been so

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[108]It may in fact, be much earlier. It is often observed for instance that the basic assumptions of communal historiography are present in Mill's *The History of British India* (1826, first published 1817). William Thomas, in his introduction to the abridged version of the book points out that though Mill is better known for his political journalism it was perhaps this book that had greater claim to affecting the process of governance since it got him an important post in the East India Company and became the official History textbook in the East India Company's colleges influencing a whole generation of British administrators (Mill 1975).

[109] See also Skinner's discussion of the concept of 'originality' in the absence of the word (2002: 159).

evident, and dangerous, a feature of recent Indian history"[110]. Thus, Pandey's political anxiety makes him save a term which he himself discredits at the conceptual level. There are two possible reasons for this: one, that he has evolved a theory of colonialism which allows him to use 'communalism' independently of colonial discourse; or two, that there has been a significant re-definition or re-conceptualisation of the concept 'communalism'. Thus, it requires first an examination of his notions of colonial discourse and then his notions of 'communalism'.

Essentialism to historicism: antidote to colonial discourse?

It is generally believed that there is a major fault-line that divides colonial and indigenous accounts of 'communalism'. This fault-line is considered extremely significant since it is not simply a difference in judgement[111] but is considered rather a deep epistemological distinction. For this fault-line invokes and champions all that divides historicism from essentialism. All colonial accounts of 'communalism' are condemned as essentialist and most accounts pitched against this colonial account would claim to be historical or historicist. The shift from the first position to the second is considered a crucial step forward in the study of 'communalism'. The fundamental reason for social scientists to have valued this shift is that it has allowed for supposedly "historical" or "scientific"

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[110] Invalid knowledge in the service of the best possible politics, however, can only remain invalid knowledge.

[111] Or in other words, an evaluation of what ought or ought not to be considered 'communal'.

explanations to triumph over the “essentialist” explanation of the British colonisers, which is rejected as unscientific and orientalist[112].

Gyanendra Pandey states, “The colonialist view of communalism as reflecting the 'natural' condition of India would have to be described, as I have suggested, as *essentialist*. The nationalistic interpretation of it as a distorted reflection of economic (and, building upon that, political) conflict could be termed *economistic*.[113]” (1992: 12) Though Pandey sees the shift as “essentialist to economistic”, I will call this shift in nationalist and other Indian scholarly positions on ‘communalism’ as ‘essentialist to historicist’ since it matters little to the argument whether the causes attributed to ‘communalism’ are economical or not. The more fundamental concern is that this shift contradicts the “natural” (as Pandey calls it) premises of ‘communalism’ in India. The shift, then, is from a perspective that sees ‘communalism’ as an eternal Indian phenomenon to a perspective that it was instituted into Indian society as a process or through an event. In Pandey’s work (and in that of most other Indian theorists), the idea of 'communalism' within colonialism is wrong *because* the discourse is “essentialist”. However, this ‘essentialism’ is summed up purely in attribution of

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[112] The use of the term ‘orientalist’ is derived here from Said’s critique of that body of knowledge (Said 1978). Dr. Mrinalini Sebastian pointed out to me that Edward Said would probably have been wary of having his approach called a more ‘scientific’ one since Science itself comes in for Said’s criticism. This is especially so since the Orientalists would consider themselves ‘scientific’ scholars of the East. This is true. Yet, the characterisations of colonial ‘essentialism’ must mean that the statements it generates are in the realm of prejudice and therefore not ‘true’. It is in this sense that I describe their understanding of colonialism as being unscientific.

[113] The nationalists themselves did not endorse the economic theory of ‘communalism’. They were usually concerned with the political formulation of ‘divide and rule’. However, other Marxist scholars like Bipan Chandra who do endorse the economic theory are also nationalist as I have pointed out in the previous chapter.

causes. Pandey himself critiques essentialism as the view that seeks natural causes for particular characteristics of a people. Once causes which are not based on the “nature” of the people are put forward, the concepts that emerge in colonial discourse supposedly become serviceable. This, I suggest, is a crucial mistake in our understanding of the nature of the problem with colonial discourse and essentialism itself.

For instance, let us contrast our attitude to ‘communalism’ with our response to the proposition, “The East is spiritual”. This is a well-refuted ‘essentialist’ statement. However, this statement is not offered the rebuttal, “Indeed the East is spiritual, but not by its nature itself, but rather, because of its history”. For what sense would such a rebuttal make? The objection is with the characterization itself and *not* with the attribution of cause.

What is a telling indicator of the relative ineffectiveness of such a shift is the fact that the colonialist viewpoint that generated these essentialist statements would not find it imperative to contradict historical causes. For instance, colonialists themselves were well ahead with historical causes of ‘communalism’[114] and one might add, of historical causes for the ‘spiritualism of the East’ as well[115]. These

[114] W.C. Smith (1985) for instance was very clear that though Indian society was essentially communal, forces of capitalism unleashed by colonization had exacerbated the situation and made it into the problem it was in the twentieth century. Clifford Manshardt (1936) gave a list of historical, social, economic, political and psychological causes of the problem! And yet, he did not find the need to contradict colonial essentialism.

[115] Meredith Townsend, in a collection of his essays called *Asia and Europe* lists the creeds of the world as all having been born in the East, which is actually a rather good historical reason to associate spiritualism with the East. “What the secret of that separateness [between the East and the West] is, has perplexed the

did not contradict their 'essentialist' proposition, they just added to its authority. Thus, **it is important to reject the idea that the problem with colonialism's essentialist characterisation of 'communalism' is refuted simply by providing historical causation**. But there is a further claim in the case of 'communalism' that the shift from essentialism to historicism constitutes in fact, a considerable shift or transformation in the theory of 'communalism'. For, it is this particular feature of indigenous theories of 'communalism' which is used to distinguish them from the colonial theory and to claim their own legitimacy while condemning the latter as illegitimate.

Let us examine another 'essentialist' statement in order to consider the tenability of that claim. Consider the statement, "Blacks are criminals". That is, African-Americans by nature are prone to crime. Such an essentialist statement would typically be *corrected* with the response that the high rate of crime amongst the African-Americans is because of their low socio-economic status, which is a product of their particular marginalization in history as well as the unfavourable policies of the State. This is a perfect analogy to the Indian response to 'communalism' especially since this statement is also read as essentialist purely in its attribution of causes.

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thoughtful for ages, and will perplex them for ages more – indeed it can never be clear until we know something definite of the primal history of man – but it must ultimately have some relation to the grand fact that every creed accepted by the great races of mankind, every creed which has really helped to mould thought, has had its origin in Asia. The white man invented the steam engine, but no religion which has endured…The truth is the European is essentially secular, that is, intent of securing objects he can see; and the Asiatic essentially religious, that is, intent on obedience to powers which he cannot see but can imagine" (1901: 29).

Let us examine whether refuting the 'essentialist' nature of this statement helps us understand the problem embodied in this statement any better. There are certain well-defined parameters set by the State which serve as indices (and thereby definitions) of 'crime'. In order to refute this statement, we may 1) disagree with those indices or 2) we may show errors in the statistics which are generated to show crime rates amongst the African-American community. But our *correction* to the statement as given above consists of neither of these responses. We still object to the statement, because of 3) its supposition that the problem of crime is related to racial configuration rather than to socio-economic factors. However, objection 3) can only be sustained in argument if objection 1) is not being made. That is, it is crucial that one actually agree about the meaning of 'crime' before one may dispute its causes, as I have just pointed out. However, for those who propose a high co-relation between crime and racial configuration what difference does a historical trajectory of that racial group make? It only serves to render the same narrative with greater 'complexity'. To say that 'history has pushed the Black man to crime' satisfies racist discourse almost as much as 'Blacks are criminals'. The reason for this is simply that in the case of racist discourse the accusation of 'crime' is simply one among many reasons[116] that confirm the *inferiority* or *undesirability* of the African-American. Thus, it matters very little what the actual statistic or the scientific configuration of the statement is. Here, 'criminal' is a judgment, not a fact. It requires little factual content

[116] For instance, a variety of characterizations including the way Black men treat Black women or the unsanitary conditions of Black neighbourhoods or even the ever-present stereotype of the lazy Black man are all part of this discourse. Can a 'scientific' refutation of each one of these statements be generated?

because the emphasis is on its evaluative force. What the anti-essentialist does, then, is merely shift blame from nature to history and does not, in fact, contradict the statement or dispel racist discourse because s/he misunderstands the nature of the statement as a factual proposition.

Consider instead another rebuttal of the same statement. A young Black nun in a BBC Channel Four documentary on race[117], faced with the same stereotype above, said unapologetically that she was sure Black boys were lured into crime, but, if one is to quantify crime racially, then surely the White population had qualified for a great deal more of criminal behaviour all through history. Why speak of car-theft as crime? Why not speak of imperialism as crime? After all, if crime is the concern then surely small crimes like car theft are a smaller concern than big crimes like imperialism!

What the young nun achieves is the de-stabilisation of the first condition. She re-defines 'crime'. She reminds us that the State indices of crime are after all one particular definition, not the only definition of crime. The concept itself applies to many historical acts that the State itself perpetrates. The concept (crime) becomes historically contingent in this narrative and not the action (car-theft). The advantage of such a rebuttal is that it draws our attention to the nature of the category 'crime' and not simply to the allegation. Once we understand that the

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[117] I have unfortunately forgotten the name of this film aired around the year 1997. However, it is the statement that is significant for the argument and not the documentary as a whole. One may treat it as a hypothetical statement for the purposes of the argument.

nature of the category is an evaluative and not a descriptive one, we no longer require a defence contingent on sympathy or a political commitment to anti-essentialism. What is so effective in the nun's rebuttal is the fact that she understands the underlying use of 'crime' in this statement as evaluative and then uses the same category in order to *evaluate* the White population in turn.

In the analogy above, the idea that crime is related to socio-economic factors rather than to racial configuration is seen as a rebuttal of racism or racist discourse. This understands racism as a 'non-scientific' discourse and seeks to replace it with a more scientific view of the world. However, racist discourse is not held together by its claims to scientific truth. It is upheld by its evaluative force. Compare this with the idea that the East is spiritual. Although this is a statement of positive evaluation, it is still a stereotype[118]. Stereotypes, like prejudices, are resilient in that they seem to be able to garner support from historical, sociological and other scientific sources in order to confirm themselves but are rarely dispelled by the same sources. Thus, our understanding of essentialism as simply un-scientific does not serve to solve our recurring problems.

The assertion that a shift from essentialism to historicism constitutes a change in theory of 'communalism' makes a bid different from other causal theories. In its characterisation of colonial discourse as 'essentialist' it seems to propose a

[118] See Balagangadhara (2006) for a detailed analytical examination of 'stereotypes'.

theory of ‘colonialism’ which should allow us to understand the discourse that embodies the concept, ‘communalism’. However, for all practical purposes it remains an attempt to shift causal explanations and not a conceptual re-theorisation. For, the thrust of the shift from essentialism to historicism is understood at the causal level as a shift from ‘natural’ to ‘historical’ causes of ‘communalism’.

Here one arrives at a crucial question. What is the problem that anti-essentialists wish to solve? The analogy of the idea that the ‘East is spiritual’ seems to show that it is not simply causation that is the problem. The successful refutation of this claim is achieved not by discrediting essentialist causation but rather by discrediting the entire body of knowledge (Orientalism) that produced such a characterisation. In this example our critiques have expressed not only dissatisfaction with the causes for the statement, but also generated helpful characterisations and predictions about the discourse of Orientalism. We observed that the discourse seems typically to generate statements that relegate populations to stagnation and puerility and that these statements are based not on scientific knowledge but on an evaluative frame, much like racist discourse in the analogy above. Thus, we do have characterisations of essentialism which are richer than causal theories. We also seem to have some interesting insights into colonial discourse but they also remain fairly stunted. For instance, Pandey’s observations on ‘communalism’ as a notion related to colonial self-conceptions is intriguing but he does not provide us with an explanation for why this happens.

What is it about colonial discourse that makes it generate statements that are at core related to colonial self-conceptions? The only answer Pandey seems to have for these questions is that colonial discourse is 'essentialist' and therefore this happens. But the 'essentialism' of colonial discourse does not answer this question. It merely gives us separate characteristics of colonial discourse that do not seem to be connected in any way. Thus colonial discourse is 'essentialist'; it generates statements that are to be understood as colonial self-conceptions; and it uses religious bigotry as a fundamental organising principle of Indian history. What explains these features?

To ask these questions is to ask for a theory of colonial discourse that will account for the features we observe above. We do not seem to have such a theory so far. The anti-essentialist stand against colonial discourse generates a basic double-bind. While they reject colonial discourse as essentialist, they still hold on to the concepts it generates. Thus they reject the theory but save the concept. This is only theoretically plausible if they have re-defined or re-conceptualised 'communalism' such that it is freed from its original theoretical framework. We have already seen that just a shift in causation cannot constitute such a shift. However, the constructivists do make a bid for having re-conceptualised 'communalism'.

‘Communalism’ as ‘identity’: A new concept?

We finally arrive at the question that we raised at the end of the examination of ‘communalism’ as a phenomenon. Do we have a theory of ‘communalism’ which does not give causal explanations but accounts for it conceptually? We have in the intermediate sections investigated our dissatisfaction with the notion that a shift from essentialism to historicism solves the problems we face with ‘communalism’ and established two further points. ‘Communalism’ is an ‘appraisive term’ and is a concept, not simply a word; and the dissatisfaction with ‘communalism’ is not simply terminological but conceptual.

But perhaps we have borrowed a concept, ‘communalism’, from this discourse and re-defined it in much the same way as the Black nun does in the example above? In that case we must have alternative characterisations of ‘communalism’ as a concept besides the colonial notion of ‘religiosity’ or ‘Hindu-Muslim antagonism’. The constructivists certainly make such a claim in their reliance on the definition of ‘communalism’ as an ‘identity’. Kenneth.W.Jones first provided this characterisation in 1968.

> In this study communalism is defined as a consciously shared religious heritage which becomes the dominant form of identity for a given segment of society. In the South Asian experience this identity has generally been expressed through a specific language with its own unique script. Religion, language and script are the basic triad of self-awareness to which are fused a re-interpreted history, coupled with a new conceptualization of the

> world and the position of that identity group in that world. Expression of this consciousness in demands for a state, a nation which would embody the unique qualities of the religious group, mark the transition from communalism to religious nationalism (Jones 1968: 39).

Amongst those who deploy ‘communalism’ as ‘identity’ are those who, like Jones see this identity as an eternal characteristic of Indian society, and others like Cohn(1996), Pandey(1992), Freitag (1990) and Jalal (2001) who claim this identity was an outcome of colonial processes. Amongst those who claim that this identity was the outcome of colonial processes there is no agreement about why this happens. For instance, Cohn proposed that colonial processes of census, enumeration and the new categories of colonial personal law led to the polarization of the population along these new identities that colonial administrative strategies instituted. This became the basis for conflict. For Freitag the crucial factor was the use of public spaces for political mobilisation. Thus, for her, new identities were constituted in the relationship with local spaces. For Pandey, identities were linked primarily to histories or history writing. Colonial histories were therefore fundamental instruments in the creation of these identities. Jalal studies popular media, especially newspapers as the site of identity construction as well as clash.

These positions do not seem to dispute each other. The various sites of identity construction are considered allied and all new sites identified in identity construction are simply added to the cumulative evidence for the occurrence and

magnitude of the same. Just as there is no one particular reason that can be identified for identity construction, there is no argument that can refute it. Any expression, mobilisation or political position becomes evidence for identity formation. Thus, language development in the formulation of scripts or the promotion and creation of literatures; the use of public spaces, not simply for political demonstration but even for religious activities; the generation of media in particular languages or along particular community interests; can never be refuted as sites of identity formation. For instance, if one examined the growth of the Press in terms of a new industry which ensured its market by addressing niche language or community audiences, this would also be evidence for 'communal identity', not just business sense[119]. But individuals, groups, communities seem to express identities all the time. What makes these identities 'new' and specifically 'communal' post-colonisation? Fundamental to making identities 'communal' in any of these accounts is the implicit notion that these particular identities caused conflict. However, it seems rather logical that a newspaper that relies on a niche community audience will generate stories about that particular community and will feature critiques in some form or other, of other communities. Generally, it has been adequate to understand that the more slanderous the newspaper the more sensational, and therefore the more likely to sell. In British histories of the newspaper for instance, there was an early phase in the news industry referred to as the 'news wars' or 'yellow journalism' when

[119] The history of the growth of the regional Press in India is so mired in the discourses of 'reform' and 'communalism' that we have never understood its development through economic or other pragmatic compulsions. Surely the establishment and growth of a major indigenous industry (even with its particular alliance to political debate) requires first and foremost an economic history.

the market wars between Hearst and Pulitzer outdid all journalistic concerns. Laws in relation to media output were not yet well-developed and therefore the market was the only law. Yet, in India, similar media behaviour is not dubbed a developmental phase but further explanation in terms of its 'communalism' is required.

While there is no means to refute the claim of identity formation, there is a systematic deflection of explanation by the use of this category[120] and once again a large number of distinct phenomena from media trends to legal history become assimilated into this mega-theory of 'identity'. For instance, Cohn's proposition that colonial law and administrative categories had an impact on the native population is not at dispute. However, instead of giving a straightforward account of what new categories *do* to create conflict, Cohn too relies on the catch-all explanation of the creation of new identities. Cohn's question is valid. Colonial administrative and legal categories were new and often ill-conceived. The imposition of these new legal and administrative categories clearly posed learning goals for the colonised. However, instead of telling us what the native did with this learning goal, Cohn takes for granted that the category once posed was internalised. And since these categories were generated within a colonial discourse driven by notions of 'age old Hindu-Muslim antagonism', the

[120] See Fredric Cooper (2005) for a discussion of identity in post-colonial discourse. He also provides an interesting graph relating to the use of the term 'identity' which shows a tremendous upsurge in its use from 1998 to 2003. He proposes that "the usefulness of an analytic category doesn't follow from its salience…such concepts must perform analytic work, distinguishing phenomena and calling attention to important questions" (2005: 8). However, his work does not investigate the conceptual foundations of 'identity', but merely criticizes its range of use.

internalization of these categories in the form of new identities was the source of conflict.

Thus, Cohn and other constructivists[121] seem to make a surprising variation on the cognitive strategy of the other available positions. The other positions seem to swap concept and object, but the constructivists swap one concept for another. Instead of swapping the concept ‘communalism’ with a variety of object level incidents of violence, the constructivists swap the concept ‘communalism’ for the concept ‘identity’. This mediating concept is then attributed with the same traits which they deny exist in native society itself. That is, colonial discourse proposes that the native society is defined by inter-community conflict. The constructivists reject colonial discourse and therefore the concept of ‘communalism’ as it exists within this discourse, but produce another ‘universal’ concept of identity that takes on the same polysemy and vacuity as ‘communalism’. One cannot but point out that this sounds dubiously like old wine in new bottles.

Several scholars have attempted to examine what *kind* of identity is generated and pin the conflict on this particular type of identity. The most influential amongst them is Kaviraj’s formulation of ‘enumerated’ vs. earlier ‘fuzzy’ identities (Kaviraj 1998). This approach has been derived from Cohn’s work on the effect

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[121] Since the constructivists do not themselves provide a philosophical characterization of their approach, I examine in detail the implications of ‘constructivism’ through Hacking’s exploration of this philosophical approach in the Appendix.

of the census and colonial administrative categories on the colonised. There is some explanatory potential in this hypothesis. For instance, enumeration could change the nature of political mobilisation in some ways. Enumeration aids 'communalism' since it seems to highlight the relative numerical strength of groups within the State, thus allowing for mobilisation along these particular group/community lines rather than local lines. However, for this kind of mobilisation to be the cause of conflict, the interests of these groups would have to be in conflict. Thus, it would be in conflicting interests that violence is generated and not in enumeration itself. Enumeration would simply have aided more efficient mobilisation of those interests. However, Kaviraj and other constructivists deny conflicting interests of the communities as an explanation because this seems to them to be part of colonial explanations for the problem. Thus, we have an explanation that invests some kind of mysterious power in enumerated identities themselves as entities that cause violence. Given this power we are then left with prescriptions for self-conception that always choose fuzzy rather than well-defined parameters for identity, which will purportedly *always* cause violence. One is tempted to ask why census statistics in other states do not seem to produce the same consequences or even, why the beginning of the census did not lead to the generation of world-wide wars since States themselves began to generate enumerated identities for their populations vis-à-vis other States.

So whereas the constructivists recognise that colonial knowledge introduces new categories and concepts, unfamiliar to the colonised, they introduce a mediating ‘universal’ concept, in this case, ‘identity’, in order to support their ideas of the transformation colonialism brought about in native society. At a fundamental level then this is not different from Pandey’s bid to replace ‘communalism’ with ‘sectarianism’. There are two points to notice about this cognitive strategy. One, it is typical of the anti-essentialist position which seeks ‘universal’ categories as an answer to the particular categories of colonial discourse. I have already shown that this in itself can achieve nothing. Second, it dispels the criticism of being caught in colonial discourse by inventing a mediating concept that does not arise in that discourse. However, this mediating concept is attributed the same features as the colonial concept of ‘communalism’. Thus, while one feels that the hold of colonial discourse is lost, what this does is simply deflect explanation. The constructivists give us no greater conceptual understanding of colonial discourse itself or ‘communalism’. But the attribute of conflict is deflected from native society as a whole to new native identities. In this process an explanation is also deferred and avoided. Instead of explaining the link between colonialism and a historical phenomenon, we are re-routed via another concept (identity) circulating in a number of conflicting theories (psychoanalysis, post-colonialism, political science) that has nothing to do with colonialism per se. In the process of then picking our way through a variety of theories of identity, neither a theory of colonialism nor an explanation of the central concepts within colonial discourse can emerge.

Pandey does attempt a partial theory of ‘communalism’, not by examining it directly but rather by examining one particular point in history in the 1920s and 30s when ‘communalism’ becomes current. He traces the transformation of ‘communalism’ from a relatively neutral category to a negative attribute to the rising discourse of nationalism and its alliance with the discourse of neutral citizenship. He provides an interesting formulation about the way the discourse of citizenship was deployed by the Congress in the 1930’s in order to create a new conception of the nation and (I would propose) of political participation.

> The relevant question for the historian of nationalism is perhaps this: How was the imagined political community of the future (commonly described by the late nineteenth century in the vocabulary of nationhood) being constructed by Indian nationalists at different times? The answer, I would like to suggest, is that it was *not*, in the earlier stages of the nationalist movement, constructed in the way in which we in India have begun to ‘think’ the nation since the 1920s and 1930s. Before that time, the nation of Indians was visualised as a composite body, consisting of several communities, each with its own history and culture and its own special contribution to make to the common nationality. India, and the emerging Indian nation, was conceived of as a collection of communities: Hindu+Muslim+Christian+Parsi+Sikh and so on.
>
> Sometime around the 1920s this vision was substantially altered, and India came to be seen very much more as a collection of individuals, of Indian ‘citizens’. The difference between these two positions was quite fundamental: and it is my contention that it was in the context of the change from one to the other that the concept of communalism was fully articulated. In other words, communalism and nationalism as we know them today

> came to acquire their present signification in the 1920s or thereabouts, to a large extent in opposition to one another, and in response to far-reaching changes that were occurring in the national movement as well as in the way in which Indian nationalism was being constructed (Pandey 1992: 210)

But the re-theorisation he initiates remains incomplete. He points out that nationalism as we know it is a product of the 1920s. However, he uses this insight to reiterate that nationalism is not natural but constructed or imagined. He does not extend this insight to understand what one must do then with the category ‘communalism’ itself at all. Logically, one may say that if nationalism is constructed and imagined then as a concept that gained currency from that discourse, ‘communalism’ itself is also constructed or imagined. While the former statement (the ‘constructed’ nature of nationalism) proposes a certain de-legitimisation of the category of nationalism, it is interesting that extending the same consideration to ‘communalism’ does not seem to delegitimize or debunk it[122]. Thus, even historical accounts that examine the term ‘communalism’ not as a phenomenon but as a concept within a discourse seem to get short-circuited into upholding ‘communalism’ as a negative attribute. The appraisive force of the concept is difficult to give up.

[122] Perhaps an investigation into why this happens would also tell us something about how constructivism works and why only certain ideas are considered legitimate objects of ‘construction’.

What does it mean to have a theory of 'communalism'?

This returns us to the primary question of the chapter, what does it mean to have a theory of 'communalism'? If 'communalism' is not a single phenomenon, then causal theories cannot serve any function. They may serve to shed light on one or another phenomenon that is categorised under 'communalism' but not on the concept itself. Before one goes into this question one must examine the nature of theory change and what it involves. Theory change may be of two kinds. The first may be of the kind where the explanation or cause of a phenomenon changes. The second would be where the *framework* for understanding a concept or phenomenon is re-defined such that it changes our conception of the world. Consider two possible explanations of the phenomenon of dreams. One explanation is that it is a divine visitation; the second, that it is a product of the sub-conscious. In order to arrive at the second what is required is not simply a reformulation of the nature of the phenomenon or a theory of cause; it requires a theory of the mind. This theory gives us the framework within which to understand not simply dreams but postulates new allied concepts like the sub-conscious which changes our conception of human psychology.

Similarly with 'communalism', in order for us to understand what it is and what renders it useful we require a theory of colonialism. Unless the larger theoretical framework is not defined, this concept cannot gain greater clarity. From our observations about 'communalism' so far, we formulate the following hypothesis.

‘Communalism’ is often mistaken as an observation of the British, but it is really a presupposition[123]. This much even the constructivists would grant. Thus, instead of treating it as a phenomenon, we must treat it as a concept. Given that the appraisive or evaluative force of this concept always seems stable we may further characterise it as a ‘value-judgment’ (for lack of a better word) which served as an organising principle for the history of a people. To provide an analogy, it would be like a study of the Indian Economy in terms of the patterns of behaviour of the “lazy oriental”[124]. It is just that “lazy” was not as well disguised as a value judgment and therefore we have had less trouble rejecting it!

We are tempted to believe that the nationalists or post-colonial scholars do not use it as a value judgment but as a form of knowledge about Indian society because we are used to considering colonialist knowledge as a product of its politics. By that logic we expect a politics in opposition to it to have come up with an oppositional knowledge base. So, we are really likely to believe that the nationalists had good reason to use 'communalism' because they were after all “on our side”, and would not use a knowledge loaded with prejudice against themselves. In order to account for this, we require some kind of characterisation of the native encounter with colonial knowledge and politics[125].

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[123] As the next chapter should make clear while also attempting to explain why the presupposition occurred.
[124] It is not as if such studies are not available in colonial discourse. For instance, early colonial narratives like that of Bernier (1989) or Orme (1805) include several observations on native economy which rely on this notion as the central tenet of native economic behaviour.
[125] Such an account would have to go beyond Bhabha’s (1984) notion of ‘mimicry’ which only poses imitation as the outcome of the colonial encounter since this would suggest that we would no longer have any conflict with colonial discourse itself. Colonialism would then have created mirror societies everywhere they moved. Our other option, the notion of ‘hybridity’ is also dissatisfying since it gives no

The next chapter attempts a theory of colonialism which may account for the particular nature of ‘communalism’ as an evaluative term which is not dispelled by historical evidence. We cannot agree with ‘communalism’ as it occurs in colonial discourse, yet we cannot seem to rid ourselves of it either. A theory of colonialism should provide us with reasonable means of breaking this dead-lock. The result of continuing to re-define or re-theorise ‘communalism’ as we have done so far not only deflects explanations as I have argued above, but also results in a truncated history.

The glitches in a truncated history

One crucial result of the essentialism-historicism shift has been the production of what I call a truncated history. That is, present accounts of ‘communalism’ (which have taken this shift in understanding as their basis), have essentially pieced together ‘colonialist’, ‘nationalist’, and ‘post-colonial-secular’ ways of seeing and understanding not only ‘communalism’ but the history of the Indian sub-continent itself without facing the glitches that should occur when one flits between one discourse and another. The presuppositions which allowed for a coherence of how ‘communalism’ was used/understood within each of these discourses, is lost and we are left with a ‘complex’ account which historicises scraps of ‘knowledge’

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predictions of the nature of change or engagement that took place but only traces a variety of cultural changes and influences. See Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, ed. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* for an entire section devoted to discussions on ‘hybridity’ (2005 Part VI 183-211).

instead of historicising the discourse itself. I call it ‘complex’ not simply because it is difficult to understand but to suggest that it is difficult to understand because of the loss of unity within each discourse.

Let us consider the problem through an analogy. Consider two distinct examples within the study of Indian history. One, the event of Mir Jaffar collaborating with the British troops at the battle of Plassey in 1757; and second, the idea of the “golden age” of India’s past.

When we consider the first event we are familiar with two positions on this event. The colonial position dubbed Mir Jaffar a “noble” man trying to free his country from the oppression of the “evil” Nawab, Siraj-ud-Daula[126]. The second position precedes nationalism as we understand it, but for the sake of convenience I will call it nationalist, very simply identified Mir Jaffar as a traitor of the worst kind. This is, of course, not surprising at all. We have come to accept that two political positions often produce two distinct assessments of a historical event.

However, consider the second example, of the idea of the “golden age”. Certainly one finds the secularists who oppose this notion as a myth and the hindutva-*wadis* who espouse it. However, outlining these two political positions does not

[126] Clive’s letter to the East India Company after the battle of Plassey has a glowing account of the man. It is a different matter that the British soon changed their mind about Mir Jaffar and began to complain about his inefficiency as ruler and used his treachery against Siraj-ud-Daula as proof of his suspected treachery towards them! See *Fort William – India House Correspondence* (Public) Vol II 1757-1759 (H.N.Sinha ed. 1957: 230-24 and 256-260)

enlighten us about a certain complexity[127] that is characteristic of this concept. One can identify at least two discourses within which this idea is found. The first is ‘orientalism’ and the second, the discourse of ‘hindutva’. It may well be said that the latter has taken this formulation from the former. However, in this case it is important to see that historicising this idea would require a historicisation of the discourse within which it operates. That would mean: to investigate what framework of ideas these concepts refer to and why they were/are useful explanations. A cursory consideration of the idea within these two discourses will show why this is so.

Within orientalism these ideas explained the evidence of an early sophisticated civilization in India which was no longer visible to the orientalist in the present. It addressed the orientalist inability to account for the “unenlightened and degenerate Hindu” who was the subject of his administration while continuing to study and venerate the texts that this “Hindu civilisation” had produced. The evidence of an enlightened past showed hope for the future and provided motivation to continue with redoubled effort his project of colonization or enlightenment. The orientalist project then became facilitative of teaching the “degenerate Hindu” his own past glory which he had forgotten and thereby “regenerating” him.

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[127] I use ‘complexity’ here to define a term that seems to find different descriptions in different discourses.

If one looks at the way this concept operates within *hindutva* however, one sees that it refers primarily to two distinctive moments of “Hindu victimisation”. These are: the Muslim invasion and the supposed destruction and oppression of Hindus it brought about; and the colonization under the British which brought a destructive “westernization”. Thus the idea here is not so much the acceptance of the need for a “regeneration of a degenerate Hindu”, as laying claim to a victim position in history. Even the pedagogic missions embodied in both orientalism and *hindutva* therefore differ drastically. The former wished to re-introduce the Hindu to his “true” legacy from the Sanskrit classics and thereby rescue him from “false practices” that supposedly served the interests of the Brahmin elite. The latter discourse may value Sanskrit and the classics but they do so because these feed into a living but supposedly suppressed tradition. The idea of ‘regeneration’ within this discourse then, is not connected to seeking a lost truth but rather to redressing perceived cultural hegemony[128]. The rhetoric may have similar strains, but historically, it has different reference points, explains different phenomena and uses different sets of evidence.

It would not be difficult to show today that this idea or concept in the way that it has been framed in either of these two discourses is neither historically valid nor conceptually plausible and so we can reject it without compunction. However, to understand what it refers to we need to examine its operation within the two

[128] Or to put it more crudely, either saving or fighting the Hindu lost to western secularism!

distinct discourses unlike in the case of the two possible narratives of Mir Jaffar's action.

It may well be argued that these two examples do not bear comparison since one is an event and the other a concept. However, the interpretation of the event of Mir Jaffar collaborating with the British resides within the conceptual arena of what a traitor is and what a hero. The colonialist and the nationalist would probably agree in their conceptual understanding of these two words, yet they attribute two opposite terms to the same person. This is political perspective. Underlying this assessment is expedience[129]. That is, it suited colonial purposes to dub Mir Jaffar a hero and it suited nationalist purposes to dub him a traitor. To understand either the colonial or the nationalist perspective does not require any historicisation of the use of the terms traitor and hero.

Thus, some appraisive terms remain constant in their meaning and yet opposite appraisive terms may be deployed to describe the same event. This does not change the event itself. However, some appraisive terms seem to require an understanding of the discourse that embodies them before we can determine their references. This is the only possible explanation for why such diverse sets of phenomena come to be referred to by the same term 'communalism' as I show in the section on the "'Communal' condition". This must be the result of the

[129] That is not to say that all political assessments may be explained away as expedience.

deployment of the term in different discourses and cannot be attributed to different political perspectives.

The fallacy we commit with ‘communalism’ is partly that differences related to this concept are treated purely as differences of political perspective. That is, the fact that different sets of people have borne the allegation of being ‘communal’ at different points of time, and different events or processes have been seen as the ‘root of communalism’ by different groups or individuals, is immediately understood as differing perspectives of different political affiliations. So also, the distinctions between the colonialist and the nationalist point of view about ‘communalism’ is most often seen as two political parties mobilizing the same event to different ends. However, this cannot be right since the object, unlike the event in the first category, changes depending upon which discourse embodies it. That is, the events/phenomena attributed to the object 'communalism' are not the same within 'colonialist', 'nationalist' and 'post-colonial secular' discourses[130] as I will go on to demonstrate. When ‘communalism’ is treated as one unified phenomenon, then there are glitches produced as the historian must shift between discourses in order to justify this position. This produces a truncated history.

[130] This is not a formal classification which claims that these are the three distinct discourses within which ‘communalism’ operates but rather an ad-hoc division, made purely in the interest of facilitating the larger argument.

I consider two studies in order to elucidate my position. The first is Gyanendra Pandey's *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1992). Through it I hope to demonstrate that the transformation of 'communalism' from a colonial conceptual tool into a historical event or process, when examined, will yield the “glitches” that are the symptoms of historicising scraps of knowledge rather than discourses. The second is Sandria Freitag’s *Collective Action and Community* (1990). This position also yields the glitches that characterise all our attempts to amalgamate different discursive positions of the past in our historical accounts. Both of these positions are useful to return us to questions of essentialism and historicism. Both of these are contrasted to that of C.A. Bayly’s ‘The Pre-history of ‘Communalism’? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860’ (in Bayly 1998). Bayly’s work is not characterised by glitches since he remains firmly within the domain of colonial discourse. The three positions I have outlined as three discourses – the colonial, national and post-colonial-secular – offer a provisional framework that will allow me to pose my question with some brevity of reference.

Pandey: Between the national and post-colonial secular

Pandey's thesis on the birth of 'communalism' is that nationalism and communalism as we (supposedly) know them today came into being in the 1920’s. He proposes, as discussed above, that before the 1920’s, the nation was visualised as a collection of distinct communities which would have their “own

history and culture and [their] own special contribution to make to the common nationality.” (1992: 210) This is an interesting explanation of how nationalism comes to pose its own polarity to ‘communalism’ and allows us to reconsider the role of discourses of citizenship and secularism within nationalism. However, Pandey’s account would also have us believe that nationalism found in the 1920s rising new political movements, which would concretely embody that polarity and become its ‘other’ as it were. These political movements became the antecedents of present day ‘communalism’. These are movements like the anti-cow-slaughter campaigns. But having put forward this hypothesis he fails to give us evidence corroborating his own proposition that the nationalists defined themselves in opposition to that movement. For instance, the nationalists were in fact, often participants of the anti-cow-slaughter campaign. It was most often the Muslim League and its activities which were quite un-hesitantly labelled ‘communal’, at least by the 1930’s. However, Pandey would definitely hesitate to corroborate the nationalists on that today. Thus, the discursive opposition that Pandey draws between the ‘communal’ and the ‘national’ may well have operated in the 1920s and after, but he seems unable to identify and explain the opposition drawn by the nationalists in their own terms and instead generates an account which is coherent to the post-colonial-secular by eliding the nationalist understanding of ‘communalism’.

The peculiarity of Pandey’s account of ‘communalism’ then is that it seeks to reconcile the nationalist deployment of ‘communalism’ and the ‘post-colonial-

secular' deployment, without really considering whether this deployment in the two discourses addresses the same phenomena. That is, he looks to understand phenomena which the 'post-colonial-secular' of the late twentieth century, with his/her experience of '*hindutva*' would be calling 'communalism' (for example, he sees the anti-cow slaughter movement as an antecedent of '*hindutva*'), and seems to criticise the 'limited understanding' of the nationalists or their limited political vision, for not seeing that these were 'communal' forces. He in turn does not see the political movements of the early twentieth century which the nationalists identified as 'communal', i.e., the Muslim League's political mobilisation and demands, as 'communal'. This has not been considered peculiar by most historians because it is treated as simply a difference in understanding which comes with the privilege of hindsight and learning history.

But the problem, I propose, is quite different. There could well be a discrepancy in historical accounts which try to mobilise the same phenomenon/event towards two different ends, like the example of Mir Jaffar's collaboration with the British. But each account is clearly intelligible in itself because the object of explanation remains the same, whereas in this case, each account cannot explain the other. That is, the post-colonial secular cannot explain what the nationalist account of 'communalism' was. There seems to be a presumption that we today have a natural familiarity with the nationalist conception of 'communalism'. How is it then that Pandey picks up as precedents of 'communalism' movements or events which were relatively unimportant to the nationalists and completely ignores

those that clearly were important? Though he is relatively more successful in mapping out what made the idea of 'communalism' intelligible to the colonialist, he is unable to do so with the nationalists. This is not because the period is fraught with historical complexity. Rather I would suggest, as long as he deals with 'communalism' within colonial discourse, he identifies it correctly as a value judgment, and can understand it and reject it. But once he arrives at the nationalist phase, he tries to account for a transformation from discourse into object (in keeping with the shift from essentialism to historicism) and then is unable to account both for the nationalist discourse as well as for the object itself (the events or processes he labels as antecedents to communalism).

Between the colonial and post-colonial-secular – Freitag's account of unsuccessful nationalism

Freitag's central thesis seems to echo Dumont's early formulation of communalism being a transitional phase towards nationalism (Dumont 1970). The colonised had to evolve into a nation according to Dumont, much like they needed to evolve into a civilisation as per colonialism's pedagogic mission. And the anomaly of 'communalism' would disappear once the evolution was complete. Freitag, in certain ways similar[131], seems to propose that it was a not fully successful transition to nationhood which gave birth to communalism. That

[131] She criticizes Dumont's approach in his *Homo Hierarchicus* (1970a) of making Indian systems seem completely different from the European model though her analysis seems otherwise to reflect his communalism as under-developed nationalism thesis. Freitag is of the opinion that European history can be used to serve as a model for the Indian though there are some "significant but subtle differences" (Freitag 1990: 6).

is, nationalism failed to evolve a language[132] of public mobilisation which would accommodate all the various communities in India. The central contradiction in her thesis however, is that as per her own historical account of the evolution of the public sphere or rather the use of public spaces in India, religion seems to have been successful where nationalism failed. That is, she proposes that religion was often local and worked to create a harmonious public space. However, there is no clear formulation of why religion was a dominant means of uniting public spaces earlier, but within a nationalist context it suddenly led to conflict. To clarify, this is what her position is:

> Thus, if we look at the central dynamic of the 1930s and 1940s, we must seek a process by which many participants chose communalism over nationalism as the ideology of public spaces, and by which they acted out in violent ways their frustrations with the inability of the changing state to accommodate this ideology. Such developments carried profound implications for the shape of the South Asian equivalent of the public sphere (Freitag 1990: 240).

> …many of the Congress district organisations had evolved out of Hindu Seva Samiti-type activities at religious fairs and festivals. To these people the connection between communal ideologies and public activism must have appeared more obvious than would that between anti-imperialism and activism. It therefore proved very difficult to prevent public arena rhetoric from shifting its primary focus from anti-imperialism to communalism, from seeing the enemy as the "Other" Indian community rather than as the foreign ruler (Freitag 1990: 229).

[132] For Freitag 'language' is a crucial theoretical tool for her approach to the study of nationalism and 'communalism' is the study of ideology through deployment of symbols.

This implies that patterns of religious mobilisation that preceded political mobilisation provided a ready rhetoric for nationalism and thereby also 'communalism'. Yet, she also asserts:

> The ceremony of Muharram took place over the first ten days of the month of Muharram…Despite this reference to events important only to Shi'as, Muharram functioned in early nineteenth-century Banaras as a ceremonial expression of "Islam" in which many members of the city nevertheless participated. This collective claim to Islamic identity was exercised by a group, where 90 percent of the Muslim participants were Sunni, not Shi'i, and very substantial numbers were Hindu (Freitag 1990: 27).

So, here is a situation where Hindus and Muslims participated together in a "claim to Islamic identity" throughout the nineteenth century. And yet, in the twentieth century these same patterns of religious participation or mobilisation become 'communal' and exclusivist rather than inclusive since they mark the Congress Party's inability to come up with a national language of political mobilisation. This ironically leads to the situation where we were more 'nationalist' when we were not nationalist!

In Freitag's account of the problem of 'communalism' religion was the primary force of peaceful mobilization in the public sphere. That is, religious processions, festivals, etc. had been an extremely successful means of keeping the people together. But, this was so only as long as it was a 'local' mobilisation. Once such mobilisation was attempted at a national, or all-India level, it generated

"politicized religious identity" (196) (which is the definition of 'communalism' that Freitag uses), and created conflict. Her thesis cannot be that religion, when invoked at a large scale rather than a smaller or local scale becomes a source of violence. If it is so, then what makes the scale of religious mobilisation susceptible to violence?

These questions are not answered because essentially Freitag's work attempts something else. It attempts to reconcile colonial and post-colonial-secular accounts of 'communalism'. Since the colonial accounts dubbed religiosity itself as the problem, they would not encounter this double bind. For colonial accounts religious mobilisation may well have demonstrated participation by both communities, but because it was an expression of 'religiosity' it was already potentially dangerous. Freitag attempts to reconcile the post-colonial-secular reliance on the notion of 'syncretism' with the colonialist notion of 'religiosity' simply by renaming the latter as "politicised religious identity". The glitch in this account is that there is little indication as to how the "claim to Islamic identity" that the Muharram processions mobilized in a mixed section of the public, is to be differentiated from the "politicized religious identity" that was 'communalism'.

Again we return to the shift from essentialism to historicism. Once we can say that it was not the nature of the people but a particular turn in their political self-conceptions that gave rise to 'communalism', we feel a significant redefinition has been achieved. That is why the institution of 'communalism' into Indian society

has been the important question for history. However, what is essentialism if not the constant regurgitation of the same answer to a variety of different questions? After all, an aspect of the essentialism would be, the perpetuation of a knowledge system which allows for only the same answers to be repeated no matter how different the questions that are being posed. Otherwise, why is it that whether we pose the question in terms of the nature of the people or their politics or their identities, the answers are all basically religion? If these answers are correct, then we should have no problems with colonial knowledge, for it was right. And it was a great deal more straightforward in terms of the answers it provided, than any of our own explanations.

Considering that both Freitag and Pandey's accounts have been conceived as important steps away from colonialist formulations in understanding 'communalism', it is ironic to find that they both draw their definitions of 'communalism' from colonialist writers[133]. Further, if a redefinition or even a significant theoretical shift has indeed been achieved in their work then a simple test, would be able to demonstrate this. The test would be the extent to which their accounts allow us to contradict colonial accounts of 'communalism'. That is, these studies should have allowed us to clearly reject a study like C.A Bayly's which I will deal with in the next section.

[133] Pandey draws his definition from W.C. Smith (1985); Freitag from Kenneth.W.Jones (1968)

Bayly: The pre-colonial existence of ‘communalism’

Bayly has more or less been condemned as an old-style colonialist because he proposes that ‘communalism’ existed before colonial administration came into place in India. Bayly points out that almost all contemporary theories of communalism rely on the birth of communalism being either seen in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. What is the explanation that these then provide for riots in the eighteenth century?

> My interest in this theme was awakened in the first place by finding in the course of other research fairly extensive documentary evidence of Hindu-Muslim riots in north Indian cities during the first half of the nineteenth century. Their origins and form seemed remarkably similar to those riots in the later half of the century. This in itself raised questions about the novelty of the events after the Rebellion of 1857. Next, a number of similar events came to light outside North India in Calcutta and Surat. But most interesting, the Company period disturbances pointed back in turn to a range of conflicts which had taken place in the mid-eighteenth century, when new regional states were forming in the wake of a weakening Mughal central authority (Bayly 1998: 212)….
>
> What is striking in these examples is that they bear a very close resemblance to the riots of the later colonial period. Like them, they often occurred when local systems of compromise and bargaining were being rapidly modified by the social mobility of new groups of merchants of artisans, or by the defensive manouvres of a declining urban gentry. Nor is there much justification for the view that ‘communal conflict’ spread into the countryside only in the twentieth century. The ‘land wars’ of the eighteenth century which saw the rise of agrarian Sikhs and Hindu peasantry against Muslim gentry were

> apparently no more or less ‘communal’ than the riots in eastern UP in the 1920s or eastern Bengal in the 1930s and 1940s (Bayly 1998: 233).

Bayly thus gives evidence for riots between religious groups and connects it to a variety of factors which have been used to explain them such as changing land relations, consolidation of states, state policies towards religious institutions, the influx of foreign soldiers etc. Thus, it is interesting to point out that Bayly is not overtly essentialist in his attribution of cause. Yet, Pandey severely criticises Bayly for his position. “There is really no sense of context here, not a hint that human beings and their actions, the events of history, derive their meaning from the political, economic, social and intellectual circumstances in which they are placed – from the discourse of the age, or the whole historical epoch (as Gramsci would have called it)” (Pandey 1992: 15).

Let us examine Pandey’s objection. He asserts that the events of history derive their meaning from the discourse of the age. In his own account we have seen that he wishes to sow together the discourses of nationalist and post-colonial within which ‘communalism’ operates. Thus, how does ‘communalism’ become meaningful for us today because it was meaningful to the nationalists? There may be another possibility. Does Pandey mean that one cannot use a concept retrospectively? That is, 'communalism' as a concept was born much later and therefore can explain only the epoch within which it was born and is not applicable to any other? If this were his objection, then Marx would have been unable to use the concept of ‘class’ in order to speak of the pre-nineteenth

century ‘feudal class’. We would also be unable to use the concept of the sub-conscious for instance in order to speak of the psychology of individuals prior to the twentieth century. Or does Pandey object to the use of ‘communalism’ since the word was actually coined only much later? As I have shown in the section on the ‘terminological problem’, this also is not a possible objection.

Both Pandey and Freitag would possibly disagree with Bayly on the basis that their definition of ‘communalism’ relies not on conflict itself but on the existence of “a politicised religious identity” (Freitag 1990: 196). But surely Bayly could as easily furnish evidence of the idea that these conflicts too were driven by a sense of identity. It is not as if Bayly does not give thought to these questions:

> Discussions of the causes of religious and communal riots have always run into severe problems of logic and method. First, it is important to avoid the danger of assuming that whenever Hindus and Muslims or Sikhs and Muslims were in conflict, a significant number of people saw these events in 'communal' terms. Certainly, it is not justifiable to class conflicts as religious or communal simply because the antagonists predominantly had different religious affiliations. In all cases discussed below, however, there is adequate evidence that participants and observers both recognized that subjective matters of religious affiliation *did* in fact represent a significant, if not exclusive, issue in the conflicts (Bayly 1998: 212).

Thus, it would not be difficult for Bayly to show a ‘religious mobilisation’ and thereby a religious identity at play. Besides, if evidence of conflict between sets of communities is not a valid test for ‘communalism’ what makes the diffused

questions of identity of greater validity? Surely Pandey's deep objection to Bayly is attempting to get at something else. Pandey's discomfort can only be related to the fact that he sees certain shifts in the deployment of 'communalism' in nationalist discourse to which Bayly's account is insensitive. He sees the function that 'communalism' served in nationalist discourse as being one that is distinctly different from any object-level evidence of conflict. Thus, he is unhappy with Bayly ignoring the work this concept was put to and focusing instead only on events of conflict. He is justified in his unease. However, one can only point out that he does the same by his easy deployment of the term to speak of his political concerns of the present.

Steps towards solving the dead-lock

My formulation of 'truncated history' attempts to characterise the gaps that become evident when one examines the use of 'communalism' across discourses. A deployment of the concept 'communalism' across the various discourses shows that there is a loss of coherence in our historical accounts. The term flourishes but there is unease, as in the case of Pandey's criticism of Bayly, when the term refers to events that we instinctively feel cannot be the same. Historicising the use of the term in different ways, as I have done in the 'Communal Condition' section or even partially in the section above, only serves to raise the problem to our awareness. We cannot think of it as a solution. Tracing the references of 'communalism' in its endless variations will not tell us

anything useful about the concept even if it does de-stabilise current historical narratives to some extent. What is required then is a conceptual history of ‘communalism’. Reinhart Koselleck (2002) provides us with some hints about what a conceptual history would involve and how this would be different from a semantic history for instance.

> Conceptual history as we attempt it, cannot manage without a theory of periodization. We do not mean temporality of a general kind, which can be procedurally stylized into historicity and which has to do with history in a fundamental way. It is, rather, a question of theoretically formulating in advance the temporal specifics of our political and social concepts so as to order the source materials. Only thus can we advance from philological recording to conceptual history. …We cannot master our task if we try to write a historical-philological history of words at a comparatively positivistic level. We would then get bogged down in the mass of socio-political expressions. In doing so, we would have to record the history of a lexical item with different meanings or be forced to trace word by word what are supposedly constant meanings. Such an additive description, by which we proceed hand over hand through history, requires a temporal indicator, which drawing on the sun of the linguistic findings, points out to us that there is a history at all (Koselleck 2002: 4-5).

An interesting example that may help establish the point Koselleck makes here is Koebner and Schmidt’s (1964) work on the history of the term ‘empire’. This would typically be a work that Koselleck would dub a “philological recording”. While this semantic history provides us with the shifts in reference and use of the word, it certainly does not give us a “periodization” or a theory of imperialism. A

theory of imperialism presumably would explain the *concept* of empire and not just its use. What allowed for the concept to gain legitimacy and power? What are its theoretical underpinnings?

> …only a theoretical anticipation that uncovers a specific time period can open the possibility of working through certain readings and transposing our dictionary from the level of positivistic recording to that of a conceptual history. Only theory transforms our work into historical research (Koselleck 2002: 6).

If only theory transforms purely philological investigations or "dictionaries" into history[134], then clearly we must have available to us some hypothesis by which to investigate these ideas we have raised in relation to 'communalism'. So far, Indian historians have contested the 'essentialist' nature of 'communalism' in colonial discourse and have replaced it with a 'historical' nature. That is, Indian historians have declared that there was no essential reason for Indian society to be 'communal' as the colonialists would have it, but rather that it was a condition put into place by processes of colonialism and therefore is a product of history. Let us turn the question on its head and propose instead that what is important is not that 'communalism' is historical, but what history is produced because of the category of 'communalism'. This is a history without "periodization" as Koselleck calls it or a truncated history as I call it. This history can only lead to the conclusion that Bayly reaches above, that we have always been 'communal'.

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[134] Koselleck's objections to "dictionaries" seems to be similar to Quentin Skinner's objection to the 'keywords' approach that Raymond Williams takes in his work (Skinner 2002). This is discussed in the next chapter.

This is the only possible conclusion of a history which flits between different phenomena without any account of the concept ‘communalism’. As Koselleck explains, this cannot serve as history any more than the “dictionaries” that simply trace the changes in the use of a term. These “dictionaries” may be useful only in so far as they are indicators to the “periodization” of Indian history. Thus, we return to the conclusion reached earlier that a theory of ‘communalism’ necessarily involves a theory of colonialism since that is the discourse that embodies this concept. Since our categories of understanding our history are derived from colonialism the first step to a “periodization” of Indian history would depend on a “periodization” of colonialism. This is the task I proceed to take on in chapters 3 and 4.

CHAPTER III

A THEORY OF COLONIALISM

In the earlier chapter I have shown that attempts to discredit the idea of 'communalism' as it was expressed within colonial discourse have centred on critiques of its 'essentialism'. This has given us the impression that once we cure 'communalism' of its essentialist causation, we change the meaning of the concept and it then becomes serviceable and indeed useful to describe a problem that we perceive in the Indian present and past. I make two counter arguments against this proposition. One, that an opposition to essentialism does not entail any change in the **meaning** of the concept. Two, historicists have sought to challenge the 'essentialism' of colonial knowledge as a variety of 'political incorrectness'. In essence this does not grapple with cognitive flaws of this knowledge system. Instead, it only tends to identify statements that are 'essentialist' or 'politically incorrect' and condemn these.

Thus, when colonialism is referred to as essentialist, we do not actually challenge colonial 'knowledge', only colonial politics. This implies that although they are grappling with a cognitive flaw endemic to the knowledge generated[135], it is each statement within colonial discourse towards which scrutiny is then directed. It is rejected if found to be 'politically incorrect' in itself, but the knowledge that generates these statements is ignored or exonerated overall. It is therefore not

[135] For what else could it mean if one is calling colonial knowledge itself "essentialist"?

surprising that although essentialism and historicism are seen as mutually opposite cognitive strategies, essentialist accounts of communalism absorb historical explanations without contradiction[136] and historicist accounts of communalism continue to exhibit deficiencies that are identical to the problems exhibited by essentialism which they seek to combat[137].

I went on to describe the product of attempts to reconcile our historical accounts with colonial discourse as resulting in a ‘truncated history’. I suggested that the way to avoid this truncated history would be to historicise the discourse[138] within which communalism gains coherence rather than trying to historicise the phenomenon as an object for historical enquiry. That is, we need to historicise colonial discourse within which communalism remains embedded rather than speculate on the causes of ‘communalism’[139]. It is my contention that the reason for our mixed response to colonial knowledge[140] rests in the absence of a theory of colonialism that will help us *characterise* and thereby understand this discourse and its implications. In this chapter I attempt to put into place a theory of colonialism which should help us return to the question of ‘communalism’ with much greater clarity.

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[136] See the analogy with “the east is spiritual” in chapter 2.
[137] For instance, essentialism is criticized for tending to account for diverse sets of problems within one causal framework. This continues to happen in historicist accounts of ‘communalism’ as well.
[138] See the analogy of ‘golden age’ in chapter 2.
[139] This is what a ‘periodization’ as Koselleck (2002) dubs it, would involve.
[140] Mixed because we call it ‘essentialist’ but continue to use it and only condemn statements within it.

Theories of colonialism

The history of colonialism has been well-charted and explained. Theoretical approaches to the study of colonialism/imperialism have been in the making since the early 20th century. Most studies of colonialism have predominantly been economic critiques[141]. Of course, 'post-colonialism' has expanded the range of approaches to the study of colonialism[142]. However, it is actually quite surprising that the wide range of literature that colonialism generated about itself over about four centuries is still to a great extent, *unexplained*. That is, those who have studied this literature have largely done so purely in order to *critique* it from political and economic perspectives of the present[143]. In so doing they have rarely been able to actually reconstruct the foundations of this literature, what made it comprehensible in its time and how colonisers in turn comprehended their actions[144]. In fact, this literature has borne the charge of being 'bigoted' for so long that it has lost credibility in history. That is, when reading accounts of

[141] The trend of economic critiques of imperialism started with Hobson (1902) who is also credited as the first British 'theorist' of imperialism. His book, *Imperialism: A Study* became the starting point for subsequent economic critiques in Britain taken up largely by Marxist historians. There is also another available approach by Koebner and Schmidt (1964), as mentioned in the earlier chapter, who wrote a "semantic history" of imperialism in the 1960's mapping at least twelve shifts in the meaning of the word.
[142] For instance psychological approaches like that of Fanon (1963) or more literary approaches like those of Homi Bhabha (1984), or historical approaches like that of the Subaltern Studies School. However, these have been more concerned with what 'de-colonization' would involve rather than an *explanation* of colonialism.
[143] This is true of most post-colonial work. Eric Stokes (1982), Thomas Metcalf (1995) and Uday Singh Mehta (1999) are different in that they attempt a framework to understand the relationship between British political/philosophical thought and their Indian policy.
[144] Exceptions to this being Pagden (1995) and Armitage (2000). However, their work does not cover the period or the literature relevant to the Indian Empire.

colonization, its ‘benefits’ and ‘motives’[145], we of the post-colonial generation have learnt to say immediately that these were reasons that were ‘false’; the ‘real’ reason was profit or deep-rooted ideas of racial superiority (the white man’s burden). However, we have missed something by ignoring this vast philosophical/political literature generated by the colonialists. Tom Kemp, in his book, *Theories of Imperialism* (1967), captures the trend in many ways for most available studies in the field.

> What we are concerned with here is *theories* of imperialism; that is, with general explanations and analyses of the phenomena…. The selection has been made from those who have sought to describe and analyse the movement as a whole, or a significant part of it, as a social and economic process requiring explanation. There are many apologetics for colonial policy; there is an enormous amount of writing which is favourable to ‘imperialism’ or which is in the nature of advocacy, and an even larger volume which, by taking for granted the phenomena associated with it, is implicitly so. **Such literature provides a fruitful source of study if one wishes to understand the manifestations of imperialism: it is less useful in trying to discern its driving forces.** The advocates, moreover, could not afford the candidness required for a fully developed theory; the most they could attain was an ideological defence, however disguised under a screen of objectivity. Consequently, analysis and description of the movement as a whole, and the working out of theories, has been almost entirely the work of critics (Kemp 1967: 3. emphasis added).

[145] The early twentieth century witnessed a school of imperial studies scholars such as Lucas (1912), Lewis (1891), Egerton (1941), Bryce (1914), Caldecott (1891) etc. who have long been rejected as henchmen of Empire, especially since several of these scholars held colonial government positions. The rejection of this school seems to serve the purpose of critiquing justifications of empire as a whole, especially amongst some of the Marxist scholars who rarely went back to the 18th century debates to generate critiques of those actually building Empire.

There is an important distinction to be noted here. We may study imperialism in order to understand its "driving forces" or in order to understand its "manifestations". Kemp asserts that the "advocacy" literature may help us understand the latter but certainly not the former. I have little quarrel with this characterisation. In fact, it is quite helpful in understanding my basic proposition of why we must study the literature that Kemp ignores. Answering *why* imperialism occurred – whether it is done through the relative sophistication of economic theories or the more simplistic racial ones – is not to answer, *what* imperialism/colonialism was[146]. This latter question still remains relevant[147], not in order to understand "its driving forces" as Kemp says, but rather in order to understand its "manifestations", which I will interpret as **frameworks of knowledge**.

[146] There has been one approach to this question led by Bernard Cohn which generated critiques of colonialism as a "cultural project of control" (Cohn 1996: ix), as Dirks put it in his 'Foreword' to Cohn's *Colonialism and its forms of Knowledge*. Cohn, Inden, Dirks and others of this school propose 'dominance' as in itself an explanation for the way in which "colonial knowledge and colonial power were imbricated" (x-xi). However, I suggest it is dominance itself that requires explanation. They do not understand dominance as purely political domination, yet, notions of cultural dominance remain rather fuzzy and seem limited to claims of superiority. Further, 'colonial knowledge' seems a self-evident category used in the sense of knowledge of the colonized generated by the colonizer which I reject as misleading later in this chapter.

[147] In the 70's Benjamin Cohen's *The Question of Imperialism* (1973) seems to have put into place the framework of "dominance and dependence" in order to understand almost all relations which were understood as 'imperialist'. Taking off from there, lately fresh interest has been generated in studies on imperialism with the idea of 'American neo-imperialism' coming into vogue. The proposition seems to be that understanding earlier imperialism allows us to understand American activities today in a more informed manner. The latest to make such a connection is Nicholas Dirks in the Preface to his book, *The Scandal of Empire* (2006). I do not see that notions of dominance and dependence defined in terms of political and more vaguely cultural superiority will yield answers to the persistence of colonial discourse in India. Further, whether a discussion of colonial discourse in India has any bearing on the 'imperialism' of America would require investigation into the forms of knowledge generated in the two contexts and not rely simply on the extension of the term imperialism to both contexts.

To speak of colonialism as a manifestation or colonialism's manifestations, in Kemp's words is certainly to understand how it was justified. But there are deeper implications to 'justification' than pure expedience as Kemp implies. Skinner, in his essay, "Moral Principles and Social Change" in (Skinner 2002), attacks the tendency amongst historians, of disregarding political or ideological claims made by politicians on the basis that these are usually "*ex post facto* rationalisations". Skinner asserts that even in the most extreme case of dealing with "someone who never believes in any of their professed principles; and whose principles never serve in consequence as the motives of their actions" (146), these professed principles are still of value. He goes on to place in context the importance of the "advocacy literature" that Kemp and other historians have rejected off-hand.

> It is in large part by the rhetorical manipulation of these [evaluative-descriptive] terms that any society succeeds in establishing, upholding, questioning or altering its moral identity. It is by describing and thereby commending certain course of action as (say) honest or friendly or courageous, while describing and thereby condemning others as treacherous or aggressive or cowardly, that we sustain our vision of the social behaviour we wish to encourage or disavow (Skinner 2002: 149).

Thus, 'ideological' literature[148] is an important source for the understanding of the normative framework within which societies of particular times operate. Further, he suggests that "all revolutionaries are…obliged to march backwards into battle"

[148] I coin the term in order to refer to literature generated by the people Skinner calls 'ideologists'. This is his term for those who are engaged in the attempt to commend an action to others and are thereby responsible for generating social change (Skinner 2002: 149).

(149-150). That is, a society is bound as much by the normative concepts, what he also calls “evaluative-descriptive terms” (148), it already has at its disposal as it is free to innovate. Innovation must refer back to an already existing framework in order to be comprehensible and valuable. As Skinner says, “The point that perhaps needs to be emphasised is that, however revolutionary such ideologists may be, they will nevertheless be committed, once they have accepted the need to legitimise their actions, to showing that some *existing* favourable terms can somehow be applied as apt descriptions of their behaviour” (149).

Studying colonialism as a ‘manifestation’ involves the study of normative concepts colonialism had available to it and it actively deployed. By implication, then, this is also the study of the grid within which colonisation *became comprehensible* and in turn *comprehended*, which essentially is what I am calling its ‘framework of knowledge’. Although ‘knowledge’, unlike ‘ideology’ is seen as non-evaluative or ‘objective’, my attempt here is to demonstrate that in the case of colonial discourse the fundamental basis of colonial knowledge about India was quite clearly located within the “moral identity”, as Skinner puts it, of the West. To understand this ‘framework of knowledge’ is what I refer to as historicising colonial discourse. Historicising a discourse would involve an attempt to demonstrate the conceptual grid which propels or generates ‘knowledge’ and, in the case of colonial knowledge, I claim that this conceptual grid is very deeply entrenched within the normative universe of the time.

Colonialism as a network of normative inferences

If one is to gain an understanding of the nature of colonial discourse and the normative concepts it had at its disposal, the first question to ask is, what is colonial discourse? It would seem technically correct to say that colonial discourse is that body of knowledge produced by the coloniser about the colonised. We would probably qualify this statement with the assertions that this knowledge was often 'racist'[149] and largely shaped by economic and political motivations.

However, this is a rather poor definition since it only identifies who generated this literature and purportedly about whom, but indicates nothing of the **character** of this literature. Thus it is merely a loose description and not a definition at all. It is also, by way of the qualifications we have to issue, ultimately misleading. Within this description, colonial discourse is a body of positive knowledge about a people as well as of political assessments about them. It is the politics of colonial discourse that is then sought to be blamed whereas the knowledge remains sometimes 'biased', sometimes 'unbiased'. However, **what is the relationship between colonial politics and colonial knowledge**? Is it one that is completely arbitrary, as is suggested by this description, or can one get a sharper focus on the question? Even the response to colonial politics itself has been fraught with

[149] I will attempt to lay out my contentions against seeing colonial discourse as 'racist' in the next chapter. But for an early refutation of this see *Imperialism and Civilisation* by Leonard Woolf (1928). Also see C.A.Bayly's "Afterword" in the recent reprint of Partha Sarathi Gupta's book *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement* (2002) and Russel's *Colour, Race and Empire* (1944). The latter traces the ideas of race as justification for colonization emerging only in the 1850's when the Empire was already well-established.

difficulties. On the one hand there is the complete condemnation of colonisation itself. However, this goes hand in hand with the defence of liberal/enlightenment ideals that served as justifications for colonisation at the time. Surely a definition of colonial discourse should be able to resolve some of these problems.

I would propose that one can understand colonial 'knowledge' in terms of a series of *inversions* that are characteristic of this discourse. These 'inversions' are similar in some ways to Skinner's idea about revolutionaries necessarily having to "march backwards into battle" (149). He asserts that normative frameworks play a crucial role in assessments that societies make about their own or others' actions which would in some definite way make certain actions possible while ruling out others. However, my own proposition is that this same framework of understanding would apply not only to what actions are made possible, but also to what 'knowledge' itself was made possible. This is an inversion since knowledge is usually considered to precede judgment. That is, we learn of certain 'facts' and then we begin to assess them within our own normative framework and come up with judgments. But it is possible that this process itself may be inverted and **statements that are necessarily assessments from within normative or evaluative frames come to be known as or equated with 'facts'**. A more neutral means of describing such knowledge would be to say that it is inferential. Clearly, we use inferential knowledge all the time and therefore that cannot be a problem in itself. However, when the

inference is drawn from within a normative framework, it remains a 'value judgment' rather than 'knowledge' about a society[150].

There are some fairly remarkable illustrations of this to be found in colonial records. For instance, in a *Report on the Interior Administration, Resources and Expenditure of the Government of Mysoor*, dated 4th September 1799, by Major M. Wilks acting resident at Mysore, we find an early explanation regarding the 'deceitful nature' of the people of India. Major Wilks drew out the essential distinction between English and indigenous systems of justice.

> 103. But the object in which the principles of proceeding differ most essentially, from those of an English Court, is in the degree of credit which is given to the testimony upon Oath.
> 104. It appears to be in the spirit of English jurisprudence to receive as true, the testimony of a competent Witness until his credibility is impeached.
> 105. It is a fixed rule of evidence in Mysoor, to suspect as false the testimony of every Witness, until its truth is otherwise supported.
> 106. It follows as a consequence of this principle, that the Panchaets are anxious for the examination of collateral facts, of matters of general notoriety, and of all that enters into circumstantial evidence: and that their decisions are infinitely more influenced by that description of proof, than is consistent with the received rules of evidence, to which we are accustomed, or could be tolerated in the practice of an English Court.
> 107. I have frequently conversed with the Dewan, and with the most intelligent members of these Panchaets, on the subject of this new principle in the reception of evidence: and none of these persons have hesitated to defend the rule, and to avow, as an abstract

[150] As I claimed in the earlier chapter is the case with 'communalism'.

> proposition founded on experience, that the presumption is infinitely stronger against the veracity, than in favor of the truth, of a witness.
>
> 108. The period is not very remote when the person who should have openly adverted to defective veracity, as a general characteristic of the people of India, would have been considered in other countries as the victim of an illiberal prejudice, or the author of an unmerited calumny. **The translation of their civil and religious institutes, has now laid open to the general reader, the apology or the expiation of perjury in most of its forms**: and the most enlightened authorities of the law, have pronounced their practical conviction, that the natives of India are lamentably deficient in that ordinary degree of veracity, which in other countries is cherished as the vital principle of moral conduct, and the foundation of all the virtues.
>
> 109. On an abstract view of the principle which has been noticed, it would seem to be more consonant to reason to receive testimony at the value which it probably possesses, than to accept it at a value, which it probably does not possess; but it would be foreign to the object of this Report, and still more remote from the competence of its author to discuss the practicability, or expedience of reconciling this rule of evidence to any fixed principles of jurisprudence.
>
> 110. It would be more encouraging to the views of a benevolent legislator to attribute the defective morals of the people, chiefly to the despotic Government, under which they have immemorially lived; involving the habitual necessity of opposing fraud to force, and to conclude, that the evil would gradually subside, on the establishment of a better order of things (Wilks 1805: 26-28 emphasis added).

Thus the absence of the idea of the *inherent* truth of a testimony is taken as evidence for the general encouragement of perjury and thereby deceit. This is quite an interesting ‘inversion’. It is difficult if not impossible to trace the absence of larger concepts like ‘Truth’ itself, which is what would be required to make a

simple inversion here – there is an absence of Truth as a concept therefore these people must be deceitful[151]. Major Wilks seems to find a way of deriving this larger norm from a legal practice – testimonial truth[152]. It is important to distinguish Wilks' statement from an observation – these people lie and are thus deceitful[153]. Wilks is also not drawing a simple contrast to the principle of how testimony is dealt with in two legal systems and its consequences. Here Major Wilks points out that there is an absence of a principle which is crucial to English Law and is also "the vital principle of moral conduct, and the foundation of all the virtues" in the West and by extension should be so in all the world. If such a vital principle is absent, not Truth itself, but the idea of inherent truth of the testimony of an individual, *even though* this practice "*would seem to be more consonant to reason*", it must serve as *irrevocable* proof of the "defective veracity" of the Indian population in general.

In this case, we see the knowledge as inferential from within the normative framework of English Law. However, some may argue that the 'knowledge' of oriental deceit precedes this inference. Thus, there may be well-accepted notions about the 'Asiatics' or 'Orientals'[154] already in circulation which are merely reassessed and thereby 'proved' within the normative frameworks of the time.

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[151] This is not to say that such an inversion would hold true either.

[152] It would seem reasonable to suggest that all 'universal' norms can only be derived from conditions that seem to uphold them within a particular normative framework.

[153] This is a common recurring observation about the 'oriental' as I subsequently point out. Again, it is certainly not my objective to give this observation credibility. I merely use this as an instance to show how normative inferences would differ from other statements. Later I hope to draw a distinction between stereotypes and normative inferences which should explain this further.

[154] See Edward Said's classic text *Orientalism* (1978).

Were these based on observation at first and only later ‘proved’ through inference? The implications of this position would be that Major Wilks in the example above may have merely examined one framework (English Law), within which to demonstrate in normative terms the deceit of the oriental, but his ‘knowledge’ (presented as ‘pure observation’) of this trait he had already received from older European sources about India.

I propose that the distinction between the ‘knowledge’ he already may have had and the ‘proof’ he provides is what gives ‘colonial discourse’ a certain distinctive character. *Observations* that Orientals are deceitful are subject to both change and contradiction by other or the same observer over time[155]. However, **once inferential knowledge of the kind above is drawn, contradiction can only come when the normative framework itself faces change**. In other words, Wilks provides proof which rests on the foundations not of observed behaviour in Eastern society but of the *absence* of a normative concept that is of crucial import in Western Law. To understand his proof requires no observation at all. **In fact, this inferential knowledge substituted the very *need* for observation**. And the only possible means of a change in assessment would have to rest either on a major change in the western normative framework itself (in this case western Law), or on the East *learning* this western normative framework[156].

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[155] For instance, see Elphinstone’s defence that the Orientals were not necessarily *all* deceptive though this was the major flaw of their character! “Breaches of faith in private life are much more common in India than in England; but even in India, the great majority, of course, are true to their word.” (Elphinstone. *The History of India* Vol.I. 1841: 372)

[156] See S.N Balagangadhara (2005) for an examination of the clash between ‘theoretical knowledge’ generated by the West and ‘action-knowledge’ generated by the East. His formulation of cultural difference

Thus, 'colonial discourse' is made up, not of observation, but of a network of normative inferences. This 'knowledge' posits the projected consequences of the absence of the subject's (coloniser's) own normative framework as statements of fact about the colonised. This means that this 'knowledge' itself embodies certain learning goals for the colonised. And until these norms are learnt, or rather, the normative framework of the coloniser adopted, there cannot be any change in the assessment of the colonised society. The characterisation I provide above is absolutely crucial to understanding colonial discourse and finally reconciling the kinds of contradictions between colonial politics and enlightenment ideals that post-colonial thought has grappled with. However, there is one more aspect that is a crucial part of definition – what is the subject[157] of this discourse? **'Colonial discourse' is that body of reasoning and knowledge which sought to justify, maintain and substantiate the Empire/s of the West**[158]. This alternative characterisation, I propose, allows for a better understanding of what this discourse was about – not the colonised people, as has been believed, but the "Empire" i.e., a **relationship** between two sets of people, the coloniser and the colonised. The relative strength of such a characterisation is that it allows us to understand the relationship between colonial politics and colonial knowledge rather than making it seem like an arbitrary connection. Thus, the 'knowledge' generated is already

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gives us one means of understanding why the normative framework of the West could not have been simply imbibed by or wholly instituted in the East.

[157] Here I use 'subject' as 'what it is about' and not *who* is generating it.

[158] Whether the Eastern empires produced anything like this discourse is an intriguing question which may bring out some interesting insights for history.

recognised as entrenched within the normative prescriptions of the relationship between coloniser and colonised.

However, this is not to suggest simply that ideology generates knowledge suitable to its goals, i.e., that colonialism generated a knowledge which would always re-emphasise the coloniser's superiority. As Skinner emphasises, there is no ready-made ideology which then generates knowledge suitable to its goals. Ideologies are generated with constant reference to normative ideals already in existence. Thus, the ideology of colonialism and colonial knowledge were generated side by side[159] with reference to already existing dominant normative frameworks of the time. And again, I would emphasise that unlike the assertion that ideology generates knowledge suitable to its goals, which would stress expedience, here there is a serious structural mechanics to the knowledge generated. Once we understand it, we can predict the kind of knowledge produced and to some extent the implications it would have for the colonised.

What is *not* a normative inference

In the section above, I use Major Wilks' observations on native law in order to suggest what a normative inference is. The definition remains tenuous and requires much more elaboration. However, the nature of elaboration I take up here is by way of analogy and example. Further theoretical elaboration is

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[159] This is clear when one looks at the 18th century especially, and the variety of responses to the question of whether colonisation was legitimate or not.

certainly required. However, that would perhaps require a work devoted completely to colonialism itself. Here I would like to propose a theory of colonialism in order to test whether it can generate an explanation of 'communalism'. Thus, by way of quick and more instinctive explanation, I seek to demonstrate through two examples, what a normative inference is *not* in order to clarify the concept without further theoretical elaboration. I hope to establish through these examples that in order to understand colonialism one needs to focus not on the *content* of the statements being made about the 'oriental' but rather on the structure of the knowledge from which they are derived.

The first example is the commonly occurring statement that "the oriental is lazy". There is a fairly long history to this assertion. But there is an important distinction to be drawn between at least three cases where the statement occurs. First let us examine Luke Scrafton's statement that the Hindus are lazy primarily because of their religious beliefs and secondly because of their climate.

> …on the whole…the Gentoos, uninfluenced by the Mahometans are a meek, superstitious charitable people, a character formed by their temperance, customs and religion…They prefer a lazy apathy, and frequently quote this saying from some favorite book: "It is better to sit than to walk, to lye down than to sit; better to sleep than to wake, and death is best of all." Their temperance and the enervating heat of the climate, starves all the natural passions, and leaves them only avarice, which preys most on the narrowest minds (Scrafton 1763*:* 17).

Let us examine Scrafton's first reason, native religion as the cause of native sloth. Scrafton proposes that the hindus are lazy because of injunctions in their religion that make them so. Scrafton's primary explanation seems rooted in the formula that the oriental must be subject to a normative discourse that dictates his behaviour and readily a saying or a text is attributed to have this power over the native.

Scrafton cites the climate as the second cause for why the oriental is lazy. Climatic theory was based on a fairly popular 'scientific' proposition that human characteristics are often dependent on the climatic conditions of their habitat[160]. Thus, it was often asserted in colonial sources that the oriental was lazy because of the warm tropical climate which made him lethargic. For instance, Orme proposed that the reason that weaving was a major occupation in India was because the "extreme" climate led the inhabitants to choose an "easy" occupation (Orme 1782: 409).

The third explanation for the same assertion however is based on the absence of private property. The basis for this is that the oriental was lazy because human beings are driven to work hard only if they find that their work yields rewards for them and leads to prosperity[161]. Thus, the 'oriental' is lazy because of the

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[160] See *Climates and Constitutions* by Mark Harrison (1999) for a detailed study of the climatic discourse in colonialism.

[161] This assumption is characteristic of a great deal of colonial literature from Bernier (1989) to Elphinstone (1841) to Lyall (1929).

absence of the principle of private property or rather, because of ‘oriental despotism’.

> The mechanick or artificer will work only to the measure of his necessities. He dreads to be distinguished. If he becomes too noted for having acquired a little more money than others of his craft, that will be taken from him. If conspicuous for the excellence of his skill, he is seized upon by some person in authority, and obliged to work for him night and day, on much harder terms than his usual labour acquired when at liberty.
>
> Hence all cumulation is destroyed; and all the luxury of an Asiatick empire has not been able to counteract by its propensity to magnificence and splendour, the dispiriting effects of that fear which reigns throughout, and without which a despotick power would reign no more (Orme 1782: 405).

The first reasoning cited for why the oriental is lazy is purportedly based on an assertion about ‘Hinduism’; the second is based on the discourse of climatic theory which was a fairly well-accepted ‘science’ of the time; and the third discourse may loosely be termed liberalism or liberal political philosophy. While all three discourses are ‘colonial’, i.e., from colonial sources and during colonial times, I suggest that it is only the third reasoning that may be considered a normative inference. In none of these cases is the statement ‘true’. However, that is not what one needs to understand or establish in order to understand colonial discourse.

What is the distinction between the three justifications? The ideas based on native religion seem to be derived from a basic misrepresentation of Hinduism. There is quite likely no such line or no such saying, and even if there were, it would require a fair stretch of the imagination in order to claim that it was a central tenet of Hinduism which informed all native decision to be lazy. Thus, the first explanation for why the 'oriental is lazy' is based on a misrepresentation of his 'religion'. One finds in early traveller accounts or early colonial accounts several features that are based on exaggerations or misrepresentations on the part of the narrator. Thus, this explanation for why the oriental is lazy, I would classify with observations which tried to account for why the 'Moor' was effeminate and debauched[162]. These are so clearly identifiable to us as the realm of fantasy or exaggeration, that we do not necessarily require an explanation for these assertions.

The second reason for the same statement is based on flawed science. Climatic theory is subject to either change or development or rejection on the basis of

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[162] "The word Moors is used by us to express the Mahometans of all sects and countries who are settled in India; and it is indeed necessary to have some general word; for whether Pytan, Persian, or Tartar by birth, it matters not, the enervating softness of climate, soon forms but one common character of them, whose distinguishing qualities are perfidy and sensuality" (Scrafton 1763: 19).

Their character Scrafton asserted is "formed in their education". And since the boys are kept in the *zenana* till the age of 5 or 6, they "acquire a delicacy of constitution". When they reach that age tutors teach them Persian and Arabic and they learn how to behave. "When the hours of school and company are past, they return to the seraglio, and the parents never scruple to admit them to all their plays and diversions, at which are exhibited representations of everything that is beastly and unnatural, not in a manner to excite horror but merely to afford diversion….the slaves and women of the seraglio wait with impatience for the first appearance of desire to debauch them…" (Scrafton 1763: 19).

"I am sensible I have altogether given the Moors a detestable character; and I am sorry to say it is so universally true, that I never knew above one or two or three exceptions, and they were among the Tartar and Persian officers of the army, whose native manners were not yet utterly corrupted" (23).

observation. Indeed, we find climatic theory was rejected and did not find much favour past the early nineteenth century. Thus, although this reasoning was very influential at the time, we need not worry about it today. At best, it would allow us some insight into notions of the past, but tells us nothing of the present. Presumably, we are interested in colonial discourse since it continues to inform the present.

In the last case, where the statement is derived from the absence of private property, we have a normative inference. This is because it is a judgment (like that in the first case), but it is very crucially *not* based on a misrepresentation. It does not rely on any proof at all. **And no evidence can serve to prove that despotism does not render people lazy, since it is a self-contained proof**. It does not require *evidence* to either prove or disprove it; what it requires is a challenge to the propositional statements themselves. Nothing short of that can serve to contradict it.

For instance, let us imagine that an 'oriental' farmer was observed to work hard. There could only be two possible explanations. In the absence of private property the farmer works hard because he is an exception to the rule and is of diligent *character*; or, his hard work is evidence for the fact that he is exploited by the zamindar[163]. It would not be likely for the reverse inference to arise: the farmers

[163] This would then be corroborated or accommodated as one more feature of the normative inference, 'despotism'. Thus, it would ironically mean that 'despotism' is responsible both for oriental sloth and oriental diligence. I discuss 'despotism' in more detail in the next section.

in India work hard irrespective of the fact that they do not own the land, therefore, human beings are not necessarily driven to work hard by virtue of the principles of private property and profit. Why is this the case? **Because norms are not subject to proof.** This leaves much to be understood about normative frameworks. However, this awaits further philosophical work which would define the nature of a normative discourse[164]. Here I attempt to distinguish it from other kinds of cognitive mistakes.

The second example I use to show what a normative inference is *not*, is based on an observation on the textile industry in India by Orme (1782). Orme observed that the people in India although extremely wanting in development of scientific knowledge had developed techniques to produce much finer weaves of cloth than those produced in the West which had the benefit of a much more “advanced state of mechanics”. He explains this by saying that the people of the East have much smaller and more delicate fingers and therefore are naturally equipped to produce finer cloth.

> For it is a matter of fact, that the tools which they use are as simple and plain as they can be imagined to be. The rigid, clumsy fingers of an European would scarcely be able to make a piece of canvas with the instruments which are all that an Indian employs in making a piece of cambric.

[164] Foucault attempts this in much of his work which grapples either with the notions of the ‘normal’ or the consequences of ‘juridical discourses’ (Foucault 1992; 2003; 2005). Dr. Vivek Dhareshwar’s course ‘Normativity and Experience’ (at CSCS 2002) is the source of most of my understanding of normativity. See also Dhareshwar ‘Politics, Experience and Cognitive Enslavement: Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj*’ (unpublished presentation at the ‘Dharma and Ethics’ conference January 2009). Explicit theorisation of ‘normativity’ has been undertaken by Balagangadhara in his forthcoming work on ethics.

> It is farther remarkable, that every distinct kind of cloth is the produce of a particular district, in which the fabric has been transmitted, perhaps for centuries, from father to son – a custom which must have conduced to the perfection of the manufacture (Orme 1782: 413)

There are two observations here. One, that Orme equates technological superiority with mechanical superiority. Two, that his explanation for the superior quality of cloth produced by the native privileges a biological over the social or technological explanation. In terms of the first observation this helps us draw out another aspect of what a normative inference is *not*. Orme's mistake of equating mechanical superiority with technological superiority is simply a mistake of association. From his historical context, he has reasons to equate the two. He is used to thinking in this way because of events related to the industrial revolution perhaps. However, this is not a normative inference, for there is no norm invoked to justify this familiarity. It is simply a contextual familiarity that is transferred erroneously. The second observation relates to the kind of explanation Orme privileges. He privileges the more ridiculous biological explanation and only backs it up with an account of how tradition seems to bring this knowledge to perfection. Perhaps all we need to understand from this is a sense of prejudice. Orme does not seem to be able to grant to the Indian traditional practices due credit. This is possibly because he is prejudiced against the Indians. Although one may be able to establish that a part of his prejudice stems from other

normative inferences he draws[165], in this one instance itself one cannot detect a normative inference.

What does this description of the 'normative inference' achieve? I suggest it allows us to identify from amongst all the colonial literature that we inherit, one major strand that, I believe, will explain a large part of our discomfort with colonial knowledge. I also believe that the formulation in terms of normative inference also forces us to face the relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial politics. These are not distinct, but rather intimately connected as I will hopefully demonstrate in my section on 'despotism'. This formulation also allows an immediate understanding of the route that we must take in order to untangle our history from this colonial knowledge. For, if colonial discourse is fundamentally a network of normative inferences, we do not need to examine historical sources in order to establish the veracity of particular statements we inherit, but rather arrive at an understanding of the coloniser's culture and history[166].

Before I try to tackle the possible criticism that this definition of colonial discourse would face, I would like to draw out the implications in terms of the similarities and distinctions of this proposition from the ways colonialism or colonial discourse has so far been viewed.

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[165] As I will proceed to show in the 'despotism' section
[166] This also reminds us of Koselleck's (2002) insights about the significance of a conceptual history and the futility of simply replicating 'philological recordings'.

Three alternative theories of colonial discourse

Colonial discourse as essentialist knowledge

The above characterisation of colonial discourse shares certain characteristics in common with critiques of essentialism that I examined in the earlier chapter. I claim that the inferential knowledge of colonial discourse was not subject to change unless the normative framework itself changed. One of the bases for the critique of essentialism similarly asserts that it produced knowledge which was unchanging. Thus, once the 'oriental' was seen as deceitful by nature, nothing could change this understanding. So why not simply say that colonial discourse was essentialist in nature? What does the characterisation of colonialism as a network of normative inferences add to our understanding that essentialism does not?

Essentialism is used as a basic criticism in relation to certain features visible in colonial discourse. One, this discourse is not sensitive to differences but is rather based on broad generalisations that are unreasonable as assertions about an entire people. Two, it poses an unchanging set of characteristics that have remained the same for centuries and does not allow for these to change in the time to come. While I agree that these are characteristics of colonial discourse, essentialism does not explain why these occur. There is also a strange lack of necessity for explanation for it **returns us to the object of the discourse while**

saying nothing substantial about the subject[167] of the discourse. Thus, while it rejects certain characterisations of the object (in this case, India) it does not add to our understanding of colonialism or the coloniser who generates this discourse. It gets caught up instead in a historical or philosophical examination of the characteristics of the object in order to deny them[168]. Thus, while, what we call 'essentialism' may be an outcome of this discourse, or a feature, it does not serve to *explain* it. The proposition that colonialism is a network of normative inferences does however, define as well as explain why the characteristics which we dub 'essentialist' would be a feature of this discourse. Since the characteristics assigned to the native population derive not from observation but from an absence of a particular norm that is registered. That is, the coloniser's normative framework makes them notice absences the predicted consequences of which are generalised to the whole native population. This characterisation of the native population then **remains unchanging until and unless the normative framework of the coloniser is *instituted* in the native context**. This accounts for the criticism raised by those who describe colonial discourse as essentialist, for the feature they observe is that it relegates native populations to stagnation and a state of never changing or developing.

[167] Here 'subject' is used not as 'topic', but as the agent of the discourse.
[168] The paradigm for this would be the discussion on the statement 'Blacks are criminals' in chapter 2.

Inversions vs. the ‘Other’

Another explanation of colonial discourse that my characterisation seems to resemble, but from which I would like to draw certain distinctions, is that of the positing of the ‘other’. Clearly, it follows from what I say above, that the lack of certain fundamental norms becomes a means of drawing out distinctions, often in terms of binaries, between the coloniser and colonised. The ‘other’ has been a popular post-colonial expression which tries to convey the series of binary distinctions drawn between coloniser and colonised. Again, as in the case of essentialism above, this term may describe a characteristic of colonial discourse, but gives no real explanation for it. Or rather, it **allows for a variety of different ideas to act as explanations alternately**, such as ‘racism’, ‘civilisation stage theory’, ‘Christianity’ etc. Thomas Metcalf for instance, systematically tries to explain colonial policy in terms of the coloniser’s avowed similarity and difference with the ‘other’.

> From the seventeenth century scientific of comparative religion, with greater knowledge of India, dissolved the old ‘monster’ image of a frightening ‘East’. Under the influence of Enlightenment rationalism and secularism, distant lands lost their cosmological significance for Europeans, and were described instead through the taxonomic structure of eighteenth-century natural science. Much of this description was sympathetic, and informed by a search for the underlying unities that bound together the family of ‘Man’. Nevertheless, it decisively set the non-European world apart as an ‘Other’. Several elements in enlightenment thinking together produced this result. One was the use of such societies as platforms from which to criticize the governmental structures and social

> conventions of Europe itself. From Montesquieu's 'Persian Letters' to the invocation of the 'noble savage', the philosophes of the Enlightenment drained non-European societies of all content. Imagined places, the served only, through the device of irony, to reflect Europe's gaze back upon itself.…
>
> One might argue further that, as Europeans constructed a sense of self for themselves apart from the old order of Christendom, they had of necessity to create a notion of an 'other' beyond the seas. To describe oneself as 'enlightened' meant that someone else had to be shown as 'savage' or 'vicious'. To describe oneself as 'modern', or as 'progressive', meant that those who were not included in that definition had to be described as 'primitive' or 'backward'. Such alterity, what one might call the creation of doubleness, was an integral part of the Enlightenment project. As the British endeavoured to define themselves as 'British', and thus as 'not Indian', they had to make of the Indian whatever they chose *not* to make of themselves. This process, as we shall see in the following chapters, had as its outcome the creation of an array of polarities that shaped much of the ideology of the Raj. These oppositions ranged from, among others, those of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' to those of 'honesty' and 'deceit'. In the end, such contrasts encompassed anything that would serve to reassure the British of their own distinctive character and keep the Indian 'Other' in its proper place (Metcalf 1995: 5,6).

Is it natural for all people to posit their 'Other's?[169] Does colonialism do this any differently from the way a European nationalism may have done[170]? Further, any kind of distinction drawn seems to count as 'other'-ing. However, people distinguish themselves from others all the time; the individual distinguishes himself from others and this process is applauded as that of gaining identity.

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[169] See S.N. Balagangadhara (2006) for a hypothesis on *why* the West generates stereotypes.

[170] For instance the distinctions between the French and the English that were a hugely popular subject in the 18th and 19th century.

Then what is it that makes ‘other’-ing a problem? Usually, ‘other’-ing is viewed as a problem only if it becomes the basis for a discriminatory politics or possibly, when it is the means of asserting the superiority of one group over another. This suggests that it is not the process of ‘other’-ing itself but rather the value attached to it that creates problems. Thus, if the knowledge generated does not make negative judgments about the other group, it would be largely unobjectionable. However, common assertions such as the ‘spirituality of the East’ were not ‘negative’ and were often qualities lauded by at least a section of the colonisers. Would that make this knowledge acceptable, useful or true? It is not the value the knowledge attaches to the group but the **structure of the knowledge** itself that is the problem. This formulation would also help us understand the difference between colonisation and other political movements which also rely on ‘other’-ing or drawing differences, like nationalism, as I have suggested above.

The motivation that Metcalf poses for this ‘other’-ing is “the Enlightenment project”. He asserts that the West *had* to make India everything that “they chose *not* to make of themselves”. This is an interesting proposition. However, he does not explain why that should have happened. What distinguished the ‘Enlightenment project’ from all other intellectual or political movements such that it required to pose certain populations as its opposite in order to develop itself? In the account above, it seems as if enlightenment thought itself *deliberately* engaged[171] in the “creation of doubleness”, in spite of its vision of ‘one family of

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[171] Skinner lays out an argument against assigning intent to ideology. See Skinner (2002).

Man'. Its vision, Metcalf suggests, was sometimes sympathetic but quite often driven by the "alterity" of East and West[172]. This brings us to the well-worn question, how does one account for alterity if the enlightenment project is that of universalism?

If one looks at the statements within colonial literature as an arbitrary set of similarities and differences between coloniser and colonised, one cannot account for what is going on. But if one attempts to answer in terms of the inferential 'knowledge' that I attempt to draw out, it may perhaps help clarify why there was space for both similarities and such stark differences and which statements of difference bear deeper investigation. For instance, the fact that certain populations were considered effeminate while others were considered manly enough to compare favourably with the coloniser himself, would quite possibly be a matter simply of expressing prejudice or perhaps deploying available stereotypes. However, a statement such as the characterisation of the East as 'slavish' and the West as 'free'[173], would be an important statement of alterity since it is based on deeper normative principles of political structures and their influence on human nature which cannot be dismantled unless their source is recognised[174]. Thus, alterity must not be understood simply as 'difference', but a particular *kind* of difference which dictates the desirability of only a particular norm for all human cultural and political systems. Further, we in fact perpetrate

[172] If anything the enlightenment project made everyone the *same*. For a discussion of how for instance religion was made into a cultural universal, see Balagangadhara (2005).
[173] For a relatively recent but extremely popular enactment of this old alterity see the popular Hollywood film *300* released in 2007.
[174] Several of these characterizations are in fact rooted in the idea of the 'despotism' of the East.

this alterity unless we reject the norms that generate it. A careful examination would establish then, that it is not in spite of, but rather because of the universalist project of Enlightenment that this kind of alterity arises[175] (see Balagangadhara 2005).

Orientalism

Orientalism is the most comprehensive theory of colonialism we have had so far. Edward Said presented the idea of an uninterrupted discourse about the East which the West had generated over several centuries preceding and enduring through colonisation. Thus, Said proposed that colonialism or colonial discourse was simply a continuation of orientalism. In fact, orientalism had made colonialism *possible* since this knowledge generated a power structure of West over East which only found direct political expression through colonialism.

Said's central thesis was that "the phenomenon of Orientalism…deals principally, not with a correspondence between Orientalism and Orient, but with the internal consistency of Orientalism and its ideas about the Orient despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient" (Said 1978: 5). This formulation captures exactly my assertions about normative inferences. Thus, unless I can demonstrate some distinction between orientalism and colonial discourse, there is really no need for the latter since the former encompasses it.

[175] For a detailed investigation into the consequences of the universalist project of enlightenment, see chapter XI, Balagangadhara (2005).

My contentions with orientalism are two-fold. Firstly I suggest that Said's proposition of an unchanging discourse may well be true. However, he does not tease out for us the diverse strands within this discourse and their consequences. Thus, Said's *Orientalism* puts together statements of pure fantasy, stereotype and what I call normative inferences altogether as one large discourse only because the putative subject of this discourse is the orient. However, these three different categories of statements would, I propose, have different consequences. Although Said himself asserts that the *content* of the statements makes little difference, he tends to rely on a repetition of the content as evidence for his theory and does not pay attention to its structure or justification. As I demonstrate in my discussion of the 'lazy oriental' however, the justifications rather than the statement give us insights into the reason these statements are generated and more importantly, why they persist. Thus, what weakens Said's thesis is that any contradiction of the *statement* from a Western source proves his theory false. And sometimes it becomes almost a matter of having to choose particular aspects of a colonial narrative and wilfully ignoring others in order to hold the completely unvarying narrative about the East produced by the West. Consider for instance, Elphinstone's ideas about native character.

> Our writers also confound the distinctions of time and place; they combine in one character the Maratta and the Bengalese; and tax the present generation with the crimes of the heroes of the "Maha Bharat." It might be argued, in opposition to many

> unfavourable testimonies, that those who have know the Indians the longest have always the best opinion of them; but this is rather a compliment to human nature than to them, since it is true of every other people. It is more in point, that all persons who have retired from India think better of the people they have left after comparing them with others even of the most justly admired nations (Elphinstone 1841: 371).

This would seem to contradict Said's thesis that the West generated the same statements without variation since here is a powerful representative of the West who contradicts some popular negative stereotypes about the natives. On the other hand, Elphinstone also says that the Bengalis are the laziest of the Indian people and while the Marathas are more industrious, "love of repose, though not sufficient to extinguish industry or repress occasional exertions, may be taken as a characteristic of the whole people" (371). What does one do when faced with these contradictory ideas within the same colonial text? Said can only defend his thesis by saying that his thesis holds true for the dominant strand of colonial discourse though there may be exceptions to the same. This is a relatively weak explanation since there is then no accounting for where these 'suppressed'[176] strands come from and how they interact with the dominant.

This brings me to my second objection to Said's *Orientalism*, which relates to his *explanation* for the discourse itself. Said suggested that the West systematically produced its alter-ego or 'other' in the East.

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[176] It also seems rather weak justification to call statements of such eminent colonial personalities as not being part of the dominant colonial discourse.

> Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for displaying in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. Additionally, the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged, first according to general ideas about who or what was an Oriental, then according to a detailed logic governed not simply by empirical reality but by a battery of desires, repressions, investments and projections (Said 1978: 7-8).

Thus, the East was a product of Western "consciousness" and "imagination". But, this seems to deflect the possibility of explanation since the problem is relegated to a deep inaccessible psychological realm. This has a further consequence. Said is unable then to reconcile the relationship of liberal politics to the phenomenon of orientalism. Thus, like Metcalf above, *Orientalism* is unable to account for how Western Enlightenment thought (the source of ideas such as liberty and equality, to which Said felt compelled to affirm his loyalties)[177], could have generated this discourse of alterity in relation to the East. Usually, this is explained away by saying that orientalism as a discourse was so well entrenched

[177] Said saw *Orientalism* (1978) as a defence of 'humanist' ideals with which he allied himself at several points in the text. See for instance his "Afterword" where he sees the implications of the dissolution of "the Orient" as a means of establishing a "human community". All such positions by implication, characterize colonization as a result of misguided or incompletely understood principles of enlightenment or liberalism or humanism. I would propose it is our understanding of enlightenment/liberalism/humanism that is perhaps incomplete. There is also a certain absurdity involved in saying that those who actually generated a doctrine *understood* it imperfectly!

by this time that even enlightenment thought could not break away from it. If enlightenment thought did indeed break away from discourses of inequality within its own societies, why would it be so difficult for the same to happen with discourses relating to other societies? This seems logically inconsistent, and one prefers Metcalf's (as well as the post-colonial scholars') position that there must be something about enlightenment thought which created these inconsistencies even if one does not agree with the explanation they provide. This is where I hope my explanation adds some strength and clarity.

In Said's formulation colonialism is a variation of the same discourse that comes together as orientalism in the 18th and 19th centuries, but has a long and well-established prior history in European imagination about the East. My proposition is that although, as Said demonstrated in his work, much early European works had notions about the Asiatics and Orientals which were often carried forward in colonial discourse, these notions are distinct from the systematic 'knowledge' put forward within colonial discourse. For instance, Said himself spoke of these characterisations of the natives as stereotypes. These stereotypes[178] are certainly a dominant feature of colonial literature. However, in the example of the statement 'the oriental is lazy' discussed above, the statement remains a stereotype within all three accounts, but is a normative inference only within one. Although stereotypes generated about the native show relatively little variation

[178] See again Balagangadhara (2006) and Dhareshwar's unpublished paper "*Adhyasa* and the 'I': On some aspects of Stereotypes" (2008). These works attempt a much more productive characterisation of 'stereotypes' than is available in Said's deployment of the term. However, I would still hold to the distinction between stereotypes and normative inferences drawn here.

through the centuries of orientalism, the justifications and the structure of the knowledge embodying these stereotypes seems to show some variation, as I have attempted to demonstrate in the 'lazy oriental' discussion. Thus, I suspect that investigating these statements as 'stereotypes' tells us less about colonialism than investigating particular statements or characterisations as normative inferences.

One of the major advantages of the idea of normative inferences is that it allows us to understand colonial discourse as 'knowledge' generated whereby colonisation *became comprehensible* to the coloniser and in turn *comprehended* the colonised This returns us to Skinner's notions of ideological or normative literature, which I proposed earlier, is central to understanding what colonialism *is* and what it was to achieve. This discourse was deeply related to the fundamental questions raised in England all through the early years of colonisation in India. These were basically, 'What are the British doing in India?' and consequently 'What must the Indians learn from them?' Thus, the central feature of colonial discourse is not the repeated patterns in the descriptions it gives of the native, but the coherence it renders to colonisation itself. It is this discourse that I characterize as a network of inter-dependent normative inferences.

The basic distinction between orientalism and colonial discourse then would be that while both are spurious discourses that tell us more about the coloniser than the colonised, oriental 'knowledge' would not have embodied learning goals like

colonial discourse did. Second, this knowledge would show fewer normative inferences. As a consequence it would make for more diversity of observations. Thus there would be much greater scope for contradictions as also for some diversity of observation about the East to be reflected[179].

Testing normative inferences

How would I prove that colonial discourse is primarily a network of normative inferences? In some cases one sees the inferences as they occur in the works of the authors, as in Major Wilks' case above. However, this is certainly not true of all colonial writing, a great deal of which was certainly presented purely as observation. It is not however necessary to discredit each colonial utterance as *not* being an observation. Instead, certain conditions must be met for my proposition to carry weight as a possible hypothesis to be tested by further investigations in history. There may be two supporting conditions (not proofs, but reasonably strong deductive clauses) to show that colonial discourse is based on

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[179] Early accounts such as those of Sir Thomas Roe covering the years 1615-1619 (Foster ed. 1926) or Captain Alexander Hamilton's *A New Account of the East-Indies*: 1688-1723 (1995, first published 1744) do not show the structures of understanding India that are evident in colonial accounts. There are instances of great differences between different areas within India and with Asia. For instance, Hamilton calls the "Moors" of Persia "robbers" but speaks of their "improved character" in India. He also makes different assessments of different rulers without deploying the idea of 'Indian despotism' as a general framework of assessment. Further, he speaks of the tolerance between Hindus and Muslims at several points while also speaking of instances of discrimination and dislike. Hamilton is also responsible for the description of the 'jagarynaut temple' where he rather neutrally describes the practice of 'Gentows' throwing themselves before the wheels of the chariot during the procession. For Hamilton this is merely an interesting story for his reader. For Macaulay however, this description became the means of proving the horrific consequences of any British 'respect' for Indian sentiments and traditions. See Macaulay's 'The Gates of Somnauth', a speech delivered in the House of Commons on the 9th of March 1843 (Macaulay 2008). For several early British accounts see *Early Travels in India 1583-1619* (Foster ed. 1921).

normative inferences. 1) Colonial literature must show some definite inconsistencies where observations may be found which reasonably contradict the inferential framework in place, but there would still be a definite inability to draw conclusions that follow from observation since they would challenge the inferential framework. 2) If these are normative inferences, then the only means of contradicting them should lie in the abandonment of the normative principles/framework these were deployed within. All other contradiction would only serve to spar at the level of 'primary historical evidence' for the claims which, can serve both claim and counter-claim equally and endlessly. For instance, if we were to oppose Wilks' claims of 'defective veracity' of the Indian people on a historical basis by examining early Indian cases under colonial law, one would surely find Indians who lied and Indians who spoke the truth. The point is to realise that this historical evidence would not serve to address Wilks' claim in *any* way. Since he does not rely on object-level phenomena or observations as the basis of his claim, these cannot serve to contradict it either. The only means of contradiction lies in excavating the normative principles themselves (in this case the principle of 'inherent truth of testimony') so as to be able to move on to real questions for history.

In addition to these two clauses, if it is indeed true that colonial discourse was based on these inferences, then we must find definite contrasts to the foundational principles or statements of colonial discourse within Indian

sources[180]. There is one more condition which may also strengthen the above hypothesis. If, as I have briefly stated above, colonial discourse is essentially generated by the establishment of the relationship of Empire, then, there must be available distinctions or contradictions to the later colonial discourse in British accounts before they became imperial powers in India[181]. That is, the later normative inferences should be absent in early accounts. I would also like to qualify this slightly. My proposition is that the discourse of Empire forms a crucial structural framework for colonial discourse as also for British historiography (of the British themselves as well as what was called the 'universal family of Man'). This is not to say that the inferential knowledge is a *consequence* of the birth of Empire. In fact, I do not claim to explain *why* these normative inferences occurred at all[182].

It is possible that normative inferences would have occurred at any point of time even before colonisation. But I do think that it is only once the relationship of Empire is established, that these inferences become the necessary and legitimate means of 'understanding' the colonised. I hope to explain this further in the next chapter. But here I would like to demonstrate the above points that I draw as requirements in order to establish the probability of my hypothesis

[180] So there should be definite points of contrast in the way Indian and Colonial sources speak to each other. I only deal with one example of this in my section on 'patronage to participation' in chapter 5.
[181] This claim is addressed by way of the history of colonialism in the next chapter in order to show the wide divergence between the conceptions of 'India' itself and the British role in India until almost the early nineteenth century.
[182] A possible answer is S.N. Balagangadhara's 'theoretical knowledge' cultures (Balagangadhara 2005).

through the investigation of the most important and perhaps foundational normative inference that is a fundamental source for colonial discourse.

'Oriental despotism'

It has often been suggested that the British posed the idea of 'oriental despotism' in order to legitimise colonisation. There have been several serious debates about the historical evidence for these assertions.[183] My intention, however, is not to add to historical evidence that seeks to refute these colonial myths as many others have done. Instead I wish to show the machinery behind the myth – what it was made up of and why historical evidence is never enough to dispel it. This should also serve to demonstrate that the conditions for my definition of colonial discourse hold.

One must begin with the myth of 'oriental despotism', since at any point of time it served as a ready and undisputed source of most statements about the East. Sir Alfred Lyall[184] (1929) cites Francois Bernier (1989) as one of the earliest exponents of this idea. Lyall's case is that this idea was not a colonial invention deliberately devised in order to justify colonisation. He asserts that after the death of Aurangzeb there was widespread political disintegration in India and "*Hindoostan*" was literally 'up for grabs' for anyone who could muster up the

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[183] See Tambiah's "What did Bernier actually Say?" in *Tradition, Pluralism and Identity* (1999) for an abridged account of the debate.
[184] Lyall's *The Rise and Expansion of British dominion in India* (1929, first published in 1894), ran into at least nine editions and was to become one of the most well-cited works on British India.

forces to do so. There are several immediate historical problems in Lyall's use of Bernier. Bernier's account relates to the period of Aurangzeb's early reign and *not* to the period after his death which Lyall refers to as the period of disintegration. Further, Bernier's account of 'oriental despotism' does not rely on political degeneracy in the sense that Lyall's does, i.e., in the disintegration of a central political power. In fact, Bernier at no point expresses the idea that the Mughal power was under threat of disintegration[185]. Thirdly, *Hindoostan*, which by Lyall's time was used to refer to India as a whole, referred only to a certain geographical area within the Mughal domain in Bernier's time. This appellation remained so at least till the final defeat of the Marathas in 1818 and the subsequent establishment of the British Raj[186]. This last confusion of course allows Lyall a major advantage. It allows him to pose Bernier's comments as being rather prophetic. However, Bernier's visit preceded by a few decades the consolidation of the greatest political power at the time of British colonisation, the Marathas[187]. While we may well say on this basis that Lyall's use of Bernier is out of context and inappropriate, it is more crucial to understand Bernier's own account of 'oriental despotism' and to see where it differs from Lyall's. Bernier's assertion of 'oriental despotism' was based on one clear principle, not 'political degeneracy' or 'civilisational decay', but **the absence of private property**.

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[185] I have been unable find in Bernier's (1989) text Lyall's (1929) attribution to him that all of Hindoostan could be conquered by 20,000 French soldiers. But even if this was said by Bernier, he would still be referring to the geographical territory of 'hindoostan' and not India as a whole.
[186] See Prinsep's *Narrative of the Political and Military transactions of British India* (1820) which gives a map of four distinct regions of India, Hindustan being one of them.
[187] As we know, their power was not centred in the geographical area of 'Hindoostan' but in the West, although they were quite clearly at one point in a position to control the Delhi Mughal court as well.

> How happy and thankful should we feel, My Lord, that in our quarter of the globe, Kings are not the sole proprietors of the soil! Were they so, we should seek in vain for countries well cultivated and populous, for well-built and opulent cities, for a polite, contented, and flourishing people. If this exclusive and baneful right prevailed, far different would be the real riches of the sovereigns of *Europe*, and the loyalty and fidelity with which they are served. They would soon reign over solitudes and deserts, over mendicants and barbarians.
>
> Actuated by a blind and wicked ambition to be more absolute than is warranted by the laws of God and of nature, the Kings of *Asia* grasp at everything, until at length they lose everything; or, if they do not always find themselves without pecuniary resources, they are invariably disappointed in the expectation of acquiring the riches they covet. If the same system of government existed with us, where, I must ask, should we find Princes, Prelates, Nobles, opulent Citizens, and thriving Tradesmen, ingenious Artisans and Manufacturers? Where should we look for such cities as Paris, *Lyons*, *Toulous*, *Rouen*, or if you will, *London*, and so many others? (Bernier 1989: 232-233)

Strangely enough Bernier goes on to rebuke those European accounts which portray Indian cities as inferior to European ones.

> In treating of the beauty of these towns, I must emphasise that I have sometimes been astonished to hear the contemptuous manner in which Europeans in the *Indies* speak of these and other places. They complain that the buildings are inferior in beauty to those of the Western world, forgetting that different climates require different styles of architecture; that what is useful and proper at *Paris*, *London*, or *Amsterdam*, would be entirely out of place at *Dehli*….Without doubt, the cities of Europe may boast great beauties; these,

> however, are of an appropriate character, suited to a cold climate. Thus *Dehli* also may possess beauties adapted to a warm climate (Bernier 1989: 240).

He also admits of the large populations in the cities and thus, the "solitudes and deserts" he predicts as a consequence of this oriental despotism also seem strikingly out of place. I will not go into the details of the contradictions available in Bernier's work since Tambiah has given a detailed account of these contradictions, in terms of the devolution of political power as well as different land ownership patterns in 17th century India.

> Francois Bernier's account of his travels in Asia, particularly of his extended stay in India, which lasted some nine years, has been a standard source for European writers on oriental despotism. It is said that he was a precursor of the *philosophes*, and that his works, which portray scepticism, faith in Reason, and a commitment to private property as a basis for good government and prosperity, were essential reading for 18th century thinkers. Montesquieu had read him and used him as a source in *L'Esprit des lois*; and so also later had Marx and Engels, just prior to Marx's writing of his *New York Daily Tribune* articles on India in 1853 (Tambiah 1999: 219)

> …while he conspicuously affirmed the traditional western stereotype of oriental despotism he also reported in detail the colourful facts of the political scene of his time in India which, if patiently read and arranged, compose a pattern quite different from that proclaimed by him. …My submission is that Bernier's description of the Mughul empire shows it to be a vast 'galactic' assembly with a complicated replication of authority, of administrative structures, and of rights over the management and produce of the soil, and that therefore its characterisation as an absolutist oriental despotism is a bizarre distortion (Tambiah 1999: 222-224).

The "bizarre distortion" that Tambiah grapples with is really quite a natural conclusion for Bernier. He was presenting a simple normative inference here – the absence of private property results in despotism. Irrespective of the contradictions in his own observations, Bernier (as also possibly Tambiah who critiques him for it), would be unable to refute this simple normative inference. The strategy of most historians has been to energetically refute the historical evidence for this 'myth'. However, one may hypothetically suggest that were the contradictions pointed out to Bernier himself, it would still make no difference to his basic proposition, for it stands not on the observations, but on his inference. This is clearly visible in his inability for instance, to see that Indian cities and their grandeur contradict his prediction of the consequences of despotism. **The statements then are predictions of what one may expect to find in the absence of the principle of private property and not *evidence* for the same.**

Thus, Bernier's account shows a direct normative inference within his text, which does not require supporting proof. It also shows the contrary observations that I predict should occur. Thus, Lyall's use of Bernier as evidence for 'oriental despotism' while ignoring the basis on which Bernier drew his conclusion, is characteristic of colonial discourse. The original justificatory framework is lost and the statement becomes 'fact'. However, Bernier at no point poses any learning goals for the East. Instead, he uses this inference in order to re-affirm the importance of the principle of private property to the French. Thus, the

second condition of a normative inference, that of setting learning goals for the native, is not fulfilled. This is not surprising since it is a normative inference that precedes the establishment of the colonial empire.

However, Bernier preceded even the first steps of colonisation by about a century. Does the presence of the normative inference in his work weaken my definition of colonial discourse? Here I would like to re-iterate that normative inferences may well have occurred earlier than colonisation. However, what is characteristic of colonial discourse is the systematic deployment of them as positive knowledge, or observational statements. Despotism specifically I would say was one of the earliest and most persistent of normative inferences and in many ways holds up the normative network. We find the same normative inference in early colonial texts like that of Dow (1792)[188] and Orme (1782). Interesting variations of the same idea occur and it is connected to a whole set of different phenomena.

> If the subjects of a despotic power are everywhere miserable, the miseries of the people of Indostan are multiplied by the incapacity of the power to controul the vast extents of its dominion (Orme 1782: 399)…

[188] Dow's list of factors that contribute to the 'despotism' of the East included a range of diverse (verging on the bizarre) factors including the climate, the fertility of the soil, the nature of Islam as a religion, the frequent bathing inculcated in the "Coran" as well as the 'fact' that Islam prohibits drink! "The prohibition of wine is also favourable to despotism. It prevents that free communication of sentiment which awakens mankind from a torpid indifference to their natural rights. They become cold, timid,cautious, reserved and interested; strangers to those warm passions and that cheerful elevation of mind, which render men in some measure honest and sincere" (Dow Vol.3 1792: vii). Thus, once the 'despotism' of the East was 'established', innumerable factors accrued to the 'fact' either as causes or as effects.

The mechanick or artificer will work only to the measure of his necessities. He dreads to be distinguished. If he becomes too noted for having acquired a little more money than others of his craft, that will be taken from him. If conspicuous for the excellence of his skill, he is seized upon by some person in authority, and obliged to work for him night and day, on much harder terms than his usual labour acquired when at liberty.

Hence all cumulation is destroyed; and all the luxury of an Asiatick empire has not been able to counteract by its propensity to magnificence and splendour, the dispiriting effects of that fear which reigns throughout, and without which a despotick power would reign no more.

In happier climes, the arts and sciences have been courted, to heighten the blessings of life, or to assist the labours and wants of it. But such a spirit cannot exist where mankind are treated on principles directly contrary to all ideas of their happiness.

Were the ideas of virtue, morality and humanity, discussed by such genii as have enlightened happier nations, notions would soon be established, which would teach men what was due to them – notions which would overset every principle and every practice of the constitution.

Who therefore shall dare to make such researches his study or discourse?

We cannot therefore admire, that arts and sciences of all kinds have been able to make no greater progress in the empire of Indostan…

Where the human race is struggling through such mighty ills as render its condition scarcely superior to that of the brutes of the field; shall we not expect to find throughout Indostan dreary plains, lands uncultivated, miserable villages thinly interspersed,

> desolated towns, and number of inhabitants as much diminished as their miseries appear multiplied.
>
> On the contrary, we find a people equalling if not exceeding in numbers the most populous states, such as enjoy the best of governments and the best of laws.
>
> Effects of the climate of Indostan seem to counteract, in favour of the human race, the violences to which it is subject from the nature of the government (Orme 1782: 405-406-407).

Thus, Orme draws several conclusions from the 'fact' that the East is despotic. This single 'deficiency' results in the ancillary 'facts' that science is stunted; 'morality' is stunted; that there is no inclination to labour or profit; and there ought in fact to be a very small population but the weather in the East counteracts its politics! Thus, a single normative inference becomes the source of validation for a wide number of other notions or stereotypes. However, even in Orme's narrative, this normative inference does not pose learning goals for the native. Thus, it is my proposition that at one particular time in history these normative inferences, which co-existed with stereotypes and fantastic descriptions of the East underwent a certain consolidation. It is the story of this consolidation that needs to be drawn out from the larger story of colonialism. This is what I attempt in the next chapter.

Acting toleration, scripting ‘communalism’

Before we investigate the history of colonialism so as to understand its development into a network of normative inferences which generated ‘knowledge’ and learning goals for the native, there is one idea that immediately comes to mind in relation to ‘communalism’ that we must investigate here. If we are to carry forward our understanding of ‘communalism’ based on the hypothesis that colonial discourse is best characterised as a network of normative inferences then ‘communalism’ would be the obvious outcome of the absence of ‘toleration’. The reasoning would run thus: since toleration was the Liberal means of solving conflict between religious groups and since India had shown no evidence of evolving this remedy in its political thought, liberal colonialism would obviously conclude that India must be plagued with the problem of inter-religious conflict. However, this is a mis-measure of the breadth of ‘communalism’. Evidence of this is the fact that several colonial writers noted (though often with surprise), that what they took to be the various religious denominations in India had co-existed in relative toleration. In 1921, for instance, just four short years before the term ‘communalism’ would completely take over almost all discourse related to Hindu-Muslim interaction, William Foster, in his preface to a collection of early travellers’ accounts of India contextualised these accounts. This contextualisation takes the form of assuring the reader of the great accomplishments of the English in India and the condemnation of the Indian despotism of the past. But he also admits,

> On the other hand justice, if rough and liable to be influenced by bribery, was fairly good; traders of all nations were freely admitted; and in religious matters toleration was more consistently practised than in any European country at that period. On the whole, our travellers, who were of course comparing Indian conditions with those of their own country, were not unfavourably impressed (Foster 1921: x).

Although the reference to toleration is situated in the past, it is still a fairly startling observation considering that the 'forever communal condition' of the Indian people was a foundational idea in colonial discourse. But what is also remarkable is that this *practice* of toleration, ironically, did not serve to contradict the idea of 'communalism'. The irony deepens when we realize that not only did the presence of harmony, so to speak, *not* contradict the idea of 'communalism', the actual presence of violence was *not* the basis for 'communalism' or 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism'. Indeed, the records of actual conflict or violent outbreaks between the Hindus and Muslims as evidence for 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' occurs almost half a century after the consolidation of notions of 'Hindu-Muslim' antagonism in colonial sources[189].

'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' seems to become a feature of colonial discourse from the late eighteenth century onwards. Early colonial literature, for instance, Captain Alexander Hamilton's accounts, see no great rift occurring between

[189] Indeed in sources up until the late nineteenth century, actual occurrences of violence between Hindus and Muslims do not often feature in their accounts of 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism'. The 'narrative of the communal riot' as Gyanendra Pandey traces it, begins in 1809 but becomes inflated and acquires predictable directions that show the entrenchment of a narrative pattern in 1907 (Pandey 1992).

these two major communities in India. Hamilton's accounts of India and Burma span the years 1688-1723. Consider the following observations on Calcutta:

> In Calcutta all Religions are freely tolerated, but the Presbyterian, and that they brow-beat. The Pagans carry their Idols in Procession through the Town. The Roman Catholicks have their Church to lodge their Idols in, and the Mahometan is not discountenanced; but there are no Polemicks, except what are between our High-Church Men and our law, or between the Governor's Party and other Private Merchants on Points of Trade (Hamilton vol 2. 1995: 13).

Bernier's accounts of India records the conflicts arising between the Mughal and Shivaji as well as the Sikhs. However, he strangely does not draw the conclusion of 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' anywhere in his narrative. He does in fact record the relative toleration with which the Mughals treat the beliefs of the Hindus.

> The *Great Mogol,* though a Mahometan, permits these ancient and superstitious practices; not wishing or not daring, to disturb the *Gentiles* in the free exercises of their religion (Bernier 1989: 303)

The first accounts of Hindu-Muslim antagonism seem to emerge in the late 18th century. For instance, Alexander Dow proposed that British laws must be imposed in Bengal because of 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' which would not allow either community to live by the others' laws:

> The inhabitants of Bengal are divided into two religious sects, the Mahommedan and Hindoo, almost equal in point of numbers. Averse beyond measure to one another, both on account of religion and the memory of mutual injuries, the one party will not now submit to the laws of the other; and the dissension which subsists between individuals, would without a pressure from another power, spread in a flame over the whole kingdom. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary for the peace and prosperity of the country, that the laws of England, in so far as they do not oppose prejudices and usages which cannot be relinquished by the natives, should prevail (Dow Vol. 3 1792: ci-cii).

Dow does not invoke incidents of violence as evidence for his claim. He cites religious and historical reasons for 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism'. This became the model for practically all claims for 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' which relied specifically on the Maratha-Mughal conflict as evidence for 'communal antagonism'[190]. Thus, inter-community conflict itself was not the source of the claim for 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism'. This becomes clearer only when we see (as in the case of Foster above) that the opposite of 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism', that is, Hindu-Muslim toleration, did not serve to contradict the idea of 'communalism' within colonial discourse.

One reason for treating the later colonial notion of 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' based on Mughal-Maratha history with greater scepticism is also the fact that both of the narratives above that stress the relative toleration practiced in India (Hamilton and Bernier) occur during the period of this so-called conflict. What is it

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[190] Almost all British histories of India from the late eighteenth century onwards focused on Mughal-Maratha conflict. See Orme (1782; 1799), Mill (1826), Elphinstone (1841), Duff (1826), etc.

that made the later colonial sources see the Mughal-Maratha conflict as a major source of antagonism between communities when their own sources for the time do not observe any such transformation?

The assertion that the presence of toleration or absence of conflict did not serve as evidence against 'communalism' (since 'communalism' did not refer to the presence of conflict in society), is not to be understood as a denial of any historical conflict that took place. Indeed, my point is to show that such denial serves no purpose whatsoever. Instead, the point I wish to establish is that **the *concept* of 'communalism' need not be associated with the attribute**[191] **of *violence***, which is the way that we understand it today. Thus, post-colonial accounts which seek to contradict the charge of 'communalism' as a pre-colonial phenomenon[192] on the basis of the relative peaceful co-existence of communities or on the basis of pluralistic practices in the Indian villages[193], fail to contradict the charge of 'communalism' or even 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism', since these practices and the relative harmony of native society were all recognized by the colonizer. It was not in ignorance of these facts, but *in spite of* these facts that the colonizer reached the conclusion of 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' from the late eighteenth century onwards, and 'communalism' in the twentieth century.

[191] I take up a more detailed discussion of concept and 'attribute' in my conclusion.
[192] Chapter two discussed one such confrontation between Bayly and Pandey for instance.
[193] All nationalist literature on 'communalism' falls in this category, but even the more sophisticated approach that Nandy (1985; 2002) brings to the study of 'communalism' shares this shortcoming.

If it seems reasonable to suggest that the lack of conflict or presence of toleration did not contradict ‘communalism’, then it acquires at least one characteristic of a normative inference, for no amount of historical evidence would serve to contradict this charge. If that is the case, then, it is only through a recognition of the normative sources of the concept that it may be dismantled. However, let us investigate a related question: What made the presence of ‘communalism’ in Indian society so significant and yet the presence of toleration just a passing observation in colonial accounts?

Active toleration, Passive toleration

There are two consequences of the above observations. The first, as I have already suggested, is that ‘communalism’ does not seem to be derived from the lack of toleration understood in some factual sense and therefore cannot be refuted by the presence of harmony or absence of conflict. But there is a second aspect which requires exploration. The *practice* of toleration that the coloniser observed seems to have been distinct from the concept of toleration conceived by the West. This difference between the two tells us why the *practice* of toleration would be treated with such contempt while the ideal was still upheld in Western political theory. For instance, the people living in toleration may be a matter sometimes for surprise (as in the case of Dilke below) and sometimes for marginal praise (as in the case of Foster above) but it was certainly not a matter for much serious attention.

The nature of toleration that the colonizer did find in the Indian context seems to be quite different from the Western notion of toleration. For instance, Dilke's account of the popularity of Mohurrum, although not framed as a description of toleration, certainly becomes one of the features of Indian toleration that other writers would also observe. This toleration was based on shared religious festivals and observances. Dilke's observations on the festival along with his characterisation of the 'Indian Musulman' and 'Hindoo' provides some hints towards the nature of toleration the colonial authorities conceded to India.

> The popularity of Mahomedan festivals such as that of the Mohurrum has been one of the many causes which have led us to believe that the Mahomedans form a considerable proportion of the population of Hindostan, but the census in the North-West Provinces revealed the fact that they had there been popularly set down as three times as numerous as they are, and it is probable that the same is the case throughout all India. Not only are the Indian Mahomedans few, but their Mahomedanism sits lightly on them: they are Hindoos in caste distinctions, in ceremonies, in daily life, and all but Hindoos in their actual worship. On the other hand, this Mohurrum showed me that the Hindoos do not scruple to attend the commemoration of Hassan and Hoosein. At Benares there is a temple which is used in common by Mahomedans and Hindoos, and throughout India, among the low-caste people, there is now little distinction between the religions. The descendants of the Mahomedan conquerors, who form the leading families in several native States, and also in Oude itself, are among the most dangerous of our Indian subjects, but they appear to have little hold upon the humble classes of their fellow-worshippers, and their attempts to stir up their people to active measures against the English have always failed (Dilke 1868: 363-364).

The opinion that Indian Islam “sits lightly” on Indian Muslims was a constant observation of the colonial authorities. Dilke was relatively indulgent of this characteristic whereas others thought of it as the degradation of a superior Semitic religion as a consequence of long contact with the ‘Pagan’[194]. Besides disapproval of the mixed practices prevalent in the native’s religious observances, descriptions of Hindu and Muslim character also seem to give us some indications of the nature of toleration observed. Dilke described the “Hindoo” as “complaisant” and “perpetually striving to make his opinions the reflex of your own”, though he does not see this as a fault, but a product of extreme politeness (206).

> One of the greatest difficulties with which the British have to contend in Hindostan is how to discover the tendencies, how to follow the changes, of native opinion. Your Hindoo is so complaisant a companion, that whether he is your servant at threepence a day, or the ruler of the State in which you dwell, he is perpetually striving to make his opinions the reflex of your own. You are engaged in a continual struggle to prevent your views from being seen, in order that you may get at his: in this you always fail; a slight hint is enough for a Hindoo, and, if he cannot find even that much of suggestion in your words, he confines himself to commonplace. We should see in this, not so much one of the forms assumed by the cringing slavishness born of centuries of subjection, not so much an example of Oriental cunning, as of the polish of Eastern manners. Even in our rude country, it is hardly courteous, whatever your opinions, flatly to contradict the man with whom you happen to be talking; with the Hindoo, it is the height of ill-breeding so much

[194] See for instance, Mill (1826).

> as to differ from him. The results of the practice are deplorable; our utter ignorance of the secret history of the rebellion of 1857 is an example of its working, for there must have been a time before discontent ripened into conspiracy, when we might have been advised and warned (Dilke 1868: 206-207).

James Mill observed a similar trait in the 'pliant Hindu'. He of course was again less charitable than Dilke in his assessment.

> In point of address and temper, the Mahomedan is less soft, less smooth and winning than the Hindu. Of course he is not so well liked by his lord and master the Englishman; who desires to have nothing more to do with him, than to receive his obedience. In truth, the Hindu, like the Eunuch, excels in the qualities of a slave. The indolence, the security, the pride of the despot, political or domestic, find less to hurt them in the obedience of the Hindu, than in that of almost any other portion of the species. But if less soft, the Mahomedan is more manly, more vigorous. He more nearly resembles our own half-civilized ancestors; who, though more rough, were not more gross; though less supple in behaviour, were still more susceptible of increased civilization, than a people in the state of the Hindus (Mill 1826 Vol 2: 205).

The 'obedient', 'pliant', 'polite' or 'slavish' Hindu was the subject of many attacks by the British. Therefore, the *kind* of 'toleration' the Hindu was capable of practicing was evaluated as either cowardice or ignorance in most colonial accounts. This was probably because 'Indian toleration', unlike the Western variety, was not considered an agential virtue but rather a by-product of the general 'laxity' of Indian moral/religious feeling. That is, the reason the people lived in harmony was not because they actively held on to their own religious

principles while allowing others to hold on to theirs. On the contrary, the reason the practice of toleration was visible was because the native was indiscriminate about his religious observances and would simply take on any popular religious observance without due consideration or deference to his own *faith*. Further, Hinduism was such a loose set of dogma that it allowed for anything to become religious observance. Islam in India had by long contact been infected with this 'pagan laxity'. And thirdly, the Hindu was so cowardly that he would accept any new rule as evidenced by the number of invasions he had succumbed to without challenge. To such a 'race', it mattered little what manner of religion was practiced by his neighbour.

Crucially therefore, the difference lay not in the *practice* or in the desired goal of toleration, which was harmonious co-existence, but in the principle itself. Toleration could only be a product of 'true religion'[195]. That is, it was only if one believed in the truth of one's own religion that one could 'tolerate' a truth claim by another. If native religion did not involve any serious truth claim, then how could there be any real toleration? Thus, the Indian practice of toleration was a 'passive' toleration which did not quite fulfil the requirements of the Western notion of toleration[196].

[195] For a detailed consideration of aspects of this question see Balagangadhara (2005).
[196] This colonial perspective on toleration survives quite clearly even today. For instance, notions of 'active toleration' and 'passive toleration', employed by Achin Vanaik, completely mirror the colonial perspective on Indian toleration. Vanaik used this distinction in a debate on 'Secularism' at the Rethinking Religion Conference II, Delhi, 2009. (For a summary account of the debate see http://rethinkingreligion.wordpress.com/2009/01/11/platform-1-1001-2009/). Ironically therefore, when we ask to become more 'actively tolerant' this merely implies that we become *more Christian*. This is the

There is an aspect of the colonial discussion of toleration that helps us understand the ubiquitous description of the Indian 'religiosity' and why it was a problem. Consider the following quote from an anonymous pamphlet printed in 1808.

> It has been a prevalent but erroneous theory in Europe, to suppose, that previously to the wicked invasions of the peninsula of India by the Mahamudans and Europeans, the innocent Hindoos had enjoyed their thousands of centuries in a profound state of uninterrupted peace…. Their wars, at that time, were Hindoos against Hindoos; and whichsoever party conquered, still the same civil polity, the same religion, the same manners, dress, and customs, as before, prevailed in country, which rather changed its limits and boundaries, than its government.
>
> On the invasions of the Mahamudans and Portuguese, the face of affairs was entirely changed; and, although the conquerors subdued the Hindoos, and subjected their country, they could not break the religious prejudices of their minds: and their attempting to do so *by force*, (and these conquerors were equally bigoted), only made these prejudices take root the deeper. The effect, however, of the British administration of government, has been very different, on the minds of the natives in general. In the room of religious persecution, these have found the most perfect toleration, and an encouragement to make use of their own proper reason (*Strictures on the Present Government, Civil, Military and Political, of the British Possessions, in India; including a view of the recent transactions in that country, which have tended to alienate the*

strange result of this demand even though it purports to wish the opposite, that we perhaps become 'less marked by religion overall'.

> *affections of the natives. in a letter from an officer resident on the spot, to his friend in England* 1808: 107-108).

This much is clear, that the author believes the only "perfect toleration" India has experienced has been that of the British-Indian State. However, what is the place of "proper reason" in the enforcement of toleration? Let us focus more closely on the argument. The author is basically proposing that it is a mistaken impression that the "Hindoos" enjoyed peace before the various invasions to which they were subject[197]. They were, he asserts, still a people in conflict with one another. However, the Portuguese and "Muhamadan" governments tended to strengthen their "prejudices" by their own "bigoted" bids to conversion and thus, increased conflict. The British, on the other hand, replaced "religious persecution" with "perfect toleration" and thus left conversion to emerge as a consequence of the exercise of private and "proper" reason. This means of course that left to proper reason the Hindus would 'naturally' convert to Christianity (or to a Semitic religion in any case) thus renouncing their "prejudices", i.e. Hinduism. Thus, the journey from reason to toleration is built via religion as a vital fuelling point[198].

This account of toleration helps us understand one aspect of 'communalism' which hinged on 'religiosity'. Primitivism and religiosity are early observations on native society in colonial discourse. Later colonial writers lamented the fact that

[197] No doubt this is in contradiction to either orientalist versions of Hindu history or it may also well be in response to the limited opposition to the East India Company within British Parliament which cited an early Indian prosperity destroyed by Company rapine.

[198] This is fairly surprising to modern understandings of reason which see it in opposition to religion. However, this is consistent with most 19th century understandings of reason which did not lie in the contradiction of religion or God but rather in the acceptance of monotheism.

‘communalism’ could not be eradicated unless religion itself was eradicated. It is curious that the West did not see the eradication of religion as a solution to its own inter-religious strife. Then why was it so crucial for India? This was definitely posed as an answer to something. Only we are I think, mistaken in thinking that it was an answer to inter-religious strife. It is also curious that for India, secularism was never a convincing answer for the colonizer. Why is it that secularism was enough in the West, but not enough for India? This points towards the idea that it was not through the nature of the State alone that one could overcome ‘communalism’. One aspect that would require change was the nature of religion itself.

> The communal principle then, though freely comminated (sic), will remain. There can be no real progress until it goes. But it cannot go unless the different systems of religion in India will overhaul their whole thought and practice, as freely as has been done with Christianity in the more civilised lands of the West (Thompson 1930: 234).

Religious practices in India are constantly linked to superstition in colonial discourse. Hinduism is often dismissed as purely a bunch of superstitions. What superstition did was arrest reason. Thus, eradication of religion in the East was the eradication of superstition in order to introduce reason. But this statement means nothing more than the eradication of ‘paganism’ and pagan influences on Semitic religions in India. It is this course that would be required for ‘communalism’ to be eradicated. This of course, has nothing to do with inter-community strife. It has only to do with normative notions of religion.

Thus, normative notions of religion itself certainly form one of the coordinates from which ‘communalism’ is derived. However, there is a different set of coordinates that go into the coherence of this discourse once it enters the political field of India.

> The Hindu-Mohammadan communal quarrel needs separate notice. Its roots are not all religious. Wherever one community has a vast preponderance in numbers and influence as well as in education, the minority keeps quiet enough, as a rule. In purely agricultural districts again, the people not only understand each other’s systems, but the systems often seem to overlap. Hindus and Mohammadans cheerfully attend each other’s festivals, sing each other’s songs. In the great cities the story is very different. Here the last dozen years have seen a shocking casualty roll, and the embitterment now goes very deep (Thompson 1930: 234).

Indeed the roots of ‘communalism’ were not all religious. But it is crucial that we separate the understanding of causes of conflict from the understanding of ‘communalism’. Thompson may be right that greater strife was visible in cities than in villages. He may also be right in observing the practice of toleration in villages through shared religious observances that does not occur in the cities. However, none of this has anything to do with ‘communalism’. To understand ‘communalism’ one must go on to understand the nature of the political goals set before the Indian communities of the 19th and 20th centuries. It is not accidental that it is only in negotiation with these goals that the term gains its sharpest focus. Before one may understand these goals and their implications one must

however, draw out a conceptual history of colonialism or attempt a “periodisation” (Koselleck 2002 as discussed in chapter 2) which should help explain both at what point colonial discourse becomes consolidated into a relatively coherent set of normative inferences and the nature of learning goals that were set for the natives as a consequence.

CHAPTER IV

THE LIBERAL PAX BRITANNICA: HISTORICISING COLONIAL DISCOURSE

When one begins to attempt an understanding of colonialism as a network of normative inferences, there is one immediate and rather obvious objection. Colonialism, the historian would say, did not remain static across its 200 years of existence in India. Thus, how does the normative framework gain any stability of reference? If colonialism evolved and changed, then the normative framework would change too and therefore, to define colonialism in such terms would be an attempt to over-simplify a complex phenomenon.

While I agree that colonialism was a dynamic entity through its history in India, it is certainly possible to map the few fundamental shifts in understanding colonialism that one needs to account for. Colonialism certainly seems to reach a certain stability and conceptual clarity (though there may be a diversity of positions at any given time on particular *policy* issues) by the early nineteenth century. However, in order to understand how that point is reached or what central concepts colonialism was grappling with, it is important to rehearse the rather familiar history of colonial development in India, not from the perspective of the expansion of political power but the development of the political conceptualisations of colonialism itself. I attempt to draw from this admittedly complicated history the central line of conceptual development that made colonialism the normative framework that I propose it was.

I suggest that it is only through an understanding of this normative framework and its development that we can understand central ideas about India available to us and inherited by us from colonial discourse. For the familiar history of the transformation of 'commerce into empire' is also the history of India under-going several parallel conceptual transformations. Every time the Company and Parliament struggled to understand the nature of their sovereignty over the colony, the latter necessarily under-went a parallel transformation. Thus, what needs emphasis is the parallel change that took place in the *conception* of the colony or 'India' itself with changes in colonialism. The colony metamorphosed from a 'set of diverse sovereign states' into a 'crumbling empire' into an 'immature nation-state' which was to mature under British guidance. This latter description is certainly not how India was conceptualised in early colonial discourse[199]. In fact, at several crucial points in time British colonialism rested on the very refutation of this status for India[200]. These shifts in conceptual status produced shifts in the nature of knowledge about India that was required, produced, and even fundamentally possible. It is through a mapping of these shifts that we may arrive at a better understanding of the central concept under investigation, 'communalism'. However, before the connections to the genealogy

[199] Most civil and military officials from Clive to Hastings' times would have found such a description of India incomprehensible. Those who expressed ideas that weakly echoed these, such as White (1822), do not seem to have left any impression on their peers.

[200] For instance, the East India Company's justification of their gains in India rested squarely on the idea that India was not a nation in any sense. For an early instance, see Scrafton (1763) for later instances see Lyall (1929) and Seeley (1909).

of ‘communalism’ are drawn, one must go into some detailed understanding of colonial history.

Merchants to administrators – the status of subject-sovereigns or sub-sovereigns

It is common-place to understand the early history of the British in India in terms of a shift of roles from merchants to administrators. Most historians of Empire, such as Bowen and Marshall, have also studied the change in the “attitude” of the company towards India with this shift in role.

> Yet, for all the consistency of principle embodied in the despatches sent to India, a slow underlying change is discernible in the Company’s metropolitan attitude towards the effect of British rule upon Indian society. Whereas it had once been commonplace for the directors to write, as in 1782, that a primary aim was ‘to secure to the natives, under the immediate government of the Company, the undisturbed exercise of their religion and customs’, by the 1820s they were advocating administrative actions that were intended to ‘improve’ Indian society. The well-being of the Indian population was now to be achieved through education and religious reform, not by the old policy of non-intervention. As the Company’s Secretary, Peter Auber, put it in 1829, ‘The welfare of India – the happiness of its immense population and the blessings of British rule are the principles which must be kept in view and any system which shall militate against the extension of them must be amended or abolished’ (Bowen 2006: 203).

However, the consideration of the 'happiness of the people of India' was not simply a change in 'attitude' of the coloniser. Bowen proposes that it was the product of the victory of the anglicists over the orientalists. However, this requires closer re-examination. Although the debate between the orientalists and anglicists feeds into this change in conception of India, there is a longer history revolving around the concept of sovereignty and its implications in India that I propose fundamentally shapes this history.

Although the history of colonialism in India generally begins with Clive's victory in the Battle of Plassey in Bengal (1757), it is when he obtains the *diwanee* of Bengal (in 1765) that the British Parliament is faced with some difficult questions. What were the British doing administering a province in India? For the East India Company, one imagines the answer was very clear. They were making money[201]. However, Parliament knew that merchants could not justifiably be sovereigns. The Company faced a strange predicament. They were subjects of the British crown and yet, seemed to have gained the status of sovereigns in the East. Their sovereignty was derived from another sovereign however, the Mughal emperor, and not from their own sovereign since the *diwanee* was not the *conquest* of Bengal in the name of the King of England, it was rather the right to tax Bengal in the name of the Mughal emperor. Thus, the East India Company

[201] That is also how all the wars to follow were primarily justified. Prinsep for instance said, "…no part of the estate [of Empire] will be found to have been purchased so cheaply [the cost of the Anglo-Maratha war], as this last portion of territorial sovereignty over the vast expanse of Asia, that lies within the natural barriers of India" (1820: 467).

servants were subjects of the British Crown and political and economic administrators for the Mughal Emperor.

This was a rather unacceptable situation and several remedies were suggested including that of sending one of the King's sons to Bengal in order to rule the kingdom in the name of the British crown[202]. Parliament was not however, interested in conquest. It therefore became incumbent on the British Parliament to respect the sovereign rights of the Mughal and respect the *diwanee* rights of the East India Company. However, this left the Company in the odd situation of being subject-sovereigns -- subjects at home and sovereigns in the East. Dundas's solution of this status was that since no subject could be sovereign, the territory that the Mughal had granted to the East India Company was actually granted to the British crown. The East India Company held their sovereignty only as a trust conferred on them by Parliament. Thus, from being subject-sovereigns they were made sub-sovereigns so to speak. They held their sovereignty in India through the authority of both an Eastern and a Western monarch.

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[202] British Parliamentary records of the debate before the vote for the first Pitt's India Bill in 1784 has an interesting comment by a member of the Parliament, Mr. Dempster. Just before the bill was put to vote the report records that Mr. Dempster "begged leave then to suggest to the House what he had often thought would be the best thing that could be done with the territorial possessions – He knew the House would not listen to a proposition for restoring them to the natives; probably they would not govern them better than we do; he would not abandon the large body of fellow subjects, who are actually in India, earning their bread, he might truly say with the sweat of their brow; but he would propose, that His Majesty should be requested to send over one of his sons, and make him King of that country: we might then make an alliance or federal union with him, and then we could enjoy all the advantages that can be derived from the possession of the East Indies, by Europeans – the benefit of commerce. The House did not at all relish this proposition which Mr.Dempster did not press farther upon them" (*Narrative of all the Proceedings and Debates in both houses of Parliament on East-India Affairs, in the present session and particularly on the Bill of the Right Hon. William Pitt, for the better regulation and management of the affairs of the East-India Company, and of the British Possessions in India* n.d. (1784) 236-237).

In practice they escaped being subjects of either in many ways since being subjects meant being accountable to the law and state. When there was a conflict of law with Indian sovereigns, however, the East India Company largely went to war on the authority of the King of England. And when there was a challenge to their 'rights' by the British Parliament, they invoked the authority of the Mughal. Their accountability to the British Parliament was really established only after a long process of commercial, legal and constitutional tussle between the East India Company and Parliament. One of the first of these tussles brought out a clear contrast between the Parliament's notion of sovereignty and the Company's notion of sovereignty in Bengal. While Parliament took a while to understand what the implications of the Company's status were, the Company itself seems to have had a fairly clear idea of what the status of 'sub-sovereigns' of their two master sovereigns actually meant. Not surprisingly for a commercial organisation, they defined this status as proprietorship.

Bolts vs. Clive: Sovereignty as proprietorship vs. protection; Bengal: as property vs. market

In 1772, William Bolts published a scathing attack on Robert Clive and the status the East India Company enjoyed in India. His basic proposition was that since the East India Company had acquired territory, not enough thought had gone into re-conceptualising the status of that company in India.

> As to the unfortunate, the very generous Prince, who is more particularly the object of our present consideration, and whom we now call the GRAND MOGUL (sic), we see him dependent for his subsistence upon the servants, in fact, of an incorporated society of English merchants, who have raised him to that exalted title for the serving of their own purposes; that he is made no other than their tool, and must, from necessity be what they please to make him at least while he continues among them, and the government of that country remains on the present iniquitous footing (Bolts 1872: 33)

Bolts was a Dutch merchant who joined the East India Company but was deported as an interloper in 1768[203]. He wished to carry on private trade in India but ran into the monopoly of the East India Company, which was not only the sole trader from England to India but had also taken on large monopolies on inland trade within Bengal. Bolts questioned the rights of the Company's monopoly now that they had so well established themselves in India. He cited the reason for monopoly that had been granted by Parliament as being meant to allow this new trade some stability. Now that it had acquired that stability and more, India should be a free port of trade. Further, he proposed that the monopoly on *inland* trade in India was simply illegal. It was the Company's despotism going unchecked.

> The English East India Company was originally intended to be a merely trading community, being first instituted by Queen Elizabeth's charter of the 30th December 1600 expressly "for the honour of the nation, the increase of navigation, and the advancement of trade and merchandise within the British dominions; for the increase of the Riches of

[203] For more information see http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/B_0578.htm (accessed 14th January, 2009)

> the People and the Benefit of the Commonwealth." And indeed this Company, by its constitution, is as unfit to exercise Sovereign authority, as by the constitution of the kingdom it must be unqualified either to acquire or possess it (Bolts 1972: 209).

Bolts took up two modes of attack against the Company. First, he wanted to prove that although the Company pretended to hold power in the name of the Mughal sovereign, this sovereign no longer enjoyed that power to vest in the Company. Secondly, the Company's use of the Mughal's authority was really to disguise the nature of their 'sovereignty' in Bengal, which was ownership. He quotes a letter from Lord Clive dated 30th September, 1765, giving motives for finally assuming *dewanee* of Bengal:

> Though *the revenues belong to the Company*, yet were the Company's officers to be the collectors, foreign nations would immediately take umbrage; and complaints preferred to the British court might be attended with very embarrassing consequences. Nor can it be supposed that either the French, Dutch or Danes will acknowledge the English Company Nabob of Bengal, and pay into the hands of their servants the duties upon trade, or the quit-rent of those districts which they have for many years possessed by virtue of the royal firmauns, or by grants from former Nabobs… In considering the subject of the Dewanee, and the consequences of your large revenues, I have already observed, that our acquisition will give no umbrage to foreign nations with respect *our territorial jurisdictions so long as the present APPEARANCE of the Nabob's power is preserved* (Bolts 1872: 36 emphasis original).

Thus the British invoked the Mughal sovereign in order to evade policies of free trade in India which the British Parliament was pledged to uphold. However, Bolts

set out to prove that if the Company were 'proprietors' they could not also be in any way answerable to the sovereign from whom they claimed to derive their power. He also clearly emphasised that the reason to keep up the sham was to please Parliament and not the Mughal Emperor. For in India, it was by the sword that issues of 'sovereignty' would be decided.

> To suppose the existence of the old established laws and actual form of government of the Mogul Empire, and to argue therefrom, is highly absurd in speaking of the present state of affairs, when no such laws or empire exist. In all the publications therefore which have lately been made of those matters, we meet with numberless absurdities and contradictions; the parties themselves having made the constitution of the Mogul empire appear just what they pleased, by representing things in such lights as best served to promote their own temporary interests.
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> Thus in the memorial from the Court of Directors of the English Company to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, on the subject of complaints from the Dutch East India Company dated 3rd February 1762, the Directors by very ingenious arguments endeavour to convince their Sovereign, that the Nabob of Bengal was *de facto,* whatever he might be *de jure*, a sovereign prince, and the Mogul nobody; because it was requisite for their purpose that Jaffier Ally Khawn, our Company's first Nabob, should appear independent. The Right Honourable Lord Clive at that time supported the same doctrine, because, in gratitude for his having secured to that officer the Nabobship of Bengal, that Nabob had made his Lordship an *Omrah*, and by appointing him a Jagueer, made him a *Jagueerdar*, or the Lord of the Company's lands, "who were thereby freed from all dependence, except on his Lordship." But when it becomes necessary to assume the *Dewannee*, as we have just seen, then our Nabob is nobody and Shah Allum issues his Royal Firmauns with all *imperial authority*.

> The fact is, that none of these revolutions or pretended grants can be supported upon principles of justice. In all the transactions we have taken notice of, there was no right but that of the longest sword, nor any law except the will of conquerors; who could, upon all such occasions, have taken for themselves, or given to the Company what they pleased, having no check but *their own consciences*, or seldom any rule but that of *convenience*.
>
> The *Black Nabobs* had the same reason for appearing to hold their Nabobships by virtue of imperial Sunnuds, as the English Company had for pretending to hold their first lands by grants from the Nabob, and their *subsequent Dewannee* from the *Mogul*, though they should be under the necessity for each purpose respectively to create their own Nabobs or Emperors; viz, the having something ostensible to screen their usurpation, in case their pretended right should be disputed by any other power; but as the sword alone would decide the point in India, this cloak seems to have been chiefly calculated for service in our northern climates" (Bolts 1872: 49-50 emphasis original).

While the Company did not admit publicly to being proprietors, they privately thought of themselves as precisely that. He quotes the letter from Clive and his Select Committee to the Court of Directors of the East India Company also dated 30th September 1765 to prove his point. "*You are now become the Sovereigns of a rich and potent kingdom*" … "*You are now not only collectors, but the proprietors*", meaning of the revenues of *the Nabob's dominions*" (Bolts 1872: 36 emphasis original).

He set out at length the consequences of this proprietorial sovereignty.

So long as the concerns of the Company continued purely commercial and while in India they were subject to the control of the Indian Governments, the powers they were entrusted with, under the authority and protection of the Crown of Great Britain; for the government of those settlements which they were authorized to establish in such remote countries, for the better carrying on of their trade might be considered as safe and requisite therefore. But the circumstances of this company have within a few years past become greatly different from what they were, or could be foreseen either at the first grant, or on any renewal of their charter. By the forces of the Company, in conjunction with those of the Kingdom, immense territories have been acquired in India. and though of right they can only belong to the State, yet hitherto they have been withheld by, or rather have been farmed to the Company, together, in fact with the persons and rights of their numerous inhabitants, for a stipulated annual consideration: so that the Company now possess and exercise in those territories, not only their prior commercial privileges, but likewise all the powers of despotic Sovereignty, equally over their fellow European subjects and the helpless subdued Asiatics; there being no courts of justice, in those countries, that are effectual for the due protection of either (Bolts 1872: 210) …

A sensible writer, not long ago, took on himself the task of representing the necessity there had become of separating the territorial and commercial powers in Bengal, as much for the security of the Company as the advantage of the state. His sentiments concerning the Company were the following. “That is itself a subject, possessing neither supreme legislative or judicial authority over its own institution of fellow subjects, for the government of those dominions; which representative it can neither properly direct, restrain, controul [sic] or inspect; and that such a substitution is, therefore, absolute, despotic and arbitrary in the execution of its sovereign trust. That the Company is a sovereign in the capacity of a merchant, and accordingly acts there in that double capacity; and that those who act under them are despots and merchants, as well for themselves as the Company: which are circumstances which must prove destructive to a

> commercial country. That, being a subject, depending on the government of the country in which it resides for its own protection and existence, it is totally devoid of that quality which constitutes the very end and being of government, which is protection (Bolts 1872: 214).

The lack of 'protection' of both the English and native subjects became the means to establishing several intermediate institutions including the establishment of the Supreme Court in India. However, these measures did not seem to go far in the direction of the protection that Bolts and others sought. The nature of the Company's sovereignty being modelled really on proprietorship could not be transformed simply by instituting a legal institution. For crucially, as Bolts himself was pointing out, Bengal had gone from being a market to being the private property of the East India Company. In such a scenario, no matter how many intermediate institutions Parliament would seek to establish, their impact would necessarily be limited[204].

The consequences of looking at Bengal as property were clearly destructive to the colony. However, there is another aspect of this relationship. While India became the means to amassing a private fortune for those ranked high enough in the East India Company, this dual status of sovereigns in the east and subjects in Britain, also generated an unending line of corruption charges. Clive was the first to bear the charge and as was typical of the defence that all those made to such charges for the next twenty years, Clive invoked native tradition in his

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[204] Instead, it simply created a power struggle between the Supreme Court and the Governor General. This was the highlight of Hastings' term in India.

defence. In his letter to Directors of the East India Company, 27th April, 1764 Bolts quotes him as saying: “I need not repeat the nature of my pretensions to the *jagueer*: the late revolutions in favour of Meer Jaffier, and the instructions I have sent to my attornies, in consequence of your stopping it, will I make not the least doubt, be the means of having it confirmed to me in the strongest manner that *the customs of India will admit, and the laws of England require*” (in Bolts 1872: 150 emphasis added).

Since the Company was to govern India ‘in her own laws and traditions’, it was next to impossible for Parliament to gauge what traditions were valid and what were not. Was Clive’s *jagueer* a present from an Eastern noble to a public servant who had won his gratitude, or a bribe to a private employee of a commercial organisation?

As the Company attempted to keep their holdings in India limited and as those holdings in fact expanded constantly[205], this delicate status was to ultimately crumble under pressure. The central concern was the definition of the nature of the Company’s ‘sovereignty’ in India. Their dual status remained very profitable for servants of the Company but it also held out a rather strange predicament. They governed in India supposedly by Indian law and tradition, but were to be

[205] Whether the British acquired their empire only because of their confrontations with the French in India as Lyall (1929), Seeley (1909) and others have proposed or because of the personal ambitions of the servants of the East India Company as Burke and others proposed is immaterial in this context.

judged in England for their actions by English law. The stage was set for a more serious confrontation.

Burke vs. Hastings – Sovereignty from proprietorship to control; India, property to 'degenerate empire'

Although the Company did not officially use the idea of proprietorship to describe its sovereignty in India, its private correspondence and their focus on revenue farming certainly reflected this understanding. As the Company played a greater role in military arbitration and territorial conquest in the coming years, this conception of India was bound to face some definite shifts. The next decisive moment I use to examine this shift is the confrontation between Burke and Hastings at the latter's impeachment trial. There are two important points to draw from this confrontation. The first is Burke's re-definition of the sovereignty the British held in India. And the second is Hastings' conception of India which is crucial, I propose, in order to understand the 'narrative of decline' that marks the historiography of medieval India.

While Hastings defined the sovereignty he exercised in India as a despotic control of an Eastern land where the people could *only* be ruled despotically, Burke upheld definitions derived from the English notion of sovereignty. Although Burke's attempts to change British policy on India were largely unsuccessful, whether in terms of the failure of Fox's East India Bill or Hastings' impeachment,

the conceptual shifts in what colonialism and what therefore India itself *was* for the British would rely on his ideas in many ways in the time to come[206].

One of Burke's first involvements in Indian affairs came with his support[207] for Fox's East India Bill which proposed to completely separate economic and political control in India. By this bill, Parliament would gain direct control over political decisions in India and the East India Company would remain only a commercial concern. On December 1, 1783, in his speech in support of the bill in Parliament, Burke first explicated the notion of sovereignty as a **trust** which may be sub-let as it were but was primarily to be held only for the benefit of the subjects of the trust or not at all[208].

> …all political power which is set over men, and that all privilege claimed or exercised in exclusion of them, being wholly artificial, and for so much a derogation from the natural equality of mankind at large, ought to be some way or other exercised ultimately for their benefit.
>
> If this is true with regard to every species of political dominion and every description of commercial privilege, none of which can be original, self-derived rights, or grants for the mere private benefit of the holders, then such rights, or privileges, or whatever else you

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[206] Macaulay for instance who is an extremely important figure in defining colonialism and India used Burke extensively (Macaulay 2008).

[207] In some accounts he is said to have framed the Bill and simply requested Fox to introduce it in Parliament (Marshall 2005).

[208] "Englishmen who thought about India seem never to have supposed that its subjection to British rule, however long it might last, was a permanent dispensation. The ultimate enfranchisement of India was implicit in Burke's doctrine of trusteeship, since the guardian's duty ends when his ward comes of age; and the implication was put into words by more than one of the British officials in India who were giving effect to the 'trust' in the first half of the nineteenth century" (Coupland 1944:18).

> choose to call them, are all in the strictest sense a trust: and it is of the very essence of every trust to be rendered accountable,--and even totally to cease, when it substantially varies from the purposes for which alone it could have a lawful existence.
>
> This I conceive, Sir, to be true of trusts of power vested in the highest hands, and of such, as seem to hold of no human creature. But about the application of this principle to subordinate derivative trusts I do not see how a controversy can be maintained. To whom, then, would I make the East India Company accountable? Why, to Parliament, to be sure,--to Parliament, from whom their trust was derived,--to Parliament, which alone is capable of comprehending the magnitude of its object, and its abuse, and alone capable of an effectual legislative remedy. The very charter, which is held out to exclude Parliament from correcting malversation with regard to the high trust vested in the Company, is the very thing which at once gives a title and imposes a duty on us to interfere with effect, wherever power and authority originating from ourselves are perverted from their purposes, and become instruments of wrong and violence (Burke 2005-2006 Vol.2).

Burke's arguments rested fundamentally on the Company's sovereignty in India as derived from Parliament alone in the event of the dissolution of its local sources. He clarified this position later in his first address to the House of Lords during the Hastings impeachment trial. In his speech on the first day of the impeachment trial on February 15, 1788, he outlined for Parliament the nature of their sovereignty in India.

> The East India Company itself acts under two very dissimilar sorts of powers, derived from two sources very remote from each other. The first source of its power is under charters which the crown of Great Britain was authorized by act of Parliament to grant;

> the other is from several charters derived from the Emperor of the Moguls, the person in whose dominions they were chiefly conversant,--particularly that great charter by which, in the year 1765, they acquired the high-stewardship of the kingdoms of Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa. Under those two bodies of charters, the East India Company, and all their servants, are authorized to act.
>
> As to those of the first description, **it is from the British charters that they derive the capacity by which they are considered as a public body**, or at all capable of any public function. It is from thence they acquire the capacity to take from any power whatsoever any other charter, to acquire any other offices, or to hold any other possessions. **This, being the root and origin of their power, renders them responsible to the party from whom all their immediate and consequential powers are derived**. As they have emanated from the supreme power of this kingdom, the whole body and the whole train of their servants, the corporate body as a corporate body, individuals as individuals, are responsible to the high justice of this kingdom. In delegating great power to the East India Company, this kingdom has not released its sovereignty; on the contrary, the responsibility of the Company is increased by the greatness and sacredness of the powers that have been entrusted to it. Attempts have been made abroad to circulate a notion that the acts of the East India Company and their servants are not cognizable here. I hope on this occasion your Lordships will show that this nation never did give a power without annexing to it a proportionable degree of responsibility (Burke 2005-2006 Vol.9 emphasis added).

Burke emphasised that while the East India Company asserted that it had gained its sovereignty by right of the Mughal emperor, they had been **enabled** or **empowered** to take on this role only by authorisation of the British Parliament. He added,

As to their other powers, the Company derives them from the Mogul empire by various charters from that crown, and from the great magistrates of that crown, and particularly by the Mogul charter of 1765, by which they obtained the *dewanny*, that is, the office of lord high-steward, of the kingdoms of Bengal, Bahar, and Orissa. By that charter they bound themselves (and bound inclusively all their servants) to perform all the duties belonging to that new office, and to be held by all the ties belonging to that new relation. If the Mogul empire had existed in its vigor, they would have been bound, under that responsibility, to observe the laws, rights, usages, and customs of the natives, and to pursue their benefit in all things: for this duty was inherent in the nature, institution, and purpose of the office which they received. If the power of the sovereign from whom they derived these powers should by any revolution in human affairs be annihilated or suspended, their duty to the people below them, which was created under the Mogul charter, is not annihilated, is not even suspended; and for their responsibility in the performance of that duty, they are thrown back upon that country (thank God, not annihilated) from whence their original power, and all subsequent derivative powers, have flowed. When the Company acquired that high office in India, an English corporation became an integral part of the Mogul empire. When Great Britain virtually assented to that grant of office, and afterwards took advantage of it, Great Britain guarantied the performance of all its duties. **Great Britain entered into a virtual act of union with that country, by which we bound ourselves as securities to preserve the people in all the rights, laws, and liberties which their natural, original sovereign was bound to support, if he had been in condition to support them.** By the disposition of events, the two duties, flowing from two different sources, are now united in one. The people of India, therefore, come in the name of the Commons of Great Britain, but in their own right, to the bar of this House, before the supreme royal justice of this kingdom, from whence originally all the powers under which they have suffered were derived (Burke 2005-2006 Vol.9 emphasis added).

Thus, the ‘joint sovereignty’ of the Mughal emperor and British Parliament was almost like the joint patronage of a child. In the absence of one parent, the other was immediately responsible for the child. More importantly however, Burke had just re-defined the source of sovereignty in the East. The East India Company had always defined their sovereignty as derived from the sovereignty of the Mughal. Thus, the East India Company defined sovereignty in terms of control, certainly not representation or even protection. However, Burke asserted that the East India Company’s sovereignty was not simply a treaty of control authorised by the Mughal. It was necessarily a **trust**, as sovereignty *always* was according to Burke, derived from the very people themselves. To the India administrators of the East India Company this must have seemed a very novel idea indeed. This is reflected in Hastings’ defence of his own conduct. Burke quoted extensively from Hastings’ letter to the Directors of the East India Company in his own speech on the second day of the impeachment trial on February 16, 1788. The following is an excerpt from Burke’s lengthy quotation from Hastings’ letter.

> I only know that the acceptance of the sovereignty of Benares, &c., is not acknowledged or admitted by any act of Parliament; and yet, by the particular interference of the majority of the Council, the Company is clearly and indisputably seized of that sovereignty…. If, therefore, the sovereignty of Benares, as ceded to us by the Vizier, have any rights whatever annexed to it, and be not a mere empty word without meaning, those rights must be such as are held, countenanced, and established by the law, custom, and usage of the Mogul empire, and not by the provisions of any British act of Parliament hitherto enacted. Those rights, and none other, I have been the involuntary

instrument of enforcing. And if any future act of Parliament shall positively or by implication tend to annihilate those very rights, or their exertion as I have exerted them, I much fear that the boasted sovereignty of Benares, which was held up as an acquisition, almost obtruded on the Company against my consent and opinion, (for I acknowledge that even then I foresaw many difficulties and inconveniences in its future exercise,)--I fear, I say, that this sovereignty will be found a burden instead of a benefit, a heavy clog rather than a precious gem to its present possessors….

Every part of Hindostan has been constantly exposed to these and similar disadvantages ever since the Mahomedan conquests. The Hindoos, who never incorporated with their conquerors, were kept in order only by the strong hand of power. The constant necessity of similar exertions would increase at once their energy and extent; so that rebellion itself is the parent and promoter of despotism. **Sovereignty in India implies nothing else.** For I know not how we can form an estimate of its powers, but from its visible effects; and those are everywhere the same, from Cabool to Assam. The whole history of Asia is nothing more than precedents to prove the invariable exercise of arbitrary power….

To be robbed, violated, oppressed, is their privilege. Let the constitution of their country answer for it. I did not make it for them. Slaves I found them, and as slaves I have treated them. I was a despotic prince. Despotic governments are jealous, and the subjects prone to rebellion. This very proneness of the subject to shake off his allegiance exposes him to continual danger from his sovereign's jealousy, and this is consequent on the political state of Hindostanic governments[209] (Hastings in Burke 2005-2006 Vol. 9 emphasis added).

[209] This is extracted from Hastings' letter to the Directors of the East India Company which Burke quoted in his speech. Hastings was not present during the opening of the trial and therefore wrote a letter in defence against the charges brought against him.

Hastings' defence and Burke's case against him rested very centrally on definitions of the Company's sovereignty in the East. I propose that while both were exercising notions of sovereignty that were really 'normative inferences', Burke was establishing a normative framework within which to place India and the Company's role in India. Hastings held that sovereignty in the East was simply an exercise of ownership which is basically what despotism meant, and therefore the Company was called upon to exercise this despotism. Burke proposed that sovereignty in the East was not equivalent to 'ownership', which to him was a distasteful corruption of the very notion of sovereignty, it was derived rather from the ancient constitutions of the Indian people[210]. However, he did not propose that the Company was therefore upholding these ancient constitutions in their original form. Instead, the sovereignty the Company exercised in India was very much the same as the sovereignty parliament exercised over the people of Britain. Burke condemned Hastings' position that sovereignty in the East was different, as a form of "geographical morality"[211]. Burke's solution was that if the

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[210] Uday Singh Mehta refers to this as Burke's conception "that India does constitute a political community" (1999: 160). He goes on to trace how the 'geographical' sense of India that Burke deployed, enriched his conception of it as a place. I would rather suggest that Burke's claims for an Indian "political community" or their "ancient constitutions" is intriguing because other colonial thinkers had clearly never considered India as 'a people'. 'Despotism' could not allow for 'a people' to exist. By their very nature the two were incompatible. Burke however, seemed to look at despotic governments also as merely 'trusts' to the ancient constitutions of the people. He is often credited for not buying into the 'despotism of the East' as much as his peers. While this is true, it also has consequences since his notion of Eastern constitutions rendered them as essentially expressing the same as the Western principles of constitution and sovereignty though they remained at a relatively under-developed stage.

[211] "And having stated at large what he means by saying that the same actions have not the same qualities in Asia and in Europe, we are to let your Lordships know that these gentlemen have formed a plan of **geographical morality**, by which the duties of men, in public and in private situations, are not to be governed by their relation to the great Governor of the Universe, or by their relation to mankind, but by climates, degrees of longitude, parallels, not of life, but of latitudes: as if, when you have crossed the equinoctial, all the virtues die, as they say some insects die when they cross the line; as if there were a kind of baptism, like that practised by seamen, by which they unbaptize themselves of all that they learned in

Company's sovereignty was derived from the Mughal, the authority that empowered them to take on this sovereignty was the British Parliament, the original 'trustee' to whom the Company was ultimately responsible. Since the Mughal was in no position[212] to regulate the Company's exercise of sovereignty, it was incumbent on Parliament to do so. Hastings clearly disagreed. In Hastings' version the Company's sovereignty in India was not the sacred trust of God in King and thereby in Parliament and further thereby in the Company; it was the power of a despotic prince in a land where control was exercised absolutely and not as a trust to the people or God. In fact, as Hastings asserted to Burke's horror, there was not a 'people' in the East to exercise sovereignty. They were "slaves" subject to the vagaries of a despotic regime. One could not rule in the East as per Western principles and therefore, Britain could not judge him by her laws.

While Hastings's understanding of the despotism of the East is as much a normative inference as that of Bernier, what neither of them had, I propose is the normative *framework* which would give systematic objectives or meaning to their actions in the East. These actions were relatively arbitrary and diverse and could not be understood except as local reactions to local problems. However, Burke's conception of the sovereignty the Company held in the East as being essentially the same as the sovereignty Parliament held in Britain became the foundation for

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Europe, and after which a new order and system of things commenced" (Burke 2005-2006 Vol.9 'Speech on the second day of the impeachment trial' emphasis added).

[212] Shah Alam II was by this time virtually a prisoner of the Marathas.

understanding India in terms that required no understanding of the East, but rather only an understanding of the West itself. Burke agreed in principle that India would have to be ruled by her laws and traditions. However, his view of those laws and traditions seems to have been defined as simply variations of the same laws that he was familiar with rather than distinct laws with distinct operational concepts. In his speech on the first day of the impeachment he said,

> If we undertake to govern the inhabitants of such a country, we must govern them upon their own principles and maxims, and not upon ours. We must not think to force them into the narrow circle of our ideas; we must extend ours to take in their system of opinions and rites, and the necessities which result from both: all change on their part is absolutely impracticable (Burke 2005-2006 Vol.9).

Although Burke says it is not incumbent on the East to change, this is only in so far as the East and its institutions are understood as variations of Western institutions. That is why, for Burke, rule in the East required the East India Company to *expand* available notions operative in the West. In his speech on Fox's East India Bill on December 1, 1783, Burke set out the task before Parliament:

> This bill, and those connected with it, are intended to form the Magna Charta of Hindostan. Whatever the Treaty of Westphalia is to the liberty of the princes and free cities of the Empire, and to the three religions there professed,--whatever the Great Charter, the Statute of Tallage, the Petition of Right, and the Declaration of Right are to Great Britain, these bills are to the people of India. **Of this benefit I am certain their**

> **condition is capable: and when I know that they are capable of more, my vote shall most assuredly be for our giving to the full extent of their capacity of receiving; and no charter of dominion shall stand as a bar in my way to their charter of safety and protection** (Burke 2005-2006 Vol.2).

It is only through Burke's definition of the role of the British in India that colonialism begins to gain coherence. Close to the turn of the eighteenth century Burke proposed the British were not 'controlling' India, they were patrons of the Indian *constitution* as he suggests above.

Although the British Parliament acquitted Hastings, history seems to have always cast Burke as the hero of this debate. Certainly, it is not pleasant to defend Hastings and I make no such attempt. And as certainly, it seems ill-conceived to find fault with Burke for it is important to acknowledge the relief that India received from rapacious Company executives by virtue of Burke's intervention. However, it is as important to identify and recognise the magnitude of the conceptual shifts in this debate and their consequences.

Once colonialism was a trust held for the benefit of the people and the object of the trust was to see the Indian people into constitutional 'maturity', the normative framework seems to have fallen into place. The objectives of colonialism were no longer either profit or a form of viable political control over local sovereignties, which would lead to a much more arbitrary and context specific response to the challenges of ruling India. The objective was very crucially the creation of a

'people' in India. A demonstration of their respective visions for British colonialism in India is also reflected in their respective understanding of the end of colonialism in India. Both Burke and Hastings saw the exercise of British sovereignty over India as temporally limited. In his private journal Hastings wrote that "…a time not very remote will arrive when England will, on sound principles of policy, wish to relinquish the domination which she has gradually and unintentionally assumed over this country and from which she cannot at present recede" (cited in Coupland 1944: 8). Burke on the other hand is not talking about political control coming to an end by the resumption of local sovereignties but a process of maturation that is to begin.

The question of what Britain was doing in India began to gain a coherent answer in Burke's doctrine of colonialism as trusteeship. This doctrine needs to be distinguished from the idea of India simply being a 'minor' that Britain must play guardian to forever, since it also involved definite ideas of learning goals that the natives had to achieve in order to end that dependence. Thus we must distinguish between a position like that of Charles Grant[213] from that of Charles Wood or Macaulay. Grant, in his speech in Parliament on August 16, 1797, expressed a different notion of sovereignty that he felt must operate in India.

> **If we have appropriated those territories in perpetuity to ourselves, if we have assumed the sovereign dominion of them, if we apply a large portion of their annual produce to the use of Great Britain, if we are avowedly resolved to maintain**

[213] Grant was one of the founder members of the "Clapham Sect". See Eric Stokes (1982) for a detailed account of this particular strain of colonial administrators deeply influenced by evangelical Christianity.

> **our possession by arms against all pretensions, foreign or local**; if by these measures, as well as by specific declarations, we show that we regard the inhabitants as exclusively and absolutely our subjects, -- all the duties of rulers must be incumbent upon us. We are not only concerned to free the people placed under our dominion from evils connected with taxation, such as feudal oppressions and official abuses, which may be termed extraneous grievances, but to look into evils and disorders which arise among themselves, which prevail in their society, and destroy their peace; to enact and enforce wholesome laws for their internal regulation, and in a word, with the affection of a wise and good superior, sedulously to watch over their civil and social happiness. No laboured argument drawn from the nature of government, is necessary to prove this position; the consideration which has been just adverted to, seems naturally to establish it; nor could it ever suit the principles of this nation to hold the Hindoos under its power as slaves, whose labours are exacted without a due return of benefits. Besides, such a system would soon defeat its own end, by reducing the value of the subjugated country. It is a truth perfectly obvious that our own interest commands the happiness of that people[214] (in Char ed.1983: 131 emphasis added).

Grant seems to suggest not trusteeship but benevolent control as the model for colonialism. However, this notion did not survive for long and colonialism as ‘trusteeship’ rather than benevolent control became well-entrenched. This meant that these ‘minors’, the natives, would have to be trained or nurtured to ‘maturity’. Macaulay became one of the most vocal and influential spokespersons for this position. In a speech in Parliament on July 10, 1833, on the subject of re-reading a “Bill for effecting an arrangement with the India Company, and for the better government of His Majesty's Indian territories” he said:

[214] His solution of course was the promotion of Christianity by either active proselytisation or more covertly through the ‘moral education’ of the native.

> The destinies of our Indian empire are covered with thick darkness. It is difficult to form any conjecture as to the fate reserved for a state which resembles no other in history, and which forms by itself a separate class of political phenomena. The laws which regulate its growth and its decay are still unknown to us. It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. **To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own**. The sceptre may pass away from us. Unforeseen accidents may derange our most profound schemes of policy. Victory may be inconstant to our arms. But there are triumphs which are followed by no reverses. There is an empire exempt from all natural causes of decay. Those triumphs are the pacific triumphs of reason over barbarism; that empire is the imperishable empire of our arts and our morals, our literature and our laws (Macaulay 2008 emphasis added).

The strength of feeling that went with this role that the British were to fulfil in India was by no means shallow. There were many who felt that if this objective of maturation was not met or was impeded by British rule, the reversal of colonisation itself was preferable. Charles Metcalfe for instance, advocated the liberation of the Press in Parliament on June 20, 1835 in order to further native ‘education’.

> If their argument be, that the spread of knowledge may eventually be fatal to our rule in India, I close with them on that point, and maintain that, whatever may be the consequence, it is our duty to communicate the benefits of knowledge. If India could only be preserved as a part of the British Empire by keeping its inhabitants in a state of ignorance, our domination would be a curse to the country, and ought to cease (in Char ed. 1983: 213).

The targets of this ‘trusteeship’ were to centrally shape debates such as those between the Anglicists and the Orientalists over a suitable educational programme for India. The central point of departure was that an education in the native tongue and the native tradition may have been suitable for an earlier time when the government required a class of translators or bureaucrats. However, an education that was to generate a ‘people’ would have to be substantially different. Another area that felt the direct impact of this new conception of colonialism was Indian history. If education was the means to bring into being the ‘people’ then history was the means of demonstrating the prior degeneracy of the natives and thereby pointing out the long route before them in order to achieve ‘maturity’. This is not to say that history was *used* instrumentally by the coloniser. Rather, we must understand this as the predictable trajectory of this notion of trusteeship.

India as 'degenerate empire'

Historians like C.A. Bayly have admitted that there was no historically authentic reason for 'Indian degeneracy' or what has been called 'the narrative of decline' in the historiography of India[215]. This notion also displays similar co-existing contradictory claims as was demonstrated in the notion of 'despotism'. First I would like to demonstrate how the idea of degeneracy is also a normative inference before I move on to the implications for our understanding of colonialism and larger questions of Indian history.

Basically, the 'narrative of decline' refers to the idea that India was in such a state of disintegration and decline that colonisation was an obvious consequence. The most immediate reason is held to be the 'stage of disintegration' the Mughal Empire had reached after the death of Aurangzeb and the political 'chaos' that followed. However, the narrative of decline went from referring to 'political disintegration' to the much more expansive 'civilisational decay'[216]. Ironically, the Mughal Empire's *dissolution* is cause for decay in the case of the idea of political degeneracy. However, in the latter case of 'civilisational decay', the *strength* of the Mughal Empire is invoked as the cause of decay. Thus, the explanation of why India was colonised rests as much on the

[215] See his 'Preface' to *Indian Society and the making of the British Empire* (Bayly 1987).
[216] Surprisingly, both positions may often be found in the same historian's account. Lyall for instance, who sees the dissolution of the Mughal Empire as cause of the rise of British power contradicts himself first by saying that it was lucky for the British that they did not have to face the Marathas in the early years of their Empire (1929: 136) thereby recognizing that the Marathas were a political force to reckon with. But he also goes on to decry the general lack of any government but "illimitable personal despotism's" (171) which had led to Indian degeneracy.

ultimate disintegration of Mughal rule as in the long invasion of India under the 'despotic' rule of the Mughals.

There was an allied answer to this question as well. That was the absence of the idea of nation. The most cogent exponent of this was probably Seeley, also writing in the late 19th century (a little before Lyall), who was echoed by the Indian nationalists and is still a means of explaining colonisation for other historians[217] even today.

> India can hardly be said to have been conquered at all by foreigners; she has rather conquered herself. If we were justified, which we are not, in personifying India as we personify France or England, we could not describe her as overwhelmed by a foreign enemy; **we should rather have to say that she elected to put an end to anarchy by submitting to a single Government, even though that Government was in the hands of foreigners**.
>
> But that description would be as false and misleading as the other, or as any expression which presupposes India to have been a conscious political whole. The truth is that there was no India in the political, and scarcely in any other, sense. The word was a geographical expression, and therefore India was easily conquered, just as Italy and Germany fell an easy prey to Napoleon, because there was no Italy and no Germany, and not even any strong Italian or German national feeling (Seeley 1909: 202 emphasis added).

[217] The lack of nationalism as the cause of colonization is readily used as an explanation in historical works ranging from K.M. Panikkar (1963) to those of Bipan Chandra (1979; 1984).

It is important to understand that the idea of Indian degeneracy was posed as an answer to why colonisation had occurred. Considering that the British traders had spent full 150 years (before 1757's battle of Plassey) paying tributes to and appeasing the tempers of local Indian powers, it is not particularly evident when Indian society had suddenly turned decadent and its political institutions degenerate, so that colonisation by the British would be a "natural consequence". One may well treat the question as a purely historical one and investigate at what point between 1600 and 1757 (the period of British contact with India), degeneracy had set in. However, if there were simple historical answers to be found, they would be clearly articulated within colonial discourse itself, or so one would expect. Why were the colonisers so sure that Indian society had become degenerate but without a definite corresponding date or event that they understood to be its cause?[218] If the state of India had become degenerate within the time frame of its contact with Britain, then answers should certainly have been quite clear. But if degeneracy had set in pre-British contact, then why was this degeneracy of Indian society not clear in all British discourse about India before this date?[219] One does not find this over-powering sense of Indian degeneracy in the letters of East India Company employees before the British transformation from traders to empire builders for instance. There is also no fear of "contamination" with the despotisms of the East which forms one strand of

[218] Some linked the degeneracy to the Muslim conquest and despotic rule of several centuries, some linked it to the Hindu degeneracy rooted in the caste system and of course there were those who linked it to the weather! See Scrafton (1767), Orme (1782), Mill (1826), Elphinstone (1841), Lyall (1929) and others.
[219] There had been a precursor to this discourse about the degeneracy of India in the discourse related to the conquest of Bengal. See Scrafton (1767) for instance. However, there is a different tenor to that claim. It becomes part of several other 'features' of native society. It does not take on the *explanatory* potential for colonialism that it did later.

opposition to the Empire once the conquest of Bengal is achieved.[220] What then was the root of the idea of Indian degeneracy?

Though it is usually asserted that the British *used* this idea for the justification of colonisation, it is important to note that the idea really *emerged* only with colonisation. What was being said really was that the fact of **colonisation in itself was proof of Indian degeneracy**. That is, if India had been subjected to colonisation, it must be degenerate. Just as Europe, within the historiography of civilisation and Empire that Britain had adopted[221], had been subject to Roman domination when it was 'uncivilised' and 'degenerate', similarly, India had become subject to domination and therefore could not but be understood as degenerate. There were several important consequences that Europe drew for its own history from the Roman Empire. In the next section I will investigate those tropes and their consequences for a conception of colonialism and colony.

[220] Both support and opposition of Empire were already well-rooted in the historiography of the Roman Empire by this time. Nicholas Dirk's proposition in his new book, *The Scandal of Empire* (2006), that it was during Hastings' trial that the discourse of corruption was generated and then transferred onto India seems to ignore the strand of opposition to establishing empire in India which argued that just as corruption of the barbarian races had been the reason for decline of the Roman Empire, contact with the despotisms of the East may well destroy liberty at home. But what is more important perhaps is that as long as we look for events as the trigger for such characterisations we remain caught up in the contesting evidences of history, which, as I have already stated above, cannot serve to generate adequate answers to colonial discourse.

[221] Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1788) was considered the benchmark of historical writing and Mill's history of India was compared to Gibbon's history of Rome by several eminent colonialists including Macaulay who called it, "the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of Gibbon" in his speech in Parliament on 10th July, 1833 (Macaulay 2008). Most of the 19th colonial thinkers were writing histories of England as well, such as Burke, Macaulay, Goldwin Smith etc. and their accounts always began with the Roman Empire. It was standard practice in the late 18th and 19th centuries to see the Roman Empire as the cradle of 'modern England'.

However, before one examines the discourse of empire and its ramifications, there is one more strand that must be highlighted within the discourse of colonialism which links to the idea of degeneracy, but which does not invoke the Roman Empire in order to gain coherence. This was the discourse of the stages of development of civilisation. The discourse of stages of development had assigned a place for different societies on the basis of their means of sustenance. In phase one of Empire (which is what the colonisation of America was called), it was this discourse that played a crucial role in making colonialism coherent to the British. As per this understanding the British Empire encountered 'primitive' people who were easily subdued for lack of social and political organization[222]. Although this could not have been true of India since the British had encountered a relatively politically 'evolved' community[223], 'degeneracy' became the means to explain why this past evolution had been lost. Thus, the story would go like this, in phase one the empire had been able to subdue a 'primitive' people; in phase two, the Empire found it had managed to subdue large numbers of people[224] and because they were vulnerable to subjugation, they must be 'primitive'. Thus, the idea of 'primitivism' in relation to India also probably did not emerge until colonisation was well under-way. However, this

[222] This was the means of explaining the subjugation of the Natives of America. They were also the point of reference for Locke's reasoning that lack of sovereignty, that is, 'politically stunted' communities could be subjected to colonization. This notion of 'primitivism' was probably embedded in the theory of 'stages of development' of human societies from hunters to settled agriculturists. See Ronald. L. Meek's *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (1976).

[223] This basically meant that political organisation in India was not 'tribal' but had evolved to the establishment of a State or several States which were 'primitive' in that they were 'despotic', but not as 'primitive' as the people without a State.

[224] And their accounts are often full of a sense of surprise at having been able to do so! There was general consternation at the fact that the British were winning India which was so much further away at the same time as they were losing America. See Marshall (2005).

discourse did not gain the kind of salience that it did in the context of Latin American colonisation. In stead, it was the idea of the role of the Roman Empire and its place in European history that remained central to understanding the British role in India. This is possibly also because of the difference in the *kind* of colony that was being established in the two countries. A settler colony in America and an administrative colony in India clearly needed separate frameworks of understanding. The framework required to understand India would have to be different from other colonies since the British were at all points in time aware of the originality of their ‘experiment’ in India[225].

Thus it was not simply the *need* to speak of the degeneracy of the Indian people that only arose once they had been subjected at the hands of the British, but the very *possibility* of doing the same. It was not until the British conceived of themselves as ‘colonisers’ that ‘degeneracy’ gained any explanatory potential. When the British did become colonisers, they explained their position in terms of a set of historical reasons, and India was a colony because it had fallen back in history, not because of some active caprice. The most crucial historical explanation for European colonisation lay in the historiography of Europe itself

[225] Macaulay’s summing up of the absolute novelty of the British Empire in his speech in Parliament on 10th July, 1833, also gives us some indication of the real strangeness of the situation. “That Empire is itself the strangest of all political anomalies. That a handful of adventurers from an island in the Atlantic should have subjugated a vast country divided from the place of their birth by half the globe; a country which at no very distant period was merely the subject of fable to the nations of Europe; a country never before violated by the most renowned of Western conquerors; a country which Trajan never entered; a country lying beyond the point where the phalanx of Alexander refused to proceed; that we should govern a territory ten thousand miles from us, a territory larger and more populous than France, Spain, Italy, and Germany put together, a territory, the present clear revenue of which exceeds the present clear revenue of any state in the world, France excepted; a territory inhabited by men differing from us in race, colour, language, manners, morals, religion; these are prodigies to which the world has seen nothing similar” (Macaulay 2008).

which, at this point, drew its beginning in the Roman Empire. Just as European civilisation had been gestated in the Roman Empire, so also the European Empire would have to gestate others in order to bring them civilisation[226].

Pax Romana and the liberal Pax Britannica

The Pax Romana was literally the 'Roman peace' (Seignobos 1939). It meant that the various forces (especially 'barbarian' tribes) which came under the Roman rule were to suspend all hostilities with each other. Thus, ironically, Roman peace meant simply that Rome had exclusive rights to war! And all war was to be carried out by and for empire and not within the empire. Thus, two barbarian warring armies would now be assimilated into the Roman army. This easily lent itself as a parallel, early on, to the British system in India. In the eighteenth century, after their first limited transformation from merchants to rulers, the British established an intricate system of "maintaining peace" in India rather than immediately taking on territory by aggression. The famous system of subsidiary alliance was just such a system. The British were literally contracting peace for the native forces – protection from other native aggressors and of course, from the British themselves[227]. However, the Pax Romana came to mean much more than just this idea. It became the foundational principle that "allowed for 'civilisation'" itself to take root and grow in Europe. And it was in this extended

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[226] Uday Singh Mehta (1999: 30-31) also characterizes colonialism similarly: "Imperial power is simply the instrument required to align a deviant and recalcitrant history with the appropriate future."

[227] See White's *Considerations of the State of British India* (1822), for an early criticism of this policy. White was a Major in the British army who could possibly be considered an early voice of 'reform' and the need for Britain to understand her role in India.

sense that the Pax Britannica also took up the metaphor of the Roman Empire. Seemingly the first parallel drawn between the Roman and British Empire specifically in reference to India is that by Greville in 1795.

> The establishment of my principle is so far from resting on new grounds, that its confirmation may be deduced from history: the *Romans* bore relation to *Asia Minor* and *Egypt*, as the *English* do to *British India*. The *Jews* were to the *Roman* conquerors in the precise relation which the *Hindoos* should be to the *British*. *Alexandria* had been selected by the *Macedonian* conqueror as the best scite [sic] for a new *Emporium* to his extended dominions; and the *Romans*, in their turn joined it to their empire" (Greville 1795: 893-4).

The parallel to the Roman Empire is at one level inevitable since the very terms of the process such as 'colony' and 'mother country' were derived from the Roman experience. Burke in his defence of the American colonies clearly addressed Roman principles of 'discipline before the law' and appealed for an exception to this principle as a special case in America. But in India, I would argue, it was not only a question of invoking precedents for policy but the very self-conception of the British that was involved in the invocation of the Roman Empire. Britain was to do for India what Rome had done for Britain. This relationship was distinct from the one she had developed with other colonies[228]. Seeley's lectures compiled together and published as *The Expansion of England* are a very good source for understanding this connection.

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[228] For the distinct relationship that Britain bore with India as against her other colonies. See Marshall (2005).

> The dominion of Rome over the western races was the empire of civilisation over barbarism. Among Gauls and Iberians Rome stood as a beacon-light; they acknowledged its brightness, and felt grateful for the illumination they received from it. The dominion of England in India is rather the empire of the modern world over the medieval….We in Europe however are pretty well agreed that the treasure of truth which forms the nucleus of the civilisation of the West is incomparably more sterling not only than the Brahminic mysticism with which it has to contend, but even than that Roman enlightenment which the old Empire transmitted to the nations of Europe. And therefore we shall hold that spectacle now presented by India of a superior civilisation introduced by a conquering race is equally large….No experiment equally interesting is now being tried on the surface of the globe….
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> Every historical student knows that it was the incubus of the Empire which destroyed liberty at Rome. …Think how different would have been the course of modern European history if the mother-city of its civilisation, instead of being in the midst of the nations it educated, instead of suffering in their discords and convulsions, instead of receiving as much barbarism from them as it gave civilisation to them, had stood outside, enjoying an independent prosperity, developing its own civilisation further with an unabated vigour of youth all the while that it guided the subject nations (Seeley 1909: 245-6).

Rome was the precedent in history as well as the guiding principle for Greater Britain[229] in many ways. In India, Britain was to give an ancient land plagued by political anarchy of late, a chance for political stability[230]. But there were two

[229] Great Britain along with her colonies was referred to as Greater Britain. See Dilke (1868) which may have popularised the term further.
[230] Prinsep (1822), in his account of the Anglo-Maratha war, is on the whole rather unapologetically justifying the conquest in terms of the consequences for British profits. However, the advantage he cites for India is "deliverance…from the most destructive form of military violence" (Prinsep 1822: 342) which will finally allow for economic growth. This is distinct from the reformist justifications which saw the Pax

views related to what this political stability was to do for India. The first held that it would protect her from the ravages of competing ruling forces and allow for the best principles within Indian culture to rise once again from the ruins to which they had fallen[231]. The second was that India was to be held in trust until she could be taught to govern herself - not in the earlier manner of 'despotic governments' but in the 'modern' manner of 'representative government'. It was the second view that became established as the only possible principle which justified colonisation[232]. One of the most assertive votaries for this second view was none other than Macaulay who is well-known for shaping the British policy on education. In the same speech quoted above on July 10, 1833, Macaulay first elucidated what was meant by 'good government'.

> If the question were, What is the best mode of securing good government in Europe? The merest smatterer in politics would answer, representative institutions. In India you cannot have representative institutions. Of all the innumerable speculators who have offered their suggestions on Indian politics, not a single one, as far as I know, however democratical his opinions may be, has ever maintained the possibility of giving, at the present time, such institutions to India. One gentleman, extremely well acquainted with the affairs of our Eastern Empire, a most valuable servant of the Company, and the

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Britannica as the chance for 'civilisation' to grow. Prinsep also quite conspicuously uses language that would have shocked the reformists since he considers the conquests in India as rendering her the *property* of England.

[231] Roughly this is characteristic of the 'orientalist' position. The connections that this conception of their political role in India may have had to the 'Anglicist-Orientalist' debate in education remains to be investigated.

[232] In the 1830s-1850s a school of thinkers referred to as the 'Colonial Reformers' is responsible for most systematic justifications of the British Empire, which were subsequently constantly deployed. Notable members of this school were Gibbon Wakefield, Burke, Bentham and John Stuart Mill. See Egerton's *A Short History of British Colonial Policy* (1941) and his 'The Colonial Reformers of 1830' published in Hearshaw ed. *King's College Lectures on Colonial Problems* (1913).

> author of a History of India, which, though certainly not free from faults, is, I think, on the whole, the greatest historical work which has appeared in our language since that of Gibbon, I mean Mr Mill, was examined on this point. That gentleman is well known to be a very bold and uncompromising politician. He has written strongly, far too strongly I think, in favour of pure democracy. He has gone so far as to maintain that no nation which has not a representative legislature, chosen by universal suffrage, enjoys security against oppression. But when he was asked before the Committee of last year, whether he thought representative government practicable in India, his answer was, "utterly out of the question." This, then, is the state in which we are. We have to frame a good government for a country into which, by universal acknowledgment, we cannot introduce those institutions which all our habits, which all the reasonings of European philosophers, which all the history of our own part of the world would lead us to consider as the one great security for good government. **We have to engraft on despotism those blessings which are the natural fruits of liberty**.
>
> [8b] Do I call the government of India a perfect government? Very far from it. No nation can be perfectly well governed till it is competent to govern itself. I compare the Indian government with other governments of the same class, with despotisms, with military despotisms, with foreign military despotisms; and I find none that approaches it in excellence. I compare it with the government of the Roman provinces, with the government of the Spanish colonies; and I am proud of my country and my age (Macaulay 2008 emphasis added).

One of the measures in the bill was the provision that no native for reason of his colour, descent or religion would be barred from holding office. Macaulay hinged the very moral core of an Empire on the defence of this principle. Since this idea

seems to form the core of his understanding of colonial policy it bears a fuller quotation.

> We are told that the time can never come when the natives of India can be admitted to high civil and military office. We are told that this is the condition on which we hold our power. We are told that we are bound to confer on our subjects every benefit--which they are capable of enjoying?--no;--which it is in our power to confer on them?--no;--but which we can confer on them without hazard to the perpetuity of our own domination. Against that proposition I solemnly protest as inconsistent alike with sound policy and sound morality. …
>
> It is scarcely possible to calculate the benefits which we might derive from the diffusion of European civilisation among the vast population of the East. It would be, on the most selfish view of the case, far better for us that the people of India were well governed and independent of us, than ill governed and subject to us; that they were ruled by their own kings, but wearing our broadcloth, and working with our cutlery, than that they were performing their salams to English collectors and English magistrates, but were too ignorant to value, or too poor to buy, English manufactures. To trade with civilised men is infinitely more profitable than to govern savages. That would, indeed, be a doting wisdom, which, in order that India might remain a dependency, would make it an useless and costly dependency, which would keep a hundred millions of men from being our customers in order that they might continue to be our slaves. …
>
> What is power worth if it is founded on vice, on ignorance, and on misery; if we can hold it only by violating the most sacred duties which as governors we owe to the governed, and which, as a people blessed with far more than an ordinary measure of political liberty and of intellectual light, we owe to a race debased by three thousand years of despotism and

> priestcraft? We are free, we are civilised, to little purpose, if we grudge to any portion of the human race an equal measure of freedom and civilisation.
>
> [13d] Are we to keep the people of India ignorant in order that we may keep them submissive? Or do we think that we can give them knowledge without awakening ambition? Or do we mean to awaken ambition and to provide it with no legitimate vent? Who will answer any of these questions in the affirmative? Yet one of them must be answered in the affirmative, by every person who maintains that we ought permanently to exclude the natives from high office. I have no fears. The path of duty is plain before us: and it is also the path of wisdom, of national prosperity, of national honour. …
>
> It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. **To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own** (Macaulay 2008 emphasis added).

It is not a surprise then to see that Seeley's account of Empire sees Macaulay as the hero who brought home to the mother country her role in India. The Pax Britannica was in fact to be greater and more glorious than the Pax Romana. For, not only did it bring civilisation and learning, political stability and unity but also, the very pinnacle of Western civilisation, its political system of representational government.

> But if our rule had achieved nothing more than this *Pax Romana,* that alone would hardly be enough to justify it to India, to the British people, or to the civilized world. … [T]he natives of India have gained in addition to the sense of security, many inestimable benefits under British rule. Among these are: equal justice; a fixed, and on the whole fairly light system of taxation in place of arbitrary and oppressive exactions from transitory conquerors…[canals, railways, irrigation, fending off famines] and, especially in recent times, a scrupulous regard for historical traditions, literature and monuments that serve to keep alive for Indians a sense of dignity and a pride in their great past and to awaken in them lofty hopes for the future of their races.
>
> These are doubtless great benefits; but beyond these we have a paramount duty to India; to encourage her people, under the shadow of the peace and security we have been able to offer her, gradually to develop the capacity for governing themselves and provide by their own efforts for their own unaided security (Williams 1928: 204-5, 207).

As Williams demonstrated, the Pax Romana or Pax Britannica was the major achievement of empire, since it was the source of making “civilisation” itself possible. The sources to quote about the parallels with Rome are numerous. But what do they achieve? For one, it is not until we understand this discourse that we can begin to understand the gravity the British attached to questions of representation in India. It was not simply a matter of negotiations between the mother country and the colony and a predictable haggling over power. From colonial literature it is fairly clear that power itself, or the increasing clout the Indian National Congress was gaining, was not the consideration for endowing the colonised with ‘self-government’. If anything, this clout was significant only so

far as it fulfilled the test for the 'maturity' of the colony. The 'trust' in which the colony was held required it to pass the test of 'coming into age' – its ability to create a representative government. This ideal of 'representative government' and what it was to involve, contributed significantly to the idea of 'communalism'. Second, while several justificatory frameworks for colonisation emerged or were available in the 18th and 19th century, such as the civilisational stage theory or the theory of race, the special relationship that Britain shared with India was understood time and again in terms of the Roman Empire. The civilisational stage theory[233] seems to have played a greater role in the discourse surrounding America. The discourse of race was certainly evident in justifications of the colonisation of Africa. However, race was, as Mehta also points out, "seldom deployed as an explicit political category in the writings by British liberals in their works on India."[234] Although some borrowings may have occurred between these discourses, the idea of the "duty of Empire"[235] forms a crucial license for colonial discourse. It is with the excavation this larger normative framework that we will, I propose, find answers to the question of 'communalism'.

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[233] This is to be distinguished from the general lessons in civilisation that the British saw the Empire as imparting. The civilisational stage theory related to a classification of peoples according to their economic stage of development. For instance, the agrarian society was superior to the nomadic etc. See Meek (1976).
[234] Mehta in his 'Introduction' to *Liberalism and Empire*. (1999: 15) asserts that one possibility of the relative absence of this discourse is that India was understood as predominantly inhabited by the 'Aryan race', which was the same racial category as the British.
[235] This was also the title of a book by Barnes, published in 1935. For similar literature see Froude's *Oceana: England and her colonies* (1886), Dilke's *Greater Britain* (1868), Lucas' *Greater Rome and Greater Britain* (1912), Tupper's *Our Indian Protectorate* (1893), Sir Charles Bruce's *The True Temper of Empire* (1912), Griffiths' *The British impact on India* (1952) and *Empire into Commonwealth* (1969).

CHAPTER V

THE TOWER OF BABEL: LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF REPRESENTATION

It is important to understand the place that the idea of 'communalism' held in colonial discourse. In the 20th century, 'communalism' had gained the same place that 'despotism' had occupied in the 18th and early 19th centuries as the most fundamental critique of Indian society or polity. Just as 'despotism' had been the justification and 'degeneracy' the explanation for the establishment of colonisation, 'communalism' became the primary validation for the perpetuation of colonial rule[236]. This fact alone ought perhaps to have rendered 'communalism' a somewhat suspect category. However, the nationalist[237] corroboration of this colonial category invested it with such substantial normative power that it has become impossible to evade this idea in any understanding of the Indian polity or society.

[236] One will find this in every single colonial account of the twentieth century but in some 19th century accounts too we find ideas of Hindu-Muslim antagonism or distrust as a reason to maintain colonialism. Hunter for instance said that the British rule had "endured because it is welded in the joint interest of the Indian races" (Hunter 1973: 1).

[237] My use of 'nationalist' here refers specifically to the deployment of charges of 'communalism' by the political parties such as the Congress and the Muslim League. It is true that certain assumptions and judgments that are characterized as 'communal' are found widely expressed in literature of the 19th century and that this literature is also characterized as 'early nationalist'. For instance, the novel *Anandmath* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1865) would be considered 'early nationalist' and 'communal'. However, my contention is that 19th century positions which we have come to recognize as 'communal' and the actual deployment of charges of 'communalism' in the 20th century are two very different phenomena.

Patronage to participation

The term ‘communal’ was first used to describe reservations of a particular kind. ‘Communal reservation’ pre-dates ‘communal representation’, a related but later development[238]. The Anglo-Indian community was the first to make demands for reservations in educational institutions and government employment as well[239]. These demands were based on the claim that the community enjoyed a ‘special status’ or had ‘special needs’. The Eurasian (as it was referred to at that time) or Anglo-Indian community in India claimed special recognition from the government since it was ‘closer’ to the British government than the natives. While the special needs of the Eurasian community seem to have been intelligible and justifiable to the colonial authorities, they were largely flummoxed by the flurry of other such requests they received from various communities. None of the other communities were special in the same way and so the need for special attention from the State was incomprehensible to the colonial government.

However, the claims made by the communities in India and the response to these claims by the colonial government bear an intriguing difference. The

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[238] The first reservations for a particular community seem to have been special reservations for Muslims put into place in the area of educational institutions for Medicine in the 1870’s. This followed a major world-wide cholera epidemic in 1865. The Hajj pilgrimage was considered one of the major sources for the spread of this disease (Low 2007). This measure was specifically taken in order to generate more Muslim doctors to travel on ships along with the Hajj pilgrims. (There seem to have been objections to having non-Muslim doctors travelling with the pilgrims.) Thus, it was a practical stumbling block that laid the foundations for educational reservations. This history appears though only in passing in the *Memorandum no. 11 On the Communal Composition of the Services in the Punjab and other Provinces* (1925).

[239] The *Memorial of the National Muhammadan Association* (1882: paragraph 23) specifically draws on the colonial State’s reservations for ‘Eurasians’ and makes a demand for similar provisions for the Muslims.

communities of India were making claims for equal or proportional or even special *patronage* by the government. These claims for patronage came to be transformed by the colonial government, into those of communal *representation* in government employment. It is an examination of this history that is required in order to understand the specific route that India was to take towards 'political maturity' via 'communalism'.

In 1882, the National Muhammadan Association of Calcutta sent a memorial to the Viceroy, Lord Ripon, appealing to the government to take measures "arresting the progress of decay" in the community. I quote extensively from the memorial for several reasons. The memorial is fairly representative of the accusations to be found in 19th century 'communal' discourse[240]. The accusations bandied against each other by the different communities are certainly a prominent feature of this literature. However, there is more to the literature than evidence for 'deplorable antagonism' prevalent between the two communities. The discourse of 'communalism' has strangely deflected attention from fundamental aspects of this literature, reducing it simply into evidence for antagonism[241]. For instance, through an examination of the nature of their demands we can recognise that the memorialists relied on an earlier set of concepts to express their expectations from the colonial state. The difference in

[240] Fairly extensive literature on the Hindi-Urdu controversy for instance, reflects similar bitterness expressed by Muslims against Hindus or by Hindus against Muslims. For a good compilation of the language debate and the kinds of bitter dialogue it generated, see Christopher King (1994).
[241] Perhaps this is a reflection of what Nandy calls the 'imperialism of categories' that is a legacy of colonialism (Nandy 1998).

the nature of these expectations and their reception by the colonial state sheds some light on crucial developments in the late 19th century.

The memorialists began by asserting that no measure of reform within the community could address the kind of decline they were facing and therefore pleaded for urgent government intervention. The justification for this intervention was made on several counts:

9. The treaty of the 12th August 1765, by which Shah Alam, the last of the Moguls, entrusted the collection of the revenue of Bengal, Behar and Orissa to the East India Company, made no alteration in the political condition of the Muhammadans. For a series of years the Mussulmans were scrupulously maintained in their position. Until the time of Lord Cornwallis, the administration of the country proceeded on the lines of the Muhammadan sovereigns. In 1793, Lord Cornwallis, who was especially deputed to India to correct the abuses which had crept into the Company's Government, owing to the malpractices of its servants, introduced various changes into the administrative and judicial systems, all of which ultimately affected Mussulman prosperity to a material extent.
10. The measures introduced by Lord Cornwallis did not however, make any immediate or decided alteration in the political condition of the Muhammadans, and in spite of the status which the Hindu collectors of revenue had acquired under the permanent settlement, and the new system of judicature, the Muhammadans continued to occupy the front rank among the Indian communities. The Civil lists of those days show a proportion of 75 per cent of Muhammadans in the service of the State. It was not until Lord William Bentinck's administration that Mussulman decadence really commenced.

11. … From the first establishment of the Muhammadan power in India up to the year 1837, Persian was the official language of those Governments, including British, which had inherited their power from the last Muhammadan sovereign in Delhi. … In 1837, an order was promulgated that office business should henceforward be conducted either in English or in the provincial dialects. The language of the people of each province and the character in which it was originally designed to be written, were fixed upon as the most convenient and practicable substitute for the Persian. … The actual impoverishment of the Middle class of Muhammadans dates from this epoch. English-educated Hindu youths, trained for the most part in Missionary institutions, from which the Mussulmans naturally stood aloof, now poured into every Government office and completely shut out the Muhammadans. A few unimportant offices remained in the hands of the Muhammadans, but year by year and day by day their number has decreased.
12. Whilst this radical change was introduced in the administrative policy of the country, rendering it necessary on all aspirants for office under Government to know the language of the rulers, no order was passed making English education compulsory. On the contrary, up to the year 1864, the Muhammadans were fed with the hope that their own classics were the *sine qua non* for Government employment, or for entering the profession of law. The order of the Government, declaring that candidates for munsiffships and pleaderships may pass their examinations either in Urdu or English, remained in force so late as 1864. A year or two later, however, a sudden change was introduced upsetting the previous orders and declaring that English alone should be the language in which the examination for higher grade pleaderships and munsiffships should be held. The measures since introduced from time to time placed the Muhammadans under a complete disadvantage. Before they had quite awakened to the necessity of learning English, they were shut out from Government employment. …

18. …For the last twenty years the Mussulmans have made strenuous exertions to qualify themselves to enter the lists successfully with the Hindus, but, unfortunately, with every avenue to public employment already jealously blocked by members of a different race, it is almost impossible for a Muhammadan candidate to obtain a footing in any Government office. Your memorialists do not mean by these remarks to reflect upon the Hindu community, but desire simply to call attention to a fact which, to a large extent, paralyzes the action of Government. In the subordinate walks of life, the briskness of competition naturally creates jealousy, which often degenerates into intrigue; and where vested interests are concerned, it must be expected that those who are already in the enjoyment of influence of power should try to keep out others by legitimate and sometimes illegitimate means. When any subordinate office in a Department happens to fall vacant, the claims of the Muhammadan candidates are either not brought to the notice of the Head of the Department, or are treated with contempt or indifference. Sometimes when a Muhammadan has been fortunate enough to obtain an appointment, intrigues are set on foot, often not unsuccessfully, to get him out. …
21. Your memorialists would humbly suggest, in the first place, that the **balance of state patronage** should be restored between the Hindus and the Muhammadans (*Memorial of the National Muhammadan Association to Viceroy and Governor General of India, Lord Ripon* 1882 emphasis added).

The memorialists went on to suggest that one of the reasons the Hindus gained better employment opportunities than them was the greater percentage amongst them who were University educated. The memorialists suggested that no regard be paid to university education when "**dispensation of state patronage**" was

under consideration[242]. Besides a petition in relation to change in court language in Bihar, the memorialists only pleaded for one more thing, a strong government scheme for education of the Muslims.

Most examinations of this memorial and similar 19th century literature are struck, as pointed out above, by the “antagonism” or “jealousy” between the Hindus and Muslims. The question posed is either Why is the relationship between the communities one of antagonism or competition? Or why is it that competition was based on ‘communal’ identity rather than class? For those who pose the answer to the latter question in terms of the formation of ‘identities’ based on stark differentiation between ‘self’ and ‘other’ paragraph 25 in the memorial is rather interesting.

> A memorial has been submitted by the people of Behar to the Bengal Government praying for the withdrawal of the order substituting the Nagri character for the Persian in the Behar courts. Your memorialists have no doubt that when all the facts connected with this subject are considered by the Lieutenant-Governor, his Honour will be pleased to withdraw the order in question, which appears to have been made on insufficient data. The largest numbers of Hindus in the Province of Behar are, in their manners, their customs, and their modes of amusement, Muhammadans. Their polish and their culture

[242] “Your memorialists would therefore humbly suggest that in the dispensation of State patronage no regard should be paid to mere University degrees, but the qualifications of the candidates should be judged by an independent standard. It will not be considered presumptuous on your memorialists’ part if they venture to submit that stamina and force of character are as necessary in the lower as in the higher walks of life, and these qualities can scarcely be tested by University examinations” (1882: paragraph 21). For us in the present day it seems odd to consider that educational merit would not be an “independent standard” of assessment. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Muslim systems of education and *madrassas* were still extant though dying a slow death at this point in time. Thus, the unhappiness the memorialists express is also towards the British recognition of only one system of education (the British) which systematically rendered another system redundant or useless.

> are derived from the Mussulmans. They pride themselves upon speaking pure Urdu. The change in question has proved vexatious to all the educated classes in Behar (*Memorial of the National Muhammadan Association to Viceroy and Governor General of India, Lord Ripon* 1882).

Thus in the same memorial that Muslims charge the Hindus with deliberately keeping them out of government service the Muslims can also claim that the Hindus of “Behar” are practically Muslims themselves[243]. It would seem then that building ‘exclusionary identities’ does not seem to be the most coherent interpretation of the objectives or representations of these memorialists. Even if one looks at the similitude drawn between the Muslims and the Hindus of Bihar as political expedience or a ploy, the historical claims for a ‘communal’ identity that comes into being at this time are based on an active disregard of the different kinds of associations that were in operation at this time. Even a cursory examination shows that competition took place along several different planes -- class, region, community and even occupational group[244]. However, historical scrutiny has often only focused on ‘communal’ identity since it has reconstructed a history that looks for this identity.

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[243] It seems like a rather strange ‘Dr. Jekyll - Mr. Hyde’ notion of identity would be required to account for this!

[244] For instance, both Thorburn and Hunter focused on Muslim communities of one particular British province, Punjab and Bengal respectively. Both held that their studies could not be generalised to the rest of India. While the first reservations in services (after the Anglo-Indians) were made for Muslims in Punjab in 1901, the next set of reservations were for the *zamindars* of Punjab in 1918. For a full history of these measures see *Memorandum no. 11 On the Communal Composition of the Services in the Punjab and of the Provinces* (1925).

The question *why* the 'communal' identity was often the predominant one used to address the colonial state, may not actually have a significant answer. Whether we answer it by saying that religion was at this time the 'primary group' affiliation of the native population or that the colonial state instituted religious groups as the primary groups amongst the natives, this answer is seemingly important only if one is already looking for a history of 'communal identity'. Further, these questions do not add to our understanding of their demands. And the point to note is that irrespective of whether the groups are formed along religious or occupational or class notions, the nature of their demand seems similar.

Let us, therefore, examine the nature of the demands being made. In the memorial, the Muslims were making a bid for an equal share in **state patronage**. By characterising state patronage as government employment the Muslims were simply employing a familiar language of appeal to new conditions. They were pleading to the sovereign for a share of the state resources, but in terms of government employment rather than contribution to institutions like the Waqf boards[245]. The memorialists invoke the treaty with Shah Alam and a history of the British relations with the Muslims for a reason. In lieu of the government's consideration of merit and qualifications, they place a history of the Muslim relationship with the colonial government (by reminding them of treaties made with Muslim Sovereigns) and the services they have rendered it. To the colonial state, these considerations would make little sense. In fact, this language and set

[245] Which were facing near destruction at the hands of that very government during this period, as the memorialists themselves pointed out.

of concepts was almost unintelligible. Typically therefore, the colonial state's response to the memorialists reflects this. A response was sought from every British province on the memorial. The responses reflected a wide variety of reflections on the 'causes' for Muslim 'backwardness', from their religion to their economic status and character, but reflect an over-all incomprehension of what they were to do with this claim for patronage[246]. The government responded to the memorial's request for the encouragement of education, but did not recognise any claim to patronage through government employment.

> The government of India, in dealing with the memorial in 1885 observed that in every province admission to the superior departments of Government service was then, speaking generally, regulated either by public competition or the possession of qualifications altogether independent of race or caste of the candidate. They considered therefore, that if Muhammadans had secured a less proportion of places in the public service than the members of other communities, the blame could not be attributed to the action of the State or of its officers. They did not consider it desirable that Muhammadans should be exempted from the usual tests; nor did they consider that special favour could be shown to them in competitive examinations. But, as regards appointments made by patronage[247], they considered that in those provinces where Muhammadans did not receive their full share of state employment, local Governments and High Courts should endeavour to redress this inequality as opportunity offered (*Memorandum no. 11 On the Communal Composition of the Services in the Punjab and of the Provinces* 1925).

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[246] See *Elaborate discussion on Muhammadan Education 1871-1873 with elaborate resolution of Government of India* (July 1885).
[247] This presumably refers to lower-level government jobs.

The Muslim memorialists were certainly making a bid for equality of sorts. However, the government discerned a charge of discrimination where the Muslims were making no such charge. Inequality, according to the Muslims, was not the product of discrimination but their particular historical circumstances compounded by a state policy which recognised only merit. However, the colonial state could only understand their memorial as a charge of discrimination. And thus, the state's response was its insistence on the fact that it made only merit-based *impartial* appointments. This defence of course does not address the memorialists' concerns in any way. The language of patronage seems to have no intelligibility to the colonial state. That is also perhaps why the measures the government suggested were that **given equal qualifications** of two candidates if one was from a community **under-represented** in government service, that candidate should be offered the job[248]. Thus, it is through a translation of these demands for patronage into a separate set of colonial concepts that a new trajectory for communal development is set up. The mediating concept here invoked by the colonial government was the 'representation' of 'interests'.

Conflicting 'interests' or conflating definitions

In 1899, Thorburn, Financial Commissioner of Punjab wrote a note to the government regarding the financial condition of the state at the point of his

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[248] This step was taken only in 1889 in response to a similar petition from the Central National Muhammadan Association of Punjab. For a history of the government's measures for 'communal representation' see *Memorandum no. 11 On the communal composition of the services in the Punjab and other Provinces* (1925).

retirement. One of the points he made in relation to government employment became the means of instituting ‘communal reservations’.

> Now, confining comments to the Musalman districts, the Musalmans there are so **inadequately represented** that I think it will be readily admitted that if a remedy can be found it should be applied both on political grounds and in simple justice to the people. Obviously in such districts there must be popular dissatisfaction when the people see that a majority of posts are held by members of **a class antipathetic to them in religion and interests** – a class which under the protection of our system is expropriating them and reducing them to the position of helots. Our system is based…on the principles that all men are equal, that superiority in education is the one thing needful for civil employ, that if Musalmans are backward in education it is their not our affair. When we started education and taxed the *zamindars* for it, the Hindus sent their children to our schools, the Musalmans did not. Thus the latter paid for the teaching of their former dependents and helped to give them the learning which was to be applied to the undoing of the cess-payers. The Hindus thus got more than a generation’s start over the Musalmans, and will easily keep their lead until we recognise that all men are not equal, and that in making appointments caste, religion, manhood, sentiment should be factors for consideration as well as book knowledge. If we make no changes in our education policy and system of recruitment, **it is hopeless to expect that Musalmans in Musalman districts will ever be reasonably represented in civil employ under Government, and until they are, their partial exclusion will be a cause for their discontent**. Their failure is now at least not so much due to the absence of youths sufficiently qualified by education for civil employment as to the fact that Hindus are in possession of the field for ministerial appointments, are better educated, and can consequently beat them in competition. Hindus owe their educational advantages partly no doubt to racial characteristics, but largely to the fact that the schools are in towns and superior education now costs money,

> and Hindus are rich, whereas Musalmans are poor. That all men are equal may be a working theory in homogeneous England, but is I think, unsuitable for **an Eastern Continent filled with conflicting races ruled over by a few foreigners**. If we are to rule successfully we must *inter alia* keep our Musalmans contented by removing legitimate grounds for their discontent. We are doing this in regard to their expropriation by Hindu money-lenders, but we shall contribute to our general object if we give them a fair share in the ministerial, judicial and executive posts under Government in their own half of the province[249] (quoted in the *Memorial from the Hindu Sabha, Lahore, regarding the differential treatment in the distribution of Government patronage, etc.* 1909 emphasis added).

What is 'adequate *representation*' in government employment? In fact, what does one *represent* at all in government employment? Why do all communities need to be present in numbers proportional to their population in government services for justice to be done? It is one thing to observe the poverty or lack of education prevalent in a community and recommend state intervention in terms of educational and employment schemes to alleviate such circumstances, and quite another to say that the bureaucracy must be made up of proportionate *representation*. The basis for Thorburn's proposition is that the Hindus and Muslims have "*conflicting interests*" and the employment of Hindus in government services naturally *creates discontent* amongst the Muslims. It seems like employment in the bureaucracy became for Thorburn a replacement for a

[249] Thorburn's full report titled *Note recorded by S.S. Thorburn, late Financial Commissioner, Punjab* was not traceable. However, paragraphs 12 and 13 quoted in the memorial above are the most important sections.

non-existent Indian Parliament.[250] The language of 'conflicting interests' in the case of government employment for instance, is particularly strange. What are these 'conflicting interests'? In parliamentary governance for instance, capital and labour would be dubbed 'conflicting interests', for the profits of one often rest on the exploitation of the other. However, in this case, neither community can have a relationship of potential exploitation. What they do have is a relationship of competition for limited state employment or resources or educational provisions. The absurdity of this situation is clear if one continues the analogy. In an election if two candidates representing labour are competing for a seat in parliament, they cannot be dubbed 'conflicting interests', they are merely competing with each other for a limited number of seats and represent the same *interest*.

The "popular dissatisfaction" that the Muslims would express because "a majority of posts are held by members of **a class antipathetic to them in religion and interests** – a class which under the protection of our system is expropriating them and reducing them to the position of helots" is a little mysterious. How could one religious community, the Hindus be oppressing another, the Muslims, in a secular British state? Clearly these remarks conflated two social group divisions, one of religion and the other of class. Thorburn's reference had to be to a class of money-lenders and landlords who were "expropriating" Muslim tenants and these were also incidentally, Hindus. He also referred explicitly to a rural Muslim

[250] This is after all about two decades before the first form of parliamentary participation by Indians in colonial government was to take place.

population and an urban, rich Hindu population which received the education suitable for government employment. The first part of the reasoning which relies on a “natural antipathy” between Hindus and Muslims is derived from the narrative of ‘Hindu-Muslim antagonism’. I have examined this separately in chapter 3 as an old assumption made in colonial sources from the late eighteenth century onwards. However, this narrative now becomes the source for the notion of *conflicting interests* of the two communities. This is rather curious and I now turn to investigate how these conflicting interests come to be considered a problem for which *representation* was the answer.

In a liberal democratic context, conflict in interest is resolved by representation since whichever party may be in power, both parties have the chance to defend their own positions and secure what benefits they can. The Hindus and Muslims were competing for a finite set of government positions but to define the acquisition of jobs as in itself an ‘interest’ is, as I have asserted above, a nonsensical claim since the ‘interest’ here is not defined in any way by particular group positions. All individuals and groups would express this very same ‘interest’ since they would be competing for the same jobs! Thus, there can be no conflicting ‘interest’, only competition. There could be no ‘communal interests’ served unless one is to make either of two inferences: that the competition was really for a religious state and therefore the two religions were ‘conflicting interests’ in the competition for state control along religious lines; or the competition itself was economic but the alleviation of the economic conditions of

one community would make the other vulnerable since they were natural or historical enemies who were always engaged in a civil war of sorts[251]. Neither of these inferences is historically tenable. Clearly, we must find another way of understanding Thorburn's proposition of 'conflicting interests'[252].

Thorburn's 'conflicting interests' may well have been based on the relationship of peasantry versus landowners. However, his use of the 'natural antipathy' between the communities as one more reason for 'conflicting interests' was to become mixed with the existing notion of the Muslim 'decline' in order to create a major shift in the discourse of representation. The discourse of Muslim 'decline' was already established through Hunter's work on the Muslims of Bengal (Hunter 2002). This discourse was referred to by the Muslim memorialists as well in their reference to Hunter. But in the memorialists' use it did not receive specific attention from the state. In Thorburn's conception this discourse of decline becomes slightly transformed and as a result gains immediacy. This is because Hunter's discourse of decline was concerned with the task of inspiring loyalty amongst the Musulmans. However, Thorburn's concern was the establishment of 'equality'. The normative force of 'equality' becomes the major force that drives

[251] It is possible that the 'antagonism' expressed in memorials like the one above may be cited at this point to make precisely this point that the Hindus and Muslims did indeed see each other as natural and historical enemies. We must recognize by now that this merely leads us to fall prey to the position in colonial discourse that Indian society was doomed to be 'forever communal'. If one continues to take this claim seriously then there is very little that can be said except that we seem to have found the right solution in partition and must have fared rather well thereafter!

[252] One suspects that the 'conflicting interests' may actually refer to the notion that India was made up of several different **nations**. That is perhaps what he wishes to stress through his emphasis on "classes" that are "naturally antipathetic" to each other. Therefore, Thorburn is really raising the point that in the absence of 'a people' who express one will, India could only demonstrate classes expressing clashing interests because it was a State made up of different nations. This is much more explicit in Minto's explication of the scheme of representation for India.

the discourse of ‘communal representation’, not simply the assumption of ‘Hindu-Muslim antagonism’.

The nature of this normative plea for equality is different from the bid for equality made by the Muslim memorialists[253]. The latter were demanding an equitable distribution of state resources. Thorburn however, sets the stage for a different notion of equality. For the memorialists, the State dispensation of resources was either equal or unequal. For Thorburn, the people *achieved* equality. That meant that through the process of learning to ‘secure interests’ the groups would also obtain and defend their equality with other groups. Equality changes reference from a share in resources to a desirable outcome of the state of mature self-representation.[254] Thus, native conceptions of equality and colonial conceptions of equality were referring to anything but the same thing. Equal patronage would always be a matter of competition before the State. This competition may well cause conflict and antagonism. However, ‘equal representation of conflicting interests’ was to trigger off a whole different set of dynamics. Implicit in Thorburn’s scheme for securing interests through *representation* is the fact that the State could not secure the interests of the groups *for* them, they could only

[253] An examination of the history of native demands and the concessions the colonial state conceded in response, reflects the often completely tangential nature of the conversations between native and coloniser. For instance, according to the above conceptions of securing interests through representation in colonial state bureaucracy, the judiciary would be a healthy institution so far as its employee statistics were in equal ratio to population statistics of the different communities in India. This is of course a completely different conception of a healthy judiciary from the one that Indian communities themselves had been demanding i.e., that they have judges of their own communities to judge their cases for they would be in a better position to *understand* their claims. It is deeply ironic that the demand of the communities for judges of their own religion could not be ceded however, since differentiation between judges and the cases they would try on the basis of their community would not be in the interest of ‘equality’!
[254] Thus it shifts from an empirical to a normative concept.

be secured by self-representation. It was therefore not long before this notion of equal representation in government services came to be understood in terms of equal *participation* in government institutions. Less than a decade after Thorburn's recommendations, the Morley-Minto reforms were to set India on the road to representative politics. However, it is crucial to see the story of political representation in India as an extension of this earlier story of 'communal representation' in government services.

"Constitutional Autocracy": learning 'interests' before 'representation'

The colonial project's primary learning goal for its trustees was their transformation from 'subjects' into 'citizens'. For this goal to be achieved every individual would have to become a 'participant' in political process. But the lessons towards becoming a sovereign citizen were not so simply learnt. Before the native could represent himself, he would have to learn what he represented. The answer was set in these terms: the native represented his interests[255]. Thus, the first lesson was the lesson in securing or representing interests.

The Morley-Minto reforms are always the first chapter in constitutional reforms in India and this Viceroy-Secretary of State duo is often credited with the

[255] This was different from the answer in the British context where the individual represented his **will** and government would then be made up of the collective will of the people.

establishment of the first representative institutions in the country[256]. However, as many other scholars have pointed out, Minto was against representative institutions in India. In a letter to his wife in March 1907 Minto explained his position.

> **I am no advocate of 'representative government for India' in the Western sense of the term. It could never akin to the instincts of the many races composing the population of the Indian Empire.** It would be a Western importation unnatural to Eastern tastes. From time immemorial in India the power of the State has rested in the hands of absolute rulers…Sir Courtenay Ilbert observes in the opening sentences of his work on the Government of India 'British authority in India may be traced historically to a two-fold source: it is derived partly from the British Crown, partly from the Great Moghul and other Native Rulers of India. There are the two sources of our authority and they involve important consequences. As heirs to a long series of Indian Rulers we are bound to reserve to ourselves the ultimate control over all executive action and the final decision in matters of legislation; as trustees of British principles and traditions we are equally bound to consult the wishes of the people and to provide machinery by which their views may be expressed as far as they are articulate' (in Mary, Countess of Minto 1934: 110 emphasis added)

The reason that the first lesson the native would have to learn was not simply that of representing his will but representing his interest was because, as Morley points out, the "instincts" of the "many races" would be divergent and therefore could not amalgamate into a public will. Minto begins his justification of 'constitutional autocracy' with this observation. Thus, the colonial state was to

[256] I have ignored two significant events that precede this set of reforms, the Bengal partition and the beginnings of the Indian National Congress and Muslim League. However, these cannot be dealt with in this account, even though they are of utmost importance.

identify the different interests amongst the native population and these would be represented by a nominated or elected representative.

> …yet possibly the dual origin of which Sir Courtenay Ilbert speaks may suggest a solution of the problem consonant both with English ideas and with Indian history and tradition. He shows how the British Government in India is the embodiment of two principles; the principle of autocracy derived from the Moghul Emperors and Hindu Rulers, whose methods they adopted, and the principle of constitutionalism derived from the British Crown and Parliament. **Can we fuse these two principles into a definite system of government, into what may be called a 'constitutional autocracy'** and thus give to our administration a definite and permanent shape? **There is all the difference in the world between the arbitrary autocracy of the Asiatic despotism and the constitutional autocracy which binds itself to govern by rule, which admits and invites to its councils representatives of all the interests which are capable of being represented**, and which merely reserves to itself, in the form of a narrow majority, the predominant and absolute power which it can only abdicate at the risk of bringing back the chaos to which our rule put an end.
>
> …
>
> The Committee has in fact been asked to discover whether it is possible to give to India something that may be called a 'constitution' framed on sufficiently liberal lines to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the most advanced Indians, whilst at the same time enlisting the support of the conservative element of Native society: a constitution based on the traditions and practice of both English and Indian Rulers: not an experimental makeshift but a working machine, **representing all interests that are capable of being represented**, and providing for an adequate expression of the sentiments and requirements of the masses of the people, and in particular of the great agricultural class forming two-thirds of the entire population. And to my mind, there is no answer to the

> problem unless we call to our counsels the people over whom we rule (in Mary, Countess of Minto 1934: 110-111 emphasis added).

If the securing of interests was simply a phrase in Thorburn's work, it gains explicit constitutional meaning in Minto's conception of "constitutional autocracy". Minto's conception of a constitutional autocracy was not the first step in the process of maturation, it was rather an *alternative* to the requirements of the full process of maturation. He did not see the possibility of the native becoming a sovereign citizen and therefore, sought a "definite and permanent" solution to the problem of representative government in the East. Minto was trying to find a means of consulting native opinion without processes of electoral representation. His solution was "communal representation". In this conception it merely meant that the communities were the primary interest groups in the state. In a letter to Morley dated July 11, 1906, he gave an early formulation of his reasons for separate representation that would be required in India.

> We must remember that our own people at home have been educated for centuries in the idea of constitutional government, and have only advanced by slow steps to the popular representation of to-day. Here everything is different; from time immemorial it has been the rule of dictators, and we must be very careful not to thrust modern political machinery upon a people who are generally totally unprepared for it (in Mary, Countess of Minto 1934: 98) …

In another letter to Morley dated January 23rd, 1907, he explained his position in much greater detail.

> The necessity for increased representation on the Legislative Councils is admitted, and the machinery for supplying that representation could be worked out by Council with the assistance of the new Native Member. This will no doubt take time, but in accepting an Indian Member of Council we should admit the immediate right of a Native to share in the highest executive administration of the country, and with this fresh factor on my Council I think we might more satisfactorily consider the question of representation.
>
> **As to that we have to be very careful. The only representation for which India is at present fitted is a representation of Communities, as I said in my reply to the Mahommedan Deputation, and only to a very small extent in that direction. The composition of the Municipalities and District Boards is to my mind more important at present than representation on the Legislative Councils, though the latter attracts more public attention.** But there is necessarily much detail to be thought out about all this, and I believe that if we accept a Native Member we should, in doing so, admit a principle which would be of the greatest help to us in dealing with the future (in Mary, Countess of Minto 1934: 102-103 emphasis added).

The "representation of communities" was not the only kind of interest group that the colonial state was to give recognition to. There were the zamindars, the peasantry, the factory workers and the depressed classes which were all slowly identified as special interests. In fact, once representation was to work through special interests the state constantly received petitions from newer and newer 'interest groups'. This cannot be fairly reconstructed to mean that Minto was obstructing 'Indian nationalism'. Consider for instance, the following extract from a letter by Minto to Morley dated 19th March, 1906:

> I think I told you that I was to receive a deputation of Mahommedans and Hindus. They came to see me last Friday, and of all the wonderful things that have happened since I have been in India, this, to my mind, was the most wonderful. The Deputation consisted of the Maharajah of Drabhanga, Surendranath Bannerjee, Mr. Chowdry, a Member of Congress, Narendra Nath Sen, Editor of the *Indian Mirror*, and three Mahommedan gentlemen. The burden of their conversation was that they are most anxious to put an end to unrest and bad feeling, and that they propose to organize associations throughout the country with a view to inducing Mahommedans and Hindus to work together for the control of their respective communities…It was simply marvelous, with the troubles and anxieties of a few months ago still fresh in one's memory to see the "King of Bengal" (Surendranath Bannerjee) sitting on my sofa with his Mahommedan opponents, asking for my assistance to moderate the evil passions of the Bengali, and inveighing against the extravagances of Bepin Chandra Pal (in Mary, Countess of Minto 1934: 108-9).

One must not reconstruct Minto's happiness to see the cooperation that the Indian National Congress was trying to effect between the Hindus and Muslims of Bengal as reflecting his desire to see common representation. He did not see the Congress as a possible representative of *both* interests[257]. That is also why he was encouraging of the establishment of the Muslim League, a measure that has often earned him the reputation of promoting 'communal' antagonism. However, this can only be an absurd claim to make against him since in this conception of communities being distinct interest groups there was no doubt that the two

[257] Especially since the Congress at this point was not a representative institution of any kind. There *were* no representative institutions at this time, only institutions of "native opinion". The Congress was an annual meeting, which invited individuals and other local organizations for participation in its annual proceedings. It was *not* a political party.

communities could not share ‘representation’. Minto’s satisfaction at having received a mixed deputation of Hindus and Muslims expresses merely the sense that cooperation between interest groups was better than conflict between them.

It is considered ironic that Minto, the liberal Secretary of State and Morley the conservative Viceroy, as they are described in several accounts, shared views on India that seemed to contradict their political leanings at home (see Koss 1967). The liberal Minto is credited with putting into place for the first time, any kind of representation at all for native opinion. However, this model of representation reflects what later became the conservative view of India, that of ‘communal representation’. Morley seems to have been in favour of a mixed electorate, which would be considered a ‘more liberal’ position and certainly was applauded as such by later British statesmen as well as Indian nationalists. However, it must be kept in mind that even the plan of ‘mixed electorate’ could not have made much difference, for even Morley recognised the two communities as two conflicting interest groups. Consider his stand on separate electorates expressed in February 1909:

> We suggested to the Government of India a certain plan….It was the plan of a mixed or composite electoral college, in which Mohamedans and Hindus should pool their votes, so to say…to the best of my belief, under any construction the plan of Hindus and Mahomedans voting together in a mixed and composite electorate would have secured to the Mahomedan electors, wherever they were so minded, the chance of returning their own representatives in their due proportion. The political idea at the bottom of that

> recommendation which had found so little favour was that such composite action would bring the two communities more closely together, and this idea of promoting harmony was held by men of very high Indian authority and experience who were among my advisers at the India Office. But the Mahomedans protested that the Hindus would elect a pro-Hindu upon it, just as I suppose in mixed college of say seventy-five Catholics and twenty-five Protestants voting together the Protestants might suspect that the Catholics voting for the Protestant would choose what is called a Romanising Protestant and as little of a Protestant as they could find….With regard to schemes of proportional representation, as Calvin said of another study, "excessive study either finds a man mad or makes him so." At any rate, the Government of India doubted whether our plan would work, and we have abandoned it….
>
> **To go back to the point of the registers, some may be shocked at the idea of a religious register at all, of a register framed on the principle of religious belief. We may wish, we do wish – certainly I do – that it were otherwise. We hope that time, with careful and impartial statesmanship, will make things otherwise. Only let us not forget that the difference between Mahomedanism and Hinduism is not a mere difference of articles of religious faith. It is a difference in life, in tradition, in history, in all the social things as well as articles of belief that constitute a community.** Do not let us forget what makes it interesting and even exciting. Do not let us forget that, in talking of Hindus and Mahomedans, we are dealing with and brought face to face with vast historic issues, dealing with some of the very mightiest forces that through all the centuries and ages have moulded the fortunes of great States and the destinies of countless millions of mankind (in Char ed. 1983: 431 emphasis added).

Morley's exasperation that too much reflection on questions of representation was a sure means to insanity seems to have been almost a prophecy for the

situation to come. Although many historians have decried the creation of separate electorates as the root of the Hindu-Muslim conflict, there is more to the question than simply the *mode* of representation. It is the very conception of representation and what it involves that is at the root of this conflict. Irrespective of what practical equation of representation may have been adopted, there was little chance of avoiding conflict once the notion of political participation was defined as conflicting interest groups which were to represent themselves. What is odd is that what started as a description of a competition for government jobs became the central principle of *representation* in India.

What remains a point of puzzlement in this history however, is the fact that the native also participated in this colonial discourse. It is not enough to say that the native discourse centred on patronage was not heard, it is also true that the native participated in the discourse of representation once it was established. The usual characterization of the failure of representation is hinged on the claim that the native did not understand it well enough[258]. This may well have been the case. But the natives certainly took to participating in the claims for representation on a large scale[259]. Both Hindus and Muslims and in fact a multitude of other groups as I will show below, participated in this discourse simply because this was the only discourse available to them. Although the

[258] That is the implication of the charge of 'stunted nationalism'. See Dumont (1970) Freitag (1990).
[259] The 'Home' department files show an increasing multitude of groups with special claims, petitions and requests under the heading of 'communal representation' after the year 1907.

native did not re-define the central terms of this discourse the engagement certainly shows agency and adaptation of the terms of the discourse[260].

The native response

Many must have shared in the complete puzzlement of Hindu memorialists writing to the Government in 1909:

> The main object of the Reforms Scheme is to satisfy the classes which, to quote your Excellency's words used on a memorable occasion, "by growth of education and encouraged by British rule were claiming equality of citizenship and aspiring to take a large part in shaping the policy of the Government." Unhappily the principle which has been accepted in providing for the separate and special representation of one particular community puts educational qualifications at a discount, and introduces a new factor of "political importance" which by giving rise to invidious and unjustifiable distinctions, based purely on denominational considerations, will tend to accentuate racial feeling, and largely militate against the good results that the people of India expected from the noble scheme of Reforms initiated by Your Excellency. Your Excellency's memorialists beg to

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[260] This is an important claim for two reasons. One, if the native was simply adopting colonial learning goals, then no anomalies should have been available. The native would then simply follow colonial expectations. However, any modern history of India shows that native political behaviour often stumped the coloniser. This does not mean that the native was able to create more harmony or peace while the colonial position set the stage for conflict. Often the native engagement could well have led to greater violence or political conflict than the coloniser could have foreseen. Two, a great motivation of the subaltern school of historians was to return some kind of agency to the native. This agency is sought not within the dominant discourse of nationalism, which is "derivative" as Partha Chatterjee (1986) asserts, but in other kinds of responses (like peasant movements or tribal revolts). While I agree that the other responses show a complete rejection of the dominant colonial discourse, I would also propose that the native engagement with colonial learning goals is a major part of our history which remains to be explained. The study of this discourse however, cannot simply be limited to laments about the incomplete lessons learnt as if the learning goals were platonic absolutes or its derivative nature but must engage with the native conceptions available and investigate what the native did understand or re-create out of this discourse. The conclusion further explores these questions.

> point out that the Hindus have looked upon the acceptance of this principle of the excessive representation of the Muhammadans on the ground of a supposed political importance as a slur particularly upon their community, who form the vast majority of the population of this country and principally contribute to its military defence, and who assuredly occupy the first place in loyalty, education and commercial enterprise as well as in providing the finances of the Empire….Your Excellency's memorialists venture to submit that for the first time in the history of British rule in India considerations of creed have been introduced into administrative policy by the acceptance of the principle of special Muhammadan representation, while the old golden rule of holding all subjects equal in the eye of the law is ignored. **Your Excellency's memorialists fail to find any justification for the introduction of a differential treatment of Muhammadan interests, for they know of no occasion in the history of British India on which it was found that in matters of legislation the interests of Hindus and Muhammadans had been in real conflict** (*Memorial from the Hindu Sabha, Lahore, regarding the differential treatment in the distribution of Government patronage etc*., 1909).

As stressed earlier, Indian history has only highlighted the feelings of animosity expressed at this time between the two communities. It has done so in a tenor of regret if not reprimand, as if this history is merely a matter of learning from previous 'bad behaviour' rather than a subject requiring investigation or explanation. One cannot deny the existence of conflict and antagonism at this time between the two communities. However, to characterise this period as simply one of increasing antagonism is to ignore the fact that this is first and foremost a conceptually extremely rich period. The native is dealing with many new situations and institutions, many new conceptualisations of himself by the British bureaucracy and legislature, and is at the same time engaging with this

dominant discourse. Thus, the fact that the Hindu memorialists are angry at their Muslim counterparts is perhaps important, but less interesting than two other facts: one, they show incomprehension of the notion of ‘conflicting interests’ which has become fairly entrenched in colonial discourse by this time. Two, although they show the ability to understand notions of ‘equality’ (the learning goal set by the coloniser), they understand it in terms similar to the Muslim petitioners who sought equal patronage. That is to say **they recognise this notion as a function of the State and not as an attribute of the people**. This is crucial since equality is in their conception is not something the people achieve or learn, it is contingent on the attention and justice the State pays to its people. That is all there is to the notion of equality here. Thus, one response that the native seemed to consistently show in response to colonial discourse is that of incomprehension.

This is not to say that the native did not engage with the coloniser on his own terms at all. For instance, an important question is that while the colonial conception of defining the two communities as two divergent interest groups seems to be based on a conflation of definitions and assumptions of a history of antagonism, what made the Muslims and other communities who followed suit, echo this conception? Again, this requires a conceptual investigation.

There are two kinds of positions taken on this question. Either the Congress was unable to inspire confidence amongst the Muslims and therefore failed to

become nationalist *enough* (Freitag 1990) or that the Muslims were unfortunately not nationalist *enough* to trust the Congress (Nanda 1989). Really this is simply two political perspectives on the same argument[261]. The reasoning is the same: the Congress was nationalist and the Muslims did not join it[262] and therefore 'communalism' arose. However, what was it that made the Congress 'nationalist'? Or even before it became 'nationalist'[263], what made the Congress 'national'?

One prominent conversation that took place on this issue was between Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Badruddin Tyabji. The latter, Congress President for the year 1888 attacked the former for keeping aloof from the Congress and its programme. This has often been given the description of a 'nationalist' Muslim chiding his 'communal' counterparts. Before one moves on to the further history of representation one must examine this conversation in order to understand that when we do a history of the native engagement in colonial discourse we cannot take for granted any one particular use of a term or concept. Thus, it becomes important to investigate the conflicts that arose amongst the natives as those that were also centrally disagreements about concepts and their use. Although the native engages with colonial discourse there does not seem to be a stable relationship of learning and application of colonial concepts. Instead, there is very centrally difference rather than agreement amongst the natives about what these

[261] Like the Mir Jaffer analogy in chapter 2
[262] Whether because the Muslims were not nationalist *enough* or the Congress was not nationalist *enough*!
[263] Nationalism did not enter the picture at least until Tilak's bid for 'Swaraj', which defined nationalism as anti-colonialism. Before this, nationalism could only mean a pro-colonial position, but one that desired native representation in colonial legislatures.

colonial concepts mean and how they are to be justifiably used. Thus, Sir Syed's encounter with Tyabji is not simply an encounter of politically divergent goals, it is also very centrally a conceptual disagreement.

In a letter titled to the editor of the *Pioneer* (n.d.) Sir Syed discussed his objections to the organisation after a public letter by Badruddin Tyabji had been published in the same newspaper attacking his position of not cooperating with the Congress. He had already discussed in some detail his objections to the Congress in a famous speech in Lucknow. I will come back to this speech but begin with the letter first since it outlines the kinds of conceptual disagreements discussed above quite clearly.

> I was very glad to learn that when my distinguished friend honoured the Madras Congress by becoming its President, he "rigidly excluded all questions which were merely of a provincial character, or in regard to which the three Presidencies were not practically agreed, or where the Hindus were opposed to the Mussalmans as a body, or vice versa." On my own behalf and on behalf of very many of our mutual co-religionists I thank him for this proceeding. I also agree with him in this—"that the Congress could not be rightly termed a National Congress where any particular resolution could be carried against the unanimous protest of either the Hindu or Mussalman delegate." But I go further: **I first of all object to the word "delegate."** I assure my friend that of the Mohammedans who went from the North-Western Provinces and Oudh, there is not one to whom the word "delegate" can be applied. I know well the condition of my own Province. **Not ten Mohammedans came together to elect any one of those Mohammedans who went. In those districts from which they went there were not among the Raises and influential**

> **Mohammedans, nor among the middle classes, ten men who knew what the National Congress was, nor who had elected whom. Four days ago, a Mohammedan of liberal views, who went to Madras as a delegate, boasted that his glory lay in this: that the Hindus, and not the Mohammedans, had elected him. Then how inappropriate and absurd to apply the word "delegate" to Mohammedans under such circumstances?** Secondly, I object to the implication that the only condition under which the Congress cannot be termed "national" is if any resolution be carried against the unanimous protest of either the Hindu or the Mohammedan members. **The fact of any resolution being carried unanimously does not make the Congress a "national" one. A Congress can only be called "national" when the ultimate aims and objects of the people of which it is composed are identical.** My distinguished friend himself admits that some of the aims and objects of Mohammedans are different from those of Hindus, while some are similar; and he desires that the Congress should put aside those in which they differ and confine itself to those in which they agree. But under these circumstances how can the Congress be a National Congress? Moreover, my friend has not pointed out what plan both sides should adopt for accomplishing those aims on which Hindus and Mohammedans differ. Should Mohammedans and Hindus each have their own Congress for their special objects in which they differ from one another? If so, as their aims are conflicting and contradicting, these two Congresses will go on fighting each other to the death; but when they meet in that Congress which my friends call the National Congress, they will then say: "No doubt you are my nation; no doubt you are my brother; no doubt your aims and my aims are one. How do you do my brother? Now we are united on one point (Khan 1982: 81-83 emphasis added)

Sir Syed's vociferous objection to the Congress' use of the term 'delegate' is extremely important. The Congress use of the term was clearly shallow. Whether

it was because it allowed the Congress greater legitimacy in the eyes of the colonial state or it was an innocent use of the term without a rigid sense of its application, we can never know. However, we do know from his letter that it was a matter of deep concern to Sir Syed. The Congress, however, would continue to use this language of ‘delegates’ and ‘nationalism’ without any cognizance of Sir Syed’s objections. Thus, the dissonance between Sir Syed and Tyabji, is not simply of political goals but the very language and its application. The significance of this altercation therefore is that the natives are in a battle in which the terms of reference have no fixed meaning. It is possible for the Congress to use ‘delegate’ and to justify its use as is the case of the individual Sir Syed refers to, who boasted that the Hindus had elected him. There is no problem technically in such a claim. However, considering that the Hindus and Muslims were ‘interest groups’, such a delegate would clearly be suspect. But then perhaps this is reason to blame Sir Syed for buying into the colonial discourse of Hindus and Muslims being separate interest groups while the Congress showed more independence. That may have been a fit accusation, only the Congress’ need for ‘Muslim delegates’ reflected a recognition of precisely this understanding that any successful ‘national’ gathering would require Muslim participation or a representation of Muslim interests. Thus, what we have here is not different *levels* of participation in colonial discourse, those who believe more (Sir Syed) and those who believe less (the Congress) in colonial discourse, we have instead a participation that is conceptually unstable. Just as the language of patronage

was lost on the colonial state, it seems that the natives amongst themselves were set to construct a semantic tower of Babel.

Similar confusion is visible around notions of the ‘national’. The Congress use of the term was perhaps more akin to “all-India” at this time since the connotations of “national” as “anti-colonial” were certainly not available at this time. The Congress was still very much simply an opinion bank, not a political party. Sir Syed’s objection to the very possibility of the Congress being ‘national’ seems to be that India itself was not one nation. He uses the term nation in two ways. In one it refers to ‘community’, in the other it points to the Congress’ use of the term ‘nation’. His use of nation for community may simply be a particular translation of the Urdu word *qaum*. However, that does not mean that the Congress could not be national because there were several communities in India. Rather, it seems the Congress could not be national because India was not a nation. Here he seems to use the colonial notion of ‘interest group’ as equivalent to ‘nation’. His logic may be reconstructed in this way: India is made up of several interest groups; interest groups constitute nations; therefore, India is made up of a multitude of nations. We may reach some understanding of his claims when one examines his related ideas on politics versus social reform. In several writings and speeches, he held social reform as a proper goal for the communities of India but politics as either conflict-ridden or simply dishonest. It is important to understand this distinction. Sir Syed went on to talk about the fact that he had no reservations about Hindus and Muslims addressing ‘social’ questions together.

Those questions on which Hindus and Mohammedans can unite, and on which they ought to unite, and concerning which it is my earnest desire that they should unite, are social questions. We are both desirous that peace should reign in the country, that we two nations should live in a brotherly manner, that we should help and sympathise with one another, that we should bring pressure to bear, each on his own people, to prevent the arising of religious quarrels, that we should improve our social condition, and that we should try to remove that animosity which is every day increasing between the two communities. **The questions on which we can agree are purely social.** If the Congress had been made for these objects, then I would myself have been its President, and relieved my friend from the troubles which he incurred. **But the Congress is a political Congress, and there is no one of its fundamental principles, and especially that one for which it was in reality founded, to which Mohammedans are not opposed** (Khan 1982: 83-84 emphasis added) …

I ask my friend Badruddin Tyabji to leave aside those insignificant points in the proposals of the Congress in which Hindus and Mohammedans agree (for there are no things in the world which have no points in common—there are many things in common between a man and a pig), and **to tell me what fundamental political principles of the Congress are not opposed to the interests of Mohammedans. The first is that members of the Viceroy's Council should be chosen by election, on which stress was laid in the recent Congress of Madras, over which our friend Badruddin Tyabji presided. I proved in my Lucknow Speech that whatever system of election be adopted, there will be four times as many Hindus as Mohammedans, and all their demands will be gratified, and the power of legislation over the whole country will be in the hands of Bengalis or of Hindus of the Bengali type, and the Mohammedans will fall into a condition of utmost degradation.** Many people have heaped curses and abuses on me on account of my Lucknow Speech; but

> no one, not even my friend Badruddin Tyabji, has answered it. Whether the Bengali demands be right or wrong, I do not like to see my nation fall into this degraded condition; and at any rate I do not wish to join in proposals which will have this result (Khan 1982: 84-85 emphasis added).

Thus, Sir Syed's opposition to the Congress was fundamentally his opposition to 'politics'. Sir Syed often claimed that if the Muslims participated in politics it would lead to their destruction. To support this claim he made two observations. First, he observed that 1857 had left the Hindu community untouched while the Muslims had paid a heavy price. This was the model of what was to be expected through political participation. The Hindus and Muslims had equally participated he held, but the Muslims had paid a heavier price. Second, the race for "politics" had a clear winner already, "the Bengali"[264]. For Sir Syed politics was synonymous with native demands of representation[265] of various kinds. He was firmly of the opinion that representation would be the most destructive of political systems for Muslims. He advocated nominations rather than elections as a much more suitable system of participation. More than a distrust of the 'Hindus', which this is often reconstructed as, his ire was directed towards the 'Bengali' who had 'mastered the means of excelling in British examinations'. Sir Syed clearly felt strongly on the issue for his position was that civil war was better for the Muslim

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[264] "Think for a moment what would be the result if all appointments were given by competitive examination. Over all races, not only over Mahomedans but over Rajas of high position and the brave Rajputs who have not forgotten the swords of their ancestors, would be placed as ruler a Bengali who at sight of a table knife would crawl under his chair. There would remain no part of the country in which we would see at the tables of justice and authority any face except those of Bengalis" (excerpted from Sir Syed's speech at Lucknow on March 16, 1888. See Khan 1982: 35).

[265] At this point the demand for representation was really limited to increased and higher level Indian participation in the civil services. The Congress demands related to this were that the number of Indians be increased and the selection rest on the basis of a competitive exam which would be held in India.

than participation in such a State! If the British left India to its fate, he asserted, the Muslims, Rajputs, the 'brave' communities would prove their worth to control the state over the 'pen-pushing Bengali'[266]. Thus, 'politics' in Sir Syed's use seemed to refer to the rather shallow skill of acquiring the English language and participating in the bureaucracy. However, 'social reform' seemed to refer to a transformation in learning and character which would create proper citizens. This is a complete echo of the colonial reasoning. It is strange however, that he could see the state as an instrument of control while also participating in the discourse of citizenship. The citizen here then could not be the individual expressing political will. Although I cannot take up an investigation of what this concept referred to in his work, I do think the dissonance points us towards a different understanding of colonial discourse and its impact on the native.

This should not be construed to mean that Muslims did not participate in the discourse of representation. The crucial charter for separate electorates which has always been related to the All-India Muhammadan Deputation's demand to Lord Minto in 1906 would come soon after Sir Syed's complete rejection of representation as a model for political participation in India. The formula

[266] This is clearly language of a preceding age. The State must lie in the hands of the conqueror and that which makes any party worthy of controlling the State is physical prowess. Sir Syed had been left behind in an age where the State would be defined less and less by control and more and more by participation. Unfortunately for Sir Syed, representation was to be the only mode of political participation in the time to come.

conceived of would later be dubbed ‘separate electorates’[267] though this description did not feature in the petition itself.

> We hope Your Excellency will pardon our stating at the outset that representative institutions of the European type are new to the Indian people. Many of the most thoughtful members of our community, in fact, consider that the greatest care, forethought and caution will be necessary if they are to be successfully adapted to the social, religious, and political conditions obtaining in India; and that, in the absence of such care and caution, their adoption is likely, among other evils, to place our national interests at the mercy of an unsympathetic majority. … As for the results of elections, it is most unlikely that the name of any Mohammedan candidate will ever be submitted for the approval of Government by the electoral bodies as now constituted, unless he is in sympathy with the majority in all matters of importance. Nor can we, in fairness find fault with the desire of our non-Moslem fellow-subjects to take full advantage of their strength and vote only for members of their own community, or for persons who, if not Hindus, are expected to vote with the Hindu majority, on whose goodwill they would have many and important interests in common with our Hindu fellow-countrymen, and **it will always be a matter of the utmost satisfaction to us to see these interests safeguarded by the presence, in our Legislative Chambers, of able supporters of these interests, irrespective of their nationality**. Still it cannot be denied that we Mohammedans are a distinct community with additional interests of our own, which are not shared by other communities, and these have hitherto suffered from the fact that they have not been adequately represented (in Char ed. 1983: 426).

[267] It is notable that this term did not feature in the petition at all. It was Minto’s term for the shape he gave to their demands.

The delegation seems to use ‘nationality’ in the same way as Sir Syed did. However, unlike his abdication of politics as a whole, the memorialists either chose to or had no choice but to[268] engage actively with the notions of representation which were now to be established as the sole principle on which political participation was to be based. Clearly, it was up to the different ‘interest groups’ to propose their own recipes for political participation to the government at this time. This was what participation *meant* at the time in the absence of full-fledged modes of electoral representation. Thus, it is crucial to remember that the nature and extent of participation at this point was measured by the active petitioning of government that groups were willing and able to make. However, within a few years, the colonial State was to re-formulate some of the central ingredients in this recipe for participation.

The strange participation recipe: less is more!

With the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, first put into practice in 1920, self-government in India was envisaged to move to a new level. Rejecting Minto’s conception of a “constitutional autocracy”, the new reforms sought to establish India on the route to constitutional democracy.

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[268] This does not radically change our understanding of the situation itself. Whether the Muslims were “opportunistic” or they were beguiled into this position by the colonial government (since it has sometimes been asserted that the petitioners were encouraged by officials on the inside) makes little difference in the face of the fact that the discourse itself was shifting firmly in the direction of separate representation for different interest groups.

> The Morley-Minto reforms were the final outcome of the old conception which made the Indian Government a benevolent despotism (tempered by a remote and only occasionally vigilant democracy in England), which might as it saw fit for purposes of enlightment consult the wishes of its subjects (*Summary of Constitutional Reforms for India* n.d (1920): 6)

Thus, the process of establishing representative institutions through a steadily expanding franchise was the means to shift from 'benevolent despotism' firmly into the vision that had been created for India about a century prior to this moment. It was time to test the waters of instruction and see how far the pupils had come. Both Montagu and Chelmsford were firmly of the view that 'separate electorates' were unhealthy.

> While regarding the system of communal electorates as a very serious hindrance to the development of the self-governing principle, the Report recognises that the privilege cannot be taken from the Mahomedans, in provinces where they are in a minority, having regard to the pledges in accordance with which they were given separate representation nine years ago. Any general extension of the communal system, it is observed, would be fatal to the development of representation upon a national basis. It is therefore to be extended only to the Sikhs in the Punjab, who are a distinct and important people, supplying a gallant and valuable element to the Indian Army; but who are everywhere in a minority, and go virtually unrepresented. For the representation of other minorities nomination is preferred, largely because it can be more easily abolished than the communal system when the necessity for it ceases. The number of special electorates should be as restricted as possible, though it is recognised that where the great landowners form a distinct class in any province there will be a case for giving them an electorate of their own (*Summary of Constitutional Reforms for India* n.d (1920): 14).

This new view of separate electorates as hindering “representation on a national basis” was also based on a re-definition of the Hindus and Muslims. They were no longer ‘conflicting interests’, they were the ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ within a state. The above observations appeared in a section in the report called ‘Protecting Minorities’. Since there were many minorities in India, they required some temporary concession in representation but since they were not conflicting interest groups, they could now learn to represent each other. This meant that for the first time political will could be expressed across ‘communal’ boundaries. In this conception the Hindu *could* and in fact *should* have been able to represent the will of the Muslim and vice-versa. This is a major re-conception of the Indian political situation. Of course it remained saddled with old baggage. It was one thing for the colonial state to no longer see the natives divided into interest groups, it was another for the native to learn this new conception. By this time it was also difficult, if not impossible, to undo in one sweep the invitation the colonial government had issued for native interest groups to come forward and represent their own ‘interests’. The colonial government was therefore in the position where it continued with old modes of representation while hoping that a ‘national’ consensus would evolve. Therefore, the report gave concession to separate electorates for Sikhs and *zamindars* and was later to concede the demand to other groups as well[269]. It is also important to note that the reforms envisaged the old nomination system as one that was healthier because it could

[269] Factory workers and depressed classes

be more easily abolished. It was this that was to be promoted for minority interests rather than the system of separate electorates[270].

Ironically, with this new conceptual framework, the colonial government decried the fact that there were no genuine 'interests' in native politics! In fact, Indian politics was plagued by the fact that it found expression only in 'communal' interests, which were a stunted and under-developed mode of understanding political will. This is a fairly striking turn to the discourse. Earlier, 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' had made it impossible to conceive of a unified native political will and this had mandated the institution of separate representation for interest groups. Now, the fact that political will was being expressed through separate interest groups was evidence for 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' and the lack of a unified political will. Clearly, irrespective of what the native did or did not do, it was impossible to escape the charge of 'communalism'.

The first review of the new Indian legislatures established under the Montagu-Chelsmford reforms makes for interesting reading. Sir Alexander Muddiman, who presided over the Committee investigating the working of the legislatures in 1924 had received a wide variety of complaints from the British Governors of the various provinces decrying how far the natives were from understanding notions of representative institutions.

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[270] This was in fact nothing but the system Sir Syed had advocated!

> 8. It cannot be said that there are yet apparent signs of the division of parties according to political principles apart from the communal question and perhaps the theory of indiscriminate opposition to all proposals of the government. Even among the political class the formation of independent groups is not so much due to differences of political principle as to communal considerations or the personal influence of individuals. Among the general body of the electorate personalities count more than principles. There is no lack of general political 'planks' in election manifestoes, but it is difficult to discern differences such as indicate in more politically advanced countries the real existence of political parties (*Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee*[271] *(1924)* 1929: 3).

For individual political will to have any force it had to be circumscribed by the principle of over-all 'good will'. This allowed for any individual to vest his will in another. That was the principle of representation after all. The native simply did not seem to be able to learn this lesson. It does not seem to have struck the colonial authorities that suddenly the lesson to be learnt by the native had been inverted. And this was the source of native 'obduracy'. Instead, the deep-seated "suspicion" amongst communities and the unwillingness to recognise 'national' rather than 'communal' representation became matters of deep concern. However, this was a strange new recipe for participation. Until a few years before, participation was measured in the bids made for separate representation. If you did not bid for the representation of your group, you were not participating. However, now, to bid for separate representation translated into inability to show 'good will'. Thus, the new recipe was, participate **less** in order to participate **more**!

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[271] Also known as the Muddiman Committee Report.

There were several different complaints with regard to the Indian electorate that the report pointed out. The British Governors of the various provinces had much to complain about. The Governor of Bengal was unhappy that the representatives had no policy or constructive programme and thus could well be replaced by any other set of representatives and the equation would remain the same (*Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee (1924)* 1929: 5). The Governor of Madras held that the only principle of distinction between the political parties was not a political principle but simply “the communal question” (3). The Governor of Bihar and Orissa lamented that the electorate was voting on the basis of superstitious beliefs related to the colours of the voting boxes rather than the political policy of the election candidates! (12).

The complaints of the British governors may be aligned along two basic points of criticism. One, the electorate is ignorant and therefore does not understand what an election means. Two, the representatives are ignorant and do not understand how to campaign on the basis of electoral planks or to create a political party. And once in the legislative assembly they understand little by way of policy but the opposition of the British governor’s proposals (3). These were serious matters and the only saving grace on the native side was the presence of the Swaraj Party, which the colonial officials were willing to concede showed signs of being a political party, attempting to build an electoral plank and thus seemed to indicate that the shortcomings may be attributed (at least partially) to the lack of

time for the idea of representative institutions to sink in. It had been after all only four years since the reforms had been introduced.

The Muddiman Committee Report, as it is also referred to, is interesting not only because of the sense it gives us of the discrepancy between early and later colonial learning goals. It also gives us insights into native learning (or seeming inability to learn) of these goals as well. It is also very interesting to examine how the idea of 'communal representation' is addressed early in this discourse, for its parameters seem much wider than would be the case a short ten or fifteen years later. The kinds of 'communal' interests that were being discussed by the Muddiman Committee ranged from urban-rural to factory workers and peasants to the 'Mahrattas' in Bombay presidency or the non-Brahmins in Madras presidency. Apart from these were the 'depressed classes' which roughly referred to the classes represented by Ambedkar. Thus, from community to language to occupation, several different categories qualified for 'communal' representation. The report in fact advocated that the 'factory workers' and the 'depressed classes' be considered for special 'communal' representation. Clearly, the report was not using the term 'communal' in a consistently pejorative sense.

Although the term 'communal' had wide reference, the report also used it in a way that is familiar to us today. Thus, in a section called 'Communal Tension and Tendencies', the report outlined its position on the matter.

> We also recognise that the conditions precedent for the success of such efforts are (1) the frank recognition by each community of the principles of religious freedom and the cultivation of habits of toleration; (2) the effective safeguarding of the interests of minorities in respect of their political representation; (3) the adequate representation of duly qualified members of each community in the public services of the country. So far as the latter two conditions are concerned, we think that they can be brought about by provisions in the Act itself or the rules thereunder and through the agency of the Public Services Commission. So far as the first condition is concerned, we think that the fulfilment of the other two conditions is bound to have its effect on the general outlook of the minorities concerned, and will materially help the leaders of the communities in their social and moral activities in the cause of friendliness (*Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee (1924)* 1929: 177-178).

These three factors that would yield the magical resolution of 'communal tension' bear deep scrutiny. The first relates to the question of religious freedom and tolerance. How did religious tolerance affect 'communal tension'? The report had conceded that tension between the Hindus and Muslims as also between other communities, especially in provinces like the Punjab had reached an all-time high with the introduction of the reforms[272]. Why would tension related to modes of representation be resolved with the recognition of the principle of 'religious freedom'? What did religious *freedom* have to do with the representation of

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[272] "It is more than possible that the view which has been indicated in some of the evidence produced before us that the introduction of the reforms scheme has contributed to the growth of such friction is not without foundation. Other causes such as the *Shudhi* and *sangathan* movements may have contributed more immediately to that growth, but the suggestion would appear to be that the desire of the different communities each to strengthen its own position has been an underlying and deeper cause" (*Report of the Reforms Enquiry Committee (1924)* 1929: 51).

minorities and majorities in India? The answer to this lies not in Indian history but in the European (specifically Liberal) means of solving problems of religious minorities. Europe had dealt with its religious minorities[273] by means of one specific concept – toleration. However, the question there had not been the *representation* of these minorities but simply allowing them to *exist* within the State. And nowhere in the West had those religious minorities "required adequate representation of duly qualified members of each community in the public services of the country". Clearly, even this new participation recipe was saddled with the earlier, unresolved baggage of conflicting interest groups.

The reason that this is a significant section is that it already demonstrates to us the different kinds of problems and claims that come to be addressed under the same notion of 'communal tension'. We require neither a notion of religious violence nor lack of 'toleration' in order to reconstruct this complete history of the production of 'communalism' within the discourse of representation. However, once it is available in the discourse of representation, it comes to be used to represent older colonial notions of religious antagonism between Hindus and Muslims as well. It then becomes commonplace to assert that political antagonism is a product of religious antagonism and the latter the product of the former – the evidential loop we encountered in the very first chapter.

[273] Most 'minorities' would have been religious minorities since language and ethnicity had found major purges with the development of the nation-state largely along linguistic lines. The religious minorities were all largely Christian, however, of different persuasions. The classical formulation of 'toleration' came from Locke (1978) who was dealing with non-Anglican Christian groups.

The transformation of 'interest groups' into 'minorities' made one kind of conception of representation possible. There was no absolute reason why minorities would not concede separate representation to common representation if they felt secure. However, this was not possible in the earlier conception of interest groups. The run up to representative institutions through the plank of equal participation had set up contradictory goals. **Each different interest group had to participate *equally* in order to reach 'maturity' and each different interest group had to devolve its own participation to the over-all representation as a 'people' also as a mark of 'maturity'**.

Proliferation of categories, proliferation of complaints

In 1929, a question was raised in the Legislative Assembly "regarding the date of introduction of the division into majority and minority communities in the services under the crown in India and the definition of the term 'communal inequality'". The reply of the government is indeed very instructive[274].

1. …Though literally the division of the communities into majority and minority for the purposes of recruitment to the services had its origin in 1923, the adoption of a system for the representation of minority communities and the announcement thereof took effect from 1925.
2. As regards the later half of part (a) of the question attention is invited to the Home Department notes in connection with and the reply given to, a similar question by

[274] Especially since the response does anything but answer the question!

> Md. Shah Nawaz in the last Delhi session, from which it will be seen that this Department was against giving any definition of any of the terms contained in that question. Our reply thereto was accordingly framed in a non-committal manner and our present reply may likewise be given below,
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> **“The term by itself is not easy to define but the meaning thereof can easily be grasped from the context.”** … (*Question in the Legislative Assembly regarding the date of introduction of the division into majority and minority communities in the services under the crown in India and the definition of the term ‘communal inequality’* 1929: 1 emphasis added).

The Government did not answer the question, but the historical outline the response presents of the kinds of confusion this notion of ‘minorities’ and ‘majorities’ (which the Government firmly maintained were self-explanatory), had generated amongst the natives is another sure measure of the instability of these central political concepts of the time.

> When in March last Mian Mohammad Shah Nawaz asked for an interpretation of the terms ‘Minority and Majority Communities’ and ‘inequality of communal representation’ we felt it would be dangerous to commit ourselves to any definition of a ‘minority community’ until the whole matter had been carefully examined in the light of the local Governments’ replies. The local Governments were, I understand, asked how they defined the term and their replies, which have been received, are under separate examination. I have not seen the file yet, but I understand from the Assistant Secretary that the replies do not help. Some Governments have merely sent up the information contained in the Census tables, others have just stated what communities are generally regarded as minority communities and so on.

A “minority community” is a perfectly well-understood term and does not, I suggest, stand in need of a definition. It would not serve any useful purpose, and it may be dangerous to attempt to attach to it too precise a meaning. The difficulties in the way of a strict definition are enormous. As Sir Malcolm Hailey explained in the debate on Mr. Nayar’s motion on 10th March, 1923, for representation of classes and communities not well represented in the Services, though the main criteria for determining the existence of a community are religion, language or caste and tribe, we have by no means arrived at a solution when we have determined communities on these criteria. For example, the Hindus are all one community on the criterion of religion but in Madras, Brahmins and non-Brahmins want to be treated as separate communities; in Bombay, the Lingayats, who are Hindus, want to be treated as a separate community for franchise and other purposes; Rajputs and Mahrattas would claim recognition on a tribal or national basis and reject any discrimination based on language. As Sir Malcolm pointed out, a common language would not unite the Lingayats and Mahrattas, still less the Sikhs and the Punjab Moslems, while a difference of language does not keep apart the different sections of non-Brahmins in Madras. The reason is that according as caste, tribal or national consciousness develops, the emphasis is changed from one to another and at a particular moment it is difficult to say on what element emphasis should be placed. **(Secretary will remember the protests we received when Bedi was nominated to the I.C.S because some Sikh organisations disowned him on the ground that he is not a ‘Keshadhari’ Sikh)**.

So far as the position of the Legislature on this matter is concerned, we accepted an agreed resolution in the Assembly in 1923 laying down the principle that in making new recruitment for the Services under the control of the Central Government steps should be taken to secure that the Services are not unduly overweighted with representatives of one community or province and that, as far as possible, claims of all communities and

> provinces should be considered. The resolution thus adopted provided for prevention of the over-representation of a particular community and was thus, in effect, a re-affirmation of the policy which the Government of India had been following which was not to seek to represent minority communities but to attempt to prevent a preponderance of any one class or community in our Services (*Question in the Legislative Assembly regarding the date of introduction of the division into majority and minority communities in the services under the crown in India and the definition of the term 'communal inequality'* 1929: 5-8 emphasis added).

It is strange that the journey to serious conflict is made through such comic political terrain! Not only did the government not know how to define a minority and a majority, the kinds of categories of minorities and majorities were by no means restricted to religious categories[275]. As the government response itself states above, considerations of caste, language, tribe and nation were all taken into account. What is important is that these categories proliferated endlessly and the government could take no measure to arrest this proliferation. There is also one more important point to note. These categories were based on the principle of *representation*. However, as the (probably unfortunate) case of Bedi above shows, the conflicts revolved not only around questions of competition between communities for the best deal on representation quotas, but also within groups on the basis of the *authenticity* of representatives.

[275] For those who view this history as expressive of 'divide and rule', it is instructive to see that confusion was expressed by both Muslims and Hindus and the reply given to both is evasive. Thus, it does not seem designed to obscure terms for one community and give access to another.

This gives us some hints into why the nature of conflict set up by such a category must be different from that of the earlier notions of patronage. For instance, what could be an adequate gauge for ‘equal representative participation’? Clearly, proportional representation seemed to fail since it only gave rise to greater and greater proliferation into smaller and smaller categories. The nature of the authentic ‘representative’ was also an ever-retreating horizon. Certainly Bedi would not have been the only victim of this notion. For now, Muslims could not be represented by Hindus, tenants could not be represented by landowners, and Marathas could not be represented by Rajputs. Then there would be the Muslim landowners and the Rajput tenants who were crosses between two minority/majority categories. How would their ‘interests’ ever find ‘representation’?

Clearly the absurdity of the situation was not lost on the British in India.

> The facts of the communal position will support any view you take. For example, the ‘minorities’ if we include the Depressed Classes as non-Hindus, outnumber the Hindu ‘majority’. You may regard this as a reason for putting the Hindu community (on democratic grounds) in a subordinate place at the Centre, in Legislature and Cabinet; or as a reason for championing their extreme claims, as those of a ‘minority’, against any other minority, especially the Moslems (Thompson 1930: 314).

But that does not seem to have stopped them from coming up with absurd solutions.

> It will help us if we isolate three minorities, as the most aggressive and best organised. The minority problem in its last phase always resolves itself into a three-cornered disagreement of Hindus, Sikhs and Moslems (Thompson 1930: 314).

This absurd solution however, seems to have set the stage for the volatile political battles that led up to partition.

Learning to be 'equal'

In 1963, K.M. Panikkar reflected that one of the important achievements of colonial rule had been the achievement of equality. "When the British took over the rulership of northern India Hinduism, for the first time in 600 years, stood on a plane of equality with Islam" (Panikkar 1963: 25). Panikkar's critique of colonialism was tempered by a critique of the despotism that preceded it. He found it difficult not to appreciate the fact that the Hindus became equal participants in government only through the intervening colonial rule. Otherwise, under 'Muslim despotism', they had little chance to share political power. This was a commonly held perspective of the secular historians of the 50's and 60's[276]. Thus, colonialism may have been oppressive, but it had brought equality. This was one of the foundations of a modern and a better India according to Panikkar. However, if we step out of the normative framework that gives 'equality'

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[276] It became rather embarrassing for later historians to concede such views because by attributing any sort of injustice against the Hindu during Mughal rule they would consider themselves as playing into Rightist visions of history.

its ‘obvious’ positive evaluative force, the history I have reconstructed gives us much to think about.

Seemingly, equality has nothing to do with ‘communalism’. But this is perhaps the most important norm in reference to which we must situate ‘communalism’. The story of achieving ‘equal political participation’ is crucial to the generation of the inference of ‘communalism’. This perhaps sounds like old wine in new bottles. It is after all not a very novel idea to propose, and political scientists and historians of modern India have been saying so for several decades (and in several less or more complicated accounts), that in the competition for economic and political dominance lie the roots of ‘communalism’. However, it is not the competition itself but this particular *idea* of ‘equality’ which generates conflict. The conflicting conceptual interpretations and conflicting learning goals that colonialism set up as part of the acquisition of ‘equality’ has certainly gone without notice in our histories which have looked only for competition itself as the source of violence. The competition for resources was all too real. However, by itself competition would always have occurred along different planes across colonial and national governments. This may or may not have generated conflict. However, once the normative notions of equal representation were set up as native learning goals, this led to violence of a kind that could not be stopped because its goals could not be located. Equal distribution of State resources is a question that can be settled. How does one settle equal participation? Equality may have both empirical and normative implications. The history of the term

'communal' shows that we must learn specifically to differentiate between these two definitions of equality. Both may have caused conflict in the Indian context. However, in their political and theoretical implications they are poles apart. The conflict set up in the former may be resolved. The conflict set up by the latter is, however, of a nature that cannot be resolved by addressing any or all of the specific issues it raises. Instead it raises conflict of a nature that is quite deeply irresolvable.

By situating the idea of communalism within the learning goal of 'equality', we achieve not only greater conceptual clarity in relation to 'communalism' but also, I believe, greater historical clarity in relation to the late 19th and early 20th centuries in India. All our historical and political scholarship has taken for granted the notions of 'equality', 'representation', 'interest', 'will' as if they were self-evident. They become the phenomenological objects of history that Foucault (in Rabinow ed. 1984) criticises and require a genealogy in order to reveal *how* these concepts operate or if they operate for the natives in their original conceptual framework at all. This chapter does not simply map the shifts in representational politics, which are available in any number of historical accounts of the same period. It attempts a periodization, as Koselleck (2002) proposes, which finally reveals the *significance*[277] of these shifts. In the absence of the conceptual history of representation we have been simply unable to account for the

[277] I use 'significance' here not just as 'importance' but also and more fundamentally as *meaning*.

consequences[278] of these shifts or have reduced the consequences to the mechanics of different modes of representation without conceptual depth or significance. However, the implications of these shifts certainly give us reason to question not just the old category of ‘communalism’ this thesis has attempted to dismantle but also our relationship to our present day political self-conceptions.

[278] In terms of their conceptual dissonance as well as the nature of the learning goals they establish which keep the native reaching for an ever-receding horizon of ‘equality’.

CONCLUSION

DE-COLONISING THE PAST

Let us return now to the example we began with. How do we understand the difference in assessment of Indian society between Ibn Batuta in the 14th century and us today? What has intervened in order to change the assessment of the same behaviour or set of behaviours today? While Batuta did not see 'difference' as 'discrimination', contemporary scholars certainly do. The distinction between Batuta and Panikkar (1963), for instance, is therefore their evaluative framework. Batuta sees 'honour' whereas Panikkar cannot make any sense of the notion of 'honour'. He seeks 'equality', whereas Batuta probably would not have understood this notion at all. Notably, Batuta does not seek the *same* treatment as evidence of honour, merely, treatment that allows for one's own practices to exist. Panikkar cannot, without the existence of 'sameness', grasp the basis of a positive evaluation which for him hinges on the existence of 'equality'. And thus, the same set of behaviours would be offered as proof of discrimination and be condemned.

The point of the thesis is not to excavate older evaluative frameworks or to decry their erosion. There are two aspects of the difference in evaluation, however, that I would like to highlight. First, one wishes to draw attention to the provisional and contingent nature of our assessments. The characterisation of Indian society as 'communal' is not a more 'true' or a 'better' understanding than Batuta's own

assessment[279]. It is crucially an evaluation that could not emerge before a particular historical moment and before the establishment of a particular *normative* framework. This thesis has attempted to uncover, at least partially, the process that gives rise to this evaluation and allows it such force and longevity. Secondly, Batuta's assessment is not one that is central to the kind of 'knowledge' he produces about India. His evaluation remains merely an observation and does not generate different kinds of policies or additional inferences. In other words, it does not have the qualities of a normative inference[280]. Thus, normative frameworks clearly have properties distinct from other evaluative frameworks[281]. For instance, Batuta's observation does not have implications for our knowledge today. If the colonial evaluative framework, like Batuta's, was merely a matter of historical interest rather than one that remains alive and active today, then this contrast in evaluation would be merely a small point of interest. As it stands however, it becomes a means to excavate the unusual character of the new evaluative framework since it persists even after colonialism ends.

The persistence of this normative evaluative framework has very significant implications for the way that we re-construct the past. To use a metaphor from the first chapter, this normative evaluative framework is the prism through which

[279] This difference in evaluation cannot be explained away with the claim that 'communalism' emerged after Batuta's visit for the behaviour he describes would certainly be dubbed 'communal' today.
[280] See chapter 3 for the detailed discussion of the qualities of a normative inference.
[281] This is where the 'evaluative-descriptive framework' as Skinner (2002) uses it does not match up to the description of a 'normative framework' as I use it. However, I do establish through analogies in chapter 3 some distinctions between an *evaluation* and a *normative inference*.

history is written. And this is a history which upholds and confirms the evaluative framework, generally at the cost of conceptual clarity and understanding. For instance, Panikkar would like to uphold ‘equality’ as a positive outcome of colonial rule and ‘communalism’ as a negative outcome. However, since the history of ‘equality’ and ‘communalism’ are really two sides of the same coin, the history of the ‘new India’ that he writes, is clearly implausible. Yet, our historical scholarship seems to be caught in precisely this same pattern. It ignores the specific history of a concept, the problems it referred to and the shifts in its use in order to produce a flat narrative which upholds the stability of the evaluative framework. When we reconstruct those concepts, we do so only in so far as they leave this evaluative framework unchallenged. This is a positive *loss* of the past[282] in that we simply cannot access it or understand it except by a dramatic distortion or active ignorance of the concepts we encounter in the texts/contexts of the past. What a genealogy then must achieve is the recovery of the past or in other words, it must create the conditions that allow for a reorganisation and recognition of the past in much clearer and coherent terms[283]. My genealogy of ‘communalism’ should thus enable a reconstruction of the past which frees concepts and contexts from the evaluative framework in which they are enmeshed. Until we recover the references of these concepts and their derivative framework, we recreate the same patterns available in colonial discourse which condemn us to the role of recalcitrant pupils.

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[282] This was partially dealt with in chapter two in my section on ‘truncated history’.
[283] This resonates with Koselleck’s concept of *periodization* discussed in chapter 2 (Koselleck 2002).

The genealogy of ‘communalism’ I undertake helps us not only to dismantle the concept ‘communalism’ but also to explicate the concepts and institutions that have shaped the domain of Indian politics. The history of representation I present performs a two-fold function. First, it elucidates the colonial concepts that underlie terms we have come to take for granted such as ‘minorities’ and ‘majorities’ or ‘interest groups’. Secondly, it examines the native relationship to the pedagogic goals of colonialism. In order to take this latter investigation further I examine the ideas of ‘divide and rule’ and ‘secularism’. This examination demonstrates the deep contrast between the ideas as they were used and as they are reconstructed in historical accounts today. This should further explicate how history maintains the stability of the evaluative framework and thereby perpetuates colonial discourse. I will go on to use the discussion on these two ideas in order to explore some dimensions of the native relationship to colonial learning goals and to mark out territories and questions future research needs to address.

‘Divide and Rule’

In his *Asiatic Neighbours*, S.S.Thorburn (1894) elaborated on the policies he envisaged for India and his opposition to the existing colonial policies. Since he is a major though so far relatively unacknowledged figure in the history of representational politics, it is certainly worthwhile tracing what it was that formed the basis for his prescription of ‘communal’ reservations in government jobs.

Thorburn was a supporter of the ‘divide and rule’ policy. However, this should not to be understood naively as the policy that the British used in order to manipulate divisions and make Indian nationalism fail. This is the nationalist interpretation of it no doubt. However, that is not the inflection ‘*divide et impera*’ had in British writings. Thorburn’s concern was not what came to be called the ‘nationalist movement’. In his time that was merely an elite and urban annual Congress. His concern was rural Punjab and by extension what he generalised as the conditions of rural India over all. The overwhelming majority of rural Punjab was also apparently Muslim and ‘divide and rule’ was, in Thorburn’s work, a policy related to justice or fair distribution of resources to this section of the population.

According to Thorburn, though the end of the 19th century was witnessing a stronger physical hold over India, the “sentimental hold” had weakened since the British system of land revenue had delivered the average farmer into the exploitative hands of the landlord. The regularisation and systematisation of British rule in India Thorburn referred to as “machine rule”. His contention was that the loose, more informal systems of governance that had been in place in Hastings’ times were much more effective and beneficial. The flaws in administration were reflected in and gained strength from the flaws in the legal system.

> The change from the patriarchal system to the intricate uniformity of the present reign of law was perhaps inevitable, but it is nevertheless disapproved by the people. They are astute enough to see that the elaborate legal machinery of the civilised West benefits the

> rich and intelligent at the expense of the poor and ignorant. What the latter want is cheap equity and rapid finality; what they get is costly unintelligible law, which often ruins them before finality is attained. To them the sympathetic face and rough justice of the personal ruler is preferable to the refined law of the judicial Sphinxes of today, whose elaborate decisions do not follow “equity and good conscience”, but the arguments of the more persuasive pleader, supported by the most recent rulings of a Chief or High Court. The technicalities of procedure and the hair-splitting in judgments are faults not so much of the judiciary as of the legislatures of India.
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> The existing fabric has been gradually evolved in the last thirty-five years by a succession of able lawyers versed in the systems of Europe, but ignorant of the sentiments of the Indian peoples. What may be necessary for the decision of disputes arising from the complex relations of highly educated Westerns is wholly unsuitable for the masses in India, nine-tenths of whom are poor illiterate peasants, whose highest aspirations rise to a humble hope that the next harvest may suffice to fill their bellies, pay their taxes and meet the interest due on their debts (Thorburn 1894: 9-10).

We do not recognise Thorburn’s disapproval of the legal system as having any bearing on the question of ‘divide and rule’ today. We would also not recognise any discussion on ‘equality’ as having a bearing on ‘divide and rule’. However, it was precisely this principle that shaped the idea in Thorburn’s conception and, I suspect, in the conceptions of others as well[284].

> The cardinal principle underlying all European legislation and common law is that all men are equal. But in India men never were, and never can become within a measurable

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[284] Several important colonial figures including Lord Elphinstone and Lord Mayo were proponents of *divide et impera*. For a record of their statements on the issue see Sharma (1987).

> period, equal. The fabric of society is built up of many tribes and castes, each with numerous gradations inside itself, each conserving as a matter of life and death the customs, prejudices and sentiments of a time which to us progressivists appears the Dark Ages. The "new India", the "young India" of Congresswallas and their ignorant English backers, has no existence except in the imaginations of idealists or traitors. In cities and towns a glimmering exists amongst a small percentage of educated minds of what government on Western principles means, and the most comprehensive of those minds readily recognise the hopeless unwisdom of the attempt to acclimatise such an exotic as democratic government in India (Thorburn 1894: 11-12).

The thrust of Thorburn's book is to critique this notion of 'equality' that the West has deployed in India. He sees it as the major cause of further impoverishing the agricultural classes who did not understand this elaborate new juridical system of the British. His views on the Congress are also notable and clearly reflect that he did not consider it a major force in Indian society or politics. He was contemptuous of it, but not afraid of it. What he does feel endangered British rule in India was their own policy.

> Under our system rural society is gradually being disintegrated, and the profits of agriculture are passing from the small producers to the capitalists, from the ignorant many to the knowing few. The greatest sufferers are perhaps the 57 millions of Muhammadans of India, who are collectively inferior to Hindus in all qualities – manliness excepted – necessary for success under a reign of law. Their superiority as soldiers enabled them to achieve empire and retain it for centuries, until our dominion superseded theirs. With the establishment of the *pax Britannica* their occupation was gone.

> Under the new *regime*, in learning, farming and business generally, they were no match for the quicker-witted and more laborious Hindus, whose leaders, conscious of the superior solidarity and wealth of their people, would now forcibly hasten the social degradation of their quandom masters and to all time religious opponents. The chronic hostility between Hindu and Musalman is becoming more and more embittered by the reversal of their respective worldly conditions. Our presence alone enforces a truce between them. Both duty and interest – the latter on the *divide et impera* principle – require us to save the Muhammadans of India from further decadence (Thorburn 1894: 296).

If indeed *divide et impera* is the means of keeping India divided, then it makes little sense for Thorburn to condemn the "chronic hostility between Hindu and Musalman". However, it does seem to be the principle that will allow the British to 'maintain peace' between the communities. Thus, 'divide and rule' did not refer to attempts that put Muslim and Hindu communities in antagonistic positions in order to strengthen colonial rule. 'Divide and rule' was a principle that recognised rights derived from interests rather than *equal* rights. In that sense, the current reservations policies for SC/ST/OBC would also be called 'divide and rule'. It could not be a 'means to divide the population' in order to strengthen imperialism since one of the greatest justifications for imperialism was the fact that the population was already divided and that colonial rule effected peace between this divided population. Thorburn asserts that it is both the duty of the British in India and in their interest to uphold the 'divide and rule' policy. And here he probably does suggest that these policies will keep an anti-colonial movement or a movement like the Congress relatively weak. But does this imply that it will keep

the latter movements weak by creating artificial divisions in the Indian population or simply uplifting conditions amongst ‘backward classes’ such that there is a greater feeling of satisfaction rather than antagonism towards the government? Considering that Thorburn spends so much time elaborating on the poor conditions of the people and the adverse impact he feels the British policy has on the “agricultural classes” and little or no mention is made of the ‘threat’ that ‘anti-colonial movements’ pose[285], it seems much more likely that he does not take the latter seriously enough in order to speak of ‘divide and rule’ as a means to snuff out opposition. One cannot say this categorically on the basis of the text. However, it does seem logical. Otherwise we are faced with a logical contradiction and a blatantly inconsistent ethical stand in the British principle of ‘divide and rule’. For it would mean that they believed the means to rule India was to create tension between communities while they also felt that they were the solution to this tension and therefore they must continue to rule. To some extent Thorburn gives a more explicit formulation of his stand at the end of his book.

> Were the dumb masses of India capable of voicing their feelings and desires, they would address the democracy of Great Britain in some such language as follows: “We number one-fifth of the human race, and are divided into many clashing nationalities and castes, speaking different tongues and cherishing different sentiments and prejudices – all foolish, perhaps, in your eyes, yet each held by us as a most precious inheritance

[285] As seen above he does not take the Congress seriously enough to see any real threat involved. He does however, worry about a peasant uprising against the Government. In fact, the impetus for the book was the possibility, according to Thorburn, that the Indian peasant would get carried into the Russian enemy ranks!

> handed down from an antiquity unknown in European history. Of late years the tendency in governing us has been to ignore our past and to treat us as one united people ripe for institutions such as yours. You have assumed that what may be good for Englishmen must be good for Asiatics, except when their respective interests diverge. But it is not so. What may be suitable for your free, enlightened, compact, and homogeneous nation, is often intolerable for the ignorant, superstitious medley of peoples who inhabit our continent. If you are sincere in asserting that you would rule us for our own welfare alone, we pray you to give effect to your wishes. See that our interests be no longer subordinated to those of party or commerce in England; that our customs and even weaknesses be duly respected and protected; that the land and its fruits be not alienated from the agriculturists; that our industries be encouraged; and that if more money is wanted, it be raised by indirect and not direct taxation. … Finally we would impress upon all of you that, like most Asiatics, we regard representative government as impracticable for India, and are happiest under a firm, benevolent, and conservative despotism (Thorburn 1894: 308).

Thus, 'divide and rule' was based on a rejection of representative principles of governance in support of a 'benevolent despotism' which would allow the colonial government to disburse special rights to certain so-called 'backward' groups. This special recognition was not possible until the policy of communal reservations in government employment came into place in the 1890s largely as a response to Thorburn's own efforts[286]. This policy probably becomes inflected

[286] *Memorandum no. 11 On the Communal Composition of the Services in the Punjab and other Provinces* (1925) gives a clear history of the move towards communal reservations in government employment. This report outlines the colonial government's responses to the native memoranda seeking government jobs. While the colonial government rejected the plea of the National Muhammadan Association of Calcutta in 1885 (as outlined in chapter 5), there was a slight change in government consideration of these demands in 1889 in response to a similar petition by the Anjuman-i-Islamiya of Lahore. The government agreed that if the Association submitted a list of qualified Muslim applicants for particular positions, they would be

with the nationalist sense of ‘divide and rule’ (the so-called colonial means of creating antagonism between groups) only after the Bengal Partition. As the colonial government began to promote ideas of representative government in India in the 1920s we would probably find that this principle fades out of use amongst colonial sources but gains strength in nationalist sloganeering against the coloniser. This later history of ‘divide and rule’ is based partly on conjecture rather than on concrete historical information that traces the idea through these later developments. However, it does seem fairly plausible given the original use of the idea and the context in which it was received.

When we reconstruct the concept in its original (and much more probable and consistent) signification, it has a definite effect on the way we perceive the past. At a fundamental level it no longer allows us to blame the coloniser as having deliberately provoked conflict amongst groups. But the ‘divide and rule’ theory is not really taken very seriously today anyway. So, this reconstruction is not influential in so far as it is related to causal explanations. Rather, its influence lies in the fact that it inverts our well-accepted evaluative framework and thereby demonstrates the way our ‘knowledge’ is constituted by it. Nietzsche proposed that his genealogy would serve to reverse what was considered ‘good’ and valued and what was considered ‘evil’ and abhorred (see Nietzsche 1989: 20). We see something similar happening in this case. When we accept that ‘Divide and Rule’ was a principle allied to justice that was transformed into the ‘bad’ or

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considered. This is still quite different from Thorburn’s establishment of the principle of ‘communal representation’ but it forms a transition.

unjust in the nationalist framework[287] we recognise the relative unfamiliarity of our past as reflected in our history. Now let us see if something 'good' does not also turn into something 'bad'[288] on closer examination.

Secularism

The concept of 'secularism' has seen several shifting definitions in India. There is still no consensus on its meaning in the Indian context. Here I examine what seems to be one of the early uses of the concept of secularism and then a later use in order to understand the range of meanings the term acquired and its implications. In 1928 Jawaharlal Nehru issued a statement to the Press negating the understanding that the Maharashtra Provincial Congress Committee had reached of his recent statements relative to the Congress policy for the 'division of Religion and Politics'. He sounded fairly irate about the fact that the Maharashtra Congress had derived from his bid to separate religion and politics "the very reverse of what [he] had intended". It would seem that the Maharashtra Congress had suggested that untouchability was outside the purview of politics and was really inside the purview of religion. Thereby, following from Nehru's statements, it concluded that the Congress should not intervene in the matter of untouchability. Jawaharlal Nehru's response reveals his mortification at this

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[287] This observation should not mislead us into thinking that nationalism was in any radical way in opposition to colonial discourse because of this dissonance. Nationalism certainly could not have existed but for colonial discourse and therefore operates very much within the colonial normative framework. However, like in the case of 'communalism' where nationalists disagreed with the causes for 'communalism' but did not contest the concept, here they change the evaluative force attached to the idea.

[288] Nietzsche's dramatic exclamation on the production of 'ideals' is actually rather apt. "This workshop where *ideals are manufactured* – it seems to me it stinks of so many lies" (1989: 47).

conclusion though it sheds less light on what exactly made the Maharashtra Congress' statement, derived from his own prescription for Congress policy, so completely untenable.

> My name has been mentioned in this statement in support of the contention that religion and politics should be divorced from each other, and certain conclusions which appear to me remarkable, have been drawn from this premise. I have certainly referred to this subject repeatedly in my public utterances but my words must have been lacking in clarity to have led some people to imagine the very reverse of what I intended. I have stated that the so-called religion in India today encroaches on every department of life – political, social, economic, cultural – and I have taken strong exception to this and have expressed a wish that it should not be permitted to make this encroachment. If religion, or rather what is called religion, in India continues to interfere with everything, then it will not be a mere question of divorcing it from politics, but of divorcing it from life itself.
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> If the high priests of religion and the shining lights of communal organisations are to decide the question of untouchability and all other social problems, the division of provinces and the methods of election and similar problems, what exactly is the function of the National Congress or of other political organisations? The Congress might as well liquidate itself instead of continuing an existence which is humiliating and futile. It will not discuss the live problems of the day; it will only carry on an academic debate on such subjects as the communal organisations in their wisdom agree to leave to the Congress (in Gopal and Iyengar ed. Vol1 2003: 140).

While the discordance in the way that Nehru and the Maharashtra Congress Committee understood the 'division between religion and politics' seems rather amusing at one level, there may be a deeper question to grapple with here. Was

there any real coherence in the way that this early exploration of secularism as 'the separation between religion and politics' was interpreted not simply by different social or political groups but within the same political group? What are the implications of this discordance? Does the discordance resolve itself at any point or are we still really recreating the same sort of discordance at different levels[289]? Nehru also does not here say why the conclusion the Maharashtra Congress Committee reached was incorrect. If the policy of division of politics and religion was to be taken seriously, then politics could not intervene in religious practice. Thereby, untouchability would lie outside the purview of politics. Instead, Nehru equates untouchability with problems of division of provinces and methods of election. In other words, untouchability was a problem purely for the State to solve. What this meant in essence was that Nehru was chalking out the role of the Congress Party as a quasi-State role. The colonial State was secular but left issues like untouchability outside its realm of influence. That is, they recognised untouchability as a religious issue and therefore did not intervene. The Congress could not relinquish untouchability to the realm of religion because unlike the colonial State the Congress idea of the State role involved an active agenda of 'reform'[290]. Thus, while the colonial State at this point in the twentieth century pursued justice through patterns of representation that would allow for equal political distribution of power, Nehru seemed to pin

[289] For instance, the BJP and Congress both stake claims to secularism; there is no consistent explanation for what 'equal respect for all religions', which is the later definition reached for secularism, is to mean; and we are still struggling to understand whether it is a Western concept or its definition has been transformed into an Indian context such that it is purely unique.

[290] Polly Hazarika (unpublished PhD thesis titled *Technologies of Knowledge: Reform as Civilisational Education*) suggests that this was perhaps partly a result of the fact that 'reform' movements formed the pre-cursors for 'political' action in the 19th century.

social justice not on equitable representation, but on a certain special attribute of politics itself which only the Congress Party enjoyed. India would require this 'right' kind of politics and not just representative institutions for social justice to be achieved. This is an inflection of the term secularism that does not appear in Western political understanding. Thus, Nehru's frustration at the Maharashtra Congress Committee's interpretation of his position consists not simply in his definition of secularism but in his definition of politics itself and what it involved.

> This is an intolerable position for the least of our organisations. For the Congress, it is unthinkable. Indeed the Congress has always in the past taken a lead in social and communal matters and I am sure it will continue to do so unless it wants to commit *hara-kiri* or to die of inanition. Perhaps there is no subject on which it has taken up a stronger attitude than the one of untouchability, and to say today that this is outside the purview of the Congress because it smacks of religion is an amazing assertion (in Gopal and Iyengar ed. Vol1 2003: 140-141).

Thus, Nehru used secularism to define the 'right' kind of politics for India. By extension, there is a wrong kind of politics. And this is 'communal' politics. Ironically, 'communal' politics is nothing but the representation of 'interests groups' based on communities. Nehru constantly used the idea that 'communal' politics was not genuine since the 'real' problem of India was poverty[291]. Thus Nehru rejected the very notion of politics as the just representation of interest

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[291] "It is necessary to bear in mind that the whole communal problem, in spite of its importance, has nothing to do with the major problems of India – poverty and widespread unemployment. It is not a religious problem and it affects only a handful of people at the top" (from the 'Election Manifesto 22nd August 1936' in Gopal and Iyengar ed. Vol. 1 2003: 370).

groups as advanced by the colonial government. He replaced ‘justice as the true representation of interest groups’ with ‘justice as the true representation of *national* interest’. And his main plank to prove the Congress stake in ‘national’ interest was the ‘alleviation of poverty’. The Congress plank was remarkable in that it actually *represented* ***no one*** in the conception of representation available within colonial definitions. But by creating the plank of a ‘national interest’ the Congress was (rather audaciously) claiming to represent ***everyone***[292]. The nation in this conception was not a combination of the interest groups or peoples that made it[293], it was independent of the interest groups; it was in fact, in *opposition* to the interest groups that made it! More and more Nehru’s secularism became the means to uphold this idea of a nation which was not made up of peoples, like all other nations of the world, but purely of citizens of a State. Thus, we are caught in a situation where ‘secularism’, as Nehru used it, does not seem to remain such an undoubtedly positive principle if we are to uphold our commitment to other purportedly positive principles such as self-determination. However, there is a further dimension to the problem of ‘secularism’ in the Indian context.

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[292] “We appeal to the country to give every support to the Congress in the elections that are coming. National welfare demands it…Every party and group that stands aloof from the Congress organisation tends, knowingly or unknowingly, to become a source of weakness to the nation and a source of strength to the forces ranged against it. For the fight for independence a joint front is necessary. The Congress offers that joint national front which comprises all classes and communities, bound together by their desire to free India, end the exploitation of her people, and build up a strong and prosperous and united nation, resting on the well-being of the masses” (ibid., 371).

[293] Pandey also reaches the same conclusion though he then seems to ratify this conception of nation as somehow necessary even if relatively illegitimate.

We talk about a secular state in India. It is perhaps not very easy even to find a good word in Hindi for 'secular'. Some people think that it means something opposed to religion. That obviously is not correct. What it means is that it is a state which honours all faiths equally and gives them equal opportunities; that, as a state, it does not allow itself to be attached to one faith or religion, which then becomes the state religion….

India has a long history of religious tolerance. That is one aspect of a secular state, but it is not the whole of it. In a country like India, which has many faiths and religions, no real nationalism can be built up except on the basis of secularity. Any narrower approach must necessarily exclude a section of the population, and then nationalism itself will have a much more restricted meaning than it should possess. In India we would have then to consider Hindu nationalism, Muslim nationalism, Sikh nationalism or Christian nationalism and not Indian nationalism.

As a matter of fact, these narrow religious nationalisms are relics of a past age and are no longer relevant today. They represent a backward and out-of-date society. In the measure we have even today so-called communal troubles, we display our backwardness as social groups.

Our constitution lays down that we are a secular state, but it must be admitted that this is not wholly reflected in our mass living and thinking. In a country like England, the state is, under the constitution, allied to one particular religion, the Church of England, which is a sect of Christianity. Nevertheless the state and the people there largely function in a secular way. Society, therefore, in England is more advanced in this respect than in India, even though our constitution may be, in this matter more advanced (in Gopal and Iyengar ed. Vol1 2003: 194)

This later position on secularism shows Nehru's expansion of the idea to almost illimitable dimensions. Secularism is over here supposed to achieve three disparate things. For one, secularism refers to the nature of the State. It is an attribute the state must have in order not to be theocratic. This is unlike his earlier use of secularism where it was a kind of politics. Two, secularism contains toleration but is not encompassed by it. It also contains, perhaps more importantly than toleration according to Nehru, "real nationalism" and a break away from "narrow religious nationalisms" which are out-dated "relics". The importance of this "real nationalism" seems to be its connection with social harmony on the one hand and some notion of progress on the other. Thus, 'communal troubles' are a measure of backwardness[294]. This equation of harmony plus progress that adds up to secularism is not a recipe for the State. It is a recipe for 'society'. Thus, secularism here addresses a 'social group' with notions of nationalism. This is akin to the use of secularism as the 'right' kind of politics described earlier. Three, secularism is not only an attribute of the state or of a political party, but of the individual. Each individual must learn to be *more* secular. This seems to refer to each individual's relationship to religion. The people must *function* in a secular manner, presumably by relegating religion to the private sphere. Thus, a non-theocratic state, a 'real nationalism' and the role of the individual in the public sphere are all addressed by secularism.

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[294] Here Nehru mirrors completely the connotations of 'communalism' or 'Hindu-Muslim antagonism' as primitivism and religiosity that were apparent in early colonial discourse.

The absolute incoherence of the concept of secularism is only one aspect of the problem we are trying to grapple with. The second is its implications for history. As in the case of ‘divide and rule’ we would do well to question the evaluative force that ‘secularism’ seems to wield. For instance, it has often been the measure to determine the ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’ of history. Jinnah’s first speech to the new nation of Pakistan where he asserted that a secular State would be established is often considered hypocritical or contradictory since the state had been established on ‘communal’ lines. However, there was no opposition between the secular state and ‘communal’ party for the latter referred merely to a formula for the *kind* of representational patterns that would make for ‘equal’ or ‘just’ representation and not to the nature of the state at all. It is not surprising then that so much of Indian history depends on de-legitimising Jinnah’s claim. However, this is ironic to say the least considering Jinnah’s fall-out with the Congress in the 1920’s was in response to what he considered the replacement of secular politics with a religious mass approach that Gandhi brought to the Congress.

Native relationship to learning goals

The two ideas discussed above demonstrate the consequences for the writing of history that the persistence of colonial discourse has generated. These two ideas are also useful in order to elucidate the way in which we have understood the learning relationship between coloniser and colonised. In my account, colonial

discourse is made up of a network of normative inferences which set up learning goals for the colonised. These learning goals are not scattered sets of objectives but require in essence the acquisition of the normative framework itself. Let us return to the example of 'Truth' in chapter 3 in order to clarify the above claim.

In 1799, Major Wilks made certain observations on native law. Native law was eventually reformed with the setting up of a new convention – that of testimonial truth[295]. What did the natives learn when this new system or principle was put into place? Let us pose two possible answers – a) the natives became more truthful or b) this new system of law changed or transformed the native conception of truth. Let us bear in mind that neither of the above statements in fact, may be correct. There may be several other possible answers that require exploration. For instance, it may in fact merely be the case that this new convention changed the way the native went about seeking justice. Instead of building his or her case on circumstantial evidence which was considered of greater importance in the case of native law, the native cases in the colonial Supreme Court would probably go about collecting witnesses for their case. Over a long period of time, with the entrenchment of this system of testimonial truth the native may forget all about the earlier system of circumstantial evidence. But, would the native as a result a) become more truthful or b) change his/her conception of truth? Claim a) seems clearly absurd. But let us investigate the possible implications of each of these claims in relation to 'communalism'.

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[295] It is immaterial whether the reform was a *consequence* of Wilks' report, since those reforming the legal system obviously thought in the same manner as Wilks.

When we apply the analogy of ‘truth’ above in order to understand the claims for native learning in relation to ‘communalism’ we have had available to us so far, we find the nationalist claim of ‘divide and rule’ (as being the cause of ‘communalism’) is really akin to response a) outlined above in the truth problem. That is, they were saying, British administrative practices of ‘divide and rule’ were ‘divisive’ and the colonised learnt ‘divisiveness’. This is an exact parallel to the idea that ‘testimonial truth embodies truthfulness and so this legal practice will make the natives more truthful’.

In claim a) ‘testimonial truth makes the natives more truthful’, we have to understand that the coloniser is posing a concept as the learning goal, not a personal attribute. The concept is that of testimonial truth. One can either have the concept[296] or not have it, independent of whether the individual is personally truthful or not. That is, it is possible for me to understand and explain the concept of truth that underlies the system of testimonial truth without actually personally being a truthful person. Just as it is possible that I am a truthful person but do not understand the concept of truth embodied in the system of testimonial truth[297].

[296] See Skinner (1978; 2002) on what it means to have a concept.

[297] For instance, the figure of Raja Harishchandra is famous for his scrupulous truthfulness in Indian lore. However, hypothetical as the situation may be, it is still instructive to observe the striking absurdity involved in the idea that this figure would understand or defend the Christian notion of testimonial truth. Perhaps it is difficult to understand different concepts of ‘truth’. Foucault’s examination of ‘*parrhesia*’ or ‘truth-speaking’ amongst the Greeks is a wonderful example however, of an excavation of just such an alternative conceptual model for truth in contrast to the Christian. The ‘truth’ in *parrhesia* does not have to do with whether one lies or not but rather with a **capacity** to speak the truth – that which is in conjunction with the practice of justice or reason. While everyone has the capacity to speak without lying, only a *parrhesiastes* has the capacity for truth-speaking. Thus, ‘parrhesia’ or truth-speaking has nothing to do with a faithfulness to fact but rather to personal courage and a sense of justice (Foucault 1983).

There is no absolute relationship between concepts and individual attributes. Besides, it is one thing for the coloniser to pose attribute as a consequence of learning a concept and quite another for the colonised to accept that relationship. Similarly, I would argue, ‘communalism’ is not an attribute but a concept. When we equate it with the rather tenuous attribute ‘divisiveness’ we set up a test that any society across the world would fail since this attribute is so amorphous and yet so compellingly of negative evaluative force.

The logical error in the claim above (‘divide and rule made the native population divisive’) has deep consequences for historical understanding as well. For one, it neither allows us to understand what ‘divide and rule’ was, nor its supposed consequence, ‘communalism’. By extension it also misconstrues the history of representational politics in the early twentieth century in India. The logical absurdity of transforming a concept into an attribute may seem obvious in the ‘truth’ example. However, this same logical absurdity is replicated in many ways in our understanding of what colonial learning goals did to the colonised. For instance, ‘modernity’ is perceived as a learning goal that has been accomplished depending on attributes as frivolous and diverse as trends in clothing to trends in sexual behaviour. There is no clear idea what concept is to be learnt, yet its so-called attributes proliferate. Thus, the transformation of concept into attribute is a significant feature of several post-colonial explanations for the persistence of colonial discourse. This logical mistake also leads to a greater loss. We lose the

means to understand and reconstruct the learning goal itself and what it meant in colonial discourse.

To return to the analogy of testimonial truth, let us examine claim b). It is conceivable that this new normative framework of law that was adopted may influence other domains of thought. Thus, the fact that the legal framework became dependent on the notion of testimonial truth may well have an influence on notions of truth in other domains of human knowledge like philosophy, ethics or history. But it is also equally possible, as proposed above, that the native learnt to function within the domain of Law with this new normative concept without actually absorbing its implications. Therefore, this question is not to be answered by logical deduction but requires historical investigation. We cannot take for granted that since the native learnt how to go about in a domain which did adopt colonial normative frameworks, that the native was transformed into a new colonial/colonised subject[298]. In this instance, for example, such a claim would actually involve the assertion that the native became Christian. Considering the native does not even understand (or care to examine) that the basis of testimonial truth lies in Christianity, what kind of impact can we postulate on his/her own native conceptions of truth? Thus, history must undertake to investigate conceptual shifts, if any, in related domains. For instance, were there any dialogues between native law officers and colonial law-givers that shed some light on the learning process that took place? Or, were there dialogues that

[298] This is the implication of the argument that native subjectivity was transformed into a new colonial subjectivity.

emerged in other domains that had a stake in defining conceptions of truth (either religion or spirituality etc.) in response to this new legal norm? Or even, one may ask, did the popular stories or lore involving ideals of truth such as the story of Raja Harishchandra undergo any changes during this time? Thus, although I propose that colonialism definitely offers a normative network as the learning goal, **we are yet to characterise the relationship that the colonised built towards these learning goals**. Perhaps there will not be one kind of relationship that emerges, but several that need to be understood on a case to case basis.

In the case of 'communalism', the implications of claim b) (that testimonial truth transformed native conceptions of truth) may take on several shades. The broadest implication would be that native conceptions of community interaction were transformed. This seems persuasive. For instance, new categories like 'minority' and 'majority' were used profusely by the natives. However, in itself, this is like the use of testimony in a new legal system. It does not show deeper conceptual learning. There is one concept that is generally proposed as the means of transformation of Indian conceptions of inter-community interaction namely, 'secularism'. This brings us to the second idea we discussed above. If the native learnt this new concept or if secularism poses a new understanding of self-conceptions that significantly impact inter-community interaction, then we have a case for claim b).

However, the one thing that seems clear in our discussion of secularism is its lack of stability. It does not seem to endure as one concept at all. Instead, it takes on several hues or functions as the case may arise. This does not seem to indicate the acquisition of a new concept. However, we do see the use of this term. So what does one make of this use? Let us examine more closely Nehru's use of secularism. One aspect of its polysemy is the diversity of characteristics that it has: it is a kind of politics, a kind of toleration and a kind of nationalism. But the later use of secularism is clearly simply as an attribute variously of the political party, the State, the society and the individual. As a concept, if secularism refers to the *role* of the State, it cannot at the same time refer to the *role* of the political party, the individual or society. Thus, crucially, in order for secularism to refer to all of these it must be an attribute. Here we come full circle to the first kind of claim where a concept is reduced to an attribute. As pointed out in the earlier section, this formulation is untenable as the achievement of a conceptual learning goal.

In the case of secularism, we find that claim b) as a possible interpretation of the learning relationship collapses into claim a). I do not make the generalisation that this would be the case for all possible learning goals but certainly, it does seem to be the case that some crucial aspects of what we have considered 'colonial subjectivity' or our 'derivative modernity' (Partha Chatterjee 1986; 1997) do not seem to show the transformation of native concepts or acquisition of Western concepts. They show instead, a set of concepts which do not seem to gain any

stable *references* in the Indian context, but proliferate as loose and variable sets of attributes. Thus, our ‘modern’ evaluative terms seem to have evaluative force but not stable conceptual significance. This sort of loose nomenclature indicates that the tower of Babel continues to be characteristic of our political constructions.

De-colonising the past

The persistence of colonialism has been the subject of post-colonial theory in different ways for a few decades now. However, ideas like ‘mimicry’ (see Bhabha 1984) or ‘hybridization’ (see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin ed. 2005) seem to reflect with equal seriousness on too many phenomena in different spheres. Thus, from fashion trends to political trends, from ‘self conceptions’ to ‘subjectivity’ we are left to scrutinize every action or thought for its ‘derivative’ nature or excavate the dregs of colonial consciousness. But this excavation does not seem to lead anywhere. It recognizes persistence but in a way that seems to condemn us to it. However, as this thesis suggests, it is crucial that we dismantle the concepts that make for this persistence of colonial discourse if we are to come to any understanding of our past and present.

Almost all theories of the persistence of colonial discourse are agreed that it is linked to learning goals set by the coloniser. Let us say there are three ways in which post-colonial theory has understood the native relationship to colonial

learning goals. One, the native adopts colonial categories. Two, the native adopts colonial concepts in order to understand his reality. Three, the native now thinks of himself as the coloniser thought of him. The first point is certainly true. New legal categories are used by the native. The second point cannot hold true in absolute terms. For instance, in the case of secularism, we see that the native may use the new concept but the meaning remains unstable or even fairly different from the original colonial concept. The use of the concept (and this use may proliferate endlessly) remains at the strategic rather than the more profound level of understanding one's reality. The third point seems to follow from the first two. The native thinks of himself as the coloniser thought of him. However, this holds true only in so far as it is an outcome of statement one. We use colonial categories when we speak about ourselves, whether in the juridical or academic domains. This in turn recreates the colonial evaluative framework thereby generating the same judgments. But it cannot mean that we are transformed into colonial subjects, because then we would not find the dissonance which characterises our historical and political discourses and a bid for de-colonisation would not arise at all. So, whatever else this transformation may involve, it does not condemn us to forever *be* the coloniser's imagined subject. For, this can only perpetuate greater dissonance.

This thesis is precisely a bid to resolve the dissonance and break out of the discourse that not only makes us think of ourselves as the coloniser thought of us, but also makes us lose our past. If this thesis makes a history without the use

of the debilitating category of ‘communalism’ possible, then we will certainly find greater understanding and better solutions to the real problems we now address by the term ‘communalism’.

I would like to end with a historical case. Towards the end of the 1930’s Jinnah, Nehru and Gandhi exchanged correspondence on the matter loosely called the ‘Hindu-Muslim problem’ (Pirzada ed. 1972). Generally historians characterise this period as a struggle for power that seems to make these three figures (or at least Nehru and Jinnah) selfish megalomaniacs or euphemisms to that effect. However, there is a genuine inability to come to terms here. This does not mean coming to terms as an agreement on power sharing. There is the much deeper conflict of not coming to terms in the sense that they seem to be using the same terms in profoundly different ways. When Nehru and Gandhi profess not to understand what the ‘Hindu-Muslim problem’ is, and Jinnah professes inability to explain it if they do not understand already, perhaps one must read this situation with empathy and recognise that there is a genuine conceptual dissonance and not simply a wilful denial of the others’ ideas. The ‘two-nation theory’ is not so much about there being two peoples or nations within one geographical area as it is about two notions of what the concept nation means. Nehru’s notion of an idealised nation that seemed to correspond not with a people at all but with an ideal state as he visualised it and Jinnah’s use of nation as the expression of the popular will of a people and their bid for representation. The job of the historian is not to either sympathise or criticise one or the other conception of nation itself but

to excavate their different uses and generate explanations[299] for this state of affairs. The historian cannot retrospectively dictate the use of concepts and therefore her empathy for one or the other use is simply misplaced. Perhaps the empathy the historian must show is not an allegiance to one of the two positions but feeling the deep sense of violence that conceptual dissonance brings; potentially a deeper violence than inter-personal conflict.

Rejecting the pervasive descriptions of ourselves as ‘communal’ is not a step towards white-washing our history in order to present ourselves as an ideal society that has never witnessed violence. That would simply be a denial of historical facts in favour of a romantic myth. However, it is perhaps even more damaging to produce a history which only serves to uphold or propagate the same normative categories which are the source of this violence. A history which upholds equality, secularism and toleration as self-evident solutions to violence, when it is the dissonance[300] these categories produce which has been a major *source* of this violence, must bear equally the charge of white-washing history. By giving up ‘communalism’ as a means of understanding our past, we do not deny or belittle the violence we have witnessed. Instead, we make a genuine attempt to diagnose[301] that violence.

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[299] Here ‘explanation’ is used to refer back to Koselleck’s ideas of history requiring a *theory* for its existence (Koselleck 2002).

[300] I refer to this dissonance through the metaphor of the ‘tower or Babel’ in chapter 5.

[301] Diagnosis was Foucault’s characterisation of what genealogy achieves (Foucault 1977). This is an important analogy as it captures immediately the essence of genealogy, which is, that it does not take for granted the ‘problem’ as history may pose it. Instead, it investigates and excavates the ‘problem’ which may be empirical or discursive, i.e., a problem with history itself.

APPENDIX

Not another ‘construction’ of ‘communalism’

Do my claims about the history of representation and its consequences qualify as one more narrative of the ‘construction’ of ‘communalism’? I have elucidated some of my objections against the constructivists in the second chapter of the thesis. However, since the constructivist approach to ‘communalism’ does not give us a philosophical account of what ‘constructivism’ itself involves, I examine Ian Hacking’s (1999; 2006) reconstruction of the philosophical implications of ‘constructivism’ in order to show my points of difference with this approach.

The persistence of colonialism in my account has been related to its learning goals. The constructivists also address this persistence of colonialism. Their account does not simply suggest hegemony as the answer to the persistence of colonial discourse. They suggest that discourse brings into being categories of social existence. This is slightly different from saying that learning goals are achieved because it suggests less the relationship of learning and more the idea of State power and its means to transform social existence.

If one concedes that violence or conflict between communities seems to have been exacerbated by the history of the modern/colonial Indian State, then what is the material objection to the claim that ‘communalism’ was instituted in India in the early 20th century? Can discourse or ideas bring corresponding objects into

existence? Hacking (1999) explains that there are ‘interactive kinds’ in the social sciences unlike the natural kinds of the natural sciences. Thus, the claim in relation to the existence of ‘quarks’, which is a natural or what he calls an indifferent kind, does not have the same bearing on social existence as does the proposition of a certain kind like the ‘woman refugee’, which is an interactive kind. Interactive kinds are classifications which interact with the objects they classify. They bear an influence on the objects that the interactive kind is meant to describe; while quarks do not interact with their classification or nomenclature in any way[302]. Thus, could the claim that ‘communalism’ was instituted into Indian society be considered as a claim that ‘communalism’ is an interactive kind that produces behaviour which answers to its description once it is created? Let me begin with an examination of the different interactive kinds that Hacking proposes and their consequences. Then we will examine whether ‘communalism’ could be an interactive kind.

Hacking’s use of ‘interactive kinds’ leaves several things rather vague and requires further clarification. There are three identifiable sets in the interactive kinds he proposes: legal, medical and social (for lack of a better word). The example he gives in the first category, the legal, is that of the ‘woman refugee’.

> This discussion of ideas and classifications takes for granted the obvious, namely that they work only in a matrix. But I do want to emphasize what in shorthand I call the *idea* of

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[302] “A woman refugee may learn that she is a certain kind of person and act accordingly. Quarks do not learn that they are a certain kind of entity and act accordingly” (Hacking 1999: 32).

> the woman refugee, that classification, that kind of person. When we read of the social construction of X, it is very commonly the idea of X (in its matrix) that is meant. And ideas, thus understood, do matter. It can really matter to someone to be classified as a woman refugee; if she is not thus classified, she may be deported, or go into hiding, or marry to gain citizenship. The matrix can affect an individual woman (Hacking 1999: 11).

Here he refers to a legal status as an interactive kind. He emphasizes that it is "more importantly" a "paralegal" entity, "used by boards, schools, social workers, activists – and refugees" (31). Here legal would suffice. Legal status always includes one's status in social institutions regulated by the State. Thus, legal classification certainly qualifies as an interactive kind. But dubbing it an interactive kind gives us no greater insight into it. Hacking may, however, contrast a status like 'woman refugee' with a more neutral classification like 'citizen'[303]. Certainly the former would seem to have a greater impact on the individual or group to which it applies than the latter. However, that may be the case with several different legal categories. For instance, 'divorcee' or 'married' may also qualify as interactive kinds where people so categorised, even though they opt for this legal status, face consequences or change their consciousness of themselves or their self-image because of such classification.

Another set of interactive kinds Hacking discusses are certain medical categories. Autism, schizophrenia, retardation are all categories that combine

[303] One may also find that the 'neutral' state category of 'citizen' bears consequences in certain contexts. For instance, 'citizen' would qualify as an interactive kind in Pandey's (1992) narrative of the political consequences of nationalism in the 1930s.

two kinds, the indifferent and the interactive. Or in other words, they combine a 'real' problem and a problem of 'construction'. These psychopathologies show two kinds of looping, biological[304] and classificatory. The two could well be interconnected Hacking says, however, he is not concerned with the first (biolooping), but rather only with the second even though they may well influence each other. The 'category looping' requires attention according to Hacking because one imagines this is clearly more avoidable and human societies and social sciences must take responsibility for actually creating the problems unleashed by these categories. This is a fair approach since there is little that a philosopher may do in terms of biolooping. However, in suggesting the problems of categorisation of ideas the philosopher may innovate a change in this categorisation thereby creating a chance for a solution. In his examination of 'retardation' for instance, Hacking expresses concern that the classification itself produces behaviours that then become further classified.

> California's programs provide a wonderful illustration of how interactive kinds work. First, the classification has become embedded in a complex matrix of institutions and practices wherein a certain number of children, designated in a certain way, must be assigned to every class, although they are also removed from the class for more individualised tuition. The regular teachers complain bitterly that the result is class disruption; the specially educated know how they are classified; they develop not only individual but collective

[304] The interaction between physical and mental states which affect our well-being. "Changes in our ideas may change our physiological states. Yoga is the technique that spans mind and body most conclusively, and serves as the model for notions of biofeedback. This phenomenon, which is well-established but not understood, is distinct from the looping effect of interactive kinds. For lack of better nametags I shall call the mind/body effect *biolooping* by analogy with biofeedback. The other is *classificatory looping*. I need the distinction because of course, in particular cases, both types of looping may be at work, and indeed mutually reinforce each other" (109-110).

> new patterns of behaviour. One can make a strong prediction that not only will the procedures be modified, but also the ways in which these children are classified will be modified because of the new kinds of behaviour that have emerged (Hacking 1999: 112).

For instance, one may hypothetically propose that one ‘retarded’ child expresses frustration through violence and then becomes further categorised in one direction while another who may express her frustration through day dreaming may get categorised another way. These categories then would proliferate in further specialised directions one may well imagine. Thus, the child’s response to his/her categorisation as ‘retarded’ seems to produce further mental problems.

In the first of Hacking’s three categories, ‘retardation’, the categories seem to proliferate and sub-categorise in an endless and fruitless or in fact, damaging manner. In the second case, that of schizophrenia, actual diagnosis seems to be obstructed by the use of the category. That is, ‘schizophrenia’ does not seem to have a stable set of symptoms. Thus, doctors may well be treating several different problems as one problem or they may well be inducing some of the symptoms which the patient may not otherwise have experienced, through their treatment for ‘schizophrenia’. Hacking’s third category, autism, is the only one that he proposes could be transformed from an interactive kind to an indifferent kind if the precise nature of the pathology involved in the disease is understood.

> We need not argue that nearly all children diagnosed with autism today have exactly one and the same biological disorder. We need only hold possible that there are a few

> [possibly just one] basic fundamental biological disorders that produce the symptoms currently classified as autistic. Imagine, however, that there is just one such pathology, call it *P*, and that in reasonable time, we discover what *P* is. A great discovery is reported: "Autism is *P*." … By hypothesis the pathology *P* will be an indifferent kind. … It is not affected simply by the fact we have found out about it, although of course our new knowledge may, with luck, enable us to intervene and either prevent or ameliorate the pathology (Hacking 1999: 116-117).

In these three examples, however, the problem that Hacking is pointing out seems to be related to the aspect of these categories that Hacking would classify as the indifferent kind. And one may propose that by naming it as a problem of interactive kinds there seems to be something that is misconstrued. Autism gives us a hint into the nature of the problem under discussion. I would suggest that in these cases, what Hacking considers the problem of the interaction between indifferent and interactive kind lies in the fact that the indifferent kind is in fact weak. The scientific understanding of the 'real' problem is poor. Therefore, autism is the only one amongst these which stands to evolve into an indifferent kind. Thus, the second set of problems Hacking discusses are problems of science. Social science or legal and institutional practices exacerbate them, but the basic problem lies in under-developed or simply erroneous scientific propositions about these entities[305]. There may be a larger problem in the matrix within which the concepts arise, i.e., psychiatry as a science. However,

[305] 'Retardation' may well be less straight-forward a problem of science than the other two. Here it seems like Foucault's work on 'madness' and the 'abnormal' as being contingent on developments in fields not simply of psychiatry but also juridical and social fields may provide some insights into the investigation of 'retardation'.

fundamentally, scientific refinement rather than the refinement of the social scientific categories is required.

But these cases are different from the case of ‘child abuse’, which is his third category of an interactive kind. Here there is no indifferent kind. There is object and concept. The object is a variety of behaviours that have come to be classified under the term. These are not under discussion. These behaviours may well be a ‘real’ problem[306] and require ‘real’ solutions. But the concept or category itself is not one that may be refined by scientific research (like autism) or legal reform (as in the case of ‘woman refugee’). In this case, the category ‘child abuse’ seems to transcend its function as a ‘kind’ and becomes not just a category but a generative force, in many ways a ‘discipline’ or ‘discourse’. This is the property that Hacking in this case refers to as interactive kind.

> The explicit idea [of child abuse] emerged at a definite time (1961) at a definite place (Denver) in the discussions of some authoritative people (paediatricians). The immediate reference was battered babies, but the reference was very quickly extended. New connotations were acquired. The idea became embedded in new legislation, incorporated in practices, and changed a wide range of professional activities involving social workers, police, schoolteachers, parents, busy-bodies. It acquired new moral weight: child abuse became the worst possible vice (Hacking 1999: 25-26).

[306] Undoubtedly, as Hacking himself says, nobody wishes to propose that harming children is morally ambiguous.

Thus, child abuse does not only produce behaviour in conjunction with the categorisation[307], it also produces an entire field of enquiry and its related legal and social action norms. As Hacking says, child abuse "is a kind whose power is to collect many different kinds, often by metaphor" (152). Thus, the "power" of this kind is different from the way the first or second class of interactive kinds function. That class impacts the people it categorises. This impacts not simply the people it categorises but the population at large and several allied fields of human knowledge, understanding and functioning. 'Child abuse' becomes a problem for paediatrics, psychology, religion, law; it is expressed in terms of deviant sexuality (incest), emotional patterns (rage), family norms (punishment), childhood (child abuse produces child abuse) etc. Hacking wishes to show that the category has created 'real' problems[308], but also that it poses philosophical problems which require attention. The crux of the philosophical problem seems to be that some of these interactive kinds create "new worlds" and also redefine "old worlds"[309]. This in itself could not be a problem unless the "new world" itself is a problem. When Hacking says that most categories of the social sciences are interactive kinds he seems to be dooming all social scientific inquiry to this kind of exercise. However, this cannot be the case. There are two reasons: one, each

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[307] Such as the cases that Hacking outlines of investigations of child abuse itself being "victimogenic" or "traumatogenic" (160).

[308] For instance, the "Cleveland affair" he cites, when between February and July 1987, 121 children were diagnosed as victims of child abuse and several were peremptorily separated from their families (148-151).

[309] I suspect what Hacking is grappling with in the redefinition of an 'old world' is the re-writing of history with the application of 'new kinds' to old events or behaviours.

interactive kind is a different story; two, 'construction' does not always have 'real' implications[310].

> Interactive kinds are involved in "making up people." There is no single story to be told about that. One gets a grip on how a kind works only by studying it in some depth. A study of one kind may illuminate many others. But no matter how well chosen the example, it will serve only as a guide for understanding a group of kinds. It should never aim at being a model for all kinds. The motto is "motley" (Hacking 1999: 130-131).

Thus, Hacking is clearly saying it is not only possible, it is probably necessary to unearth and undo some "new worlds" generated by interactive kinds. What Hacking does not provide us with is any guidance on which ones! An examination of the three classes of interactive kinds I examine seem to provide some clues. The first class, the legal classification of individuals, is a problem for law. Political activism is required to generate change. The individuals within the categories will either live with or change their legal status pretty much in the same way that they will either live with or change the way they deal with stereotypes generated about them by friends or family or even the social sciences. The second class sorely requires scientific developments. It seems to be a matter of either generating a 'better' or more effective science of psychiatry or refining knowledge about the particular psychopathologies under question, especially schizophrenia. However, the third category of interactive kinds exemplified by child abuse has legal, medical, psychological, religious and

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[310] The example he provides of satanic ritual abuse as being purely a "fantasy" with no corroborating evidence which then slowly disappeared is a case in point.

historical consequences. The measures to 'fix' this problem elude us because it generates a "new world" that is not pierced by object level change or research. This kind of interactive kind is not, I would propose, to be treated in the same way as the other two. For, the problem with child abuse is only partly that it is an interactive kind. The larger part of the problem is that it is a 'normative discourse'. A normative discourse is evaluative, not descriptive.

> There are less novel ways in which some interactive kinds differ from most indifferent kinds. Many of our sortings of people are evaluative. But surely not scientific sortings, sortings of medicine or the positive sciences? Yes, those too. Many of the kinds that have emerged in social sciences are kinds of deviance, typically of interest because it is undesirable for the person to be of that kind. Such social sciences aim at providing information to help people in trouble. Classifications evaluate who is troubling or in trouble. Hence they present value-laden kinds, things to do or not to do. Kinds of people to be or not to be. Partly because of implied values, people sorted under those kinds change or work back upon the kind (Hacking 1999: 130-131).

Hacking also points to the evaluative force of these interactive kinds. However, this is also only one feature of its normativity. The most important feature, as I suggest is the case with colonial discourse, is that it cannot be dispelled by object level evidence or by discussion of the political consequences of the discourse. Thus, the notion of interactive kinds is useful in some ways but misleading in others. It seems to draw attention away from the real problem in the case of the third class of concepts (like child abuse) where the nature of the discourse itself requires examination and not simply the category.

To return to the question of ‘communalism’, Cohn’s studies of administrative categories and their impact on the native population can be considered as a proposition that ‘communalism’ is an interactive kind of the first class. That is, it is the result of the interaction of a set of people with a new ‘legal’ status. It is certainly true that once nomenclature like ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ was instituted, certain kinds of behaviour is visible that responds to this category instituted by the state. So for instance, instead of local negotiations which decided whether cow slaughter would take place in a village during the *bakri-eid*, it was now a ‘minority right’ to slaughter cows and therefore, there was corresponding exercise of this right by the minority. Further, an almost insane rush for minority status and thereby a claim for minority benefits marks the early decades of the 20th century. Thus, it would be unreasonable to say that the category of ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ did not evoke a response from the Indian people. One may also say further that psychological consequences of understanding oneself as a ‘minority’ or a ‘majority’ may well be visible once the categories become entrenched in state and social science vocabulary[311]. However, the institution of categories does not correspond to the institution of concepts. In fact, this relationship itself is rendered absurd, as I show in my conclusion, by the transformation of concept into attribute.

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[311] This does not mean that the categories themselves are in any way more valid today than they were when they were instituted. They remain confusing as nomenclature and as political instruments in the context of India.

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