Encountering Violence in Hindu Universes:

Situating the Other on Vedic Horizons

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Abstract

A study of Hindu engagements with violence which have been structured by scriptural themes reveals that violence has been regulated, enacted, resisted, negated or denied in complex ways. Disputes based on Vedic orthodoxy were channelled, in classical India, through the mythical frameworks of gods clashing with demons, and later in the medieval centuries this template was extended to the Muslim foreigners who threatened the Brahmanical socio-religious orders. In the modern period, the electoral mechanisms of colonial modernity spurred Hindu anxieties about a weakened nation which would die out in the face of Muslim solidarity, and various Hindu organizations began to increasingly draw on motifs from the Vedas, *Bhagavad-gītā*, and other texts to speak of a martial Hindu nation. These two moments—the articulation of the boundaries of the robust Hindu nation and the projection of the Muslim as the enemy lurking at the gates—have been integral to the shaping of Hindu cultural nationalism by several key thinkers and political activists. Thus, the forms of violence associated with Hindu universes should be placed within their dynamic socio-historical contexts where Hindus have interpreted, engaged with, and acted on a range of scriptural texts both to generate violent solidarities and to speak of peace. A study of these phenomena alongside some Christian theological attempts to legitimize, valorize or transcend violence from within scriptural horizons points to the complex conceptual terrain encompassed by the conjunction in "religion and violence."

Keywords: Religious violence, Crusades, Vedas, *Purāṇas*, Vedānta, political Hinduism

A characteristic feature of several strands of Hindu modernity is the claim that Hindu life-worlds are steeped in pacifism, non-violence, and benevolence towards the religious other. From around the turn of the twentieth century, certain indigenous constructions of a Vedic golden age began to represent Hindus as inherently peace-loving individuals who were, however, compelled to engage in violent conflict to guard themselves against the depredations of the foreigners, whether they were Muslims, British colonialists, or Christian missionaries. The dichotomy between an intrinsically non-violent Hinduism, on the one hand, and Islam or Christianity, which are fundamentally antagonistic to socio-religious diversity, on the other hand, continues to structure several styles of Hindu polemical literature and political rhetoric in contemporary India. For a striking expression of this viewpoint, we may turn to Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar: "Hindusthan lived a life of unchallenged glory and power for thousands of years and spread its spiritual and cultural effulgence over vast areas of the globe […] Never has its flag waded towards military victory through the blood and tears of those races as it happened with Islam and Christianity when they spread to new countries. Its victory had always been moral and cultural." [1] However, as we will argue, these binary oppositions, which seek, in effect, to distinguish between a "spiritual Hinduism" which is sanitized from all contact with violence, and a "worldly Hinduism" which steps into warfare only because of external provocations, gloss over the complex dialectic between the quest for peace and the structures of violence in various premodern Hindu cultures. The Hindu epic narratives and the philosophical-soteriological traditions often agonize over the

[1] Golwalkar 2000, 161.

moral dilemmas of engagement in unavoidable forms of violence against the backdrop of the overarching value of non-violence.

We will explore some of the intersections between patterns of violent action and the attempts to categorically deny or reject violence in Hindu universes. We begin with some recent analyses of the nexus between "religion" and "violence," especially in the case of the medieval Crusades. While the crusades are precisely the kind of Christian-Muslim hostilities that some Hindu thinkers point to in support of their claim that "violence" and the "Semitic religions" are necessarily interlinked, our discussion will highlight the contingent associations between religious templates and political transformations in the generation of religious violence. We will then explore this theme of the interconnection between scriptural motifs and historical events in some classical and medieval Hindu contexts, and in two specific modern Hindu configurations, the Arya Samaj (established 1875) and the All-India Hindu Mahasabha (established 1915). The instances of violence associated with Hindu scriptural values and norms that we will discuss sometimes vary significantly, with the modernist vocabulary of electoral representation, census categories and lower caste political mobilization adding distinctive valences to the discourses of violence in the Samaj and the Mahasabha that were not present in premodern South Asia. However, we will highlight certain underlying continuities in the manner in which some texts from the Vedas, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the *Purāṇas* have been repeatedly invoked, in medieval and contemporary India, to direct violence against either the internal Others (such as the non-Vedic Buddhists and Jains) or the external Others (the Muslims and the Christians who are portrayed as foreign invaders). These scriptural narratives do not always categorically deny violence, but seek to regulate it towards specific worldly goals, which generates the moral dilemma of Arjuna on the eve of a righteous war (*dharma yuddha*) in the *Bhagavad-gītā*,

where he initially refuses to engage in fratricidal violence. Further, the motif of cosmic clashes between the gods and the anti-gods elaborated in various epic narratives is often appropriated by Hindu nationalist organizations to project ongoing Hindu-Muslim conflicts onto a mythic register. Our discussion of these complexities in Hindu socio-religious structures will indicate that Hindu-Muslim religious conflicts emerge at volatile points of intersection between, on the one hand, scriptural templates which seemingly demand certain kinds of violence, and, on the other hand, complex patterns of socio-historical transitions during which these templates are called upon to sustain oppositional identities against concrete historical rivals.

The Religious Cause in Violent Conflicts

One of the reasons why the relation between "religion" and "violence" remains an intensely contested matter is that it is usually not possible to pick out a specific religious theme, value, or narrative as the sole cause of violent conflicts. While the adherents of the world religions usually view these traditions as pacifistic horizons which promote harmony and reconciliation, historians and observers of these religions also highlight the various patterns of war and violence that have been associated with them. Mark Juergensmeyer, Margo Kitts and Michael Jerryson point out that this "disconnect" between the two perspectives "raises some profound questions: Is violence peripheral to the religious imagination or at its core? Is it religion that promotes violence or some other social or natural factor? Is religion even distinguishable from those factors?"[2] An additional complication is that because there are no "objective" definitions of violence which are accepted across the world's religious traditions, the wider the definition, the greater the implication of a certain religion with violence. While intentionally causing bodily harm to individuals could count as "violence," the term could

[2] Juergensmeyer, Kitts, and Jerryson 2013, 2.

also be extended, at least in the perception of outsiders, to the Jain practice of fasting to death, renunciatory practices of some Hindu ascetics or Catholic monks, and so on. The violence involved in revolutionary uprisings and massacres is very graphic, while the everyday violence of infant mortality, disease, and despair that destroys the socially marginalised with greater frequency is often invisible. Therefore, according to Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Phillipe Bourgois violence "defies easy categorization. It can be everything and nothing; legitimate or illegitimate; visible or invisible; necessary or useless; senseless and gratuitous or utterly rational and strategic."[3]

Given these wide definitional ranges, we will limit our discussion to some specific instances in Hindu universes where, as we will see, religious templates have shaped or transformed the nature of conflicts—by locating violence on transcendental horizons, by supplying institutional forms of mobilization, and by shaping individual and collective identities.[4] The cosmic visions of religious traditions can generate and intensify intra-group solidarities by appealing to scriptural texts such as the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, which contain warnings against the adversaries of God or individuals who are unfaithful to God. The Biblical narratives which portray peoples locked in patterns of conflict have, according to Regina Schwartz,[5] authorized intolerance against the other by appeal to the will of God. Thus, the portraits of a God who is ruthless, vindictive, and wrathful have been appropriated by diverse figures to defend their military struggles. For instance, Oliver Cromwell drew parallels between his own revolution and the Exodus, and between the Catholics in Ireland and the Canaanites, while some years later the Puritans in New England drew upon these biblical texts to present the native Indians as the Canaanites and the

[3] Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2014, 2.
[4] Cady and Simon 2007, 16.
[5] Schwartz 1997.

Amalekites.[6] However, as these examples also indicate, the Biblical visions have promoted and sustained conflicts by becoming enmeshed in a complex of socio-economic changes and political upheavals.

As Heather Gregg has pointed out, while scriptural passages which speak of violence directed at those who are not in the company of the faithful have existed for several centuries, individuals have resorted to violent conflict by appealing to these passages only in specific socio-political contexts, which have been shaped by numerous variables other than religious understandings. Religious groups turn to violence for a diversity of goals such as responding to real or perceived threats to the identity and the faith of the community, especially within contexts of rapid socio-political changes, fighting governments which are perceived to be corrupt, and even hastening the apocalypse and ushering in an era of millennial peace and prosperity. Therefore Gregg argues that "religiously motivated violence is the result of specific *interpretations* of a religion's beliefs and scriptures rather than the mere presence of specific passages in a tradition's holy books or doctrines."[7] She details four variables whose interplay produces 'religiously motivated violence': the socio-political contexts which produce scriptural interpretations which summon the faithful to take up arms in violent conflict; the religious leaders who can speak authoritatively and generate these interpretations; the followers who will answer the call to fight and willing to defend the faith; and the material, social, and technological resources which enable conflict to grow (Gregg 2014:31). The enmeshing between 'organization' and 'ideas' indicated here, as will see, was to play a crucial role also in the imaginations of some Hindus, elaborated through the print culture of late colonial India, of a Hindu nation besieged by the foreigners within their midst, the Muslims.

[6] Collins 2004, 20.
[7] Gregg 2014, 3.

Justifying Violence as Non-Violence in Premodern Hinduisms

While Biblical passages, which speak of the institution of the "people of God" and set them against the nations, have been appropriated by some figures as a rallying cry towards violent conflicts in their own historical times, other passages outline a vision of peace and plenitude under the sovereign God. The ambivalence towards violence across the Christian traditions over two millennia is perhaps even more intensely focused in some of the Vedic and post-Vedic texts, which, on the one hand, view the cosmic order as sacrificially produced and sustained by sacrificial rituals, and, on the other, seek to deny the violence of the sacrifice. As Joseph A. Magno points out, there are certain Hindu texts which "unequivocably condone" and others which "unequivocably condemn" violent acts.[8] The *Rg Veda* 1.162.21 already resorts to a euphemism in negating the violent killing in a sacrifice: the animal victim in the *aśvamedha* sacrifice is told that it does not really die nor is it truly harmed, but it goes on to the gods on pleasant paths.[9] The *Brāhmaṇas*, which are commentaries on the Vedic rituals, display a clear ambivalence towards sacrifice, and enjoin priests to take the sacrificial victim outside the altar space when it is killed, and to kill it by suffocating it to muffle its cries. The animal is to be killed by a specially appointed priest, the Śamitṛ, after the sacrificer and the other priests have turned away from the victim. The sacrificer, in turning away from the animal and the Śamitṛ, says: "You do not really die here, you are not hurt, you are going to the gods along paths easy to traverse …"[10] Referring to this unease relating to the slaughter of animals in the Vedic rituals, Brian Smith and Wendy Doniger note: "The reluctance to face the horrific reality of human beings profanely killing animals in the sacred ritual leads the Brahmins to imagine that they are operating in the morally pure universe of the divine: they do not 'kill' like humans but, like the gods, they make the victim 'acquiesce' in its own death

[8] Magno 1988, 79.
[9] Vidal, Tarabout and Meyer 2003, 15-16.
[10] Houben 1999, 118.

or 'make it pass away'."[11] Later, with the *Upaniṣads*, the individual's inner self (*ātman*) is posited as the site of the true sacrifice, into which are offered the mental functions which are homologized with the material sacrificial elements.

The anti-ritualism of the *Upaniṣads* provided the context where the earlier Vedic anxieties about sacrificial violence led to substitutionary vegetable offerings and the emergence of the ethic of non-violence.[12] However, while the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Upaniṣads* display a deep ambivalence about sacrificial violence, and the Sāṁkhya and the Yoga texts begin to increasingly emphasize non-harm (*ahiṃsā*), leading exegetes of the Mīmāṃsā school such as Kumārila (*c.*700 CE) defend ritual violence against the charge that Vedic rituals are impure because of their association with the infliction of harm. Kumārila responds that the general rule about not harming others is to be set aside in the case of sacrifices which are specifically enjoined by the Vedic scriptures.[13] The Vedāntic theologian Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE) too, while commenting on *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.31—"For a Kṣatriya [ruler] there is no greater good than a righteous war"—draws on the textual strategy of the *Brāhmaṇas* to negate the violence of the war. He notes that in the Agnīṣomīya ritual no injury (*hiṃsā*) is caused to the animal which is immolated, for the sacrificial victim will attain heaven with an auspicious body. Just as the lancing and the operations of a surgeon are directed at curing the patient, the killing of the animal too is for its own protection.[14]

The attempts of the Vedic traditions to respond to the Buddhist and Jain emphases on non-violence (*ahiṃsā*) only accentuated the contrast, especially in the epics such as the *Mahābhārata*, between the *dharmic* duty of rulers to engage in necessary violence and the goal of spiritual liberation through the complete renunciation of worldly violence. The epics suggest that, provided kingly force is employed for the preservation of *dharmic* order and the

[11] Smith and Doniger 1989, 209.
[12] Pennington 2012, 24-25.
[13] Houben 1999, 145.
[14] Sampatkumaran 1985, 38-39.

protection of the innocent, the violence involved in the fulfillment of the king's caste duty is legitimate. Through the exercise of royal power, the king provides the canopy under which ascetics and Brahmins may follow the path of non-violence, so that "[o]nly by means of Kshatriya violence is the renouncer's nonviolence even possible." [15] However, somewhat paradoxically, the ascetic, precisely by renouncing the Vedic world and entering into a space of absolute non-violence, gains a spiritual autonomy which can generate the power to oppose or ally with kings: "The ascetic then becomes simultaneously representative of both 'non-violence' and limitless power, and a central and recurrent figure in all representations pertaining to violence and non-violence …" [16] Thus, both kings and ascetics are often depicted in their hagiographies as engaged with their opponents through diverse modes of conflict, opposition, and co-option to defend their own religious standpoints.

The medieval hagiography of Śaṁkara, the *Śaṃkaradigvijaya* describes how he reduced to ashes with his yogic power several tantric Kāpālika ascetics who had attacked his patron, King Sudhanvan.[17] According to some legends, the Śaiva saint Appar was initially a Jain, but after his miraculous conversion to Śaivism, he was subjected to various kinds of punishments by Mahendravarman I (580–630) of Kanchi. He survived, and the king thereafter himself became a Śaivite, destroyed the Jain monastery, and built a Śiva temple.[18] The relations between Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites too were sometimes marked by intense hostilities and the maintenance of social distance. Jan Gonda[19] argues that Vaiṣṇavites were often "passively intolerant" in their social exchanges with the Śaivites—that is, they did not seek to actively harm Śaivites while they avoided their contact which was viewed as ritually polluting. Vaiṣṇavites were to be devoted to only one God (*ekāntin*), and worship no other

[15] Pennington 2012, 26.
[16] Vidal, Tarabour and Meyer 2003, 17.
[17] Tapasyanand 1986, 167.
[18] Narayanan and Veluthat 2000, 392.
[19] Gonda 1970, 93.

deities such as Śiva, Durga, and others as equal to Viṣṇu. Śaivite texts, in turn, sometimes consign to hellish punishment individuals who will not give the highest worship to Śiva. Further, across the boundaries of Vedic orthodoxy, Hindus and Jains have sometimes borrowed from one another idioms, notions, and images through complex strategies of accommodation and appropriations. While the Jain fordmakers (*tīrthaṅkaras*) are sometimes related to Hindu gods, and the Jain Somadeva (*c.*1000 CE) allowed Jains to accept regional customs which did not directly negate the basic teachings of Jainism, Hindus sometimes incorporated the first fordmaker, Rishabha, as a minor incarnation (*avatāra*) of Viṣṇu. Notwithstanding these overlaps, Jain texts often sharply challenged the Brahmanical Hindu claims about the transcendental origin of the Vedas, arguing that the view that these scriptures did not have a human author could not be defended. The Jain scriptures, on the other hand, because they had been conveyed by the omniscient *tīrthaṅkara*, were said to be superior to the Vedas.[20]

Kings, too, are presented as involved in these conflicts over Vedic orthodoxy because they are viewed as divine *avatāras* who have appeared to rid the world of enemy demons through violent wars. The mythic paradigm of the *Purāṇas* where gods are threatened by the anti-gods (*asuras*) is employed by some medieval poets to identify historical enemies or outsiders (*mleccha*), such as the Hun invaders or Muslims, with demoniac powers. The *Vikramānkābhyudaya* is set against the historical backdrop of the clashes between the Chalukya and the Rashtrakuta dynasties in peninsular India (*c.*1200 CE), and applies this paradigm to these two Hindu kingdoms. The text describes Viṣṇu's promise to the gods, in the style of the *Purāṇas*, that he will be born on earth to rid it of the demonic Rashtrakutas and restore Vedic order. Later, on Śiva's request, Viṣṇu is born again as Vikramaditya VI,

[20] Dundas 1992, 200-203.

who, it is predicted, will destroy the demons of the Rashtrakutas and bring in an era of righteousness and prosperity.

The same paradigm is used also in some *Purāṇas* to depict non-Vedic beliefs and practices, such as Buddhism and Jainism; the practitioners of these non-Vedic systems are, in fact, demons who have been misled by false views preached to them by the gods.[21] The scriptural trope of demonic powers, which are opposed to the Vedic socio-religious order, appears in several Sanskrit and Telugu inscriptions from medieval Andhra Pradesh in southern India. The Vilasa Grant of Prolaya Nayaka, written in Sanskrit, and issued between 1325 and 1350 CE, describes how with the defeat of Prataparudra, a ruler of the Kakatiya dynasty, by the lord of the Turks, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq, the "pitch darkness of the Turks enveloped the world." After the righteous Prataparudra was vanquished, Brahmin priests were forced to abandon their ritual activities, their villages were confiscated, the temples were desecrated, and so on, by the "demon-like" soldiers. While these descriptions have sometimes been taken as evidences of actual Muslim brutalities, CynthiaTalbot argues that we should read them as reflecting the stylized predictions of the morally degenerate Kali age in the *Purāṇas*, which outline socio-moral decline in terms of the dissolution of the ritual privileges of the Brahmin priests.[22] The inscription goes on to note that the Muslim advance was halted by Prolaya Nayaka, who appeared as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, and restored *dharma* by re-establishing the villages of the Brahmins, reinstalling Vedic sacrifices, and taking only the lawful portions of the cultivators' crops. According to Talbot, these religious invocations are part of the attempt of Nayaka, who had stepped into the power vacuum produced by the collapse of the Kakatiyas, to highlight the demoniac ways of the Muslims and to present himself as the legitimate king who would uphold the Brahmanical order.[23]

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[21] Granoff 1984, 291--295
[22] Talbot 1995, 696-697.
[23] Talbot 1995, 703.

The historical and legendary accounts that we have discussed indicate the complex intermeshing between the spiritual values of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), the quest for liberation (*mokṣa*), and the embodied power in historical contexts ridden with multiple forms of ritual, kingly and military violence. Hindu ascetics were themselves sometimes engaged in worldly violence. Particularly in late medieval India, at a time of the dissolution of imperial authority, some groups were organized into regiments (*akhāṛā*) to protect the lands of temples and monasteries. There are accounts of clashes between Vaiṣṇavite ascetics (*bairāgīs*) and Śaivite Daśanāmī ascetics (*nāgas*), primarily over collection of dues from pilgrims, and rights of precedence at religious fairs such as the Kumbh mela.[24] The *nāga* army of the Śaivite ascetic Anupgiri Gosain is said to have reached at one point the figure of 30,000 ascetics, who were armed with tridents, swords, iron discs, muskets, and rockets.[25] Therefore, pointing out that western observers are often surprised to see Hindus engaged in violent conflict in India, Doniger argues: "[I]t is what Hindus have said, and what they have seemed to believe, rather than what they have done, that had led to the European and American expectation of Hindu tolerance."[26] While quite often the Indic traditions have been viewed, both by Hindus themselves and by western observers, through the lens of Gandhian non-violence, Gandhi himself contended that a violent strand was deeply embedded in Indian cultures, including the narratives of the *Mahābhārata*, the *Bhagavad-gītā*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa.*[27] As we will see, the modernist appropriations of the violent aspects of traditional Hindu scriptural and mythic themes were integral to the development of certain types of militant Hindu nationalism.

Hindu Selves and the Muslim Other

The socio-political landscapes of colonial India were marked by the emergence of various

[24] Lorenzen 1978, 70.
[25] Gier 2014, xvi.
[26] Doniger 2003, 111.
[27] Parekh 1989, 48.

Hindu groups which attempted to interweave western ideas, institutions, and norms with classical Vedic formulations, resulting in hybridized configurations with varying attitudes towards violence. The Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1829, was for the most part involved in matters of Hindu social reform and the establishment of Vedāntic Hindu forms of worship in response to the critiques of "Hindu idolatry" levelled by Christian missionaries.[28] While the theme of national identity, and disputes relating to whether such identity would be elaborated with vocabulary inflected by Hindu texts and symbols, do not figure prominently in the lectures and publications of Brahmo leaders, the anti-colonial protests after the partition of Bengal in 1905 were structured by a religious nationalism that was informed by the vision of the emerging nation as an incarnation of the goddess Kāli. In the wake of these agitations, volunteer brigades, gymnasiums, and nationalist societies were organized which were directed at physical training, nationalist indoctrination, and home rule (*svadeśī*) propaganda activities, and one of these nationalist societies, the *Anuśīlan Samiti*, established the *Jugāntar*, a vernacular newspaper which preached revolutionary terrorism.

For the editors of the *Jugāntar*, the destructive aspect of Kāli symbolized the violence that was necessary for the political independence of the nation, which was to be effected through the deeds of the revolutionaries, viewed as agents in the cosmic play of the divine mother. The Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had invoked Kāli as a symbol of the motherland, and in his novel *Ānandamath* (1881–82) he tried to appropriate the Hindu tradition of monasticism (*sannyāsa*) as a form of world-renunciation that would be dedicated to the service of the nation. Chatterjee believed that the resources for responding to western notions of liberty, polity, culture and so on had to be supplied by the Sanskritic tradition, which raises the issue of whether segments of the population—such as women, Muslims, Christians, and so on—who did not have access to this tradition were to be excluded from

[28] Kopf 1979.

this process of forming self-identities against the backdrop of the empire. For instance, the slogan *Vande Mātaram* ("I revere the Mother"), which was the rallying cry of the nationalist struggles, could also become a divisive point during Hindu–Muslim riots.[29]

Elsewhere, in the Punjab, the Arya Samaj, founded in 1875 by Swami Dayananda Sarasvati, became increasingly entangled, by the turn of the century, in disputes relating to the colonial categories of "religion" and "politics," and also the decennial census classifications which provided figures for the numbers of "Hindus" and "Muslims" in British India. The rhetorical idioms directed by Arya Samajists against Muslims through their polemical literature was part of their attempts to build a consolidated Hindu community in the face of the projected Muslim threat. After asserting that the Arya Samaj believes in the doctrine of non-violence, the *Arya Jagat* noted in an article on 26 September, 1924: "To refrain from punishing malignant enemies and allow tyrants to do whatever they like is, however, tantamount to committing serious violence."[30] The exclusionary forms of Hindu identity developed by the Samaj would be rejected by Gandhi, who highlighted Hindu-Muslim unity as an integral aspect of the moral and political revival of India. Gandhi developed, according to Judith M. Brown, a "complex and nuanced attitude" to violence—for instance, holding violent resistance to be superior to cowardice in extreme situations.[31] Against Hindu nationalists such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, he believed that the message of the *Bhagavad-gītā* was not a literal call to arms for achieving good, but rather an allegory of the clash between good and evil in the human heart. At the same time, *ahiṃsā* was not simply the avoidance of harm to others but was "a positive state of love, of doing good even to the evil-doer. But it does not mean helping the evil-doer to continue the wrong or tolerating it by passive acquiescence—on the contrary, love, the active

[29] Lipner 2008.
[30] Thursby 1975, 170.
[31] Brown 2011, 48-49.

state of ahimsa, requires you to resist the wrong-doer by disassociating yourself from him even though it may offend him or injure him physically."[32] Gandhi's critics, in contrast, sometimes invoked the *Bhagavad-gītā*'s template for a righteous war and argued for a more militant stance towards Muslims and British colonialists. As his assassin Nathuram Godse was to state later: "I could never conceive that an armed resistance to the aggressor is unjust. I will consider it a religious and moral duty to resist and if possible overpower such an enemy by the use of force … In the *Mahābhārata*, Arjuna had to fight and slay quite a number of his friends and relations …"[33]

Starting in 1907, the Arya Samaj came under suspicion for being involved in seditious agitation, and in a certain court case in 1908, the eleventh chapter of Dayanand's foundational text, *Satyarth Prakash,* was declared by the magistrate as objectionable literature. The Arya response *The Arya Samaj and its Detractors: A Vindication*, which challenged the claim of Mr A. Grey in the Patiala Case, December 1909–January 1910, that the Arya Samaj was a political organization fomenting seditious revolution against the government, is an early example of how Muslims are positioned vis-à-vis Hindus by employing militant imageries. The text states that before the arrival of Dayananda, the Hindu world had forgotten the pure wisdom of the Vedic scriptures, which had become encrusted with "Puranic debris and Tantric filth."[34] Dayananda consecrated his life to the recovery of Vedic wisdom all over the globe, and he valiantly fought against the forces of unrighteousness, superstition, and servile reverence for clerical authority. He vanquished his opponents with his incisive logic, piercing irony, profound learning in the Vedas, fiery eloquence, and "above all his infinite pity for his suffering fellowmen…" Emphasising that his mission was purely religious, the authors described his titanic struggle to assault and

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[32] Gandhi 1965, 195.
[33] Jaffrelot 2003, 312.
[34] Rama and Deva 1910, 2.

overcome the entrenched powers of conservatism: "Citadel after citadel was captured by frontal attacks. He, then, marched triumphantly to the centre of orthodoxy, surrounded the walls of the fortress of priestly supremacy, and peremptorily and insistently demanded surrendered. The battle thickened. He bore the brunt all alone."[35] The authors emphasized that the Arya Samaj is a universal Church which preaches the Vedas revealed to all humanity, and with a veiled barb at Christians and Muslims notes that it has no references to "any particular favoured or to the matrimonial squabbles and connubial felicity of a prophet."[36]

Dayanand himself, in contrast to the prophet Muhammad, is described as an exemplar of forbearance who personified divine forgiveness: "He always met taunts, curses, anathemas and imprecations, with blessings, benedictions, good wishes and loving thoughts, and frowns by sweet smiles. Such was the man whom the followers of Mohomed … charge with intolerance."[37] Turning the tables on Christianity, the authors declare that if the Arya Samaj is to be regarded as seditious because its books are supposed to preach intolerance, the Christian Church in India too should be suppressed since numerous Biblical passages speak of the fury of God against the idols of other nations. More pointedly, they argue that Christian missionaries, who complain about the intolerance of the Arya Samajists, should remember that "if Dayananda was intolerant because he thundered against the priest craft of all sects, Luther was a hundred times more so because he not only condemned evils and evil-doers but foully and in some cases without any intellectual warrant and moral justification abused his adversaries in debate."[38] As a matter of fact, the ancient Vedic Aryas "were the most tolerant of peoples in History—even more tolerant than Christians. While England boasts of being the

[35] Rama and Deva 1910, 6.
[36] Rama and Deva 1910, 30.
[37] Rama and Deva 1910, 97-98.
[38] Rama and Deva 1910, 139.

centre of religious freedom, toleration is but a growth of yesterday. The Test Act was abolished only in 1828 and the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed in 1829."[39]

Around the time of these legal disputes over the "political" nature of the Arya Samaj, Acharya Ramdev, who was a professor of history at its school (Gurukul) at Kangri, wrote a two-volume history of India (*Bhāratvarṣ kā itihās*). The Gurukul was set up in 1902 as an educational institution which would seek to revive Sanskrit, promote the use of *ārya bhāṣā* (Sanskritized Hindi), and rewrite the history of the ancient land. The volumes, published between 1910 and 1914, were based on his lecture notes at the school, and argue that Vedic civilization was the basis for the higher cultures of the world, including the Chinese, Persian, Greek, Roman, and Celtic. By studying the history of the ancient Aryan people, Indians would be filled with a national pride (*jātīya abhimān*) at the glorious deeds of their ancestors, while the knowledge of their faults would help Indians to move more surely on the path of progress. He seeks to counter the Orientalist argument that ancient Indians did not have a historical consciousness, and by citing evidence from the Vedas, *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, and the Kashmiri narrative *Rājataraṅgiṇi*, replies that ancient Indians did have a historical science (*aitihāsik vijñān*) and, in fact, the methods of modern historical writing were known to Aryan historians. However, the reason why Hindus do not have a chronological account of their great deeds is because many books with historical accounts had been destroyed by the bigoted Muslim invaders.[40] Countering another western charge that Indians had never been united before British rule, he argues that the land of Bharat had already attained a "high degree of political development" at the time of the *Mahābhārata* (which is dated by him at 5000 BCE). King Yudhisthir was the ruler of the entire Bharat, and his empire stretched from the Hindukush mountains in the north to Cape Comorin in the south. Further, the land was governed in accordance with democratic principles; as early as the time of the *Brāhmaṇas*

[39] Rama and Deva 1910, 92-93.
[40] Fischer-Tine 2003, 118.

(which are dated at 10,000 BCE), individuals rose to the position of the king only if they were religious (*dhārmik*) and deeply knowledgeable in the field of politics. The king was himself subject to Vedic rules, and had to discuss new laws in a parliament (*sabhā bhavan*) with representatives from all groups of people.[41]

The Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Nation

These two Arya Samaj themes—the Muslim as the hostile Other and the narrative of a Vedic golden age ruled by egalitarian principles—were actively developed by a diverse set of institutions which were connected to the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. The Punjab Hindu Sabha was established in 1909 by prominent figures from the Arya Samaj such as Lala Lajpat Rai, Lal Chand and others, to unify the Hindus and to generate pride in the ancient Vedic civilization. At a conference which was organized in October 1909 with the mission of Hindu "consolidation and homogenisation," several leaders voiced the anxiety that the Hindus were undergoing a significant numerical decline relative to the Muslims. As Lal Chand noted: "Numbers carry great weight in this age and help materially in deciding the fate of any struggle."[42] The leaders emphasized the need for consensus across the Hindu community, which had to be organized to defend itself against the Muslim League and also the British government which was perceived as hostile to its interests. They criticized the Indian National Congress for not supporting "Hindu interests," and called for a "Hindu-centred politics." The conference passed various resolutions regarding the promotion of Sanskrit and Hindi, protection of the cow, development of Ayurvedic medicine, and so on. The anxiety relating to the declining numbers of the Hindus was dramatically portrayed in a series of letters that Lal Chand published around this time in the *Punjabee*, where he articulated the fear that Hindus were being reduced to an isolated group who could turn neither to the British

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[41] Fischer-Tine 2003, 121-123.
[42] Bapu 2013, 18.

government nor to the Congress which was indifferent to Hindu issues: "The Hindus have no outside friends and sympathisers to look after and press their claims. Inside India they are helpless between the police and repressive measures, even if they give utterance to their grievances."[43] While he was aware that his promotion of Hindu interests was critiqued by his opponents as "sectarianism," Lal Chand argued that this was "the very breath of life, viz., that a Hindu should not only believe but make it part and parcel of his organism, of his life and of his conduct, that he is a Hindu first and an Indian after."[44]

These anxieties would later be expressed more vehemently by the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, which was set up in the United Provinces in 1915, and later relaunched in 1923, with the goal of Hindu organization (*saṅgathan*) against the perceived threats of the Muslim other. The Morley-Minto reforms in 1909 had established separate electorates in the provincial councils for Muslims, and within this legal-political framework, the Mahasabha sought to consolidate Hindu identity and regenerate Hindu society. The communitarian identity that it sought to mobilize involved the promotion of the Hindi language (as the cultivated speech of the "Hindus") instead of Persian-Urdu, and the protection of the cow. Starting from Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, the president of the Mahasabha between 1927 and 1933, leaders of the organization began to directly oppose the Congress, which they claimed could not stand up for Hindu rights or promote Hindu unity.

Expressing the anxiety about declining Hindu numbers, Moonje declared: "Democracy means a government which is based on the counting of heads. In India … the Moslem heads and the Christian heads are yearly increasing in numbers and are hopefully aspiring to swallow up the majority community of the Hindus or to reduce it to a minority community."[45] He lamented that while Hindus were divided into "water-tight compartments"

[43] Jones 1976, 285.
[44] Thursby 1975, 160.
[45] Bapu 2013, 52.

of numerous castes, which had led to their disintegration, Muslims were well-organized members of "one organic community," and were growing in "numbers, strength, material welfare and solidarity."[46] The next president, Bhai Paramanand, called for a Hindu nation that would be based on "one language, one religion, and one culture," and for the Mahasabha to become a political party that would capture seats in the legislative assembly and councils. Under the leadership of Savarkar, starting from 1937, the Mahasabha began to pursue even more actively the program of establishing a Hindu nation (*rashtra*) by contesting the Congress in the political arena. The threat of the Indian Muslims, who had the support of non-Indian Muslim nations, looms large in Savarkar's speeches. According to the speeches, they were a powerful minority, and their numbers were increasing with every successive census report. They were confident that should the British be defeated in a world war, they could call upon neighboring non-Indian Muslim powers to invade India, and wrest it from British control and re-establish Muslim rule.[47] The Indian Muslim was "often found to cherish an extra-territorial allegiance, is moved more by events in Palestine than what concerns India as a Nation, worries himself more about the well-being of the Arabs than the well-being of his Hindu neighbours and countrymen in India."[48] Declaring the Mahasabha to be primarily not a religious organization (Hindu Dharma Sabha) but a political-national organization (Hindu Rashtra Sabha), he called for all Hindu organizations to unite under its banner to fight the "pseudo-nationalists [Congress] and Muslims."[49]

Savarkar rejected the principle of territorial nationalism promoted by the Indian National Congress, on the grounds that a common territory or habitat could not weld together people into a nation, unless they shared religious, racial, cultural, linguistic, and historical affinities. Therefore, the Mahasabha stood for the national regeneration of the Hindu people,

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[46] Bapu 2013, 49.
[47] Savarkar 1992, 28.
[48] Savarkar 1992, 8.
[49] Bapu 2013, 40-41.

which is possible only with their political independence (*svarājya*), which is not merely their territorial independence but also the establishment of their cultural identity. Savarkar singled out, in particular, the Congress notion of Hindu-Muslim unity as a "will-o-the-wisp," and stated that it was a mistake on the part of some Hindus to go meekly begging to the anti-national and fanatical Muslims to join in a common cause. Nevertheless, Hindus were willing to grant special protections for Muslims provided they did not infringe on the civil and religious liberties of other communities. However, knowing the anti-India designs of the pan-Islamic movement, Hindus would not trust them any longer with "blank cheques," but would fight for their Hindu identity: "We are not out to fight with England only to find a change of masters but we Hindus aim to be masters in our own house. A Swarajya that could only be had at the humiliation and cost of Hindutva itself is for us Hindus as good as suicide." Therefore, the true formula for Hindu-Muslim unity should be: "If you join us, we will fight with you for national freedom; if you don't, without you; and if you oppose us, in spite of you."[50]

Savarkar and the Hindu Self

The figure of the hostile Muslim is crystallized in Savarkar's *Hindutva*, which is widely regarded as the pivotal text in the consolidation of Hindu nationalism. Savarkar clearly distinguishes between the religious and the doctrinal aspects of Hinduism, on the one hand, and *Hindutva*, on the other, where the former is only a part of the latter, which "embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race."[51] The key moment in Savarkar's narrative is the day that Sindhusthan (Hindustan), a land of peace and plenty, was overrun by Mohammad of Gazni, for on that day "the conflict of life and death began. Nothing makes Self conscious of itself so much as a conflict with non-self. Nothing

[50] Savarkar 1992, 12-13.
[51] Savarkar 1928, 3-4.

can weld peoples into a nation and nations into a state as the pressure of a common foe. Hatred separates as well as unites."[52] The long centuries of conflicts with Arabs, Persians, Pathans, Baluchis, Tartars, Turks, and Mughals welded the Hindus into a nation under the banner of *Hindutva*. Whether they were Aryans or non-Aryans, Brahmans or untouchables, they "all suffered as Hindus and triumphed as Hindus." All these Hindus, of different peoples, sects, and creeds, who inhabited the land between the Indus and the Indian Ocean were "individualised into a single Being."[53]

More specifically, Hindus are a people who dwell in their fatherland (*pitribhu*) of Hindustan, and are bound by the ties of a common blood because they are descended from the Vedic fathers. For every Hindu the land of Bharat, of Hindustan, is not only a fatherland but also a holy land (*punyabhu*). Thus Hindus are not only a nation (*rashtra*) but also a race with a common origin (*jati*). However, these two characteristics also apply to the majority of Indian Muslims who, if they are "free from the prejudices born of ignorance," are able to love Hindustan as their fatherland, and who, because they have been recently converted to Islam, have inherited Hindu blood. Yet, they cannot be called true Hindus because they do not pay homage to the common culture (*sanskriti*) inherited from Vedic times and preserved through Sanskrit.[54] Therefore, although Savarkar admits that for some Indian Muslims and Indian Christians, Bharat is indeed a fatherland, he claims that they do not view it as a holy land, since theirs is Arabia or Palestine. Their "love is divided," since they set their distant holy lands above the fatherland of Bharat.[55] While Hindus are indeed divided into numerous castes, these have arisen from intermarriage across the four *varṇas* of ancient Vedic society, and it is the same blood that flows through a Brahman as well as an untouchable. Whether they are Aryans or non-Aryans, monists, pantheists, or atheists, Hindus feel that the "same

[52] Savarkar 1928, 42-43.
[53] Savarkar 1928, 45.
[54] Savarkar 1928, 91-92.
[55] Savarkar 1928, 113.

ancient blood that coursed through the veins of Ram and Krishna, Buddha and Mahavir, Nanak and Caitanya, Basava and Madhava, of Rohidas and Tiruvelluvar courses throughout Hindudom from vein to vein, pulsates from heart to heart."[56]

The unity of Hindudom was clearly displayed, according to Savarkar, during the civil resistance movement of the Mahasabha against the "anti-Hindu" policies of the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1939. He characterized this movement as a "veritable crusade," a religious war of righteousness (*dharma yuddha*) which had brought together under one banner Hindus from different parts of the country—whether they were rich or poor, Arya Samajists, Jains, Sikhs, and so on. Savarkar argued that the fact that around fifteen thousand civil resisters were mobilized at the first blare of the trumpet demonstrates that the movement for Hindu organization should not be treated lightly: "These fifteen thousand Hindu Sangathanists constituted a force superior to those English or German forces who are now fighting in Europe for their respective Nations in moral courage and had it not been only a Civil Resistance Movement and had we been in a position to face our opponents' bayonet for bayonet and rifle for rifle, chances are they would have proved superior to them in an armed resistance too." [57] Savarkar had highlighted this theme of a religious war also in his presidential address at the 20th Session of the Mahasabha in 1938, where he noted that in the Muslim princely states such as Hyderabad, Bhopal, and others, the religious persecution that had been targeted at Hindus was reminiscent of the days of the Muslim rulers such as Aurangzeb.

While various atrocities are being committed on Hindus across the country, the Congress Party, which holds on to its "pseudo-nationalism," condones these violent acts by claiming that there is nothing anti-Hindu about them for they can be explained in terms of the socio-economic deprivation of its perpetrators. Meanwhile, the Muslim League intends to

[56] Savarkar 1928, 89.
[57] Savarkar, 1992, 39.

split India into a Muslim Federation and a Hindu Federation, and invite alien Muslim powers to invade the latter: "Such is the present state of the Hindus in Hindusthan, their own land!"[58]

Hindu Nationalism and Gandhian Non-Violence

The Hindu Mahasabha viewed Hindu masculinity—expressed through the physical strength of a vigorous and strong body—as the basis for the regeneration of a strong Hindu nation. The masculine power of Hindus would regenerate a virile, martial, and unified community, and would avenge the humiliations that the Hindu nation had suffered under the British. Medieval figures such as Maharana Pratap, Shivaji, and others, who had valiantly fought against the Mughals were reclaimed as exemplars of a militant nation based on self-rule (*svarāj*) and political unity. Several leaders of the Mahasabha called for the establishment of wrestling gymnasiums (*akhāṛā*), where, to counter the British charge that Hindus were physically weak and effeminate, the manliness of the Hindus would be cultivated through fitness training programs. For instance, at the 1923 Session of the Mahasabha, M.M. Malviya urged the construction of a temple to the god Hanuman and an *akhāṛā* in every village and urban quarter of the country. Since the weak, pacific, and cowardly Hindus had been overrun by the aggressive and violent Muslims, B.S. Moonje called for the reinstallation of the Vedic practice of animal sacrifice so that Hindus would become hardened to the sight of blood and killing.[59] He claimed that violence to defend one's rights is not to be condemned, and admitted that he "liked [d] the Muslims for the virile vigilance with which they protect their racial interests … which, alas, is visibly lacking in the present-day Hindu race."[60] The Mahasabha pursued several militarization drives, starting from the late 1930s, to set up militias which would protect the nation from internal and external threats, and in particular

[58] Savarkar 1992, 17-18.
[59] Bapu 2013, 83-85.
[60] Jaffrelot 2003, 306.

defend the Hindus from the threat of an Islamic invasion if the British were to be defeated in the Second World War. The Ram Sena (Army of Ram) was set up in March 1940, with Moonje as the president.

Reinforcing this theme of Hindu feebleness, one of Savarkar's specific critiques of Gandhi was Hindus had become weakened by adopting his teaching of non-violence, precisely at a historical conjuncture when Hindu militarization in the face of the Muslim threat was imperative. While Muslims, who didn't care for Gandhi's non-violence, have gained numerical superiority in the army and the armed police, the martial instinct of Hindus has been diluted by the adoption of non-violence.[61] He condemned the doctrine of absolute non-violence which would reject all armed resistance as impracticable as well as immoral. The Sabha instead accepted, he argued, the virtue of relative non-violence, that is, non-violence in all circumstances except when armed resistance to aggression is justifiable as well as imperative: "To save a saint from being murdered outright by a violent and armed sinner, Ahimsa itself requires that the sinner should be killed there and then if that act alone could save the life of the saint."[62] At the 24th Session of the Mahasabha in 1942, Savarkar noted because of the Gandhian claim that the true spiritual warrior was the spinner of homemade cloth, Hindus had largely refused to join the Army, so that the percentage of Muslims in the Army had risen to 62 %. However, after the British government had opened up the Army, Navy, and the Air Forces to Hindus, as part of the war effort, the Sabha had generated military enthusiasm among Hindus, and sent thousands of them to the military forces, with the result that this figure has come down to 32 %.[63]

Violence and Mythic Time

[61] Savarkar 1992, 86.
[62] Savarkar 1992, 83-84.
[63] Savarkar 1992, 125.

According to Mark uergensmeyer, religions seek to establish an "ultimate order" against the "ultimate disorder" of death, and this clash between order and chaos is symbolically represented in terms of sacrifices and divine power. Through these images, the disorder of violence is conceptually tamed and peace is restored; thus Christ's violent death opened the way to redemption for his followers, and the two-edged sword in Sikhism reminds the Sikh of the battle between belief and unbelief within the soul. However, in periods of natural disasters and political threats, these images of cosmic violence, which represent the ritual domestication of violence, can become correlated with concrete socio-historical threats and anxieties, where groups such as westerners, European colonialists, ethnic rivals, and others are identified as the evil and disorderly others. The imagery of cosmic warfare is then employed by leaders of revolutionary situations to give moral justification to their violent acts.[64] This intertwining between sacred history and secular temporality is evident in the popular histories of the first crusade constructed by three twelfth-century monks, Robert the Monk, Guibert of Nogent, and Baldric of Bourgueil, who encapsulated the event within providential history, by claiming that it was Christ who had inspired and sustained the crusaders through a miraculous intervention in their military victories. Further, they saw the crusade as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies: through their exegeses of prophetic passages in the Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Zacharias and elsewhere, they argued that scripture had foretold the siege of Jerusalem and had also indicated that Jerusalem would be rebuilt by foreigners. As Riley-Smith notes: "It is not hard to imagine the shock caused by a realization that passages in scripture which had always been thought to have been susceptible only to allegorical interpretation were suddenly being literally fulfilled."[65]

Our discussion has highlighted that diverse Hindu texts too have been continuously re-imagined in specific socio-historical conjunctures to construct the otherness of those who

[64] Juergensmeyer 1993, 163.
[65] Riley-Smith 1991, 143.

are perceived as historical opponents, whether non-Vedic Buddhists in classical India, the foreign Muslim invaders in medieval India, or the British colonialists. The theme of a Vedic India which had suffered a decline and whose descendants had lost their inner strength began to appear from around the turn of the twentieth century. Some Hindu figures, in response, elaborated a binary contrast between a "materialistic West" and a "spiritual East," according to which the Hindus had remained spiritually sovereign even in their colonial subjugation by "masculine" Western powers. These gendered constructs of the "manly Englishman" and the "effeminate Bengali" emerged from the intersections of the multiple axes of race, religion, and sexuality as British administrators, male Indian nationalists, Englishwomen, and Indian women responded to the various tensions and anxieties thrown up by contemporary social and political currents in late nineteenth century Bengal.[66] Thus, one of the most important formulators of this distinction, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) argued: "Let others talk of politics, of the glory of acquisition of immense wealth poured in by trade, of the power and spread of commercialism, of the glorious fountain of physical liberty; but these the Hindu mind does not understand and does not want to understand. Touch him on spirituality, on religion, on God, on the soul, on the infinite, on spiritual freedom, and I assure you, the lowest peasant in India is better informed on these subjects than many a so-called philosopher in other lands. I have said … that we have yet something to teach to the world."[67] At the same time, he acknowledged that the Hindus have become weakened, so that what they needed was not immersion in spirituality but recovery of physical strength: "First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of

[66] Sinha 1995, 48.
[67] Vivekananda 1992, Vol III, 148.

the Gita. These are bold words, but I have to say them, for I love you … You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger."[68]

The themes of the recovery of Hindu strength would later be rearticulated more vehemently with idioms and metaphors drawn from various scriptural texts. From 1911 the traditional Ramlila procession during the Hindu festival of Dusshera in areas such as Benares and Mathura in northern India began to combine the mythic depictions of Ram slaying the demon Ravana with revolutionary figures from recent times such as the Queen of Jhansi, Aurobindo Ghose, and Bal Gangadhar Tilak. The provincial administration was particularly alarmed by the report that during a certain procession, a figure of the Queen rode "on horseback with a British soldier transfixed on her spear."[69] Similar fusions of religious archetypes and nationalist messages appear in the "political Vedanta" of Aurobindo, where the nation is viewed as an aggregate of finite embodiments of the divine feminine power (*Śakti*), identified with the Goddess Kali. An order of ascetics (*sannyāsins*) should be ready to die for the Goddess, to bring about the political independence of India and also recover India's status as the agent for the spiritual regeneration of humanity.[70] Aurobindo declared that "[t]o shrink from bloodshed and violence under such circumstances is a weakness deserving as severe a rebuke as Sri Krishna addressed to Arjuna when he shrank from the colossal civil slaughter on the field of Kurukshetra."[71] The demoniac others in many of these narratives, which infused contemporary events with mythic significance, were the Muslims who are depicted as bloodthirsty fanatics intent on undermining the Hindu nation.

For instance, in a series of articles in the *Organiser* in 1962, Sita Ram oel noted that figures such as Bharata may be mythical for modern minds, but for the Hindus they are

[68] Vivekananda 1992, Vol III, 242.
[69] Freitag 1989, 199-202.
[70] Southard 1980, 364.
[71] Minor 1986, 65.

"more real than Alexander or Caesar or Ashoka or Akbar." The history of the Hindus, he claimed, is a long narrative of how numerous Muslim dynasties were swept away by Hindu heroism, which had a single aim—the destruction and the dispersal of Muslim invaders.[72] Goel's narrative is an instance of what Gyanendra Pandey has described as "Hindu history"—the set of writings, usually in Hindi, which argue that the Hindus in contemporary India possess a history that is dichotomous from that of the Muslims, and that the former is synonymous with Indian history. The Hindu historians set the current decadence of the land against the backdrop of a glorious past, a decline that was instigated by waves of invasions of the Muslims with whom the Hindus have been engaged in mortal combat. In their chronology of events at the temple town of Ayodhya in northern India, the God Ram was born in Ayodhya around 9,00,000 years ago, the Hindu King Vikramaditya constructed a temple at the birthplace of Ram sometime before the Christian era, this was destroyed by the Mughal emperor Babar in 1528 to set up a mosque, and the destruction was followed by 76 "wars of liberation" (between then and December 1992) which were carried out by the Hindus to build a temple in place of the mosque.[73] The narrative of the devotees of Ram versus the Muslims draws upon mythic clashes between the gods and the demons in classical Hindu epics, and places contemporary events at Ayodhya as "a replay of this eternal contest."[74] For the enactment of this battle, Hindus have to be prepared to meet the solidly organized Muslims with physical strength, and not be ensnared by teachings that promote apathy or pacifism.

These oppositional identities between "Hindus" and "Muslims" are summarized in a statement of the VHP, a Hindu nationalist organization: "Islam has never learnt to argue its case with facts or logic. All through its history, it has relied on the sword and street riots."[75] Several pamphlets and books written by Hindu nationalists, from the 1880s onwards, began

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[72] Udayakumar 2005, 31-32.
[73] Pandey 1995, 373-380.
[74] Pandey 1995, 386.
[75] Udayakumar 2005, 37.

to present Islam as a violent and fanatical religion, driven by bloodthirsty invaders who were intent on killing and enslaving Hindus in the name of a holy war. While Hindus were tolerant, peace-loving, and generous, the aggressive, despotic, and bigoted Muslims had failed to enter into fellowships with the Hindus and had remained aliens to the Hindu cultures of the country. Though these narratives present a monolithic "Hindu consciousness" of being oppressed by Muslims throughout history, medieval texts usually referred to Muslim rulers as Yavanas (Indo-Greeks) and Shakas, two groups which had invaded the northwest from around the second century BCE, which indicates that the Muslims were othered not so much because of their Islamic beliefs but because of the threat that they posed to the socio-hierarchical privileges of the Brahmins. The terms "Islam" and "Muslim," or references to Islamic beliefs or doctrines, do not occur in epigraphical records in medieval Andhra Pradesh, which refer to the invaders with the ethnic categories of Turk (Turushka), Persian (Parasika) and Greek (Yavana).

While the figure of the holy warrior (*ghazi*) who destroys Hindu idols appears around the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, this image was sometimes projected backwards to several Turkic invaders from earlier centuries who were depicted as demolishing or desecrating Hindu shrines. However, Talbot argues that the iconoclastic boasts made by some Muslim warriors should not be taken at face value, for the "rhetoric of religious war in Indo-Turkish historical chronicles frequently served to either inflate the importance of minor military campaigns or to mask the raw political ambition of rulers."[76] Nor is temple desecration exclusively an Islamic enterprise. The medieval historian Kalhana notes that the King Samkaravarman (883–902 CE) became overpowered by avaricious habits, and began to oppress his subjects and also to destroy temples and rob them of their wealth: "He took from the temples the profits arising from the sale of incense, sandal-wood, and other [articles of

[76] Talbot 1995, 719.

worship] … Then, again, he plundered straightaway sixty-four temples …"[77] The King Harsa (1089–1101 CE), who plundered the wealth of several temples and defiled the images in many, is described, in fact, as a Turushka (Turk).[78]

Patterns of Hindu-Muslim interreligious violence, then, should be understood not in terms of two implacably opposed religious worldviews but of a series of contingent imbrications of religious themes with highly contested political identities. A factor that contributed to Hindu-Muslim conflicts in British India was the synchronization of Hindu festivals such as Ram Lila with Muslim observances of Eid, where the sacrifice of cows became a major flashpoint. Hindus and Muslims also clashed over the question of whether Hindus who were carrying out musical processions through streets should stop the music in front of mosques. For instance, a major communal riot broke out on 2 April, 1926 in Calcutta when a drummer in an Arya Samaj procession refused to stop playing in front of a mosque, around the time of the four o'clock call to prayer. The fighting between the Hindus and the Muslims soon spread out into neighboring streets, and the next day there were attacks on Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh places of worship in the north of the city.[79] Regarding cow slaughter and the playing of music, Thursby notes that these activities were so directly associated with "communal conflicts in the 1920s that some observers have referred to the Hindu-Muslim clashes of the period simply as the 'cow-music' question."[80] More recently, Paul Brass (2003) has criticized explanations of Hindu-Muslim riots which see them as inevitable outbreaks of violence between communities divided by deep fault-lines. He argues that in northern Indian towns such as Aligarh, which have witnessed endemic riots, institutionalized systems of riot production have been generated in the decades after independence. Brass shows that the localities in Aligarh which have frequently witnessed

[77] Stein 1900, 208.
[78] Stein 1900, 353.
[79] Thursby 1976, 95.
[80] Thursby 1976, 76.

riots are characterised by the presence of riot-specialists, who are able to draw upon the discourses of threat to Hindus to orchestrate the violence, and later interpret it as a "natural" Hindu response of self-defense. Riots on a large scale are activated under specific circumstances such as electoral competitions by various actors, especially militant Hindu nationalists who address groups of potential rioters with inflammatory speeches.

Conclusion

The socio-political crucible of late colonial India was an intensely contested ground where conflicting notions of nationhood were imagined and enacted. These narrations were pivoted on the construction of the figure of the Muslim who was portrayed as descended from medieval bloodthirsty invaders, and fanatically intent on unravelling the fabrics of peace-loving Hindu cultures. These two moments—the articulation of the boundaries of the robust Hindu nation and the projection of the Muslim as the enemy lurking at the gates—have been integral to the shaping of Hindu cultural nationalism by several key thinkers and political activists. For instance, the VHP organized in 1983 the Sacrifice for Unity (*Ekatmata Yajna*), which involved three chariots (*raths*) that moved along three pilgrimage routes through the country with a statue of Mother India (*Bharat Mata*) and a ritual pot with the waters of the Ganges. The VHP leader Ashok Singhal noted that the event brought together religious leaders from not only various sects of Hinduism, but also Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism. He emphasised that this unity needed to be developed so that the "foreign powers of Islam and Christianity" do not regard the weaker sections of Hindu society to be vulnerable.[81] The anxiety towards the machinations of the foreign powers, who could also be the internal others, is reflected in the statement by Shivram Shankar Apte at the foundation of the VHP in 1964: "The world has been divided into Christian, Islamic and Communist [zones], and these

[81] McKean 1996, 120.

three consider Hindu society to be a very good and very rich food upon which they feast and grow fat. It is therefore necessary, in this age of competition and conflict, to think of organising the Hindu world to save it from the evil eyes of these three."[82]

Hindu engagements with violence which have been structured by scriptural themes reveal that violence has been regulated, enacted or denied in complex ways that the projection of an intrinsically "nonviolent Hinduism" obscures. Through a detailed study of certain Brahmanical Vedic texts and aspects of the *Mahābhārata*, Brian Collins (2014) has argued that Rene Girard's critique of sacrificial violence and the scapegoating mechanism is already present in certain classical Hindu sources. The Brahmanical traditions seek to chart a middle course between, on the one hand, the condemnation of intending to harm others through cruelty, anger, or hatred, and, on the other hand, the prescription of causing pain to specific kinds of living beings as the duty of Brahmin priests in sacrifice and of kings in governing the people. Beyond these empirical concerns lies the cultivation of *ahiṃsā* the conjunction of not intending harm as well as not causing pain, which is presented as the highest ideal in some of the renouncer traditions, where the empirical self becomes the battleground for the struggle against the inner enemy of evil passions and dispositions. This ideal *ahimsa* co-existed with other "realistic" strands which accepted that violence could be necessary in certain worldly contexts, especially in the presence of forces which challenged the *dharmic* order.[83] Thus, disputes based on Vedic orthodoxy were channelled, in classical India, through the mythical frameworks of gods clashing with demons, and later in the medieval centuries this template was extended to the Muslim foreigners who threatened the Brahmanical socio-religious orders. The electoral mechanisms of colonial modernity spurred Hindu anxieties about a weakened race which would die out in the face of Muslim solidarity, and various Hindu nationalist organizations began to increasingly draw upon motifs from the

[82] Jaffrelot 2001, 392.
[83] Clooney 2003, 123.

Vedas, *Bhagavad-gītā*, and other texts to speak of a martial Hindu nation. Against this complex socio-historical backdrop, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925, envisages a glorious Hindu nation symbolized as the mother who should be heroically worshipped and served selflessly. In an appropriation of Hindu mythic themes, the autumn festival of Dashehra, which celebrates the victory of Lord Rama over the demon king, is given a martial tone, with the worship of weapons associated with the medieval King Shivaji. The RSS has a strong, hierarchical organization with charismatic leaders at the apex such as Dr. Hedgewar (1925–40), who was called Doctorji, and Golwalkar (1940–73) who was called Guruji. The formal hierarchy of the system includes a network of organizers who are usually young unmarried men with an ascetic living style, and who both supervise the functioning of the branches (*sakhas*) at the base and coordinate the activities of the RSS at city, state, and national levels.[84] Though the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which emerged in the early 1980s, has sometimes been associated with the RSS, the party has usually avoided the explicit anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rhetoric of the RSS, instead using the slogans of self-reliance, Indianization, and integral humanism. As the trajectories of the multiple imaginations of the Hindu nation indicate, the attempts to ground the Indian nation-state on Hindu foundations remain an intensely contested matter, especially given the violent conflicts that such attempts have sometimes generated.[85] Thus, the forms of violence in Hindu universes should be placed within their dynamic socio-historical contexts where Hindus have interpreted, engaged with, and acted on a range of scriptural texts both to generate violent solidarities and to speak of peace.

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[84] Gold 1991, 560.
[85] Bhatt 2001.

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