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Societies in South Asia:

How Can They Live Toghether?

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Societies in South Asia:

How Can They Live Together?



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Introduction

The Generalised Fragility of Democracy

by Vincent Berthet*

Whether subjected to events of extreme violence (1), with threats made to people in the fields of culture and politics (2), or, on the contrary, to the gradual, generalised degradation of urban districts, rural environments, and public services, all the countries of South Asia (3) are affected simultaneously by the rise of religious, ethnic and cultural sectarianism.

We do not intend to make a sweeping denunciation of communities as such: the structure of a society according to partition by community is integral to following the pattern of partition is part and parcel of the democratic configurations generally common to countries under Anglo-American influence. Unable to act differently fifty years ago, the Indian Federation has based its democracy on the recognition of partially distinct communities, even writing it into the law. Care should be taken not to assimilate the Indian version of representative democracy with what representative democracy means in France.

Consequently, the outline of what is entailed by the South Asian term of « communalism » will appear frequently this dossier. There seems to be good agreement between union leaders, academics, and certain politicians on the Indian sub-continent in using this term to define a political-religious amalgam, the highlighting of cultural and specific features of a people or a part of a nation in the service of a government programme or a desire to win power, and to promote the rights of a fraction of the population to the detriment of those of another.

These calculated and intentional confusions are dangerous for human life. More generally, they run counter to harmonious social organisation by playing on the differences existing in each nation, taking advantage of each person's tendency to define themselves individually and collectively in opposition to, and even in the exclusion of, others. Obviously, it would be ridiculous and myopic to treat communalism, this perversion of freedom of thought and association, as a specifically Indian or Asian malaise. Stand up and be counted the Dreyfuses, Sacco and Vanzettis, Anwar El-Sadat, the children of Srebrenica and the anonymous victims of the OAS (4) and the Arab bashers of today! Was it not in 1947, at the moment of the tragic partition of India and Pakistan, followed in 1948 by the assassination of Gandhi by Hindu extremists, that in Madagascar the French Republic committed one of the worst collective assassinations in its colonial history in peacetime, if it is at all possible to speak of peacetime in a context of occupation? If the former

* Editor - in - Chief of Economie et Humanisme.

(1) It is of interest to recall the successive assassinations of Indian politicians since Gandhi himself in 1948, the thousands of civil victims of the Ceylonese-Tamil conflict in Sri-Lanka, the punitive raids on certain Islamic districts of Bombay, etc.

(2) Taslima Nasreen, a Bangladeshi author; Salman Rushdie, Indian author; etc.

(3) India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh.

(4) Secret Army Organisation : an anti-liberation front military group during the French-Algerian war (1958-1962).

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS (1996)

Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Population (in millions)	120.1	944.6	140	18.1
Annual population growth	1.51%	1.76%	2.72%	1%
Urban population	18.8%	27%	35.1%	22.5%
Literacy rate	38%	52%	38%	90%

Source : *L'état du Monde,* La découverte, Paris, 1997.

example is not representative of the progression of French society as a whole, then neither are the bursts of inter-community sectarianism representative of the societies of South Asia. It would be clearly wrong to reduce political life in the United States to the sole rise of the ideology -or rather the propaganda- of Louis Farrakan, or in Austria to the breakthrough of the neo-Nazis. Naturally, this dossier does not make any pronouncement for or against Hinduism, or any other living spiritual tradition as such.

That being said, precisely because the advantages of democracy and peaceful co-existence between ethnic groups and nations remain tenuous, the situation of the Indian sub-continent, which forebodes that of other nations due to an exaggerated plurality derived from a multitude of divisions (casts, languages, regions, political conceptions, social classes, and religions) gives reason for alarm. The danger is that the universal question, « How can we live together? » becomes an unequivocal assertion, an aggressive admission of failure that « It is impossible to live together ». This sad refrain of retreat and fear can be heard everywhere, both in the street and the ballot box. Has the modern conception of democracy - of which the well-known sexist and colonialist third Republic was but a pale debut - become obsolete, to become a sort of anti-Athenian perception (5): no slaves, nor half-castes, but a meeting of differences in a framework of equality?

(5) The mention of Athens as a worthy reference of democracy is currently too frequent for its not being included in the ploys to sway opinion, justifying the ambiguity of rights and situations amounting to apartheid which is more or less tolerated.

These phenomena which trouble the democratic progress of India, come up against diverse forms of opposition from a number of players in civil society. Moreover, they echo the increasingly urgent consideration that must be given to the mechanisms of integration in Europe which, somewhat amazingly, appears caught off-guard by the assertion of cultural and religious pluralism.

RELIGIONS IN SOUTH ASIA

(as a percentage of total population)

Religions	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
Muslims	86%	11.4%	97%	8%
Hindus	13%	82.6%		15%
Others	1%	6%	3% (including Hindus)	77%
including : *Christians*		*2.4%*		*8%*
Sikhs		*2.0%*		
Buddhists		*0.7%*		*69%*
Jains		*0.5%*		
Miscellaneous		*0.4%*		

Source : *Encarta,* CD Rom, Microsoft, 1997.

Why then, have we decided to dedicate this issue to authors from very varied geographical regions, professional backgrounds and commitments, some of whom also vary in their positions and analyses? The reasons are as follows:

- The very importance of India and South Asia in terms of demography - approximately one in four of the world's population - and their former history of cultural and religious pluralism, attract the attention of any person or organisation interested in the often potholed road taken by pluralist societies throughout the world. These situations call for more detailed examination of reality (6), in order to avoid other amalgams, and attempts to provide explanations (7).

- The economic context of this increasing retreat of populations into communities deserves specific examination, in order to pinpoint factors of disintegration in social cohesion and falling back onto identity which are present in other regions of the world also under the pressure of neo-conservative globalisation. In countries with relatively strong governments, such as France and India, what happens when the lid of government and administrative economic regulation is lifted? What powers occupy these new areas of influence (8).- The resistance of individuals and communities in these countries against communal sectarianism and their exclusion is an important

(6) Cf. in this issue, the articles by **V. Graff, H Kapoor, M. Abou Zahab** and **M. Selim**.

(7) See further for the articles by **J.L. Racine, G. Heuzé** and **S. Mahajan**.

(8) It is certainly in echo of this question that we hope for more active and faster European construction than « less Europe ».

SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDICATORS (1996)

Indicators	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan	Sri Lanka
GNP (billion $)	28.6	319.7	59.9	13.4
- annual growth	5%	6.9%	6.0%	3.5%
- per capita	1380 $	1400 $	2230 $	3250 $
Inflation rate	4.1%	7%	11.4%	16.8%
Human development indicator*	0.309	0.382	0.393	0.665

* Composite indicator, variant from 0 to 1, which is an aggregate of the following: life expectancy from birth, adult literacy and average number of years of study, and income per capita (Ed.).

Source : *L'état du Monde*, La découverte, Paris, 1997 and *Encarta*, CD Rom, Microsoft, 1997.

aspect of the fight for human rights on a world-wide scale. It requires information (9) and new possibilities for building relations and unity on intelligent foundations (10).

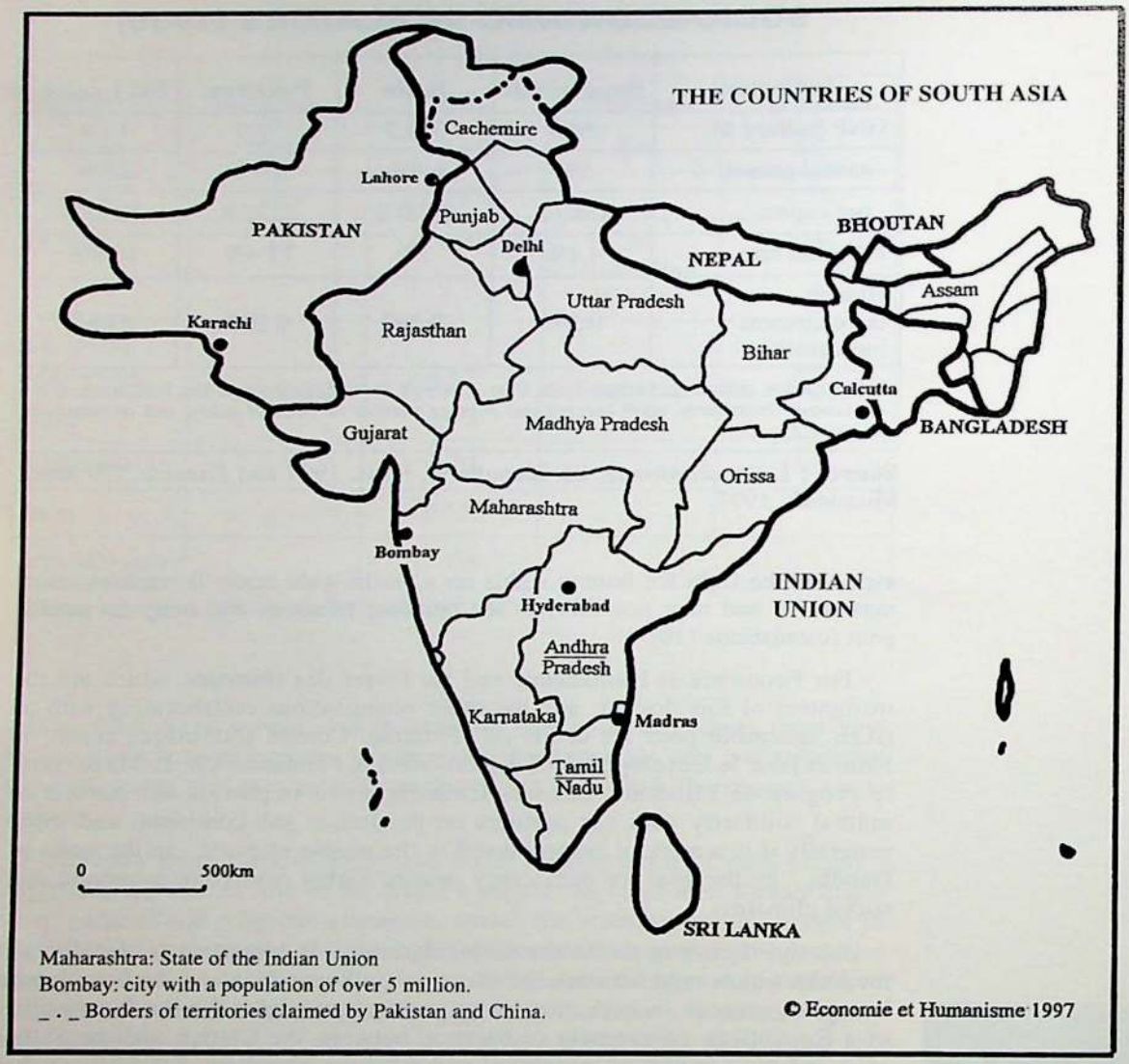
- For Economie et Humanisme and for Frères des Hommes, which are the instigators of this dossier, and the other organisations collaborating with us (Agir ensemble pour les droits de l'Homme, Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement, Eglises d'Asie, Fondation Ch. L. Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme, Secours Catholique), it is part of our pursuit of mutual solidarity with our partners on the Indian sub-continent, and more generally it is a mark of respect owed to the people inspired - in the wake of Gandhi - by the goal for democracy despite highly restrictive economic and social climates.

- Lastly, regarding the future of secularism, it is important to develop all the links which exist between the situations in South Asia and the French and European context, in both directions: political principles for the functioning of a Republican government (separation between the Church and the State, etc.) and the experience of cultural and religious pluralism. Establishing the rule of law and the creation of a society embodying respect and the promotion of freedom, permitting the development of humankind, remain unfinished projects. They require that we all share our weaknesses and our strengths.

Vincent Berthet

(9) See further for the articles by **T. Setalvad, C. Gaudard** and **A. John.**

(10) Cf. in particular the comments by **S. Agnivesh** and **P. Blancher.**



Maharashtra: State of the Indian Union
Bombay: city with a population of over 5 million.
_ . _ Borders of territories claimed by Pakistan and China.

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Societies of the Indian Sub-Continent, Their Links and Their Conflicts

Public order and development are threatened by inter-community strife in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. What are the origins of this strife?

The Hindu Right Wing Mobilisational Styles, Communication Strategies and Fundraising

Notes and Reflections

by Harsh Kapoor*

Starting out as small fringe organisations in the twenties, the Hindu right wing organisations in India have vastly grown in volume and have acquired a visible presence in most locations of the Indian diasporic communities.

A politico-social network

The largest organisation constituting the core of Hindu right is the RSS (*Rashtra Swamayamsevak Sangh* - National Self Service Front). Founded in 1925, it had no more than five hundred members in 1932, but this number increased to a hundred thousand by the forties. This era was propitious to the RSS which drew advantage from the political vacuum left by the repeated absences of the main leaders of the Congress party, due to their imprisonment. The RSS was outlawed following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948 by a member of the organisation, Nathu Rama Godse. At this point it had two hundred thousand members. This prohibition lasted only a short time and the RSS was able to continue its work, and increase its membership.

Thus in one of its bastions, the central Indian State of Madhya Pradesh, the RSS had one hundred thousand members in the seventies thanks to the sustained daily physical and ideological work done by its local sections, the *shakhas*. The *shakhas* are small groups of young boys aged from ten to fifteen, generally from lower middle class backgrounds, organised in villages and urban districts. Dressed in khaki shorts, they can be seen every morning practising Indian martial arts in the form of a drill, learning self-defence techniques, discipline and obedience, as well as Hinduist nationalist songs and lessons of morality. A member of a *shakha* can only climb the hierarchy and receive political education after a long period of initiation (1).

* Sociologist, independent researcher, member of the « Asia Commission » of *Frères des Hommes*. The author makes use of sustained political work carried out in the 1980's by the activists of Sampradayikta Virodi Andolan (Movement against Communalism) in Delhi. Furthermore, the works of the French researcher Christophe Jaffrelot on the Hindu Right and the work by Achin Vinayak are sources of great inspiration for his own research efforts.

(1) See the documentary by **Lalit Vachini**, *The Boy and the Branch*, produced by Channel Four, London, 1993.

For many Indians, these activities appear to be perfectly innocuous and such movements are at best assessed as an Indian version of the Boy Scouts. The militant leaders at grassroots level like to be seen as social workers ready to lend a hand to all without payment of money. This image, nurtured over the decades, is all the more credible as the RSS is not organised as a political party.

By 1989-1990, the RSS numbered some 25 000 local sections and about 30 000 sub-sections, spread out over 18 000 villages, towns and cities throughout India (2). At this point, it was reckoned to group around two millions activists, which makes it one of the largest and best organised movements.

During the last fifty years, the RSS and the organisations founded at the same time, such as the *Hindu Mahasabha* (Hindu Grand Assembly), have given rise to a large number of political and non-political organisations, including :

- The *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP - Hindu World Council), founded in the mid-sixties to promote political Hinduism ;

- The *Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (now defunct) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP - Indian People's Party), founded at the beginning of the eighties as the parliamentary wing of the RSS, in order to enter the political arena and win power in the long term ;

- The *Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad* (ABVP, for students) ;

- *Baratiya Mazdoor Sangh* (BMS, for workers) ;

- *Hindu Suraksha Samiti* (Hindu Self Defence Committee) ;

- *Bajrang Dal* (the group of *Bajarang Bali* or the monkey god Hanuman who was a disciple of Rama).

The VHP was founded (3) with the aim of allying the religious Hindus in order to promote Hinduism as a universal religion. This entailed modernising it so as to give it the same capacity for expansion as the Semitic religions, and to integrate it within a nationalist perspective.

It is of interest to see how strategies have been implemented during the last few decades to obtain this objective, and how the nationalist Hindus have combined the use of religious metaphors and the most efficient techniques of political organisation.

(2) The book by **W. Andersen and D. Sriahar**, *The Brotherhood in Saffron: The RSS and Hindu Revivalism* (Vistaar, New Delhi, 1987) offers a historical panorama of the operation and development of the RSS.

(3) In 1982, the VHP asserted that it was present in 302 districts (counties) of India and in 23 countries (these figures should be treated with caution). At this time it had 3 000 active groups and 118 500 members.

(4) Public meetings at which contemporary figures of the Hindu religion such as Santoshi Mata are venerated and where hymns are sung.

(5) Cf. **T. Basu**, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*, Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1992.

New religious rites and events

The VHP and the RSS profited from the emergence in north India of new religious fervour based on local rituals such as *bhagwati jagaran* (4) at the end of the seventies. Likewise, the number of pilgrimages organised to holy places rose (5). These changes were concomitant with the social rise of a

class of small businessmen and the development of consumerism specific to the middle classes which constituted the new social base of the RSS-VHP alliance. In the mid eighties many north Indian cities saw the creation of religious-nationalist rituals like *Maha Artis* invented directly to create a sense of public participation in a ceremony initiated around the Rama Temple movement.

In 1981, a « Mammoth Conference » of Hindus (*Virat Hindu Sammelan*) was held in Delhi. In 1984, the VHP invited figures of different Hindu groups and sects to what was called Dharma Sansad (Parliament of the Hindu religion). This entailed uniting the Hindu leaders around a common platform and to obtain their support for a nationalist programme. It was on this occasion that the decision was taken to free the Hindu temples destroyed during the Mogul invasions.

The VHP then organised *Ram Shila Pujan*, public blessings of the foundation stones and bricks for the reconstruction of the temple of Rama. These events had a nation-wide impact. A totally new array of religious and political practices, such as *Maha Artis*, were developed with the aim of galvanising religious energy.

The VHP organised series of public religious ceremonies (*yagyas*) to protect it from evil, and marches such as the one leading to the building of the temple of *Bharat Mata* (the Temple of our Mother India), a monument to the unification of all the divinities of the Hindu pantheon and certain figures of the nationalist movement. It also organised an event of national proportions in the eighties to distribute holy water from the Ganges throughout India.

All these projects obviously called for an acute flair for business and organisation provided by the trained senior members of the RSS. The preparation and organisation of these events served to train young activist leaders, presenting them with the occasion of swearing their lives to the cause of freeing the temple of Rama.

Mass processions and demonstrations were also of strategic importance for the Hindu right. They gave its movement a high profile and permitted it to reap political dividends.

During the last fifteen years, the organisations of *Hindutva* (« Hinduness ») have organised marches and processions with a religious and a political content and iconography along thousands of kilometres throughout India. All these marches have been planned systematically and with great care, and they make increasing use of certain images from popular Hinduism, widely diffused by films which borrow from Hindu mythology and television soap operas such as the one on *Mahabharata*. These marches and processions have had what can be called a « dotted line effect », i.e. each particular dot (a small town or village) can be associated symbolically with an event of regional or national importance (6).

(6) The most famous of these marches was by the BJP leader L.K. Advani in a chariot (in reference to the chariots *-rath-* mounted by the Gods). It established the mobilisation which led to the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in 1992.

They have generated a charged atmosphere and, among Hindus, left an air of tension by creating feelings of injustice for the exactions committed in the 15th century. They increased the polarisation between Hindus and Muslims. Local notables and even film and television stars were invited to give this strategy an air of respectability.

The invention of structured Hinduism with a goal

According to the Indian historian, Romila Thapar, « The new Hinduism that is being propagated by the *Sanghs, Parishads and Samajs* (RSS/VHP/Arya Samaj) is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic uniform religion, rather paralleling some of the features of Semitic religions. This seems to be a fundamental departure from essentials of what may be called the indigenous « Hindu » religions. Its form is not only in many ways alien to the earlier culture of India but equally disturning is the uniformity which it seeks to impose on variety of « Hindu » religions » (7).

The VHP issued a code of conduct at its world conference of 1979 comprised of the six duties of every Hindu (8) who should:

- believe that the sun is eternal God and worship it at dawn;

- consider that the symbol *aum* is the image of God, to wear out it around their necks and mark it on their books, diaries, visiting cards, writing paper, cars, etc.;

- make the *Bhagavad Gita* the holy book of all Hindus, summarising the religious philosophy of Hinduism;

- keep an image of their family divinities in their homes and worship them;

- grow basil mint in their homes;

- have a central place where they practice their faith (temple, monastery, etc.) and pray there.

Furthermore, during the last decade, the Hindu right has granted a special status to the god Rama, the incarnation of Vishnu.

(7) **R. Thapar**, « Syndicated Moksha », *Seminar*, New Delhi.

(8) **Lise McKean**, *Divine Entreprise*, 1996.

(9) VCRs and televisions sold widely in India in the beginning of the eighties, triggered by the Asian Games of 1982.

Occupying the front and back stages of the media

In the middle of the eighties, the systematic use of audio and video cassettes spread in political campaigning (9).

National television channels produced and broadcasted series based on the popular Hindu mythological epics *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. They led

to the creation of a standardised version of these epics for popular audiences. These standardised versions broke viewing records and were widely utilised by the Hindu movement which had made massive use of sound and video media in its campaign to destroy the mosque of Ayodhya. The actors who had played the roles of Ram and his wife Sita (10) were invited to participate at BJP meetings (11). At the Indian parliamentary elections of 1991, the BJP won 89 seats and the two actors were elected.

During the Ayodhya campaign, thousands of audio cassettes of impassioned anti-Muslim speeches by the Hindu activists Sadhavi Ridhambra and Uma Bharati were distributed at meetings or were played over loudspeakers mounted on jeeps or lorries during processions. They had been produced by the « Jain » studios of Delhi. The owner, a certain J. K. Jain, an up and coming businessman, built his success on the production of cassettes of religious chants and film soundtracks. He ingratiated himself with the BJP and became one of its MPs. His studios have become the nerve centre of audio-visual production for Hindu activists. Likewise, several thousand video cassettes were distributed during the campaign for the return of the native land of Rama (*Ram Janam Bhoomi*). These showed Rama, accompanied by special effects, emerging from nowhere in the mosque of Ayodhya, in 1949.

The BJP has also used and manipulated certain Hindi language newspapers of the States of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to diffuse anti-Muslim rumours and propaganda. This led to reports by the Press Council of India (12).

In 1993 the BJP set up a publicity committee to make use of private cable systems across urban India. Video tapes with speeches of leaders from BJP were produced as clips and then plans were made for use of cable networks. In 1995, the television channel JAIN TV (Joint American Indian Network), was launched to broadcast religious programmes by satellite over India. Co-financed by expatriate Indians in North America, the channel's board of directors includes eminent members of the BJP.

A world-wide pan-Hindu network

It is in countries and regions such as Mauritius, South Africa, the United States, the Caribbean, the United Kingdom and Nepal that the activities of the RSS and the VHP have seen the greatest development. Rooted in the old networks in countries where the Indian Diaspora arrived long ago, they are more recent in Europe and America. Messages from the King of Nepal and the Prime Minister of Mauritius were received at the VHP's inaugural conference. Founded in 1970, VHP America was registered in the State of New York in 1974 as a cultural organisation. The youth branch of the VHPA (the Council of Hindu Students) has forty two chapters in the United States and Canada. The foreign activities of these organisations are often fronted by cul-

(10) With clenched fist, the actress starts her campaign speech with « Long live Rama! Long live our Mother India »)

(11) The BJP's openness and adaptability regarding new communication technologies is partly based on the experience acquired by its leader Advani when he was Minister of Information and Television.

(12) **Charu and Mukul,** *Communalism and the Media,* Race and Class.

tural or social activities. They organise summer camps for children, celebrate Hindu festivals, yoga courses, Sanskrit writing courses, etc. (13)

In August 1993, some fifteen thousand people, mostly expatriate Indians, gathered at the Hilton and Omni Soreham Hotels in Washington to participate in the pompously titled conference « Global Vision of 2000 », organised ostentatiously by American Hindu activists. The publicity for this conference boldly advertised the arrival of Bill Clinton and the Dalaï Lama, and more modestly that of Bill Moyers and Carl Sagan. On closer inspection, it seems that these celebrities had not yet agreed to participate. The dignitaries and spiritual leaders who had agreed to « guide » the conference represented the extremist wing of the Hindu movement. This conference was programmed to coincide with centenary of the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 at which the Hindu humanist Swami Vivekananda had made a great impression. It was this aura that the Hinduists wanted to exploit.

In the United Kingdom, the RSS operates under the name of *Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh* (HSS - Hindu Volunteers Association). This organisation is involved in the management of the Swami Narayan temple, the largest Hindu temple in Europe. This temple is the headquarters for the HSS's socia' and cultural activities intended for diasporic Indians in Africa, the Caribbea and, of course, South Asia. Over the last few years, right wing Hindu organisa tions are increasingly ill at ease at being identified as Asian or as Indian, an claim to represent Hindus in the same way as the Islamic faith is represented. These organisations have been very active in the cultural area, vehemently opposing certain plays and films judged to be offensive to Hindus (14).

To reach expatriate Hindus scattered in several western countries, militant Hindus have successfully exploited the new potential of electronic mail on the Internet (15). The forums and discussion groups on the Internet are used to generate a feeling of community identity. They are aimed at people who, when they return home after selling their souls to transnational capitalism, seek to forge links with community networks, receive news « at home » or find something in common with these faceless correspondents with whom they start to share a commitment, a language, and information.

The Web sites produced by the Hindu movement started blossoming in 1993 and they have since multiplied and become increasingly sophisticated. In the beginning, the logistical platform was the Global Hindu Electronic Network (GHEN), which was followed by tens of others. The RSS, the HSS, the VHP, the Hindu Students Council, the BJP, the *Hindu Vivek Kendra* (group of Hindu experts) all have their own sites. There are also apparently independent pages which host *Hindutva* writings. The very banally named web site, Hinduism Today, provides a most complete collection of articles going back to 1991. Other sites diffuse articles by important journalists close to the Hindu movement, such as Arun Shourie and Jay Dubashie. Membership forms for Hindu groups, a children's sponsorship programme, information on Vedic texts and on campaigns to free Hindu temples, and book lists are all available on the Internet. The Net is being used to document

(13) The ninth VHPA conference was inaugurated by the mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley, and President Reagan sent a message. This organisation's declared revenues rose from $385,462 in 1990 to $1,057,147 in 1993.

(14) For example, in Leicester, during the performance of the play by the remarkable Indian playwright Habib Tanvir.

(15) **Mathew, Biju and V. Prasad,** *Pahele Paisa, Phir Bhagwan* (Money First, then God), Himal South Asia, September 1996. Also, see the research and documentation work done by **H. Kapoor** on the Internet from 1993 to 1997.

who is writing and working against the Hindutva project to draw up black lists for purposes of identification. Most of the main sites of Hindu activism are based in North America though there are many others in Europe, Africa and India.

World-wide finance

Membership subscriptions and fund raising by visits to homes provide the finance most regularly declared by the RSS clan. At the end of the eighties, when organising the Ram shila pujas in the small towns of central and northern India, the VHP collected one rupee from each family, thereby amassing millions of rupees thanks to painstaking work in the field (16).

However, during the last thirty years, since the VHP was founded, the RSS has above all benefited from prosperous connections between a large number of trusts associated with the temples, political leaders, gurus and groups belonging to the *Hindutva* movement. These relations take the form of interlinked participations in the management boards of the different organisations concerned, guaranteeing access to the funds belonging to them. In addition, well-known industrialists from the Indian upper-middle class such as Kathau, Dalmia, and Birla have offered their financial support and given the assurance of their names to the VHP and other organisations.

Part of the sums collected from pilgrims visiting Hindu temples ends in the coffers of Hindu organisations: from the payment of middlemen who in some ways serve as guides, or of holy men who organise the rites (the control of this commerce is subject to constant struggle), to donations in cash or in kind, paid to the temples.

Funds are also raised by conferences given by politico-religious figures who have built veritable empires during the post-hippie period, following the example of Swamy Chinmayanand.

Likewise, the collection of funds to promote socio-religious activities has proved to be an efficient method for the Hindu movement. An example of this is the financing of the chair of Vedic studies at the University of Columbia by the Hinduja family.

Declared as non-profit making, some organisations belonging to *Hindutva* have been able to obtain donations and grants in western countries where multiculturalism is a respectable policy.

Lastly, in both India and abroad, much income is generated by the sale of statuettes of Hindu gods and goddesses, religious books, cassettes of political speeches and chants, T-shirts, and the sale of advertising space in publications produced by organisations belonging to the Hindu movement.

Harsh Kapoor

(16) Bricks for building the Ayodhya temple were collected throughout India, but also in Mauritius, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

India, its Communalists and its Secularism

Going beyond the Appearances

by Gérard Heuzé*

Since 1981, the immense Indian Union has found itself faced with extremely difficult problems caused by the so-called « communalism ». This word refers to attempts from every sector to reconcile the concept of nation with that of religion.

The situation is dramatic, because the Hindu nationalists with their huge organisations (1) have succeeded in winning a major symbolic victory over the Islamic minority (11.6% of the population in 1991) with the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque (1992). In 1997, the Supreme Court recognised the legitimacy of the concept of Hinduism, according to which being a Hindu is not related to a belief but to living in India. Different bodies have pointed out that Indian secularism, or rather the « equal respect of all religions », which is the official motto, is far from being viable and accepted by all, as it is composed of an increasingly disputed jumble of contradictory practices and jurisdictions.

A shaken country

The organisation which most frightens authorised Indian commentators, who nonetheless join it in sometimes vehement condemnations of Pakistan, demands for a uniform civil code (stipulated by article 44 of the constitution), criticisms of Islamic » backwardness and the « hordes of Bangladeshis », is the RSS (2) (National Volunteers Organisation), founded in 1925 at Nagpur as a self-defence militia, and its various satellite organisations.

On the side of those for a secular society which bitterly opposes the Hindu nationalists, manoeuvring by socialist and congress party notables (3) has become increasingly unpredictable, leading to an endless barrage of insults. What perhaps is at stake, according to the leaders of NGOs and journalists, is survival and a struggle between « subaltern elites ». As for big business, it is much more discreet and ambiguous. These parties are denounced as « monsters », « nightmares », « viruses », « witches brew », cancers », a « clique of obscurantists » and « gangsters ». The list is endless but provides few explanations. These can be divided into three themes stemming from a

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(1) Read above the contribution by H. Kapoor.

(2) Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

(3) Members close to the Congress Party.

general condemnation: « they » are « communalists » which is a fundamental sin (the entire history of « community » construction under British rule has been eluded, since those who stand for a secular society are often, alas, themselves the by-products of colonialism); « they » are involved in conspiracies against democracy; « they » use violence and oppose modernity.

Nonetheless, the Hindu nationalists continue to progress, in spite of the insults proffered by the major pro-liberal and post-Marxist dailies and small publications from militant groups. For all the accusations against the Shiv Sena (a provocative militia and plebeian movement, distinct from the RSS « family ») blamed for every crime committed during the riots in Bombay from 1992 to 1993 (1,000 victims), the people above all remembered that the young Muslims of the city had attacked the police during the first wave of rioting with extreme violence. Secondly, the Congress government had killed, as usual, more people than the Hindu and Muslim « communalists ». They brought the Shiv Sena to power two years later, with the party winning Bombay's all the six parliamentary constituencies.

The anti-communalists are not unpopular but they are hardly representative since they belong to minorities (in particular Christian) and are established in the most affluent sections of society. Their followers' loyalty is limited unless they come from the castes (*Dalits* of the BSP (4), the RPI, etc.), and from among radical Muslims, who are no more democratic than the Hindu nationalists. Thus they will have to cease simplifying the Hindu nationalists and Muslims, who are gaining popularity (in Kerala and Tamil Nadu), to derisive and hateful metaphors long proved to be inane. These groups and movements are very much the result of a complex history and a present over which they have never had much control. They cannot be accused, for example, of generating the immense popularity of the « culture of vengeance » among the poorer classes. This is due rather to family structures, the harshness of the environment and life, exploitation, colonisation ... and films. Finding themselves at the cross-roads of uncontrolled social changes, a malaise of identity and upheavals in lifestyles, they apply solutions they believe are simple and fair but which often reveal themselves to be horrific.

Using the example of Bombay, it is possible to formulate three theses to explain certain facets of the rise in successive surges of Hindu nationalism, in spite of its increasingly blurred objectives.

By-products of recent development?

Firstly, there is a negative conjunction between development in the way it has been implemented, and above all deviated, and the rise of the Hindu nationalists.

It is now very often in industrialised areas with high literacy rates that acts of violence and high numbers of votes given to the Hindu nationalists are

(4) Bahujan Samaj Party.

concentrated. Gujurat and Maharashtra are the two most industrialised States in India. The intensity of the horrors of Surat (Gujurat) in 1992 and 1993 exceeded those of Bombay. This completely « deregulated » city, almost devoid of public services, or roads, in which finance reigns over a fragmented industry, has absolutely no rules applicable to labour. In Bombay, health campaigns, urban sanitation and social health (sterilisation) were not the principal obsessions of the masses which voted for the *Shiv Sena* or even the shopkeepers, which all supported the BJP. The former were concerned about jobs and housing while the latter were concerned about taxes. Those responsible for throwing the people into confusion were the big businessmen, the establishment (the Gujurati in Bombay), the technocrats of the state of emergency, the doctors (who performed sterilisations by force and without compunction), town planners concerned with razing the slums to « improve India's image » and the politicians of the Congress Party who, while profiting from the instability in the rundown districts to obtain the backing of the voters bereft of choice, began to loot the State without the least concern, except for their own re-election. Links were forged between the communities affected and scapegoats were sought. The Hindu nationalists have cruel remedies for abused egos, but they do not appear so much worse for those who exploit them than the life in the slums of Bombay (48% of the population live in shantytowns, and 20% in other squalid and overpopulated buildings).

What is more, it is not the Hindu nationalists that have failed in giving primary education to the majority, neither have they imposed European style examination systems, nor assisted companies to put a million people out of work in Bombay, a city with 10.5 million inhabitants. Moreover, they have not been responsible, even indirectly, for the underemployment of another million young people, police brutality and corruption, the crushing of hope and workers' movements. It is not the Hindu nationalists, and especially the RSS, that have diffused the American lifestyles which have caused so much damage, since unobtainable, to the youth of the « impossible middle class » of modern India (5). There is no middle class in Bombay (or in India), a city dislocated from end to end, though 20% of its inhabitants are either wealthy or well-heeled, despite their claims to be simply « middling », occupy two thirds of the space and want even more. The 48% of the population housed in shantytowns have only 1% of the space. The leaders of the *Shiv Sena* have simply known how to profit from these problems.

Furthermore, there is nothing backward or traditionalist about them. The Hindutva (a concept which emerged in 1924, much later than free market theories) is a symbol that spurs action. The leaders of both parties dream of motorways and gigantic bridges - with tolls - in keeping with plans put forward by the promoters of so-called globalisation, i.e. by putting the national effort at the exclusive service of those who can pay. The *Shiv Sena* gives courses in management and computer initiation in its branches in the poor districts. *Shiv Sena* and the BJP, the latter being more moderate, have openly opted for deregulation and welcome the multinationals. They are only held

(5) Cf. further the analysis of **J.L. Racine.**

back by their union branches. What is more, they chose secularism (a uniform civil code) fifteen years ago (6), without relinquishing religion as a tool for getting political advantages at certain moments. What is more, they have promulgated neo-Malthusianism, even for Hindus. A large number of their critics have not even taken note of these developments.

Complex relationships with the other

There is no simple and univocal relationship between Hindu nationalism and Islam, especially in Maharashtra, which has for too long been populated by a Hindo-Islamic society to achieve this. What fuels their hate is modernisation, marked by the arrival of « pure classes », along with fears accumulated by both sides since the 19th century, and the very recent concept of « wars of civilisation » imported from Europe and the USA since the Iranian revolution.

In the *Shiv Sena*, which is particularly committed and of interest in this respect, there are, for example, according to the moment and the militant groups involved, at least five relevant rationales used for perceiving the Other, either banded together or not as Muslim.

The objective of the main perception is to classify the « good » and the « bad », the « Pakistanis » being the worst, while the best (sometimes leaders of the *Shiv Sena*) are the Muslims who speak Marathi (7) and seem fully integrated in the life of the city or province. Between these exists a hierarchy of groups distinguished by a variable relationship with the earth and culture.

The second perception uses a revamped version of the myth of Shivaji (8). This aims to integrate Muslims among others in a system of loyalty. This neo-feudal approach is not specific to *Shiv Sena*.

The third and popular perception sees them as « kid brothers », a family metaphor whose purpose is to show that a hierarchy exists in the Indian family. This consists of showing great severity, of « training » them, without calling into question the legitimacy of their presence.

In the fourth perception, implicit in the city, they are seen as a kind of *Kshatrya*, a second rank of « *varnas* » in the Brahmanic order. Thus they make faithful lieutenants (they served Shivaji) or worthy enemies.

The fifth perception, the most ambivalent given the context, is that of the nation, citizenship and integration. It wants all Muslims to carry identity cards (there are none in India), and proposes that they give up specific institutions and laws (qualified as privileges) in exchange for a standardised Indian citizenship. This long emerging rationale has its reverse side. Those who refuse are considered as traitors and allies of Pakistan, hence the local expression of a world-wide « green peril » (9). According to the generally nationalist logic of citizenship, it is possible to imagine the imprisonment or

(6) The Indian constitution accepts the existence of codes concerning the members of different religious faiths.

(7) Marathi is the language spoken in the State of Maharashtra. The language most usually spoken by Muslims in India is Urdu. Ed.

(8) Founder of the Marath Empire, 1674.

(9) Name given to the Islamic movement.

extermination of minorities that cannot be integrated. Lastly, behind these perceptions, there is the accumulated fear of the Other by the poor (80% Hindu) who judge in terms of collective responsibility and tend, especially during moments of tension, to view the Muslims as slovenly, throat-cutters, violent and sexually obsessed. This level alone, combined with the haziness of citizenship without citizens, harks back to European anti-Semitism. The nationalist Hindus exploit this feeling with varying skill, but it is a monster that has gone beyond the control of those who want to instrumentalize it.

Contemporary ambivalences

Lastly, populism has bulldozed the political arena, by destroying several of the pillars supporting the State, particularly its authority over social development and justice. Regarding this, although early on *Shiv Sena* resembled the Congress party, being controlled by a family and bereft of internal democracy, the BJP was, on the contrary, a model of democracy, even if ambiguous given its links with the RSS. It fought emergency. It elects its representatives. The current extravagances (rice priced at one rupee, electricity unpaid for by entire regions, etc.) are part of a system set up by the cliques of the Congress party to hold on to power whatever the price before building their fortunes to the detriment of the national purse. Not one political party is unscathed, not even the CPI(M) (10) of J. Basu, who has clung to his bastion of Bengal since 1977. While the State disintegrates and loses its status, the secular movements appear to cling even more fervently to it, making them look like auxiliaries of the police or the judiciary.

Now, the one overriding question is: Are the current standards of political management which entail « stuffing your pockets while you can », founding parties within parties, and setting up courts around petty chiefs (all general practice in the Congress Party of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, and then Rao), much more capable than the loud cries of a tiny group of unpopular secular rationalists of stopping the heterophobic but also at times reformist momentum of the nationalist Hindus? Do money and power dilute every conviction as exemplified by the paid defection of C. Bhujbhal (*Shiv Sena*) to the Congress Party in 1992 or the splitting of the BJP in Gujurat in 1996? Furthermore, is it not true that the threat to democracy, « what is already there, that which inflames social tensions and destroys any faith in the progress of reason », apart from the aggravation of social inequality, stems from the authoritarian attitude of the State, the « dirty war » in Kashmir, executions without trial in Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, assassinations of union activists, firing on striking workers, rather than the somewhat theatrical and frightening gesticulations of a Bal Thackery and his nephew Raj?

On this last point, the question remains as to whether the nationalist Hindus, members of the « subaltern » elites whose obsession is to do better,

(10) Indian Communist party (Marxist).

or worse, than the establishment, by aggravating its fear of disorder and the dangerous classes, but by relying on the force of the people and all types of tension to gain power, are not about to engender more terrible and more inhuman movements than those already seen in India. The RSS has been converted to « integral humanism ». The *Shiv Sena* puts the young in front of work benches. However, it seems that all these attempts must explode when taking into account the deluge of desires, fantasies and insecure identities caused by the ineptly named process of globalisation. The thinking and practices of Raj Thackeray, an atheist raised on « Bollywood » films (11), are much more basic and brutal than those of his uncle. If central and provincial governments dismantle their systems of assistance, subsidies for staple produce, property regulations and the public sector, as encouraged to do by the IMF, there are enough ingredients around to make the strange hybrids of Hindu nationalism into true monstrosities, unless a secular and repressive authoritarian government, in the Algerian mould, fills this role.

(11) Combination of Bombay and Hollywood.

Gérard Heuzé

SOME HINDU KEY WORDS

To understand this dossier and the phenomena it reports, it is vital to take into account the following notions:

- Where the West speaks of the Hindu religion, the Hindus speak of *Hindu Dharma*. According to Madeleine Biardeau (1), « The *dharma* is the socio-cosmic order which maintains the existence of the universe. *A-dharma*, or disorder, leads to the end of the world. It is the Brahman who is given the particular duty of caring for *dharma*.

- In his works, Louis Dumont (2) has shown how « Indian society orders itself, and classifies itself as a function of religion, i.e. the universal order as represented by it. [...] It is less a hierarchy than a graduation of statuses. Justice consists of placing the different social functions in the positions to which they are intended [...]. The principle dominating the distinction and hierarchic classification of these functions is the opposition of pure against impure ». The status of each person is determined by their *jati*, literally their birth. The *jatis* are endogamous groups. What we call castes encompasses the notions of *jati* and *varna* (the classificaiton of *jatis* into four groups: *Brahman, Kshatrya, vayshya*, and *Shudra*).

- In Hinduism, there is no « book », head, dogma, belief or one or more gods which dominate everything. The religious beliefs and practices of a Hindu differ according to his *jati*, geographic origin, etc. Traditionally, conversion is impossible. The assimilation of dissident or allogenic groups over long periods gives ample proof of this (particularly regarding the Buddhists in India).

- These characteristics make the expansion of Hinduism to other countries and cultures difficult. Inside the country and within the Indian diaspora, Hindu nationalists also count now distant religious groups such as the Sikhs and the Jains as being Hindu.

Ph. Blancher

(1) **M. Biardeau**, *Hindouisme, l'anthropologie d'une civilisation*, Champs, Flammarion, 1981.
(2) **L. Dumont**, *La civilisation indienne et nous*, U. Prisme, Armand Colin, 1975, pp. 16-17.

Indian Islam at a Glance

by Violette Graff*

Who are the Indian Muslims, this giant minority of 120 millions persons (11,7% of the Indian total population), who are so much talked of on the eve of every election in India but who, at the same time, whether in their own land or abroad, remain largely unknown, if not misunderstood? Who are they indeed? Are they citizens like any others, who have reconciled their faith with modernism, and stand ready to take part in the process, set in motion by Nehru, of secularising the State? Or are they rather members of battered communities, maladjusted to the regime and to an environment in which, since Partition, they have resigned themselves to eking out survival, but no more? Or again, at least in certain States of the Union, do they constitute an important pressure group whose influence affects subtly, but effectively, the internal politics and foreign policies of the Nation?

An extreme fragmentation

Let us begin by clearing away the superficial impression which might lead us to believe that Indian Islam is a monolithic block. This would be to ignore the extreme fragmentation characteristic of the whole Indian world. It is not only the Hindu society which, in addition to its ethnical and linguistic diversity, is segmented in castes organised into a hierarchy, though we find that notions of purity and impurity in that society have a meaning unknown outside the pale of Hinduism. On the other hand it cannot be denied that, within the Muslim Indian world also, in spite of the Islamic tradition of egalitarianism, the « caste system » exists, with its own meaning, relevance, and way of functioning, which raises many questions.

In addition, and if we take now into consideration the geographic immensity of the subcontinent and the highly unequal distribution of minority communities, it becomes obvious that the situation of the various groups must be analysed in very different terms, depending upon their demographic concentration in certain key States of the Union, their historical or socio-cultural

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heritage, the languages they speak, their economic situation -or their perception of this- and their adjustment to the processes of modernisation. Moreover, the degree of « Hinduisation » of the Muslim communities varies considerably according to the sect and social class considered, and imbues inter-ethnic relations -or quarrels- with regional, or even local, variations of considerable importance.

In fact we are dealing here with a very heterogeneous society. From the first inroads by nomads galloping in from Central Asia right up to the mighty Mogul Empire which, in the 16th and 17th centuries, was to achieve the pinnacle of Muslim power, Indian Islam has been strongly marked by successive Turkish, Afghan and Persian influence. Arab also since, along the centuries, in contrast to the raids and conquests which gave an aggressive tone to the continental incursions of Islam, Arab navigators and merchants landed up along the West Coast where they were able to mix easily with the local populations.

Indeed, contrary to the image propounded today by the Hindu activists from the *Rashriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (R. S. S.) of an Islam sowing systematically death and terror, and converting only by force, despite also the claims of large sections of the Muslim society to prestigious foreign origins, it is clear that the majority of the communities present on Indian soil are in fact native. They descend form people who converted in the hope of escaping the Brahmanical system which relegated them to a low status; or from those who, at one moment or another, were swayed by the missionary zeal of Pirs (Saints) arriving from Persia or the Arab world; or again from families and clans who followed the lead of the dominant groups on which they depended: high caste Hindus who rallied to the cause of Muslim sovereigns in order to draw benefit from governmental posts, profits, lands, and who took along with them an army of functionaries and artisans.

It is not possible to enter here into the details of the various schools of thought and sects. It should be borne in mind only that most Indian Muslims are Sunnis. A few millions of Shias are gathered in former « Princely States », and Ismailis are well settled on the West Coast (Bombay) (1).

Numerically, more than half the Muslim population is concentrated, one could even say jammed, in the Ganges Valley. They number some 60 to 70 millions, probably more, with a very large number of districts where the Muslims amount to 20 to 50% of the population. Concentrations elsewhere such as these are only to be found in Assam, Kashmir of course, and in two districts of Kerala, on the Malabar coast, where the Arab navigators landed long ago (2).

Now let us have a better look at the Ganges Valley. It is in Uttar Pradesh, the heavyweight State of the Indian Union, that the largest population of Muslims live (24 millions). They have not really recovered from the upheaval of Partition in 1947. Even though the great majority of them never acted in favour of a separate Pakistan, they are still paying the price, psychologi-

(1) For more details, see our chapter « L'Islam indien » in **Y. Masquelier, F. Lenoir** (eds), *L'encyclopédie des religions*, Bayard, 1997.

(2) The fertility rate among Muslims is higher than that of the other major religions, and this is not the least of the complaints expressed by non-Muslims. The Hindu nationalists are warning of the day when the Hindus (85% of the population) will be « submerged"!

cally, and economically, for the earlier commitments of their leaders. There are some « success stories » today, but, by and large, the artisans and labourers are extremely poor, and the traditional education in *madrassas* does not help them to merge fully into the so-called « national mainstream ». The electoral victories of the nationalist party, the BJP, are of course a source of great anxiety.

The Muslims of Bihar (approximately 13 millions) share the general misery of this State, as well as its climate of recurrent violence. In recent years, however, communal tensions have been kept in abeyan by an energetic, if controversial, Chief Minister. In West-Bengal, the Muslim population (16 millions, i.e. 26% of the total population) live in a society in which social relations can be analysed in terms of class more than of caste or religious distinctions. The parties in power in West-Bengal - the Congress party, then the Communist Parties - have always been careful not to nurse communal antagonisms. It is to be hoped that the recurrent influx of migrants from Bangladesh does not alter the situation.

In Assam, now reduced to the Brahmaputra Valley, the massive immigration of Muslim farmers from the Delta had long been encouraged by the British, followed, after independence, by the regional Congress governments. It wasn't until the seventies that the local populations woke up: the electoral lists showed that a quarter of them were Muslims! This was to give rise to a movement of protest which soon deteriorated. After ugly massacres in 1983, the regional leaders displayed fresh common sense. Communal tensions subsided, which does not mean that « all is quiet on the eastern front ». Liberation movements in the Tribal areas are extremely active.

The last region with a very large Muslim population is Kashmir, where Islam is by far the majority religion (60% to 95% in the Srinagar Valley districts). Islam here has a character of its own. It was deeply influenced by the Sufi tradition and never displayed any « radical » trend. Things have changed a lot since 1989, when Islamist militants took the lead in a rebellion against the rule of New-Delhi. The ambiguities of a situation inherited from steps taken at the time of Partition have brought about the present tragedy. In Kashmir today, it is blood and tears.

A threatened harmony

Communalism is in no way at the root of the Kashmir violence, although the situation of the Kashmiri Pandits - Brahmins - is dramatic. It would be also unfair to describe the relationship between Hindus and Muslims throughout India with dark glasses. However there is no doubt that the traditional harmony is threatened, here and there, by various developments, namely the military of communal organisations and the aggressive display of religions symbols. Gujarat and Maharashtra, with respectively 4 and 8 millions

Muslims, mostly in the cities, and also Andhra Pradesh, in the old congested city of Hyderabad, have had more than their share at tragic riots. Even the deep South which looked immune to the communal virus is now affected. The growing importance of ritual processions and Yatras, the great Ganesh (elephant god) festival, the mushrooming of Hindu groups are an answer to the local conversions of Untouchables to Islam in 1981, to the so-called « Gulf money », to the smuggling activities and, generally speaking, to the growing visibility of Islam in the region.

There were some unhappy episodes in Karnataka (5 millions Muslims, i.e. 12% of the total population), and in Kerala (7 millions, 23% of the population). More recently, tragedy struck in Tamilnadu. The average citizen, whether a Muslim or a Hindu, was certainly not involved, but on December 6 1997, the anniversary of the Ayodhya demolition, several trains were sabotaged. Then in February, in Coimbatore, on the eve of the recent general elections, bomb blasts killed more than 60 people. It shook deeply the public opinion. Two Muslim outfits were banned. In the constituency of Coimbatore, the « Hindu » candidate won with the largest margin recorded in the State.

Violette Graff

(3) Cf. **Violette Graff**, « Les musulmans et la vie politique indienne », in **Christophe Jaffrelot**, *Histoire de l'Inde indépendante*, Fayard, Paris, 1996, pp. 499 - 507.

The History Behind the Divisions

An interview with Sucheta Mahajan*

Economie et Humanisme: *In order to understand the different currents of thought in India today according to their historical roots, it seems necessary to clarify some words.*

Sucheta Mahajan: True, it is necessary to redefine the notions of « secularism » and « communalism ». Secularism is related to belief. During the twenties, the word « secularism » was considered positively. It implied tolerance between religions and not their negation.

On the contrary, « communalism » implies the intrusion of religion into politics; it is the negative use of religion in politics. One sometimes hears people say, « If you are not a communalist, you must be a secularist ». According to some Indian sociologists, « secularism » corresponds to a programme for Indian society.

The case of Mahatma Gandhi is of interest regarding this. He was deeply religious, a man of tradition, who had strong secular convictions. His secularism, deeply rooted in humanist and universalist beliefs (1), was nourished by his faith. The key to understanding Gandhi is his life. Nehru (2) was relatively westernised and his religious convictions were very different from Gandhi's. However, when it comes to politics, it can be seen that, all said and done, there were not as many differences as all that between them in the combat against the drift towards communalism. They represented two ways of achieving the same thing. Today, as part of the revival of religious traditions, the young are interested in Gandhi for his religious ideas rather than for his political struggle.

E.H.: *Did the colonial era influence this way of considering coexistence between religions?*

A progressive separation between Hindus and Muslims

S.M.: The presence of the English and their policies are responsible for the gulf between Hindus and Muslims. The English were always ill at ease with the Muslims. When they opened schools in the 1880s, they taught both English and Arab, though English was only taught to the Muslims afterwards. The fact that the Hindus drew closer to western culture encouraged

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(1) The nationalism of Gandhi was « neither secular, nor hindu, like that of the militant hindus, but linked communities with each other » (**K.J. Shah**, in *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. II, winter 1995). On Gandhi's practise of hinduism, read **S. Mahajan**, *The hindus, Hindutva and « the greatest living hindu »*, a summary of research available from Economie et Humanisme.

(2) Also taken as an ideological target by the communalists.

them to become nationalists. It is because they became impregnated with the western values of democracy, justice, etc., that a nationalist school of thought came into being. Finally, it is modern education which made them nationalists. The Muslims have become neither modern, nor western, since they were separated from the Hindus.

We can even consider that « communalism » came into being as from 1906-7 curiously, at the same time as anti-imperialist and anti-British nationalism. This is the moment when the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, tended to organise themselves along separate lines. The Islamic League was founded in 1906.

Gandhi returned to India in 1915 and the Pact of Lucknow was signed between Hindus and Muslims in the same year. At the same time, at an international level, there was generally very anti-British feeling among Muslims due to the war waged by the British against the Ottoman Empire. There was a great reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims from 1916 to 1923, among the people in any case, but this period did not last. However, this trend had a significant effect on the population and on actions in-the-field. The Congress was more a platform than a party at this time.

1930 was the year of the salt march and civil disobedience orchestrated by Gandhi. These events attracted both Hindus and Muslims and the latter participated as Indians and not as members of a religious faith. This was also a time when Marxist and communist ideologies were gaining strength, the middle classes made their appearance, and when women began asserting themselves economically and socially. During this period, the most important development was the building of the movement for the independence of India. All the religions fought on the same platform against the British. The followers of the different faiths considered themselves first and foremost as Indians.

The period from 1932 to 1934 was particularly hard for the nationalist movement. Then, after 1934, the British decided to encourage a division between the Left and the Right in the Congress Party.

Nationalist movements renewed their activities in the years leading up to independence, but the Congress asserted itself as a party reserved for the elite and did little to understand the Muslims.

In brief, in the first half of the 20th century India opposed colonial rule and British acts of repression when they occurred. Nonetheless, separation between Hindus and Muslims remained marked. What is more, the Muslims were underrepresented in the official political movements. The tragic separation of India and Pakistan, which often overshadowed the birth of these new independent states, did not occur out of the blue.

E.H.: *What of the situation today? Are certain aspects of India's past of a structurally importance?*

Making politics more Hindu or more spiritual

S.M. Gandhi was the political and then physical target of Hindu extremists, because they considered him to be pro-Muslim and they were afraid that his social project (*Swarj*), put forward as an ideal society (*Ram Rajya*) would supplant their vision of a « Hinduised » world (*Hindu Raj*). This is one of the reasons why the communalists now parody Gandhi's dynamic concepts in their speeches.

There is a great deal of continuity between the criticism of the « secularism » of the twenties, thirties and forties and those of the nineties. The dominant characteristics of current debate can be seen in the positions of a Hindu leader such as Savarka, a contemporary of Gandhi, who speaks of his project to « Hinduise all political activity », and that of Gandhi himself, i.e. by « making politics more spiritual ». Religion, according to these two views, can either be used to consolidate the links within a community for political ends, or, by becoming a way of life, it can contribute to mutual respect and tolerance towards other religions and communities, being integrated in a wider project to constitute a « secularised » society. Furthermore, those promulgating Hindutva are quite ready to interpret history for their own purposes, for example, by emphasising the relations between the first Nehru governments and the Hindu leaders.

That being said, it is very difficult to analyse the current situation. Many answers have been given but they are too simplistic to be credible. Nonetheless, two aspects can be identified:

- The propensity for public demonstration of traditional religious beliefs: whether Hindu or Muslim, people want to show and show themselves. Since most Indians are Hindus, this generates a mass effect and it is them who are the most noticed. It is a Hindu revival. Some pilgrimages which only attracted a few dozen followers several years ago now attract ten thousand of them every day. There is no hierarchy among the faithful during these pilgrimages, which are of an egalitarian and uniforming nature.

- Globalisation has certain influences: religious phenomena have no frontiers either. What happens in Iran, for example, has repercussions in a large number of countries (3). One of the lessons to remember from the period when independence was obtained was the fact that politicians did not exacerbate the risks of « communalism », as opposed to what often occurs today with unfortunate consequences. All the parties could gain from examining the nationalist movement, which opposed « communalist » ideology by principle and without compromise, though there was no condemnation of the Indians influenced by it. Similarly, the movement made the same distinction when it fought imperialism rather than with the British people.

(3) Regarding this « globalisation » read also **H. Kapoor** on the ramifications of militant Hinduism.

E.H.: *How do you explain the modes of thinking prevalent among the young and students?*

S.M.: At university level, there is a phenomenon of assertion and pressure by « religious » groups. During the seventies and eighties, Indian universities were greatly influenced by Marxist thinking (which corresponded at national level to the state of emergency). Politics played a very important role among the students, like a dream of utopia. Furthermore, the educational system was not egalitarian. It is in theory but not in practise, and it is clear that the educational system works at two speeds. The government has no influence on the educational system which in turn appears to no longer have need of the government. Even though the State had contributed much to the educational system in the past (1950-1970), what it is doing is now seen in a rather negative light.

Today, the young are always looking for something, but they expect little from the politics promulgated by the traditional parties. Consequently, « communalism » fills the divide, and appears to be an alternative to politics, permitting them to believe in something. That said, this belief is diminished: their personal lives revolve around their material well-being, few read... It seems that few youths know what Hinduism is, and they do not make the effort to understand what this identity encompasses. In this respect, they are greatly influenced by television which presents a modern « pop » version of Hinduism.

Faced with this, many young people think only of money and ignore politics. The people who militate actively against communalism are close to circles of Marxist origin and constitute a minority.

Interview by Frédérique Bourgeois

India between Globalisation and the Temptations of Identity

An interview with Jean-Luc Racine*

Economie et Humanisme: *It seems that poverty has not necessarily made India a hotbed for fundamentalism and inter-community strife. Is this true, or is there a more subtle relationship between them?*

Jean-Luc Racine: There is no direct simplistic relationship between « fundamentalism » and poverty. It is not the poorest people who are attracted by extremist movements. Furthermore, I'm not sure one should use the term « fundamentalism ». The word is inappropriate when talking of Hindu nationalism, which acts more to unify the Hindu community than to maintain the segmentation of the caste system, expounded in ancient texts such as the Laws of Manu. Contrary to Christianity and Islam, Hinduism is not based on an essential, revealing and basic text. It would be more appropriate to speak of « communalism », a feeling of a strong but possibly threatened identity of one community as opposed to other communities. As a phenomenon of militant activism, this communalism certainly attracts a section of the middle classes, (particularly the lower middle classes) more than it does the masses at the bottom of the scale.

The poor can be involved during trouble and riots (Ayodhya, Bombay), but they often serve as tools by organised firebrands, possibly relayed by a manipulated lumpen proletariat.

E.H.: *Statistics at the beginning of the nineties showed that Indian society was hardly less inegalitarian than French society (1) and above all less inegalitarian than the other major countries of the « South », such as Brazil. Hasn't the break with « Indian socialism » accentuated these inequalities?*

J.-L.R.: It is difficult to make a comparison between the inequalities existing in Brazil, India and France. In Brazil, the inequalities are blatant; between the *favellas* and the American style skyscrapers, the contrasts are more marked than between the central districts of the major Indian cities and the slums. However, it is not possible to say that there is definitely less inequality in India.

Care is required when talking of a break with « Indian socialism ». Was Indian socialist before 1991? The official definition of the system, i.e. a

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(1) According to the difference between the richest and poorest quintiles.

« socialistic pattern of society », was more subtle, and more realistic. It was more a social democracy in which the state played a substantial economic role, but left a very important place to the private sector, however tightly controlled. The state also gave itself the task of intervening directly in favour of underprivileged categories of the population, by setting up a parallel distribution circuit for subsidised food and by reserving jobs, first for the *dalits* (previously known as untouchables), then increasingly for the so-called « lower castes ». That said, although social justice was announced as the goal, its implementation was far from being satisfactory.

As for evaluating the effects of the new political economy, the estimations of experts are contradictory and it is still too early to judge. But what we do know is that inequalities are increasing between those who profit from the reforms and the others. The question can also be asked in the following terms: Overall, is the situation improving for everybody? The government and the World Bank have admitted that the underprivileged sections of the population have not profited from the deregulation in progress. Have they suffered from this situation? Here again, arguments between experts sometimes emphasise rising staple food prices, and at other times falling inflation. Taken as a whole, there seem to be two major trends: disparities have increased and the beneficial effects of deregulation have not reached the poorest.

The frustration of the middle classes

E.H.: *Is an assertive, large middle class a factor of instability, since only average wealth, which sustains growing expectations, might be considered more unbearable in the Indian system than hopeless poverty?*

J.-L.R.: The middle classes are at the centre of the problem since it is they that are the most divided by the effects of liberalism (2). In the short term, this profits those who already possess financial capital, or those with the educational capital of good diplomas. However, all those with diplomas are not on an equal footing. There is a threshold between the lower middle class (students with mediocre diplomas who aspire to positions they will not obtain) and the upper middle class. The lower middle class is therefore very frustrated and there is resentment against the system which snares them between those who are better endowed, and who profit from the new trends, and the poorer section which benefits, for example, from reserved jobs and henceforth constitutes a factor of competition. For the poor, however, there is a risk of this frustration happening later on. For the moment they simply hope that their children will be able to go to school. Later, no doubt, they will share the resentment of those disappointed by India's economic growth.

Your question thus calls for a thorough analysis on the sociological level which also takes into account the time factor. Furthermore, the case of the *dalits* requires separate examination. Although there is a historical coinciden-

(2) We use in this paper the concepts of liberal, liberalism, and liberalisation as they are used in India, i.e. as we used them in French. In England or in United-States one refers rather too neo-conservatism, neo-conservatism economics, and deregulation.

ce between the emergence of militant groups of dalits and economic globalisation, it is difficult to see a relationship of cause and effect.

E.H.: *Aren't the problems of poor housing and the environment in the cities and, more generally that of urban disorder, factors which require highlighting in order to explain the changes in Indian society?*

J.-L.R.: It is the middle classes who are most sensitive to the sirens of « communalism », and they mostly live in the cities. This does not mean that there are no middle class population in the villages, but the scattered geography of the latter does not encourage the emergence of a middle class attracted by militant action. The city, independently of the slums, is more sensitive to the « communalist » message, both from the viewpoint of class (the middle classes) and that of community. It is in the cities that Hindu and Muslim districts exist alongside each other, whereas in large areas of India there are not many Muslims in the villages. The wholesale massacres of recent years have not occurred in the cities by chance alone.

These urban riots occur against a backdrop of economic interests and strategies of conquest. For example, certain people would like to see the slums cleared so that they can make money out of the land thus freed, or a group of shopkeepers can profit from the riots in order to get rid of rivals from another community. We know today that the riots of Bombay (1993) and the massacre of the Sikhs in Delhi (1984) were led by groups which had detailed lists of names. There have been skirmishes in the villages but these are part of another problem, linked more to the scourge of untouchability and the effects of social competition between the *dalits* and the non-*dalits*.

E.H.: *Don't the restrictions made on government investment aggravate the problem, even though the government has defined and still defines itself as the body which supervises economic development?*

J.-L.R.: One of the key elements of the watershed of 1991 was the reduction of the role of the State in economic production. However, Indian political leaders say they reject the « Washington consensus »: the single track doctrine imposed by the IMF, the World Bank and others. While deregulating at its own speed, the Indian government - be it the Congress or the United Front - intended to maintain some authority and took a third direction by attempting to preserve a balance between deregulation, opening up the economy to international capital, and the protected public and private sectors - or at least those that are still protected, such as craft and very small industries.

Regarding the public sector, it is true that the limits of State investment are a problem, particularly in the decisive area of infrastructures, one of the factors which hampers growth. It's true that India is now open to private capital (including foreign) in this area (energy, ports, etc.), but by nature this capital is invested for fast profits which are possible in certain cases (for example, generating electricity) but not in others (roads).

The diaspora: between the desire for identity and national feeling

E.H.: *Given the low amount of available investment, India has need of the transfers of funds made by its expatriates. Isn't there a propensity to accentuate the rationale of identity amongst non-resident Indians as a way to bring money into the country?*

J.-L.R.: Indeed, every government has tried to attract the money and the skills of the non-resident expatriates which supply approximately one tenth of investments from abroad. In the beginning, many chose financial investments, which are easily transferred in the case of risk, rather than investments in industry or starting-up companies. However, things are changing here, too. On the one hand, this trend is part of the desire for identity and of national feeling. One has to take a broad idea of what an Indian is, that's to say someone with Indian roots. An Indian of the second generation, born abroad, can still be considered as an Indian, even if he hasn't got an Indian passport. There is something about this phenomena that resembles the Chinese diaspora.

Inevitably, the diaspora includes currents of Hindu nationalism, which rganise themselves abroad and collect funds. However, these links shouldn't e caricatured. Certain non-residents are in some ways « more monarchist than the King ». For all that, the majority of emigrants are not necessarily supporters of the BJP, and still less of the RSS.

Will the BJP government play the identity card with the NRIS in order to attract investments? This could have an effect, but I'm not sure that it is decisive. The image of a strong India capable of safeguarding the interests of investors is just as important. To conclude on this point, these possibly reinforced links between the Indian diaspora and communalist currents essentially concern some of the emigrants who have succeeded in the United States, Canada and Europe. The Indians who've emigrated to the Gulf, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, are generally poorer, less educated and less politically free to express themselves. Although they send back large amounts of money, it is practically negligible in terms of major investments.

E.H.: *Do the weaknesses of the Indian economy stem from errors following independence? Hasn't the policy of self-reliance and substitution of imports now turned against an India almost absent from the world market?*

J.-L.R.: Error or not, it's a point for discussion. It's obvious India's very weak position on the world market was brought about by the belief that implementing a policy of self-reliance required, besides a self-centred market, eventual aid from outside (loans, aid from international financial organisations) rather than foreign capital. The analysis made by businessmen and then by politicians in the eighties was the following: the policy implemented

during the fifties gave India a solid industrial base and made it self-sufficient for food (the famines had disappeared). However, there was a price to be paid which was the lack of competitiveness of Indian products on the world market. This policy also had a negative facet which was hyper-regulation, controlled by an extremely heavy bureaucracy which centralised everything and encouraged corruption. The new policy is trying to solve these problems.

The first question with which the new BJP government, appointed in March 1998, must deal is the balance that should be achieved between opening up the Indian economy to foreign capital and its control. The BJP manifesto defines this expected balance through two concepts: « full liberalisation » in India itself, and « calibrated globalisation" in relation to world markets. Foreign capital is now present in many areas. But it is not possible to invest in India to do just anything anyhow. This question has a corollary: how is it possible to export more? The key can be summed up in one word: competitiveness. There's a lot yet to be done. India still represents less than 1% of world trade, a very low figure, even when taking into account the natural preponderance of the domestic market.

E.H.: *India takes a liberal outlook while retaining a large public sector and quite substantial State control over companies. Isn't this policy contradictory, to the point of making India and its government vulnerable?*

J.-L.R.: A priori I don't see why considering an alternative direction should lead to vulnerability. The fact that India is not wholly deregulated and that it retains a large public sector is not a weakness in itself.

In my opinion, hope for India resides precisely in this strategy of compromise, which opens the country to the unavoidable realities of globalisation without, however, selling off the government's responsibilities regarding, some might say hypocritically, social concerns. From 1991 up to now, governments have been quite cautious in avoiding sudden privatisations and the downsizing they lead to. Liberal ideologues accuse India of being too timid in reforming its economy, of conserving public sectors that could be privatised (insurance), and of maintaining subsidies considered ruinous (such as the supply of electricity to peasant farmers at extremely low prices). On the contrary, shouldn't India be considered as wise in enacting this transition gradually? It is true that its fragile coalition governments are obliged to tread carefully, and this prudence goes beyond electioneering.

However, does this lead to making governments vulnerable? The answer goes further than the political and economic framework and leads to examination of the changing nature of political power in India today. Does the rise of regionalist and caste based parties and the beginning of coalition governments prove a weakening of the State and of the administration? Two opinions oppose each other regarding this. The pessimists emphasise the instability of governments, rising criminality in political circles (particularly in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), and the negative effects of the progress made by the so-called « lower » castes, who have little experience in holding power

and, what's more, wish to take their revenge on the upper castes traditionally in command. On the contrary, the optimists feel that it is healthy that social movements are expressed by new political forces, and also healthy that the diversity present in such an immense country as India is represented by regionalist parties. Also, after the centralised hegemony of the Congress Party, it is normal that the decentralisation of politics should occur hand in hand with the decentralisation of economic decision-making. As for the rest, from the Congress Party of P.V. Narasimha Rao to the United Front of I.K. Gujral, each government has accepted the new economic policy, even though the pace of reform has slowed down a little.

A smooth transition?

This observation raises a two edged question: Will the apparently weakened political system find itself out of touch with the economic growth now in progress, or will a stronger and more stable government encourage more sustained development? This question is now the subject of debate in India. I will also raise several others: What is behind the apparent calm with which the new economic policy is being implemented? Is this lack of strong popular protest against liberalisation the proof that the reforms are well accepted by all? Is it the result of a relative consensus between the players in the political arena, which in spite of their differences (from the Communist Party - Marxists to the BJP) do not call into doubt the basis of the direction chosen? Or, should one see in all this the calm that reigns before an unseen but inevitable storm?

Whatever the case, India is going through a dual transformation: that of its economy and that of the balance of power between the centre and the States. This dual transformation is occurring step by step, organised by minority governments (even the Congress Party of P.V. Narasimha Rao did not have an absolute majority). It therefore demonstrates a relative consensus, hardly masked by the vicissitudes of an unsettled political climate. Far from suffering from dangerously weakened state power, India may in fact achieve its transformation smoothly, fifty years after independence if these challenges are met: i) reasonably sustained economic growth; ii) adequate concern given to improving the lot of one third of the Indian population living below the poverty line; iii) a better standard of political life, less perturbed by unbridled factionalism and opportunism. I would like to add a fourth imperative: the control, including by the present government of A.B. Vajpayee, of any Hindu communalist drift.

E.H.: *Even so, doesn't the weight of the constraints represented by economic and financial globalisation on Indian society make the population seek some kind of refuge in its culture and religion?*

J.-L.R.: What are the constraints of globalisation? The dismantling of customs barriers and the facilities offered to foreign investment. The question of culture is obviously present, very much so with regard to telecommunications. As with France, India invokes the issue of cultural exception. It continues to prohibit foreign investors from owning substantial shares in the press. Confronted by the globalisation of culture, India takes the same stance as many other countries. It has opened itself up to satellite TV networks, but there are a multitude of local responses mushrooming in India itself, including in the media.

As for the economy, take a look at the Indian States most open to investment by multinational companies: Gujarat (a stronghold of the BJP and its factions), Maharashtra (Shiv Sena and the BJP), Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu (regionalist parties), West Bengal (Communist Party), and Karnataka (ruled by the *Janata Dal*). When examining the map of globalisation in India, one sees that it is well accepted by both the Hindu and regionalist parties. This does not rule out sporadic and more vehement movements against globalisation. Movements against GATT, for example, have existed but only within a fragment of Indian opinion.

Will globalisation strengthen religious identities? There is nothing decisive in this respect. The BJP has not come to power on the issue of globalisation. The spread of Hindu nationalism (including in a part of the diaspora) must be analysed in its dual dimension: religious identity, yes, but also a sense of belonging to an important nation called to play a growing role in the future world order. This reassertion of national pride goes far beyond the Sangh Parivar, and in fact also characterises the strongest opponents of *hindutva* ideology. As far as global challenges are concerned, I believe that national feelings are stronger than religious affiliations, and none of them call for India to withdraw tensely into itself.

If you make a rough assimilation of the major forces behind globalisation with American imperialism - to which India is opposed - you must also take into account that the United States is the leading investor in India. The American administration is sending its ministers to India forever more frequently, before the visit by Bill Clinton himself, planned for 1998. Anti-Americanism is a constant feature of Indian opinion, which is generally open, though such feeling does not run high at present. It could rekindle, but inspection of what is happening in Southeast Asia leads rather to questioning the pertinence of a specific theory of « Asianism », which in fact was mostly formulated in Japan and Malaysia and not in India, whatever the B.JP. government's position is on strengthening « Asian Solidarity »

Taking up the challenge of globalisation

Keeping this lesson in mind makes it possible, perhaps, to view more relatively the risks of retreats into identity as a reaction to the constraints of glo-

balisation. At the moment, the strongest of these reactions come to the fore more due to domestic problems than to globalisation: look at Yugoslavia. On the contrary, the size of India, and its vast population, which has its share of ethnic conflicts (Kashmir, the North-East etc.) is an advantage which permits it to absorb a great many traumas. The cost of globalisation has also been attenuated, at least up to now, by an economic policy implemented in small doses. Naturally, there is nothing to stop the implementation of a more determined and brutal liberal policy, or a serious crisis damaging social cohesion from spurring aggressive communalism in reaction. At this juncture, I'm more struck with the absence of major conflicts since 1993.

I don't intend ignoring the statements made by Indian and foreign NGOs which emphasise that India is falling under the yoke of a new international order. I am not totally convinced by these statements, since globalisation works in two directions. The combat taken up by the Narmada Bachao Andolan has universal significance because the activists involved have obtained feedback from beyond India's borders. I feel that the very strength of the country gives reason for being optimistic as to its capacity to react to disproportionate tensions. The capacity of reaction of states and nations confronted by the threats of globalisation should not be underestimated. As important as it is to denounce the excesses of international financial speculation, I feel there is a danger in overestimating the power of what we mean to fight. Ideas are changing quickly regarding this: we know better today that globalisation and its networks do not simply mean the end of nation-states, or even that of governments and citizens.

As a final analysis, the capacity of governments and *a fortiori* the great nations (for example, China and India) to preserve their specific characteristics should not be neglected. True, we are going through a stage in which external forces are gaining influence, affecting every country in the world. However, India may rightly see globalisation as a challenge to be taken up - and perhaps as an opportunity to be seized - rather than the cause of cultural and religious tensions liable to pervert the country. That this Indian ambition is fuelled by a strong image of itself - well beyond *hindutva* ideology - implies less a retreat than the expression of renewed confidence. The future will tell whether this new confidence is justified, not only in terms of production indexes and geopolitical power, but also and above all in terms of the necessary improvement of the living standards of the greatest number, not to mention the need for internal peace and unity amongst the constituents of a diverse India.

Interview reported by Frédérique Bourgeois

The State and Islam in Bangladesh

A Constant Political Dispute Since Independence

by Monique Selim*

Since winning its independence in 1971, after a very bloody war against Pakistan, former East Bengal became Bangladesh, but it has never achieved real and durable political stability.

The first secular and socialist government, led by the independence leader, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, assassinated four years after his victory, was succeeded by the two military dictatorships of General Zia Rahman (also assassinated) and of General Hussein Mohammed Ershad, overthrown in 1990 and only recently released from prison. Since 1991, the appearance of democratic political change (1) cannot mask the abyss that separates governments, whatever their natures and obediences, from a very politically conscious and voluble civil society. Violence, innumerable general strikes (hartal), and mass movements are customary reactions against the factionalism and corruption in political circles which are prepared to do anything to obtain power and hold on to it, albeit for never more than a few years.

Silences and concessions

The appointment of Sheikh Hasina to the post of Prime Minister on 23 June 1996 is the consequence of the Awami League's relative majority at the last elections. However, this result, which ended a two year political crisis, was more due to the population's opposition to the government in place than its political confidence in the League. Since its fall from power in 1975, the Awami League, the victorious party of Independence, has substantially renovated its points of focus and made its principles more flexible, evolving with the electoral campaigns and grassroots movements that have marked the last two decades. Supporting secularism in 1971, against Pakistani domination, which claimed the need for islamic unity, the Awami League did not, however, protest in 1988 against the ruling that proclaimed islam as State religion. This ruling, promulgated under the dictatorship of H.M. Ershad, was part of a number of measures intended to make institutions and society more islamic. By not protesting against this measure, the League, afraid of upsetting popu-

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(1) With the appointments to the post of Prime Minister of the begum Khaleda Zia, wife of General Zia and head of the BNP - Bangladesh National Party - followed by that of Sheik Hasina in 1996, the daughter of the « Father of the Nation » and head of the Awami League.

lar opinion, made its first deviation from its original convictions. The electoral campaign of 1991 saw the Awami League make an apparent attempt to outbid the other parties on religious matters, permitting it to compete with the fundamentalist party *Jamaat-I-Islami*, then the up-and-coming force. Initially, the BNP formed a successful tactical alliance with this party, since it brought the begum Khaleda Zia to the post of Prime Minister, against whom *Jamaat-I-Islami* quickly turned. More recently, there seems to have been a rapprochement instigated with the Jatyo party of General H.M. Ershad against whom the Awami League fought bitterly in concert with Left wing groups from 1985 to 1990. One of the many paradoxes of political manoeuvring in Bangladesh is the revival of the party of the ex-President, despised for the eight long years of his reign (29 seats in 1996).

In echo to these reversals regarding the vital political challenge of islam in the State and the nation, is a partial renunciation by the Awami League of the watch words of 1971. This concerns the application of greater social justice in the form of moderate socialism. Thus the League's economic and social policies differ little from those influenced by the neo-conservative line held by its predecessor, the BNP, it can be assumed that general discontent will erupt as virulently as that in the past against the begum Khaleda Zia.

The Awami League's lack of political mettle matches that of the other parties and offers observers a backdrop of political in-fighting, to a great extent dissociated from the aspirations of the people. This phenomenon is characteristic of Bangladesh's structure and in a certain way runs counter to the remarkable political awareness of the population, which demonstrates the mushrooming of often minuscule parties destined to a more or less long life, and a very large number of NGOs based in the villages and districts. The inhabitants invariably prove themselves to be much attached to the slogans brandished at the time of the country's liberation and demand, for example, that the « collaborators » of the Pakistanis present in all the previous regimes be tried and condemned.

A corollary of this is that they are constantly dissatisfied with their governments - which they have been able to vote into power since only a few years ago - against which they demonstrate their defiance and opposition with vehemence. Thus the political spectrum is, as in India, split from end to end by confrontations. The struggles between factions are very violent, but at the same time they uphold a strong parliamentary tradition.

One of the most significant discussions regarding this divorce between the State and the population is without doubt the role of islam in a very different context compared to that of other islamic countries. This is because the victorious nationalism of independence is still just as vigorous, thereby bringing the bengali identity to the fore, in opposition to the islamic identity asserted by those designated as Pakistani « colonialists ».

What islam?

National identity and the fight against poverty appear to affect the social structure of Bangladesh more than religious identity in the strict meaning of the term. Bengali identity is strong on both sides of the border and has been constituted historically. The combats that began as early as 1947 focused on the bengali language and the islamic polarisation was pushed to the sidelines during the war of independence, since the population above all desired autonomy and independence. Thus the people of Bangladesh are first of all Bengalis while their islamic identity is of secondary importance.

The regular recurrence of this debate on the political stage provides a particularly relevant looking glass through which to examine the challenges at play in society vis-à-vis the elected authorities. Belonging to the islamic community (*umma*) seems to be a permanent motive of the political parties in search of power, despite the fact that the bangladeshi version of islam is very syncretic, combining hindu practices with popular magical-religious beliefs, and with a sufi tradition and a cult of the saints. This peripheral islam, cut off from arab centres of traditional orthodoxy, has led to a general tolerance, partly supported by feelings among the population of illegitimacy and religious inferiority.

Made to feel inferior in comparison to arab centres, islam tends to be « open » since the people are not the holders of the orthopraxy of legitimate and original islam to which Pakistan is closer on the symbolic level. « Imported » relatively late, islam cannot be a centralising standard reference.

These socio-economic characteristics fashion the ambivalence behind the ritual attempts by politicians of the parties in government to attenuate the insecurity of their tenure, and of their rivals to dislodge them.

The originality of islam in Bangladesh stems from the fact that it was disassociated from politics in 1971 (2). Thus the constitution of 1971 formally ruled that all religions were equal and that the entire population (Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists) would benefit from the holy days of the different religions. However, the politicisation of islam is linked directly to the war of independence against Pakistan and it is apparent that islam has been used since this period as a factor of political division (3). The short history of Bangladesh is therefore strewn with moments and events crystallising the political manipulation of islam without any definitive results.

(2) An original situation, especially in comparison to Algeria, for example..

(3) **Gérard Heuzé, Monique Selim** (collective work), *Politiques et religions dans l'Asie du Sud contemporaine (Inde, Bangladesh, Pakistan)*, Khartala, Paris, 1998.

An islam in search of political opportunity

Consequently, General H.M. Ershad, despite his opening of the country to ever more abundant subsidies from Saudi Arabia, his authorisation of islamic parties of ex-collaborators of Pakistan, the instituting of islam as the State religion was ousted by popular decision (1982-90). A similar strategy used

THE COUNTER-POWER OF A NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

There are a large number of NGOs in Bangladesh and they form a dense network. Four of five of these NGOs are particularly influential and are capable of becoming genuine players in the political arena according to the issues of the day. Among these is the Grameen Bank, the best known, which provides small loans to women and landless farmers. There is also the organisation Gonashastaya Kendro or GK, which literally means « people's health centre ». This NGO run by doctors was founded during the war and is well regarded abroad due to its health and pharmaceutical policy based on vital medicines. (1). The originality of this fabric of organisations stems from the multitude of small NGOs that have sprung up in the villages or in urban districts (2). Individuals constantly group together to set up development organisations for the poor or for women. These NGOs find their roots in a reformist tradition present everywhere in Bengal, dating from the 19th century, and encouraged by the upper and middle classes. Furthermore, the issues pursued by these NGOs are progressive, in the education of the poor, women's' rights, and stem from society itself.

There are also Islamic NGOs which are largely « supported » by the countries of the Persian Gulf. It is on the basis of these organisations that the party, *Jamaat-I-Islami* has gathered an audience for itself. Nonetheless, a distinction should be made between the islamic NGOs (whose aims are religious education, emergency and longer term aid, and charity) and those which take the step from islamic education to political islamism.

Generally, the relationships between the NGOs and the government are complex. During the recent fatwas organised by *Jamaat-I-Islami*, the NGOs were the principal targets, along with the women involved with them. The aim of this was to denounce foreign hegemony inside Bangladesh. However, the government requires foreign aid in order to function, some of this aid arriving via local NGOs. Thus foreign aid is recycled through collective organisations working on such issues as important as education and women's' emancipation.

The NGOs have participated directly and indirectly in politics since independence. Certain of them were supported by the former military dictatorship. What is more, the major NGOs have now become genuine companies involving daily work and production. They are generally managed by members of the middle and upper classes, and invariably reproduce the same hierarchy of statuses and classes in their midst. Mirroring the contradictions present in society, they nonetheless constitute an area of real social mobility. Exemplary, on the ideological level, as action schemes against poverty and for development, they are both original and significant factors of progress.

M.S.

(1) See **Bernard Hours and Monique Selim**, *Une entreprise de développement au Bangladesh, Le centre de Savar*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 1989.

(2) Cf. **Monique Selim**, *L'aventure d'une multinationale au Bangladesh* (l'Harmattan, Paris, 1991), which describes small NGOs set-up by workers.

by the begum Khaleda Zia (1991-95) accorded the head of *Jamat-I-Islami*, Professor Golan Azam, the Bangladeshi nationality that had been refused him by every previous government for « crimes of collaboration with the Pakistanis ». She believed, naively, that she could count on the support of this party, but was unable to avoid defeat by a unanimous opposition joined by *Jamaat-I-Islami*, which paralysed parliament for two years, until the end of 1995. With respect to this, it is interesting to note that the popular trial of Golam Azam started by the « freedom fighters » also rallied the small « anti-islamist islamic parties », ie the movements against the intrusion of islam into the State in the name of an alternative idea of religion: among these, certain spoke out in defence of Tasmila Nasreen.

Lastly, the independent campaign led by the integrist party in recent years in favour of islamic purification, mainly in the form of *fatwas* against innumerable women mostly working on NGOs and against the famous writer, T. Nasreen, ended in 1996 with an unprecedented failure at the elections (4).

The first conclusion that can be drawn from these aborted rehearsals of using religion for political ends is that the people of Bangladesh, which historically founded its independence on nationalism based on the disassociation of islam from politics, has shown itself capable of durable resistance to any return to the past, reminiscent of a political-religious union experienced under Pakistan. In parallel, the social commitment of the people to the development of a country hit by the impoverishment of an increasingly larger fraction of landless farmers, to its modernisation and to the reduction of the extreme destitution in which many find themselves, also takes root in the local interpretation of the messages issued by islam, which puts forth the fiction that all are equal (5). The inhabitants appear to be totally concerned by their misery. According to historians, islam appeared in the 15th century, after the conversion of the lower castes in Bengal, setting forth the ideal of equality and social redistribution in a region ruled by implacable hierarchical structures of which the hindu system of castes is the most concrete manifestation. Contrary to India, where the caste system is present to a greater or lesser extent in even the most minority religions, Bangladesh has no castes or jatis in the strict meaning of the term, it is the hierarchies of status and class that dominate. The most important criteria are education and knowledge, including for women; social and economic class; and participation in political life, which acts as factor of social mobility and integration. It is a highly politicised society, including in the countryside.

This vision of Islam, combined with the founding tenets of political struggle, naturally run counter to the propaganda of parties assimilable with political islamism. Profoundly open and liable to revolt, with a class of intellectuals and literate people quick to show their discontent, Bangladeshi society is as unready to kneel before the diktats of a party whose will it is to impose the standards of an imported islam considered as foreign, as it is to accept military dictatorships and democratic fictions.

Monique Selim

(4) Jamaat-I-Islami only retained two of its twenty two MPs, giving Bangladesh a special place among Islamic countries in which political islamism is revealing itself to be a growing force.

(5) **Bernard Hours**, Islam et développement au Bangladesh, l'Harmattan, Paris, 1993.

Pakistan: The Reasons for the Emergence of a Sectarian Counter-Culture

by Mariam Abou Zahab*

Contrary to a commonly held opinion, religious violence is not a part of Pakistani history. The rural areas of Punjab and Sind had a historical tradition of harmonious co-existence in which tolerance and respect for religious pluralism were prevalent. Communal riots rarely broke out: Sunnis and Shias revered the same saints, prayed in the same mosques and participated in the same rituals, particularly during the month of *Moharram* (1). Tensions were felt only in the cities and were mostly confined to verbal attacks.

Everything has changed in the last twenty years: religious identities have crystallized, new forms of communal identification have emerged and South Punjab has been caught in the grip of sectarian violence. According to an report published in May 1997 by Pakistani daily, 1, 004 sectarian (2) incidents leaving 1, 120 persons dead and thousands more injured have been recorded since 1987. The number of victims has increased since and Sunni-Shia tensions remain very high.

Shia radicalization under influence

The Pakistani press analyses this situation as the aftermath of General Zia ul Haq's regime (1977-1988) and it insists on the importance of external factors, seeing violence as a mere extension on Pakistani soil of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran or, alternatively as an Indian or American conspiration aiming at destabilizing Pakistan. It cannot be denied that the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq war, the Afghan war and Zia ul Haq's islamization policy played a well documented role in the radicalization of the communities and tostered the spreading of sectarianism.

The Iranian revolution gave Shias a new awareness of their separate identity. This brought a change in the attitude of a section of the Pakistani Shia community who had so far stayed away from politics, living in the nostalgic remembrance of a glorious past while waiting for the return of the imam

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(1) Shia period of mourning commemorating the death of Imam Hussain at Karbala in AD 680 (cf. inset).

(2) Sectarianism refers to conflicts and acts of violence between religious sects and more precisely between Sunnis and Shias within the context of present Pakistan.

Mehdi (3). Khomeini's accession to power demonstrated that an unjust regime could be overthrown and that it was possible to change the world without waiting any longer. Besides, religious parties were considerably strengthened through their participation in the Afghan *jihad* (holy war): the availability of weapons and foreign financing together with military training imparted to the members of these parties gave an entirely new dimension to communal differences.

General Zia ul Haq's islamization policy, implemented from 1979 in a political vacuum and without any consensus, could only increase tensions and controversies. Zia ul Haq resorted to Islam to legitimate his government. The Islamization policy based on Sunni hanafi law mobilized the Shias who had already been radicalized by the Iranian revolution and it brought them on the political scene. It also gave the mullahs a new social status that they would never have dreamed of before: traditionally dependent on landlords or on tribal chieftain, their social status was rather low. Islamization created a religious bureaucracy and it enabled the mullahs to build a power base through their management of zakat (legal alms) funds and their contacts with the local administration. They could thus spread their influence throughout the society, most notably in the educational field. With such an infrastructure at their disposal, they were in a position to challenge the political system, something they had never been able to achieve through the ballot box.

Numerous internal causes

This analysis, however relevant it may be, is somehow too simple. It seems more accurate to consider that the present situation is not only the outcome of ideological or religious differences fostered by foreign powers. An upsurge of violence is observed in times of internal political struggle or of economic crisis. Sectarianism is also a means, sometimes the only one available, of political expression in a widely depoliticized society ; in such conditions, it can be seen as a legitimate answer to injustice and oppression. That is why some internal -and in some cases purely local- social and economic factors should also be taken into account.

Punjab has undergone, within a single generation, a change from a stable and predominantly agricultural society to a transitional society with a high level of urbanization and industrialization. Modernization, although superficial, is highly visible in the cities of the north and the centre of the province while the society remains essentially tribal and feudal. Power is centralized, the political system can hardly be called democratic, dissidence assimilated to treason is harshly suppressed. The ordinary people, who have never really had a say in the political decision process, are depoliticized and they no longer place any trust in the promises of politicians. The feudals have managed to retain their privileged status owing to the lack of a real land reform and they continue to oppose taxation of their farming income. Besides, depolitici-

(3) According to the doctrine of the « hidden imam », the twelfth descendant of the Prophet Mohammad did not die but was « occulted » in AD 873. He will come back to re-establish justice on earth.

Sunnism, Shiism, Sufism, etc.

- The Sunnis, who are the majority among the Muslims (there are, however, large Shias communities in Iran, Iraq, the Lebanon and North Yemen) are characterized by their respect, beyond the Koran itself, for the Sunna, a tradition made up of words, tales and reference texts directly linked to the Prophet Mohammed. Sunnism recognizes the legitimacy of the first four Caliphs of Islam. It is subdivided, at the level of behavioural codes into several « schools », of which the Hanafi School is relatively liberal.

- From the beginning the Shias were politically organized, bringing together the partisans of the Caliph Ali, the ousted successor of the Prophet Mohammed. They transmit the sayings and traditions of Ali, according them a recognition equivalent to that due to those of Mohammed. They are very attached to the « Twelve Imams », that is to say, Ali and his eleven descendants. The Shias are the only Muslims to have a formally constituted clergy (Ayatollahs, Mullahs), who, however, only became politicized towards the end of the 19th century.

- Sufism is the mystical branch of Islam. Without necessarily being opposed to dogma and codes, it attempts to go beyond them so that the believer can live in a form of direct union with God. The Sufis are generally organized in brotherhoods or « ways », practising an allegorical interpretation of the Koran and admitting a cult of « saints ».

- The Ismailis are a group of Muslims also to be found in South Asia, in particular, as based on the dynasty of the Aga Khan. It is a branch of Shiism that awaits the return of the Imam Ismael.

Vincent Berthet

zation has enabled them to regain, at least partially some of their past influence.

There are in fact two Punjab: the first one -the north of the province- is efficient and looks towards the outside world: the other one -the south- is traditional and it feels increasingly neglected and exploited.

South Punjab is the area most affected by sectarian violence; this deprived area dominated by feudals benefited much less than the north of the province form the economic returns of migration to the Middle East. South Punjab has undergone rapid population growth coupled with unplanned urbanization without industrialization, which caused frustration and a deep resentment towards the social and political system. Politics are traditionally controlled by a few feudal families which ally with every government. Agricultural

mechanization had far reaching consequences for the rural society: farmers who had to leave their villages cannot find employment as small market towns are dominated by the migrants who came from East Punjab in 1947.

Trained to exclude

South Punjab also witnessed the mushroom growth of *madrassas* (religious schools) in the 1980's. These schools which turn out half-educated mullahs function as a recruting base for extremist groups. The Iranian revolution and the Afghan war have given an international dimension to communalism; huge funds started flooding into these *madrassas*, 65% of which receive private financing, often coming from abroad, without any control of the State. There are at present 2, 512 *madrassas* in Punjab (4), 1, 619 of which are located in the south of the province and 883 in Bahawalpur district alone which is one of the main centres of sectarianism. In a region where feudals have succeeded in maintaining a low level of literacy, these schools have attracted the poor. The pupils who live in harsh conditions -corporal punishments are commonplace and children are sometimes kept in fetters - receive a traditional religious education based on learning by rote, which gives them a vision of the world in which social hierarchy is linked to religious criteria. *Madrassas* have introduced in South Punjab a puritanical kind of Islam previously unknown in this area which was formerly the realm of the Sufi. Almost 220 000 pupils are currently enrolled in *madrassas* in Punjab; many of them are foreigners, mostly Afghans, but also Chinese, Burmese, Thais and others -it is now several years that no Algerian or Egyptian students have been accepted . Sectarianism arises from the concept that the belief of a group is the only true one and that members of other sects must either be converted or eliminated (5).

There is obviously a link between the growth of *madrassas* and the upsurge in communal violence. The pupils who leave these *madrassas* have a much more definite ideology than the mullahs of the previous generation; some of them took part in the fighting in Afghanistan alongside the *taliban*. They are prepared to die for the glory of Islam and go as far as to believe that they are doing their religion a service by killing members of other sects. As weapons have being readily available since the Afghan war, these marginalized young people take to religious violence -thus legitimate in their eyes- because it gives them power. They reinforce their group identity by attacking others. It is no longer just a religious war between Sunnis and Shias but is has become a kind of social revolution. The militants are at war with the social and political system and, to an ever greater extent, with the State which, for them, has no legitimity. The Iranian revolution and the *taliban* movement have shown them that, at least in the short term, power comes from the barrel of a gun. They think that, as Pakistan was created in the name of Islam, their mission is to establish an Islamic State.

(4) Only 868 of these *madrassas* were founded between 1947 and 1975, the remaining 1, 644 were founded between 1976 and 1997.

(5) This is contrary to one of the principles of Islam which says that there is no compulsion in religion.

Sectarianism as a substitute for political expression

Lastly, it is worth turning our attention to Jhang which was until recently the centre of Sunni-Shia tension. The situation in this town demonstrates perfectly how sectarianism can be seen as the sole means of political expression when the population has no access to the political scene. In this case, external factors have served simply as a catalyst. In Jhang, sectarianism has taken on the aspect of a class struggle: the majority of the population is Sunni, but the power has always been in the hands of Shia landlords. Sunni extremists have found a foothold in this region by exploiting the oppression of the people by the Shia feudals. In 1985, the emergence of the *Sepah-e Sahaba* (SSP) (6) polarized the communities, as this movement soon appeared to be the only movement with a political program that confronted the feudal families. In April 1992, the SSP won a by-election in Jhang district, which reinforced its credibility. Sunni shopkeepers and small proprietors turned to communal violence in order to express their political opposition to the Shia landlords. The struggle of an emerging class against vested interest took on the accommodating form of communalism and religious conflict was exploited for political ends.

These communitarian phenomena are also the result of the « disarticulated development » of Pakistan which, having fallen into the trap of foreign aid, has not sought to use its agricultural resources to develop its industry, and which devotes a good part of its budget to repaying the debt and to defence expenditures. The root causes of sectarianism can only be cured through radical socio-economic reforms and a restructuring of the educational system.

Once again the future of Pakistan looks rather bleak: the violence has not stopped despite the adoption in August 1997 of the Anti-Terrorist Act which set up special courts. The economic situation keeps getting worse. The census which should have been carried out in 1991 and which has been delayed time again because of ethnic tension, notably in Sind and Baluchistan, has once again been postponed.

Mariam Abou Zahab

(6) The army of the companions of the Prophet Mohammad, a Sunni extremist group involved in most of the acts of violence perpetrated against Shias.

2

Living Together, Beyond the Conflicts

In spite of the problems the Ganges continues to flow and relative peace reigns in the neighbouring countries. The vital forces within civil society are taking up the challenge of pluralism, a challenge that concerns the entire world.

Resistance by Collective Organisation and Dialogue

by Aloysius John*

The traditional democratic system in India has been able to stop the advance of communalism up to a point. But alarms are sounding throughout civil society via a network of capillary-like links within poor communities which are vulnerable and exposed to inter-community tension. Local associations, churches, and other NGOs are acting to oppose the advance of sectarian ideologies. Experience of running micro-developments in communities can be used to promote secularism, tolerance and above all learning how to live together.

Two types of action are being carried out to increase awareness among the poorer sections of the population, which have often been the most vulnerable (1) during the recent conflicts. These entail generating dialogues between communities by setting-up micro-development projects, and the launching of dialogue between religions; this dialogue becomes a tool against the rise of « communalism ». These different actions permit attenuating the phenomenon and are a genuine form of non-violent resistance capable of promoting social harmony.

Awareness of a future to be built

For ten years, NGOs, the Church and other small organisations have been involved in a real fight, using micro-development as a tool against « communalism ». This entails involving the members of a local community to take in hand their own development, a process which occurs in several steps. Firstly, the members gather round a formally or informally recognised co-ordinator to analyse the causes of poverty. Then, they seek common solutions to the

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(1) In that they fall prey to activists who lead them to commit exactions of which they are also the physical victims.

problems identified and, lastly, they distribute the tasks required. It is the very process of local development which serves to integrate the population and generate solidarity. This type of collective combat thus becomes a formidable common denominator for rallying the poor. Hindus, Christians and Muslims all share the same enemy: unbearable poverty and the socio-economic system that oppresses them. In this united combat, cultural and religious differences, and even caste barriers are seen relatively, since they serve no use and are even counter-productive to development.

Sometimes, a lack of immediate concrete results causes the failure of a development project. Despite this, local communities have proven that they can remain united, fuelling their common conviction and drawing wealth from their diversity (2). In certain villages, these groups are capable of claiming their basic rights (drinking water, roads, etc.). They have taken up an approach of non-violent pressure vis-à-vis the local authorities and elected representatives and won their case.

This awareness and accompanying collective work can only be initiated via a long process of co-ordinating these poor communities and it is the co-ordinator's work to give a vision of a harmonious and united society which involves the members of these communities on the road of dialogue, with tolerance and respect of others.

Today, there are several thousand communities of this type in India and in certain places this approach is even perceived as a nuisance for the promoters of communalism, who do hesitate to resort to violence to impede it.

The dialogue between confessions

Dialogue between religions can also foster genuine resistance. This approach is taken at the level of intellectuals and between religious leaders, before spreading to the social fabric of the community. It permits bringing together all the common points and values that characterise India's main religions. These common points give meaning to Indian secularism and they draw citizens closer to each other. Certain values such as charity, human respect, respect for life and love of one's fellows are used to achieve dialogue and coming together and can be considered as the basis for unity and harmony in Indian society.

This religious dialogue has an affect on religious practices. Thus the Catholic Church has found common ground with the Hindus by allowing Indian culture to enter into Christian practice (prayers, chants, priests' clothing, etc.). This approach has allowed the Church to claim a place in Indian culture and society and demand a legitimate place for Christians in society. Thus the approach of stimulating dialogue between religions has become a means of promoting an opening without domination between religions on the basis of culture and by referring to common values.

(2) Women now often step forward as leaders, involve themselves in politics and act with determination to promote their community.

PACIFIC RESISTANCE

Trained during the seventies in the framework of the integrated development programmes implemented by *Frères des Hommes*, the activists of the organisation, Prayas (in Hindi this means attempt, experimentation), have worked constantly to further the development and emancipation of the population of their region, and the neighbourhoods of the districts of Gaya and Patna in Bihar, one of India's most backward states. They now have to face the threat of fundamentalism, as recounted below.

From 1989 and 1991, when the BJP launched a national campaign to build a Hindu temple on the site of the mosque of Baber, the agitation caused by the fervour for Hindu identity, which started in Uttar Pradesh, rapidly spread to Bihar. The violence finally reached the villages where we had been working for several years and where the Hindu and Muslim communities lived without trouble in a climate of peace and brotherhood. By causing the death of several people, the BJP succeeded in destroying these good relationships that had existed for centuries.

In this context, our action first consisted in identifying and contacting sensible Muslims and Hindus who were ready to restore peace between the two communities. We organised meetings between them and discussed together the initiatives to be taken. Thus, jointly, we organised fasts, sit-ins and meetings in several quarters of the district of Gaya and Patna, to advise people to beware of rumours and keep away from extremist parties. In the villages where the massacres had occurred, we went with the representatives of the two communities in a delegation to talk with the survivors to prevent them from carrying out reprisals. Each time we referred to the teaching of Swami Vivekananda: « God is one ».

Ram Lakham Prasad

Collective action that begins as a fight against unbearable misery and poverty frequently alternates dialogue with teaching tolerance and generating economic development during the different stages of development. These actions are credible since they are gestures of resistance on an everyday level of existence rather than being great rebellions against the spirit of communalism.

Aloysius John

The Central Aspect of Education

by Teesta Setalvad*

The Khoj « secular education project » , started experimentally in 1994, is one of the initiatives of the Sabrang Communications organisation (1). This was founded in Bombay in 1993, following the demolition of the *Babri Masjid* mosque and inter-community riots throughout the country, to encourage cultural and community exchanges (2).

The aim of the Khoj programme is to examine Indian school curricula for the things that maintain prejudice (on the basis of various differences of religious community, sex and caste) and to train voluntary teachers in this secular line of thought, at all levels and in all subjects.

Reaction from the great range of existing teaching worlds (in Bombay, for example, schools are run in Hindi, Marathi or Urdu) to this proposal has been massive (3). This indicates that not only these training modules have long been essential in the Indian context, but also that great effort is required in the area of teacher training.

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A new look at teaching history

At the same time publishing and research activities are being undertaken.

Thus a book on stereotypes and a comic strip introducing a new way of reading Indian history have been published. A seminar for history teachers was held in Bombay on « History and its modifications » . Four internationally reputed Indian historians exchanged views with forty teachers based on an in-depth presentation of the periods of Indian history since the Middle Ages. Such a seminar, which will be followed by others, acknowledges the fact that, in most schools, the lack of means makes it difficult for teachers to have access to « non-aligned » books and historical documents. Also, over the last ten years we have noticed that history curricula and textbooks have been subject to cynical manipulation. The ideologists of the Hindu community policy have transformed the approach to history into a simple but insidious attempt at dividing Indians between « us » (the Hindus) and « them » (the Muslims, « raiders » , « invaders » , etc.).

(1) This project receives financial support from « Frères de l'homme » and « Agir ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme » , and also local help - the fundamentalists are not the only ones to attract funding.

(2) This organisation publishes the monthly *Communalism Combat* and manages the distribution of documents concerning inter-community excesses and their consequences for human rights.

(3) In India and also to a certain extent in Sri Lanka.

SRI LANKA:

FROM CHILDREN TO ADULTS

As with many countries in Asia, religion and ethnicity in Sri Lanka exist in symbiosis, and are therefore a decisive element in influencing culture and socio-political behaviour.

Examination of Sri Lanka's history shows that the Celanese have begun a process which excludes minorities, with the aim of establishing an Aryan identity and bringing to life a providential history (religious mythology). The aim of this process is to give the country a national identity which is Buddhist regarding religion, Aryan racially, and Celanese culturally. Consequently, the minority culture and identity of the Hindu Tamils are stifled and their economic, religious, cultural, social and political autonomy is suppressed. Furthermore, by politicising religion, the Buddhist integrists are trying to get the government to become the guardian of the Buddhist faith.

As for the Tamils, confronted by the attitude of the Celanese and the government, they consider themselves as living in an enclosed territory whose autonomy has to a great extent been suppressed. This suppression has been enforced by measures which limit the capacity for economic expansion within the Tamil community.

Faced with this situation, the local branch of Caritas, in conjunction with a group of NGOs, and the support of the international network of Caritas, is involved in a non-violent approach of education for peace and harmony in society. This action consists of making children in schools aware and involving them in becoming real agents of peace. Whether Tamils, Celanese, and Muslims, these children share the same benches at school. When returning home, their games go beyond their cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

By basing its action on this situation, Caritas Sri Lanka attempts to mobilise these children in an effective campaign for peace by putting them at the front of the stage as ambassadors of social harmony. They remind society as a whole of its duty not to retreat into communities which fragment it and disrupt social harmony.

Their cries are heard in silence. With placards in hand, they tell their parents and the whole of society: « When you fight, we, as children, do suffer », « don't kill our childhood through your selfishness », etc. What is more, by organising camps and collective activities, they demonstrate their capacity to live together and show how a separatist attitude destroys their lives. Thus they plead for their people to stop their conflicts and live, like them, in peace. These groups of young people are increasing in number and they could become real agents of peace and act against sectarianism.

Aloysius John

Following this seminar, many participants expressed their need to act: they have created a history teachers association in Bombay, in order to research and circulate complementary documentation. This association, called *Hamara Itihas* (Our History) has also written a memorandum intended for all school textbook selection committees. It recommends that all history textbooks be examined every five years, and that a full revision be carried out every ten years to take into account the progress made in history between times.

India-Pakistan : involving the pupils

The wound left by the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 is inseparable from the prejudice existing today between Muslims and Hindus. This is maintained by the cursory and simplistic treatment which this extremely important period of history (at least 500,000 dead) is given in school textbooks, in both India and Pakistan.

Due to this situation the Khoj organisation has launched exchanges between Indian and Pakistani pupils since 1996. This operation is called *Aman*, « olive branch » . It started with the creation of groups of « Friends of Peace » on both sides of the border using the well-tried technique of inter-school correspondence.

On 14 and 15 August 1996 (anniversary dates of the declarations of independence), as a symbolic gesture, pupils from Bombay and Karachi swore solemnly that « the only way to live as neighbouring peoples and countries is in peace, with love and without war » . Since then, an exchange of correspondence has begun between the children of the International School of Bombay and the Karachi School of Higher Education, as well as between the children who work and live in the deprived districts of Tussawadi and Lahore. An overwhelming number of Pakistani and Indian schools have demonstrated their intention of creating similar links.

Following some articles in the national Indian newspapers, requests from individuals were sent to the organisation by young people living in various regions of India who wished to find a pen-friend in Pakistan. An *Aman* data bank has been set up in order to help children living on either side of the border to create such links.

Throughout the year 1997-1998, students from Karachi and Bombay will also have taken part in a programme of exchanges including, on both sides, a week's visit and a week of teaching.

Teesta Setalvad

The Indo-Pakistani Forum for Peace and Democracy

by Catherine Gaudard*

Relations between the Indian and Pakistani governments since the partition in 1947 have been riddled with serious conflicts (1). Three wars have succeeded each other and both countries remain highly militarised, notwithstanding the burden this represents for the socio-economic needs of both countries. Trade relations between them are messy and tightly regulated (2). Using national security as a pretext, increasing restrictions have been imposed on the movement of people between the two countries (3).

Relations have worsened even more with the aggravation of the crisis in Kashmere, the trouble spot that has brought the two countries into confrontation and fuelled the ire of extremist religious factions on both sides of the border. Propaganda encourages fear and mutual suspicion, constantly stirring hate and provocation and stoking inter-community conflicts.

Breaking the ice

In this context of increasing polarisation and the multiplication of barriers, groups of citizens have taken it on themselves to renew contacts and break the ice. Regular meetings have been held over the last few years between groups of women of both countries, resulting in the Declaration of South Asian Feminists. This initiative has been followed by other sectors of society: the United Union Front, intercultural programmes, the Alternative Agenda of South Asian Solidarity, etc. These are all links made between the two countries by citizens eager to water down the « warlike » refrains regularly issued by political and government circles. However, an initiative of greater breadth was required.

The opportunities offered by international meetings, such as the Vienna Conference on Human Rights in 1993, have given rise to a project. The preparatory conferences at Delhi and Lahore led to setting up a Forum for Peace and Democracy, whose first convention took place at Delhi (4) in 1995. In spite of many difficulties and much criticism, this unprecedented event was eventually given an enthusiastic reception.

The Forum wants to encourage a long term process of citizen's collaboration towards building peace, and strengthening democratic institutions, by exchan-

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(1) Division along religious lines has caused deep uneasiness and both governments have based their legitimacy on religious and national chauvinism fuelled by their mutual hostility.

(2) Suspended during the wars and restored at the beginning of the eighties, major restrictions still remain.

(3) To the extent where it was difficult for ordinary people to obtain visas to cross the borders or even simply communicate (postal and telephone services between the two countries function poorly and are very costly).

(4) 117 Indian and 92 Pakistani participants.

Point of view

A RESPONSIBLE NATIONALISM

Whether we like it or not, we are all being brought together by the process of globalisation. There is no doubt at all that the world of the future will never live in peace unless we learn to accept the differences of the Other. A country such as India cannot survive as a truly secular and neutral State unless there is strict separation between State and religion. I think that India contains the philosophical and religious foundations to accommodate a pluralistic society. Thus it goes without saying that we have to abandon any ideas of exclusivity insofar as belief, knowledge, prophecy, holy texts or absolute truths are concerned. How would Christians react if 250,000 Hindu missionaries tried to save souls in the Western World? What would the Muslim world say if billions of petrodollars were poured into their countries in order to build Hindu schools and temples? We must be ready to launch the philosophical debate and start dialogue. But in order to achieve this, we must not think of ourselves as Hindu, Muslim or Christian, but as Indian. This debate is not only important for India but equally for the whole world.

I see no objection to any one person preferring this God or this holy text to that, but, at the same time, they must respect truth, love, solidarity and co-operation and not encourage division. What India needs today is « healthy nationalism ». That is to say a nationalism based upon universal truths, a responsible nationalism, especially with regard to the most deprived, such as the dalits, the tribal peoples and the Muslims. We must create a national consciousness over and above religious interests, castes and votes.

As the world changes and shrinks more and more, particularly via communication networks, the English language, the metric system and the new laws of the market, I continue to think we need common universal values that apply to all of us. In order to make this international ethos acceptable and as wide as possible, we must first examine the most obscure and negative aspects of our culture and of our beliefs.

It is high time that we scrupulously analyse what we have done in our history, in the name of holy books, prophets and Gods. It is only through in-depth consideration that we will find the path. Talking only of what unites us will not help us to achieve a better world or to create true inter-community dialogue. What we need in order to fight against fundamentalism and intolerance, is an atmosphere of doubt, of questioning, of debates and, in terms of religion, the acceptance of the right to be different. Without this, we will remain hypocrites. Could we not create an environment where -like in the scientific world- our way of life, our economic system, our view of the world and our religions would be constantly questioned?

The high cast Hindus know very well how to jump on the bandwagon of modernity, with their cellular telephones, *Internet*, Mac Donald's, CNN etc. However, over half our society still struggles for survival day after day. Hindus have to learn what solidarity means, over and above clans, castes and personal interest. If we do not attack social inequality, injustice and exploitation, not only in India but at a more global level, we will provide religious fundamentalism and fanaticism with an ideal ground and we will pay dearly for our mutual distrust.

Let us simply remind ourselves of what Buddha said 2,500 years ago: « Do not believe in what you have heard; do not believe in doctrines because they have been handed down to you through generations; do not believe in anything because it is followed blindly by many; do not believe because some old sage makes a statement; do not believe merely on the authority of your teachers and elders. Have deliberation and analyse, and when the result agrees with reason and conduces to the good of one and all accept it and live up to it ».

Swami Agnivesh
Hindu priest of the Arya Samaj (reform movement founded in the XIXth century), an activist of the « Bound Workers » Liberation Front.

ging experiences and strategies, and by putting pressure on governments so that they change their policies.

The main issues dealt with by the Forum were demilitarisation, the stopping of nuclear programmes, seeking a democratic solution to the Cashmere conflict and, of course, the fight against religious intolerance. On this question, the need for a joint initiative was emphasised and recommendations for concrete actions were formulated. Peace between the two countries is the unavoidable condition for reducing « communalist » and ethnic tensions on the sub-continent, and for making effective economic and social progress.

Defending the interests of the silent majority

The second convention took place in Lahore in November 1995 and was acclaimed by certain major organs of the media, while famous political and social figures saw the meeting as the vanguard of the combat for tolerance, mutual respect, co-operation and peace, in defence of the interests of the « silent majority ».

Sub-committees met to deal with specific issues (5), in order to prepare the Third Convention in December 1996 which attracted five hundred delegates from both countries (6) for five days in Calcutta. This event was accompanied by a festival of films and entertainment, painting and poster exhibitions, etc.

The Indo-Pakistani Forum for Peace and Democracy has become a reality which the governments must take into account. Hostile relations had prevented any systematic, direct contact between individuals and social movements for over fifty years. The aim of the Forum is to act as a stage for voices other than the belligerent stances taken by the leaders of different factions and oblige them to listen. This mixed coalition of people from different non-governmental organisations, representing a wide spectrum of civil society, attempts to formulate a strategy to promote peace and strengthen the democratic process on the Indian sub-continent.

The impetus generated by the Forum has made it possible to sway public opinion in both countries in favour of peace, something that the governments could not ignore. Visa application procedures in India and Pakistan have been made easier; student visas have been granted for university exchange programmes; and economic co-operation between the two countries has been encouraged.

However, threats continue to rain down (7) and improved relations between India and Pakistan remain fragile, thus giving reason to encourage the Forum to continue its efforts in every way.

Catherine Gaudard

(5) With preliminary meetings in several Indian cities (Bombay, Bangalore, Calcutta, Hyderabad, Shimla) and in Pakistan (Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad).

(6) These comprise activists from civil rights movements, union members, ecologists, women's rights movements, academics, jurists, social workers, businesspeople, journalists, teachers, etc.

(7) The change of government in India and the forced resignation of the Pakistani President Farooq Leghari augured a period of uncertainty. Tension is still rife about the problem of Cashmere, in spite of official attempts to resume dialogue.

SRI LANKA: IS THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS BEING HIDDEN AWAY?

Mandawala Pannawenesa, a Buddhist monk, was the chief editor of a Sri Lankan magazine devoted to the defence of human rights. He has lived in France for ten years. Here he describes what he feels are the important characteristics of the Sri Lankan context.

The problem of human rights in Sri Lanka is singular due to the confrontation of two communities, the Ceylonese and the Tamils. This rivalry has several facets that cover history, politics and even geopolitics, and economics.

The historic aspect is important if one takes into account that the Cola and Pandya (Tamils from southern India) have invaded Sri Lanka many times. These invasions have made the Ceylonese afraid of the Tamils in Sri Lanka who they feel are strongly influenced by the Tamils of India. In the eyes of the Ceylonese, the flag of the Tamil guerrillas displaying a tiger is significant in that it displays the same emblem as that used by the Cola.

As for them, the Tamils of Sri Lanka are afraid of the Ceylonese majority (74% of the population). The politicians of both communities have used this fear for personal goals, permitting them to be elected to parliament.

However, in spite of these attempts at bringing both sides into conflict, Tamils and Ceylonese are capable of living together. The proof is that in Colombo, for example, where the population is 61% Tamil, the people live in harmony. But it is hard to imagine that this harmony exists everywhere, since much inequality and injustice remain.

Furthermore, most Ceylonese believe it is India which is to blame for leading the Tamils into terrorism in camps located in India. A commission of inquiry set up to elucidate the assassination of Rajiv Ghandi by a Tamil has brought to light India's involvement.

It should not be forgotten that for both the Indians and Ceylonese, the notion of human rights differs from that of the West which they feel is always impaired by unnatural individualism.

In conclusion, it could be said that the real debate on human rights, on the political level, has not yet taken place.

Opinion reported by Michel Delahoutre

Should We Be Afraid of Communalism?

by Guillaume Arotçarena*

Albert Camus was absolutely right. The dilemma which, during the Algerian war, made him hesitate between his mother and justice, his community and an apparently more universal entity, symbolised by the Republic, is just as topical now as it used to be, even more so as it has become commonplace to note the growth of myriad types of religious, ethnic and linguistic communalism and nationalism.

The collapse of communism, an ideology with global pretensions, has brought to light the persistence and strength of older, « nationally » inspired orms of human organisation throughout Eastern Europe. Not enough attention as been given to the fact that the communist regimes still in existence are tho- e of Vietnam, China and North Korea whose legitimacy is largely founded on combats for national liberation. In a large part of Africa, the States imagined and set-up by the West have never functioned and continue to be instruments which pass from hand to hand between clans or ethnic groups, according to their strength of arms and the interests of the major powers.

Nowhere is this phenomenon of communalism more obvious than on the Indian sub-continent and in the Indian Union whose constitution and secular government are openly disputed by a majority political party, representing a swarm of Hindu religious and paramilitary organisations (1). The *Hindutva* envisioned by these activists is to be the total identification between India and Hinduism. Once India and Hindu become synonymous, there will be no place for Muslims, Buddhists, Christians and others in this new entity. Ethnic and religious cleansing go hand in hand.

In the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan, it is Buddhism which is used to convey ethnic and religious cleansing. Since several years ago, a hundred thousand Hindu Bhutans of Nepalese extraction have been expelled to Nepal. Their lands have been confiscated in the name of a kind of national Buddhism that wants to dictate uniform cultural standards, even including clothing, for the entire population. The Burmese government has also attempted to use Buddhism to its own ends to rid itself of the minority Muslim Rohingyas and the Christian Karens. In Pakistan, Islam is used in the same way, even if the situation is far more complex (2). In Sri Lanka, it is the Buddhist leaders who have put up the greatest resistance to any attempt at ethnic reconciliation bet-

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(1) Read above the articles by **H. Kapoor** and **G. Heuzé**.

(2) Cf. the article by **M. Abou Zahab**.

ween the Hindu Tamils and Ceylonese Buddhists organised by the government of Chandrika Kamaratunga.

Protective communalism

Confronted by this « hegemonic » form of communalism whose aims are totalitarian and exclusive, minorities react differently but mostly use the same language as those who try to exclude them. Thus, the Christian Karens of Burma, for example, find their religion is the mortar which binds their ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity threatened by the Burmese Buddhists. The same could be said, with nuances, of the minorities in Taiwan which turned to Christinanity en masse during the fifties.

Even in India, linguistic disputes in some southern States between Tamil, deemed dominant, Kannada, Telugu, and even Urdu in certain major cities such as Bangalore, belong to the same context. In the place of, or in parallel with religion, the defence of language can become the medium of protest or of defensive « retreat » into communalism and identity. Faced with the ideology of *Hindutva,* which does not hesitate to invent a largely imaginary past of Hinduism oppressed by Islam, the casteless *dalits,* the real losers in history, nonetheless use the same language. Several of their intellectuals are now trying to found a « *dalit* » community capable of claiming its rights, by writing the history of a Dravidian people oppressed by the Aryans (3) whose true descendants would be the dalits. Alongside religion, or sometimes without it, a randomly structured memory becomes the tool of a « community » claiming liberation. However, it is not possible to group avowedly totalitarian nationalism in the same bracket as nationalism proclaimed in the name of « liberation », even if both use the language of historic, linguistic and religious identity. This distinction had already been made by Lenin, who could hardly be suspected of having sympathised with nationalism of any type.

Modern government, founded on Western rationalism, has shown itself to be incapable of responding to the challenge thrown down by different types of communalism.

The first reason is that, in spite of its own constitution, it is the incarnation of the majority « community » and therefore cannot take a position of disinterested neutrality capable of allowing it to arbitrate fairly and serenely. This can be seen in Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Pakistan and Burma, even though the latter can hardly be deemed a modern State.

The second reason could be that the State lacks contact with the base, or rather that the civil servants that represent it do not speak the language of reasons of State but that of the reasons of their respective communities, castes and clans. The continually denounced corruption of the civil service in India appears to belong more to this logic than to the individual cupidity of depraved functionaries. Under these conditions, even if the State constructs facilities for

(3)The people of south India who lived there before the Aryan invasion are generally called Dravidians. More specifically, this term covers a homogenous linguistic family, the best known member of which is Tamil, which does not belong to the Indo-European languages. The term Aryans refers to the people who came from the Caspian Sea in about 1500 BC to invade India. They now constitute a linguistic group which covers the languages spoken in the Indo-Gangetic plain. Ed.

the overall social good, such as hospitals and schools, it is not perceived symbolically as an entity that unifies. In any society where these elements exist, unity is almost exclusively perceived as being the product of a religious, ethnic, and linguistic community, or a caste.

A third reason why the « modern » State cannot manage all kinds of communalism is because it simply has less and less room to manoeuvre and react to the effects of globalisation and its succession of privatisations carried out to the profit of the only value recognised universally today. In India, for example, the political arena is increasingly occupied by communities, castes and regional parties. Parties inspired by the tenets of modern democracy, such as the Congress Party, which seeks to represent India as the sum of all its components, are running out of steam. The BJP, which seeks to take over the reins of power, has never been popular in the south, and seeks to exclude a certain number of India's parts rather than to represent them.

From Asia to Europe

Are these phenomena so far removed from the concerns of France and the est of Europe? Apparently, yes, because these communities of the Indian subcontinent are emerging from a historic context specific to them, that of British colonialism and its aftermath, and also within a cultural and religious context different from that of France and Europe. Thus they should be seen under a light specific to themselves.

However, well beyond the issue of economics, the effects of globalisation are making themselves felt by all. There is no longer any society which can be considered as having a uniform language, religion or ethnicity. The difference of the other is standing on our doorsteps. The question of identity is asked starkly from each and everyone. Is the growing number of people who seek to discover their genealogy for ancestors a passing fad or the sign of a deeper search? Are the claims of the Corsicans, Basques, Irish, Catalans, Britons, Occitans, Savoyards, Jurassiens, and the proclaimers of an independent Padonia, quaintly archaic expressions of collective egoism, and retreats into identity as stated here and there, or can they be compared *mutatis mutandis* to the communalism of « liberation » of the Indian sub-continent?

Likewise, is the language of French and Spanish government representatives so different from that of the « domineering » communalist factions? Doubt is permitted when taking into account that France has recently decreed that French is « the » language of the Republic to the exception of any other, not simply the official language (4), or, moreover, that France is « one » nation which excludes the nations of others who, nonetheless, live on its soil. Doubt is permitted again when one hears certain French people speak of immigration and integration in view to the assimilation of immigrants, saying that they must « integrate or go », which is exactly what the BJP is saying in India.

(4) The decree of Villers-Cotterêts in 1539 (under François 1) made French the language of France. This decree was amended by the decision of the Council of State in 1997, which restated that French is the language of the Republic. In 1996, under the Juppé government, Alain Lamassoure proposed a draft of a law on the promotion of regional languages and the signature by France of the European Charter of minority languages. In February 1997, the Council of State declared that the project was incompatible with the constitution of the Republic, basing its decision on the decree of Villers-Cotterêts.

Furthermore, is the « self-interestness » for which certain claims for linguistic rights and autonomy are accused, perhaps quite rightly, specific to them only? French communalist ideology is well expressed by French television news broadcasts: one simply needs to observe the headlines of these programmes everyday to realise that self-interestness is shared more widely than previously thought.

Differences do exist, and they are perhaps expressed with more vigour than before, as is evident to all day after day. Also, the language of modernity, in its scientific version, aims to be universal, ridding itself of the issues of meaning and identity now re-emerging everywhere in the form of religious and ethnic communalist organisations. What do the Republic and the State offer in the way of symbols with which people can identify?

Today, can the State and society, in Europe and the Indian sub-continent, produce, and be seen to produce, enough of the elements which provide effective cohesion, thereby bringing the other, whose language and religion are different, to integrate themselves? How is it possible to bring a « dominant » community to know, understand and respect other communities? Are there other paths to the universal than those offered by the scientific language of western logic? Or should we ask the question differently? When all is said and done, is not the real question, since it precedes all the others, that asked by Alain Touraine in the title of his most recent book: *Can We Live Together, Equal but Different?* (5). Granted, the answer is far from obvious. However, it accepts the existence of different communities. Perhaps society still requires a long time for new methods of functioning to come into being. Perhaps the old continent lacks creative imagination and the answers it needs will come from elsewhere. Regarding this, we must pay great attention to what is said, for example, by Christian and Indian theologians who make this issue the starting point of their consideration (6).

In the meantime, what appears most urgent is the spiritual journey that each must make to the other, to rediscover the meaning of hospitality, to know and make known the « different other », to understand and make understood, all things which cannot be taken for granted in the world which is ours today.

Guillaume Arotçarena

(5) Fayard, Paris 1997.

(6) Cf. for example, **Michel Amaladoss**, *A la rencontre des cultures: comment conjuguer unité et pluralité dans les Eglises ?*, Editions de l'Atelier, Paris, 1997.

Perspectives

How Can We Live Together in South Asia and in Europe?

by Philippe Blancher*

India, a million mutinies now (1), this was the title that the novelist V.S. Naipaul used for his collection of long interviews with Indians from different backgrounds faced with the upheavals of « India in development ». Each of them tells of these changes: very brutal for some (Brahman or the servant of a prince) since the substance of their world and their status had disappeared; too slow for others (a leader of the untouchables); and lastly, aborted for yet others such as a former far-left activist from Calcutta. One is struck by the hopes and perhaps even more by the frustrations embodied by these revolts. Frustrations which are lived deep within for some, while others express them by delinquency, activism in all its forms, and even terrorism. Such a book, though it does not give the whole picture, cannot be summarised. But, it clearly demonstrate the wide range of behaviours, ideologies called upon and values claimed by people and social groups in their attempts to build a vision of the future and to solve the problems of daily existence.

As observers, and even more as organisations concerned with supporting certain of these initiatives, we are bound to relate to people and groups somehow guided by our own values and ideological references. For our part (2), during the eighties, we chose to develop relations with organisations questioning the type of development implemented in India since 1947 and the oppressive social and economic set-up, but which are sticking to values promoted during the struggle for independence (equal rights for all, democracy, secularism).

Rebuilding hope at gassroots level

During the sixties-seventies, *Frères des Hommes* was involved in integrated development projects aimed at dealing with all the development components (agriculture and income-generating activities, education, health). Its experience was that this type of project did not sufficiently rely on the local population willingness and capacities, and that it had the disadvantage of replicating government public services and programmes. Therefore, like many Indian and some foreign NGOs, during the eighties, it supported the emergence of social action groups (3) organising the poorest and most

* President of the *Frères des Hommes* Asia Commission, researcher at Economie et Humanisme.

(1) William Heinemann Ltd, London, 1990.

(2) Some of these considerations were made within the *Frères des Hommes* Asia Commission and form the basis of the programme Civil *Societies in Dialogue*, co-ordinated by Economie et Humanisme.

(3) See especially the journal Lokayan (13, Alipur Road, Delhi 110054), or **Gail Omvedt**, *Reinventing the Revolution: New Social Movements in India*, M. E. Sharp, New York, 1993.

oppressed social classes at the grassroots (4): landless peasants, the untouchables, tribal populations (5), fishermen, slum dwellers, etc.

In spite of their great diversity, these groups have common approaches differing from three types of traditional social and political action:

- Political parties of all persuasions, and trade-unions from the mainstream, which shown their inability to defend the interests of the majority of the population excluded from the benefits of economic development (the term « marginalised groups » is ambiguous in that such people contribute to this development via the cheap labour they supply);

- Charitable actions and traditional development which turn the beneficiaries into passive recipients and do not question the types of exploitation that cause misery to last;

- Far-left political groups (*naxalites*) which, during the sixties and seventies, even today sporadically, have attempted to use the exploited and disorganised classes to promote an armed revolutionary movement.

On the contrary, the instigators of the action groups, who were often first involved in one of the three forms of actions described above, stirred awareness at grassroots levels (both in the groups with which they work and in other sectors of society), with often non-violent protests and actions termed constructive (alternative development projects). Whatever their ideological references (Gandhi, socialism, communism, Liberation theology for Christians, etc.), their approach is above all pragmatic. It is through their involvement with the oppressed, in the concrete situations of their lives and the real struggles that they undertake, that they form perceptions of exploitation and ways of freeing oneselves from it.

(4) *Frères des Hommes* (NGO set up in France, Belgium, Italy and Spain) considers that local activities require support, but that the more global context should not be overlooked. These local actions must be co-ordinated with regional and national movements.

(5) These people, generally despised, have become poorer over the years and have found themselves dispossessed of their land and deprived of free access to the produce of the forests by the nationalised ownership of large forests since the colonial era.

(6) Regarding the changes of the economic context, read the interview with **J.L. Racine** in this issue.

(7) Cf. above the reminders of the region's history by **S. Mahajan**.

(8) Cf. the article by **T. Setalvad**, « The Central Aspect of Education ».

Exchanging ideas on common challenges

For organisations such as *Frères des Hommes*, the current context has increased the need to support this type of groups. But two major changes have to be taken into account and represent major challenges: the partial deregulation of the economy (6) leading to a decrease of Indian government involvement in welfare and development activities ; the rise of politico-religious extremism and fundamentalism which affect every area of society, from the administration to the media, from the unions to NGOs. It has become vital to provide support to groups (often set-up recently) whose efforts go towards combating the effects generated by communalist ideologies and practices detrimental to human rights.

On these issues, fruitful exchange can occur between Europeans and Indians, who share common values promoted as well by Indian « secularists » (7) and French republicans. Actions of solidarity with organisations such as *Sabrang Communications* (8) can also be used to promote public debate and

awareness in Europe on the necessary link between development initiatives and resistance in the name of human rights, in both Europe and South Asia. « How is it possible to live together » in a Europe that is becoming more culturally diverse than ever, but where policies creating exclusion and segregation regarding rights (in the fields of housing, health, work, training, etc.) are becoming commonplace? This is one of the questions, one of the most common challenges facing different societies, and one of the most difficult to transform into constructive acts that are both pertinent locally and significant politically.

This issue of *Economie et Humanisme* is intended as an aid and an instrument for continuing and developing this work of educating public opinion (9) with respect to its responsibilities regarding development carried out in a spirit of unity. Such an approach includes the right to exercise essential rights freely, in Calcutta or Karachi, as in the racially mixed suburbs of London and Marseilles, or among the fragile rural populations of Europe's mountain regions or the meanders of the Ganges. « How can we live together? » This obsessive question could be the perfect focal point for co-operation between the citizens of Europe and Asia, of the « North » and the « South » (10), in the reciprocal exchange of experience and consideration.

Philippe Blancher

(9) To know more about it, please contact the organisations involved in publishing this issue of *Economie et Humanisme*.

(10) This consideration will be fuelled by several of the forthcoming issues of *Economie et Humanisme* (lessons from co-operation between Europe and Latin America - no. 344, August 1998, dialogue between European and Japanese cultures on man and the company, comparisons of urban social development in Santiago, Montreal and Lyon).

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• All reality and any task carried out with others has an economic dimension. This can be approached in strict isolation but it cannot be truly understood unless it is considered in relation with everything that goes to make up and give impetus to societies (cultural factors, demography, social movements, etc.).

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« The observation of reality associated with concern for human well-being is the source of real culture ». (L. J. Lebret, founder of Economie et Humanisme).

* The Economie et Humanisme review, published by the association of the same name since 1942, publishes four issues a year, including :

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