

# History, Nation and Community

## Reflections on Nationalist Historiography of India and Pakistan

*If it is true that emotions must be brought back into social science then to begin doing so, surely no better site exists than the study of nation-building. This paper attempts to do just this. It discusses in some detail how the nation, the cultural community and the relation between the two were imagined by historical actors in India. The author argues that a failure to achieve the objective of living within a single unified state is to be explained not just by economic and religious causes but by a lack of political imagination shaped as it was by distinct conceptions of nation and community, as by differing emotions.*

RAJEEV BHARGAVA

I was first drawn to the relationship between national identity and history, when I accidentally stumbled upon a copy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *Modern Islam in India*.<sup>1</sup> Written between 1943 and 1946, the book is a gripping account of communalism and nationalism by a brilliant, but youthful Marxist who later became one of the greatest scholars of comparative religion. Though naive and occasionally too up front about the author's political values, it remains one of the most subtle and insightful books on the subject.

I read the book in one sitting. It set me off on a detective trail that yielded an unexpectedly curious result. Familiar with the book's internal rhythm and flow, I was immediately struck by the last chapter entitled 'Toward Pakistan' which was wholly discontinuous and discordant with the tone and substance of the rest of the book. In the penultimate chapter, Cantwell Smith was unmistakably critical of the Muslim League, which he did not hesitate to compare to the Nazis. In the final chapter, the argument suddenly changed focus and claimed that the Muslims were merely fighting for sheer survival against the Hindu imperialism of the Congress Party. All too soon, I discovered that what I had in my hands was on the second edition of the book, printed in December 1947 in Lahore. Had the author changed

his views so dramatically and so very drastically? Was this the impact of witnessing the wanton carnage during the partition of India? After all, entire world-views collapse overnight under the tumultuous impact of apocalyptic events. Could this have happened to Cantwell Smith? It seemed unlikely. At any rate, this had stirred enough curiosity in me to sleuth for an answer. Patient research eventually solved the mystery: This last chapter, inserted into the book without the knowledge of the author, was written by an unknown hand which having writ moved on. Whether or not it was the handy work of an individual 'scholar', or an unscrupulous government official I do not know. However, it is not difficult to surmise that behind it lay the ruse of nationalist passion.<sup>2</sup>

Renan famously observed that a nation is dependent both on the possession of rich remembrances and a shared amnesia, a collective forgetfulness. Surely it is commonly accepted that nations can barely survive without losing some of the memories they inherit from their founding moment. The play of lies and distortions in the birth and growth of nations is less evident. At least some histories of every nation are manipulated, and patriotic fervour plays an astoundingly central role in the production and consumption of such

myths. My paper, however, is not concerned merely with these manipulated, over-politicised and 'abnormal' histories. It focuses rather on the role of emotions in the writing of 'normal' scholarly history. A wrong-headed division of cognitive labour misallocates the study of emotions to literature, leaving social science with the description or explanation of only the rational action of humans. If it is true that emotions must be brought back into social science, then to begin doing so, surely no better site exists than the study of nation-building.<sup>3</sup>

This paper attempts just this. Part I outlines my general methodological standpoint.<sup>4</sup> My purpose is to undermine the motivational reductionism that undergirds both the selection of explananda and explanans (the properties of actions selected for study and the variables with which they are explained) and the self-understanding of the enquirers, the false standards of objectivity that enquirers often aspire (surely under the influence of a blindingly passionate search for truth). With the help of this schema, I distinguish four types of history writing on nationalism, i.e., manipulated, strongly relativist, critical and objectivist.

Part II renews my discussion of Cantwell Smith's book and closely examines manipulated history. In Part III, I discuss the

more common brands of nationalist history writing in India, which often pretend to be wholly objectivist but in fact contain the usual mix of strongly relativist and critical histories. I hope to give the reader a flavour of the debates about manipulated history in India, between strongly relativist (ultra-nationalist) and critical histories, and over the precise content of Indian nationalism. Finally, Part IV discusses in somewhat greater detail, how the nation, the cultural community and the relation between the two were imagined by historical actors in India. My focus remains on inter-communal estrangement rather than on confessional violence, to which no doubt it is related. I argue that a failure to achieve the objective of living within a single, unified state (it is established fact that till 1940 political separation was not on the agenda of the Muslim League) is to be explained not just by economic or religious causes but by a lack of political imagination – shaped as it was, as much by distinct conceptions of nation and community, as by differing emotions. I argue, that even social scientists and historians, much like the protagonists of these events, could not properly see or explain why we failed to solve ‘the problem facing the subcontinent’.

## I

### Methodological Preliminaries

It is probably true that much history writing in the middle of this century was dominated entirely by politics and economics. It worked with the following methodological maxim: Look for the condition and cause of events. Among the causes, examine the actions of relevant agents (individuals or groups). Assume that these actions are caused by self-interest (short or long term; real or apparent.) Let us refresh our collective memory by recalling Marx’s famous statement: Human beings make history but not always in circumstances of their own making. I believe the dominant interpretation of this claim continues to be the following: Human agents work within constraints that shape their interests. Rational human beings then try to realise these modified objectives, if not with the best available set of actions, at least with a satisfactory one. For example, the interest of capitalists is shaped by the structure of production relations. Most of their actions are therefore best explained as ways of realising such interests. Likewise, religious interests may explain

the actions of religious groups whose interests qua religious groups are shaped by their worldview.

There is a straightforward objection to this view. First, it is insensitive to the difference between an external and internal interpretation of interests. Second, it fails to see that principles and social norms guide actions too. The methodological maxim must now be modified: Assume first that action is guided by self-interest. When this hypothesis fails, explain it by principles or social norms. Surely, the development of social and cultural history is unthinkable without this change effected by contributions from:

(i) Hermeneutics and anthropology (the meaning of a particular action is interpreted by relating the action to the conceptual universe of the agent, much as the meaning of a sentence emerges from the entire text).

(ii) Sociology (the explanation of action by social norms); and

(iii) Plain common sense (action is guided not only by self-interest but also by other regulating principles).

But now another objection can be raised. It is true that historians are less prone than economists, to reduce human motivations to self-interest. In the complex set of subjective motivations, historians include principles and social norms. They also realise that an action may have a predominant motive. Their explanatory schema contains behaviour that is largely principle-governed, norm-induced and interest-driven. However, it must be recognised that actions may also be propelled by emotions. So, in response to this criticism, our modified methodological maxim may now look like this: Assume first that action is caused by self-interest, principles or social norms but, when an explanation in terms of any of these falls flat, treat the action as pathological and look for the irrational, aberrant or the bizarre. Why did this individual kill? Answer: Because of a sudden fit of madness. Why did a riot take place? Answer: Because of a sudden outburst of mass hysteria. Here, history is linked to and benefits from social psychology and psychoanalysis. Perhaps, this is where a large portion of the study of nationalism properly belongs.

However, the objection that emotions suffer from a relative neglect in the social science is not fully met. There are two distinct senses in which the role of emotion is still improperly understood. First, in so

called normal, non-pathological action, their part is underplayed. Consider the question: Why does resistance to land reforms exist? Answer: The landlord protects his interests. But rarely: The landlord has a sentimental and enduring attachment to his land. (To understand this, we must see Ray’s ‘Jalsagar’!) Second, the power of emotion in shaping other motives is left unexamined. For instance, my abstract commitment to socialist principles may be bolstered by a strong emotional attachment to a sub-culture of like-minded friends from roughly the same class-background. How often is the following explanation offered for religious strife: In situations of foregrounded differences, people often suppress self-interest in favour of loyalty to a religious group and when in this manner, interests are trumped by identity, people can simultaneously be selfless and vicious towards others.<sup>5</sup> Such explanations are certainly uncommon in social science and if I may put my neck on the block, in history, too. Indian history writing may well be an exception to this rule, however. As we shall see, Indian historians are more comfortable with the language of emotions and somewhat less inhibited in admitting the role of emotion in actions.

## II

### Manipulated History

Chapter V of Cantwell Smith’s book ends ominously with a warning:

Of late, the situation in the country has denigrated menacingly. Communal hatred, one of the lowest, if not the most powerful, of human motivations, has threatened to become the main driving force on both sides. Instead of an India with freedom for all, united in friendly communal partnership, there have been signs pointing to, at best, a stagnant India of intense mutual bickering, within an atmosphere of moral degradation and of riots; and, at worst, an India of civil war...If the liberals are strong in each party, it may yet be possible to conciliate the warring groups. Otherwise the future of India is dark...

Smith made these observations at the end of his chapter on the Islamic nationalism of the Muslim League. He condoned neither the political demands of the Muslim League nor its brown shirt methods of agitation. He claimed that in the 1930s the League initially propagated a fascist ideology with which it caught the aggressive frenzy and religious bigotry of the middle classes. “The Muslim League threw on

attack. It was anti-Hindu, anti-Congress, anti-'one free India'. It attacked the Hindu with fervour, fear, contempt and bitter hatred. It would seek out, air and emphasise the differences between the two communities'."<sup>6</sup> Its method of refusal, he claimed was to postulate an utterly impossible 'condition' and then to adopt an air of offended generosity when this was not accepted. In short, the Muslim League was concocting an enthusiasm for a separate state of Pakistan based on the fear that, if Hindus and Muslims lived together in independent India, the Muslims would be horribly maltreated.

Chapter VI begins with the causes of the breakdown of the Simla conference. The book claims that its primary cause was the refusal of the Congress to "face the fact that Muslims formed quite a distinct people and could not be fitted into any scheme conceived on the basis of a common nationhood".<sup>7</sup> The book pleads that the Congress may have seen this as the intransigence of the League, but for Muslims it was a question of sheer existence. Every attempt at settlement, the chapter says, floundered because the Congress tried to realise its impossible dream of establishing Hindu imperialism. Muslims were already seething with discontent at the insulting treatment meted out to them. But after the massacre of Muslims in Bihar, which overshadowed even the carnage of Calcutta, Jinnah was left with no alternative but to boycott the session of the constituent assembly. As partition became reality, the genocide of Muslims began. Millions of Muslims were killed.

It did not require much intelligence to note that by now the style and substance of the chapter was startlingly discontinuous with the rest of the book. The blame for partition and mass-massacre was squarely apportioned to the essentially Hindu Congress. The Muslim League, on the other hand, appeared to have haplessly reacted to events not of its own making and over which it had no control. It was virtually impossible not to smell a rat here, and not to observe things that would otherwise pass unnoticed. To begin with, footnotes were missing in this chapter. Though listed in the table of contents, the title of the chapter had disappeared from the sectional contents of Part II. This edition, published in Lahore in December 1947, had no preface. My suspicions were further aroused when I checked out reprints from Delhi in 1964 and New York in 1974,

from both of which the controversial chapter had once again vanished. These were reprints of the second (London) edition of 1946, which also included the preface to the first edition (1943). From this evidence, I concluded that this was the last published edition of the book. But what I had in my hands was a December, 1947 edition from Lahore. Was this a rouge chapter inserted into the book without the permission of the author. But direct confirmation eluded me. Months later, a small footnote in another book by Cantwell Smith, unravelled the mystery:

It is perhaps legitimate to point out that the work entitled *Modern Islam in India* (title page: on the jacket, *Modern Islam in India and Pakistan*), Rippon Press, Lahore (1954), bearing the present writer's name as author, is a pirated edition made without his knowledge and consent, and includes a chapter "Towards Pakistan" that is by another hand and is entirely spurious. There are a few other interpolations also.<sup>8</sup>

Other publications of this period from the government of Pakistan displayed remarkable similarity to this notorious chapter. One of them quotes extensively even from Savarkar to prove the wide acceptance of the idea of two distinct nations and the inevitability of partition:

"The logic of events and experience justifies the demand for Pakistan,...for it was the only way in which the cultural separateness, religious identity as well as economic well-being of Muslims could be secure". Its description of inter-communal massacres during partition, was brief. "At the time of partition...the Hindus embarked on a systematic decimation of Muslim population by mass killing and forcible evacuation or conversion, with connivance if not collaboration of the police, trains carrying Pakistan personnel, records and furniture was attacked by hordes of Hindus and Sikhs...in the riots that immediately preceded and followed partition, hundreds of thousands of Muslims were done to death and thousands of women were abducted. Pakistan was deprived of coal...every effort was made to sabotage the established government of Pakistan."<sup>9</sup>

Such manipulated history is not uncommon in India. Distortion, lies, exaggerations, the maligning of other communities, is found extensively in the historical literature of militant Hindu nationalists. But official history in India, an adjunct of state policy, invented a different common memory. In contrast to Pakistan's state-backed propagation of the two-nation theory, the Indian state vigorously tried to

underscore that Hindus and Muslims not only are but always have been a unified nation. The justification of official ideology, coming from professional historians, had a pronounced flavour of what Nietzsche called monumental history.<sup>10</sup> For example, in the presidential address to the Indian History Congress of 1964, it was announced that:

We must get to the spirit of the movement and the soul of India with an approach that will help surmount the danger of communal, regional, linguistic and class hatreds that beset history writing. History has a mission and obligation to lead humanity to a higher ideal and nobler future...The historian cannot shirk this responsibility by burying his head in the false dogma of objectivity. History must not call to memory ghastly aberrations of human nature, of dastardly crimes, of divisions and conflicts, of degeneration and decay but of the higher values of life, of traditions of culture and the nobler deeds of sacrifice and devotion to the service of humanity. The facts of Indian history and the process of its march have to be judged by the criterion of progress towards liberty, morality and opportunities for self-expression...The reason for omission is that such things bring in unhealthy trends which militate against the course of national solidarity or international peace.<sup>11</sup>

Criticisms of such official history and of the pronouncements accompanying it came from the Right as well as, more cautiously, from the Left R C Majumdar complained that official directives to historians showed utter disregard for standards of objective history writing:

When the history of the freedom movement was written, a directive was issued to research workers that they collect only such data as proves that the outbreak of 1857 was a war of independence and not a mutiny of soldiers...Research workers were instructed to record the evidence of only one group of revolutionaries and to restrict the mention of violence deployed in the freedom movement.<sup>12</sup>

The government, he said, seeks to buttress Gandhian philosophy of non-violence by claiming that this ideal was followed throughout the course of Indian history. Historians, he claimed, were asked to repudiate that Muslim rulers ever desecrated temples or to admit that Aurangzeb was intolerant. History became a handmaiden for contemporary politics and resulted in a rigorous politicisation of history.<sup>13</sup>

The tacit support provided by historians to official ideology did not go

entirely unchallenged. For example, Parthasarthy Gupta wondered why historians shied away from explaining communal riots or from probing why communal passions are so easily whipped up by leaders of communal parties.<sup>14</sup> Romila Thapar, cautious in her criticism of official ideas of national unity, warned that unity could not be enforced from above and will never exist unless it was felt by various groups which constitute the whole. Thapar offered her own view of national integration as "tolerance, an attitude that is willing to accommodate diverse and opposing opinions without suppressing them at various levels of social, economic and intellectual life".<sup>15</sup>

### III Histories: Relativist, Critical, Objectivist

Official histories fabricated to undergird the specific policies of nation states must be distinguished from other nationalist histories. Official history is shaped almost exclusively by collective self-interest. Other forms of nationalist history writing mix cognitive interest with ephemeral nationalist passion or the more enduring national sentiment. The strong tie between emotion and nationalist history has long been noted. Over 2,000 years ago, Polybius wrote that "historians must show some partiality to their own countries". Morley expressed the same point centuries later: "the historian has been the hearth at which the soul of the country has been kept alive".<sup>16</sup> Such sentiments were echoed in India too. Thapar unhesitatingly admitted that historians are subject to the "same emotions as others in society". The crucial issue then is not whether history and national identity can be altogether uncoupled but precisely how the bonds between them are forged. Does reflective distance enable people to work out ambivalent historical legacies of their own rather than accept more easily available conventional versions? To admit the inevitability of a link with national identity is one thing, to make it the central aim of history writing is quite another. Indian historians fought with each other not only over the assessment of how much distance could be achieved and the degree to which it was desirable but also over the inflection of an Indian past made accessible by history writing.

Nationalist history was made inevitable by three interrelated causes. First, by the advent of modernity that required a new

identity to replace traditional ones. Second, by the passionate desire to restore a sense of dignity lost in the seductive embrace of a conquering culture. Finally, by a commitment to set the historical record straight, warped wilfully or unwittingly by English historians.

Commentators noted the presence of each of these motivations. One claimed that Modernity requires a new identity and since identity requires a past, one of (our) prime concerns was the discovery of India's heritage... Moreover with their self-respect at stake, idealisation of the past became a mainstay. A passionate evocation of the past, an effort to prove the continuity between an idealised past and the reformer's own image of a reformed future, was unavoidable.<sup>17</sup>

Historically minded writers such as Nirad Chaudhury confessed:

We were swept by the emotional fervour of the nationalist movement. The first element in this emotion was an intense, almost religious hopefulness. We believed in the second advent of our country and nation with a firmness of conviction which nothing could shake. We knew that our present condition was pitiable: we were poor, subjugated and oppressed and even degenerate in certain respects but we were great once and should be greater in the future. This amazing faith was justified by itself and needed no evidence of validity external to itself.<sup>18</sup>

In such a milieu it was hard to see any contradiction between a usable knowledge of the past and knowledge of the past for its own sake, between nationalist and objective history. The diplomat and historian, K M Panikkar, captured some of these motivations well: "Brought up on text books which claimed that there was no such thing as India, we each had to discover India for ourselves: It was a spiritual adventure for each of us to understand the historical processes which have made us what we are."<sup>19</sup>

The prejudice of English historians was frequently cited as both a spur to Nationalist history and as a cause of reverse bias. Crane noted that since Indian nationalism during British rule was unwelcome, nationalism was equated with subversion. Colonial writers defended British rule and by implication critiqued Indian nationalism. Further problems were due to misunderstanding across deeply diverse cultures and to asymmetries of power. British historians almost always relied on official records and described political events only where the British dominated.

As a result, history by British historians "was more a history of British involvement in India rather than a history of Indian people".<sup>20</sup> Majumdar also noted how woefully inadequate the writing of English historians on India was when judged by the constitutive principles of 'objective history'. He called for three constraining standards: (i) refrain from ignoring data that undercuts the political or moral values of the historian (ii) avoid philosophical or moralistic interpretations of history, and (iii) have a purely objective approach like that of a scientist. "A historian must divest his mind of sentiments, prejudices and preconceptions and all kinds of emotions that are likely to distort his vision and judgment".<sup>21</sup> English historians, Majumdar argued, violated all these fundamental principles. For example, James Mill could not "absolve himself of the charge of a deep rooted prejudice against the Hindus". Statements such as "the Hindu like the eunuch excels in the qualities of a slave"<sup>22</sup> show, as Majumdar noticed disapprovingly, that for Mill, the people of Europe were greatly superior to the Hindus. Elphinstone's book, he stated, contained similar passages such as: "The prominent vice of the Hindus is want of veracity, in which they outdo most nations even of the east".<sup>23</sup> Other historians such as Vincent Smith and Chirol were hardly more objective.

Irfan Habib, historian of medieval India, argued that imperialist historians had their own interest in showing how all "governments previous to the British had been despotic, intolerant and monstrously cruel, and the Indian people, forever divided, were fit only to be conquered. This attitude lent itself to a peculiar interpretation of medieval Indian history. It was assumed that the Muhammadans were the conquerors and rulers of India in the same sense as the British had been." Seeds of communal historiography that flowered during and soon after the independence were laid, Habib argued, by British historians.<sup>24</sup>

But a decent quotient of national sentiment crucial for an "objective history of the nation" must be distinguished from nationalist fervour that falsifies and distorts. "If British historiography was tainted by the need to sustain the empire, the chief defect of Indian historians flowed from a patriotic fervour which magnified the virtues and minimised the defects of their own people."<sup>25</sup> The most absurd example of ultra-nationalism cited by both Thapar

and Majumdar is Jaiswal's extravagant claim that ancient India had a parliamentary form of government. Romila Thapar ratified the need to meet the challenge of Eurocentric historians who claimed that the Greeks were superior in every respect to ancient Indian civilisation but cautioned that this need to delve into the past, linked to the pride in Indian heritage could cloud the judgment of the historians. She mentions the alleged presence of tolerance in the past stemming from "a certain extra-spiritual quality which the ancient Indian possessed."<sup>26</sup> Ashoka's plea for tolerance is evidence, she argued, not of tolerance but of excessive intolerance in his times. She similarly criticised anachronistic claims about a unified nation.

Majumdar also pointed out that intense hatred against the British produced spurious histories. Lurid pictures of the British in India were drawn in which a long list of evil deeds, errors of omissions and commission of the British in both the economic and political spheres was commonly found. For Majumdar, Savarkar's book *Indian War of Independence* was a typical specimen of the representation of history from an extremely nationalist point of view.<sup>27</sup> As partisan advocates rather than judges, Indian historians, he added, tended to minimise the harsh treatment of the lower castes by upper caste Hindus. Furthermore, Majumdar claimed that the "political motive of bringing Hindus and Muslims together against a common imperial enemy glossed over the intolerance and bigotry of Muslim rulers." Since Indian intellectuals felt part of the national movement and were compelled to advance its cause, "objective scholarship suffered in the ensuing welter of charges and counter charges."<sup>28</sup>

Crane noted that "all nationalism carry irrational elements and all nationalist writing tend towards polemics. Indian writers were no exception. Foreign domination brings with it inevitable psychological effects such as the deep need to assert the dignity and capacity of one's own culture. Everywhere this leads to a romantic reconstruction of a nation's past in the most favourable light possible. At times the effect of foreign domination is so great as to cause people to find in their past things which were not only not there and had no reason to be there but worse, are found there only because the conquerors highly value them. This most subtle form of colonial domination did not escape India."<sup>29</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of Indian independence, most historians, I believe, accepted the inescapability of durable national sentiment as an incentive for the writing of history, but also felt the need to separate it from the obsessive nationalist fervour that interfered with objective history. No historian is likely to contradict Majumdar's statement that:

Nationalist historians are guided in their study of India not only by scientific spirit but by the need to examine and re-examine points of national interest or importance, particularly those on which full or accurate information is not available or which have been misrepresented, misunderstood or misconceived. Such objectives are not necessarily in conflict with critical study and therefore a nationalist historian is not necessarily a charlatan or a propagandist.<sup>30</sup>

No one could agree with this more than Irfan Habib. However, for Habib, Majumdar's own history was not nationalist but communal. Habib argued that I H Qureshi, who wrote the semi-official *History of Pakistan*, and Majumdar, who was initially asked by the government of India to write a history of the freedom movement – the first draft of which was rejected by the board constituted for this purpose – shared a common communal framework".

Historians of both schools speak the same language and have an identical interpretation of medieval history. The drama is the same, only the characters with whom they most identify are different. It only remains for one side to paint the other community in the blackest colours.

Both agreed that the Bhakti movement was a Hindu reaction to a proselytising Islam, that Aurangzeb was the author of Muslim restoration and that all revolts against him were essentially Hindu. Their whole analysis, Habib argued, rested on the categorisation of Mughal rule as Muslim Empire with Hindu subjects. But the division of the ruler and the ruled did not coincide with the division between Hindus and Muslims, and many revolts against Mughals were lower class, not Hindu in character.

Against Majumdar's demand that "we should not bow before the exigencies of political complications, for history does not fear wounding the susceptibilities of the sister community". Habib claimed that objective history does not contradict nationalist history. Historians of different persuasions, some with a liberal outlook, others simply in pursuit of facts, still others

such as the 'Canadian clergyman, Wilfred Cantwell Smith' and those historians who "wrote under nationalist inspiration for which none may feel ashamed", converged on the same truth and thereby laid the foundation of objective history writing in India.<sup>31</sup> It is our duty, Habib urged, to cherish the views of those "who bequeathed the objective view of history and thus serve the cause of national unity."<sup>32</sup> Habib charged that when taught in schools, Majumdar's communal history and tales of ancient wrong, when fed to student, sow dissension and division in the country.

It is clear that at stake in the controversy is not some recondite argument about objective, value-free social science, but the wider issue of the public use of history. Also in competition were two different conceptions of nationhood, one that sidelines religious communities and the other that refused to do so. Thapar saw these points well. Historians, she said, are not infallible and superhuman. "We are influenced by the same emotions as the rest of society in which we live. No historical writing is ever completely objective and objectivity is relative anyway."<sup>33</sup>

#### IV Sentiment, Nation and Community

In the 1920s, when the Muslim League and the Congress co-operated with each other, it was not uncommon for members of the League to simultaneously be members of the Congress Party. By the end of the 1930s, however, the two parties were irrevocably opposed to each other. What caused this estrangement? More generally, what explains the deterioration of relations between the Hindu and Muslim elite? Why was India partitioned? How did historians see these events and how did emotional entanglement with ideas of nationhood and community affect their perception of Hindu-Muslim relations?

Two contrasting answers dominate the literature. According to the first, the official Pakistani view, Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations. The division of British India into Pakistan and Hindustan is legitimate because every nation must have a state. The second view, the official stance of the Indian Congress Party, does not question the assumption that nations must turn into states but denies that Hindus and Muslims are distinct nations. Thus, on this ground alone, it had a principled opposition to the partition of India. How-

ever, despite these differences, both display a failure of collective imagination. Neither is able to acknowledge the possibility of an institutional design that accommodates distinct cultural communities. Nationalist history, probably inspired by a sentimental idea of national unity, replicates this failure on both sides of the border.

There were notable exceptions, however. At the end of 1944, Beni Prasad, in one of the few insightful books on the subject, disputed the use of the term nation for a religious group such as Muslims but then added:

in any case it does not follow that nationhood coincides with statehood. The confusion between the two has been one of the chief sources of disquiet and frustration. The disassociation of statehood from nationhood is one of the supreme needs of the modern age in the east as well as the west; in a word, the depoliticisation of the whole concept of nationality, a definite renunciation of the idea that those who feel themselves to be a nation should necessarily constitute an independent state of their own.<sup>34</sup>

Two decades later, I H Qureshi, vice-chancellor of Karachi University, ruminating on partition, first admitted that, till as late as the early 1940s, Muslims (read Muslim elite) had not abandoned the very real possibility of a *modus vivendi* with Hindus. He then wondered if the two communities possessed the requisite sophistication, rare even in politically developed societies, required for the maintenance of a multicultural society. Perhaps he meant that a modern multicultural state is yet to develop anywhere in the world.<sup>35</sup> Majumdar, in a severe attack on the official Congress position, wrote:

Hindu leaders ignored facts that make Hindu and Muslims distinct religious, cultural and political units. The consequence was that no real effort was made by them to tackle the real problem that faced India, namely how to make it possible for two distinct units to live together as members of a single state. Whether this problem could have been solved no one can say with great certainty but the examples of Canada and Switzerland before us would have made the attempt worth making.<sup>36</sup>

All three historians point to a failure of imagination in the Congress as well as in the Muslim league. Neither could imagine that distinct cultural communities could live together in a single state. What explains this failure? Majumdar provides one answer:

An impression was created that Hindus

and Muslims had shed their differences, that there was a complete transformation in the two and a fusion of two cultures... though every true Indian must devoutly wish for such a consummation, it was unfortunately never a historical fact.

Majumdar claimed that Syed Ahmed and Jinnah had more realistic views than Gandhi and Nehru. To accept as a fact what is eminently desirable but has not yet been achieved is not only a great historical error but also a political blunder of the first magnitude which can lead to tragic consequences. Majumdar went on to lambast historians for encouraging an ideology of fanciful fraternity. A solid structure of amity and understanding, he claimed, could not be built on the quicksand of false history and political expediency. Real understanding could only be arrived at by a frank recognition of the facts of history and not by their suppression or distortion. Only such a reorientation would put Hindu-Muslim relations in better perspective and give a rational explanation for the birth of Pakistan.<sup>37</sup>

Majumdar was ambiguous about two claims. (a) The predominantly Hindu leaders of the Congress failed to see real difference and therefore the ensuing estrangement between Hindus and Muslims, and (b) for sheer political expediency, Hindu elites deliberately created the false impression and the fictitious slogan of Hindu-Muslim fraternity. Overall, it would not be incorrect to say that Majumdar interpreted the actions of Hindu leaders in terms of strategic rationality: Congress leaders desired a unified state. They believed that Hindu-Muslim amity is essential for this. Therefore, ignoring the difference and estrangement between two communities, they invented slogans of Hindu-Muslim fraternity. For Majumdar, this was a calculated act. Indian historians conspired with the Congress Party to create and sustain this myth. In so doing they abandoned standards of good history writing. They are unable to tolerate history that mentions facts incompatible with ideas of national integration. In India, the critique of a usable history came from historians not associated with the left.

I agree with the assessments of Majumdar, Qureshi and Beni Prasad that political parties failed the two communities. However, I disagree with the strategic rational explanation offered by Majumdar. I believe that the failure of political imagination was due first to the conception of nation and community shared by both parties and that assumed the necessity

of thick commonality for nationhood. Second, because this conception was influenced by and laden with specific emotions. Finally, because even political expediency was affected by the mechanism of wish fulfilment.

For subcontinental elites, what were the formal features of the community? I propose the following: A community is a dense network of relations binding members into a thick unity of purpose. Fusion rather than the diffusion of identity is critical to this conception. Furthermore, these bonds of solidarity must be experienced emotionally, if they are to exist or else at best they exist very weakly. The language of emotions came naturally to Gandhi and Nehru. Gandhi demanded "not a patched up thing but a union of hearts based upon a definite recognition of the indubitable proposition that swaraj for India must be an impossible dream without the indissoluble union between the Hindus and Muslims of India."<sup>38</sup> He unfailingly insisted that this unity must not be based on fear or merely be a truce (*modus vivendi*). Hindus and Muslims, he said, "are one in sorrow." We must, he often pleaded, help our brethren. Similarly, Nehru reiterated this "deeper unity of the people of India" and demanded a "conscious effort on the part of all of us for the emotional integration of all our people".<sup>39</sup> For the Indian National Congress, a thick common purpose and deep emotional bond constituted a nation.

It might be claimed that this discourse has a familiar ring to it. Does it not, after all, contain the standard romantic conception of community? Is this not the naive and sometimes dangerous romantic error of grafting features onto a large, impersonal community that are more appropriate to a smaller face-to-face community, such as the modern family? But really this response misses the point. The Gandhi-Nehru discourse, articulated by the Congress Party, never strayed from its liberal moorings. Gandhi would say in the same breath that this union of hearts was also a "partnership between equals, each respecting the religion of the other." In fact, it is interesting to see how liberal principles of equality were combined in the nationalist discourse with romantic notions of fraternity and how, in particular, Gandhi had his fingers in both pies. Surprisingly, participants in this two-layered discourse rarely saw its internal tension. They did not always realise that by placing *felt* solidarity above the more formal and

rational principle of equality of respect to which they also owed allegiance, they undermined their own larger interests.

In my view, this valorisation of emotional integration had far-reaching consequences for Hindu-Muslim relations. A person distancing himself from fraternal talk was less likely to be seen to prefer a world of formal relations in which self-interest is restrained by a set of moral principles, and more likely to be viewed as having plunged straight into a purely strategic calculation of self-interest. This clearly was a breach of fraternity. To be sure, there was room for strategic calculation but only with outsiders. To insist upon self-interest was to cross the rubicon and align with the outsiders. Such a world leaves little room for conceptions of reasonable disagreement among loosely tied persons. Not surprisingly, often reasonable disagreement was seen as a betrayal tantamount to a declaration of enmity. Qureshi expressed this point well. "It was however difficult to press demands for effective safeguards and substantial autonomy without in any way or another creating in the Hindu mind misgivings of their intentions and what was even more important of their complete identification with Indian nationalism. The average Hindu looked upon such demands as essentially anti-national, narrow-minded, based on prejudice and inevitably resulting in a weak state."<sup>40</sup> An expression of legitimate self-interest was seen as a blatant exhibition of prejudice, brazenly against unity and therefore anti-national.

But does this not show that Hindu-Muslim relations were already pretty bad? The answer is yes and no. Yes, because, at one level, they had always been bad.<sup>41</sup> No, because, at another level, an emotional bond did exist on which relations of mutual respect could have been built.<sup>42</sup> The real question then is not why relations were bad but why they turned sour? My very, very tentative explanation is this: Whatever, the real nature of its practice, the dominant discourse of the Congress, particularly in relation to Muslim, was driven by *principles and emotions*. The discourse of Muslims, led by Syed Ahmed and others, was shaped on the other hand by *principles and self-interest*. The foregrounding of emotions by one or self-interest by the other obscured even from themselves the real significance of principles well within their reach and demanded by the very situation in which Hindus and Muslims found themselves. The Hindu elite fre-

quently presented its liberal claim in the romantic language of emotions. The same claim was formulated by the Muslim elite in the language of self-interest. The substantive liberal claim of mutual respect was easily obscured by the formal language in which it was presented. To the Muslim, the emotional talk of Hindus seemed hollow and merely cloaked strong Hindu interest and potential Hindu hegemony. This is not entirely puzzling. I here allude to the underside of benevolence which springs forth amidst hierarchy. Even minimal self-awakening can see through the asymmetry hidden beneath benevolence and recognise how the language of love can frequently be deeply intertwined with inequality. The Congress Hindu, on the other hand, saw only hostility in what by his lights appeared cold, calculating self-interest. Neither could bring himself to trust the other's commitment to impartial principles. Even the wise Mahatma could not break this impasse because he too had no room in his philosophy for the impersonal. His world contained only the near or the distant-personal.

Conceptions of the 'communal' were also affected by emotions. Hindus and Muslims understood the importance of religious/cultural groups, but any deviation from thicker conceptions of commonality together with the abrogation of the language of emotions implied the adoption of the framework of unmitigated self-interest. Mere talk or endorsement of religious community was not therefore 'communal'. This is a much later accretion to the semantics of the term. But any loosening of ties signalled by the retreat from an informal discourse of emotional integration was viewed as a willing embrace of the project of self-interest. *This* was 'communal'. Hindu elites in particular frequently saw *all* expressions of cultural identity in these terms.

To be sure, no transformation had occurred in the sense of the term 'community', but its reference had shifted from Hindus and Muslims taken collectively to each of them taken singly. Within the parameters set by the Indian national movement, the term 'communal' registers a protest against this shift of the reference of 'community'. A religious group becomes communal when it begins to act with thick purpose, as an emotionally integrated community, as if it were a nation. Is not felt solidarity the natural and exclusive preserve of the nation? And, since it was widely accepted that a nation must

have a state, the loosening of ties or a withdrawal from emotional discourse signalled political separation. This is how the terms 'communal' and 'national' became antithetical to each other.

I have tried to show how emotions entered the very conception of community and nationhood and how the specific nature of estrangement between Hindus and Muslims cannot be understood without a proper grasp of the sentimental component of the Indian conception of community. I do not wish to over-emphasise this point but it is wise not to ignore durable sentiments or deny them some explanatory power. It is surely not my intention to give emotions primacy over other explanatory variables. I want to claim that estrangement and its converse are primarily affective notions and an attempt to reduce them to something else serves no cognitive purpose.

Let me return to Indian historiography. Why did Hindu leaders not see that two cultural communities can live together in a single state? The simple strategic rational explanation is that they cynically constructed an ideology of Hindu-Muslim brotherhood in the service of their desire for a unified nation-state. The more complex strategic explanation is that their passionate desire for a unified nation prevented them from acknowledging the growing estrangement. Passion affected their desire for national unity, and this intense desire induced a false belief of lasting warmth between Hindus and Muslims. In other words, this was a classic case of wish fulfilment. When something is desired strongly, it is seen to exist before it actually does; the very passion that induced the slogan of Hindu-Muslim unity also obscured the lack of amity in their relations.

Even this does not fully explain the issue. I have argued that a sentimental conception of community affected the perception and evaluation of inter-community conduct. It left no space for relatively impersonal principles that could prevent reasonable disagreements from degenerating into hostility. Majumdar failed to grasp this. To my knowledge, few Indian historians did. To try to explain this failure was part of the task of this paper. **[EW]**

## Notes

[This is a revised version of a paper presented at a colloquium 'The Historian, Nationalism and the end of Empire', sponsored by the Council of the Humanities, the Council on Regional Studies, The Department of History and the Shelby Cullom

Davis Centre for Historical Studies, Princeton University, May 3, 1996, and then at a seminar on Cultural Delimitations at the Centre of German Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University.]

- 1 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*, Ripon Printing Press, Lahore (Pakistan), first published in May 1943; second edition, December 1947. Also, W C Smith, *Modern Islam in India*, from the edition of 1946, London, AMS edition, New York, 1974.
- 2 I leave it to the reader to judge whether the complex motivations guiding the work of this sleuth includes a passionate commitment to the idea of India, second nature to many of us since childhood.
- 3 On the importance of emotions (passions and durable feelings), see J Elster, *Political Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993 and Stephen Holmes, *Passions and Constraint*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995.
- 4 I simply lay bare my methodological beliefs without claiming to offer any argument in their support.
- 5 I do not make these claims for social and cultural history. My gut feeling is that role of passions is universally underplayed but I do not insist on this point.
- 6 W C Smith, op cit, p 317.
- 7 W C Smith, *ibid*, p 361.
- 8 Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957, pp 210-11, 5n.
- 9 *Pakistan, The Struggle of a Nation*, published by the Director of Foreign Publicity, Government of Pakistan, 1949, p 26.
- 10 F Nietzsche, *The Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life in Untimely Meditations*, trans Hollingdale, p 68?
- 11 Quoted in S P Sen (ed), *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1973, p xxii.
- 12 R C Majumdar, *Historiography in Modern India*, Asia Publishing House, pp 37-57.
- 13 C H Phillips (ed), *Historical Writing of the People of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*, London, OUP, 1961, p 426.
- 14 Indian History Congress, *Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Session*, Delhi, 1961, Calcutta, 1963, p 359.
- 15 *Ibid*, p 345.
- 16 Quoted in Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, Harvard, 1981, pp 142-43.
- 17 S C Misra, 'Historical Thought and Indian Heritage in 19th Century Social Reform Movements: Some Observations' in John Webster, ed, *History and Contemporary India*, Asia Publishing House, New York, 1971, p 9.
- 18 Nirad Chaudhury, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, Macmillan, 1951, Addison Wesley, 1989, p 221.
- 19 K M Panikkar, *A Survey of Indian History*, Asia Publishing House, 1963, p viii.
- 20 R I Crane, 'Problems of Writing Indian History: The Case Studies in Indian Nationalism' in, *Problems of Historical Writing in India*, Proceedings of the seminar held at the IIC, January 1963, pp 35-49.
- 21 Majumdar, *Historiography in Modern India*, Asia Publishing House, New York, pp 37-57.
- 22 *Ibid*.
- 23 *Ibid*.
- 24 Irfan Habib, *Indian History Congress: Proceedings of the Twenty-fourth Session*, Delhi, 1961, Calcutta, 1963, pp 350f.
- 25 Majumdar, op cit.

- 26 Romila Thapar, op cit, p 346.
- 27 Majumdar in C H Phillips (ed), *Nationalist Historians in Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, OUP, 1961, p 425.
- 28 *Ibid*.
- 29 Crane, op cit.
- 30 *Ibid*, p 417. Majumdar often mentioned R C Dutt as an example of a nationalist historian who never strayed from the course of objective history.
- 31 I Habib, op cit, p 353.
- 32 *Ibid*.
- 33 R Thapar, op cit, p 350. But she added 'historical training should at least be able to caution the historian, prevent him not only from participating in popular prejudices but also leading him to draw attention to what may be historically fallacies. Only then can the historian claim to be representing man in his actuality.'
- 34 Beni Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Question*, Book Traders, Lahore, 1944?, p 82.
- 35 I H Qureshi, 'A Case Study of the Social Relations between the Muslims and the Hindus, 1935-1947' in C H Phillips (ed), *The Partition of India*, The MIT Press, 1968, pp 360-68, and 362.
- 36 R C Majumdar, *Freedom Movement in India*, Firma K L Mukhopadhyaya, Calcutta, 1962, p xix.
- 37 Majumdar, *ibid*, xix and xx.

- 38 M K Gandhi, *The Hindu-Muslim Unity*, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1965, p 9.
- 39 S Gopal (ed), *Nehru: An Anthology*, OUP, 197, p 332-33.
- 40 Qureshi, op cit, p 361. It is interesting to note how heavily Qureshi's account relies on the language of emotions. 'Muslims are anxious to preserve their identity. They are highly sensitive to real or imaginary danger to their religion and their culture. Most of the manifestations of ill-will, leading sometimes to riots and ugly incidents were basically the result of revivalist feelings among Hindus and the anxieties of Muslims. The attitude of Hindu nationalism filled the Muslim with alarm and he resented all attempts at Hinduising the language, culture and education. The congress could not have resisted this pressure for long and Muslim resistance to this process could have come to the surface before long, because the injury to deep-rooted Muslim feelings would have resulted in discontent and frustration.
- 41 Chaudhury made this point poignantly. "When I see the gigantic catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord I am not surprised because we as children held the tiny mustard seed in our hands and sowed it diligently," op cit, p 225.
- 42 Including emotions associated with asymmetric dependence. For example, the love and hate that is so characteristic of master-slave relations.

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