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The Lokamanya and the Sardar:  
Two Generations of Congress 'Communalism'

Amar Khoday

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
History

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts at  
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Amar Khoday

“The Lokamanya and the Sardar: Two Generations of Congress ‘Communalism’”  
A Thesis in the Department of History.

Antagonism among various religious communities and particularly between Hindus and Muslims has become a recurring feature of the public sphere in South Asia. This antagonism fed a steady growth of Muslim separatism in British India which led to the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the evidence of such communal attitudes within the major movement dedicated to achieving Indian nationhood, the Indian National Congress. From its founding in 1885, the organization espoused secular ideals and a broad vision of Indian nationalism which would be inclusive of all religious communities. Nevertheless, a strong undercurrent of Hindu chauvinism was evident early in its history and contributed to the weakening of political and communal harmony from the early 1890s to the late 1940s. Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and Sardar Vallabhbhai J. Patel (1875-1950) were two powerful leaders who helped to nurture this Hindu chauvinism over a period of two generations of political activism. This thesis investigates how Tilak and Patel’s demonization of Muslims in the print media and the relegation of Muslims to limited roles within Congress helped to enfeeble the secular goals of Congress, despite the efforts of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964).

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## List of Abbreviations

AICC	All India Congress Committee
CWMG	<i>Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi</i>
CWSVP	<i>Collected Works of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel</i>
NMML	Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
PBC	<i>Patel Birth Centenary</i>
RSCSD	<i>Rajendra Prasad: Correspondence and Select Documents</i>
SPC	<i>Sardar Patel's Correspondence</i>
SDLBGT	<i>Selected Documents of Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak</i>
TOF	<i>Transfer of Power</i>



## Glossary

Allah:	The name of God in Islam.
Bhagavad Gita:	A Hindu Holy Book, considered by some to be the Bible of the Hindus. Also translated as 'Song of the Lord'.
Berads:	Low caste community within Western India.
Brahmans:	The 'highest' or priestly caste in the four-fold hierarchy of Hindu classes.
Calipha:	The spiritual head of the Sunni Muslim community.
Chhattarpati:	Hindu Lord of the Universe.
Chitpavans:	A sub-caste of the Brahman caste which resides predominantly in Western India.
Devanagari:	Name of the the script used for Sanskrit, Hindi and Marathi.
Devata:	In Hinduism, one's chosen deity or object of devotion.
Dharma:	Hindu religion, law, duty, responsibility.
Gurkhas:	'Martial' caste based in Nepal.
Hindutva:	Literally 'Hinduness'. The assertion of Hindu essence or identity and political ideology based on it.
Inam:	Land grant in perpetuity which is rent free.
Inamdar:	The holder of an inam.
Juma/Jumna Masjid:	The largest and most prominent mosque within any Southern Asian city.
Jihad/Jehad:	Muslim Holy War.
Koran/Quran:	The Holy Book of Islam.

Lathi:	A long stick carried by Indian police.
Lokamanya:	Literally translated as 'one who is revered by the people'.
Mahars:	Low caste community located within western India.
Mahatma:	Great Soul.
Maratha:	A caste cluster members of whom were traditionally soldiers and cultivators; an inhabitant of Maharashtra.
Marathi:	The principal language of those living in present-day Maharashtra.
Maulvi:	A Muslim teacher or learned man.
Mela:	Another word for festival or event.
Mlechha:	A derogatory label for a foreigner.
Mopla/Moplahs:	Muslim tenant cultivators settled in Southwest India.
Muhamadans/ Muhammedans/ Mahomedans/ Musalmans	Another name for Muslims.
Muharram:	Muslim festival to venerate the martyrdom of Hussein and Hasan.
Pandit:	A Sanskrit scholar; adviser on Hindu law in the courts.
Parsis:	Followers of Zoroastrianism who fled from Persia in the eighth century c.e.
Patidars:	Peasant cultivator caste based in Gujarat.
Peshwa:	The head of the Maratha polity.
Pir:	Muslim holy man of a Sufi order.
Puja:	Worshipful offering, usually flowers or food, to a Hindu God.
Quaid-i-Azam	The great leader

Rajputs:	Princely warriors and landowners based in present-day Rajasthan.
Rama:	A reincarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu.
Ram Rajya:	A utopian society based on the model from the Hindu epic, the <i>Ramayana</i> .
Samadhi:	A memorial erected on the exact spot where someone was cremated.
Sardar:	Noble.
Swadeshi:	Of one's own country.
Swaraj:	Self-rule.
Tabuts:	Emblems of Muslim martyrs used in the Muharram Festival.
Ulema:	Persons versed in Islamic theology.
Zamindar:	Muslim revenue collector overlord, confirmed by the British as landlord.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Communalism has been one of the most explosive and controversial elements in South Asian<sup>1</sup> societies over the past century. It is based on the narrow belief that because certain people belong to a particular religious, caste and/or linguistic group, they naturally share common political, economic, social and religious goals. Therefore, according to Hindu communalists, all Hindus share a commonality with one another despite regional, class, gender and linguistic differences. Communal identities are highly emotive areas of private and public space and have been exploited through various means not only by British administrators but by South Asian politicians such as *Lokamanya* Balwantrao Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) and *Sardar* Vallabhbhai Javerbhai Patel (1875-1950). Indeed, some of the most traumatic episodes of communal violence transpired during the months surrounding the independence of India and Pakistan on 15 August 1947. The argument postulated by Pakistan's founder and leader of the Muslim League, *Qaid-i-Azam* Mohammad Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) was that it was essential to give Indian Muslims a homeland, away from the machinations of the predominantly Hindu Indian National Congress (hereafter referred to as Congress), which was certain to form India's first independent government.<sup>2</sup>

The partition of British India involved one of the largest mass migrations in human history. Approximately ten to fifteen million Hindus, Sikhs and

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<sup>1</sup>South Asia refers to the Indian subcontinent and all the nations that comprise it. This includes primarily, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, in addition to Nepal, Bhutan and the Maldivian Islands.

<sup>2</sup>See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin* (London: Routledge, 1997). In the first few years of India's independence, rank communalists such as Syama Prasad Mookerjee of the Hindu Mahasabha became cabinet ministers.

Muslims were estimated to have left one side of the Indo-Pakistani border for the other. Apart from the shock of suddenly leaving (or being forcefully ejected from) one's home, millions of people were massacred in wholesale communal violence. Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims flooded into India and Pakistan respectively bearing the scars of unparalleled tragedy with them.<sup>3</sup> Both dominions were deluged with stories and rumours of atrocities taking place on the other side of the border, fueling retaliation on minorities staying on the 'wrong' side of the border; 'recalcitrant' Muslims remaining in east Punjab and Delhi and 'obstinate' Hindus and Sikhs remaining in Pakistan were repeatedly harassed and attacked.

The bitter memories of partition have contributed to an unprecedented growth in communal politics in both India and Pakistan. Despite India's officially secular status, right-wing Hindu groups assert that India is a Hindu country and threaten its minorities, demanding they either submit to the majority's will or leave.<sup>4</sup> The Muslim and Christian communities have contributed to building a composite culture in various parts of the subcontinent; however because their religions originated outside South Asia, they are suspected of having divided loyalties (or no loyalty to India at all) and are deemed 'foreigners'. The Hindu and Muslim communities of India have been heavily stratified and heterogeneous for centuries along the lines of caste, sect, linguistic and regional identities. Nevertheless, communal parties and politicians continue to construct their 'communities' almost solely along the lines of religion and caste for the purposes of political consolidation in the attempt to brush over economic, social and gender grievances.

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<sup>3</sup>There were indeed cases of Muslims who migrated to Pakistan only to return to India. Some left with the intention of returning once the killings and rioting were brought under control.

<sup>4</sup>Although Pakistan was meant to be a homeland for Muslims, Jinnah's desire was that it should operate as a secular state and not as a theocracy dictated by the *ulema*. Despite Jinnah's professions, many Hindus regarded Pakistan as a state built on fear and fanaticism. As Pakistan and Bangladesh (1956 and 1988 respectively) declared themselves to be Islamic republics, Hindu right-wing activists have argued that India should also become an officially Hindu state.

In recent years, the Bharatiya Janata Party<sup>5</sup> (BJP), India's leading Hindu communal party, has grown from being a mere political oddity in its earlier incarnations in the late 1970s and early 1980s to becoming the foremost partner in later 20th century Indian coalition governments. The early 1990s witnessed a horrific spate of communal rioting fueled by the BJP and Vishwa Hindu Parishad<sup>6</sup> (VHP) and militant organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)<sup>7</sup> and the Bajrang Dal.<sup>8</sup> On 6 December 1992, Hindu communalists razed a sixteenth century mosque in the north Indian city of Ayodhya. The mosque was built during the reign of the first Mughal emperor, Babur (r.1526-1530), supposedly over the remains of a demolished temple where the Hindu God, Rama was born.<sup>9</sup> Some of the people who actively took part in the movement to destroy the mosque were individuals who hold key posts in the Indian Government, including, Lal Krishna Advani, currently Home Minister and perhaps the most powerful member of the BJP.<sup>10</sup> The ramifications of the mosque's destruction

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<sup>5</sup>Translated as Bharatiya (Indian) Janata (People's) Party.

<sup>6</sup>Translated as Vishwa (World) Hindu (Hindu) Parishad (Council).

<sup>7</sup>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh can be translated as national (rashtriya) self (swayam) service (sevak) society (sangh). Fanatical members of the RSS were responsible for the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948.

<sup>8</sup>Bajrang Dal can be translated as the organization (Dal) of Hanuman (Bajrang). Hanuman was the half-man half-monkey god in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*. He served the deity Rama with absolute loyalty against evil demons. Members of the Bajrang Dal were allegedly responsible for the recent murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two adolescent sons in the Eastern Indian state of Orissa. Staines and his two sons were burned alive as they were sleeping in their jeep.

<sup>9</sup>Research has revealed that it is highly debatable that a temple was demolished to build the mosque. Moreover, there are reported to be at least two other places in Ayodhya where Rama was supposed to be born. The actual historic figure of Rama was said to have ruled from Varanasi. See A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India: A survey of the history and culture of the Indian sub-continent before the coming of the Muslims*. Third revised edition, 30th impression. (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 1954,1997), 39-40. Due to the havoc caused by this incident, several books have emerged over the past decade to account for the history of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. See Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram and Achyut Yagnik. *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhoomi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), S. Gopal, ed., *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi Issue* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1991), Gyanendra Pandey, ed., *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today* (New Delhi: Viking, 1993) and Jonah Blank, *Arrow of the Blue Skinned God: Retracing the Ramayana Through India* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

<sup>10</sup>Advani is a Hindu from the province of Sind, now located in Pakistan. Like many of his contemporaries from Sind and Punjab, Advani has retained his bitterness against Pakistanis and Muslims for the forced removal of many Sindi Hindus from their homeland.

included several days of rioting in many Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi cities, the setting up of curfews in urban centres as far south as Bangalore, not usually known for communal outbreaks.<sup>11</sup> In March 1993, Muslim terrorists suspected of links to the Dubai-based Indian crimelord Dawood Ibrahim bombed the Bombay Stock Exchange in retaliation for the destruction of Babri Masjid and the violence perpetrated against Indian Muslims.

The BJP's use of religious and cultural symbols as a tool for political mobilization was however far from innovative. Although the Congress as a nationalist organization in colonial India was led by many 'secular' personalities such as Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958), Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948) and Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964), other leaders have been widely regarded as pioneers in merging Hindu symbols and terminology into their nationalist rhetoric. Both Bal Gangadhar Tilak in the first generation of Congress activism and Vallabhbhai Patel in the later Gandhian era have been identified variously by historians as great national leaders, as heroes in the fight to establish a free Hindu Indian nation and also as communalists who hated Muslims.

It is the purpose of this thesis to explore the realities underlying such conflicting characterizations, both by examining Tilak's and Patel's writings and actions in this area and analyzing the social and political contexts in which these ideas were expressed. Did the vigorous deployment of Hindu symbols as Tilak did from the early 1890s help to alienate a significant proportion of minority political leaders and activists? Did they share a perception of Muslims as

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<sup>11</sup>Although areas of northern and western India have been more commonly associated with Hindu-Muslim conflict in Indian historiography. South Indian cities have become the sites for communal conflict in recent years. During a trip made in 1994, clashes took place over a proposed 10 minute news broadcast in Urdu after the regular broadcast in the state language of Kannada. Although the fighting took place over language, it became a theatre for religious conflict for Kannada proponents objecting to Urdu were mostly Hindu and those supporting Urdu, Muslim.

“religious fanatics,” leading to an unwillingness to rein in more extreme expressions of Hindu communal sentiment which contributed to the growing trend of Muslim separatism culminating in Pakistan? The causes and ramifications of the partition of British India were undoubtedly multitudinous, for no single explanation can account for such a far reaching event in the history of the subcontinent, the after-shocks of which both Indians and Pakistanis are still experiencing. Indubitably, Muslim separatism was aided and abetted both by British officials who wished to nurture these sentiments through divide-and-rule tactics and by Muslim politicians seeking to gain political mileage from it. However, another reason indeed lay in the attitude of Hindu communal elements within Congress, both extreme and moderate, stretching back into the late 19th century. Hindu communal propaganda worsened matters and in fact gave minorities a reason to fear dictatorship and oppression by the ‘majority’.<sup>12</sup>

This thesis combines a biographical study of these two leading yet relatively understudied figures in South Asian history with an examination of communalism and political mobilization. The remainder of this chapter will examine the effects which communalism, the partition of India and the emergence of Hindu right-wing extremism in the past two decades (epitomised by the Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya) have had on the modern historiography of communalism and on recent biographical studies of Tilak and Patel.

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<sup>12</sup>Labels such as ‘majority’ or ‘minority’ are constructions which came to be centred around religious identities. Both the Hindu ‘majority’ and Muslim ‘minority’ are heavily stratified groups along the lines of sect, caste, and class differences. The BJP, although claiming to be a pan-Hindu party consists primarily of higher caste Hindus which form a minority within Hindu society and Indian society at large.



## Historiography: Nationalism and Communalism

Communalism has left its indelible imprint on various schools of Indian historiography. South Asian scholars, because of their ethnic roots in the subcontinent, have been extremely affected by various crises, such as partition and the demolition of Babri Masjid, which have left their mark on the region's polity. The study of communalism permeates several academic fields including history, political science, sociology, religion, psychology and cultural studies.<sup>13</sup> This section will provide a brief outline of how the three major schools of Indian historiography have viewed the problem of communalism and what their motivations have been in writing about it.

Based in England, the Cambridge School, usually considered to include Anil Seal, Francis Robinson, David Washbrook, Gordon Johnson, John Gallagher and C.A. Bayly have argued that divisiveness amongst religious communities was not based on British divide-and-rule policies but on natural pre-existing animosities rooted in medieval Hindu-Muslim rivalry.<sup>14</sup> In the late 1960s and 1970s, this school argued through various monographs and articles in its flagship *Modern Asian Studies*<sup>15</sup> that the essence of Indian politics in the pre-independence

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<sup>13</sup>See Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1995), Peter Van Der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), Achin Vanaik, *The Furies of Indian Communalism: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (London: Verso, 1997) Christoffe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and Rustom Bharucha, *In the Name of the Secular: Contemporary Cultural Activism in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup>Indians such as the Bengali expatriate Nirad C. Chaudhuri (1897-1999) have also argued that the British merely exploited a rivalry and hatred that existed for centuries. He wrote, "When I see the gigantic catastrophe of Hindu-Muslim discord of these days I am not surprised, because we as children held the tiny mustard seed in our hands and sowed it very diligently. In fact, this conflict was implicit in the very unfolding of our history, and could hardly be avoided. Heaven preserve me from the dishonesty, so general among Indians, of attributing this conflict to British rule, however much the foreigner rulers might have profited by it. Indeed they would have been excusable only as gods, and not as man the political animal, had they made no use of the weapon so assiduously manufactured by us, and by us also put into their hands." Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*. Reprint (London: The Hogarth Press, 1951, 1987), 225.

<sup>15</sup>However it should be pointed out that various scholars of other schools have appeared in *MAS* such as Romila Thapar and Gyan Pandey.

period lay not in the altruistic vision to establish a nation, but the search for power through any available means possible, including the use of narrow caste and religious identities which they argued lay at the heart of Indian society. In essence, they believe that Indian nationalism did not really exist.<sup>16</sup>

Based mostly at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi, the Radical Nationalist School includes several top names in the Indian historical profession including Sarvepalli Gopal, Romila Thapar, Bipan Chandra, K.N. Panikkar and Mushirul Hasan. These historians believe that communalism was essentially the product of colonial rule. Unlike the Cambridge School which characterise the essence of Indian nationalism as communalism, the Radical Nationalists argue that communalism and nationalism were two separate entities, indeed polar opposites. Due to the scarcity of employment within administrative services such as the Indian Civil Service, and competition for seats in Government councils and assemblies, Chandra posits that Indians, both Hindus and Muslims, turned on one another by focusing on artificial divisions such as religion. He contends that the main interests of the majority of Indians are centered around secular and economic issues, while communal antipathy has been encouraged by greedy, self-interested members of the bourgeoisie determined to exploit the ignorance of the uneducated masses for their own ends to attain political power.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Various works of the Cambridge School include Anil Seal, *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism: Competition and Collaboration in the Later Nineteenth Century* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), Frances Robinson, *Separatism Among Muslims: The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson and Anil Seal, eds., *Locality, Province, and Nation: Essays on Indian Politics, 1870-1940: Reprinted from Modern Asian Studies* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), and C.A. Bayly, "The Pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860," in *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, 2, (1985), 177-203 and Judith M. Brown, *Modern India: The Origins of an Asian Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

<sup>17</sup>Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1984).

The senior members of this collective grew up in the latter decades of the nationalist movement and imbibed many of its ideals including the dream of a unified and sovereign nation and were equally subjected to the shock of its demise with partition. Some of these historians emerged from Indian families prominent during colonial rule. S. Gopal was the son of S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), an eminent scholar of Hinduism, a professor at the University of Oxford and the second President of India. Currently an emeritus professor of contemporary history, Gopal was chief editor of the multi-volumed *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru* and author of a three-volume biographical study on India's first prime minister. Concurrent with his career as an historian, Gopal worked under Nehru in the Ministry of External Affairs during the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>18</sup> Romila Thapar hailing from a military family background, grew up in various parts of India and was exposed to the diverse cultural traditions of the subcontinent. Her main area of study has been the ancient period of Indian history.<sup>19</sup> K.N. Panikkar is professor of intellectual and cultural history and is the son of the late K.M. Panikkar, a famous Indian historian and diplomat. Along with Bipan Chandra, these historians have been professors at Jawaharlal Nehru University for many years.

Mushirul Hasan is an historian at Jamia Millia University in New Delhi and the son of a leading Congress Muslim leader. Like many of his colleagues, he is a firm Indian nationalist with a distaste for the two-nation theory. However, he is strongly critical of the role of right-wing Hindu elements within Congress and their part in keeping Muslims in subordinate positions within Congress. He has

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<sup>18</sup>Nehru served as both prime minister (1947-1964) and as minister of external affairs (1946-1962). Gopal served in the Ministry of External Affairs during a very tense period when India and China were becoming increasingly antagonistic over their boundary disputes in the northeast and Kashmir.

<sup>19</sup>Some of Thapar's written works include *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1963), *A History of India*, Volume 1 (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1966).

extensively studied the partition of India, the causes leading up to it, the views of partition as expressed in creative literature, and the legacy partition and communalism have left on Indian Muslims.<sup>20</sup>

Many of Nehru's ideas and beliefs on the causes of communalism and its growth in colonial India permeate the writings of these scholars.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, like Nehru, who in his time condemned Hindu communal groups such as the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha, these scholars firmly attack right-wing Hindu militancy in contemporary politics and its use of history to legitimise itself. Moreover, this increasingly intolerant aspect of Indian political life has been disheartening to a school that believes in the fundamentally secular nature of the society in which they live. It should also be noted that while there is a great deal of admiration for Nehru's thinking, he has also been criticized by these historians, including his foremost biographer, S. Gopal. He argues that while Nehru was "unqualifiedly committed...to the principles of secularism, a hesitancy on his own part in enforcing them has helped to weaken their impact."<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Mushirul Hasan asserts that in relation to the protection of the Urdu language, "Nehru dithered and betrayed a marked tendency to compromise with his ideological adversaries." Despite Nehru's belief that Urdu was the common language of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, Hasan posits that the Prime Minister did little to "promote this idea in the rank and file of his own party."<sup>23</sup>

Lastly, the Subaltern Studies collective which includes Ranajit Guha,

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<sup>20</sup>Hasan has edited *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993) and *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, 2 volumes (New Delhi: Roli Books Pvt Ltd, 1995), and has written *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup>This is particularly evident in Nehru's several published works. See Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 15th impression (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund, 1995; 1946).

<sup>22</sup>See S. Gopal, "Introduction" in *Anatomy of a Conflict*, 17.

<sup>23</sup>Mushirul Hasan, "Adjustment and Accommodation: Indian Muslims After Partition," in K.N. Panikkar, ed., *Communalism in India: History, Politics, and Culture* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1991), 74.

Partha Chatterjee, Sumit Sarkar, David Hardiman, David Arnold and Gyanendra Pandey form the third and most recent school of Indian historiography. Throughout the 1980s, the Subalternists mounted a continuous critique of the other two main schools of Indian historiography. They argue that the main form of anti-colonial insurgency came from marginalized groups within Indian society which did not cater to the elitist, upper caste and ostensibly non-violent principles of the Congress.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the real heroes of the nationalist movement were not the elitist politicians of Congress such as Gandhi and Nehru, but peasants who suffered the brunt of the Government's oppression and often times resorted to less than non-violent means to assert themselves.<sup>25</sup> The Subalternists accuse the other schools of focusing their studies on elites and administrative history to the neglect of others, and aim to write a new history of India from the vantage point of marginalized groups in the subcontinent.

Amongst the Subalternists, Gyan Pandey has headlined the attack on communalism, and Hindu right-wing forces in particular. Trained at the University of Oxford, he has taught history for many years at Delhi University and has most recently shifted to Johns Hopkins University where he is now a part of the department of anthropology. His main area of study in the past decade has been communalism in North India, particularly Uttar Pradesh. In 1990, he completed *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, which focused on the growth of communalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Pandey has also written articles and essays on the assertion of Hindu militancy and its appropriation of cultural symbols.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ranajit Guha argues that while elites maintained a dominance in society through coercive means, their power was not hegemonic. Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup>See Shahid Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory, Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup>See "The Civilized And The Barbarian: The 'New' Politics Of Late Twentieth Century India And The World," & "Which Of Us Are Hindus?" in *Hindus And Others*, "The New Hindu

These three schools have been critical of one another's interpretation of Indian history in general and of communalism in particular.<sup>27</sup> The Cambridge School questions the Radical Nationalists' arguments about the innately secular nature of Indian society. The Subalterns, particularly Pandey, similarly criticise the Radical Nationalists for claiming that communalism is a problem rooted exclusively in economic jealousies. Simultaneously, the Subalterns are sensitive to perceived 'racist implications' rooted in the Cambridge School's line of thought. Pandey finds that communalism in the Cambridge School's studies, is a societal ill that has been specially attributed to South Asia and other parts of the non-western world, almost to the point of denying that sectarianism and prejudice existed in European society, specifically in Great Britain itself.<sup>28</sup> While the Radical Nationalists assert that communalism is nationalism filtered through the wrong lens, Pandey sees nationalism as "nothing but communalism driven into secular channels- and not sufficiently driven."<sup>29</sup> The Subalterns accept that narrow, parochial views exist in Indian society; however unlike the Cambridge School, they do not believe that South Asians are or have been exceptional in this regard, nor do they see the need to gloss over the problem as they feel the Radical

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History" in *South Asia*, Vol. XVII (1994), 97-112.

<sup>27</sup>Although there is no general monograph which dissects that intricacies of Indian historiography as Peter Novick has done for American and European historiography, there have been numerous discussions and historiographical critiques on Indian historiography relating to nationalism and communalism. See Bipan Chandra, "Nationalist Historians' Interpretations of the Indian National Movement" in *Studying Indian History* (1986); Bipan Chandra, Mridula Mukherjee, Aditya Mukherjee, K.N. Panikkar and Sucheta Mahajan, *India's Struggle for Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1988), 16-24; Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Indian Historiography of Colonial India," in *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Volume 1 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 1-8; John L. Hill, "Introduction" in *Congress and Indian Nationalism: Historical Perspectives* (London: Curzon Press 1991), 1-15; Ian Copland, "Interpretations of Modern India" in *South Asia*, Vol. IX, 2, (1986), 81-91. Gyanendra Pandey, "The Prose of Otherness," in *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*. Volume VIII (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 198?), 188-221; Ayesha Jalal, "Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of 'Communalism': Partition Historiography Revisited," in *Modern Asian Studies* 30, 3, (1996), 681-689.

<sup>28</sup>Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 6-7.

<sup>29</sup>Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, 236.

Nationalists do.<sup>30</sup> The Radical Nationalists do not deny such parochialism exists, however they have attempted to ascribe the crux of the problem to a middle-class preoccupation, and moreover as a by-product of economic conflicts. Lastly, while the Subalterns have accused others of writing an elitist history using elitist sources, many of their own writings incorporate studies on elite figures and similarly use elite sources such as government documents and private papers of figures such as Gandhi and Nehru.<sup>31</sup>

Based on the descriptions of the schools mentioned above, the analysis of two 'elite' political figures such as Tilak and Patel and their propagation of communalist rhetoric would seemingly fit within the confines of the Radical Nationalist School. In concurrence with other scholars of the Radical Nationalists, I support the view that Indian nationalism existed (in opposition to the Cambridge School which claimed that it never existed) and that millions of freedom fighters believed in their cause and risked their lives for it. Moreover, the individuals and organizations which I have chosen to write about, namely Tilak, Patel, the Congress and the Muslim League, could most clearly be placed under the rubric of an 'elitist' historical study in which the 'subaltern' plays only a marginal role. This said however, I strongly disagree with Radical Nationalist historians such as Bipan Chandra who contend that these communal tendencies within politics are solely confined and rooted in economic motivations and competition, rather than from also emerging from narrow tendencies within society itself. I fully concur with the Subaltern School that the existence of clashing identities, whether on religious, caste or regional grounds is not solely restricted to India, nor that these identity clashes negate the existence of an anti-imperial struggle throughout the subcontinent. Pandey's contention that nationalism is essentially communalism

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<sup>30</sup>Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism*, chapter one.

<sup>31</sup>See Bipan Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence* and Ayesha Jalal's "Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of Communalism." in *Modern Asian Studies* 30, 3 (1996).

driven through secular channels and not sufficiently driven relates to a study of Tilak and Patel's attempts at nationalist mobilization for both were fighting an anti-colonial struggle against the Government of India, however their nationalism was essentially a moderate communalism insufficiently driven into secular channels which would encompass all sections of Indian society. Lastly, although the Subaltern Studies collective contend that subaltern sections of society, namely labourers and peasants led the real battle against British imperialism, one cannot but still acknowledge the role, however negative or positive of elites in influencing trends and events in the nationalist movement. The Subaltern School's legacy is that it has brought a great deal of deserved attention to the subaltern as an agent in history who was not wholly dependent on elites to mount an effective assault on the colonial edifice. However, one must acknowledge that the subaltern while not controlled by elites was indeed influenced by them to some degree and vice-versa. Individuals such as Tilak and Patel did have the ability to influence and shape people's perceptions given their status in the Congress hierarchy and this can not but be acknowledged. Moreover, as David Hardiman's study illustrates, the line as to whether an individual is a subaltern or an elitist can easily be blurred. In his study, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, Sardar Patel and his fellow Patidars were portrayed as subaltern peasant nationalists who fought according to their ideals and were not solely dictated to by Gandhian and Congress politics. However, Patidars within the framework of Gujarati society can hardly be characterised as subaltern given their socio-economic status. Furthermore, Patel, who was a Patidar and a successful lawyer advocated the status quo vis-à-vis rural Gujarati society which left his caste members in a dominant position over many other castes and tribal groups. His stance could hardly be characterised as subaltern. One the one hand, Patel and his Patidars might be considered subalterns vis-à-vis their struggle against colonial oppression



and their position within Congress in relation to the interests of the urban middle classes and industrialists, on the other, they were rural, elite neo-colonialists in their own right for their subjugation of lower castes and tribes. Similarly, Tilak and his Chitpavan followers, in relation to British dominance may have been considered a subaltern class, however their relation to others within Indian society and how they viewed others placed them at the apex of Maharashtrian society. Therefore while I support Pandey's analysis of communalism, I do not consider focusing on 'elites', to be inimical to an historical analysis of communalism or nationalism.

The use of mythology in the guise of history can be a powerful tool in the hands of activists and politicians and has been appropriated by Hindu communalists even prior to the turn of the century. In his multi-volume *History of British India*, James Mill (1736-1836) divided the history of the subcontinent into three distinct time periods: ancient, medieval and modern. Ancient India was marked significantly by Hindu kingdoms, notably the Guptas (ca.320-540 c.e.), medieval India by Muslim rulers such as the Mughal Dynasty (1526-1858), and modern India by the British after 1757.<sup>32</sup> Based on this construct, Romila Thapar posits that "Hindu communalists try and project the image of an ideal Hindu society in the ancient period and attribute the ills of India to the coming of 'the Muslims'."<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, Hindu communalists view medieval India as characterized by Muslim oppression, while neglecting to take into account the emergence of powerful Hindu kingdoms and princely states throughout India such

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<sup>32</sup>The Mughal Empire was officially terminated in 1858, however its decline started following the death of its last great Emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1707). The British Crown officially assumed control over the administration following the Revolt of 1857. However, 1757 is often considered the beginning of British rule with the East India Company taking control in Bengal following the Battle of Plassey.

<sup>33</sup>Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia and Bipan Chandra, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* (Delhi: People's Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1969), 1. See also Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity" in *Modern Asian Studies* 23, 2 (1989), 209-231.

as the various Rajput and Maratha ruling clans in northern and western India, or the Vijayanagar Empire located in southern India. Moreover, they choose to ignore the degree of cooperation that took place between Akbar (and his successors), arguably the most famous Mughal Emperor (1542-1605), and his Hindu allies which included several Rajput ruling states.

From the annals of medieval Indian history emerges a controversial figure named Shivaji Bhonsle (1627-80). Hailing from western India, and "imbued with his mother's love of Hinduism," Shivaji sought to achieve independence from all overlords, "especially those of 'foreign' faith."<sup>34</sup> However, despite the association that has been made between Shivaji and xenophobia, Stewart Gordon argues that Shivaji was not trying to establish a Hindu rule but did in fact consistently espouse tolerance and syncretism.<sup>35</sup> Whether he was perceived as an oppressor of Muslims or a tolerant local ruler, Shivaji was a powerful symbol for orthodox Hindus and Hindu social reformers alike in Bombay Presidency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such, he becomes particularly relevant in this study, for Tilak initially used him as a symbol of Maharashtrian political assertion and later transformed him into an Indian national figure. Therefore, Shivaji was deployed as a symbol for extreme communalism and simultaneously as a near-mythic nationalist figure which could be used to unite vast sections of Indian society.

Tilak and Patel, like many other historical figures such as Akbar and Shivaji, are perceived by many today as nationalist heroes who fought for the country's glory and freedom.<sup>36</sup> Thus most accounts of their lives and political

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<sup>34</sup>Stanley Wolpert, *A New History of India*. 4th edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 163.

<sup>35</sup>Stewart Gordon, *The Marathas 1600-1818* in *The New Cambridge History of India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81.

<sup>36</sup>Tilak's photo was carried alongside those of Ganesh and Shivaji during the festivals that Tilak initiated himself.

careers tend to treat them as 'sacred cows' and are almost always more celebratory than critical in assessing their political careers.

### Historiography of the *Lokamanya* and the *Sardar*

Tilak and Patel symbolize two particular strands of Hindu right-wing activity during two distinct phases of the freedom movement. The first phase lasted from 1885-1920 and the second phase from 1920-1947. This is reflected throughout the discourse on Indian national and communal politics. Some writers perceive them to be outstanding political mobilizers while others view them as rank communalists who have contributed to the alienation of Indian minorities. Apart from specific biographies on them, general perceptions of Tilak and Patel have been formed over the years through biographies of contemporary figures and political rivals such as Gokhale (for Tilak) and Nehru (for Patel). Lastly, sources such as Maulana Azad's *India Wins Freedom* have also contributed their share to forming recent popular impressions of Patel.

Unlike the scholars mentioned in the previous section, some of the biographical authors do not necessarily align themselves with any particular school of historical writing. However, given their foci, namely Tilak or Patel, they can more easily be placed under the rubric of the Radical Nationalists. Moreover the study of communalism through the genres of popular and political biographies can produce great insights into the individual development of communal philosophies.

Interest in the earlier period of Indian nationalism has been on the decline over the past two decades while the Gandhian period, in which Patel flourished, still receives much scholarly attention. Historical studies of the early nationalist movement and biographies of its earlier figures were partly inspired by the desire to know more about what preceded the Gandhi-led nationalist movement. The

growing right-wing activism of the *Hindutva* forces in the past two decades have inspired writings on Patel for various reasons, both by those seeking to promote ideas of *Hindutva* and equally by those who wish to promote its demise.

Many of the biographies written on Tilak since India's independence appeared during the late 1950s to the 1970s. Two biographies were published in conjunction with Tilak's birth centenary in 1956. *Lokamanya Tilak: The Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India* by D.V. Tahmankar and *The Legacy of the Lokamanya: The Political Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak* by an American, Theodore L. Shay were both highly eulogistic accounts of Tilak's role in Indian history.<sup>37</sup> Both Tahmankar and Shay argued against any suggestions that Tilak was anti-Muslim. Tahmankar asserted that Tilak was merely standing up for the Hindu community "when Muslims in Poona and other cities caused riots by attacking Hindu temples and processions." He further argued that Muslims were responsible for organized violence against Hindus with the government's support.<sup>38</sup> Shay similarly believed that Tilak was "one of India's most misunderstood prophets" who was not a communalist but "was the one who first taught the need for overcoming communal disagreements in the name of national unity."<sup>39</sup> Shay praised Tilak's efforts to galvanize Indian society by inaugurating the Shivaji and Ganapati Festivals, yet he neglected to recognize that India's heterogeneous society included other religious communities who would feel alienated by these communal festivals.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Three other biographies of the same style were written soon after 1956. See S.L. Karandikar, *Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak: The Hercules and Prometheus of Modern India* (Poona: S.L. Karandikar, 1957), G.P. Pradhan and A.K. Bhagwat, *Lokamanya Tilak: A Biography* (Bombay: Jaico Publishing House, 1958) and T.V. Parvate, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: A Narrative and Interpretive Review of His Life, Career and Contemporary Events* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1958).

<sup>38</sup>D.V. Tahmankar, *Lokamanya Tilak: The Father of Indian Unrest and Maker of Modern India* (London: John Murray, 1956), 53.

<sup>39</sup>Theodore L. Shay, *The Legacy of the Lokamanya: The Political Philosophy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak* (London, Oxford University Press, 1956), vii.

<sup>40</sup>Shay, 73-77.

While earlier writers tended to take a hagiographic approach to assessing Tilak's role during the nationalist movement, scholars such as Stanley Wolpert and Richard Cashman have provided some of the more interesting biographical and scholarly work on the Lokamanya. Wolpert, an American historian of South Asia, formerly based at UCLA, published his first major work in 1962 entitled, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India*. He has written several other biographies over the past three decades focusing on key South Asian figures such as Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1927-79) and most recently a controversial study on Jawaharlal Nehru. His novel concentrating on the conspiracy to kill Gandhi, *Nine Hours to Rama* was the basis for a film of the same name during the 1960s. Based on Tilak's writings in English and Marathi, Wolpert attempted to draw a political comparison between Tilak and his main political rival Gopal Krishna Gokhale. His primary concern was "the interaction and influence mutually exerted by their lives and ideas, and by the parties and platforms within India's nationalist movement which they came to represent." He argues that as political rivals, they were "continually influenced by and reacting to each other's policies and pronouncements."<sup>41</sup> While Tilak showed a disdain for western thought and an intense cultural chauvinism, Gokhale approached relations with the British and other communities in the spirit of syncretism. Moreover, Tilak "stimulated the revival of the Ganapati festivals and similar movements with scant apprehension about their impact on the Muslim community."<sup>42</sup>

The other key source on Tilak is a study of political mobilization in Maharashtra by an Australian historian, Richard Cashman, who studied at Duke

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<sup>41</sup>Stanley Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), xi. See also B.R. Nanda, *Gokhale: The Indian Moderates and the British Raj* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977).

<sup>42</sup>Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 298-301.

University during the 1960s. In *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra*, he focuses on the construction of Tilak as a mythical figure, a 'superman' like the Maratha chief Shivaji himself. In order to "examine the myth of the *Lokamanya*, to isolate the myth from political reality or, more correctly, to consider the myth as a component part of political reality," Cashman analyzes key political activities during Tilak's career.<sup>43</sup> He studies four mass movements in which Tilak became involved: The Ganapati Festival, the Shivaji Anniversary Celebrations, a famine relief campaign and an appeal to the urban proletariat in Bombay. Despite an initial antipathy for Tilak, Cashman posits that Tilak was a unique leader "who symbolized the range of Maharashtrian experience" for he "drew upon his familiarity with mass culture to introduce humour, sarcasm, and various dramatic techniques; by re-interpreting and disseminating Vedic knowledge he established a connection with the high Sanskritic tradition."<sup>44</sup> Like Wolpert, Cashman relies on evidence from Tilak's newspapers, *The Mahratta* and *Kesari*, in addition to government documents and Tilak's private papers.

Since Cashman's book appeared, other scholars of Indian nationalism have rendered their view of Tilak's role in the freedom movement. B.R. Nanda, who has written several biographies and studies on leading Indian political figures such as the Nehrus, has also discussed Tilak in his study of Gokhale and the Indian Moderates. Tilak is in part represented as an aggressive troublemaker who sought to use deities for cheap popularity in order to pamper the ignorant masses.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Tilak had the tendency to stir up aggression amongst the

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<sup>43</sup>Richard Ian Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 4.

<sup>44</sup>Cashman, 218-9.

<sup>45</sup>B.R. Nanda, *Gokhale: The Indian Moderates and the British Raj* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), 37, 77.

Extremists, yet he was unable to pacify them when they became violent.<sup>46</sup>

Mushirul Hasan, although sympathetic to Congress's role in fighting imperialism, is critical of the negative portrayal of Muslims by right-wing Hindu politicians. He describes Tilak as the "fiery politician-writer" who "sought to build a Maratha identity through a conscious choice of historical figures and symbols that evoked memories of Muslim oppression and exploitation." His references to Mahmud of Ghazni (971-1030) and Aurangzeb created a religious divide in Maharashtrian society which "provided ideological coherence to the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), two of the most militant Hindu organisations in the 1930s and '40s." Essentially, Hasan asserts that the use of Hindu symbols and its antagonising effect on Muslims "enfeebled the intellectual underpinnings of secular goals set by the Congress."<sup>47</sup> Bipan Chandra, in contrast, views Tilak as the "outstanding leader of militant nationalism... who devoted his entire life to the service of his country." He characterises Tilak as a "fiery and courageous journalist whose style was simple and direct yet highly readable." Chandra asserts that Tilak's use of religious and political symbols was for nationalistic purposes.<sup>48</sup>

The contrast in language between Chandra and Hasan, two leading 'secular' Indian historians is revealing. Hasan limits Tilak to being 'a politician-journalist'; in Chandra's account, Tilak was a 'militant nationalist' who selflessly devoted his life to the service of his country. To Hasan, Tilak helped to weaken the nationalist movement by imbibing communalism through his Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals, while Chandra viewed them as tools for nationalist propaganda against the evils of colonial rule.

Equally, the historiography of Sardar Patel has been informed by the

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<sup>46</sup>Nanda, 288-289.

<sup>47</sup>Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, 43, 49.

<sup>48</sup>Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence*, 107.

legacy of partition and the deteriorating communal situation in India over the past two decades. Among prominent Congress leaders, Patel was the first to accept partition. Second, he was perceived by Hindutva forces as having been stern and straightforward with Indian Muslims and the Pakistani government. Apart from biographies of Patel, many of the popular perceptions formed about him have been based on characterisations contained in books by or about his political colleagues, particularly Nehru, Gandhi and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad.

*India Wins Freedom*, first published in 1958, was Azad's autobiographical account of the last decade of colonial rule and the political turmoil leading up to India's independence. Until 1988, about thirty pages were missing from the original book due to Azad's controversial opinions about the role of certain individuals in the freedom movement, particularly, Nehru and Patel.<sup>49</sup> The latter emerges from the unabridged account as a rank communalist out to keep minority politicians from any chance to fill key administrative or political posts. Azad argues that Patel robbed K.F. Nariman (d.1948), a Parsi politician of the chance to become chief minister of Bombay presidency when provincial rule was granted as one of the provisions of the 1935 Government of India Act. Although a Congress enquiry absolved Patel of any wrongdoing, Azad asserted that "the truth had been sacrificed in order to satisfy Sardar Patel's communal demands."<sup>50</sup> Azad indicted Patel as the greatest supporter of partition, due mostly to the latter's irritation with the machinations of the Muslim League and especially Liaquat Ali Khan's (1895-1951) conduct as Finance Minister in the interim government.

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<sup>49</sup>Azad wrote that Nehru's press conference on July 10, 1946 was the greatest blunder in the history of the subcontinent. Because of his statement Jinnah withdrew his support for the cabinet mission plan. B.R. Nanda, argues that Azad overemphasized the impact of the press conference. Nehru was merely stating a fact and Jinnah who was reluctant to have even agreed with Cabinet Mission was seeking any reason to extricate himself from it. B.R. Nanda, *Jawaharlal Nehru: Rebel and Statesman* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 181.

<sup>50</sup>Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1988), 17.



Azad wrote, “I must also admit that he [Patel] had developed such strong prejudices against the Muslim League that he would not have been sorry if the Muslims who followed the League suffered.”<sup>51</sup>

Azad’s account was controversial for he was a top-ranking member of the Indian National Congress for many years, Minister of Education in the Government of India from 1947 until his death in 1958, and one of the foremost Muslim intellectuals on the national stage. However, in many instances, strict historical accuracy was found wanting in Azad’s book and one of Patel and Azad’s biographers, Rajmohan Gandhi (b.1935) took it upon himself to bring these inaccuracies to light.<sup>52</sup> In a thoroughly detailed study, he notes numerous contradictions between various editions of *India Wins Freedom*, particularly when comparing its two earlier editions with its most recent version published in 1988. After dissecting Azad’s book Gandhi concludes that Azad’s inaccurate portrayals of historical events are largely due to his inability to admit his own failures and weaknesses. “Unprepared to blame himself, Azad had to suppress his failures and exaggerate his colleague’s mistakes.” Ultimately, *India Wins Freedom* was not “a story of how India won her freedom but of how Azad lost his spine.”<sup>53</sup>

Rajmohan Gandhi was the grandson of both Mahatma Gandhi and Chakravarti Rajagopalachari (1879-1972).<sup>54</sup> Rajmohan was editor of the Bombay newspaper *Himmat* for two decades from 1964 to 1984. He has written biographies of various Indian political figures. Along with his biographies of Gandhi, Rajagopalachari and Patel, he has written a book called *Eight Lives: A*

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<sup>51</sup>Azad, 225.

<sup>52</sup>Rajmohan Gandhi, *India Wins Errors: A Scrutiny of Maulana Azad’s India Wins Freedom* (New Delhi: Radiant Publishers, 1989).

<sup>53</sup>Gandhi, 92.

<sup>54</sup>Rajaji’s daughter married Gandhi’s youngest son to the consternation of all their parents. Incidentally, Gandhi and Rajaji were close colleagues and strong advocates of the uplift of untouchables. Rajaji was a south India Brahman of the Iyengar subcaste and Gandhi’s main lieutenant in the south. He was the only Indian to ever become Governor-General of India (1948-1950).

*Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (later republished as *Understanding the Muslim Mind*).<sup>55</sup> In it, he gives biographical sketches of prominent Muslim political figures in Indian history over the past 150 years starting with Syed Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), and including such personalities as Mohammad Ali Jinnah, Maulana Azad, and Zakir Husse in (1897-1969). The reason for writing such a book was 'to help bridge a gap' between the Hindu and Muslim communities. By humanising traditionally demonised individuals within Indian political discourse, particularly Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan, he seeks to attain his goal by showing his readers, mostly English-educated middle-class Hindu readers, traditionally imbued with a hatred for Pakistan and its creators, that these men were hardly the evil caricatures that they have been made out to be. The gulf between communities is based on ignorance, he argues, and the most suitable way to break this trend is to educate Indians.<sup>56</sup>

In *Patel: A Life*, Rajmohan Gandhi gives the most comprehensive biographical study of Patel's life published so far. Like many of Patel's biographers, who are mostly Indian journalists and academics, he seeks to compensate for the general lack of attention that has been given to Patel in contrast to Gandhi and Nehru. Like P.N. Chopra, Rajmohan tends to justify Patel's aggressive attitude toward Indian Muslims.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Patel's communalism is similarly presented as a by-product of the political tension surrounding partition. Gandhi argues that while Patel did not feel it necessary to wrap his utterances under a secular garb like Nehru (who often imagined Hindu-

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<sup>55</sup>Rajmohan Gandhi, *Eight Lives: A Study of the Hindu-Muslim Encounter* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1986), *The Rajaji Story* (Madras: Bharathan, 1978) and *The Good Boatman: A Portrait of Gandhi* (New Delhi: Viking, 1995).

<sup>56</sup>Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, ix, x.

<sup>57</sup>See P.N. Chopra, *The Sardar of India: Biography of Vallabhbhai Patel* (New Delhi: Allied Publishers Limited, 1995). Chopra, who has served as chief editor for the *CWSVP*, has written one of the most poorly organized hagiographic studies ever conceived and stands perhaps as Patel's most prominent apologist vis-a-vis the Sardar's communal attitude toward Muslims.

Muslim unity where it did not exist), he had not given up on Hindu-Muslim understanding. The Sardar, he writes “never claimed to represent Muslims. And he found it natural to speak as a Hindu.”<sup>58</sup> However, how does this place Patel in conjunction with Congress’s avowed line that it represented all Indians irrespective of religion, caste or class? Indeed, if Patel found it natural to ‘speak as a Hindu’ and never claimed to represent Muslims, then he was indeed representing Hindus and embodied a form of Hindu communalism within Congress.

In *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims*, historian Rafiq Zakaria sets out to promote the goal of Hindu-Muslim unity by attempting to persuade Indian Muslims that Patel was not anti-Muslim. “I know that most Hindus adore *Sardar Patel*; it is necessary, therefore, for Muslims to understand him and if possible to give up their aversion to him,” in order to reestablish a unity of hearts.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, this book becomes a conduit for Zakaria to achieve this ‘noble goal’, yet he ignores the reality that Patel believed that a majority of Zakaria’s co-religionists were fanatics. As a life-long opponent of the two-nation theory, Zakaria criticizes Jinnah and the creation of Pakistan. Furthermore, he excuses Patel’s behaviour and mentality at the time of partition given the tension and the actions of the Muslim League and their ‘provocative attitudes’. However, Zakaria’s problem lies in the fact that he focuses solely on the latter period of Patel’s life, and touches upon Patel’s earlier career only briefly. As this study will show, Patel maintained a negative attitude toward Muslims throughout most of his political career, therefore, the argument that it was the League’s agitation for the creation of Pakistan which produced his attitude does not stand.

The most objective, academic, and critical study written of Patel has been

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<sup>58</sup>Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, 352.

<sup>59</sup>Rafiq Zakaria, *Sardar Patel and Indian Muslims: An analysis of his relations with Muslims-before and after India’s partition* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1996), xxi.

by Rani Dhavan Shankardass. She was a student of B.N. Pandey<sup>60</sup> and Peter Robb. Adapted from her doctoral dissertation written for the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London during the 1980s, in *Vallabhbhai Patel: Power and Organization in Indian Politics* she discusses Patel's dual role as Congress's political organizer and strict party disciplinarian. Shankardass relies heavily on archival sources as well as interviews with several key associates of Patel's such as former Indian prime minister Morarji Desai (1897-1997). While many writers perceived Patel's domineering attitude as a positive point and a necessity to ensure political discipline, Shankardass shows that it was at many times inhibiting to the building of democracy within Congress and its provincial ministries which were held by Patel's tight leash. The main drawback in her study however is that she sidesteps the issue of Patel's communalism and only briefly touches upon it. Nevertheless, she shows Patel's mentality and methods in dealing with predominantly left-wing opposition within the Congress. Indeed her work stands alone as the only detailed critical study of Patel's methods of mobilization and political control.

Since the second half of the 1980s, there has been a growing discontent over Nehru's handling of several issues, particularly Kashmir. These criticisms have predictably come from the growing Hindu right-wing<sup>61</sup> but also from secularists who believed that Nehru did not deal with communal forces in a sufficiently forthright fashion.<sup>62</sup> Some amongst the Hindu right-wing believe that

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<sup>60</sup>Pandey was a biographer of Nehru who passed away in the late 1970s.

<sup>61</sup>Shankardass argues that right wingers in the late 1980s who called for the implementation of Patelist strategies were blind to the fact that such strategies were already in use. She further posits that they have taken Patel's strategies out of their historical context. During the freedom struggle, Patel's sole concentration on political matters was accompanied by Gandhi's tireless efforts in the socio-economic realm. Ultimately, what exists today in India's polity is an all out pursuit for political power along the Patelist model without the accompanying desire for human welfare of Gandhi and Nehru. See Rani Dhavan Shankardass, "Patelism sans Gandhism, An Inadequate Alternative to Nehruism," in *Mainstream*, January 9, 1988, 7, 34.

<sup>62</sup>S. Gopal, "Introduction" in *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, 17.

had Patel been made Prime Minister, India would not only have been a stronger nation today in relation to Pakistan, but would have maintained all of Kashmir clearly in its grasp. Michael Brecher, a political scientist at McGill University, had written one of the leading political biographies of Nehru in the late 1950s and addressed the issue of who held more power between Nehru and Patel.<sup>63</sup> Brecher demonstrates that although Nehru officially held the top position in the country as Prime Minister, there existed a parity between him and Patel as the Deputy Prime Minister. Brecher asserts that “[i]n the broadest sense they were equals, with Patel possessing substantial power to compensate for Nehru’s greater prestige and popularity. Patel controlled a greater aggregate of power through the party and the key ministries of government, but Nehru commanded the country at large.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, Patel controlled key portfolios, which included the Home Ministry, the States Ministry and at one time the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. In the first three years of India’s independence, the Home and States portfolios were particularly important for the former dealt with internal threats (perceived or real) and the latter with the integration of the princely states into the Indian Union.<sup>65</sup>

Alternative perceptions of Patel have been presented in various historical studies. Many of these have been biographies of Nehru and Jinnah. Brecher describes Patel as a master of machine politics; “dour and ruthless, unimaginative and practical, blunt in speech and action, cool and calculating.” This was in contrast with Nehru, who was a “man of great charm generous to a fault, sensitive and aesthetically inclined, impulsive and emotional.”<sup>66</sup> In many Nehru biographies, Patel’s character gets short shrift while in biographies of Jinnah,

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<sup>63</sup>Written in the late 1950s, Brecher researched in India and interviewed Nehru himself.

<sup>64</sup>Michael Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, abridged edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1961; original 1959), 155.

<sup>65</sup>See Ian Copland, *The Princes of India in the Endgame of Empire 1917-1947* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>66</sup>Brecher, 151.

Patel emerges as a leading communalist determined to hate Pakistan.<sup>67</sup>

Members of the Radical Nationalist School also differ on Patel's role in the freedom movement. S. Gopal has argued that while Patel has been accused of being a Hindu chauvinist, his major concern was indeed national unity.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, Bipan Chandra believes that secularism became stronger when individuals such as Nehru, Gandhi and Patel came to the helm of affairs.<sup>69</sup> It is hardly surprising that Chandra would see Patel as being the harbinger of Indian secularism given his view of other figures such as Tilak. With the growing trend of appropriating 'national figures' such as Tilak and Patel as proponents of a strong Hindu India, writers such as Gopal and Chandra emphasize the Lokamanya and the Sardar's secular and national credentials to counterbalance their 'Hinduization' by Hindu communalists. Yet, some secular writers do criticize Tilak and Patel for exactly the same reasons that Hindu right-wing activists see them as symbols of Hindu nationalism.

Mushirul Hasan asserts that Patel 'relapsed' into his "old attitude of suspecting Muslim loyalty" in the post-partition era of Indian politics.<sup>70</sup> His language is instructive for it implies that Patel did not always maintain or exhibit such a negative attitude. However, in the post-independence period, it is evident that the Sardar's speeches were clearly antagonistic toward Muslims in a time of great civil unrest. Yet Patel was evidently not the only Congress leader to exhibit such opinions.<sup>71</sup> Recently, Christoffe Jaffrelot, a professor of South Asian politics at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques in Paris, has also written about the links

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<sup>67</sup>Akbar S. Ahmed, *Jinnah, Pakistan and Islamic Identity: The Search for Saladin* (London: Routledge, 1997), 182. See also Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985) and *Democracy and Authoritarianism in South Asia* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28, 32-33, 39.

<sup>68</sup>S. Gopal, "Introduction" in *Anatomy of a Confrontation*, 15.

<sup>69</sup>Chandra et al, *India's Struggle for Independence*, 410.

<sup>70</sup>Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, 147.

<sup>71</sup>Hasan, *Legacy of A Divided Nation*, 147.

between 'Hindu traditionalists' in the Congress such as Patel and Hindu communalists like Syama Prasad Mookerjee (d.1953) in the Hindu Mahasabha. While aligning themselves with Hindu parties to some extent, leaders such as Patel and Govind Ballabh Pant (1887-1961) were not about to go all out and become Hindu nationalists. Jaffrelot argues that Patel simply wished to bring Hindu nationalists within the Congress fold and control them.<sup>72</sup>

With the current growing pervasiveness of communalism in Indian political life combined with the resurgence of interest in Patel (although predominantly for a popular market) and the hiatus in writing about early nationalists such as Tilak, this thesis seeks to tie all elements together to show a continuum between Tilak and Patel's brand of communalism which further provided the foundation for modern day manifestations of this problem in contemporary Indian society. As South Asia and the world heads towards the new millennium, all the old problems of communalism and hatred still remain. The role of higher caste and upper middle class leaders such as Tilak and Patel (although dismissed by the practitioners of Subaltern Studies), were instrumental in setting the stage for modern Hindu communalism and shaping modern South Asian polity.

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<sup>72</sup>Christoffe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), chapter two.

## Chapter Two

### Mass Mobilization and Hindu Symbols: Bal Gangadhar Tilak and the Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals

#### Introduction

Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), otherwise known as the *Lokamanya*, was a prominent leader in the nationalist struggle for home rule<sup>73</sup> in pre-Gandhian India.<sup>74</sup> Emerging from an elitist political environment which consisted of lawyers, doctors and zamindars, Tilak attempted from his regional base in Poona, located within Bombay Presidency, to mobilize and politicize vast sections of Hindu society. By utilizing the images and myths surrounding popular deities and heroes, namely Ganapati<sup>75</sup> and Shivaji Bhonsle (1627-80), Tilak's goal was to instill a sense of national pride in Maharashtrians.<sup>76</sup> Yet, the overwhelming quantity of Hindu symbols that he and his followers used raises questions as to whether he was a Hindu communalist or a shrewd political mobilizer who employed whatever tactics necessary to achieve his political and economic goals. This issue has received some attention from Indian historians Mushirul Hasan and Bipan Chandra. Hasan asserts that "Tilak's mobilization strategy had a divisive

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<sup>73</sup>Home Rule Leagues were established by nationalist politicians in various sections of India like Tilak in Bombay Presidency and Annie Besant in Madras. Home Rule Leagues asserted that India should be governed autonomously while still remaining within the British Empire with the King of England functioning as the titular Head of State as was the case with other dominions within the empire, such as Canada and Australia.

<sup>74</sup>I refer to the pre-Gandhian era as the years preceding the Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22). Arguably, this is slightly contentious since Gandhi was active with issues like the abolition of indentured labour and the rent problems of the Champaran indigo cultivators, yet he made his mark on the nationalist movement after launching Non-Cooperation in 1920.

<sup>75</sup>Ganapati is another name for Ganesha, the son of the Hindu deities Shiva and Parvati. Ganapati means "Lord of the Army." Gana is a name used for Shiva's soldiers and pati means lord.

<sup>76</sup>The state of Maharashtra located in western India today officially came into being on May 1, 1960. However, throughout Tilak's writings and those of scholarly writers, 'Maharashtra' has been used, albeit anachronistically. The word means great (maha) nation (rashtra) and is indicative of the fact that Tilak and many who supported him in the region perceived themselves as a nation; particularly Hindu Marathi speaking people.



impact and polarized Maharashtra's urban society around communal lines," and further posits that "it is hard to ignore his role in heightening communal consciousness in Western India."<sup>77</sup> Chandra, in contrast, argues that while Tilak also promoted the use of Hindu themes in Indian nationalism with his propagation of Ganesh *puja* and Shivaji Festival with their Hindu religious overtones, his "basic political propaganda and agitations were organized around political and economic issues and contained little appeal to Hinduism."<sup>78</sup> Based on articles written in Tilak's newspapers, *Kesari* and *The Mahratta*,<sup>79</sup> in addition to his writings and speeches, this chapter will evaluate the arguments of these historians by focusing on Tilak's involvement in organizing the Shivaji and Ganapati Festivals in Bombay Presidency in the late nineteenth century. Was the Lokamanya trying to mobilize the masses of the region, who happened to be predominantly Hindu, or was there a genuine antipathy towards the Muslim community? During the first phase of his career in the 1880s and 1890s, Tilak was both a political mobilizer and a Hindu communalist. Following his transformation from a regional politician in the late nineteenth century to a nationalist politician in the early twentieth century, the Lokamanya's attitude toward Muslims ostensibly changed as he was willing to incorporate the interests of Muslim politicians within the Congress's agitation for political and administrative reforms. This chapter will assess how genuine this transformation truly was.

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<sup>77</sup>Mushirul Hasan, *Nationalism and Communal Politics in India, 1885-1930* (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1991), 23.

<sup>78</sup>Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., 1984), 143.

<sup>79</sup>Many of the articles and editorials from *The Mahratta* cited in this essay were not necessarily written by Tilak himself, but by the newspaper's editor, Narsinh C. Kelkar. However, John L. Hill, professor of Indian History at Concordia University, has indicated to me that Tilak always oversaw and approved of what was being printed in both newspapers that he owned. Therefore, the essential tone of the writings can represent what Tilak's perspective was on various issues covered in this essay.

### 19th Century Maharashtra

After establishing its dominance in 1818, the Government of India directly administered and collected taxes on lands once held by the Peshwa in Poona. Based on established British practice elsewhere in the subcontinent, government officials sought the assistance of the most educated and literate sections of the native population to help administer its newly acquired territory. In the Maharashtrian context, the Chitpavan Brahman community, although a relatively small minority, stood out as the most obvious choice. The Chitpavan Brahmans were part of the Maratha ruling elite prior to the British assumption of power. Given the Chitpavans' earlier status, the British were suspicious that the community was seeking to oust them from the region and consequently, were often quite distrustful of the former's motives in helping the British administer.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, to diminish the high proportion of Brahmans enrolled in presidency colleges, the government offered scholarships to members of lower castes and non-Hindu minorities. Despite the best intentions of Chitpavans such as Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842-1901) and his disciple, Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915), British officials continued to distrust and malign Brahmans while questioning their legitimate right to act as the elite of Maharashtrian society. Richard Cashman, an Australian historian, argues that "by introducing policies which appeared to threaten the power, status and prospects of the Brahmans, they provided a powerful stimulus for a dissenting movement to emerge."<sup>81</sup>

Born in the Konkan district of Ratnagiri in 1856, Bal Gangadhar Tilak was part of the Chitpavan Brahman community. A Sanskritist, fluently bilingual in

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<sup>80</sup>For a more extensive profile of the Chitpavan Brahman community, see P.N. Chopra, ed., *Religions and Communities of India* (New Delhi: Vision Books Pvt. Ltd., 1982), 49-52.

<sup>81</sup>Richard Cashman, *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 44.

Marathi and English, the Lokamanya graduated from the Deccan College in Poona in 1876 and passed the law examination in 1880. In collaboration with Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (1856-1895) he established both the *Kesari* (Marathi) and *The Mahratta* (English) newspapers in 1881. Tilak inaugurated the Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals in 1894 and 1896 respectively. From 1898 to 1907, he was one of the leaders of the Extremist faction within the Indian National Congress and considered one of the main orchestrators of the 'Surat Split' in 1907. In 1908, he was sentenced to six years for 'seditious writings'. Upon his release from prison in 1914, Tilak quickly emerged as the chief nationalist spokesman from western India following the deaths of G.K. Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915). Continuing his desire to press for autonomy within the empire, Tilak created a Home Rule League in 1916. During the same year, Tilak helped to create the Lucknow Pact which forged an alliance between the Congress and the Muslim League. Unlike his earlier years as an Extremist, he had become more of a Moderate by the final years of his life.<sup>82</sup>

Tilak was an activist and a mobilizer who believed in a practical and pragmatic approach to politics. Unlike Gokhale and his protege, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948), Tilak valued physical strength and force and placed very little emphasis on asceticism. Richard Cashman posits that Tilak was the first politician to attempt to merge elite and mass politics.<sup>83</sup> Like Gandhi, the Lokamanya was staunchly religious and well versed in Hindu scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita and placed significant emphasis on karma yoga which stressed

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<sup>82</sup>The Moderate and Extremist factions represented two visions of how the Indian National Congress were to press for reforms from the Government of India. The Moderates believed in a gradual approach which essentially meant participation within Government councils. Above all, their method of protesting or requesting reforms was by peaceful methods, i.e. petitions and letter-writing. The Extremists' program especially after the partition of Bengal in 1905 called for a mass boycott of all British goods, and protests. Some of the more violent members of the Extremists advocated terrorism and bombing campaigns.

<sup>83</sup>Cashman, 1-2.

action and disinterested dedication to one's work as the key to *moksha* or salvation. Tilak posited that "[k]arma [y]oga is nothing but the method which leads to the attainment of [d]harma or material and spiritual glory."<sup>84</sup> However, their perspectives diverged on the issue of non-violence. Gandhi's belief in Hinduism, rooted in Gujarati Vaishnavism, was heavily influenced by Jainism, which stressed extreme asceticism, service and non-violence. Tilak on the other hand, emerged from a martial tradition where Brahmans not only served as ministers of state, but also as Maratha warrior-kings such as Madhavrao (r. 1761-72).

The Indian National Congress, established in 1885 by Allan Octavian Hume (1829-1912), an ex-Indian Civil Service officer, was an organization which consisted predominantly of an Indian educated elite. One of its goals was to convince the Government of India that it was a loyal body which sought administrative reforms which would enable Western-educated Indians to participate in government administration. Yet, due to its limited high-caste and upper-middle class membership, it was considered by some British officials, such as Viceroy Lord Dufferin (1884-1888) to be a microscopic minority. Ultimately, it was a harmless petitioning body which instilled little fear into the government to push through any significant reforms, but also too dangerous for any government employee to attend as a delegate after 1887.<sup>85</sup> However, Moderates within the Congress had some success in convincing the Government to enact legislation on social issues. For the more orthodox Extremist faction, social reform was considered reckless tampering with cherished Indian customs.

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<sup>84</sup>Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *Bal Gangadhar Tilak: His Writings and Speeches*, Third Edition (Madras: Ganesh & Co., 1922), 246. For a more detailed look at Tilak's religious views, see his book (translated into English from Marathi) *Gita-Rahasya*; Mark J. Harvey, "The Secular as Sacred?-- The Religio-political Rationalization of B.G. Tilak," in *Modern Asian Studies*, 20 (1986), 321-331.

<sup>85</sup>See Daniel Argov, *Moderates and Extremists in the Indian Nationalist Movement 1883-1920: With Special Reference to Surendranath Banerjea and Lajpat Rai* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1967).

Social reform became a contentious issue for both Moderates and Extremists. At the urging of the social reformers, the Government of India introduced the Age of Consent Bill in 1890, to raise the age of consummation of marriage from ten to twelve years of age. Gokhale had the support of the government in his attempts to enact these changes, yet Tilak maintained staunch support from Hindu pandits and Muslim maulvis, as well as the bulk of Maharashtra's orthodox society which was opposed to government interference in social and cultural issues.<sup>86</sup> With the exception of the city of Bombay, which was generally more sympathetic to the Bill, smaller cities such as Poona and Ahmednagar were bastions of orthodoxy and conservatism, and rallies were organized to protest the proposed legislation.<sup>87</sup> Despite these protests, the Age of Consent Bill was passed two years later. Angered by the passing of the bill, Tilak lashed out in the *Kesari*:

The Muhamadans forced the Hindus to grow beards after cutting off Hindus' locks of hair by taking a sword in one hand and a Koran in the other. So also our subjugation to others gives evidence that our brave English people have the power to send us to "Our Father in Heaven" after making us drink red water [wine] instead of the sacred water of the Ganges.<sup>88</sup>

It is interesting that Tilak would slander the Muslim community in the same breath along with his diatribe against his English overlords. After all, Muslims were also sensitive to government intervention in socio-religious issues

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<sup>86</sup>Secondary education for girls was another contentious issue between social reformers and conservatives. Moderates like Gokhale were proposing to establish a high school for girls which would receive government funding. An editorial in *The Mahratta* argued "[o]ur English rulers and their native mimickers may hold whatever views they like with regard to female education, but they have no right to apply people's money to an object which the people would certainly disapprove. What is urgently wanted at present is the increase of primary schools for girls that would give them such knowledge as is needful in domestic life [emphasis mine]." *The Mahratta*, December 25, 1892, 3. Interestingly, after the school was opened, Tilak enrolled his own daughter into the very school whose creation he fought against. See Cashman, 54.

<sup>87</sup>Cashman, 56-57.

<sup>88</sup>*Kesari*, March 24, 1891, 3 in Stanley Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 60.

such as marriage. The answer may lie in the fact that the Muslim population in the Deccan and Konkan regions of Bombay Presidency were demographically and politically insignificant. It was only in Bombay that Muslims had any notable political voice or demographic proportion.<sup>89</sup> If Tilak's goal was to mobilize the masses which were predominantly Hindu in Maharashtra, perhaps minding the sensibilities of Muslims was not chief amongst his concerns. It is highly probable that the *Kesari* was read mostly by Marathi-literate Hindus receptive to its more orthodox Brahmanical outlook.

### *The Mahratta and Hindu-Muslim Tensions*

By the end of the nineteenth century, Hindu-Muslim riots were breaking out within various urban centres in India, including Presidency cities such as Bombay and Poona. In several 'objective' accounts of these riots published in *The Mahratta*, Muslims were always found responsible for causing these communal clashes. Hindus were generally portrayed as peace-loving, law-abiding citizens, while Muslims were considered antagonistic brutes. Whenever it was evident that Hindus acted as violently as Muslims, they were 'justified' as they were defending themselves and protecting the sanctity of their temples.<sup>90</sup> In one account from August of 1893, *The Mahratta* writes, "[t]he Juma Masjid holds nearly 6,000 people and it is highly dangerous that 6,000 *roughs* [italics mine] should be allowed to assemble there at any time under the ostensible purpose of worshipping..."<sup>91</sup> That the newspaper would associate the Juma Masjid, being the

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<sup>89</sup>Cashman, chapter one.

<sup>90</sup>Indeed years later in his civil suit against Valentine Chirol in 1919, Tilak maintained that in 1893, Muslims were indeed the aggressors in every scenario supported and encouraged by the Government of Bombay. When questioned as to whether Hindus threw the carcasses of dead pigs into mosques, Tilak declared that it was an allegation made by Muslims and he knew nothing about it. For Tilak, it was a declared fact that Muslims desecrated Hindu temples, but as far as he was concerned, the opposite was never the case. See *Samagra Lokamanya Tilak*, Vol.7. (Poona: Kesari Prakashan, 1975), 243-4.

<sup>91</sup>*The Mahratta*, August 13, 1893, 3.

principal mosque for Muslims within any Indian city, as being a religious establishment that houses ruffians is significant, inflammatory and indicative of its communalist attitude.

The following week, *The Mahratta* commented about the Bombay city riots and the perceived government bias for Muslims which they deemed as “utterly unjustifiable and impolitic. It must be borne in mind that the people of the Maharashtra, if left to themselves, have sufficient capacity and intelligence to *make the Mahomedans respect the rights of the Hindus* [emphasis mine].” The Muslims were then set apart from the rest of Maharashtrian society as a distinct and violent entity. They were made out to be a monolithic community while Hindus (in this article) were represented as stratified along the lines of different castes: the Ghatees, Kamaties and Marathas. While Muslims were characterised as violent thugs, Hindus were represented as rational people, however capable of fighting back. The article asserted

“We, in the Deccan, never lived by the sufferance of the Mahomedans and the fact that in the present riot so many *Ghatees, Kamaties, and Marathas* [sic] resented the invasion of their personal rights by the Mahomedans clearly shows that the spirit is not yet extinguished. It is true that the *Marathas* [sic] *are not as rash and inconsiderate as the Mahomedan roughs so as to be aggressive, but recent riots have made it plain that they will not be slow, if assaulted, to take revenge upon the Mahomedans* [emphasis mine].”<sup>92</sup>

Hindus of various communities were then called to defend themselves and avenge the ‘atrocities’ inflicted upon them by the aggressive Muslim ‘hordes’. Hindus, whatever their *jati*, were portrayed as victims constantly being attacked.

*The Mahratta* offered opinions on Hindu-Muslim hostilities not only within Bombay Presidency but in other areas of India as well. Commenting on a

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<sup>92</sup>*The Mahratta*, August 20, 1893, 3.

Mopla outbreak<sup>93</sup> on 15 March 1896, the newspaper posited that the Mopla, originally Hindus, were converted to Islam in the sixteenth century. The main characteristics of the Mopla were "fanaticism, bigotry and a proneness to fight, murder and some such agreeable pastimes." The article asserts that "the outrages of the Moplas are peculiarly inhuman and horrible. Their fanaticism is simply phenomenal and they fight for their religion with all the zeal of a convert and proclaim a kind of *jihad* against the heathen." The worst crime of all in the eyes of the editorial staff and their upper-caste readers was that the "Moplas began their business by killing a Brahman." Eventually, the article mentions that the disturbance was more a consequence of agrarian discontent against the 'alleged' tyranny of the Hindu Nair landlords who were nothing but an "extremely quiet and industrious race." However, by the time one gets to this passage, the reader is made fully aware of the savagery of the Muslim Mopla who "harrassed the poor Hindus in all directions."<sup>94</sup>

It is evident through a sampling of articles and editorial pieces from *The Mahratta* before and after Tilak inaugurated the Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals that Muslims were considered backward, violent and antagonistic by the newspaper's editors and contributors. Muslims were demonised to such an extent that it is difficult to believe that Tilak and his extremist coterie did not harbour some malice towards the Muslim community, whether within or without Bombay Presidency. It was from within this tense communal atmosphere that Tilak inaugurated the Ganapati Festival in 1894.

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<sup>93</sup>The Moplas were Muslim agriculturists who lived along the Malabar coast of India. Tensions between them and their Hindu Nair landlords have turned violent on various occasions. The Mopla rebellion in the early 1920s illustrates that the tensions between the two groups were not isolated to 1896. Historiographically, some nationalist historians argue that the Mopla uprisings were more symptomatic of landlord-peasant antipathy than Hindu-Muslim antagonism. See Conrad Wood, "Peasant Revolt: An Interpretation of Moplah Violence in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in David Hardiman, ed., *Peasant Resistance in India 1858-1914* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 126-152.

<sup>94</sup>*The Mahratta*, March 15, 1896, 3.



## Ganapati Festival

In September of 1894, Tilak inaugurated the Ganapati Festival with the objective of bringing the Brahman elite and the Hindu masses together to worship a popular local God.<sup>95</sup> Ganapati, the elephant-headed deity in Hindu mythology is the son of the destroyer God, Shiva. He represents three traditions of Hindu philosophy merged into one symbolic figure: devotion (bhakti), asceticism (jnana) and action (karma). He is not only considered the chief remover of obstacles, by his sheer strength and size, but he is also considered extremely wise.<sup>96</sup>

Hindu communalists often make the association that whatever or whoever is Indian is Hindu and vice-versa. Therefore, anything foreign (which includes certain religions, specifically Islam and Christianity) is something that should be denigrated and boycotted. In preparing for the Ganapati Festival in 1894, Hindus were exhorted through songs to boycott the Islamic Muharram Festival:

“Oh! why have you abandoned today the Hindu religion?  
How have you forgotten Ganapati, Shiva and Maruti?  
What have you gained by worshipping the tabuts?  
What boon has Allah conferred upon you  
That you have become Mussalmans today?  
Do not be friendly to a religion which is alien  
Do not give up your religion and be fallen.  
Do not venerate the tabuts,  
The Cow is your mother, do not forget her.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>It should be noted that Ganapati is a popular god that was and is worshipped throughout India, however, some deities are particularly revered in certain regions and cities as patron Gods and Goddesses.

<sup>96</sup>According to one myth, recounted to me by a relative in India, Parvati wanted to see which of her two sons, Ganapati or Kartikeya was more intelligent. She ordered both of them to circle the globe as fast as they could. Kartikeya, a warrior god took off on his vahana (or vehicle) to circle the world. Ganapati sat quietly for a few moments, then got up, walked in a circle around his mother and sat back down. Asked why he did that, he replied that as his mother, she was his world. She declared henceforth that whenever one performs puja, Ganesha would be worshipped first, as he was the wisest of the Gods. See John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion, Geography, History and Literature* (Calcutta: Rupa & Co., 1991), 106-108.

<sup>97</sup>Bombay Government, Judicial, 1894, vol.27, 263-264 in Cashman, 78.

The Muharram Festival was a popular event where both Hindus and Muslims came together and celebrated.<sup>98</sup> Hindu musicians and dancers were particularly active during its processions. By placing the Ganapati Festival within earshot of the Muharram Festival and demanding Hindus to make a choice over which one to attend, Ganapati Festival organizers were calling upon Hindus to show loyalty to their religion. "Do not be friendly to a religion which is alien," a phrase in the song quoted above, draws a clear line and stigmatizes the Muharram Festival for would-be Hindu participants.

Why would Tilak risk alienating the Muslims of Bombay Presidency, by asking Hindus to boycott the Muharram Festival?<sup>99</sup> Was there more to the Ganapati *Mela* than just uniting Hindus around the worship of a popular deity? Clearly the tone of some of the articles in *The Mahratta* manifest open disdain for Muslims in Bombay Presidency and specifically for those in Poona. Boycotting the Muharram Festival was an act of retribution, both for immediate and ancient wrongs. The immediate justification was to protest the desecration by Muslims of a palanquin holding the idol of a revered Maharashtrian Hindu saint. The boycott was meant as a peaceful retaliation to the spirit of intolerance shown by the Muslim community.<sup>100</sup> However, the Ganapati *Mela* was "not a new one. It was observed from time immemorial, but they modified it so as to resemble the

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<sup>98</sup>The Muharram Festival was a Shi'a Muslim religious practice. The Festival, celebrated during the month of Muharram, is a remembrance of the killing of the prophet Muhammad's grandson, Husayn ibn'Ali in Karbala, Iraq by the army of Yazid, the Sunni Ummayid Caliph. During the processions, participants beat their chests, gather and recount the tragedy of Karbala and enact passion plays called *ta'ziyas*. The Muharram Festival was an event which divided Muslims more than it divided Hindus and Muslims. In India, Pakistan and Iraq, Sunni-Shi'a Muslim riots have taken place quite often. Some might argue that much of the fighting that Muslims took part in during the nineteenth century, had been amongst themselves, along the Shi'a-Sunni divide. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam," in *Our Religions* edited by Arvind Sharma (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 475-476.

<sup>99</sup>In the Tilak-Chirol suit mentioned above, Tilak denied that the Ganapati Festival was meant to keep Hindus from participating in the Muharram Festival. *Samagra Lokamanya Tilak*, Vol. 7, 188.

<sup>100</sup>*The Mahratta*, July 8, 1894, 5-6 and October 21, 1894, 3-4.

M[uharram]."<sup>101</sup> Clearly, the latter festival was so popular that the 'traditional' Ganapati *Mela* had to be altered to attract Hindus away from it by utilizing motifs similar to those they were accustomed to see during the Muharram Festival.

The Ganapati *Mela* fit into a larger framework of long-standing grievances and aims of the Chitpavan Brahman elite. By attempting to bring Hindus of various classes together under one festival and placing himself and others within his subcaste at the helm, Tilak was demonstrating to the British that Hindus were a united society and that Brahmans were not out of touch with the Hindu masses.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, he was also retaliating for what he perceived as years of abuse and slander suffered by the Chitpavans in Poona at the hands of British officials. The Government of Bombay was determined, *The Mahratta* argued, to continue "their unrighteous, unchristian and unstatesmanlike policy of repressing the poor and innocent Brahm[a]ns."<sup>103</sup> The boycott of the Muharram Festival and the demonization of Muslims in Tilak's newspapers were also methods by which to respond to a perceived governmental bias for the Muslim community.<sup>104</sup> An article in *The Mahratta* asserts

"The Mahomedans may be more fanatic [sic] than the Hindus, but that is no reason why Government should depart from its just course, and circumscribe the liberty of law-abiding people.... There have been several instances where government officials have failed to maintain an attitude of such strict neutrality. For instance when a riot is threatened it is the Hindus that are usually ordered to stop their festivals; and where riots have taken place the Hindus have had to bear the charges of the punitive police."<sup>105</sup>

One of the main issues of contention between extremist Hindus on the one hand and the government and Muslims on the other was the playing of music before

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<sup>101</sup> *The Mahratta*, October 21, 1894, 3

<sup>102</sup> Cashman, 79.

<sup>103</sup> *The Mahratta*, October 21, 1894, 3.

<sup>104</sup> *The Mahratta*, April 23, 1893, 3.

<sup>105</sup> *The Mahratta*, August 22, 1893, 4.

mosques during prayer times.<sup>106</sup>

Throughout the discourse on Hindu-Muslim riots in Southern Asia, playing music in front of mosques during prayer times has been one of the principle ways by which Hindu communalists have antagonized Muslim worshippers.<sup>107</sup> The playing of music during the recitation of the Quran, is considered sacrilegious to Muslims. Apprehensive about the danger of violence breaking out, the district magistrate in Poona ordered that no music be played in front of mosques, at anytime during the day.<sup>108</sup> When Tilak and his more orthodox supporters assumed control of the Poona Sarvajanic Sabha, a petitioning body which was once a stronghold of the Moderates, they used its reputable offices to send memorials to the government protesting the magistrate's orders banning any music played near mosques. They argued that playing music near mosques should be allowed except during prayer times. However reasonable Tilak's suggestions were in the memorials, it is evident that he would have condoned almost any acts perpetrated by Hindu processionists during the festivals. As Cashman argues, Tilak was more concerned "to light the fires of opposition and to stir up unrest against the rulers"<sup>109</sup> and those that the government favoured.

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<sup>106</sup>*The Mahratta*, October 22, 1893, 3; July 1, 1894, 3; August 26, 1894, 3.

<sup>107</sup>The playing of music before mosques has been controversial during different periods of colonial and post-colonial India. During the mid-1920s, the Government of India passed a law prohibiting it after a Hindu-Muslim riot broke out in Calcutta. Many communal and non-communal Hindus perceived this as a platform on which to attack the government. Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi argued that playing music wherever they so desired became an issue of defending *dharma*. This often went in the face of Muslim worshippers who saw this as an affront to their religious practice and an example of the 'majority' setting aside their feelings for their own causes. See Gyan Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 257.

<sup>108</sup>*The Mahratta*, August 26, 1894, 3.

<sup>109</sup>Cashman, 90.

Rioting broke out between Hindus and Muslims in Poona during the week of the Ganapati Festival in September of 1894, when a band of Hindu processionists passing by a mosque, were attacked by Muslims.<sup>110</sup> According to *The Mahratta*, the Mohamedans “attacked the party with cries of “din, din” [religion]...In the fighting that ensued, the Hindus, who were much weaker in numbers, and some of whom were again small boys, fared badly and several of them were seriously wounded.” After establishing the barbarity of the attack, primarily on small boys, the article posited that ‘sight seeing’ Hindu crowds who happened to be “strolling from place to place,” witnessed this attack and retaliated against the Muslim attackers by following them back into a mosque and in the process damaged ‘minimal’ parts of the building.<sup>111</sup> What needs to be emphasised is the ritual portrayal of Muslims as the initial attackers and the fanatical instigators of trouble and the Hindus as the innocent defenders and protagonists.<sup>112</sup> Two years later, *The Mahratta* declared that the “charge of rowdyism [against Hindus in the Ganapati Mela] cannot be sustained...[for] the Hindus have maintained their reputation as respectors of law and the leaders of the movement are perfectly sure that the attitude of the Hindus will never cause a breach of the peace.”<sup>113</sup>

Ultimately, despite the hopes of some of its supporters who wished to convert the Ganapati Festival into a national event resembling the Olympic

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<sup>110</sup>*The Mahratta*, September 16, 1894, 3.

<sup>111</sup>*The Mahratta*, September 16, 1894, 3.

<sup>112</sup>The newspaper argued that the facts as represented by anti-Hindu European newspapers, *The Times of India* and the *Bombay Gazette* were entirely false. *The Mahratta's* account according to themselves was the only authoritative narrative of the incident. *The Mahratta*, September 16, 1894, 3.

<sup>113</sup>*The Mahratta*, September 20, 1896, 3.

Games of Ancient Greece,<sup>114</sup> its ability to unite Hindus, in the aftermath of the Age of Consent Bill's passing, died out by the time the plague struck Poona in 1897. Following the original *mela* in 1894, smaller versions of the festival were organized by local organizations around Poona while a central organizing committee made arrangements for the final procession. With the proliferation of smaller celebrations, the local *melas* assumed a more distinctive caste character depending on the area where it was being celebrated. For example, if Brahmans predominated in a particular locality, the *mela's* participants were mostly from that community. Therefore this defeated the original purpose, which was to bring various portions of Hindu society together.

Tilak's inability to successfully spread the Ganapati Festivals to the rest of India was indicative of the deity's powerful appeal to Hindu Maharashtrians. Although the festival experienced some pan-regional resurgence during the Swadeshi Movement following the partition of Bengal in 1905, it declined yet again after 1910. During this period from 1905 to 1910, cooperation between Bengali, Punjabi, and Maharashtrian politicians like Bipin Chandra Pal (1858-1932), Lala Lajpat Rai (1865-1928) and Tilak could more aptly be described as a pan-regional movement rather than an all-India protest such as characterized Gandhian-era politics. The Lokamanya, who was the festival's main organizer was still politically prominent only in Bombay Presidency and would make a more successful foray into national politics after 1914.

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<sup>114</sup>*The Mahratta*, September 20, 1896, 3.

The Ganapati Festival not only inflamed the sensibilities of Muslims, but it also raised the ire of certain contemporary newspapers. While *The Mahratta* argued that “[n]o man can deny that our country is badly in want of a religious revival,”<sup>115</sup> the Parsi-edited *Indian Spectator* commented on the 'backwardness' of associating religion and politics. *Sudharak*, a Moderate newspaper, whose contributors included G.K. Gokhale, argued that the festival was not representative of the nation, in contrast to the Muharram Festival which involved not only Muslims, but Hindus as well.<sup>116</sup> Tilak's inauguration of the Shivaji Festival would prove to be more successful in garnering the support of Hindu Maharashtrians, including the Moderates.

### Shivaji Festival

While Tilak sought to use the Ganapati *Mela* to arouse the religious fervor of the Hindu masses, the Shivaji Festival was used as a political symbol to unite the population in reverence of a popular local hero. Shivaji had potentially more appeal to Hindu Maharashtrians of various castes than Ganapati who was the *devata* or chosen deity of only certain communities. For a degraded society (and more specifically its degraded elite) living under colonial rule, whose traditions were perceived as inferior by government administrators and Anglo-Indian society, hero-worship took on an added significance; especially for those seeking to prove their right to equality and swaraj, or self-government.

The worship of Shivaji as a hero presents key issues when examining communal issues. He was a Hindu ruler, fighting against Muslim overlords. One story in particular, involving Shivaji's slaying of the leading general of the Bijapur

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<sup>115</sup>*The Mahratta*, September 20, 1896, 3.

<sup>116</sup>Cashman, 90.

army, Afzal Khan, provides some potentially harmful grist for the communalist mill. In the midst of a battle between the two opposing armies led by Shivaji and Khan, the former's army was pushed back and needed to retreat into a fort nearby. Once surrounded, Shivaji was offered terms of surrender. Shivaji accepted on the condition that he and Khan met alone face-to-face outside the fort walls. While embracing Khan, Shivaji, wearing tiger claws, dug his fingers into Khan's body, killing him. Khan's fallen body was the signal for Shivaji's army to come out and attack the former's now leaderless soldiers, who were ultimately defeated. For Tilak and his followers, was the key issue that Shivaji was slaying a political rival or was it that he was fighting against a 'foreign', i.e Muslim rival? What significance and appeal did Shivaji, and stories surrounding his life, hold for leaders like Tilak in the late 19th century?

The Shivaji Festival was an opportunity for Tilak to marshal the conscience of the Hindu community of Maharashtra. The festival was "a means of stimulating a resurgent Maratha nationalism,"<sup>117</sup> by associating it with the non-Brahman Shivaji on "whom all the different castes of Maharashtra could focus their loyalty."<sup>118</sup> Inaugurated in 1896, the festival had religious as well as political significance. Tilak asserted that "[t]he people of no other country in the world would have forgotten the great man who laid the foundation of our empire, who upheld our self-respect as Hindus, and who give [sic] particular direction to our religion."<sup>119</sup> To emphasize Shivaji's "Hindu-ness", the second festival took place not on Shivaji's Birthday in April, but in June to commemorate the day Shivaji took the vow of *Chhattarpati*, to be the Hindu Lord of the Universe.<sup>120</sup> In

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<sup>117</sup>Cashman, 98.

<sup>118</sup>*Kesari*, April 28, 1896 in Cashman, 98.

<sup>119</sup>*Kesari*, April 14, 1896 in Mohammad Shabbir Khan, *Tilak and Gokhale: A Comparative Study of Their Socio-Political-Economic Programmes of Reconstruction* (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1992), 90.

<sup>120</sup>However an article in *The Mahratta* mentions that the reason the Festival's 1897 date was switched was because the government prohibited it from taking place in April because of the



establishing the Shivaji Memorial Committee, Tilak urged people to contribute to a fund to rebuild Shivaji's *samadhi*. For this endeavour, he asserted that anyone could contribute and join the committee as its composition was not racial.<sup>121</sup> While also seeking funds and donations from Hindu kings and noblemen, Tilak argued that Muslim inamdars who owed their inams to Shivaji should also feel obliged to contribute to the fund. He indicated that the Shivaji Festival was not inaugurated to "alienate or even to irritate the Muhammedans."<sup>122</sup> Clearly, Tilak had no problems stressing Shivaji's role as a Hindu leader, as lord of the universe no less; however, he still managed to convince himself that this mentality would not alienate Muslims.

Tilak's use of Shivaji as a symbol to unite Maharashtrians was neither a new nor innovative tool to instill pride in Maharashtrians. Mahadev G. Ranade wrote extensively about Shivaji's role in propagating a national spirit by including various castes and classes in the administration.<sup>123</sup> Although Muslims comprised a small proportion of the population, during Shivaji's reign, they partook in Hindu festivals while Hindus revered Muslim *pirs*. It was a spirit of tolerance and moderation that characterized Maratha rule during Shivaji's reign. Ranade's reputation as a Moderate within Congress ranks helped bolster Tilak's desire to organize the festival in the hopes of capturing support from Moderates as well as Extremists. Unlike its opposition to the Ganapati Festival, the moderate newspaper, *Sudharak* supported the organizing of the Shivaji Festival.<sup>124</sup>

Reformers' support for the Shivaji Festival notwithstanding, Hindu communalists interpreted Shivaji's role in Maharashtrian history in a violent and

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outbreak of plague. *The Mahratta*, May 2, 1897, 4.

<sup>121</sup>*The Mahratta*, June 2, 1895, 3.

<sup>122</sup>*The Mahratta*, June 2, 1895, 3.

<sup>123</sup>See Mahadev Govind Ranade, *The Rise of Maratha Power*. Reprint. (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1966).

<sup>124</sup>*Sudharak*, June 3, 1895 in Cashman, 106.

xenophobic way. For some journals, notably the *Native Opinion*, the mission of the Shivaji Festival and the memorial fund associated with it was to protect the cow and the Hindu religion. Despite Tilak's stance, he maintained an ambiguous attitude towards letters and comments which stressed an anti-Muslim message in reference to the Shivaji Festival. Cashman asserts, "it is difficult to decide whether he did so in order to secure broader support for his cause...or to make concessions to the opinions of his more orthodox followers."<sup>125</sup>

Two of Tilak's main objectives were to make Congress a nationalist movement and to arouse the masses. Based on his religious philosophy, which stressed the need for one to follow their dharma and act accordingly without any interest in the outcome, he easily gathered a variety of characters into his cadre of followers. This included 'moderates' amongst the Extremists, notably, Narsinh C. Kelkar (1872-1947), who edited *The Mahratta* for a number of years, as well as more fanatical elements such as Krishnaji P. Khadilkar (1872-1948) one-time editor of the *Kesari*.<sup>126</sup> Kelkar as editor of *The Mahratta* received considerable criticism from the Khadilkar faction of Tilak's clique of top lieutenants. Kelkar was more moderate in his attitude to social reforms and did not feel the need to criticize the Government of India on every piece of legislation. Unlike Kelkar, many of the Marathi journalists pursued a rather orthodox stand towards the government. What also made Kelkar more of a moderate Hindu communalist was that he did not advocate outright murder as the Chapekar brothers did.

The bubonic plague struck Poona during the first half of 1897. The Government of Bombay established a Plague Commission in mid-March to handle the crisis. By the end of the month, the death toll averaged fifty people daily.<sup>127</sup> The Commission headed by W.C. Rand (d.1897) was considered

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<sup>125</sup>Cashman, 108.

<sup>126</sup>Cashman, 95-96.

<sup>127</sup>*The Mahratta*, March 28, 1897, 13.

particularly insensitive to the needs of the people and outraged the orthodox citizens of Poona by their flagrant disregard of social customs. Houses were inspected by British health inspectors whether they were granted permission or not to enter the dwellings; this became even more controversial if the male head of the household was not present. On some occasions, widows, children and pregnant women were "sometimes mercilessly caught hold of and severed from their friends and neighbours by being removed to the Segregation Camp."<sup>128</sup> By mid-May, the plague was claiming fewer and fewer victims, however "the strictness of the measures of the Poona Plague Commission [wa]s not abating in proportion to the abatement of the plague."<sup>129</sup> Seeing Rand as responsible for the outrage, *The Mahratta* lashed out against his lack of "discretion and courtesy," for "[t]he feelings of the public." It angrily threatened that since the plague was all but over, "Mr. Rand had better be less stringent."<sup>130</sup>

During the 1897 Shivaji Festival held in the immediate aftermath of the plague administration and the outrage caused by Rand, Tilak seemed to advocate a more violent stand against the British. On the second day of the festival, Tilak spoke about whether or not Shivaji was morally circumspect for killing Afzal Khan the way he did. Tilak asserted,

"Great men are above the common principles of morality...Did Shivaji commit a sin in killing Afzal Khan? No blame attaches to any person if he is doing deeds without being actuated by a desire to reap the fruit of his deeds. With benevolent intentions he murdered Afzal Khan for the good of others. If thieves enter our house and we have not sufficient strength in our wrists to drive them out, we should shut them up and burn them alive. God has not conferred upon the Mlechhas the grant inscribed on a copperplate of the Kingdom of Hindustan."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup>*The Mahratta*, April 4, 1897, 4.

<sup>129</sup>*The Mahratta*, May 16, 1897, 3.

<sup>130</sup>*The Mahratta*, May 16, 1897, 3.

<sup>131</sup>*Kesari*, June 15, 1897, in John McLane, ed., *The Political Awakening in India* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall of Canada, Ltd., 1970), 54.

Within weeks following Tilak's editorial in the *Kesari*, the Chapekar brothers, violent extremists that Tilak had known for some years, carried out the assassination of Rand and his assistant Lt. Ayerst.<sup>132</sup> Yet, what was Tilak's role in the assassination? In his biographical study of Tilak and Gokhale, Stanley Wolpert argues that Tilak knew about the murders immediately after they took place and helped the brothers evade being captured by the police. Although he publicly deplored their actions, Tilak was not adverse to lying to serve a 'higher cause'; in this case, ridding India of foreigners like Rand.<sup>133</sup>

Tilak's articles in the *Kesari* however, proved to be his undoing. In September of 1897, three months after Rand's assassination, the Lokamanya was brought to trial and was successfully prosecuted for inciting disaffection against the Government of India.<sup>134</sup> Based on translations of the articles written in Marathi, the advocate-general convinced an almost all-white jury that Tilak was slandering the British and was sentenced to eighteen months imprisonment. Tilak argued that had the jury been fluent in Marathi, he would not have been convicted of sedition, as his words were misconstrued through imprecise translations. He asserted in a letter to a friend, "You as well as I know that we are incapable of nourishing any sinister feeling against British rule, and it is thus impossible for any of us to be convicted of such a heinous charge as sedition."<sup>135</sup> Indeed, the Government of Bombay went through three judges before finding one to preside who would accept the prosecution's interpretation of Penal Code article 124 A on "inciting disaffection".<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>*The Mahratta*, June 27, 1897. Kelkar, as editor condemned the assassination of Rand. However, he categorically denied that the Brahmans of Poona had anything to do with the murders as it was being rumoured.

<sup>133</sup>Based on interviews conducted by Bombay's History of the Freedom Movement Committee. See Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale*, 96.

<sup>134</sup>*The Mahratta*, September 12, 1897, 1.

<sup>135</sup>*The Mahratta*, October 3, 1897, 4-5.

<sup>136</sup>John L. Hill, "The Moderate-Extremist Conflict in the Indian National Congress, 1893-1907," (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Duke University, 1962), 18.

Nevertheless, Tilak's conviction in 1897 affected the tone of the writings in *The Mahratta* and in speeches that he would make in later years in reference to the Government of India. Criticisms directed at British rule were henceforth tempered with references to natives' loyalty to the British Crown. The Shivaji Festival of 1898 provides a telling example of what was to follow later on. *The Mahratta* writes

"[l]oyalty to Shi[v]aji is not inimical to British rule, but it is if anything only serviceable as strengthening that loyalty. It is impossible for us to go back to the times when the Mahratha enjoyed an independent Empire; our ideal now is to be *the permanent citizens of the British Empire* [italics mine]. That a well established and powerful Government like the British should be scared away by the innocent and semi-religious worship of an antiquated hero buried two centuries back is not certainly very creditable to their prestige and position. That the Shi[v]aji movement has a political character is altogether an absurd myth."<sup>137</sup>

The tone of the article emphasized an innocuousness about the festival and chided the Government for even suspecting that it had anything to fear from such an event that promoted the hero-worship of a local long-dead hero. Seeing the danger of British reaction, as evidenced by Tilak's conviction, journalists such as N.C. Kelkar stressed the loyalty of Indians to British rule and toned down the 'greatness' of Shivaji, at least for the eyes of British officials. After Tilak was released from prison in 1898, he was more careful of how he criticized the Governments of India and Bombay and how Muslims were referred to in his speeches, as well in his newspapers.

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<sup>137</sup>*The Mahratta*, April 17, 1898, 3.

### Tilak, Shivaji and Ganapati in All-India Politics 1905-1920

As Tilak became more engrossed in pan-regional politics and affiliated himself increasingly with the Extremists within the Indian National Congress, he continued to promote Shivaji and Ganapati as symbols by which to unite the masses of the country. The Extremist faction which included amongst its members, Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai of Punjab, and Bipin Chandra Pal of Bengal sought to gain swaraj by, amongst other methods, boycotting English-made products. The three leaders who famously became known as Lal, Bal and Pal, were blamed for the Congress being split in 1907 during its annual session, held that year in Surat. This split between the Moderates and the Extremists was not patched up until the 1916 Congress meeting in Lucknow.

Tilak's experiences in pan-regional politics exposed him to a wider world that went far beyond the confines of his native Maharashtra. He made speeches in various cities on issues such as instituting a standard character for all Indian languages, swadeshi and the need for national education.<sup>138</sup> On these occasions he was required to expand his perspective on what made up the 'nation'. Prior to his increasing role in pan-regional and later, all-India politics, Tilak's vision of the nation was arguably limited to Maharashtra. However, with his exposure to other parts of the country, he sought to find issues that would unite Indians across the subcontinent. He stressed the need for a common language for all Indians, yet emphasized that the lowest step that needed to be taken was the creation of a common script and character for all Indian languages for Hindus before venturing to include Persian and Muhammedan characters. Tilak asserted that these were the "two great important elements which we have to harmonise and bring together

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<sup>138</sup>Tilak, 27-34, 42-47, 81-89.

under *our* [italics mine] common character or language."<sup>139</sup>

Language was not the only issue by which Tilak sought to unite Hindus. In addressing the Bharata Dharma Mahamandala in Varanasi, the Lokamanya stressed the need to gather all the various philosophies of Hinduism under one banner. Tilak argued that "[r]eligion is an element in nationality." Moreover, he posited that by "forgetting all the minor differences that exist between the different sects, then by the grace of Providence we shall ere long be able to consolidate all the different sects into a mighty Hindu nation."<sup>140</sup>

Tilak jumped head first into the Swadeshi Movement which emerged after the partitioning of Bengal in 1905.<sup>141</sup> The partition was a grievance that would serve as "the edifice for the regeneration of India." He used Shivaji as an ideal hero whose spirit was to be emulated. He stated, "I hope that God will give us such a leader who would regenerate the country by his self-sacrifice, ardent devotion, disinterested action. We must raise a nation on his soil. Love of nation is one's first duty. Next comes religion and the Government."<sup>142</sup> Shivaji thus became transformed from a regional to a national hero whose selflessness could be emulated elsewhere in India. What is striking about this speech (delivered in Calcutta) was that there was no reference made to Shivaji as a Hindu ruler, nor any reference made to fighting the British as a united Hindu nation. Moreover, religion was placed second to love for one's country. This reflects an emphasis for the necessity of cooperation between Muslims and Hindus, where the latter comprised a sizable proportion of the population in West Bengal while Muslims

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<sup>139</sup>Tilak, 27-34.

<sup>140</sup>Tilak, 35-41.

<sup>141</sup>The Partition of Bengal enacted by the Viceroy, Lord Curzon (1899-1905) in 1905 was perceived by the westernized Hindu elite of Calcutta as an attempt to subvert their influence and power throughout Bengal. By dividing the province for administrative purposes, East Bengal would become a Muslim majority province while West Bengal would have a Hindu majority. However, West Bengal would include so many Hindi and Oriya speaking people that Bengalis would no longer maintain a majority.

<sup>142</sup>Tilak, 46.

were a demographic majority in East Bengal.

With Tilak's involvement in the Swadeshi Movement, Shivaji too became a 'Swadeshi' hero. But it was also at that point that Tilak stressed the need to make Shivaji a secular hero. During Shivaji's time

“it is true that the Mahomedans and the Hindus were then divided; and Shivaji who respected the religious scruples of the Mahomedans, had to fight against the Mogul rule that had become unbearable to the people... The Shivaji Festival is not celebrated to alienate or even irritate the Mahomedans. Times are changed...the Mahomedans and the Hindus stand in the same boat or on the same platform so far as the political condition of the people are concerned. Can we not *both of us* [italics mine] derive some inspiration from the life of Shivaji under these circumstances? What makes Shivaji a national hero for the present is the spirit which actuated him throughout and not his deeds as such. That is the lesson which the Mahomedans and the Hindus have to learn from the history of the great *Mahratta* [italics mine] chief; and the Shivaji Festival is intended to emphasise the same lesson. It is sheer misrepresentation to suppose that the worship of Shivaji includes invocation to fight either with the Mahomedans or with the Government.”<sup>143</sup>

The fact that this excerpt is taken from *The Mahratta* would suggest that Tilak was trying to show a secular front to a more moderate Westernized audience. Moreover, as Tilak gained further exposure in the growing all-India political arena, the English language newspaper, *The Mahratta* would be read widely elsewhere in India and therefore could be used as a tool to propagate his nationalist ideas beyond the confines of Bombay Presidency. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Tilak emphasized Shivaji's role as a great Maratha chief to inspire both Hindus and Muslims who were fighting against what he perceived as British injustice.

One of Tilak's greater interests was the establishment of a new curriculum in schools. Religious education was his primary focus. In spite of arguments that religious education begot religious bigotry, he asserted that the Hindu religion

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<sup>143</sup>Tilak, 48-49.



advocated tolerance for others' religious affiliations. Tilak proposed that Hinduism would be taught to Hindus and Islam to Muslims in schools and stressed that "it will also be taught there to forgive and forget differences of other religions." He also suggested that vernacular languages be studied since too much emphasis was placed on English which was deemed compulsory by the government. Lastly, he noted that under Muhamadan rule "we were required to learn Persian but we were not compelled to study it."<sup>144</sup> Suddenly, the once tyrannical rule of the Muslims becomes minimized and its more positive aspects highlighted. Tilak argued that the Muslims made India their own home and were politically more sympathetic and economically less ruinous than the British.<sup>145</sup> However one can notice a backhanded criticism therein of what he considered Muslim rule; it was transformed from tyrannical particularly during Aurangzeb's rule to "politically more sympathetic and economically less ruinous." To further diminish the severity of Aurangzeb's rule, which is understood by most Hindus even today to be the height of Islamic fanaticism under the Mughal rule, Tilak while commenting on the injustice of the British passing a law barring 'seditious meetings', argued that "even under Aurangzeb, the people were not subject[ed] to such coercion."<sup>146</sup> The most tyrannical of Muslims rulers and the enemy of the 'great' Shivaji which Tilak had spent several years promoting was now shown in a more positive light. Again to emphasise the tyranny of the British, Tilak asserted, "Even the tyrannical rulers of Europe did not disarm their subjects; even a savage race like the Muhammadans did not disarm the Hindus while exercising their imperial sway over India." Lastly, "Emperor Aurangzeb exercised tyranny of various kinds over the Hindus from the point of view of religion - though not

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<sup>144</sup>Tilak, 85.

<sup>145</sup>*The Mahratta*, 3 Feb., 1907, *SDLBGT* Vol.1, 35.

<sup>146</sup>*Kesari*, 15 October, 1907, *SDLBGT*. Vol. 1, 62.

from the point of view of distribution of wealth.”<sup>147</sup>

Based on some of his writings that advocated revolutionary activity, Tilak was brought to trial in 1908, and sentenced to six years in jail in Mandalay. When he returned, there was a remarkable reversal in his approach and in the tone of his writings and speeches. In *A Step in the Steamer*, a collection of Tilak's writings and speeches after his release from prison in 1914, the Lokamanya was incredibly tame in his attacks on the Government of India; so much so that he almost sounded similar to Moderates like Surendranath Banerjea in expressing his loyalty to the British Government.<sup>148</sup> As Richard Cashman elaborates, Tilak eschewed his more radical revolutionary mass mobilization tactics for more constitutional forms of agitation;<sup>149</sup> the Extremist had become a Moderate through the course of time. A number of factors could explain this change of attitude. Advancing in age, especially after spending six years in Mandalay, Tilak's revolutionary zeal may have become more docile, perhaps to prevent the risk of being tried a third time for inciting a rebellion. Yet another view suggests that upon returning to India, and during the remaining years of his life, Tilak gained the status of a seasoned freedom fighter who had inherited the mantle as the chief constitutional agitator from western India following the deaths of Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta. Although, Gandhi also hailed from western India, he would only really ascend within the ranks of the Indian National Congress in 1919. Therefore, Tilak had little competition to contend with within the confines of the politics of the Bombay Presidency and the growing all-India nationalist movement.

During the final two years of his life, Tilak found himself wary of Gandhi's ideas on non-violence, mass mobilization and his plans for Non-Cooperation. What is more interesting is Tilak's views on the Khilafat Movement

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<sup>147</sup> *Kesari*, 9 June, 1908, *SDLBGT*, Vol.1, 106.

<sup>148</sup> Bal Gangadhar Tilak, *A Step in the Steamer* (Bombay: The National Bureau, 1918).

<sup>149</sup> Cashman, 192.

where he believed that Muslims should ally themselves with Congress on the issue of self-rule rather than on sectarian and foreign affairs issues like the Khilafat Movement.<sup>150</sup> As Cashman argues, Tilak no longer believed that religion and politics went together.

In the years that followed his return from prison, Tilak made many references during speeches on home-rule about the necessity of Hindu-Muslim unity in the struggle for *swaraj*. The year 1916 was a momentous one for the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League for both parties agreed on a plan to demand home-rule. While the League promised to support Congress's demands for home-rule following the war, the Congress would agree that a higher proportion of seats be reserved on government councils to Muslim delegates. Although some Congressmen believed that Hindus were surrendering too much political power to Muslim politicians, Tilak argued that "I am sure I represent the sense of the Hindu community all over India when I say that we could not have yielded too much. I would not care if the rights of self-government are granted to the Mahomedan community only."<sup>151</sup> For Tilak by 1916, it was more important that any group of Indians rule India, even if they were Muslims. During other home-rule speeches from 1916 to 1920, Tilak often made references to examples of *swarajya* during centuries past, and of the capabilities Indians possessed in governing themselves. Tilak obviously referred to Shivaji and the Marathas, but he also made mention of the Mughals, specifically the emperors, Akbar and Aurangzeb.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>One of the consequences of World War One was that the Ottoman Sultan, who served as the spiritual leader of Sunni Muslims, was removed by the British Government. Gandhi sought to unite the grievances and protests of Sunni Muslims with his Non-Cooperation Movement from 1920-22. See B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>151</sup>Tilak, *Writings and Speeches*, 202.

<sup>152</sup>Tilak, *Writing and Speeches*, 155. In a speech at Ahmednagar on 31 May, 1916, Tilak asserted that the "Muhammedan kings who ruled here at Ahmednagar (I don't call Muhammedans aliens)

However, Tilak's communal rhetoric always emerged when speaking in Poona and particularly at the Shivaji Festival in front of his Chitpavan Brahman followers. He informed his listeners that the British Indian army consisted mostly of Afghans and Gurkhas. "This army consists mainly of Mussalmans and non-Indians. What is the result? They are ready to shoot you down without compunction if ordered to do so." This type of propaganda was reminiscent of his earlier days of the 1890s. Moreover, he gave an added slant for his Brahman followers. Tilak asserted, "If you want an army, go to the very soul of the nation. The upper classes are ready to join the army. . . .Is it right to enlist Mahars and Berads and thus alienate the sympathy of Brahmins and Marathas. What use are Mahars and Berads in the army? Their vocation is thieving."<sup>153</sup> Tilak not only attacked Muslims as those who would shoot his Hindu followers down, but also lower castes for their 'anti-social' behaviour.

### Conclusion

Bal Gangadhar Tilak began his political career in the large Deccan town of Poona and emerged by the end of his life to become one of the most prominent and senior Indian politicians of the early nationalist period. He was the first politician to attempt to merge elite and mass politics within the Indian National Congress. During the earlier phases of his career, Tilak remained staunchly orthodox regarding social reforms which drew him support from more conservative elements within his community and Hindu society in Maharashtra. Moreover, by utilizing figures such as Shivaji and Ganapati as symbols for hero-worship to unify Hindus, he succeeded in isolating a portion of the population, particularly Muslims from being involved in early nationalist activity in Bombay

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came to and lived in this country and at least desired local industries should thrive." *SDLBGT*, Vol.4, 96.

<sup>153</sup>Speech delivered in Poona, 06-07-1918, *SDLBGT*, Vol.3, 96-100.

Presidency. Newspapers that he owned contained articles that depicted Muslims as rough, antagonistic brutes. As Tilak's career progressed and he became a prominent leader within Congress, he toned down his anti-government stance while stressing loyalty to the Crown and urged cooperation between Hindus and Muslims. Ultimately, by 1920, he had sworn his allegiance to the British Government time and again, while demanding that the British do what was right, by granting Indians home-rule. Tilak's anti-Islamic slant had tapered to such an extent that he was willing to have the Government of India hand power over to a Muslim-led administration.<sup>154</sup> Evidently, Tilak no longer considered Muslims as foreigners, but as Indians.

But the question remains unanswered: was Tilak a Hindu communalist as Mushirul Hasan contends, or was he merely a political mobilizer as Bipan Chandra argues? They may both seem correct, depending on which phase of Tilak's career is focused on. During the early years of his political career, specifically the 1880s and 1890s, Tilak was clearly a communalist. Based on writings and articles from his newspapers, there was a discernible antipathy for Muslims on Tilak's part and on those on his editorial staff. *The Mahratta* did not stop at asking Hindus to refrain from attending the Muharram Festival, they continually lambasted the Muslim community for causing riots whenever they occurred. Muslims were consistently referred to as foreigners by virtue of their religious beliefs and demonized considerably. Like communalists who would follow his strategy later in the twentieth century such as Lal Krishna Advani, Tilak chose religious figures that would appeal to a particular religious community rather than to all Indians. Obviously, Ganapati would not appeal to

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<sup>154</sup>Tilak and Gandhi were similar in many ways. During the negotiations in Spring of 1947, leading up to the June 3rd Plan, announcing the partition of British India into the independent dominions of India and Pakistan, Gandhi offered M.A. Jinnah (d.1948) and the Muslim League the chance to administer the government of a united India if he agreed to keep the country together.

Muslims, since for them, there is but one God and his name is Allah. Second, Ganapati is represented in anthropomorphic form, which is sacrilegious to Muslims, for according to Islamic law, God cannot be represented in any form, living or otherwise. Shivaji's Hindu characteristics were often emphasized during the first two years that his festival was celebrated, and by focusing on his battle against Afzal Khan, a Muslim, therefore a tyrannical foreigner, it is also clear that Muslims would not find these projected images very appealing.

However, a difference can be noticed during the first decade of the 1900s; Tilak, although speaking about the need for unity between Hindus of all castes and geographic origins, also increasingly stressed Shivaji's pertinence as a role-model to both Hindus and Muslims. By the second half of the 1910s, the transformation was complete as he was willing to grant Muslim politicians almost anything they wanted, including the reins of government in return for their cooperation in the quest for home-rule. By the end of his career, his role as an agitator focused strictly on political and economic issues and appealed very little to Hinduism as Chandra argues.

Even as Tilak put aside his communal antipathy and embraced Muslims as fellow Indians, some questions still remain. For instance, why did Tilak change his view towards Muslims? But more importantly, was this change really genuine? One could surmise, although rather optimistically, that through exposure to the larger world outside Maharashtra, and seeing the influence Islam had on other regions of India, he became more open-minded and appreciative of the contributions Muslims made to Indian society and culture, especially in the north. Realistically, Tilak could probably see that Muslims comprised a larger percentage of the population in other sections of India, and needed to be incorporated within the struggle for swaraj. Therefore stressing Shivaji as a hero to both Hindus and Muslims became necessary and practical.

It is difficult to detect whether Tilak was genuine in his change of attitude towards Muslims, and it is perhaps impossible to ever know definitively. It is clear that he was willing to advocate whatever means were necessary to achieve his ends, the most important of which was for India to be given home-rule. During the last six years of his life, following the deaths of Gokhale and Mehta, Tilak became the main politician from western India, and his emphasis on constitutional agitation and pledge of loyalty to the empire during the First World War resembled that of the late Gokhale and secured unparalleled support for him from Maharashtrian and nationalist politicians, Moderate and Extremist. However, even after his transformation to Moderate constitutional agitation, he once told M.K. Gandhi that if India could successfully free itself from British rule by using violent methods, he would have readily supported it.<sup>155</sup> So what becomes apparent is that Tilak was prepared to 'sell his soul to the Devil' (seen in this context as the British), if necessary to get his way. He was not above lying as he clearly demonstrated in 1897 by helping the Chapekar brothers evade the police, following W.C. Rand's assassination. Perhaps this willingness 'to do whatever it takes' extended itself to allying himself and Congress with others that he also considered foreign, i.e. Muslims. As Richard Cashman astutely observes, "Tilak was a free agent, a law unto himself, who would bow neither to priest nor to reformer, neither to government nor to the elite, unless it suited his purposes."<sup>156</sup>

This doubt notwithstanding, one thing remains clear about the legacy of Tilak's methods. His use of symbols for political mobilization, although not as successful as he would have liked, provided a model which future Indian politicians would emulate. One has to bear in mind that the use of symbols and

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<sup>155</sup>G.V. Ketkar, *Reminiscences and Anecdotes about Lokamanya Tilak*, Vol.1. 1<sup>st</sup> edition (Poona: Kesari-Prakasan, 1935), 105 in H.M. Ghodke, *Revolutionary Nationalism in Western India* (New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1990), 31.

<sup>156</sup>Cashman, 54.

images is not and has not been limited to communalists, nor to the politics of Southern Asia.<sup>157</sup> After all, Mahatma Gandhi used Hindu symbols during the freedom movement and often spoke of transforming India into Ram Rajya. Gandhi could hardly be accused of being a communalist considering his long-standing views on Hindu-Muslim unity and mutual respect for the religious faith of others. Therefore, it is the utilization of symbols and myths to demonize and segregate people of other communities which makes one a communalist.

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<sup>157</sup>See Thomas Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero Worship* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, Publishers, 1905), chapters one and six. Carlyle discusses the roles of hero as divinity (with reference to Scandinavian mythology) and hero as king (particularly Oliver Cromwell and Napoleon) in the European context.



## Chapter Three

### The Politics of Marginalization: Sardar Patel and Communalism

#### Introduction

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950)<sup>158</sup> was one of the most important politicians in modern Indian history. Emerging from humble origins, he occupied several leading cabinet positions in the Government of India including the portfolios of Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. Although an intimate colleague of Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) from the commencement of his political career in Gujarat, Patel was closely associated with Hindu right-wing elements within the Indian National Congress, and by the mid-1940s he was openly sympathetic to other Hindu communal organizations throughout the country. Despite much focus on the acrimony produced by the political struggle between the Congress and the Muslim League in the decade prior to independence, culminating in the partition of the subcontinent, Patel's perceptions of Indian Muslims (and indeed other minorities) were rather negative for years prior to the transfer of power. This chapter will explore the depths and the causes for this disdain. Why did Patel harbour such negative opinions of other religious communities while other close associates of Gandhi such as Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) did not? Why and how did Patel go from preaching Hindu-Muslim unity in the early 1920s to believing that Hindus and Muslims could not live together (at least in the provinces of Bengal, Punjab and Sind) twenty-five years later?

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<sup>158</sup>Patel's birthdate, October 31, 1875, was by his own admission a fabrication. When he wrote his matriculation exams in 1897, he was required to put down his date of birth. As he was unsure, he decided upon the date mentioned above. See Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1990), 3.

Studies on Indian communalism focus predominantly on incidents of Hindu-Muslim conflict. This is due in great part to the ongoing tension between Pakistan and India which has in the past two years seen both countries detonate nuclear bombs demonstrating their rival nuclear capabilities.<sup>159</sup> Yet, this overwhelming focus on Muslims and Hindus tends to veer attention from other areas of communal conflict, particularly between Hindus and other religious minorities such as Parsis and Christians.<sup>160</sup> Hindu society is generally portrayed as an open and tolerant society willing to accommodate people of different faiths like the Parsis, the followers of Zoroastrianism.<sup>161</sup> The Parsis were an exiled community that fled Persia (ca. 7th century c.e.) when invaders pressured them to convert to Islam or face death. Parsis came to South Asia and settled predominantly along the Malabar coast in cities such as Bombay and Karachi. They were a tiny but extremely affluent community by the early twentieth century that was involved in many commercial activities such as alcohol production, cotton textile production and trade. From Congress's early days to the 1910s, Parsis were a prominent community amongst the organization's leadership represented by individuals such as Pherozeshah Mehta (1845-1915), Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) and Dinshaw Wacha (1844-1936) at the helm. Gandhi was emerging as a leading figure by the late 1910s and his social programmes became a significant part of his campaigns to rejuvenate Indian society. Prohibition was a major aspect of this social reform and struck at a source of revenue for Parsi alcohol manufacturers. Gandhi's methods of mobilisation and radical ideas of reforming Indian society did not appeal to many Parsi politicians and socialites,

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<sup>159</sup>Most recently, from May to July of this year, the Indian army fought against Pakistani-backed militants in Kargil in Kashmiri India.

<sup>160</sup>In the past year, Christian communities in India and Pakistan have come under attack from both Hindu and Muslim communalists in both countries.

<sup>161</sup>For information on Zoroastrianism, see Lewis M. Hopfe, *Religions of the World*, fifth edition (Toronto: Collier Macmillan Canada, 1991), 271-294.

who were predominantly Westernised and geared more toward reforms obtained through negotiation and the constitutional methods of old-style Moderates like Mehta and Naoroji. Given their prominence in urban centres such as Bombay, the capital of the Presidency and a major political and commercial centre of British India, their influence as a minority seemed to intensify feelings of jealousy amongst other communities seeking to climb the socio-economic ladder. This antipathy also manifested itself in the political arena.

What essentially makes people communal? Is it due to their upbringing, their lack of exposure to different people, or an exclusive fraternisation with their own community? The society in which Patel grew up was predominantly a Hindu and an agrarian-based society in Gujarat in western India. Occupationally, the majority of people from his Kheda District worked in agriculture. The Hindu population of Kheda in 1872 was 711,619, while Muslims numbered 70,741.<sup>162</sup> Patel's village was located within the district subdivision of Nadiad whose Hindu population numbered 138,767 and whose Muslim population totalled 17,701 and Parsis just 15 in 1872.<sup>163</sup> These were the demographics of Patel's society just three years prior to his birth. By 1901, Hindus numbered 124,204 and Muslims 17,251,<sup>164</sup> the latter forming only 12% of Nadiad's population.

Patel's family belonged to the Patidar community, a landholding cultivator caste. His parents, especially his father, provided a particularly religious upbringing.<sup>165</sup> In his adolescence, Vallabhbai was a defiant student who often found himself in trouble with those in authority. At the age of 22, he passed his

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<sup>162</sup>*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* Volume III, Kaira and Panch Mahals (Bombay: Government Central Press 1879), 28.

<sup>163</sup>*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* Volume III, Kaira and Panch Mahals (Bombay: Government Central Press 1879), 26

<sup>164</sup>*Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency* Volume III-B (Bombay: Government of India Press, 1904), 8

<sup>165</sup>While Patel fasted with his father, he did not appear to be particularly religious. Yet when Patel was imprisoned with Mahatma Gandhi and Mahadev Desai, he took up the study of Sanskrit and the Hindu Holy Books.

matriculate exams and was attracted to the practice of law. He studied privately for three years, studying with books borrowed from friends and passed the pleaders exam at the age of 25. Within a few years, he opened an office in Borsad in 1902 and earned a solid reputation and the contempt of the local police as a district pleader. Despite his great success in having his clients acquitted, which was due in large part to incompetent police work, Patel was dissatisfied with his position and salary. He saved his earnings over several years and eventually paid his way to England in 1910 where he studied law, passed the bar exams in 1912, and stood first in his class.<sup>166</sup> By early 1913, Patel returned to India and began practicing law as a barrister in the growing industrial city of Ahmedabad. He and his older brother Vithalbai (1873-1933) became distinguished lawyers and were making inroads into the political domain. Beginning his political ascent from Bombay political spheres in the 1910s, Vithalbai became a prominent figure in Moderate Congress circles and was eventually elected President of the Central Legislative Assembly in 1925. Vallabhbhai's real submergence into Indian politics came after a short, thin, khadi-clad<sup>167</sup> Gujarati named Mohandas K. Gandhi delivered a speech at a club in Ahmedabad in 1915. Although Gandhi failed initially to impress Patel with his lecture (he was busy playing billiards), in time, through further exposure, the latter became intrigued by Gandhi's ideas for regenerating India and opposing the British through non-violent protest.<sup>168</sup> Patel

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<sup>166</sup>When Patel's letter of acceptance to attend law school in England arrived in the mail, it was addressed to V.J. Patel. His older brother Vithalbai whose initials matched his brother's pleaded that he take his younger brother's place. Vallabhbhai as a 'good Hindu' allowed his brother without regret, to take his place. See B. Krishna, *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel: India's Iron Man*, paperback edition (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1997; 1995), 22.

<sup>167</sup>*Khadi* is Indian homespun cloth.

<sup>168</sup>The essence of Gandhian protest is to face one's opponent open-handedly and offer one's body to injury. The object is to force the aggressor to see how unjust his/her actions are. By seeing the suffering caused by their hand, the aggressor would hopefully have a change of heart. Gandhi's philosophy was a mix of Jainism, a pacifistic religion based in Gujarat, along with tenets of Christianity. Although an odd character, many like Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru saw Gandhi as a breath of fresh air from politicians who sought political reform through constitutional means such as Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Motilal Nehru and C.R. Das.

soon emerged as one of Gandhi's most important political activists in Gujarat by the late 1910s, organizing the Kheda Satyagraha of 1918.<sup>169</sup> By the mid-1920s, he would emerge as the Mahatma's main lieutenant in Gujarat and western India.<sup>170</sup>

The First World War brought together a short marriage between Indian nationalists and British officials. The latter sought Indian support for their war effort and in return nationalists expected some degree of autonomy to be granted in the post-war period. While Edwin Montagu (1879-1924), the Secretary of State for India proposed his administrative reforms that would make the Imperial Legislative Council more 'representative' and allow for Indians to take control over certain government ministries in the provinces through the system of dyarchy, Justice Rowlatt argued that repressive measures were needed due to the 'seditious atmosphere' that existed in India. The Government of India passed the Rowlatt Acts which allowed for continued government oppression, in essence a continuation of the Defence of India Act which was in effect during the First World War. These repressive measures included amongst others, press censorship. Apart from infuriating Indian nationalists, many of whom were Hindu, the British managed to also unwittingly aggravate Sunni Muslims throughout India. Due to the Ottoman Empire's alliance with Germany in World War One, the British Government reduced the former's territory to Turkey, taking away its control over the holy lands of Islam in western Asia. The Caliph not only served as the head of the decaying Ottoman Empire, but also as the spiritual leader for Sunni Muslims the world over and represented the last vestiges of Islamic glory amidst the growing dominance of European imperialism. Pan-

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<sup>169</sup>The Kheda satyagraha was held to fight against an increase in revenue payments due to widespread crop failures. See David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917-34* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>170</sup>Gandhi had several lieutenants throughout the subcontinent, C. Rajagopalachari in Madras, Rajendra Prasad in Bihar, Jawaharlal Nehru in United Provinces, Azad in Bengal and also as a spokesman for Indian Muslims and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the Northwest Frontier Province.

Islamic fervour grew at a feverish pace in the early decades of the 20th century in opposition to these trends. Several leading Indian Muslim scholars and political activists such as Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1887-1958) and Mohammad Ali (1878-1931) and Shaukat Ali (1873-1938) actively participated in pan-Islamic activities in India and the Arab world.

By the war's end, Gandhi's popularity gained strength, particularly after the Champaran Protest in 1917.<sup>171</sup> Despite his smaller campaigns at the regional level against the British and their supporters, on the national stage, Gandhi believed that Hindu-Muslim unity needed to be secured in order to mount an effective movement against the Government of India. British rule in Southern Asia was often justified on the belief that without its presence, the subcontinent would descend into an orgy of communal bloodshed.<sup>172</sup> Gandhi believed that if Hindus wholeheartedly supported Muslims in their religious cause to restore the Turkish Caliphate's suzerainty over Islamic holy lands, the latter would naturally, seeing this 'outpouring of fraternal love', come out and support their Hindu brethren in the Congress and abjure activities deemed offensive to large sections of the majority, especially cow slaughter.<sup>173</sup>

During the joint Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement of the early 1920s, Hindu-Muslim unity reached a political zenith. Individuals such as Patel, who were unlikely to have done so otherwise, began preaching Hindu-Muslim unity. He asserted "The Hindus cannot remain neutral when the Muslims are in such a sorry state. If the Hindus want the friendship of the Muslims, they must

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<sup>171</sup>Gandhi led a campaign in Bihar against the rent demands of British landlords upon their tenants who grew Indigo. The landlords demanded the peasants grow indigo but when the market declined, the landlords continued to demand the same rents. Gandhi led a successful satyagraha for the peasants.

<sup>172</sup>The partition massacres particularly played into this belief and vindicated British rule for politicians such as Winston Churchill.

<sup>173</sup>See B.R. Nanda, *Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1989).

share their troubles."<sup>174</sup> However, prominent Hindu leaders such as Tilak were hesitant to back the Khilafat movement for they considered it at best a foreign issue, outside the real concerns of most Indians. Nevertheless, Gandhi insisted on merging the Congress agitation with the Khilafat Movement and many of his assistants toed the Mahatma's line. Another problem was that while agitations took place collectively between Congress and the Khilafatists, Muslims tended to gravitate toward the Khilafat committees and Hindus toward Congress committees, thereby minimizing the chances of possible interaction between the two groups.

British stereotypes of Indian society flourished outside the British community. The effeminate and conniving Hindu, the fanatical and vindictive Muslim and the loyal and gallant martial races became accepted stereotypes by various sections of Indian and Anglo-Indian society.<sup>175</sup> While Hindu activists and social reformers endeavored to change the hackneyed image of the community as being effeminate, weak and compliant,<sup>176</sup> modifying their own perceptions of other religious communities did not occur as swiftly. The image of the 'fanatical' Muslim was something many Hindus were unprepared to abandon. Patel was heartened by the fact that Muslims were brought into Non-Cooperation and taught the methods of *satyagraha*, for the "Muslims are a people who are zealous by nature. If they had not been advised to take to civil disobedience, bloodshed would have resulted. Has anybody considered this aspect of the matter?"<sup>177</sup> Patel, like many of his contemporaries simply bought into the stereotypes propagated by

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<sup>174</sup>CWSVP, Vol. 1, 44.

<sup>175</sup>See Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995) and Chandar S. Sundaram, "Reviving A "Dead Letter": Military Indianization and the Ideology of Anglo-India 1885-1891," (unpublished article, 1999), 7-10.

<sup>176</sup>Many social reform and activist groups emerged in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which sought to strengthen the Hindu community and alter the negative stereotype that the community was saddled with. See Nandini Gooptu, "The Urban Poor and Militant Hinduism in Early Twentieth-Century Uttar Pradesh," in *Modern Asian Studies* 31, 1997.

<sup>177</sup>CWSVP, Vol. 1, 46.

the British and other European and Indian elites.<sup>178</sup> Hence, while he was sympathetic to this "Muslim" cause, his speech shows that he believed that Muslims represented "the other", a distinct community capable of committing unspeakable atrocities.

Hindu-Muslim unity became one of the central pillars of Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-22), yet it faced certain challenges during the two years of its existence. Firstly, many Congressmen, some of whom were Tilak's supporters in Maharashtra, were against the idea of supporting a 'foreign' issue such as the Khilafat Movement. Secondly, the Mopla Uprising of 1921 seriously strained Gandhi's concept of Hindu-Muslim unity. The Moplas were Muslim tenant cultivators settled along the Malabar coast in southwestern India.<sup>179</sup> In August of 1921, a large-scale revolt took place against Government officials and the tenants' Hindu landlords. Mass conversions and desecration of temples became some of the chief manifestations of the revolt. The Moplas were lashing out against symbols of their oppression, which in great part tended to be largely 'Hindu'. Yet, they also destroyed symbols of government power, hence railway lines were destroyed, telegraph wires cut, post offices and police stations burnt down, and money looted.<sup>180</sup> Government suppression of the movement was equally fierce as martial law was clamped down for up to six months in certain areas, due to the existence of widespread disorder.<sup>181</sup>

Although a localised occurrence, the events of the uprising, particularly the temple desecrations and the forced conversions left a taste of bitterness and

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<sup>178</sup>Unlike most of his contemporaries, Jawaharlal Nehru believed that Muslims were a diverse community.

<sup>179</sup>Conrad Wood, "Peasant Revolt: An Interpretation of Moplah Violence in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in David Hardiman ed., *Peasant Resistance in India 1858-1914* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 126-152.

<sup>180</sup>Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 147.

<sup>181</sup>One incident took place where 100 convicted Moplas were carted off in a boxcar. When they arrived, 56 had died of asphyxiation and eight died later on.



doubt.<sup>182</sup> Whatever the causes,<sup>183</sup> this became mere justification for all the misgivings of the conservative Hindu elements which formed Congress's majority who were suspicious about merging the Khilafat Movement with the Non-cooperation Movement.<sup>184</sup> Given this tense atmosphere, even Gandhi admitted that distrust and communalism were rampant.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, sections of the Muslim leadership in India, were divided on whether or not the forced conversions during the Mopla Uprising were beneficial or destructive. Some believed that the stories were false, yet even if proven true, they were not against supporting such proselytization, while others denounced it.<sup>186</sup> The absence of a united denunciation of the conversions did not sit well with many Hindu leaders wary of having their cultural and demographic majority slowly eroded through conversions to Islam and Christianity.

Although Gandhi's 'heart unity' was predicated on fragile foundations, it represented a watershed that was never again fully attained. Following Gandhi's suspension of Non-Cooperation in 1922, the Khilafat Movement was left to fend for itself. First abandoned by the Mahatma and Congress, then attacked by Kemal Attaturk in Turkey when he abolished the Caliphate in 1924, Khilafat activists watched their efforts and hopes laid to waste. Some blamed Gandhi for leaving

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<sup>182</sup> Temple desecrations and forced conversions have been an important part of public memory in India. Hindus recount the days of Mahmud of Ghazni storming northern India, raping and pillaging along with a storm of later invaders to India. Many Hindus see it as a concomitant part of 'Muslim' rule, a label graciously applied by James Mill.

<sup>183</sup> The Government of India and the nationalists disputed the causes of the outbreak. The government chalked the uprising up to a manifestation of religious fanaticism that Muslims inherently succumbed to. Nationalists argued that the uprising was rooted in agrarian discontent whatever acts of religious fanaticism took place. Gail Minault asserts that both the Government and the nationalists were valid in their assessments. While the Khilafat Movement, and ideas of Islamic glory coupled with the martial tradition of the Moplas turned out to be an explosive element, agrarian reform, monsoon failures and incipient famines contributed a great deal to the explosiveness.

<sup>184</sup> Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Responses to Islam* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1994), 42.

<sup>185</sup> Minault, 149.

<sup>186</sup> Minault, 149.

the movement high and dry and never again trusted the Congress and Hindus after this supposed 'treachery'.

During the early 1920s, Hindu-Muslim unity sometimes assumed violent forms, including attacking Parsis and Christians. In 1921, the city of Bombay became the scene of a violent confrontation between Hindu and Muslim prohibitionists on one side, and Parsi and Christian liquor vendors and consumers on the other. Liquor stalls were looted and several Parsis and Christians were killed during the *melee*.<sup>187</sup>

Prohibition was not only a central component of Gandhi's social development scheme to regenerate India, but was also a stab at the government's income through its sales tax on alcohol. For Muslims, the consumption of alcohol was forbidden according to Islamic law while many Hindus deemed it a social evil.<sup>188</sup> Parsis owned many of the alcohol shops and distilleries throughout India and the city of Bombay. Gandhi believed that if he could persuade them to give up their westernized lifestyle, which consisted of wearing predominantly western attire, speaking English instead of Gujarati and other foreign habits, he would be making 'ideal' Indians out of them.<sup>189</sup> While some Parsis supported Gandhi, many refused to give up such a huge source of their earnings and a cherished aspect of their lifestyle. This 'resistance' irked some of Gandhi's right-wing Hindu supporters such as the Sardar.

The Sardar was a highly focused individual and resisted distractions that would deflect him from a specific goal. As Rajmohan Gandhi argues, Patel was

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<sup>187</sup>See Ravinder Kumar, "From *Swaraj* to *Purna Swaraj*: nationalist politics in the city of Bombay, 1920-32" in *Congress and the Raj: Facets of the Indian Struggle 1917-47*. D.A. Low, ed. (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977), and Gandhi's articles in *Young India* 24-11-1921 published in *CWMG*, Vol.21, 462-465, 466-7.

<sup>188</sup>In India today, some states have remained staunchly prohibitionist. The state of Andhra Pradesh in southern India has maintained its stand on alcohol prohibition. However, those living close to the 'wet' state of Karnataka make trips there to purchase alcohol.

<sup>189</sup>*CWMG*, Vol.20, 25-29. Farsee is generally used by Parsis for the purposes of worship while Gujarati is their *lingua franca* since many Parsi families were settled in Gujarat for centuries.

imbued with the Patidar code, an unspoken rule that all internal problems and disputes be kept out of view from outsiders and opponents.<sup>190</sup> Patel had a strong reaction to dissent and detested open displays of it. He would become aggravated by any Indian community or party that voiced open dissent, whether they be Parsis who did not champion prohibition, socialists and communists who advocated violence or the Muslim League which demanded the creation of a separate Muslim state in the 1940s.<sup>191</sup> By the late 1920s, Patel's patience with the reluctance of many Parsis to support and encourage prohibition was wearing thin. Although he was openly supportive of those who gave up the production and sale of alcohol, his heightened advocacy of prohibition and his focused activity within Bombay Presidency made him a target for Parsi-owned newspapers. He responded that those who criticized him were "not Parsis but those who bring a bad name to the Parsi community."<sup>192</sup> Patel deployed a tactic used effectively by the British; all those Parsis who disagreed with him were not 'real' Parsis, and all those who continued in the liquor trade were not 'real' Indians, for they did not support the Gandhian cause.<sup>193</sup> The consumption of alcohol was seen as a slavish capitulation to western living and a sign of one's disloyalty to Indian culture. Patel attempted to delineate very specific parameters of what made a good and loyal Parsi or a true Indian.

Patel's importance within the Congress hierarchy was building throughout the 1920s. Although, he led numerous protest movements, and gained particular notoriety due to the success of the Kheda (1918) and Borsad (1924) satyagrahas,

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<sup>190</sup>The code also included loyalty to Hinduism, male supremacy, silence before elders and an individual's subservience to the extended family. See Rajmohan Gandhi. *Patel: A life*. (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1990), 4.

<sup>191</sup>*CWSVP*, Vol.1, 73.

<sup>192</sup>*CWSVP*, Vol.2, 334.

<sup>193</sup>The British Government set down guidelines for who was to be considered a legitimate Sikh for recruitment purposes. Essentially that meant those Sikhs who kept unshorn hair, carried the *kirpan* or dagger, wearing a bracelet and retaining the name Singh. All those who did not adhere to these tenets were not considered pure orthodox Sikhs. See Metcalf, 127-128.

it was after the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928 that Patel made a major impact in Congress and was given the title Sardar. In Bombay Presidency, land revenue was collected under the Ryotwari land settlement which taxed peasant proprietors directly. Under this settlement, the Government claimed ownership over lands and failure to submit taxes could result in confiscation.<sup>194</sup> After a fixed time period, the British Government would revise the land settlement with the proprietors and would generally effect a rent increase. In 1927, the Government raised the settlement by 22%. Despite the protests of the peasant landholders, the Government of Bombay insisted that the new payments be made. The Bardoli satyagrahis pledged that if Patel led the satyagraha against the government, they would refuse to pay the new taxes whatever the cost. After five months of withholding payment, the Bardoli satyagrahis emerged victorious.<sup>195</sup>

The population of Bardoli was 87,909, and was comprised principally of Hindus who made up 96% of the population. Muslims and Parsis came in next with 3.43% and .43% respectively.<sup>196</sup> Patel's speeches during the movement were aimed at keeping the solidarity of the peasants intact rather than addressing Hindu-Muslim issues. Tenants and landlords were made up primarily of *Ujaliparaj* society, which included Brahmans, Banias, Parsis, Muslims and Patidars who controlled most of the land while *Kaliparaj* society, which consisted of the backward castes, tribals and other lower castes provided most of the labour for the *Ujaliparaj*. Patel was adamant that the *Kaliparaj* not make any demands, but listen to the advice of their paternalistic social superiors. Patel was not prepared to commit himself to a social revolution, especially one where members

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<sup>194</sup>Under the Zamindari and Taluqdari systems prevalent in the United Provinces, Bengal and Bihar, landlords submitted a fixed settlement annually to the government, giving them the power to tighten their vice around the necks of the peasantry while the government turned a blind eye.

<sup>195</sup>For further reading on the Bardoli Satyagraha and the role of the Patidars, see David Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat: Kheda District 1917-34* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981).

<sup>196</sup>Shirin M. Metha "Social and Economic Background of the Bardoli Satyagraha-1928" in *Journal of Indian History* Vol. LV, Part III, Dec. 1977, T.K. Ravindran, ed.

of his caste and his main supporters would be adversely affected by any measure of land reform. His objective was clear: to embarrass the government and obtain reparations for his supporters who were predominantly Hindu and from his own caste. Patel believed in this maintenance of social order. Like Gandhi he believed that lower castes needed to be helped, but that any radical step to change rural Gujarati society was a risky political venture, especially since Congress was dependent on the wealthier classes for financial support.<sup>197</sup> As an increasingly experienced political organizer, his objective was to build up the party and find a common ground for widespread political activity.

Patel's reluctance to touch upon communal issues at Bardoli lay partially in the fact that minorities in the taluk were incredibly small and he relied heavily on those amongst his own caste for support. Indeed, the Government of Bombay attempted to raise a communal furor by sending in Pathans<sup>198</sup> to confiscate the lands of the Patidars. Moreover, Patel had little faith in communal unity, given the political climate of the country, which consisted of several unity conferences which failed to hammer out a communal *rapprochement*. By April of 1929, dissension was so extensive that Patel commented, "I am afraid that I shall not be able to impress upon you my faith in Hindu-Muslim unity due to fresh memory of the cruel murders which took place at some places in the wake of communal riots."<sup>199</sup> Furthermore, he added that, "I am of the firm belief that sooner or later those supporting the policy of enmity and revenge shall have to realize the failure

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<sup>197</sup>Gandhi, despite his talk about the upliftment of the masses, still believed, vis-à-vis the relationship between zamindars and peasants in the north, that land should be held in trust by the former for the latter. Gandhi was not adamant about losing his supporters for the cause of land revision. He believed that a certain traditional order in society could be maintained. Yet Gandhi did acknowledge that Patidar treatment of the Kaliparaj was abusive and tantamount to 'Swadeshi Dyerism'. See D.N Dhanagare, "Myth and reality in the Bardoli Satyagraha - 1928: a study in Gandhian politics" in *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 26, 2, (1980), 265-278.

<sup>198</sup>Pathans were Muslim tribesmen from the NorthWest Frontier Province known for their fierce fighting abilities. Many of these tribes provided the British with some of the fiercest battles during their stay in Southern Asia.

<sup>199</sup>*CWSVP*, Vol.2, 328.

or folly of their suicidal policy."<sup>200</sup> Although not specifically mentioned, he was most likely referring to Muslim communal leadership. As later evidence will show, he believed that Muslims were clearly capable of following a suicidal policy of enmity and revenge.

Notwithstanding Patel's exposure to other communities by his involvement in Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat Movement, his perception of most of India's minorities by the late 1920s was rather negative. During these earlier years, he was generally cautious about what he said publicly about divisive communal matters. His line of thought militated against any open expression of dissent, including his own. Barring a few instances, most of Patel's openly derogatory views of Muslims or other minorities appears in correspondence and discussions with other close colleagues. During the Civil Disobedience Movement (1930-34), he was jailed with Gandhi and the latter's private secretary, Mahadev Desai (1892-1942) who kept a diary and documented many of their prison discussions.<sup>201</sup>

One important discussion centred around the issue of separate communal mobilisation where a Muslim leader (unnamed in the diary) decided to create a separate relief fund for his community. Both Gandhi and Patel were against such activities, however the Mahatma acknowledged that this Muslim leader was justified due to the horrible treatment meted out to Muslim activists during Civil Disobedience by Hindu organisers. Gandhi posited that many Muslim activists were treated as untouchables for they were not given proper accommodation, owing to conservative Hindu attitudes. The contrast between Gandhi and Patel is clear, while Gandhi opposed separate mobilisation, he acknowledged that realistically, he needed to accommodate certain 'divisive' trends. In contrast,

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<sup>200</sup>CWSVP, Vol.2, 328.

<sup>201</sup>Valji Govindji Desai, trans. *The Diary of Mahadev Desai*, Volume I, Yeravda-Pact Eve, 1932 (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1953).

Patel was not willing to accept any separate mobilisation whether it was justified or not.<sup>202</sup>

Patel's stereotypes of Hindus and Muslims were quite rigid despite his travels and exposure to various people throughout India. The Sardar believed that Hindus and Muslims were so different that they could not naturally live together. He posited that Hindus were vegetarian and Muslims non-vegetarian. Gandhi educated his uninformed colleague that Hindus by rule were not all vegetarian for Hindu communities in Sind, Punjab and the United Provinces took meat.<sup>203</sup> Patel's narrow belief that Hindus were vegetarian was perhaps predicated on his narrow contacts with his own caste who were at the time, vegetarian.<sup>204</sup>

The late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the eruption of communal riots in urban centres such as Kanpur and Bombay. Unlike Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement which maintained some degree of Hindu-Muslim unity, the participation of Muslims in the Civil Disobedience Movement was limited and the communal riots did not auger well for bringing out any such unity for these outbreaks brought out tremendous bitterness from both Hindu and Muslim communities.<sup>205</sup> Gandhi, Patel and Desai discussed the Bombay communal riots that broke out in May of 1932. Patel complained, "It is not a straight fight. If people are stabbed in the back and women are injured in the chawls by Muslims

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<sup>202</sup>Desai, diary entry 30 March 1932, 49-50.

<sup>203</sup>Desai, diary entry 30 March, 1932, 50. Indeed, many in south India as well are non-vegetarian.

<sup>204</sup>Rajmohan Gandhi also posits that the Patidars although practicing vegetarians at the time of Patel's death, were not always so and that their customs shifted from time to time. See Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, 4.

<sup>205</sup>In the official history of the Indian National Congress written by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya (1880-1959), a leading Congress leader from the Telegu speaking area of Madras Presidency, the account of the Kanpur riots was particularly one sided in some respects against Muslims. Pandit Sundar Lal, who served as the Secretary of the Congress Committee of the Enquiry into the Kanpur Riots of 1931 argued that some of the facts and incidents stated in Sitaramayya book were incorrect. Moreover, Sitaramayya neglected to mention that there were several instances of Hindus and Muslims helping each other during the riots and that Sitaramayya focused only on the massacres. It showed a clear illustration of what the Congress line was supposed to be regarding the riots and the pessimism for Hindu-Muslim unity that it engendered. See AICC Papers G-24/1934, 9.

disguised as Khadi-clad Congressman, what is to be done and what is the advice to be given to the citizens of Bombay?"<sup>206</sup> Patel insisted that Hindus were incapable of fighting because they were not like Muslims. Gandhi replied that they were fully capable of violence as was demonstrated in the Kanpur riots of 1931.<sup>207</sup> Fundamentally, Patel concluded that Muslims were dirty, underhanded fighters, capable of stabbing people in the back and attacking women. He considered them especially deceitful for dressing up as Congressmen thereby smearing the reputation of the organization he had helped to build.

Animal sacrifices, conversions and any other 'cultural and religious practices' of Indian Muslims were considered barbaric by Hindus such as Patel who held very parochial ideas about the nature of Hindu society.<sup>208</sup> Gandhi once referred to a quote, "vrakshaan ghittva pashuun hatva krtvaa ruughirakardmam, yaghevan gamyate svagan narakan ken gamyate." The translation read, "If one can go to heaven by cutting trees, killing animals and making blood flow, how pray can he go to hell?" Patel remarked, "Muslims at any rate seem to believe in that pathway to paradise."<sup>209</sup> According to the Sardar, Islam dictated that Muslims must act like barbarians.<sup>210</sup>

Patel's negative attitude towards Muslims is striking given that one of his leading assistants during the late 1920s and early 1930s was a Gujarati Muslim

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<sup>206</sup>Desai, 122 May 21, 1932.

<sup>207</sup>Desai, 122.

<sup>208</sup>Animal sacrifices were not uncommon in ancient Indian history. The *ashvamedha yagna* was a horse sacrifice practiced by Hindu kings as late as sixth century c.e. and even prior to that. The horse was considered one of the most prized and revered animals in Hindu culture. During the *ashvamedha*, a king would let loose a horse from his stable for one year. All the territory covered by the horse would be claimed by the king and the horse would be offered as a sacrifice to God. See Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, volume 1 (New York: Viking Penguin., 1966), 54.

<sup>209</sup>Desai, 259. July 30, 1932.

<sup>210</sup>In a letter written to Nehru from Patel, the latter inquired into an attack made on Nehru's life upon his arrival at a particular location. He asked, "What was that ugly incident about some *Mahommedan ruffian* [emphasis mine] attacking and wounding several people with a knife when you reached there? For whatever reason Patel deemed it necessary to associate or emphasise the religion of the attacker. Patel to Nehru, Date torn off, AICC Papers G-60/1931, 279.



named Abbas Tyabji. He was a former judge turned freedom fighter and President of the Kheda District Congress Committee. Tyabji's journal entries from the late 1920s and early 1930s demonstrated a strong affection and admiration for Patel. A devout Muslim, Tyabji spoke very highly of the Sardar despite the latter's apparently negative opinions of Muslims that emerged in Desai's prison diary. His devotion to Islam notwithstanding, Tyabji's beliefs coincided with Patel's. For instance, Tyabji believed that Congress represented the majority of Indians and "must have a preponderant voice."<sup>211</sup> On M.A. Jinnah, who was considered a leading light amongst Muslim politicians even before he resumed his career in Indian politics in the mid-1930s (and whom Patel strongly disliked), Tyabji wrote that he "is a great man & has a great idea of himself but what sympathy has he shown for the thousands who are in jail or the hundreds who have been beaten by the police?"<sup>212</sup> Patel was rather intolerant of those who did not fight the British along the lines set out by Gandhi. The Sardar believed that anyone who wrote articles and did not suffer from a lathi charge or receive a prison sentence was committing a disservice to the nation.

Tyabji viewed Patel as a gifted leader. He wrote,

"Ramdas [prison mate] also spoke very nicely of Vallabh. Especially his wonderful practicability. When Bapu [Gandhi] gives an ideal people doubt how far they will be able to follow it out but when Vallabh takes up the matter it is given such practical shape that people find no difficulty in taking it up."<sup>213</sup>

Yet it is apparent that whatever good relations Patel maintained with key followers and colleagues, his attitude toward Muslims as a whole was rather negative and suspicious. Patel's biographers argue that he could not have been communal as he was so closely associated with Tyabji.<sup>214</sup> However, Tyabji's

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<sup>211</sup>Tyabji Diaries #18, 10-7-30, NMML.

<sup>212</sup>Tyabji Diaries #18, 13-7-30, NMML.

<sup>213</sup>Tyabji Diaries #18, 26-6-30, NMML.

<sup>214</sup>Gandhi, 352.

views were consonant with Patel's ideas of unity and fighting the British. An educated man, Tyabji was polished and unaggressive about the propagation of his faith, rendering him inoffensive and perhaps an 'exception' in Patel's view. Perhaps the difference was that Patel did not fear any competition for power from Tyabji, who was locally based in Kheda and remained at Patel's disposal, as contrasted to a figure such as Maulana Azad who was a political rival within the Congress leadership.

### 1930s: The Nariman Affair and Muslim Mass Contacts

The mid-1930s marked the return of Mohammad Ali Jinnah to Indian politics as the head of the All-India Muslim League. In 1935, the British Government passed the Government of India Act which allowed for popularly-elected governments to administer provinces in British India. Congress swept the polls in seven out of eleven provinces. When they refused to share power with the League in areas such as the United Provinces, Jinnah charged the Congress with being a communally-minded Hindu organization out to serve the interests of its own people. Despite the presence of many Muslims within Congress's ranks like Maulana Azad and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Congress leaders such as Nehru were consistently on the defensive trying to prove that Congress was a secular and broad-based organisation. The Nariman affair which garnered great attention from certain Bombay newspapers gained significant notoriety and raised doubts about Congress's secular claims.<sup>215</sup>

The Nariman affair stemmed from Patel's favouring B.G. Kher (1888-1957) for the Bombay Legislature leadership election over K.F. Nariman (d.1948), a Parsi and President of the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee. Nariman blamed Patel for his loss, accusing him of coercing the representatives of

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<sup>215</sup>*CWSVP*, Vol.7, 1.

three provinces<sup>216</sup> into voting for Kher. Many Parsi-owned newspapers (especially the *Bombay Sentinel*) took up his cause.<sup>217</sup> Although maintaining the image of a calm, collected leader free from any wrongdoing,<sup>218</sup> newspaper critiques by the *Sentinel* took their toll on Patel who found himself being consoled and defended by Gandhi.<sup>219</sup> Gandhi argued that there was no evidence that Patel coerced others to do his bidding and posited that one man could not have forced the removal of Nariman if he was indeed the chosen man of the Congress party throughout the Presidency. Gandhi assured Nariman before the public that Patel harboured no evil intentions toward him. Patel for his part guaranteed that anyone who would testify against him before a tribunal as demanded by Nariman's supporters would be assured protection and would not suffer from any reprisals. He asserted, "So far as I am concerned I might point out that that I possess no power whatever to victimize anybody even if I had the wish."<sup>220</sup> Rani Dhavan Shankardass demonstrates that Patel was an all-powerful figure and despite his self-diminution in this statement he clearly had the power to cut someone down to size and prevent someone's political career from ascending within Congress.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, if a leader such as Nariman could not withstand Patel's political maneuverings and displeasure, it was unlikely that most others could do so either.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>216</sup>Bombay Presidency was broken by Congress organizationally into three distinct areas: Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnatak where the majority populations spoke Gujarati, Marathi and Kannada respectively. Each area had a Congress committee that administered district and town congress committees. For the selection of a Premier to represent the entire Presidency, negotiations took place between Patel and the leaders of the other two areas.

<sup>217</sup>Parsi newspapers such as the *Mumbai Samachar* and the *Kaiser-i-Hind* got Patel's attention as he proposed to file a suit against the former for a cartoon illustration. Patel to Mathuradas, 2 Aug. 1937, *CWSVP*, Vol. 7, 16.

<sup>218</sup>See *CWSVP*, Vol.7, 7 #9 from *The Bombay Chronicle*.

<sup>219</sup>*CWMG*, Vol.65, 481. July 17,1937.

<sup>220</sup>*CWSVP*, Vol.7, 21.

<sup>221</sup>Rani Dhavan Shankardass, *Vallabhbhai Patel: Power and Organization in Indian Politics* (New Delhi: Orient Longman Limited, 1988).

<sup>222</sup>One of Congress's most publicized internal disputes was a confrontation between the Gandhite wing of Congress led by Patel against the left-wing led by Subash Chandra Bose of Bengal. While Bose won the election for the second year in a row, most of the Congress's executive, comprised of the right-wing, namely Patel and his supporters resigned. Without Patel and his colleagues'

The Bardoli Satyagraha gave Patel a solid reputation throughout the country and particularly within Bombay Presidency. In contrast, the Nariman Affair soiled his name considerably, particularly within the city of Bombay. The Parsi-owned *Bombay Sentinel* led the attack against Patel. Within days of Kher being selected for the Premiership of Bombay, the headlines and by-lines were replete with anti-Patel epithets. "Sardar's Fascism Must Be Smashed," "Sardar Must Resign," "Sardar's Ignoble & Unjust Act," and "Democracy Thrown Overboard: MLAs Behave Like Dumb Cattle. Sardar Ignores Voice of People" were some of the titles that greeted *The Bombay Sentinel's* readers on March 15, 1937.

Patel's perceived attack on a Parsi politician also raised fears in other communities including South Indian Hindus and Indian Muslims. On March 17, 1937, J.V. Iyer, a Brahman Hindu of South Indian descent wrote, "I take my hat off [to] the Gujarati Hitler. Bravo! Well done Patidar...The next step is only a drive [sic] against Tatyas and Madrasis, so that Bombay can be made safe for the Gujerat Patidars." Another writer, A.K. Mehta asserted that Patel's make-up was that of a typical fascist. "As far as fascist methods and tactics go, the self-styled 'suba of Gujerat' can certainly give points to Hitler and Mussolini."<sup>223</sup>

The Nariman affair produced fears over Patel's perceived attempts at Gujarati hegemony. However, far more important was how it fueled communal suspicions. K.P. Schroff argued,

"Already a very huge section of Mahommedans are viewing the Congress with suspicion and are openly saying that the Congress is purely a Hindu organisation. And this unjust act of the Congress will further confirm them

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participation, Bose was reluctant to face the British under the Congress name. Bose was an increasingly popular and powerful figure in Congress, yet Patel succeeded in thwarting Bose from operating as President for a second year in a row.

<sup>223</sup>From AICC file p.105 and *The Bombay Sentinel*, 17 March 1937, 7.

in their view and in future no member of any small community will join Congress."<sup>224</sup>

In an open letter to Patel, E.A. Anklesaria wrote,

"The Moslems have been rightly looking upon you with an eye of suspicion and doubts. . .[and] have practically divorced itself from the great national Institution- the Congress, to a great extent. By your this [sic] ungracious and autocratic act of Nazism, you have strengthened their fears not only, but you have given birth to doubts and fears in the minds of other communities, as Christians, Parsis etc. and none would be surprised of these communities in the great fight for freedom, which are so eagerly sought for by Congress would be lost in 'toto'."<sup>225</sup>

Patel promised a gathering of Parsis and other minorities that they would be given a blank cheque once independence was attained. When Nariman was cast aside, many believed Patel was going back on his own promise to minorities. H.T. Chinoy asserted, "Mr. Vallabhbai Patel, who wanted to give "Carte-Blanche" to the Parsi community at Navsari meeting [sic], has forgotten his promise or he has unfortunately a short memory. There is one fault that Mr. Nariman has...that he has not been a Hindu."<sup>226</sup> One 'nationalist Muslim' wrote, "One great consolation is that those who were assuming the role of leaders upto now are ungarbed as self-seekers having communalist tendency [sic]." He adds that "the public is sane enough to understand that if people like Mr. Patel remain to exist till India get Swaraj, what the blank cheque is going to be like."<sup>227</sup> Barjor M. Mistry poignantly wrote,

"Can it be that Congressmen flushed with victory, allowed their repressed communalism and ambition, which may have been lurking behind the veneer of nationalism, full sway?

The Chapter of conspiracies to oust Mr. Nariman darkens the beginning of Provincial Autonomy [sic] in the Province,...is it the shape of things to come?"<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup>*The Bombay Sentinel*, 15 March 1937, 7.

<sup>225</sup>*The Bombay Sentinel*, 19 March 1937, *passim*.

<sup>226</sup>*The Bombay Sentinel*, 16 March, 1937, 7.

<sup>227</sup>*The Bombay Sentinel*, 17 March, 1937, 7.

<sup>228</sup>*The Bombay Sentinel*, 15 March, 1937, 7.

Although the newspaper itself was Parsi-owned, it is evident from the several articles and letters written by non-Parsis that this affair struck a chord with many different communities including some Hindus.

The city's leading nationalist newspaper, the *Bombay Chronicle*, was also critical of Nariman's being swept aside, yet rather moderate in how it portrayed Patel's involvement in the issue. While numerous letters condemned Patel, the editorials were conciliatory.

"..the suggestion that the election was made under any undue pressure from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is unwarranted. But we still believe that the Party committed a serious error of judgement and consequently did injustice to Mr. Nariman. The people of Bombay felt likewise and they had every right to agitate in the matter to bring it to notice [sic] of the Working Committee and to help the latter to undo what they felt to be wrong."<sup>229</sup>

The editorial proceeded to argue that whatever the final decision of the Working Committee was to be, it should be accepted as final. It called for an end to the divisiveness by refocusing and redoubling the nation's efforts on fighting the British through participation in the legislative assemblies.

*The Hindustan Times* based in North India ran minimal coverage of the Nariman Affair, yet what little they did print was favourable to Patel and the election of Kher to the Premiership of Bombay. The newspaper featured a letter written by Nariman himself asking for the protest to end. "I was pained to find in certain quarters that attempts were made to give a communal turn to this incident...the raising of a communal bogey on this political issue would be most unfortunate."<sup>230</sup> It also featured a statement made by Nehru who asserted, "This agitation has been grossly unfair to Sardar Vallabhbhai. It has been unfair to Mr. Nariman. It has caused a heavy burden on Mr. Kher."<sup>231</sup> Nehru's statement was

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<sup>229</sup>*The Bombay Chronicle*, 23 March 1937, 6. See also *The Bombay Chronicle*, 16 March 1937.

<sup>230</sup>*The Hindustan Times*, 25 March 1937, 2.

<sup>231</sup>*The Hindustan Times*, 29 March 1937, 1-2.

significant for he was seen as one of the most trusted secular leaders amongst the Congress elite.<sup>232</sup>

Lastly, *The Times of India*, a pro-British and anti-nationalist newspaper was also supportive of the criticism laid at Patel and Congress's doorstep.

"Let it be stated at the outset that somehow or the other Mr. Nariman was a persona non grata [sic] with the Working Committee. It is stated that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru would not have him become the leader. Reports have been current that Mr. Vallabhbhai is the "villain of the piece." Although it is likely that one or both of these may have influenced the Working Committee, it seems pretty certain that the Working Committee as a whole sets its face against Mr. Nariman's election. Nothing has happened in recent months to free the minorities more than the incident in which Mr. K.F. Nariman was deprived of the leadership of the Parliamentary Party in the Presidency. It has been the sole topic of conversation since. They read much into it which the dictator, Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel, may not have had in mind. But until their fears are set at rest, if that is possible, they have every right to consider seriously their position."<sup>233</sup>

Two major Indian newspapers then were supportive of Nariman, *The Bombay Sentinel* and *The Times of India*. The latter, being pro-British, emphasized Congress's dissension and inner power politics, the former because it was Parsi-run, objected to perceived Hindu chauvinism. *The Bombay Chronicle* attempted to play both sides of the dispute. On the one hand, it acknowledged that Nariman was mistreated but simultaneously, absolved Patel of any wrongdoing. *The Hindustan Times* came out clearly on Patel's side but generally gave the matter little coverage, at least initially. *The Times of India's* criticism of Congress would hardly have surprised Patel. However, he was incredibly aggravated that *The Bombay Sentinel*, an Indian-run newspaper, was so candidly and viciously critical of him and the Congress. Moreover, Vallabhbhai viewed this as a betrayal of the

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<sup>232</sup>Maulana Azad later wrote "Jawaharlal knew that people looked upon him as a critic and opponent of Sardar Patel. He did not like to do anything which would give Sardar Patel's friends an opportunity to criticise him. He therefore sought to placate Patel and rejected Nariman's appeal. It seemed that he was trying to prove the he would not allow accusation or aspersion on Sardar Patel during his tenure of office." Azad, *India Wins Freedom* (1988), 17.

<sup>233</sup>*The Times of India*, 17 March 1937, 9.

freedom movement by exposing their internal disputes, disunity and dissension out in the open. Lastly, the *Sentinel's* rather crude and openly denunciatory criticisms contributed to Patel's belief that minorities had a natural communal complex and were more susceptible to expressing extreme, irrational opinions than the majority of Hindus who, were generally more moderate.

Although Nehru defended Patel from any accusations, as Congress President he was equally aware from the several letters he received and newspaper reports he read that he had to take an active role in fighting the growing image of Congress being a communal organization. One youth activist wrote that he and his Muslim friends were going to join the Provincial Congress Committee in their region. However, following the Nariman affair, they decided against it for they were convinced that Congress was deceiving minorities by its claims of secularism.<sup>234</sup> A former Congressmen telegraphed Nehru, "Though out of Congress, my past experience of Vallabhbhai and present developments demand destruction of communal canker before Purna Swaraj [complete independence] prey bodily remove of the core Vallabhbhai Bombay demands this [sic]."<sup>235</sup> Nehru already observed that Congress activity amongst Muslims was rather limited and sought to rectify the situation by instituting a special cell within the Congress's Political and Economic Department named the Muslims Mass Contacts Programme. It was placed under the control of Dr. Kunwar Mohammad Ashraf (1903-1962), a noted Muslim scholar of history and a Congress socialist.<sup>236</sup> The goal of the programme was to recruit Muslims and spread Congress's message across India by way of distributing news and information through pamphlets and publications and arranging speeches by noted public speakers and

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<sup>234</sup> Ahmed M. Yaffi to Nehru, 4 April 1937, AICC Papers E-7 Pt. III/1937, 21-23.

<sup>235</sup> Prarasi Pagal Vesova to Nehru, AICC Papers, E-7 pt. II/1937, 525.

<sup>236</sup> Indeed Nehru perceived that contact work with Muslims was required much earlier, however his idea was scotched. See Nehru to Bajaj, 27 March 1930, AICC Papers G-44/1930.



Congress supporters. As Ashraf's correspondence indicates, the programme was sparsely funded and was maintained almost as a one-person operation although it required the participation of several provincial, district and town congress committees. He informed one correspondent, "Our funds just at present do not permit us to help any [news]paper or organization. In any case we have to think out an all India policy in that connection and our resources are totally inadequate for it."<sup>237</sup>

Despite Congress's secular claims, Hindu communalists were a stock presence in the organisation. During his tenure as President of Congress in 1931, Patel received information that several congressmen were actively taking part in communal conferences and simultaneously holding office in Provincial Congress Committees.<sup>238</sup> Yet very little was done about this until Nehru's two year tenure as Congress President in 1936-7. One Congress worker observed that Muslims at the town and district levels were having difficulty being able to tell the difference between Congress Hindus and Mahasabhite Hindus<sup>239</sup> for rampant communalism was taking place and creating a great deal of confusion as to whom they could trust.<sup>240</sup> Another individual commented that what kept Muslims apart was the zeal of Hindus in local boards to monopolize power and from letting Muslims have any share in the power structure. He posited that it required "an open heart towards the minority not to endanger your own majority, but only to give their due share."<sup>241</sup> Ashraf received many complaints from Muslim Congressmen from

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<sup>237</sup> Ashraf to Ashrafuddin Ahmad Choudhary, undated, AICC Papers 26/1937, 13.

<sup>238</sup> Bhagvandas to Patel, 17-5-31, AICC Papers 17/1931, 311.

<sup>239</sup> The Hindu Mahasabha was a political organization started by Madan Mohan Malaviya (1861-1946) in 1915. Its aim was to represent Hindus as a counterfoil to the Muslim League which was created in 1906 under aegis of the Viceroy, Lord Minto (1845-1914) to represent Indian Muslims. The Mahasabha are in many ways, the pre-independence predecessors of BJP. See Keith Meadowcroft, "From 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' to 'Hindu Raj' : The Evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha 1922-1939." (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Concordia University, 1995).

<sup>240</sup> Ramgopal Gupta to Ashraf, 3 July 1937, AICC Papers 38/1937, 99-100.

<sup>241</sup> Mohammad Habibullah to Nehru, 26 April, 1937, AICC Papers 41/1937, 87-97.

the United Provinces who sought election in Congress executives throughout the province and lost due to the communal attitude of their Hindu rivals.<sup>242</sup>

By the late 1930s, Jinnah and his Muslim League were criticizing and agitating against the Congress Ministries, accusing them of bias and even atrocities against Indian Muslims. While accusations of atrocities were unsubstantiated, the behaviour of Congress politicians and workers was indeed questionable. Rajendra Prasad (1894-1963), an important member of the Congress Working Committee, wrote to Patel criticizing the behaviour of Congress politicians sitting in opposition benches. Instead of scrutinizing the government's policies, he argued that they were trying to lure government ministers over to their side to secure a victory and were ultimately soiling Congress's good name. Prasad asserted that "the Musalmans as a body have been alienated and in spite of all that Congress Ministries have been doing to be just and even generous to them there is not only no recognition but positive opposition to even a good scheme like the Wardha Scheme."<sup>243</sup> He further added that had they "not been engaged in breaking or at least discrediting Muslims Ministries in Non-Congress Provinces, the position would have been different. The Muslim League propaganda has gained much strength on account of this attitude of Congress in Muslim Provinces."<sup>244</sup>

Patel frankly replied

"In our country where the constitution is based on communal electorate, we cannot expect to have peace with the minority, which is aggressive and which is bent on coercing the majority and to compel it to accept its own terms...The Muslims as a body have been alienated and they are opposed even to our good [schemes]...because they feel...they have not been able to prevent the formation of Congress Ministries in seven provinces without

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<sup>242</sup>Ashraf to Gen. Sec. UP PCC. 6 June, 1938, AICC Papers B-11 Pt.II Ka Pt.II/1938, 551.

<sup>243</sup>The Wardha Scheme stressed the need for more vocational and manual training in India's curricula.

<sup>244</sup>RPCSD, Vol.2, 11 Oct.1938, 103.

or in spite of them. They expected to rule the country, but they have been sadly disappointed."<sup>245</sup>

While he blamed the British for implementing a constitution which allows the minority a greater chance to compel the majority to accept its terms, he asserted that Muslims were aggressive, perhaps inherently so. Hence, the minority rejected Congress's good schemes because they had no sense, were unnecessarily obstructionist and being imbued with a religious fanaticism which prevented them from seeing clearly. Lastly, due to their lust for power, Muslims (and their 'natural representatives' in the Muslim League) were resentful over their failure to seize power nationwide. Hindus at the district level fueled the communalism and separatism of Muslims at the local level while Patel evidently did little to prevent, or perceived no need to curtail, similar occurrences at the higher echelons of power. This ultimately gave Jinnah the opportunity to condemn Congress as a Hindu organization. He asserted, "No settlement with the majority is possible, as no Hindu leader speaking with any authority shows any concern or genuine desire for it."<sup>246</sup>

#### The Final Years: Independence, Partition and 'Loyalty'

The culmination of the Second World War and the election of Clement Attlee's (1883-1967) Labour Government in 1945 augured well for Indian nationalists. Attlee's government was committed to Indian independence and announced the deadline for British withdrawal from India as June 1948. To handle negotiations between rival Indian politicians, Attlee selected Viscount Louis Mountbatten (1900-1979) as the last Viceroy of India. With the growing potential for a Congress-led government at the centre, Jinnah and his Muslim League doubled their efforts to show that the two parties could not co-exist

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<sup>245</sup>RPCSD. Vol.2, 15 Oct.1938, 112-114.

<sup>246</sup>The Light, 24 Oct., 1937, 7 in AICC Papers B-8/1938, 37.

politically. The growing communal atmosphere, particularly the League's Direct Action Day in August of 1946 and the wave of partition massacres the following year contributed in great part to Patel becoming outwardly communal in the final years of his life.<sup>247</sup> Patel's belief that Muslims were a savage uncivilized lot grew to become more solidified with the League's intensified propaganda and advocacy for violent methods. He complained to two Muslims leaders, Sir Akbar Hydari and Dr. Alam that the Muslim masses, being ignorant and poor were being led down the wrong path by their leaders who were disgracing India by committing such atrocities.<sup>248</sup> Likewise, Patel became increasingly perceived as the saviour of Hindus. One Bengali Hindu in November of 1946 informed Patel that, "You are saving India and Hindus by your strong attitude."<sup>249</sup>

Inspired by the killings taking place in Calcutta and elsewhere in India, massacres of Hindus started to occur in rural East Bengal in Noakhali in late 1946. Gandhi ventured to this area to restore communal relations and secured a pledge from local Muslim leaders to protect their Hindu neighbours from any further massacres. Nevertheless, news of the Noakhali massacres spread and looting of Muslim households ensued in Bihar with equal fury. However, Patel informed the Viceroy, Field-Marshal Archibald Wavell (1883-1953) that Noakhali Hindus were not receiving sufficient quantities of aid and were living amidst Muslim hostility and 'goondaism'.<sup>250</sup> He was certain that Bihari Muslims

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<sup>247</sup>An incident took place in Bhavnagar in 1939 which most likely contributed to worsening Patel's views on Muslims Patel was riding in a car through the town. As he passed a mosque, his car was attacked by Muslims bearing axes and lathis. Consequently, one colleague was killed and others injured. Patel to Mahatma Gandhi, 14 May 1939, *CWSVP*, Vol.8, 91-2.

<sup>248</sup>Patel to Dr. Alam, 25 Aug. 1946, *SPC*, Vol.3, 83; Patel to Sir Akbar Hydari, 25 Aug.1946. *SPC*, Vol.3, 272.

<sup>249</sup>Nichaldas C. Vazirani to Patel, 27 Nov.1946, 132-133 *SPC*, Vol. 3.

<sup>250</sup>Patel emphasised that Gandhi was walking amongst *asuras* or demons. Patel to Wavell. 22 Nov. 1946, *SPC*, Vol. 3, 175 encl. 1. Wavell and Patel were hardly on friendly terms with one another. While Patel viewed Wavell as pro-Muslim League, Wavell saw Patel as "a tough, determined party boss: attractive in his own way but ruthless and a communalist. He is strongly influenced by the capitalists and lives in the pocket of one of them, G.D. Birla." Wavell, unsigned note, undated, *The Transfer of Power*, Vol.9, 1009. In his diary, Wavell wrote "he [Patel] has more balance than

were receiving such tremendous portions of aid that they were selling them on the Black Market. Bihari Muslims were getting he contended three times the ration of Noakhali victims and two times what they would normally eat in regular times.<sup>251</sup> Colonel Gill, formerly of the Indian National Army turned volunteer aid worker, wanted to proceed to Bihar to lend his assistance to refugee relief. Patel prevented him from going, believing that no useful work could be done there.<sup>252</sup>

Despite his negative attitude, Patel was not completely devoid of his sense of duty to Muslim refugees. In a letter to Sri Krishna Sinha, he asserted that Muslim refugees must be accorded safety and returned home.

"Vigourous efforts must be made to remove their apprehensions about any possible danger to life or property in case of their return to their villages. Mere increase in the police force is not enough. The Hindu villagers must be persuaded to change their attitude and they must give an assurance to the refugees for their safety."<sup>253</sup>

Patel's language is revealing for he maintained that Hindus were innately capable of being reasoned with, amenable to persuasion, and more often devoid of fanaticism. The behaviour of Bihari Hindus was the culmination of League-induced atrocities elsewhere. Therefore, Hindus were not entirely to blame as they were retaliating. Furthermore, Patel posited that "the mild Hindu also, when driven to desperation, can retaliate as brutally as a fanatic Muslim."<sup>254</sup>

Congress work amongst Muslim communities was about non-existent yet all the more necessary at the time. Likewise, the growing communal atmosphere that gripped Congress in the late 1920s and early 1930s was more apparent during the years leading up to independence. Astute observers such as Jayaprakash Narayan (1902-1980), a Congress Socialist and political opponent of Patel argued

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Nehru though he is even more communal and anti-Muslim in his outlook." Penderel Moon, ed., *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 376.

<sup>251</sup>Patel to A.V. Thakkar, 17 Dec. 1946, *PBC*, Vol.4, 225.

<sup>252</sup>Patel to Gill, 10 Feb.1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 227.

<sup>253</sup>*RPCSD*, 2 Feb 1947, 170-171 #3.

<sup>254</sup>Patel to Cripps, 15 December 1946, *SPC*, Vol. 3, 313-4.

that Hindu communalism had to be removed from Congress and steps taken to improve the economic deprivation of the Muslim masses suffering under immense poverty and to re-establish contact work.<sup>255</sup> Sarat Chandra Bose (1889-1950), a prominent Bengali left-wing politician, also fought against communal violence and politics.<sup>256</sup> In his opinion, "communal frenzy is not the monopoly of the Muslim Leaguers; it has also overtaken large sections of Hindus, both Congressites and Mahasabhaites."<sup>257</sup> Another observer asserted that Congress's inactivity with the Muslim community had helped to foster a belief that Congress did not tolerate the existence of Islam in India. This created a serious vacuum which the League filled with detrimental results.<sup>258</sup> This gulf had widened so considerably that Patel even commented that the time had come to recommence work amongst the Muslim community. He observed,

"The results of elections in U.P., Bihar, and other Provinces have shown that there is a good field for work amongst Muslims all over and if Congressmen will work honestly for communal unity, there is excellent opportunity for reviving the old atmosphere of Hindu-Muslim unity all over India."<sup>259</sup>

Patel's flaw remained that he gave more lip-service to this sentiment. In the past, particularly the Mass-Contacts Campaigns of 1937, when the opportunity was ripe, very little was done to increase such activity or fund it. Furthermore, League activists had been so successful in spreading their propaganda that by the mid-1940s, the idea of Pakistan had become more powerful, rendering what contact work could be done minimal.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> AICC Papers G-36/1946, 13.

<sup>256</sup> For a lengthy biographical study of Sarat and Subhas Chandra Bose, see Leonard A. Gordon, *Brothers Against the Raj: A Biography of Indian Nationalists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

<sup>257</sup> SC Bose to Patel, 27 May, 1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 45.

<sup>258</sup> Mohammad Enayatullah to Balkrishna Keskar, 14 July 1946, AICC Papers G-23/1946, 29.

<sup>259</sup> Patel to Shanti Prasad Jain, 26 March 1946, *PBC*, Vol.4, 67.

<sup>260</sup> The Quit India Movement initiated by Gandhi and Congress in August of 1942 led to a full scale crackdown by the Government of India. All Congress leaders were thrown into jail allowing the League to spread its propaganda without any let or hindrance from Congress.

The interim government was inaugurated on 2 September 1946 and consisted primarily of Congress leaders. One month passed before Jinnah gave his approval for Liaqat Ali Khan (1895-1951) and other leading League members to join the ministry at the Viceroy, Lord Wavell's request. The League's goal was to obstruct the running of the government, to prove that Hindus and Muslims could neither work nor co-exist together; therefore justifying the creation of a separate Muslim state. As Finance Minister, Liaqat Ali Khan restricted funding for various departments and ministries. Similarly, League ministers would attempt to stir up controversies which would inflame Congressite Government Ministers such as Patel.

During his tenure in the interim government, Patel held the posts of Home Minister, Minister for Information and Broadcasting (MIB), and within months prior to independence, States Minister. As MIB, Patel oversaw All India Radio's (AIR) programming. The League focused on AIR's use of Hindustani, a language which Gandhi described as a syncretic mix of the most common Hindi and Urdu words spoken by a majority of people in north India which could be written in either the Devanagari or Persian scripts. Proponents of Urdu, however perceived any promotion of Hindustani, which they believed was a pseudonym for Hindi, as a displacement of Urdu and the diminution of their culture and language. By early 1947, Liaqat Ali Khan adopted the Urdu-Hindustani controversy to stir up communal trouble with Congress and particularly Patel. The latter assured that broadcasts in Hindustani brought elements of both languages together where a specific use of vocabulary was chosen by members of a committee consisting of both Hindus and Muslims.<sup>261</sup> Ghazanfar Ali Khan, a prominent League member in the cabinet asserted that Urdu already filled the role of a common language more than Hindustani ever would. He further argued that it was an attempt to displace

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<sup>261</sup>Patel to Liaqat Ali Khan, 8 January 1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 60.

Urdu with Hindi under the pseudonym of Hindustani.<sup>262</sup> Patel stated,

"You have seen that the controversy is restricted to the realm of the literary class of people who want to mould this policy according to their taste and liking...We have to cater to the taste and look to the viewpoint of the common listener who does not sit in a drawing room or in library, but who has got a cheap radio..<sup>263</sup>

Yet merely two years after independence, Patel stated that Hindi rather than Hindustani would become the official national language of India, utilizing solely the Devanagari script.<sup>264</sup> To ensure that it would attain its due position, the Government would also actively promote its usage. Patel, with a supportive Congress behind him, faced little opposition with most of the Muslim League leadership having migrated to Pakistan. It also gave further credence to the League's suspicion that the promotion of Hindi was the Congress's original intention.<sup>265</sup>

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry was an excellent platform from which to promote communal harmony through film and radio, given the tense atmosphere prevailing at the time. Patel however was not prepared, despite his earlier statement that Mass Contacts should be restored, to use his ministry for such propaganda. He stated the government had no plans whatsoever for the promotion of communal harmony.<sup>266</sup>

Patel's irritation with Muslim politicians did not stop with the League. His relations with Congress Muslims, particularly Maulana Azad, were generally tense.<sup>267</sup> An added aspect of this tension was that many of Congress's leading

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<sup>262</sup>G.A. Khan to Patel, 21 Jan. 1947, *SPC* Vol.4, 68-9.

<sup>263</sup>11 March 1947, *Legislative Assembly Debates*, Vol.1, 1947, 1721.

<sup>264</sup>Patel to Munshi, 19 Aug.1949, *RPCSD*. Vol.11, 246.

<sup>265</sup>Following independence, Nehru also witnessed the growing trend of communalism in his home state of Uttar Pradesh with much dismay. The government of Uttar Pradesh in the 1950s sought to make Hindi the official language of the state. See Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, 150-151.

<sup>266</sup>*Legislative Assembly Debates*, 5 March 1947, Vol.2, 1947, 5112.

<sup>267</sup>Years later, Azad accused Patel of being one of the first Congress leaders to agree to partition.



Muslim figures were socialists, a political creed which Patel had a strong aversion to. The Sardar, during the years prior to partition was critical of Azad's tenure as Congress President (1940-45). He argued that Azad operated like a despot, incapable of allowing for varying opinions.<sup>268</sup> He complained to the Maulana that Congress's reputation suffered greatly because of the latter's decision to select and spend money on certain Muslim candidates who proved to be unreliable.<sup>269</sup> After seats were contested in provincial elections all over British India, appeals were made to Azad as Congress President to overturn decisions of the Congress Parliamentary Board on the selection of particular Congress candidates. In one case, Azad unilaterally overturned the Board's decision, thereby in Patel's mind undermining the latter's authority as chairman. Patel threatened to resign from the Parliamentary Board as well as from the Working Committee. He asserted acerbically, "I should be grateful if you will relieve me without any delay as my continuance in the present state is likely to give me constant mental trouble and anxiety."<sup>270</sup> As Congress was preparing to enter the interim government, Azad at the behest of a fellow nationalist Muslim, Habibur Rehman, argued that Congress should allow for more space for Congress Muslims in the cabinet by having one seat vacated either by Sarat Chandra Bose or Rajendra Prasad, both of whom were Hindu. Patel adamantly refused to agree to any such suggestion.<sup>271</sup> Congress ran Muslim candidates such as Maulana Daud, at the insistence of Azad, in joint Hindu and Muslim electorates. However, Daud soon after winning defected to the Muslim League leaving Patel disgruntled and further mistrustful. He informed Nehru that many Hindu votes were responsible for electing Daud and his

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Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, . This book was controversial and criticized by both Nehru and Patel's biographers such as Sarvepalli Gopal and Rajmohan Gandhi. The latter wrote a reply to Azad's republished book which he entitled, *India Win Lies*.

<sup>268</sup> See Patel to Gandhi, 24 Feb. 1946, *PBC*, Vol.4, 160.

<sup>269</sup> Patel to Azad, 21 Dec. 1945, *SPC*, Vol.2, 47.

<sup>270</sup> Patel to Azad, 23 Feb. 1946, *SPC*, Vol.2, 59-61.

<sup>271</sup> Patel to Gandhi 23 Aug. 1946, *PBC*, Vol.4, 243.

defection to the League would only make it difficult to trust 'the best of them'.<sup>272</sup> Lastly, Patel vehemently objected to Azad's proposal that Asaf Ali (1888-1953) be appointed leader of the Central Assembly. He argued that this was unjustified since there were only two Muslims voted in through joint electorates by a majority of non-Muslims.<sup>273</sup> Patel argued that Congress made such decisions based on merit, not on communal considerations, yet in this case, the latter seemed to prevail, for Asaf Ali was a respected member of Congress.

Political rivalries with Muslims within or out of Congress aside, what communalised and worsened Patel's attitude was the creation of Pakistan and the massacres of Hindus and Sikhs in West Pakistan. He viewed Jinnah and his Muslim League as India's version of Hitler and the Nazi party.<sup>274</sup> He was highly sensitive about the condition of Hindus and Sikhs living in Pakistan under Jinnah's government.<sup>275</sup> A year after Pakistan's independence, Patel noted, "the hysterical search for fifth columnists which seems to have been started in the typical Hitlerian fashion has the appearance of another excuse to drive out the comparatively few non-Muslims that are left there."<sup>276</sup> Following the Pakistani-aided attack by Muslim tribesmen on Kashmir in 1947, Patel quickly concluded that the invasion was "going to be true to Nazi pattern."<sup>277</sup> The Pakistani leaders were clearly connected to the worst stereotypes that Patel and other Hindu leaders could find. Given all the allusions to the state of fanaticism and nazism prevalent in Pakistan and to its Muslim population there, what then was the status of Muslims in India?

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<sup>272</sup>Patel to Nehru, 19 July 1946, *SPC*, Vol.3, 74.

<sup>273</sup>23 Dec. 1945, *RPCSD*, Vol.6, #72, 67.

<sup>274</sup>According to Mountbatten, Patel believed that Jinnah wanted to establish a fascist dictatorship with "ultimate designs against the Dominion of India." Mountbatten to Cripps, 9 July 1947, *TOF*, Vol.12, 34.

<sup>275</sup>Although Jinnah held the symbolic position of Governor-general, he also directed the affairs of Liaquat Ali Khan's Government based in Karachi, Pakistan's first capital.

<sup>276</sup>Patel to Provincial Premiers, 15 Oct. 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6 #363, point #8, 443.

<sup>277</sup>Patel to Baldev Singh, 7 Oct. 1947, *SPC*, Vol.1 #59, 57.

Since the creation of Pakistan, before and after it was proclaimed an Islamic Republic, Indian Muslims have inherited to this day the reputation of being fifth columnists and supporters of a 'rogue' and enemy state, by virtue of their religion. Whilst Nehru and Gandhi stressed the majority's obligation to demonstrate its goodwill and protection of its minorities, Patel emphasized that it was the burden of the minorities to show their loyalty to the state and the majority. Within a year after India's independence, amid the partition massacres and millions of refugees languishing in camps outside Delhi, Patel perceived Indian Muslims to be troublemakers, disloyal citizens and as open receptacles to unbridled fanaticism. Patel's comments were often blunt. "I am a frank man. I say bitter things to Hindus and Muslims alike... I maintain, as I have said a number of times, that *I am a friend of Muslims. If Muslims do not accept me as such they also act like madmen.* They don't seem to understand the right or wrong [emphasis mine]." He advised them that they must forget the evils of the two-nation theory that were taught to them.<sup>278</sup>

Patel was exposed to the millions of refugees that flooded into New Delhi and their tragic fate. He believed that the League was responsible for the plight of the refugees, first with Direct Action Day on 16 August 1946 and the partition atrocities against Hindus and Sikhs in West Punjab. He insisted that any acts of cruelty against Muslims in East Punjab were rooted in retaliation from what was occurring west of the Indo-Pakistani border.<sup>279</sup> Patel wrote to Nehru that the refugees' mass psychology was unwilling to tolerate the conciliatory approach of the Indian government. They were demanding to know why so many Muslims were in positions of power in the police and civil administration. Patel believed that the only way to mollify public anger was to persuade the Pakistani

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<sup>278</sup>Speech at Bombay, 16 Jan. 1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 197.

<sup>279</sup>Patel to Patiala, 14 Nov. 1947, *SPC*, Vol. 4, 333 and Patel to Porter, 19 Dec.1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 505.

government to suppress lawlessness.<sup>280</sup> During the partition massacres, Patel was notified that families he knew in Sind had been stripped of everything they owned and beaten.<sup>281</sup> After listening to such stories, he became doubly convinced that Hindus and Sikhs could no longer live in Pakistan for their safety was compromised and that above all the Pakistani government was incapable and unwilling to protect its minorities.<sup>282</sup> "I am quite certain that India's interest lies in getting all of her men and women from across the border and sending all Muslims out from East Punjab."<sup>283</sup> According to Patel then, all of India's men and women were Sikhs and Hindus while Pakistan's people were Muslim. Patel was so convinced of this position that when Gandhi proposed to go and visit Punjab to help quell the violence, Patel asked him

"What would you do by visiting the Punjab? You will not be able to quench the conflagration [sic] there. The Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims cannot anymore live together there. Hindus, if at all, may agree to stay with them. But that might be in the remote future. But it is absolutely unimaginable if the Sikhs would be prepared to stay together with Muslims even in [the] distant future; or, at any time, in the future."<sup>284</sup>

Patel laboured side by side with Gandhi for close to 25 years and had seen what kind of peace the latter had been able to bring to many situations, including the Noakhali outbreak just the year before. Hence, it is a clear illustration as to Patel's sense of futility in being able to bring about peace through Gandhian methods, even by Gandhi himself! It also demonstrated his lack of confidence in the potential for communal amity and perhaps an unwillingness to encourage it. Lastly, inherent in his letter was the belief that Hindus might one day be able to live with Muslims for the former were capable of being reasonable and tolerant

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<sup>280</sup>Patel to Nehru, 2 Sept. 1947, *SPC*, Vol. 4, 318.

<sup>281</sup>Popatlal to Patel, 12 Jan. 1948, *SPC*, Vol. 6, 246-247. Enclosure.

<sup>282</sup>Patel to Popatlal, 20 Jan. 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 248 enclosure. Nehru nevertheless believed that Liaqat Ali Khan and other League leaders in Pakistan were doing their utmost to quell the violence.

<sup>283</sup>Speech at Amritsar, 30 Sept. 1947, *PBC*, Vol.2, 134.

<sup>284</sup>Patel to Gandhi, 28 Aug.1947, *PBC*, Vol.5, 220.

enough to forgive past transgressions. However, he rules out the possibility entirely for Sikhs, for as we shall see later, they were also 'communally-minded'.

In Patel's perspective, it was of paramount importance that the Pakistani government take the initiative to suppress lawlessness. With waves of refugees still pouring in, he masterminded ways in which to persuade them to treat refugees leaving Pakistan properly. Patel knew that Hindus and Sikhs going east were being restricted in what they were being allowed to take with them. He believed that the only way to stop it was to do the same to Muslims migrating westward.<sup>285</sup> News of atrocities brought by refugees coming in brought new tales of misery and hatred for Muslims. Patel did very little to contain the spread of such stories. His antipathy for Muslims was so intense that even his longtime colleague C. Rajagopalachari, then Governor of West Bengal, observed, "You are sending Punjab refugees all over to spread the doctrine of hatred."<sup>286</sup> Notwithstanding, Congress's avowed policy that equal rights and citizenship be granted to all Indians regardless of religion, Patel saw his priorities in terms of housing and resettling Hindu and Sikh refugees first.<sup>287</sup> Economic conditions in East Pakistan were becoming so grim that both Hindus and Muslims were migrating westwards toward India. However, given India's overwhelming situation with Punjabi refugees, Patel asserted that Pakistan would have to make adequate space for Muslims from India, in other words that he would have to deport Muslims if the influx of Hindus remained as high as it did.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup>Patel to Nehru, 23 Oct.1947, *SPC*, Vol. 4, 281.

<sup>286</sup>Rajaji to Patel, 4 Sept.1947, *SPC*, Vol.5, 64-5.

<sup>287</sup>Patel to Nehru, 4 May 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 318-319.

<sup>288</sup>Patel to Nehru, 19 Oct.1948, *SPC*, Vol.7, 260. Nehru responded that such a suggestion would make every Muslim feel like an alien and take away any claim India had to be a secular state and would moreover affect its standing internationally. He also inquired, "How would one pick out Muslims, who are undoubtedly citizens of India, to be sent to East Bengal?" Nehru to Patel, 27 Oct. 1948, *SPC*, Vol.7, 670-671.

Patel was not altogether sympathetic towards Muslims in New Delhi either. He felt that rehabilitating Muslims returning to their homes in New Delhi posed a security risk while there was still such little progress in rehabilitating Hindu and Sikh refugees.<sup>289</sup> He also contended however that those Muslims who had remained in Old Delhi were perfectly safe. Yet, Azad speaking for Muslim shopkeepers residing in Old Delhi asserted that they were being continually harassed. Patel's investigators assured him that safety in the area had improved considerably. Azad argued that these false assurances were contradicted by cases where Muslims were still being attacked. In one particular incident, a Muslim was stabbed in a government office. The Sardar never replied.<sup>290</sup>

Varying perceptions of Patel amongst Muslims and Hindus also promoted his reputation as a communalist. Many Hindus believed that Patel would deal with Muslims harshly if Pakistan misbehaved, thus rendering Indian Muslims *de facto* hostages. Governor Jenkins, while believing that this may not have been true, posited that the story represented the attitude Hindus hoped and Muslims feared Patel would take up.<sup>291</sup> One Muslim newspaper portrayed Patel as Hitler delivering Muslims to Sikh murderers to be massacred. Others alleged that Patel coolly watched the slaughter of Muslims in Delhi without lifting a finger.<sup>292</sup>

Accusations against Patel were mounting by the summer of 1947. Gandhi found himself defending Patel's character from these damaging characterisations. "You do not know the Sardar. He is not vindictive or communal. But he does not share my belief that non-violence can conquer everything. He used to be a whole-

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<sup>289</sup> Patel to Rajendra Prasad, 18 May 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 267.

<sup>290</sup> Azad to Patel, Dec.1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 368-370. See also Abul Kalam Azad, *India Wins Freedom: the complete version*, reprint (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1995), 232. While Rajmohan Gandhi has criticised many of Azad's statements and allegations, he never contradicted Azad's criticism of Patel's lack of interest in the welfare of Delhi Muslims.

<sup>291</sup> Jenkins to Mountbatten, 16 June 1947, *SPC*, Vol. 4, 141.

<sup>292</sup> *SPC*, Vol.7, 80.

hogger once. He is no more."<sup>293</sup> Another common belief was that Patel wanted Muslims to leave India. Gandhi responded that "the Sardar was indignant at the suggestion. But he told me that he had reasons to suspect that the vast majority of the Muslims in India were not loyal to India. For such people it was better to go to Pakistan."<sup>294</sup> Perhaps without realising it, Gandhi confirmed this suspicion, for if Patel believed that the vast majority of Muslims were sympathetic to Pakistan, then he evidently thought most Muslims were therefore traitors who should go to Pakistan. Gandhi attempted to assure the public that neither Patel nor Nehru could dominate anyone in the cabinet as they were merely individuals. He stressed that they were the people's servants, and if the people were displeased they could vote them out.<sup>295</sup> However Gandhi's rhetoric often lay in the realm of theory, for no one entertained any doubts that either Patel or Nehru would ever be removed given their stature in Indian political life at the time.

The assertion and propagation of national identities was of primary importance to the Congress High Command, particularly Patel and Nehru. This included the denigration of any regional assertions of identity such as Tamil and Telegu linguistic nationalism in Madras Presidency or the division of Bombay Presidency into the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat.<sup>296</sup> Patel's was convinced that for minorities to be trusted, they had to openly show loyalty to the state and not criticize it. Namely, Muslims had to shed any desire for separate electorates.

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<sup>293</sup>Interview with Arthur Moore, 10 July 1947, *CWMG*, Vol.88, 311.

<sup>294</sup>*CWMG*, Vol.89, 198.

<sup>295</sup>*CWMG*, vol.90 13 Jan 1948.

<sup>296</sup>In a speech at Madras on 2 February 1949, Patel told his Tamil-speaking audience that they would have to start speaking in Hindi. "It will not belong when you will have to speak in your *own national language* [Hindi] [emphasis mine]. Otherwise you will bring the whole country down." *PBC*, Vol.3, 3. Anti-Hindi agitations have been particularly vigorous in Tamil Nadu who have opposed the imposition of Hindi as a form of North Indian cultural imperialism. Following independence, there were also calls by Maharashtrian and Gujarati nationalists to divide Bombay. Patel, in response asserted "Although our freedom is hardly a year-old, we are thinking in terms of Maharashtrians, Gujaratis, etc. It is poisonous growth. You must avoid it. It is only the foolish and the ignorant who think along those lines." Speech at Nagpur, 11 March 1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 276.

He argued that while minorities needed to be protected, they could not hold the majority hostage or oppose it. If they opposed the majority then it would be inevitable that they would not hold any share in the government.<sup>297</sup> Therefore holding any alternate political views was inimical to a minority politician's political future.

Patel also maintained a close watch on the South Asian Press. In the pre-independence period, *Dawn*, owned by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was a virulent critic of Congress and reported speeches of prominent League officials, yet its highly inflammatory communal propaganda provoked little intervention from the British.<sup>298</sup> In contrast, *The Hindustan Times* often criticized the government and the League, and frequently caught the attention of British censors. In one instance, Lord Wavell felt that *The Hindustan Times* deserved censure for a particular cartoon. In defending the *Hindustan Times*, Patel argued that *Dawn* was generally more virulent and offensive. Patel's penchant for criticizing Jinnah's newspaper did not go unnoticed. Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, observed that while Patel was the most sensible and realistic and balanced person in the Viceroy's cabinet, he noted that Patel "probably regards *Dawn* as being the only paper which really requires restraining. It would, however, be hard to deny that he is right so far as he goes."<sup>299</sup> Lord Wavell once commented in his journal, "Earlier on I had seen Patel who was frankly communal as usual. To him control of the Press means suppression of *Dawn*, prohibition of private armies, the dispersal of the Muslim Guards, and the rehabilitation of East Bengal only; although of course he professes to be impartial."<sup>300</sup> Immediately following independence, Patel tolerated little opposition and ordered that disloyal papers be

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<sup>297</sup>Speech on 26 May, 1949, *PBC*, Vol.3, 155.

<sup>298</sup>Patel to Wavell, 14 Feb.1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 6.

<sup>299</sup>Pethick-Lawrence to Wavell, 22 Nov.1946, *Transfer of Power*, Vol.9, 145 #78.

<sup>300</sup>Journal Entry dated 26 November 1946, *Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal*, 383.



targeted for press censorship.<sup>301</sup> Even two years following independence, Patel was still targeting "disloyal" elements amongst the Muslim Press. In one Muslim magazine, Hindus were referred to as *kafirs* or infidels. Patel was dismayed to find out that even some nationalist Muslims were affiliated with this publication. Following the removal of the offending passages, Patel remarked to Nehru that while the situation had been settled 'amicably', "it was rather unfortunate that some of our nationalist friends should get mixed up like this in religious fanaticism."<sup>302</sup>

The expression of loyalty by minorities was paramount for Patel who believed that a significant proportion of Indian Muslims, especially those in government service, supported the creation of Pakistan.<sup>303</sup> A year after independence, Patel asserted, "Each one of us must realize our responsibility to our neighbours and our loyalty to the state. *There is no room in India for divided loyalties or conflicting allegiances.*"<sup>304</sup> To Syama Prasad Mookerjee (d.1953), leader of the Hindu Mahasabha during the late 1940s, Patel wrote, "As regards Muslims, I entirely agree with you as to the dangerous possibilities inherent in the presence in India of a section of disloyal elements."<sup>305</sup> They were seen not only as disloyal elements but as a threat to the state.<sup>306</sup> Patel continued, "Here also, we are taking such measures as we can consistent with the needs of security and the secular nature of our State."<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>301</sup>V. Shankar to Morarji Desai, Oct. 4, 1947, *SPC*, Vol.4, 415.

<sup>302</sup>Patel to Nehru, 30 Nov. 1949, *SPC*, Vol.8, 363.

<sup>303</sup>Speech in Delhi, 11 Aug.1947, *PBC*, Vol.2, 11.

<sup>304</sup>Speech on 14 Aug. 1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 31.

<sup>305</sup>Patel to Syama Prasad Mookerjee, 8 July 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 324.

<sup>306</sup>Nehru once asserted in the Constituent Assembly, "I know for a fact that quite a large number of Muslims are very loyal to the State here, and I know for a fact that a very large number of Hindus are disloyal to the State. . .the mere fact of a person's religion does not make a person loyal or disloyal to a state; and it is [a very] wrong way of describing a person or considering a question on those lines." *Legislative Assembly Debates*, 7 April 1948, 3360.

<sup>307</sup>Patel to Mookerjee, 18 July 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 324.

“One fact is indisputable. Many Muslims in India have helped for the creation of Pakistan. How can one believe that they can change overnight? The Muslims say that they are loyal citizens. Therefore, why should anybody doubt their bonafides? To them, I would say, "Why do you ask us? Search your own conscience?"<sup>308</sup>

Three days later he asserted,

“I am a true friend of Muslims although I am dubbed as their greatest enemy. I believe in plain speaking....I want to tell them frankly that mere declarations of loyalty to the Indian Union will not help them at this critical juncture. They must give practicable proofs of their declarations.”<sup>309</sup>

Patel's desire was that Indian Muslims prove themselves by criticizing Pakistan over the Kashmir issue and supporting his government in whatever they did. Later in the year, Patel's negative attitude seemed to subside. He warned against any vigilante action taken by Hindu communalists against disloyal Muslims. "It is nobody's individual concern to deal with disloyal Muslims. They must be treated as your own brothers. If you think you can go on constantly troubling loyal Muslims because they happen to be Muslims, then our freedom is not worthwhile."<sup>310</sup> While Patel was mindful of any disloyalty, he was staunchly against any sort of vigilantism that would undermine his authority as Home Minister or indirectly criticize his ability to control disloyal elements.

Patel was placed in charge of the monumental task of integrating approximately 565 semi-autonomous princely states scattered throughout India into the Indian Union and under New Delhi's control.<sup>311</sup> These states comprised one-third of Southern Asia's territory and two-fifths of its population. While they managed their internal affairs under the 'advice' of the Resident, the Government of India's Foreign Department assumed responsibility for each states' foreign

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<sup>308</sup>Speech at Calcutta, 3 Jan.1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 18-19.

<sup>309</sup>Speech at Lucknow, 6 Jan. 1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 191.

<sup>310</sup>This passage was taken from a speech in Gwalior, where Hindu communal activity was rampant. Speech, 4 Nov. 1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 52-53.

<sup>311</sup>See V.P. Menon, *Integration of the Indian States* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited, 1985); originally published as *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States*, 1956.

affairs, defence and communications. By August 15, 1947, Patel succeeded in convincing a majority of princes with the help of Lord Mountbatten to accede to the Government of India. The arrangement called for the Indian government to take over its predecessor's duties until a new arrangement could be made between the rulers and the dominion's government.<sup>312</sup> Yet Hyderabad, Junagadh and Jammu & Kashmir refused to accede to either India or Pakistan by the transfer of power. The first two states although ruled by Muslim leaders, were landlocked within India and predominantly Hindu in population. Hyderabad's ruler, the Nizam sought to become independent while Junagadh surrounded by other Hindu rulers who acceded to India opted to transfer power to Pakistan. Kashmir, whose population consisted predominantly of Muslims, was ruled by a Hindu Rajput prince.

Patel viewed Hyderabad's case as an opportunity for Indian Muslims to demonstrate their loyalty to the newly independent country and its country. Following months of Hyderabad state-supported terrorism against its Hindu population through forced conversions, temple razing and murder, he ordered the military to assume control over the state's administration in June 1948 with the Police Action. Patel believed that about 800,000 Muslims left Indian territory to Hyderabad and registered as refugees and maintained that roughly 10,400 of these people were known to have joined the state's army and police.<sup>313</sup> He also posited that others returned to India but were being watched by provincial governments.<sup>314</sup> This confirmed his belief that a great many of India's Muslims were an untrustworthy, disloyal lot. Assessing the situation, Patel argued that Hyderabad

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<sup>312</sup>For an in depth study on the integration of the princely states, see Ian Copland, *The Princes if India in the Endgame of Empire, 1917-1947* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>313</sup>*Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. VI pt. 1, 18 Aug.1948, 366.

<sup>314</sup>*Constituent Assembly Debates*, Vol. VI pt. 1, 10 Aug. 1948, 106.

Muslims were at best uncooperative, distrustful and thoroughly shaken.<sup>315</sup> Yet some popular Muslim reaction throughout India cheered Delhi's action. Seeing this, Patel was heartened by this expression of support for the government's action against Hyderabad.<sup>316</sup>

Notwithstanding, there were Muslim critics who viewed the Hyderabad police action with some trepidation, specifically that it showed the intolerant mood of Congress. Moreover, it demonstrated to what lengths Patel would go to crush any Muslim dissent. One such critic was Maulana Hasrat Mohani, a Muslim Urdu poet-politician with communist leanings. Patel sought to pass the Scheduled Securities Bill for Hyderabad on 8 February 1949. He explained that the Nizam of Hyderabad's government granted an illegal loan of 20 crores<sup>317</sup> rupees to Pakistan without the knowledge of the Indian government, therefore committing a breach of the standstill agreement signed between the two governments. Patel knew that the Hyderabad Government was arming itself and in order to fund its adventurism was selling its holdings of Government of India securities. Sensing that this would have a detrimental effect on the Indian market, an ordinance was passed which prohibited the sales of Government of India Securities and included the 20 crores in securities given to Pakistan. Mohani argued that the bill attempted to legalize an inherently illegal action by the Government of India. He asserted that the standstill agreement was broken by the Indian Government by sending in its troops for the Police Action. When the transfer of securities was made, he contended that there was no objection made by the Reserve Bank of India. Essentially, he affirmed that the bill was being passed because Congress maintained a majority and could roll over any opposition with any legislation they wanted to pass whether it was moral or immoral. Patel's simple reply was that he

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<sup>315</sup>Patel to Nehru, 5 June 1949, *SPC*, Vol.7, 321.

<sup>316</sup>Patel to Suhrawardhy, 28 Sept. 1948, *SPC*, Vol.7, 254.

<sup>317</sup>One crore equals 10,000,000.

did not see any justification in responding to "irrelevant ramblings." He was uninterested in answering the charges of someone whom he considered a fanatic and a communist.

Hyderabad was not the only princely state ruled by a Muslim ruler to cause problems for Patel and the Government. When the Nawab of Junagadh opted to accede to Pakistan, two smaller states linked to Junagadh, Mangrol and Manavdar also decided to accede to Pakistan although originally opting to join India. The Indian government intervened and placed the two states under the control of managers. Mohani asserted that although he did not support Pakistan, these states had the right to opt legally for Pakistan if they so desired. He also criticized Patel for not pensioning off these rulers like the other princes and emphasized that these managers were to take care of private property which rightfully belonged to Manavdar and Mangrol's deposed leaders.<sup>318</sup> Patel delivered a stern reply

"We are a responsible House, a sovereign legislature. It is not a meeting of Ulemas or Maulanas, or Congress Committees or the Pakistan League, or anything of that kind...[The Maulana] is carried away by his prejudices, when he says that I am responsible for partition or Pandit Jawaharlal is responsible, God knows whether those who were not for Partition were not really responsible for this. It is difficult to say whether those who advocated against partition did not want this country to be partitioned, not in two parts but in many parts. Therefore it is difficult to understand such people. They say one thing but mean another...He complained about Junagadh: now he complains about Manavdar and Mangrol: and he complained, in the case of Hyderabad, but never any other State!"<sup>319</sup>

Clearly Patel was pointing out that members of the Legislative Assembly were not meant to act like a bunch of irresponsible religious fanatics which he associated predominantly with ulemas, Maulanas and the Pakistan League, but also included

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<sup>318</sup>Princely rulers, in exchange for acceding their states to India, were given annual pensions and allowed to retain their palaces as private property. Many of the descendants of these Indian princes have today opened their palaces up for tourism.

<sup>319</sup>*Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates*. Volume 1, part 11, 1949, 227-243.

Congress Committees so as not to appear too partisan. Patel questioned Muslims like Mohani who focused sole attention on the plight of these Muslim-ruled states but mentioned little about Kashmir.<sup>320</sup> The passage above alluded to the fact that Patel distrusted the bonafides of those nationalist Muslims who claimed that they were against Pakistan, yet found themselves supporting the rights of Indian Muslim Princes over the decisions of the Indian government.

Following the migration of Hindus and Sikhs eastwards in 1947, a section of Sikh politicians veered towards outright separatism, in essence the establishment of a Sikh state. This group was headed by Master Tara Singh, who was known for his rather hardline stance against Muslims and Pakistan. The Sikh community predominantly resided in Punjab and were tremendously affected by partition. Fearing a similar political oppression from Hindu politicians like they did from Muslim politicians, some Sikhs sought political autonomy. However, still suffering from the fallout of independence, the Government of India was unwilling to tolerate any form of parochialism which was seen as the root cause of the partition massacres. Patel asserted to Nehru, "you know the Sikh mentality very well. There is always a tendency and willingness to listen to extreme communalism."<sup>321</sup> In a speech in Patiala, one of the premier Sikh princely states of India, he admonished that, "this is not the time to involve ourselves in needless disputes, nor we can we afford to follow the mirage of many stans like Khalistan, Sikhistan or jatistan. If we are not careful...we can only succeed in turning India into a pagalistan [a land of the insane]."<sup>322</sup> Therefore, anyone demonstrating

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<sup>320</sup>Mushirul Hasan asserts that Mohani was an outstanding Urdu poet-politician who died in penury. He was at times reckless and inconsistent "but the credentials of a man who had joined the *swadeshi* movement in 1909, introduced the 'Complete Independence' resolution in 1921 and chaired the reception committee of the first communist conference held at Kanpur in 1925 were unchallengeable." Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, 195.

<sup>321</sup>Patel to Nehru, 17 September 1949, *SPC*, Vol.9, 166.

<sup>322</sup>Speech at Patiala, 22 Oct. 1947, *PBC*, Vol.2, 59.

anything but pure loyalty to the Indian state was deemed 'insane'.<sup>323</sup> Patel claimed to be a friend of the Sikh community, as he did with other communities, including Muslims, however he was not always sensitive to their religious concerns and sensibilities. During question period in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian parliament, a Sikh member, Sardar Hukam Singh aggressively demanded from Patel if a palanquin carrying the *Granth Saheb*, the Sikh Holy Book, was attacked in a lathi charge because it was being illegally carried out into the street. Patel's reply was, "Oh no. No palanquin was lathi-charged. There has been no injury to any palanquin nor has any palanquin been sent to the hospital."<sup>324</sup> Patel's answer to minorities' religious concerns was sarcasm.

Patel continued to chair the Congress Parliamentary Board (CPB) following independence.<sup>325</sup> Two cases before that body further illustrated Patel's mentality towards other minorities. A Christian candidate named Pillai was rejected because of having leprosy, but he accused the CPB of rejecting him because he was Christian. Patel wrote to Madras Congress leader Kamaraj Nadar that Pillai "belongs to a minority community and therefore suffers evidently from communal complex [sic]."<sup>326</sup> Another case emerged where a Parsi was rejected because of his religious affiliation as Nariman was in the 1930s. Patel's counter was that "You wanted us to interfere in this matter because Shri Awari happens to be a Parsi. To us, he is a pure and simple Congressman and we have never recognized him as a Parsi. Communal considerations do not affect us nor should

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<sup>323</sup>*Paagal* or *pagal* means 1. adj. insane, mad. 2. crazed; rabid (a dog). 3. foolish. 4. m. a madman. 5. a fool. See R.S. McGregor, ed., *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 619.

<sup>324</sup>*Parliamentary Debates*, 12 Feb. 1950, Vol.1 Pt.1, 1950, 365.

<sup>325</sup>The Congress Parliamentary Board selected candidates from all over India to represent Congress. This board was started in the mid 1930s following the Government of India Act of 1935 which allowed for provincial elections in 1936-37. The Board consisted of Patel, Maulana Azad and Rajendra Prasad.

<sup>326</sup>Patel to Kamaraj Nadar, 30 Dec. 1945, *SPC*, Vol.2, 189-190.

they affect you in judging the merits of such cases."<sup>327</sup>

The assassination of Mahatma Gandhi on 30 January, 1948, became a controversial aspect of Patel's career as Home Minister. Although carried out by extreme members of the Poona Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Hindu communalists amongst the RSS and members of the political party, Hindu Mahasabha were jailed and interned after the backlash caused by Gandhi's assassination. Much of this was at the insistence of Nehru who had a special vengeance for Hindu communalists. Patel's position on them was somewhat ambiguous.

Patel believed that the Hindu community was in dire need of self-strengthening. Many Hindu social reform organisations sought to transform Hindu society from being a 'weak' community into a stronger more assertive one. This was essentially based on notions of inferiority vis-à-vis the British and Muslim community. The RSS was a national self-service society which served as the militant wing of the Hindu Mahasabha. Patel believed that the RSS should give up violence and work for the regeneration of India through peaceful means.<sup>328</sup> He asserted

"There was a time when people called me a supporter of the RSS. To some extent, it was true. These young men are brave, resourceful and courageous: but they were a little mad. I wished to utilize their bravery and courage by making them realize their true responsibilities and their duty. It is the madness in them that I wanted to eradicate."<sup>329</sup>

Essentially, he wanted to make them compliant and perhaps use them for his own purposes. On the political front, Patel believed that no coalition was necessary with the Mahasabha as it was a weak party.<sup>330</sup> Furthermore, he advised Syama Prasad Mookerjee that "the Hindu Mahasabha should be dissolved and its

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<sup>327</sup>Patel to Dossabhai Dalal, 12 March 1946, *SPC*, Vol.4, 65.

<sup>328</sup>Speech on 17 March 1949, *PBC*, Vol.3, 117.

<sup>329</sup>Speech at Ambala, Punjab on 5-3-1949, *PBC*, Vol.3, 234.

<sup>330</sup>Patel to Nehru, 12 Oct. 1945, *SPC*, Vol.2, 11.



members should join the Congress."<sup>331</sup> It is noteworthy that Patel should suggest that members of an association renowned for its communal outlook join Congress's ranks, an avowed 'secular' organization. Patel argued that he could not trust Muslims easily for they could not change overnight, yet he would allow several notorious Hindu chauvinists, proponents of the two-nation theory, join Congress and still claim to lead a secular organization. He realized that the Mahasabha would clearly never dissolve and was willing to make political settlements with them where the Mahasabha had more than a 50% chance of beating a Congress candidate.<sup>332</sup>

Despite his apparent willingness to allow for Mahasabha candidates to run with Congress support or his desire to 'drive the madness' from the RSS, Patel still believed that they posed a threat to his government. Six months following Gandhi's assassination, he wrote Mookerjee, "activities of the RSS constituted a clear threat to the existence of government and the state." He asserted that despite the ban on the RSS, their activities had not died down, rather they had become increasingly defiant and were "indulging in their subversive activities in increasing measure."<sup>333</sup> Nehru was also concerned about the high level of sympathy within the Delhi police force for the RSS and made it clear to Patel that he should keep an eye out as Home Minister.<sup>334</sup> Patel informed Nehru that the RSS was not responsible for Gandhi's assassination but only a fanatic section of the Mahasabha.<sup>335</sup> On the whole, Patel believed that while many in the RSS and Mahasabha were against Gandhi's thinking, it was impossible based on the evidence to implicate all its members. "The RSS have undoubtedly other sins and

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<sup>331</sup>Patel to Mookerjee, 20 Dec. 1945, *PBC*, Vol.4, 21.

<sup>332</sup>18th Oct. 1945, *RPCSD*, Vol.6, 28.

<sup>333</sup>Patel to Mookerjee, 18 July 1948, *CWSVP*, Vol.13, 170.

<sup>334</sup>Nehru to Patel, 26 Feb 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 55.

<sup>335</sup>Patel to Nehru, 27 Feb. 1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 67.

crimes to answer for, but not for this one."<sup>336</sup> However Patel continued to observe the RSS's activities and as Nehru rightly noticed, there were plenty of RSS sympathizers within the Government. When inquired as to what action would be taken against these individuals, Patel assured that departmental action would be taken against them and any government employee "arrested and detained for participation in the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh activities [was] to be suspended from duty."<sup>337</sup>

Congress despite its secular claims contained a good proportion of members that did not subscribe to Nehru and Gandhi's open-minded views toward Muslims and minorities. Nehru had decried the communal rot that was taking over Congress and constant calls of vengeance against Muslims because the Pakistanis were suppressing and ill-treating Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan.<sup>338</sup> Prior to Patel's death in 1950, the election of a communalist named Purushottamdas Tandon as President of Congress became a burning issue between Nehru and Patel. Although he was a prominent member within the Uttar Pradesh Provincial Congress Committee and a long time associate of Nehru's, the latter contended that Tandon was becoming similar in mentality with those in the Mahasabha and the RSS and was receiving some degree of support from them.<sup>339</sup> Nehru argued that Hindu revivalism was growing and that Tandon epitomized that trend.<sup>340</sup> While Jawaharlal had problems with Tandon's communal outlook, Patel was convinced that the latter was a restraining force at a refugee conference that displayed a significant degree of anti-Muslim hatred. Patel acknowledged that these conferences were naturally full of animosity and it was impossible to stifle such opinions given the circumstances. Patel's acceptance of Tandon also

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<sup>336</sup>Patel to Nehru, 27 Feb.1948, *SPC*, Vol.6, 67.

<sup>337</sup>*Constituent Assembly of India*, 9th Feb. 1949. Vol.1 1949 pt.1, 443.

<sup>338</sup>Nehru to Patel, 20 Feb. 1950, *SPC*, Vol.10, 5.

<sup>339</sup>Nehru to Patel, 27/28 Aug. 1950, *SPC*, Vol.10, 220-1.

<sup>340</sup>Nehru to P. Tandon, 8 Aug. 1950, *SPC*, Vol.10, 198-199.

demonstrated that he was open to bringing in more Hindu communal elements into Congress, particularly members of the RSS and the Mahasabha.

In recent years, the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in the North Indian State of Uttar Pradesh has become a flashpoint for Hindu and Muslim antagonism. Hindu communalists argue that the mosque was built on the demolished ruins of a temple built on the alleged birthplace of the Hindu God, Rama. The dispute over this site re-emerged just after independence. While many Hindu communalists saw Patel as the Hindu strongman, Patel approached the Babri Masjid problem with more tolerance. Worried about events brewing in Ayodhya given the recent communal conflagration surrounding partition, he wanted Muslims to be able to settle down to their new loyalties. He believed that the issue of the mosque could be settled amicably between the two communities. "Such matters can only be resolved peacefully if we take the willing consent of the Muslim community with us. There can be no question of resolving such disputes by force. In that case, the forces of law and order will have to maintain peace at all costs."<sup>341</sup> Patel was equally cognizant that he had to be mindful of the concerns of Hindus, and at the same time defend Congress from the barbs of the Hindu right-wing. Patel asserted, "we have not assumed powers to advance the cause of Muslims at the expense of Hindus. To be Hindus is not their monopoly. We are also Hindus. We do not believe in killing our opponents as some of our critics do."<sup>342</sup> He drew a line of distinction between himself and the more fanatical members of the Hindu right, particularly those who were responsible for Gandhi's assassination or sympathized with it. This is where Patel's role as a moderate Hindu communalist becomes clear. On the one hand, he believed in the dominance of Hindus as the majority population and that those of minority communities who did not show

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<sup>341</sup>Patel to G.B. Pant, 9 Jan. 1950, *SPC*, Vol.9, 310.

<sup>342</sup>Speech at Gwalior, 4 Nov. 1948, *PBC*, Vol.2, 52-53.

their loyalty, should quite clearly leave. However, he did not advocate the outright murder of dissenters. As long as minorities accepted a certain communal hierarchy, and knew their place in it, they would be given protection.

### Conclusion

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel emerged as one of most powerful Indian political figures in the past century. Unlike the other two main figures synonymous with modern Indian nationalism, namely Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, Patel was a leading symbol of Congress's moderate communalism. This form of communalism was not virulent in its views of minorities as other more extreme groups who advocated extermination or expulsion. However this moderate communalism deemed minorities, particularly Muslims, as savage, intolerant and unreasonable groups that needed to be contained and given little or no power. Beginning his career with Gandhi and Congress at a time when Hindu-Muslim unity was part of the accepted political mainstream, Patel toed the party line. However from the beginning of his political career, he still viewed Muslims as 'irrational zealots.' As the years leading up to independence became marked with growing violence and communal conflict, Patel became increasingly convinced that the fault lay more with Muslims than with Hindus. Like many of his co-religionists, Patel was immensely affected by the partition massacres and the refugees' tales of woe and consequently generalized that since Muslims had been the instigators of the misery, those who remained in India were to be mistrusted.

Patel shifted his political colours when it suited him. When it was convenient to him, he would stress Hindu-Muslim unity. Closer to independence, he realized that he was often viewed as the 'Hindus' saviour' and played to that audience very well. Moreover, with Nehru as his main political adversary and rival for the Mahatma's ear, Patel sensed that his base lay with conservative

Hindus afraid of Nehru's growing socialism and 'pandering' to the needs and safety of the minorities whom they considered troublemakers. Patel's nationalism was predominantly one that catered to the majority population, which therefore made it increasingly a form of Hindu nationalism rather than Pan-Indian nationalism.

## Chapter Four

### Conclusion

Lokamanya Balwantrao Gangadhar Tilak and Sardar Vallabhbhai Javerbhai Patel represented two key aspects of the Indian National Congress's moderate Hindu communalism. Both leaders were clearly nationalists, yet they were proponents of a nationalism which fit Gyanendra Pandey's characterization of Indian nationalism which he argues was "nothing but communalism driven into secular channels- and not sufficiently driven."<sup>343</sup> Although neither Tilak nor Patel promoted outright extermination or excessive violence against religious minorities like their more extreme counterparts in the RSS and Hindu Mahasabha, they tended to advocate and justify any violence perpetrated by Hindus as done in self-defence against the 'notoriously aggressive tendencies' of Muslims. The accumulated effects of perpetuating the view of Muslims as a savage social entity and their relegation to a minor role in Congress's nationalist movement spanning several decades helped contribute to the growth of Muslim separatism. Tilak inaugurated this process in the 1890s with his Ganapati and Shivaji Festivals. Although he claimed that these festivals were not meant to alienate other communities, it was clear that he neither silenced the more extreme members of his coterie, consisting mainly of his fellow Chitpavan Brahmans, nor contained their tendency to express radical communal sentiments. His newspapers actively placed the blame for all Hindu-Muslim conflicts on 'Muslim fanaticism'. Tilak's exposure to other religious communities in north India during the first decade of the twentieth century contributed to the lessening of his communal rhetoric. By addressing a far more communally diverse society, where Muslims comprised a

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<sup>343</sup>Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990), 236.

larger proportion of the population, particularly in Bengal and the United Provinces, Tilak realized that he needed to broaden the image of Shivaji from a solely Hindu Maharashtrian hero to an all-India figure that all sections of society could venerate (or at least tolerate). Soon after his release from prison in 1914, Tilak became the leading nationalist figure in India from the older generation of Congress leaders following the deaths of G.K. Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta in 1915. Having assumed this heightened status, the Lokamanya promoted Hindu-Muslim unity on the national stage without reservation and suggested that if the British hand power over to Muslims, they would at least be handing power to an Indian community. Aware of the government's desire to imprison nationalists for any hint of seditious innuendo in their speeches or writings, Tilak tempered many of his criticisms of the Government of India by sprinkling his rhetoric with expressions of loyalty to the empire. Essentially, Tilak made exaggerated claims for Hindu-Muslim unity and asserted a pious loyalty to the Government of India for he had nothing to lose; his goal was to attain independence at whatever cost. Therefore, it is unlikely that his disdain for the British or Indian Muslims changed radically. Moreover, wartime legal restrictions on political expression discouraged active nationalist disaffection toward the government. The political climate following his release from prison necessitated that Tilak fall in line with the atmosphere surrounding the 1916 Lucknow Congress which was to reunite the Extremists and Moderate factions of Congress for the first time since the 'Surat Split' of 1907. Equally important, it brought together for the first time an alliance between the Congress and the Muslim League. This combined Congress-League cooperation was a watershed which Tilak was not going to ruin as he indeed perceived it as a chance to prove at least temporarily that Hindus and Muslims could co-exist politically. Furthermore, this would thereby prove false British

claims that Hindus and Muslims could not rule together; often seen as moral justification for British rule in India.

Patel began his political career in the late 1910s. Like Tilak, the Sardar worked predominantly out of his home province of Gujarat and built his support base around his own community, the Patidars and other upper castes. The Patidars, like the Chitpavans, were a community fully imbued with a superiority complex which endeavoured to assert this perceived predominance through the political arena. During the early 1920s, Patel contributed to fostering a sense of Hindu-Muslim unity during the joint Non-Cooperation and Khilafat Movement agitation against the Government of India. Yet underlying this support was a belief that Muslims, in contrast to 'peace-loving' Hindus, were religious zealots who were determined to achieve their goals through violent means. This attitude exhibited itself in conversations with Gandhi and correspondence with other Congress workers throughout the 1930s and was intensified by the late 1940s with the crisis over partition. Why did Patel cater to Hindu communal elements within the country? In part, he sincerely believed himself to be the saviour for Hindus and Sikhs migrating from West to East Punjab. Moreover, he received sufficient positive reinforcement to substantiate this belief.

Quite apart from personal psychology and beliefs, Patel's catering to Hindu communalists was also partly due to his rivalry with Jawaharlal Nehru and other left-wing politicians within Congress like Jayaprakash Narayan and Subash and Sarat Chandra Bose. Nehru and Patel's rivalry endured for close to thirty years. While many minority politicians, socialists and students looked to the youthful, intellectual and spirited Nehru, Patel cultivated a following amongst the majority of Congress members who were generally more conservative, Hindu, male and right-wing, who looked to him to maintain their interests against certain radical and 'disruptive' forces within society. Following his successful satyagraha



at Bardoli in 1928, Patel became the leading choice of the majority of Congressmen for the post of Congress President at the 1929 Lahore Congress. However, the Sardar stepped back once Gandhi insisted that Nehru become President in order to appease the more radical members of Congress, namely socialists and students who were clamouring for complete independence from Britain. Although extremely popular throughout India, Nehru's power and influence within Congress was limited and without the Mahatma's insistence, he would not have emerged as President that year. By the late 1930s, Gandhi and Nehru both witnessed the hardening communal stance amongst Congress Hindus with dismay. Sumit Sarkar, a leading Indian historian based at Delhi University asserts that while Gandhi and Patel were more closely associated during the 1920s and 1930s, Gandhi moved closer to Nehru by the mid-1940s.<sup>344</sup> Although Nehru insisted that minorities feel welcome, his message was not well received by Hindu communalists who wanted to see Muslims suffer for the alleged role they played *en masse* in bringing about partition. Undoubtedly faced with the growth and spread of communal antagonism throughout the country and within Congress, Gandhi perceived Nehru as the cure. Furthermore, despite his defence of Patel against accusations of communalism, Gandhi knew at the very least that Nehru's reputation with minorities as an opponent of communalism and Hindu communal groups was far stronger than Patel's. In the aftermath of partition (and certainly prior to it), the Mahatma perceived Nehru as the one to instill confidence in the minorities, to convince them that they had a place in an independent India.

From the early days of Tilak's career, G.K. Gokhale was his main rival within Congress. Tilak's rivalry with Gokhale was especially intense for they were both Chitpavan Brahmans based in Poona. Gokhale was far more westernized and open to other cultures and simultaneously maintained friendly

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<sup>344</sup>Based on a discussion with Prof. Sarkar during my research trip at NMML in May 1999.

relations with other religious community leaders and was a popular figure amongst Congress's elite and Moderate majority. During the late nineteenth century, Tilak countered Gokhale's social reform initiatives and the Moderates' dominance within the Congress by attempting to make the organization a mass Hindu body filled with delegates who supported him. By mobilising conservative sections of Hindu society through a deployment of religious symbols, he opposed (although unsuccessfully) any legislated social reform by the Government of India. By 1905, Tilak and his Extremists were increasing their foothold within Congress and he began to tone down, but not eliminate the use of religious and communal rhetoric. By the later days of his career, Tilak occupied a high position within the nationalist organisation and had little need of communal propaganda. However, he did not abandon its usage entirely as speeches given in his native Marathi were still peppered with many negative allusions to Muslims and lower-caste Hindus.

Patel's predominance in Gujarat was relatively unchallenged for most of his political career which extended from the early 1920s to 1950. However, when faced with branching out at the all-India level during the 1930s and 1940s, Patel did not have the popularity amongst the mass populace that Nehru did. Unlike Gokhale and Tilak, who shared both caste and regional identities, Nehru and Patel were neither from the same region nor from the same caste. However, Patel and Nehru were key members of Gandhi's inner circle which consisted of nationalists from all over the country. While Nehru's popularity grew throughout the nation, Patel built his power base within Congress as a counterweight. After independence, Nehru's actions as Prime Minister were limited; he could do very little without Patel's active support. One of the principal differences between Tilak and Patel was that while the former built his popularity more amongst the populace and later became extremely powerful with Congress, Patel's power lay

in his prime position within Congress while his popularity amongst the general public was second to Nehru.

Age and deteriorating health also weighed heavily on both Tilak and Patel. Tilak's six years in a Burmese prison were rigorous and he suffered from various ailments. He was in his late fifties when he was released and rather reluctant to relive the experience. This partly explains his caution when criticizing the British Government in the final six years of his life. Wolpert observes that he was far too practical an individual to voluntarily court martyrdom or self-destruction. "He rallied his forces by devious means, and directed them in techniques other than the frontal assault."<sup>345</sup> While Gandhian methods of satyagraha dictated that one court arrest, offer no defence and accept all punishment willingly, Tilak fought against the charges laid against him. The Lokamanya's goal to achieve political power necessitated that he support the Lucknow pact which allied the Congress and the Muslims League for a brief period. Tilak was willing to go along with contemporary political trends as long as he believed that it would bring him closer to achieving his objectives.

Patel was 70 years old when released from prison in 1945. Like Tilak, he also suffered tremendously within and outside jail from various ailments. After their release from prison following World War Two, Congress leaders quickly realized that the League was not going to accept Indian independence under the former's auspices. By the spring of 1947, Patel was extremely frustrated by his experience in the Interim Government and was ready to accept partition as a necessary evil. Patel's patience with the League and the British was extremely limited and his general health was declining. On the one hand, he faced the growing agitation of the League stalling Congress's desire for independence from

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<sup>345</sup>Stanley Wolpert, *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reform in the Making of Modern India* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962), 301.

the British which it had in its grasp. On the other hand, as independence was approaching Patel had to contend with Nehru's visions on how to modernize and change India. With imperialism on its way out, rival schemes on how to improve Indian society came to the forefront. However, given his dominance within Congress, Patel had few doubts that he could manage to implement the changes he desired, despite any difficulty Nehru might give him.

Congress's moderate communalism was neither solely responsible for Muslim separatism nor the creation of Pakistan. Indeed, British officials played a significant part in abetting communal tensions. Yet to look solely at the British as puppet masters fomenting communal tensions is degrading to both Indians and Pakistanis. South Asian politicians were active agents in contributing to the damage caused by partition. Moreover, while Muslim politicians such as Muhammad Ali Jinnah were greatly responsible for the heightened communalism of the 1930s and 1940s, they were indeed responding to moderate Hindu communalism within Congress at every level. Congress leaders such as Patel and Nehru knew about the existence of these communal elements, yet they were either unwilling or incapable of dealing with the problem. Sixty years of Congress's moderate communalism proved to be in the long run more devastating than the more extreme aberrations within the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha. Congress's posturing as an organization which represented all Indians was inconsistent with the existence (acknowledged by many of its leading figures) of so many Hindu chauvinists within its ranks. Moderate Hindu communalists hoarded power in district boards and provincial congress committees and subsequently enabled Jinnah's League to exploit such grievances when it became necessary. Patel had the power and the opportunity to bring more Muslims into Congress's infrastructure and superstructure, for there was clearly a desire amongst Muslims during the 1930s to join Congress. However, Patel was either unwilling or

indifferent to the cause and the subcontinent suffered the consequences in 1947.

The potential to continually exploit the socio-psychological attitudes of Hindus as Tilak and Patel had done earlier this century, is clearly demonstrated by contemporary developments. The two areas of the country in which Tilak and Patel were based, Maharashtra and Gujarat, have become flashpoints for Hindu communal activity in recent years. Headed by the ultra-Hindu nationalist Bal Thakeray, a one-time political cartoonist, the Shiv Sena (or the army of Shivaji) has been virulent in its verbal attacks against Muslims and Pakistan. Essentially, they promote the image of Shivaji as a violent and xenophobic defender of Hinduism in contemporary India. Along with its governing partner, the BJP, the Shiv Sena runs the current government in Maharashtra. The makeup of these two parties has been predominantly upper-caste Hindu.<sup>346</sup>

Gujarat has also become in the past decade a flashpoint for communal riots particularly in the city of Ahmedabad and other districts such as Kheda where Patel grew up. When the Congress (I) government of Indira Gandhi (d.1984) realigned its support groups in the state in the late 1970s and early 1980s, its original supporters, the Brahmans, Banias and Patidars found themselves being displaced by lower-caste Hindus and Muslims. The BJP rallied these one-time Congress supporters over successive years into a solid support group. In the past two decades, the state that spawned such an outspoken proponent of non-violence as Mahatma Gandhi has been the site of major communal clashes, particularly in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>346</sup>Originally, the Shiv Sena's main targets were immigrants from elsewhere in India, particularly South India. However, as years progressed, the hatred became more focused against Muslims and other minorities.

<sup>347</sup>See Ashis Nandy et al. *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*. Second impression (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100-23.

Essentially, what made these two leaders communally minded? Was it solely political competition with rival colleagues and other religious communities? Like many Hindus, they read a narrow view of history which suggested that Muslims were all out invaders, inherently violent and prone to forcing others to convert to their religion. Given this perspective on Muslims which Patel and Tilak shared, they could not help but paint the image of Muslims as an inherently different people with different customs. Yet, they did not seem to take into consideration the fact that most of India's Muslims were converts from the lower castes within Hinduism and one of the prominent reasons in which many lower castes converted to other religions was because of ill-treatment by higher castes. Despite the quotas implemented by the government, lower castes were and still are given most of the least desirable jobs and are often still treated as phariahs. Tilak and Patel both believed in the superiority of Indian culture which to them was synonymous with a male-dominated, upper-caste and upper-middle class Hindu culture. Moreover, Tilak referred to the nobility of higher castes and believed in a casteism which upheld the superiority of Brahmans and his own subcaste in particular within Maharashtra. Likewise, the Patidars were also a caste imbued with a sense of superiority against other communities and held a strong pride in their religion. Both held narrow beliefs that most or all Hindus shared similar customs such as vegetarianism. Moreover they both believed that Hindus were an inherently peaceful race of people, although capable of fighting back when provoked. For Tilak, Shivaji epitomised the righteousness of Hinduism fighting against the tyranny of Aurangzeb. The inherently 'peaceful nature' of Hindu society is of course contradicted by various historical facts: the descriptions of war recounted in epics such the *Mahabharata*; the centuries of warfare between Hindu kingdoms, particularly amongst Rajputs; and upper caste domination and bigotry of lower castes which tended to be far from benevolent.

Tilak and Patel both believed in the superiority of the Hindu culture and argued for a commonality amongst Indian (read Hindu) languages based on Sanskrit. During Tilak's era, this was limited to focusing on a common script amongst Indian languages. *Devanagari* was meant to be this unifying script, while Urdu and Persian were considered foreign and to be incorporated later. During Patel's era, the issue of language became a potent communal issue. In the years prior to independence, Congress promoted Hindustani which could be written in either *Devanagari* (left to right) or in Persian (right to left). After independence and Gandhi's assassination five months later, Hindi was proclaimed the national language of India and *Devanagari* its sole script. Urdu was transformed from being a composite language shared by Hindus and Muslims in north India to a language ascribed to Muslims as their own and therefore foreign.<sup>348</sup>

Tilak and Patel also shared a disdain for many aspects of westernized urban culture. Tilak looked down upon Gokhale and other Moderates for many reasons, including their westernized dress and their catering predominantly to western education. Well schooled in the Hindu scriptures, Tilak could speak with authority on socio-religious issues and appeal to a public that was far removed from the sophistry of the westernised elite. Proud of his history and heritage, the Lokamanya demonstrated this by dressing in traditional clothing. Similarly, when Patel went to London to study law and take the bar exam, he was hardly impressed with what he saw around him and quickly returned home after completing his studies. As his biographers note, he was not fond of city life and found the rusticity of rural Gujarat far more refreshing. However, after returning from England he continued to live a westernized lifestyle until he joined Gandhi,

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<sup>348</sup>Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims since Independence* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 157.

after which he discontinued his law practice, stopped frequenting clubs and abandoned his western attire.

A major contributing factor to Tilak and Patel's communalism was their upbringing and relatively small interaction with other minorities. Gandhi and Nehru provide a stunning contrast which partly explains their acceptance of Muslims as fellow Indians. Raised in Porbandar in coastal Gujarat, in a family which had for six generations served as prime ministers to the local princely rulers, Gandhi was exposed to an extremely composite culture of Hindus, Muslims, Parsis and Jains while growing up. All communities, irrespective of religion were indeed received as guests in the Gandhi home. The presence of Islam in Gandhi's early life was powerful, for Porbandar and several other princely states in the Kathiawad region of Gujarat were trading centres for Arab merchants and other foreign tradesmen. The interaction between Hindus and other communities was so commonplace that Gandhi thought of Muslims, Jains and Parsis as natural friends and supporters.<sup>349</sup> In Gandhi's struggles in South Africa, a great many of his colleagues and clients were Muslim and shared his struggles against the discriminatory policies of the South African government.

Likewise, Jawaharlal Nehru was exposed to Islamic culture at an early age by his father, Motilal Nehru (1861-1931), an eminent Kashmiri Brahman barrister settled in Allahabad in the United Provinces. Socially diverse, the elder Nehru frequently associated with the British and with Indian Muslims who visited his palatial home. An admirer of Urdu and Persian poetry, Motilal passed his admiration and respect for Islamic culture, particularly Persian and Urdu poetry, on to his son Jawaharlal.<sup>350</sup> Throughout Jawaharlal's life, he was constantly

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<sup>349</sup>Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Responses to Islam* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld (P) Ltd., 1994), 6-7.

<sup>350</sup>See Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), originally published in 1936 and Henny Sender, *The Kashmiri Pandits: A Study of Cultural Choice in North India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).



exposed to various influences and maintained links with people from various religious communities and was perceived by many amongst India's minorities as their saviour; a direct mirror image of Patel as the saviour of Hindus.

Due to their upbringing and exposure to Islamic culture which did not portray Muslims solely as villains, Gandhi and Nehru were able to retain a broad and composite vision of what constituted an 'Indian' identity which ultimately was not to relegate Muslims and minorities to an irrelevant position. Despite attacks on their lives by individuals who happened to be Muslim, Gandhi and Nehru retained a balanced, empathetic and respectful view of the community on the whole. They did not perceive their attackers as representative of all Muslims. Nehru for his part looked more to class differences in society rather than religious divisions.

Tilak and Patel's exposure to and views of Islam were in stark contrast to Gandhi's and Nehru's. In Tilak's environment, Islam was associated with the tyranny (solidified with consistent negative reinforcement via his newspapers) of Aurangzeb and Shivaji's battles against 'Muslims'. Patel associated Muslim rule with Mughal expansion into Gujarat. As Rajmohan Gandhi writes, the Patidars were responsible for ejecting a "Muslim satrap from Baroda and install[ing] a Hindu ruler in his place."<sup>351</sup> They were a proud community deeply imbued with a sense of superiority of their own religion and culture. Unlike Gandhi and particularly Nehru, the Sardar viewed attacks by Muslims as natural to their temperament; it was instinctive. Given Patel's beliefs, it is unlikely that he brushed off the attack on his life by Muslims in Bhavnagar as Gandhi and Nehru did when faced with similar encounters. Tilak and Patel perceived Islam as a monolithic invasionary force injecting itself into the (Hindu) body politic of India. If it could not be expelled, it would have to be tolerated. Ultimately, no person or group

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<sup>351</sup>Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life* (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1990), 4.

whether internal or external would stop Indians, from once again ruling themselves.

## Biographical Data

Agarkar, Gopal Ganesh (1856-1895): A Chitpavan Brahman based in Poona who established *The Mahratta* and *Kesari* newspapers with B.G. Tilak in the early 1880s. Although once allied with Tilak, Agarkar was increasingly drawn to social reform and the activities of the former's main rival, G.K. Gokhale, therefore incurring the Lokamanya's displeasure.

Ali, Asaf (1888-1953): A Congress Muslim Socialist from Delhi who was jailed with Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel during the Quit India Movement (1942-5). He was allied predominantly with Nehru and Maulana Azad.

Ali, Mohammed (1878-1931): Mohammed Ali was educated at the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental School and College at Aligarh and later Oxford University where he attained an honours degree in history. Like Maulana Azad, he established a newspaper called *The Comrade* and emerged as one of the foremost leaders of the Khilafat Movement. Along with his brother Shaukat Ali, he aligned himself with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement and stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. However, near the end of his life, he became disgruntled with Congress and the growing communalism within its ranks amidst several failed unity conferences during the late 1920s.

Ali, Shaukat (1873-1938): One of the prominent leaders of the Khilafat Movement. Along with his brother Mohammed Ali, he aligned himself with Gandhi's Non-Cooperation movement and promoted Hindu-Muslim unity. Witnessing the demise of the Khilafat Movement and the growing presence of Hindu communalism by the late 1920s, Shaukat Ali became an opponent and critic of Congress and its claims to represent Indian Muslims.

Ashraf, Dr. Kunwar Mohammed (1903-1962): A Congress Muslim Socialist and trained historian who was responsible for operating the Muslim Mass Contacts Programme for J. Nehru in 1937.

Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam (1888-1958): Azad was one of Congress's foremost left-wing Muslim politicians. Born in Mecca to an Indian father and an Arabian mother, he was well schooled in Islamic theology in both Arabia and India. Fired by the ideals of nationalism and pan-Islamism, he established the Urdu language newspaper *Al-Hilal* in 1912. After joining Congress, he was nominated President on numerous occasions, yet his most important tenure as President lasted from 1940-46. He steadfastly argued against the two-nation theory incurring the wrath of several rival Muslim politicians within the Muslim League. In independent India, he held the post of Education Minister from 1947-58. Along with his various articles on Islam, he has also written a controversial memoir of the nationalist struggle, *India Wins Freedom*.

**Bose, Sarat Chandra (1889-1950):** A prominent Congress left-wing politician from Bengal and brother of Subash Chandra Bose (d.1945). Bose sought to prevent the partition of his province by arguing for (amongst other Bengali politicians) a united and independent Bengali nation.

**Desai, Mahadev (1892-1942):** Mahatma Gandhi's private secretary for many years who died in prison during the Quit India agitation. Desai kept several records of Gandhi's conversations during prison, particularly with Sardar Patel during the early 1930s.

**Gandhi, Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand (1869-1948):** The most recognizable and celebrated leader of the nationalist struggle against British colonial rule in India. Raised in Porbandar, Gujarat, a princely state where his father and other ancestors served as prime ministers for local rulers, Gandhi went to England to study law. Failing to show his potential as a lawyer after returning to India, Gandhi was sent to South Africa to represent the interests of the Indian merchant community settled there. Encountering the racist attitudes of the South African government, he organized protests and agitations against discriminatory laws which became the prototypes for his later struggles against the British in India. From the late 1910s to his death, he was one of Congress's most influential leaders who organized and initiated three massive movements against the British: Non-Cooperation (1920-22), Civil Disobedience (1930-34) and Quit India (1942-45). Like his political mentor Gokhale, Gandhi actively pursued the uplift of lower castes and promoted Hindu-Muslim unity. He was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic named Nathuram Godse on January 30, 1948.

**Gokhale, Gopal Krishna (1866-1915):** A prominent Moderate politician and social reformer from Maharashtra. The disciple and friend of M.G. Ranade, Gokhale was a soft-spoken social activist whose endeavours enraged the conservative sections of Maharashtrian society. Apart from his teaching duties at Fergusson College, he was a member of the Deccan Educational Society in Poona. In 1899, he was elected to Bombay Presidency's Legislative Council and later the Imperial Legislative Council. In 1905, he established the Servants of India Society whose active aims were to promote Hindu-Muslim unity, education and the elevation of the lower castes. He became increasingly interested in the activities of M.K. Gandhi in South Africa and the latter's agitation against discrimination of Indians in South Africa.

**Jinnah, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali (1876-1948):** The founding father of Pakistan and its first Governor-General (1947-48), Jinnah was born and died in the coastal city of Karachi. At the age of 16 he was sent to London to pursue his studies in law. In 1896, he returned to India where he became a barrister at the Bombay High Court. After establishing himself as a successful and wealthy

lawyer, he joined the Moderate faction of the Congress under the tutelage of leaders such as Gokhale. By the late 1910s he was known as the 'Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity'. However, following Gandhi's emergence as Congress's driving force, Jinnah soon dropped out of the Congress fold but remained politically active until the late 1920s. During the first half of the 1930s, Jinnah kept somewhat aloof from Indian politics; practicing law in London. However, at the insistence of Liaqat Ali Khan, he returned to India where he took over as President of the All-India Muslim League and led the movement for the creation of Pakistan.

Kelkar, Narsinh C. (1872-1947): Served as editor for *The Mahratta* and *Kesari* at various points. He remained Tilak's staunch ally until the latter's death in 1920. However unlike the more extreme members of Tilak's coterie, Kelkar was for more moderate in his views.

Khan, Ghazanfar Ali: A leading figure in the Muslim League and strong critic of the Congress during the Interim Government of 1946-47 which he himself was a part of. He later became a minister in Liaqat Ali Khan's cabinet in Pakistan following independence.

Khan, Nawabzada Liaqat Ali (1895-1951): The son of a Muslim landlord from the United Provinces and educated at Oxford University, he became the first Prime Minister of Pakistan. In 1935, he persuaded his friend M.A. Jinnah to return from his self-imposed exile in 1935. Having convinced Jinnah to take over the Muslim League, Khan became Jinnah's chief lieutenant in the struggle to create Pakistan. Prior to Pakistan's creation, he served as Finance Minister in the interim government of 1946-47. He was assassinated in 1951.

Kher, B.G. (1888-1957): Kher was the Prime Minister of Bombay Presidency from 1937-39. Although head of government, he answered to Patel who oversaw the affairs of the ministry as chairman of the Congress Parliamentary Board.

Mehta, Pherozeshah (1845-1915): A prominent Parsi lawyer and politician from Bombay and a member of the Moderate faction within Congress. He was also the original proprietor of *The Bombay Chronicle*.

Mohani, Maulana Hasrat: A poet-politician who started his political activities in 1909 during the Swadeshi Movement. He became a member of the Communist Party of India and a critic of the Congress and Sardar Patel after partition and the latter's treatment of Muslim princely states.

Mookerjee, Syama Prasad (d.1953): Leader of the communal Hindu Mahasabha from Bengal in the late 1940s and cabinet minister in independent India from 1947-50. He criticized the full-scale imprisonment of members from the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha following Gandhi's assassination.

Mountbatten, Louis, Lord (1900-1979): The last Viceroy of British India and first Governor-General of independent India. He arrived in India in March 1947 and left in June of the following year.

Narayan, Jayaprakash (1902-1980): A Congress Socialist who opposed the Congress right-wing led by Vallabhbhai Patel.

Nariman, Veer K.F. (d.1948): Nariman was a top-ranking Parsi politician from Bombay. He was strongly allied to the Swaraj party faction within Congress which sought to attain their political goals through participation in administrative bodies established by the Government. After the provincial elections of late 1936, it was clear that Congress would administer Bombay Presidency. It was assumed that Nariman, the popular leader from the city of Bombay would be given the post of Prime Minister. However, the position was given to B.G. Kher, setting off a wave of protest and allegations that Sardar Patel engineered the decision to keep Nariman out of power. Nariman left Congress and later joined Subash Chandra Bose's Forward Bloc.

Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal (1889-1964): The first Prime Minister of India and the architect of India's foreign policy. Nehru was born into an extremely wealthy family of Kashmiri Brahmans settled in Allahabad in the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh). His father, Motilal Nehru was a prominent lawyer and a leading figure amongst Allahabad's elite social circles, frequently mixing with both British and Indians. Educated in England from the age of 15, at Harrow and the University of Cambridge, Jawaharlal was inspired by the nationalist movement and the activities of both Tilak and Gokhale. Returning to India in 1912 as a barrister, he began practicing law. Becoming quickly disenchanted with his profession, he took more interest in national politics, particularly following Gandhi's assumption as Congress leader in the late 1920s. Despite their many differences over the future of an independent India and what path it should follow, Gandhi emphasized his desire that Nehru become his political successor and India's first Prime Minister. A Fabian socialist, Nehru vigorously fought against communalist tendencies throughout the subcontinent, but ultimately succumbed to Jinnah's pressure to create Pakistan

Pal, Bipin Chandra (1858-1932): Pal was a leader of the Extremist faction within Bengal, particularly during the Swadeshi Movement of 1905-12. Together with Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, they were known as Lal, Bal, Pal.

Prasad, Dr. Rajendra (1894-1963): Originating from the north Indian state of Bihar, he became the first President of the Republic of India in 1950 and held that post until 1962. A member of Congress's right-wing, he was an ally of Sardar Patel and Gandhi's lieutenant in Bihar. He served as Congress President on numerous occasions.

**Rai, Lala Lajpat (1865-1928):** Known as the Lion of Punjab, he was allied with Bipin Chandra Pal and B.G. Tilak, collectively known as Lal, Bal, Pal. A member of the Arya Samaj, an organization centred around the reform of Hinduism, Rai was a lawyer who had written many books concerning India's plight under colonial rule. During World War One, he spent his time in the United States and Japan. After returning to India after the Armistice, he resumed his position in Congress but also became involved with the Hindu Mahasabha in 1925. He suggested that India be divided into Muslim and non-Muslim areas.

**Ranade, Mahadev Govind (1842-1901):** Born into an orthodox Chitpavan Brahman household, Ranade ascended to becoming a judge in the Indian judicial system. Although his duties on the bench prevented his participation in national politics, he was involved in social reform and efforts to eradicate child marriages and the seclusion of women. He became a mentor to G.K. Gokhale.

**Rajagopalachari, Chakravarti (1879-1972):** An Iyengar Brahman lawyer from Madras Presidency, Rajaji as he was often known as, became Gandhi's lieutenant in South India. He emerged as Prime Minister of Madras Presidency during 1937-39 when the Government of India allowed popularly-elected governments to take power. During the 1940s, he broke from Gandhi and the Congress by agreeing with Jinnah's call to create Pakistan. Following independence, he was appointed Governor of West Bengal. In June of 1948, Rajaji became India's first and last Indian Governor-General.

**Tandon, Purushottamdas:** A Hindu communal leader from the United Provinces who was elected President of Congress much to the dismay of Nehru but supported by Patel. After Patel's death in 1950, Nehru was able to force Tandon's resignation by threatening to resign as Prime Minister. Tandon tendered his resignation and Nehru assumed the post of Congress President.

**Tyabji, Abbas:** A Gujarati Muslim who served as Patel's lieutenant in Gujarat and operated the Kheda District Congress Committee. He also once served as a judge before devoting himself to the cause of Indian independence.

**Wavell, Field-Marshal Archibald (1883-1953):** Wavell served as Viceroy from 1943-47. He was perceived by Patel as pro-Muslim League, and equally viewed Patel as a Hindu communalist. He was replaced by Lord Louis Mountbatten as Viceroy in March of 1947.

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