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From 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' to 'Hindu Raj':
The Evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha 1922-1939

Keith Meadowcroft

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
History

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ABSTRACT

From 'Hindu-Muslim Unity' to 'Hindu Raj':
The Evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha 1922-1939

Keith Meadowcroft

This study traces the transformation of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha from an avowedly non-political organization devoted to the socio-cultural reform of India's Hindu community into the principal Hindu communalist political organization in British India. The focus is on the Mahasabha's changing aims, program and perception of self as manifested in its conference resolutions and campaigns and its interaction with other organizations. The development of a "Hindu" political identity necessarily entailed a redefinition of the Hindu Mahasabha's attitude toward communal relations, the struggle for Indian self-rule, the Indian National Congress and the British Indian government.

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Be genuine, strong and firm Hindus, but realize also that you are Indians first and Hindus next.

Madan Mohan Malaviya, 1922

Our politics henceforth will be purely Hindu politics, fashioned and tested in Hindu terms only ...

V.D. Savarkar, 1938

INTRODUCTION

For nearly a decade prior to the 1947 Partition of India, the All-India Hindu Mahasabha exhorted India's Hindus to prepare for a potentially violent power struggle with the Muslims of the subcontinent. Although Muslims had lived in India for more than a millennium, the Hindu Mahasabha held that the ninety million Indian Muslims were not part of the "Hindusthani nation." In the "Free" India that it envisaged, the Muslims were to be branded an "anti-national minority" and their every action watched "with the greatest distrust possible."¹

During World War II, the Mahasabha allied itself with the British Indian government and established Hindu

¹ V.D. Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan. Its Ideology and Immediate Programme (Bombay: Hindu Maha Sabha Presidential Office, 1940), pp. 84, 86 and 93.

Militarization Boards to recruit Hindu youths into the Indian armed forces and "instill military mindedness in the Hindu public."² For the Mahasabha, the British war effort was a unique opportunity to "militarize the Hindu nation," to make it strong enough to suppress "internal anti-Hindu anarchy" and uphold the indivisibility of Hindusthan "from the Indus to Assam."³

In pursuit of this policy, the Mahasabha moderated its praise for Nazi Germany and fascist Italy. In the years immediately preceding the war, the Mahasabha had lauded Hitler and Mussolini for "reviving" their respective nations and making them bulwarks against "godless communism." "The very fact," declared Mahasabha President V.D. Savarkar, "that Germany or Italy has so wonderfully recovered and grown so powerful ... at the touch of the Nazi or fascist magical wand is enough to prove that those political ... [doctrines] were the most congenial tonics ..."⁴ In its rhetoric and actions the Mahasabha sought to emulate the European advocates of the politics of blood and race. Savarkar implored the delegates at the Mahasabha's 1938 session, "Make this address your Mein

² "All-India Hindu Militarisation Mandal," Hindu Outlook (New Delhi), March 18, 1941, p. 1.

³ "Militarize the Hindu Nation", Hindu Outlook, Nov. 4, 1941, p. 2.

⁴ "Press Note Issued by the Hindu Mahasabha Office, Bombay Branch", Jayakar Papers, File 65, Item 124.

According to the Jan. 18, 1939, Hindu Outlook, Savarkar's comments were reported in a prominent article in the Nov. 30, 1938 issue of Berliner Beobachter, Berlin's largest circulation daily.

Kampf. Make Savarkar your Fuehrer. And in no time your nation will rise to the pinnacles of glory."⁵ What the Mahasabha leaders most admired in the Third Reich was its treatment of the "anti-national Jewish community."⁶ Germany, they claimed, was a country that had known how to solve its minorities problem. Replying to a warning from Muslim League President M.A. Jinnah that India's Muslims might one day imitate the Sudeten Germans and appeal for intervention by their Muslim brethren outside India, Savarkar declared:

To that threat I retort that our friends in the Muslim League ... should remember that the illustration cuts both ways. If ... [the Muslims] grow stronger they can play the part of the Sudeten Germans alright. But if we Hindus in India grow stronger, in time these Muslim friends of the League type will have to play the part of the German Jews instead.'

Needless to say, the Mahasabha was a vitriolic opponent of the Indian National Congress. The INC's advocacy of "territorial nationalism"--its vision of an independent, secular India in which all Indians, whatever their religious faith, would enjoy equal rights--and its insistence that the attainment of Indian self-rule was the first step to overcoming all the problems that beset India, including communal discord, had, in the eyes of the Mahasabhites, sapped the "Hindu spirit" and placed the "Hindu nation" in peril. The Mahasabha condemned all attempts on the part of the

⁵ "Heralding the New Dawn," Hindu Outlook, Jan. 11, 1939, p 1.

⁶ "Notes and Comments," Hindu Outlook, March 8, 1939, p. 5.

⁷ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, p. 85.

Congress to forge Hindu-Muslim unity, whether through negotiations with the Muslim League or through efforts, such as the "Muslim Mass Contact Campaign," to extend the Congress's support among ordinary Muslims by championing the cause of the peasantry. The Mahasabha also vigorously opposed the Congress's socio-economic reform program, which it labelled "communistic." The Mahasabha denounced the Congress ministries that held office between 1937 and 1939, particularly Govind Pant's United Provinces' ministry, for "inciting the laborers and the kisans [peasants] to ... class war" and "ruining" the capitalists, zamindars [landlords] and middle classes with tenant and labor legislation and increased taxes.⁸

In short, by the late 1930s, the Mahasabha was a quasi-fascist political party--a proponent of Hindu chauvinism and militarism, an advocate of co-operation with the British colonial authorities and deferment of the struggle for Indian self-rule in the hopes of undermining "Muslim power," and a vehement opponent of the Indian National Congress and of any measures to curb landlord privilege or the power of capital.

Yet in a period not long before this, the Mahasabha had been closely associated with the Congress and the cause of Indian nationalism. In the 1920s the Mahasabha was revived by, and rose to prominence under the leadership of, renowned

⁸ "The U.P. Government's Failure," Hindu Outlook, April 26, 1939, p. 3, and "U.P. Government and Gandhi," Ibid., May 17, 1939, p. 4.

Congress politicians. Madan Mohan Malaviya, Lajpat Rai and other leading Congressmen promoted the Mahasabha as a "Hindu" auxiliary of the Congress dedicated to tackling issues of Hindu socio-cultural reform that the INC, as a national-political body, could not pursue.

This thesis will trace the evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha from its revival in 1922 to 1939. It will document the Mahasabha's transformation from an avowedly non-political movement concerned with socio-cultural reform and ostensibly allied with the Indian National Congress into the principal Hindu communalist political party in British India.

Communalism

I use the term communalism advisedly, recognizing that it implies a definite attitude toward Partition and to a host of historiographic and political controversies extending from India's medieval past to today. The Governments of Pakistan and Bangladesh and historians of the Pakistani "national school," such as K.K. Aziz, reject the term entirely. They regard the Muslim communalist politicians--those who argued that India's Moslems should act politically only through Muslim organizations and should be represented in political institutions exclusively by their co-religionists--as "Muslim nationalists." In their view the establishment of Pakistan was the inevitable outcome of a primordial religious-cultural Muslim identity.

Among historians who do consider "communalism" a valid

concept, why communalist politics came to play such an important role in British India, why a subcontinent peopled by more than a dozen major ethno-linguistic groups and hundreds of small groupings and riven by caste and class divisions came to be politically polarized along religious lines, remains a matter of great controversy. Indeed, it is safe to say that communalism and its offspring, the Partition of 1947, are the most contentious and vexatious questions in the historiography of modern India. This debate is beyond the purview of this thesis. A few brief observations are in order, however.

Communalism has been variously defined. K.W. Jones has termed it "a consciously-shared religious heritage which becomes the dominant form of identity for a given segment of society."⁹ Writing in an earlier period, W.C. Smith defined communalism

as that ideology which has emphasized as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and has emphasized the distinction, even the antagonism between such groups; the words "adherents" and "religion" being taken in the most nominal sense."¹⁰

A difficulty in defining communalism is that it denotes not a single belief, but a continuum of beliefs. This continuum does, however, have a history. The tendency of communalism to grow more virulent, to pass from an insistence on the need to defend "Hindu" or "Muslim" interests to the

⁹ K.W. Jones, "Communalism in the Punjab, the Arya Samaj Contribution" JAS, V. 28 (1968), p. 39.

¹⁰ W.C. Smith, Modern Islam in India 1946 ed., (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963), p. 157.

assertion that these interests should prevail over all others, caused one historian to compare it to "a habit-forming drug which, so long as it is administered is needed in ever-increasing doses."¹¹ Communalism emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth, coincident with the development in British India of modern politics based on notions of popular sovereignty. It was asserted that the adherents of a religion have common secular interests, that they form a separate socio-political community, distinct from those belonging to other faiths, and therefore that communal interests should be represented in political institutions. Later more extreme strains of communalist thought developed which, in the name of these religion-based communities, championed rival claims for increased political power and emphasized the need for separate communal political organization, action and representation. Ultimately, many communalists came to view their communal-political group as the most fundamental unit of Indian society, transcending all differences of class, region and linguistic-ethnic identity; for them, this was the "nation."

The Construction of Communal Identities

Central to this study is the understanding that communal identities are modern political constructs. They did not arise due to religious doctrinal differences, nor out of

¹¹ Ibid., p. 172.

medieval values. Rather a pre-existing religious identity was reshaped and filled with a political content. In the interests of boosting Hindu numerical-political strength the Hindu Mahasabha, as will be demonstrated in Chapter One, sought to subsume in the category "Hindu" any faith that originated in India. Many of the communal politicians were not devout. In fact, Savarkar was an avowed atheist.¹² The one religious current that was closely identified with the Mahasabha, the Arya Samaj, developed only in the late nineteenth century.

In traditional Indian society, people identified themselves not as Hindus or Muslims, but according to social class.¹³ Nor was either religious current generally conceived as constituting a whole, radically distinct from, and opposed to, the other current. Both Hindus and Muslims were divided into numerous sects. Participation by the adherents of one faith in the religious festivals of the other was common.¹⁴

Many historians have pointed to the role the British

¹² Dhananjay Keer, Veer Savarkar (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1966), p. 201.

¹³ A.T. Embree, India's Search for National Identity (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) p. 18.

¹⁴ Mushirul Hasan, Nationalism and Communal Politics in India (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), pp. 1-13; Francis Robinson, Separatism Among Indian Muslims. The Politics of the United Provinces' Muslims, 1860-1923 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), Chapter 1; Paul Brass, "Elite Groups, Symbol Manipulation, and Ethnic Identity Among the Muslims of South Asia," in Political Identity in South Asia, eds. David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (London: Curzon Press, 1979), p. 53.

colonial authorities played in constructing communal political identities.

The British authorities materially assisted this process ... by treating the Muslims of India as an official category for purposes of census, enumeration, distribution of government appointments, political representation and education.¹⁵

British perceptions of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' as the two fundamental divisions of Indian society, despite the manifest diversity of these 'objective characteristics' intensified communal rivalries.¹⁶

The British insisted on discussing Indian society and politics in terms of Muslims and Hindus. ...

This is one of the most important facts of British Indian history; it was a potent force in encouraging the growth of political groups or parties on the basis of religious community. For, if the government wished, to woo 'the Muslims,' 'Muslims', whether true believers or not, would assuredly step forward to take whatever was going.¹⁷

Whether first formulated as part of a deliberate policy of "divide and rule" or, as is more likely, as the result of the efforts of the colonial authorities to impose conceptual order on an unfamiliar and complex Indian reality, communal categories and similarly constructed concepts of caste (eg. "the martial races") were rapidly incorporated into the system

¹⁵ Brass, Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁶ Christopher King, One Language, Two Scripts. The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 17.

¹⁷ F. Robinson, pp. 99-100. See also, Gayendra Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), particularly Chapter 2; G.R. Thursby, Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India. A Study of Controversy Conflict and Communal Movements in Northern India, 1923-1928 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975), pp. 174-175; and Sandria Freitag, Collective Action and Community. Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 61.

of imperial control.¹⁸ The British Raj, as the historians cited above observed, created communal political interests, then used them to woo support and sow discord among a native political elite comprised of the remnants of India's gentry and newly empowered merchant-banker and professional classes.

The British Indian government also invoked communal and caste categories to justify policies that were in fact designed to placate class interests. The Punjab Land Alienation Act of 1900 was designed to bolster the position of the province's landlords vis à vis the moneylenders and traders. But it did so not by placing restrictions on the powers of capital, but by barring certain castes of Hindus, those from which most of the province's money-lenders and traders came, from owning and repossessing land. "From that time forward a distinction was drawn between agricultural and non-agricultural tribes and those unfortunate enough to fall in the second category suffered severe discrimination."¹⁹ Separate communal electorates were a major factor in the communalization of politics, for candidates for political office were no longer compelled to seek support from electors who belonged to

¹⁸ G. Pandey discusses how diffuse caste identities were recast by colonial authorities into rigid socio-economic categories in the Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), especially pp. 67-69.

¹⁹ David Page, Prelude to Partition. The Indian Muslims and the Imperial System of Control 1920-1932 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 49. See also S.L. Malhotra, Gandhi an Experiment with Communal Politics. (A Study of Gandhi's Role in Punjab Politics, 1922-1931) (Chandigarh: Panjab University, 1975), pp. 23-25.

India's other major faith. Their introduction under the 1909 Indian Councils Act, however, had a quite specific purpose: to bolster the position of the Muslim landlords whose political authority had come under increasing challenge from a growing class of Muslim professionals.²⁰

The promotion of communal interests and manipulation of communal tensions were far from the only means employed by the British to maintain imperial rule. Moreover, it was only a means, not the goal of British. Concerned as they were first and foremost with the maintenance of public order, the colonial authorities were aghast when the tensions generated by communal political conflict began, in the 1920s, to be vented in riots. Still the policy of "Divide and Rule" was not, as some historians have suggested, a fiction invented by nationalist politicians.²¹ Wrote Lord Birkenhead, the Secretary of State for India, to Viceroy Reading, "I have always placed my highest and most permanent hopes in the eternity of the communal situation."²² Churchill, according to the minutes of a 1940 cabinet meeting, "regarded the Hindu-Muslim feud as the bulwark of British rule in India."²³

But if the British could divide Indians, it was only

²⁰ Page, pp. 13-14.

²¹ See for example, Francis Robinson, p. 2 and pp. 348-349; Thursby, p.173-175.

²² As cited by Thursby, p. 173.

²³ As cited by Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, Second Revised Edition (New Delhi: Vikas, 1987), p. 245.

because there were numerous socio-economic faultlines underlying Indian society.²⁴ Another conclusion emerging from recent historical writing is that the rise of communalism was fuelled by the attempt of various social groups to use religion and religious identities as a means of validating their social status and safeguarding their power. The cow-protection movement that erupted in the U.P. and Bihar in the 1890s derived significant support from a layer of newly prosperous peasants who saw it as a means of laying claim to a higher social status.²⁵ The gentry clutched at religion as a means of asserting its traditional right to political leadership under conditions where its wealth and social position were increasingly being undermined by the economic and cultural upheaval that had resulted from India's subjugation to an alien, capitalist power.

The relative weight that these two interconnected elements--British colonial policy and the power struggle among indigenous social groups--played in the growth and ultimate

²⁴ One tack taken by those who have attacked the Congress thesis that the British encouraged communalism is to claim that the nationalists held that the British had simply conjured up the communal problem. In fact, as Chandra has reminded us, the nationalists well understood India was fraught with divisions. (Communalism, pp. 238-242.) Wrote J. Nehru, "Obviously, no one can say that there was not an inherent tendency towards division in India, and with the prospect of the approach of political power, this was likely to grow. It was possible to adopt a policy to tone down this tendency; it was also possible to accentuate it. The Government adopted the latter policy..." (Selected Works of J. Nehru, 1972 Series, Vol. 7, pp. 69-70).

²⁵ Freitag, p. 166; G. Pandey, The Construction of Communalism, pp. 93-94.

triumph of communalism is one of the fundamental questions at issue in the historiographic debate over communalism and Partition.

It can be argued "Indian" was also a constructed political identity.²⁶ Indeed, the first response of the British Raj to the rise of Indian nationalism was to deny that there were any Indians.²⁷ What distinguished Indian nationalism from Muslim and Hindu communalism was political program. Notwithstanding the limitations, prejudices and selfish class interests of the Congress leadership, the vision of a democratic, secular and united India was, within the context of colonial India, a liberating one that served to undermine caste and religious barriers. It can be argued that the Indian National Congress ultimately betrayed this vision, preferring to unite India from above, by inheriting the state constructed by the Raj, to leading a popular movement from below. What is undeniable is that in the years prior to partition both the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha became refuges for the most reactionary elements within Indian society.

Before proceeding, a caution and an explanation are required. First the caution. Several historians of

²⁶ Eric Hobsbawm's Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) is a good summation of the argument against the ethno-linguistic school of nationalism and nation-state formation.

²⁷ Embree, p. 1.

communalism have rightly warned of the danger of inadvertently adopting the categories of communalism.²⁸ The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha were not "Hindu politicians," nor the leaders of the Muslim League "Muslim politicians." They were communal politicians. They claimed to be the political representatives of existing communal communities, while actually they were in the business of constructing such communities.

Secondly, the explanation. Bipan Chandra, one of the foremost authorities on the history of communalism has criticized the term "Hindu nationalist."²⁹ Those who championed "Hinduvta," Savarkar's conception that India was exclusively a Hindu nation, were not, argues Chandra, nationalists at all. They were "loyalists."³⁰ They were more interested in gaining communal advantage than in winning Indian independence and hankered after an alliance with the British Indian government. His argument has some merit. Still, some term is needed to distinguish those Hindu communalists who sought to combine the defence of Hindu communal interests with Indian nationalism, from those who advocated Hinduvta. As no other term is common coin, I have reserved the term Hindu nationalist for the advocates of

²⁸ Chandra, Communalism, pp. 10-15.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 99.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 101.

Hinduvta.³¹

The Mahasabha's Aims, Program and Perception of Self

Historians have written little about the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. I would suggest this is not simply due to the Mahasabha's lack of electoral success. If the rival national schools of historiography born of Partition have been disinclined to investigate the Mahasabha's emergence as a communal political party, it may be because such a study would raise troubling questions. During the 1920s and even much of the 1930s, the Mahasabha was closer organizationally and politically to the Congress, or at least the Congress right-wing, than many Indian historians would care to admit. A study of the Mahasabha-Congress relationship undermines the claim the Congress was a communal organization in nationalist guise.

This thesis can not be a comprehensive history of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha. Scant attention is paid to its

³¹ The term Hindu nationalist has been used by several historians and political scientists, including K.P. Karunkaran, in connection with the Extremist faction of the Congress. The Extremists' propaganda was tinged with Hindu chauvinism and anti-Muslim sentiment, but the Extremists were not Hindu nationalists. They did not deliberately exclude the Muslims from the Indian nation. In the 1920s, a significant number of former Extremists, including Lajpat Rai and many associates of the late B.G. Tilak joined the Hindu Mahasabha. Some, most notably Dr. B.S. Moonje, ultimately did adopt a Hindu nationalist viewpoint. Others, including Lajpat Rai, did not. In his last major speech before his death, Lajpat Rai emphatically declared, "I do not want the Hindus to call themselves a gaum [nation]." (Lajpat Rai Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2, p. 453.)

organizational growth and structure. The focus is on the Mahasabha's aims, program, and perception of self, as manifested in its conference resolutions and campaigns and in its interaction with other organizations. Of especial importance will be the Mahasabha's changing perception of its role as the spokesman of India's Hindus. The development of a "Hindu" political consciousness necessarily entailed a redefinition of the Hindu Mahasabha's attitude toward communal relations, the struggle for independence, the Congress and the British Indian government.

The discussion of the Mahasabha leadership is limited to the internal struggle over the Mahasabha's orientation and its interaction with the Congress and the various Congress factions.

No attempt has been made to analyze the social composition of the Mahasabha and its leadership. Scholars have shown that the communal parties had their principal base of support among the professional middle class--among those whose interests were most directly affected by the communal struggle over government jobs and patronage--and the landlords.³² In the Punjab, the Hindu Mahasabha also received strong support from Hindu traders and money-lenders who found their interests threatened by communal legislation, beginning

³² Shan Muhammad, The Growth of Muslim Politics in India (1900-1919) (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1991), p. 125; Also see Prabha Dixit, Communalism--A Struggle for Power (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1974) Chapter 7 and Chandra, Communalism, Chapter 2.

with the 1900 Land Alienation Act.³³

The emphasis this thesis places on political ideology and program runs counter to an important school in recent Indian historical writing. The Cambridge School, whose leading representatives include Gordon Johnson, Judith Brown and C.A. Bayly, view ideology as nothing more than an instrument, a means for elite groups to mask their real socio-economic interests and manipulate the gullible. Ignored is the role ideology plays in the cognition of the world. However, even were the student of a socio-political struggle to concede no more significant a role to ideology than that it helps social groups to coalesce, to identify themselves as a group with common interests, he or she would still be obliged to trace the origins and evolution of that ideology.

The Origins and Early History of the Mahasabha

The All-India Hindu Mahasabha (or Great Society) was founded in 1915 out of the union of two provincial Hindu Sabhas, one covering the Punjab, the other the United Provinces.³⁴ The two provincial Sabhas had quite different histories and orientations.

The Punjab Hindu Sabha had been founded as an overtly political organization. The items that topped the agenda of its first conference, held in Lahore October, 21-22, 1909,

³³ Malhotra, p. 26 and 29; Chandra, Communalism, p. 84.

³⁴ Initially the Mahasabha was known as the All-India Hindu Sabha. It changed its name in 1921.

were "1. Hindus and Punjab Land Alienation Act and Preemption Acts. 2. Hindus and the [Morley-Minto] Reform Scheme. [and] 3. Hindus and Government Service."³⁵

The Chairman of the Reception Committee at the 1909 Conference was Lal Chand, a Punjab High Court Judge. With some justification, Chand was later described by the Mahasabha as the founder of "the Hindu National Movement."³⁶ In a series of articles published in The Punjabee of Lahore and reissued in 1909 as Self-Abnegation in Politics, Chand indicted the Congress for betraying "Hindu interests," appeasing the Muslims and weakening Hindu self-consciousness. Chand promoted the Punjab Hindu Sabha as a political alternative to the Congress, for he considered the Congress beyond repair.

Mending Congress on the lines I advocate would mean ending the Congress ... would mean not a mere change in the name but a change in the ideal. ... The ideals are totally different and one must make his choice absolutely. A person who believes in the Indian ideal would subordinate the Hindu interests as of secondary importance, and this has actually happened in the conduct of the Congress leaders. ... Whereas those who believe in the Hindu ideal must subordinate the Indian as of secondary significance and lend their support to it so far only as the ideal does not militate against the real Hindu interests.³⁷

Understandably, the Congress leadership did not look favorably on the new organization. In his presidential

³⁵ As cited in Dixit, p. 149.; K.W. Jones, "The Arya Samaj in British India, 1874-1947," in Religion in Modern India, Second Edition, ed. Robert D. Baird (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), p. 34.

³⁶ Bhai Parmanand, "Foreword" to L. Chand, Self-Abnegation in Politics (Lahore: The Central Hindu Yuvak Sabha, 1938.)

³⁷ Lala Chand, Self-Abnegation in Politics, pp. 119-120.

address to the 1909 session of the Indian National Congress, Madan Mohan Malaviya warned of a "great estrangement" between Hindus and Muslims, then rebuked those who "under the influence of this feeling ...advocate that Hindus should abandon the hope of building up a common national life, and should devote themselves to promote the interest of their own community as Mahomedans have tried to promote theirs."³⁸ G.K. Gokhale, Motilal Nehru and the Extremist leader Aurobindo Ghose also placed on record their opposition to the Punjab Hindu Sabha.³⁹

The origins of the United Provinces Hindu Sabha are less clear. It appears to have emerged out of the movement to found a Hindu University at Benares. Unlike its Punjabi counterpart, the U.P. Hindu Sabha was an ostensibly non-political organization, although it did speak out in 1916 against a bill which provided for separate Muslim representation on the province's municipal councils. The local Sabhas established in the major towns of the U.P. were

³⁸ As cited by B.D. Graham, "The Congress and Hindu Nationalism", in The INC: Centenary Hindsight, ed. D.A. Low (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 171)

³⁹ Wrote Ghose, who was renowned for his Hindu revivalist beliefs: "We do not understand Hindu nationalism as a possibility under modern conditions. Our ideal ... is an Indian nationalism, largely Hindu in its spirit and traditions, ... but wide enough also to include the Moslem and his culture and traditions and absorb them into itself." (As cited in Dixit, p. 125.) Said Gokhale, then the most important leader of the Congress, "The movement is frankly anti-Mohammedan ... and anti-national." (Cited in Chandra, Communalism, p. 100)

peopled by a cross-section of the Indian political elite. Among those on the Executive Committee of the U.P. Hindu Sabha in 1915 were Malaviya, M. Nehru, C.Y. Chintamani, Tej Bahadur Sapru and the taluqdar Rampal Singh.⁴⁰

At its birth the All-India Hindu Mahasabha took on the coloration of the U.P. Hindu Sabha. It purported to be an organization for Hindu social reform that brought together Congressmen and more politically-conservative Hindus to work "in loyal cooperation with the Government" on projects that would be beneficial to the Hindu community as a whole. A reference to Hindus' "political interests" was made in the Mahasabha's constitution, but, only in passing, in the sixth and last clause of the "Aims."⁴¹ In 1918, under the impact of the Home Rule movement and at a conference held in Delhi during the annual gathering of the Indian National Congress, the Mahasabha amended its constitution to include the attainment of "responsible government" among its goals.⁴²

In this period the Mahasabha remained limited to the UP and the Punjab. It was merely one in a growing number of socio-cultural and reform associations that a growing and

⁴⁰ Richard Gordon, "The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926," MAS, V. 9 (1975), p.153.

⁴¹ Swami Shradhannand, Saviour of the Dying Race (Delhi: 1926), pp. 109-110.

⁴² Ibid., p. 113; Indra Prakash, A Review of the History & Work of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Hindu Sanghatan Movement (New Delhi: The Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha, 1938) p. 163. Hereafter Prakash's work will be referred to as "Prakash, 1938."

increasingly wealthy layer of civic-minded, middle class Indians had established, on a pattern borrowed from the traditions of nineteenth-century liberal England. These associations, with their interlocking memberships and aims, considered politics to be the prerogative of the Indian National Congress.

CHAPTER 1

HINDU STRENGTH FOR HINDU-MUSLIM UNITY, 1922-1926

The All-India Hindu Mahasabha became a significant force in the politics of British India in the period of political reaction that followed the failure of the first mass movement for Indian self-rule.

The years 1917 through 1921 had been marked by tumultuous socio-political unrest, the transformation of the Indian National Congress into a mass political organization, and unprecedented inter-communal political action. Conversely, the half decade that followed was characterized by dashed hopes, recriminations, and communal strife. In 1921, at the height of the Non-Cooperation movement, the Indian National Congress had enrolled millions of members. By March 1923 its membership barely exceeded one hundred thousand.¹ No less dramatic was the deterioration in Hindu-Muslim relations. In the years 1923-27, communal disturbances were greater in number and more violent than at any time until 1946.

During the post-World War I nationalist upsurge, the

¹ Gopal Krishna, "The Development of the Indian National Congress as a Mass Organization, 1918-1923," in Modern India an Interpretative Anthology, ed. Thomas Metcalf (Toronto: MacMillan, 1971), p. 263.

Hindu Mahasabha had all but ceased to function. In the years 1919 through 1922 it met in annual session just once. The Mahasabha was relaunched in 1922-23 under the leadership of Madan Mohan Malaviya. A Congressman since 1886, Malaviya was one of the most experienced and respected Indian politicians. While other INC leaders, most notably Lajpat Rai (the "Lion of the Punjab"), came to champion the Mahasabha cause, it was Malaviya who from 1923 through 1926 spearheaded its work.²

An orthodox Brahmin and a principal figure in the campaign to establish a Hindu University at Benares, Malaviya had been associated with the Hindu Mahasabha since its founding. In 1917 he had presided over its annual session. But on assuming the presidency of the Mahasabha in December 1922, Malaviya gave new importance to its work. While he pressed for the development of the Hindu Mahasabha as a broad-based and effectively organized movement, Malaviya brought it into closer association with the INC. Non-Congressmen--such as the Liberal politician C.Y. Chintamani and the taluqdar Rampal Singh--remained an integral part of the organisation. Its leadership, however, passed into the hands of experienced Congress politicians, who promoted the Mahasabha as a Hindu counterpart to the Muslim organizations with which the

² Although in other respects critical of Malaviya, both Swami Shradhdhanand, the leader of the shuddhi conversion movement, and Indra Prakash, the author of the Mahasabha's official history, credit him with having "laid the foundation of the present Hindu Sangathan [unity] movement." (Shradhdhanand, p. 119 and Prakash, Hindu Mahasabha: Its Contribution to Indian Politics, 1966, p. vii).

Congress had waged the Non-Co-operation movement and was still nominally allied. That on three occasions between December 1922 and December 1926 special sessions of the Hindu Mahasabha were held in conjunction with the INC's annual deliberations indicates the strength of the ties that linked the Mahasabha to the Congress.

No doubt the change in Malaviya's conception of the Mahasabha was bound up with his own factional maneuvering within the Congress. In 1923, unlike in 1917, he found himself at odds with the leadership of both the All-India Congress Committee and the Provincial Congress Committee in his own United Provinces. The Mahasabha provided Malaviya with a vehicle for rallying his supporters and attacking his Congress opponents. Others--particularly a group of Maharashtran Congressmen who had been followers of the late Lokamanya Tilak--also used the Hindu Mahasabha as a platform from which to vie for influence within the Congress. But the growth in the Mahasabha's membership and its increased significance cannot be attributed simply to its value as a factional tool of various Congress politicians. What made the Mahasabha a valuable factional tool was that its program--the defence of "Hindu interests"--tapped into and fanned the confusion and dissatisfaction within the Congress over the leadership's stand on Hindu-Muslim unity.

Here is not the place to trace the complex process by which M.K. Gandhi gained unprecedented authority over the

Congress in the years 1920-22.³ Suffice it to say, Gandhi appeared to have solutions to two problems that had long vexed the Congress: how to forge Hindu-Muslim unity and how to mobilize the popular support needed to win concessions from the British without precipitating a violent challenge to the social order.

The Gandhian solution to these problems, however, made the nationalist movement's already ambiguous attitude toward communal identities even more confused. In his political appeals, particularly those addressed to the peasantry, Gandhi employed Hindu religious symbols and traditions. At the same time, he aligned the Congress with the Khilafat movement, which opposed Britain's plans to dismember the former Ottoman Empire on a religious rather than a political basis, from the standpoint of Pan-Islamism, not anti-imperialism.⁴

Many veteran Congress politicians had questioned the wisdom of tying the Congress to the Khilafat movement, but had dared not publicly oppose it when Gandhi's program was

³ Judith Brown's Gandhi's Rise to Power in Indian Politics, 1915-1922 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972) is the most detailed account.

⁴ Lajpat Rai did much to foment communalism in the last years of his life. However, during the Non-Cooperation Movement he sought to rally support for the Khilafat cause from the standpoint of anti-imperialism. "Any further extension of the British Empire in Asia," he told the December 1920 (Nagpur) session of the INC "is detrimental to the interests of India...If the British imperialist had no scruples in using Indian troops in Egypt, Persia and Mesopotamia... why will he have any [scruples] in using the troops he raises in these countries against us? The Hindu-Muslim problem will become ten times more troublesome and dangerous." (Gail Minault, The Khilafat Movement, p. 114.)

mustering mass support. They saw subsequent events as confirming their worst fears. The Khilafat movement became "bogged down in religious issues instead of concentrating on the consolidation and integration of anti-colonial forces," concedes the author of a historical monograph that argues Pan-Islamism expressed emerging Indian nationalism not communal separatism.⁵

The immediate impulse for the revival of the Mahasabha was provided by the Moplah (Malabar) rebellion of August 1921 and by the riots that rocked the Multan District in the Punjab in September 1922. The Mahasabha organized relief for the Hindu victims of these disturbances. That in both instances the communal violence had an obvious socio-economic or class dimension served only to further agitate Malaviya and other conservative Congress leaders.⁶ They perceived "unruly Muslims" to be attacking both their faith and their property.

But it was a more general apprehension about the impact of the Khilafat movement that caused large numbers of Congressmen to flock to the Hindu Mahasabha sessions at Gaya in December 1922 and Benares in August 1923. They were alarmed by the Khilafat movement's stimulation of Muslim consciousness, by the entry of the ulema into politics and by

⁵ M. Hasan, Nationalism, p. 285.

⁶ During the Moplah rebellion, Muslim peasants forced Hindu landlords to convert to Islam at pain of death. In Multan, the fury of the Muslim peasants was directed against Hindu money-lenders.

the Muslim leaders' success in mobilizing popular support.⁷ As Rajendra Prasad, India's first president, relates in his memoirs, he and many others felt "the necessity of Hindu organization ..."⁸ "The Khilafat agitation," wrote the veteran Congressman B.C. Pal, "has helped to make the Mohammedan community as a whole much stronger than the Hindu community ... The Hindus must apply themselves seriously to organize their forces and resources just as the Mohammedans have done."⁹

Initially, the Hindu Mahasabha did not question the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. Only it insisted that inter-communal unity could not be brought about simply through the building of the Congress. Hindus needed their own communal organization to unify all elements of the Hindu community and to defend Hindus from what Malaviya termed "the rowdy section among the Mohammedans."¹⁰

As communal strife intensified, and politicians from

⁷ B.R. Nanda, Gandhi: Pan-Islamism, Imperialism and Nationalism in India (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 392-394 and F. Robinson, p. 338.

⁸ Prasad, At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi (New York: Philosophical Library, 1955), p. 141. See also the testimony of M.R. Jayakar before the 1929 Bombay Riots Inquiry Committee: "... the alliance between the Congress and the Khilafat movement, the Ulemas coming into the political sphere and Fatwas being promulgated in the political world ... created the fear in many Hindus that the interests of the Hindus were not safe in the hands of the Congress." (Jayakar Papers, File 437, Item 118).

⁹ F. Robinson, p. 338.

¹⁰ M. Hasan, Nationalism, p. 242.

both sides of the communal divide found they could rally support by exploiting communal antagonisms, the attack on Gandhi's Hindu-Muslim policy became more overt. In a May 1924 article, Gandhi acknowledged that he had received

many letters ... some from well-known friends telling me that I was responsible even for the alleged Moplah atrocities, in fact for all the riots in which the Hindus have or are said to have suffered since the Khilafat agitation. The argument is somewhat this: 'You asked the Hindus to make common cause with the Musalmans in the Khilafat question. Your being identified with it gave it an importance it would never have otherwise received. It unified and awakened the Musalmans. It gave prestige to the Maulvis which they never had before. And now the Khilafat question is over, the awakened Musalmans have proclaimed a kind of jihad against us Hindus'.¹¹

At the INC's Gaya session, Gandhi's policy of boycotting the legislative councils, the last remaining plank of the suspended Non-Cooperation campaign, was directly challenged. In retrospect, it is evident that the revival of the Hindu Mahasabha--which began at a conference held in the Congress pandal at Gaya--was a second challenge to Gandhi's leadership. The relaunching of the Mahasabha, however, was not widely perceived to be directed against Gandhi, let alone the Congress. A calculating politician, Malaviya accepted the Hindu Mahasabha presidency only on condition that Rajendra Prasad, one of the leaders of the pro-Gandhi No-Change faction at the Gaya Congress, joined the Mahasabha and nominated him for that office.¹² But the broad involvement of Congress

¹¹ Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi [CWG], V. XXIV, p. 136. Also see Prasad, At the Feet of Mahatma Gandhi, p. 137.

¹² Prasad, Ibid., p. 141.

politicians in the Mahasabha--in the years 1923 through 1926, leaders of all the major Congress factions, including the Swarajists C.R. Das and M. Nehru, participated in its deliberations--cannot be attributed simply to Malaviya's maneuvers. As Prasad candidly admits, he joined the Mahasabha "because I saw nothing wrong with it."¹³ Gandhi's appeal to Hindu religiosity as well as the INC's alliance with such Muslim organizations as the Jamiat-i-ulema and the Muslim League seemed to validate the organization of Hindus in a communal body.

As for the Mahatma himself, he failed to recognize that the Hindu Mahasabha was on a fundamentally different trajectory.¹⁴ Even after the Hindu Mahasabha had, through its promotion of the shuddhi conversion movement and vigorous assertion of Hindus' right to play music before mosques, proven to be an instigator of communal strife, Gandhi sought to coax it into moderating its stance and defended Malaviya and Lajpat Rai, its foremost leaders, from charges of being

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ That the emergence of the Hindu Mahasabha was a reaction against Gandhi's policy was recognized by some contemporary political leaders. In his presidential address to the 18th session of the Muslim League in December 1926, Sheik Abudl Qadir said, Gandhi "had a genuine sympathy with Muslim sentiment and firmly believed that no political progress was possible without Hindu-Muslim unity, but a large number of his co-religionists did not share his views and there has been a strong reaction against Mahatma Gandhi's policy. As a consequence of this reaction the Shuddhi and Sangathan movements came into being." (Indian Muslims. A Documentary Record, V. 8, ed. Shan Muhammad, p. 194).

anti-Muslim.¹⁵ Gandhi's January 1927 remarks about Hindu sangathan [unity] underscore his failure to grasp the Hindu Mahasabha's communalist aims. Gandhi called the Mahasabha-led Hindu sangathan movement "a sound movement."

I have kept myself aloof from it because of my peculiar ideas of organization. I believe in quality rather than quantity. The fashion nowadays is to rely on quantity even at the cost of quality.¹⁶

What Gandhi mistakenly termed a difference over organizational practices was in fact the difference between "Hindu" as a religious and as a political identity. A devout Hindu, Gandhi's concern in respect to Hindu sangathan was with questions of doctrine and spiritual commitment. The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha, as we shall see in this chapter, were concerned with maximizing the numerical-political strength of the Hindu community.

I--The Program of the Hindu Mahasabha

In relaunching the Hindu Mahasabha, Malaviya linked its first aim--Hindu sangathan--to the attainment of swaraj and Hindu-Muslim unity. The Mahasabha's (1922) Gaya session motivated the call for the building of the Mahasabha on the grounds that it was necessary "for the fulfilment of the first essential condition of attaining Swaraj, viz. Hindu-Muslim unity."¹⁷ "There is no more effective means for having Hindu-

¹⁵ See for example CWG, V. XXIX, p. 330.

¹⁶ CWG, V. XXXII, p. 515.

¹⁷ Indian Annual Register [IAR], 1923: V. 1, p. 941.

Muslim unity than by strengthening the Hindu community," Chintamani told the Mahasabha's 1923 session.

A key element in strengthening the Hindu community and forging a viable Hindu-Muslim alliance, or so claimed the Mahasabha, was organizing Hindus on a communal basis to resist aggression by the "irresponsible element" among the Muslims. Unity, warned Malaviya, could never "be maintained unless both Hindus and Musalmans individually felt strong enough to defend themselves against attacks by bad elements of the other" community.¹⁸

Friendship could only exist between equals. If the Hindus made themselves strong and the rowdy section among the Mohammedans could not rob or dishonor Hindus, unity could be established on a stable basis.¹⁹

Among the main items of business at the 1923 Benares session of the Mahasabha was the adoption of a resolution calling for the formation of Hindu Volunteer Corps in every village and town for "the social service of the Hindu community and its protection when necessary ..." The resolution instructed the Corps "to preserve peace and order in the locality, in co-operation with the followers of other religions, if possible."²⁰

Malaviya told the Benares session those responsible for the communal violence were not "good and gentle Mohammedans",

¹⁸ IAR, 1923: V. 1, p. 940.

¹⁹ M. Hasan, Nationalism, p. 242.

²⁰ Prakash, 1938, p. 168.

but "rogues, vagabonds and bad elements of the Muslim society."²¹ Yet he did not call on the INC to halt the communal strife, nor propose the creation of some other national or inter-communal organization to maintain peace. Self-defence was to be a communal affair. Similarly, the Mahasabha limited its relief efforts to the Hindu victims of communal violence.

Malaviya and other Mahasabha leaders often made scathing and derogatory remarks about Muslims. In his presidential address to the Mahasabha's 1923 session, Malaviya reviewed the "unhappy" history of Hindu-Muslim disturbances since the turn of the century. In every instance, he found Muslims were the aggressors and Hindus the victims of "horrible inhumanities."²² Swami Shradhdhanand, a leader of the Hindu Mahasabha and the spearhead of the shuddhi conversion or "re-conversion" movement, denied Hindus bore any responsibility for the deterioration in communal relations.

It is true shuddhi is a cause of Muslim dissatisfaction, but the Muslims are responsible for it. Muslims think that they are made to do the beating and Hindus are for beating. ... The present enmity is not due to the Hindus. Its cause is the Muslims.²³

Strident denunciations of Muslim aggression were coupled with lamentations about the state of Hindu society. Malaviya told the special session of the Mahasabha held at Belgaum in

²¹ IAR, 1923: V. 2, p. 131.

²² Ibid., pp. 131-132.

²³ Thursby, p. 164.

December 1924 he was convinced that some of the communal riots that had erupted in the preceding months could have been avoided were it not for "the weakness and cowardice of Hindus."²⁴ According to Malaviya, Hindu society was physically, socially and morally feeble. Physical weakness was expressed in a falling birth rate, rising death rate and a want of courage. This decline in the physical strength of the Hindu community was a consequence of social decay. Hindus had allowed social evils like child-marriage and untouchability to enter their social system. The social decay of Hindu society was itself rooted in moral decline. Hindus had forgotten their dharma. The most striking expression of Hindus' moral decline was their failure to defend their own religion, their reluctance to lay down their lives to defend Hindu dharma.²⁵

Although Malaviya held that the crisis confronting Hindu society was due to a loss of dharma, religious teaching played only a minor role in the program he outlined for the Mahasabha. Rather the Mahasabha program consisted mainly of proposals for social and cultural reforms, most of which had been raised by political, social and religious reform movements, including the Congress, since the nineteenth

²⁴ As cited by Bakshi, Madan Mohan Malaviya. The Man and His Ideology (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 1991), p. 99.

²⁵ Bakshi, p. 99 and S.L. Gupta, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya. A Socio-Political Study (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1978), p. 294.

century.

The Mahasabha called for the education of girls and urged Hindus not to marry off their daughters before they attained the age of 12 and their sons before they reached 18.

It also, although not without considerable opposition, called for the removal of the disabilities on Untouchables. (As this element of the Mahasabha's program was bound up with its efforts to bolster the numerical strength of the Hindu community it shall be discussed below.)

Mahasabha sessions routinely passed resolutions supporting the use of swadeshi cloth, preferably hand-spun; hand-woven Khaddar.

The Mahasabha promoted physical training for boys and girls. This was a traditional pursuit of social reform and nationalist groups--a reaction against colonialism. The British had divided Indians into so-called martial and non-martial races, barred the latter from serving in the army or bearing arms, and routinely mocked Indians, particularly Bengalis, for cowardice and effemininity. However, physical education, as other elements of the Mahasabha program, took on a different significance when promoted from a communal standpoint. The calls for physical training were invariably coupled with those for Hindu self-defence.

The organization of physical fitness troupes or akharas was among the most popular and successful of the activities undertaken by the local Hindu Sabhas. These troupes provided

training in wrestling, gymnastics and the use of lathis (wooden clubs). Many akhara members were subsequently implicated in communal violence.²⁶

The Mahasabha urged that Hindi in the Nagari script be made the lingua franca of India. Like its advocacy of physical education, this demand had a nationalist and an anti-Muslim side. By omission it denied equal status to Urdu--a variety of Hindi, written in a modified Persian script, which had served as the judicial language in north India for close to a century and which was favored by the Muslim elite. Ultimately Hindi became associated with Hindu, while Urdu came to be viewed as the exclusive patrimony of the Muslims.²⁷

Another important element in the Mahasabha program was cow-protection. To his subsequent regret, Gandhi agreed in December 1924 to serve as chairman of an All-India Cow Protection League whose leading committee was largely staffed by Mahasabhites, including Lala Lajpat Rai, Swami Shradhanand, Dr. Moonje, N.C. Kelkar and Dr. Bhagwandas.²⁸ The cow-protection movement, which was initiated in the 1880s

²⁶ See below "The Hindu Mahasabha and Communal Violence."

²⁷ By 1925 Gandhi had persuaded the Congress to accept "Hindustani" in the Nagari and Persian scripts, ie. in both its Hindi and Urdu forms, as its official language. The script/language controversy is the subject of Christopher King's One Language, Two Scripts.

²⁸ CWG, Vol. XXVI, pp. 317-318. The General-Secretary of the All-India Cow Protection League from 1922-1926, Nami Gopal Banerjee, subsequently became secretary of the Bhagalpur District Hindu Mahasabha. (Selected Works of Motilal Nehru, Vol. 5, p. 234).

by the founder of the Arya Samaj Hindu reform movement, Swami Dyananand, had been associated with efforts to promote a Hindu consciousness that transcended regional, linguistic, caste and class differences. It also had often assumed a militant, anti-Muslim tenor and, from the 1890s on, had frequently led to communal riots, as Hindus tried to prevent Muslims from performing cow-sacrifice during the annual Bakr Id religious festival.²⁹

Increasing Hindus' Numerical Strength

What was new in the Hindu Mahasabha's program and campaigns was its emphasis on maximizing the numerical strength of India's Hindu population. For the Mahasabha, the chief measure of Hindu strength came to be a population ratio, the proportion of Hindus to Muslims in India.³⁰

Speakers from the Mahasabha rostrum repeatedly warned

²⁹ The cow-protection movement has been analyzed by Sandria Freitag in Collective Action and Community (see especially Chapter 5, pp. 148-174) and by John McLane in Chapters 9 and 10 of his Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977.)

³⁰ Although the Hindu Mahasabha was the first organization to make maximizing Hindus' numerical strength its principal activity, it was not the first to raise concerns either about the decline in the Hindu proportion of the population or the definition of Hindu used in compiling the decennial census. The first conference of the Punjab Hindu Sabha discussed the decline in Hindu's "numerical strength." In 1911, there was a furor following the leak of the Gait Circular, a government document that appeared to support a proposal from Muslim communalists that Untouchables, Hill tribesmen and members of other "backward classes" not be classified as Hindus in the coming census. The controversy over the Gait Circular is discussed by Kenneth W. Jones in "Religious Identity and the Indian Census", The Census in British India: New Perspectives, ed. N.G. Barrier (New Delhi: Manohar, 1981), pp. 91-94.

that the Hindus were "a dying race"--no matter that the 1921 census had reported that there were 150 million Hindus living on the subcontinent (including Burma) and that they comprised 65.9% of the total population.³¹ In his presidential address to the Feb. 1924, Allahabad session, Dr. Kurtakcti declared: "If in these hard times, Hindus do not take seriously in hand the holy work of 'Conversion' and prevent their brethren from embracing alien faiths through mistaken views, I say here as I stand that within ten decades you shall find no Hindu on the surface of this earth."³² Shradddhanand made a somewhat more conservative prediction. If "no efforts were made to stop the present decline" the Hindus "would be swallowed up" in 420 years.³³

The anxiety, or should we say phobia, over population ratios becomes comprehensible only when one understands that political power and employment had become tied to the census and to the British Indian administration's census categories.³⁴ As discussed earlier, the colonial authorities

³¹ The Nehru Report, republished in The Nehru Report an Anti-Separatist Manifesto, ed. N. Gerald Barrier (New Delhi: Michiko & Panjathan, 1975), p. 27.

³² Prakash, 1938, p. 90.

³³ Shradddhanand, p. 15.

³⁴ The discussion here is limited to the rational motive behind the Mahasabha's fixation with the census figures. A more comprehensive study of the development of communalism would have to consider why, almost simultaneously, privileged sections of India's population from both the Muslim and Hindu faiths came to be gripped by a psychotic fear for the fate of their religion. In passing, I would suggest that the cries of Hindudom and Islam "in danger"

employed communal categories in their system of imperial control and increasingly allotted seats on government bodies, public service jobs, education grants and other forms of government largesse on a communal basis. But how were the communal shares determined? Traditionally, the British had sought to rule through the landowning elite. Consequently, the share of power that fell to a particular communal community was usually bound up with its strength within that elite. In the United Provinces, where Muslim landlords owned much of the land, an elite group of Muslims wielded considerable political power and were well-represented in the government bureaucracy. In Bengal, on the other hand, relatively few Muslims were to be found in governing bodies or administration.³⁵ There, Muslims, although a much larger proportion of the population than in the U.P., comprised only a small part of the landowning elite.

The First World War and its stormy aftermath compelled the British to make adjustments to their system of imperial control. Faced with demands for democratic reforms, the British drafted the Government of India Act of 1919. It introduced separate electorates for Sikhs and Christians--they

served as a cri de coeur for those who feared that the old order in India was dying, that their economic and social position was threatened.

³⁵ F. Robinson pp. 15-32; P. Hardy, The Muslims of British India (London: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 121-125; and J.H. Broomfield, Elite Conflict in a Plural Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), "Part 1: Bengal and the Bhadrak." "

had existed for Muslims since 1909--and enshrined the principle of political representation on the basis of communal numerical strength in the Central Legislature and Provincial Councils. As one historian has noted "... under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, for the first time, power began to be distributed, at least in some measure according to population. ... Numbers began to matter."³⁶

A second effect of the legislative reform of 1919 was to greatly increase the stakes in the struggle for council seats. Under a system called dyarchy, control over a number of provincial government departments--and, hence, the power to dispense government contracts and other forms of patronage--was ceded to Indian legislators. Politicians, as is their wont, were quick to use their new power to reward their friends and to prove to their electors that they had the interests of their communal electorate at heart. Muslim communal politicians in the Punjab and Bengal used the provincial councils to wrest a larger share of government jobs and education grants for the Muslim middle class.³⁷

Boosting the numerical strength of the Hindu community was thus tied directly to the competition for jobs and contracts. And this competition grew fiercer in the 1920s, as the ranks of the educated swelled, while India's economy stagnated and the government, which had depleted India's

³⁶ Page, p. 40.

³⁷ Page, pp. 44-46 and pp. 69-72; Malhotra, pp. 44-45.

resources to support the war effort, retrenched. Declared M.J. Jayakar, the Swarajist leader in the Bombay Legislature and head of the Bombay Hindu Sabha, "Now that the Montagu-Chelmsford Report has put a value on each individual ... if a single Hindu be taken out of his religion owing to causes which have nothing to do with the religious change of mind--we resent that conversion."³⁸

How did the Hindu Mahasabha try to maximize the numerical strength of the Hindu community?

An inclusive definition of Hindu: First, it defined Hindu as broadly as possible. According to an amendment to the Mahasabha constitution adopted in 1924, all were Hindus who professed a faith indigenous to India, whether they were hill tribesmen, orthodox Hindus, members of the Arya Samaj, Buddhists, Jains or Sikhs.³⁹ The Mahasabha urged the government to interpret the results of the 1921 census in this vein and to use the Mahasabha's definition of Hindu in the next decennial census.

The promotion of a broad Hindu identity was aimed not

³⁸ Jayakar Papers, File 437, Item 118.

³⁹ Several of these groups did not accept the Mahasabha's definition. Take the Sikhs. Some attended Hindu Mahasabha sessions and Sikh organizations lent their support to the shuddhi conversion movement (J.F. Seunarine, Reconversion to Hinduism Through Shuddhi, p. 37). The Akali Dal, the principal Sikh organization, however, never accepted the Hindu Mahasabha's assertion that Sikhs are Hindus and resisted calls to give up separate Sikh council seats. [See for example, Lajpat Rai's report on the communal negotiations in the Punjab in December 1924, Jayakar Papers, File 478, Item 130.]

just at the Mahasabha's Muslim communalist adversaries. It was also directed against the Non-Brahmin movement, which had secured reserved seats in some provinces under the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms, and subsequently, become a major force in Madras province and a growing one in Maharashtra. Malaviya deplored that the "introduction of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms" had caused Brahmins and Non Brahmins, who "should have lived like brothers", to fight each other "for a few loaves and fishes of office, and a few Ministerships."⁴⁰ "If the Hindus were to organise themselves on a broad basis," Lajpat Rai told the Bombay Provincial Hindu Conference "the distinction between Brahman and Non-Brahmans is bound to disappear."⁴¹

Keeping Untouchables in the Hindu fold: The otherwise laudable objective of removing the disabilities on the Untouchables constituted a second front in the Hindu Mahasabha's campaign to make the Hindu community numerically strong. Time and again, Hindu Mahasabha conferences heard warnings that if upper caste Hindus did not allow Untouchables to use village wells and worship in Hindu temples the Untouchables would seek to get round these disabilities by joining other faiths. If Hindus did not remove the "blot" of Untouchability, Dr. Choitram told the 1926 Mahasabha session,

⁴⁰ As cited in Bakshi, pp. 99-100.

⁴¹ Lala Lajpat Rai Writings and Speeches, Vol. 2, ed. V.C. Joshi (Delhi: University Publishers, 1966), p. 249.

"Muslim and Christian missionaries would take advantage of the weakness of their social system."⁴² Malaviya's presidential address to the 1924 special session of the Mahasabha in Belgaum, was one of the rare occasions when a Mahasabha leader left aside, as he put it, "the political side of the swelling census figure" to argue that Hindus should oppose the disabilities out of a sense of "duty to their brethren untouchables ..."⁴³

The fear that the Untouchables might rebel against centuries of oppression by joining another faith was not without foundation. According to a Hindu Mahasabha report only timely action by a local Hindu Sabha stopped the "drainage of untouchable Hindus to other religions" in Berar.

It was reported that lower class Hindus of Mangrul, Hiwarkhed and Digras, being harassed by the upper class ones in respect of drawing water from public wells and some other social customs, had decided to embrace Islam to avoid social inequality. The Hindu Sabha members at once hurried to these places and by mutual understanding saved these 1000 souls.⁴⁴

Promoting the shuddhi conversion movement: Finally, and most divisively, the Hindu Mahasabha promoted shuddhi--a movement to win converts from the Muslim and Christian faiths.⁴⁵

⁴² IAR, 1926: V. 1, p. 401.

⁴³ As cited in Bakshi, p. 100.

⁴⁴ Prakash, 1938, p. 264.

⁴⁵ The term shuddhi, which literally means purification, was also used to refer to work among the Untouchables. For the purposes of this thesis, its usage is confined to the Hindu

Launched by the Arya Samaj at the beginning of the century, the shuddhi conversion movement was controversial within the Hindu community, since orthodox or Brahmanic Hinduism, with its emphasis on ritual purity and caste exclusivity, has no proselytizing tradition. It became a significant movement only in the early 1920s when the Malkana Rajputs, an orthodox Kshatriya clan, threw their support behind efforts to "reclaim" those of their brethren who had converted to Islam several centuries before. The change in the Malkana Rajputs' attitude to the shuddhi conversion movement was directly related to increasing communal tensions. It was, wrote Lajpat Rai, "the communal demands of the Muslim community, the policy of Fazl-i-Husain and the Multan Riots which created the necessary atmosphere" for the orthodox Rajputs to abandon their opposition to the reclamation of the Malkana Rajputs.⁴⁶

Shuddhi soon became a vital test of communal-political strength. Declared the editor of one newspaper, "It is true that Shuddhi should be for religious purposes alone, but the Hindus have been obliged by other considerations to embrace their own brothers. If the Hindus do not wake up now, they will be finished."⁴⁷ The Jamiat-al Ulema and other Muslim organizations responded by mounting a counter conversion

conversion movement.

⁴⁶ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 208.

⁴⁷ Dixit, Communalism, p. 159.

movement, tabligh. Many of those who had been active in the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements now became proponents of tabligh, including Saifuddin Kitchlew, the principal mobilizer for the Khilafat cause in the Punjab.⁴⁸

Malaviya and the other politicians active in the Hindu Mahasabha quickly embraced the shuddhi movement, but at the 1923 Benares session of the Mahasabha they encountered resistance from many Sanatan Dharma pandits. In an impassioned plea for the orthodox Hindu pandits to give shuddhi their sanction, Malaviya linked the conversion movement to the Mahasabha's efforts to reverse the perceived loss in Hindu political power. "When now we are so badly treated with a numerical strength of 22 crores, what would be our condition in future with a much reduced Hindu population, if we allow this rate of conversion from Hinduism and do not allow reconversion into Hinduism?"⁴⁹ Malaviya coupled this argument with a sinister warning that a group of influential mullahs were secretly plotting to launch "an expansive scheme for reconversion of Hindus on a grand active scale ..."⁵⁰ After a twelve-hour debate in the subjects committee, punctuated by threats that the orthodox pandits would walk

⁴⁸ For more on the tabligh movement see M. Hasan, Nationalism, pp. 232-237; Gail Minault, The Khilafat Movement. Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp. 193-195; and F. Robinson, p. 339.

⁴⁹ IAR, 1923: V. 2, p. 133.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

out, the Mahasabha adopted two resolutions on shuddhi. One welcomed the reclamation of the Malkana Rajputs. The other empowered the Mahasabha executive to appoint a committee of Hindu scholars to advise how the "feeling and desire all over the country" for reconversion "can be satisfied according to the preachings and interpretations of the shastras."⁵¹ Five months later, Malaviya secured a more emphatic declaration of support for the shuddhi movement from a meeting of learned pandits. The following week, on February 4, 1924, he convened a special session of the Mahasabha in order to endorse the pandits' decision. Soon after, the Mahasabha amended its constitution to include shuddhi among its "Aims and Objects."

Although the Hindu Sabhas carried out few conversions--the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha, the Arya Samaj and the Kshatriya Upakarini Sabha actually did most of the proselytizing--the shuddhi movement and the Hindu Mahasabha were all but synonymous. One of the best-known and most active Mahasabha leaders, Swami Shraddhanand, was President of the Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha and the spearhead of the conversion movement. Leading Mahasabhites Rampal Singh

⁵¹ IAR, 1923: V. 2, pp. 136-137. Page (pp. 75-77) claims Malaviya merely flirted with the shuddhi movement in 1923; that not until after M. Nehru had refused to cut a deal with his faction of the U.P. Provincial Congress following the council elections of late 1923 did Malaviya throw his support behind the conversion movement. This is a well-constructed argument. Unfortunately, it cannot survive comparison with the historical record. If, at the Mahasabha's 1923 session, Malaviya accepted a compromise resolution that only endorsed shuddhi in principle, it was because he feared the orthodox pandits would walk out and undermine his efforts to revive the Mahasabha.

and Raja Durga Narayan Singh of Tirwa were instrumental in securing the support of the Malkana Rajpat's caste association, the Kshatriya Upkarini Sabha, for the reconversion campaign.⁵² One of the principal bankrollers of the shuddhi movement, Seth Jugal Kishore Birla, was also a key financial backer of the Mahasabha.⁵³ At the September 1923 special Congress session and the Delhi Unity Conference (Sept. 26-October 2, 1924), Mahasabha leaders resisted calls for shuddhi to be suspended in the interests of communal peace. The Mahasabha's trumpeting of shuddhi lent stature to the conversion movement, helped it overcome opposition from orthodox Hindus, and served to elevate the shuddhi/tabligh controversy into an all-India affair.

The number of converts was not great--30,000 Malkana Rajputs were reclaimed in 1923--and after 1925 the movement pretty much petered out.⁵⁴ Indra Prakash, in his 1938 history of the Mahasabha, reproduced reports from conversion institutions showing that in the fifteen years 1923-1937 862,090 people had been converted to Hinduism and a further 39,529 "saved" from conversion to rival faiths.⁵⁵ If true, this would mean the shuddhi movement had affected the

⁵² Lajpat Rai, The Arya Samaj. An Account of its Origin, Doctrine, and Activities (Lahore: Uttar Chand Kapur & Sons, 1932), p. 252; R. Gordon, MAS, pp. 172-173.

⁵³ Thursby, p. 155; Prakash, 1938, p. 329.

⁵⁴ Thursby, p. 152.

⁵⁵ Prakash, 1938, pp. 416-417.

religious allegiance of about .4% of India's population, but even Prakash's figures were likely grossly inflated. The Census of India, 1931, reported that many Malkanas made money out of undergoing repeated conversions.⁵⁶

The shuddhi movement's impact on communal relations however, bore little relation to the number of converts it actually won. It both incited religious passions and politicized religion. Even Lajpat Rai, who held Hinduism's right to make converts to be "the great question of the 1920s," admitted "shuddhi and Tabligh ... created a situation the like of which was not known to Indian history." The "wound inflicted on Muslim sentiment" by shuddhi "was undoubtedly one of the basic causes" of an unprecedented wave of communal riots and violence.⁵⁷ Ultimately, Shradhanand himself fell victim to the communal passions he had helped arouse. On December 23, 1926, he was assassinated by a Muslim zealot.

Many of those who participated in the shuddhi and tabligh campaigns were no doubt sincere in their religious beliefs. The decision of the Arya Samaj and the orthodox Hindu community to bury their doctrinal differences and collaborate in promoting shuddhi can be understood, however, only from the standpoint of politics and the communal-political struggle. The Arya Samaj, because it considered

⁵⁶ Hasan, Nationalism, p. 233.

⁵⁷ Lajpat Rai, The Arya Samaj, pp. 255-257.

much orthodox Hindu ritual to be idolatry and opposed a hereditary priestly class, did not, prior to the 1920s, consider conversions to Sanatan Dharma as valid; yet, both wings of the Arya Samaj supported and even supervised the induction of Malkana Rajputs and other "reclaimed" Hindus into the orthodox community during the shuddhi campaign of the 1920s. The orthodox had, in the name of purification or "shuddhi," long championed religious-caste exclusivism. Now they collaborated with the reformist Samaj to reclaim their fallen brethren. That both shuddhi and tabligh missionaries used duplicity, bribery and even violence to gain converts only underscored that worldly interests were at stake.

At times the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha claimed that shuddhi was a purely religious movement. On other occasions, they frankly admitted it had a political side. "That ... [shuddhi] has direct political bearings," wrote Lajpat Rai, "cannot be denied and the only way to minimize its importance is to do away with communal representation."⁵⁸ In a report on the first three years of the Bombay Hindu Sabha, M.R. Jayakar argued that shuddhi was a defensive movement directed against the politically-motivated proselytization efforts of Muslim communalists. Hindus, he wrote,

had discovered that there was an organized attempt, chiefly due to political considerations, on the part of rival faiths to reduce numerically the strength of Hinduism, so that in the ultimate political evolution of India the position of the Hindus might be weakened.

⁵⁸ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 208.

Hinduism has always had a tolerant look towards other religions, but when it found that religious beliefs were being exploited for the purpose of consolidating the political strength of other communities and weakening that of the Hindu community, it had to be necessarily on the defensive and to organize itself in self-protection.⁵⁹

Writing in 1938, the then Hindu Mahasabha President V.D. Savarkar, bluntly asserted that the central purpose of shuddhi was to maximize Hindu's numerical political strength, that the reconversion movement was "not only a religious or dogmatic necessity but is in the main a political and national necessity."⁶⁰ Hindus, he said, must recognize:

political power in democracies ... hinges more and more on the census, the population strength of a community. And the population strength of the Hindus, other things being equal, must depend in the main on the Shuddhi Movement, i.e. on the proportion in which the Hindus succeed in stopping the dreadful conversion activities of the Alien faiths and in accelerating the reclamation of the alienated numbers back to the Hindu fold."⁶¹

Divisions within the Mahasabha over Religious-Social Issues

The Hindu Mahasabha pledged in its constitution that it would "not side or identify itself or interfere with or oppose any particular sect or sects of the Hindu Community."⁶² For the most part, this pledge was kept. The Mahasabha leaders recognized nothing would more quickly shatter their movement than for it to sally forth onto the doctrinal battlefield.

⁵⁹ Jayakar Papers File 436, Item 136.

⁶⁰ Prakash, 1938, p. xiii.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. xi.

⁶² Jayakar papers, File 435, Item 8.

But in the interests of promoting its inclusive definition of Hinduism, of maximizing Hindus' numerical-political strength, the Mahasabha was forced, as we have seen, to challenge the beliefs of many orthodox, high caste, Sanatan Dharmists.⁶³

Having ceded on the question of shuddhi, the ultra-orthodox sought to mute the Mahasabha's opposition to caste disabilities. Again it was Malaviya who played the central role in reconciling staunch Sanatanist Hindus with the Arya Samajists and other reform-minded Hindus.

The Mahasabha's 1923 session had to be extended from two to four days because of opposition in the subjects committee to the resolutions on Untouchability and the shuddhi conversion movement. Ultimately, Malaviya secured passage of a resolution that said Untouchables should be permitted "to read in schools, to draw water from wells, to have Dasrhan in temples and to sit in public meetings."⁶⁴ But the debate on the resolution was marred by complaints that a sweeper had been allowed to address the session. "After a few minutes the disorder was stopped by Pandit Malaviya who assured" the protesting "Pandits that Mr. Phagu was not a sweeper but only

⁶³ Jayakar and others argued that the Hindu Mahasabha broad definition of Hinduism was in keeping with an important strand of the Hindu religious tradition: pluralism. A pantheistic faith, Hinduism has given rise to a myriad of religious traditions and practices. Still, the broad definition of Hinduism ran counter to another equally important part of the Hindu tradition: segregation. With its emphasis on exclusivity and ritual purity, Hinduism has been a central bulwark of the caste system.

⁶⁴ IAR, 1923: V. 2, p. 139.

a Mahar of Nagpur."⁶⁵

Six months later, at the Mahasabha's Allahabad session, the orthodox Sanatanists succeeded in passing a second resolution on the caste question that largely nullified the first. [It is possible that Malaviya and other Mahasabha leaders allowed this resolution to pass in order not to jeopardize the pandits' endorsement of the shuddhi conversion movement.] The Allahabad resolution urged local Hindu Sabhas to develop new relations with untouchables within the limits of an authoritative determination that "initiating the untouchables with the sacred thread, teaching them the vedas and to interdine [sic] with them is against the Shastras and custom according to Sanatan Dharma."⁶⁶ At Belgaum in December 1924 and at the Mahasabha's 1925 Calcutta session, the Allahabad resolution was reaffirmed, but in the latter case only because the session president, Lajpat Rai, appealed for the withdrawal of an amendment "out of respect for the feelings of the Sanatanists." So displeased was the Bengal Hindu Sabha with Lajpat Rai's intervention that, at a special session held at Farridpur, it placed its protest on public record and, to underline the depth of its anger, refused to affiliate to the All-India Hindu Mahasabha.⁶⁷ Swami

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ As cited in Y.B. Mathur, Muslims and Changing India (New Delhi: Trimurti Publications, 1972) p. 30.

⁶⁷ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 161.

Shraddhanand gave vent to the growing resentment among reform-minded Mahasabhites over the Sanatanist backlash. In response to the Sanatan Dharmists' criticism of his "propaganda for social reform," he resigned from the Mahasabha.⁶⁸

The ultra-orthodox, for their part, remained dissatisfied, especially when the Mahasabha voted to raise five lakhs to support Untouchable reform. Some began demanding separate representation for Sanatan Dharmists in the legislatures.⁶⁹ In his address to the Dec. 1925 Bombay Hindu Conference, Lajpat Rai warned of an attempt by orthodox Hindus to seize the machinery of the Hindu Sabha from Congress politicians and use it to gain Council seats. He said the "cry of religion in danger" was being raised "by persons who have no political knowledge or experience" some of whom are "closely associated with the officials ... or want such association" in order to claim that "Sanatan Dharmis can alone represent the community in the councils of the nation."⁷⁰

At its 1926 session, the Mahasabha placed itself in the reform camp, passing a more liberal resolution on the untouchability question, but not before a clash which saw

⁶⁸ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 128. At the urging of the Mahasabha Working Committee, Shraddhanand retracted this first resignation. But by the time of the Mahasabha's March 1926 Delhi session he was again threatening to resign, this time because of orthodox opposition to his attempts to have the Mahasabha pass a resolution in favor of child-widow remarriage. Later in 1926 Shraddhanand left the Mahasabha for good.

⁶⁹ R. Gordon, MAS, p. 181.

⁷⁰ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, pp. 253-254.

Malaviya pitted against his "life-long co-worker Pandit Din Dayal Sharma." When the resolution was passed, reported one newspaper, the orthodox minority "rose as if on a signal with a threat to walkout" and Sanatanist volunteers "began to pick ... quarrels with the Mahasabha volunteers." Only due to "the latters' forbearance" was "any untoward happening" averted, but for two-hours "there was a pandemonium and confusion" and proceedings were at a "standstill." In the end, Malaviya told the orthodox Sanatanists to walk out, but "their number being too small to make any material difference to the audience in the pandal they kept to their seats."⁷¹

Although after 1926 the Hindu Mahasabha remained on record as opposing caste disabilities, its campaign to eradicate them was "rather half-hearted and ineffective."⁷² The Mahasabha did not want to rile the orthodox, from whom it continued to draw considerable support. Those Mahasabhites who were reformers either tempered their zeal in order to preserve "Hindu unity" or, as in the case of Shradhdhanand, left. The Mahasabhites' real concerns lay elsewhere; their opposition to Untouchability was entirely self-interested.

II--The Hindu Mahasabha and the Intensification of Communal Conflict

In the years 1922 through 1926, more and more of India's political elite were drawn, as if by a vortex, into the

⁷¹ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 141.

⁷² Lajpat Rai, The Arya Samaj, p. 270.

communalist quagmire. Each outrage or perceived outrage led to recriminations and communalist slurs, if not explicit calls for revenge. "The only hope of this beleaguered community," N.C. Kelkar told a special session of the Mahasabha in 1925, "lies in strong[ly] fortifying itself at all points of attack."⁷³ Hours of legislative debate were consumed in wrangling over the communal allocation of government jobs and education grants. "I am afraid," conceded Lajpat Rai, "an analysis of the conduct of some Hindu members of the Punjab Legislative Council, both in the last Council and in the present one, will not convince any fair-minded person that the whole blame for the present communal tension in the Punjab can be laid at the door of Main Fazl-i-Husain."⁷⁴ Religious and political leaders, who during the heady days of the Non-Cooperation movement had, in the interests of Hindu-Muslim unity, voluntarily renounced such religious practices as cow-sacrifice and boisterous musical processions, now called them sacred rites and urged that they be exercised in the most ostentatious fashion.⁷⁵ In July 1925, Mohammad Ali, Gandhi's most important Muslim ally during the Non-Cooperation movement, gave voice to the spirit of intransigence and mutual suspicion that reigned in both camps, when he argued that if Muslims ceded to Hindu sentiment on the issue of cow-

⁷³ IAR, 1925: V. 2, p. 354.

⁷⁴ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 217.

⁷⁵ Nanda, p. 393.

sacrifice,

tomorrow it would be something else ... the Hindu majority will be more and more aggressive as every day passes in imposing its will upon us and in insisting that Muslims should live on its sufferance in Aryavarta.⁷⁶

In 1922-23, "the whole country," to use the words of Lajpat Rai, had looked to Gandhi to cure "the disease that had overtaken the body politic during his incarceration ... [I]t was believed that 'the key to Yervada jail' was the key to Hindu-Muslim unity."⁷⁷ But in March 1925, just thirteen months after he had been released from prison due to ill health, Gandhi announced that he was abandoning his efforts to mediate an agreement among Hindu and Muslim political leaders. The Hindu-Muslim problem, he said, was an insoluble riddle the answer to which must come from God.⁷⁸

The Hindu Mahasabha battered on the intensifying communal strife. It was also one of its principal causes.

Formulating "Hindu" Political Demands

In 1922-23, the Hindu Mahasabha had been a meeting place for those troubled by the Congress's alliance with the Khilafat movement. In 1924-25, it became a rallying point for those who opposed the attempts of the foremost Congress leaders--Gandhi, C.R. Das and Motilal Nehru--to accommodate the demands of the Muslim communal politicians in the hopes of

⁷⁶ M. Hasan, Nationalism, p. 221.

⁷⁷ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 171.

⁷⁸ CWG, Vol. XXVI, pp. 232-234.

reviving the Hindu-Muslim alliance for Swaraj or, at least, halting the communal brawling.

Both because of their stature within the Congress and their renown as Hindu leaders, Malaviya and Lajpat Rai played an important role in the Congress's initial efforts to mend the rift in the Hindu-Muslim alliance. Malaviya served on the Congress sub-committee that visited Multan in the aftermath of the September 1922 communal clash. A special session of the Congress in September 1923 delegated Lajpat Rai and Dr. Ansari to draw up a formal agreement to guide relations between the two communities. But their "National Pact" was superseded even before it came before the Subjects Committee at the annual Congress session in December, because C.R. Das--the President of the Swaraj Party and, next to the imprisoned Gandhi, the most powerful Congress politician--forged his own agreement with Muslim political leaders in Bengal. Through the Bengal Pact, Das sought to secure Muslim support in his native province by acquiescing to many Muslim communal demands, including the reservation of 55% of Bengal's public service jobs for Muslims. Many in the Congress, most notably Malaviya, Lajpat Rai and the Tilakites, deemed the price Das had paid for communal unity exorbitant.

Das claimed the Bengal Pact was merely a regional modification of the Lucknow Pact, the 1916 agreement between the Congress and the Muslim League that was the cornerstone of the alliance between Hindu and Muslim nationalist politicians.

For those active in the Hindu Mahasabha, however, the Bengal Pact was proof that the Lucknow Pact was itself fundamentally flawed. By the end of 1924 it was accepted wisdom in Mahasabha circles that the Lucknow Pact, which enshrined the principle of separate electorates, had been a "blunder".⁷⁹ The Mahasabhites now sought to use the Bengal Pact and the calls from Muslim politicians in other parts of India for like concessions as a lever to press for the Lucknow Pact to be scrapped.

To pressure the Congress leadership to resist the demands of the Muslim politicians, the Mahasabhites undertook, beginning in December 1924, to formulate "Hindu" counter demands. Speaking at a special session of the Hindu Mahasabha held in Belgaum in conjunction with the Congress's annual year-end deliberations, Malaviya called for the Mahasabha to focus "Hindu opinion" on the issue of communal representation and "voice it when ever anyone undertook to discuss the question."⁸⁰

The proposal that the Mahasabha formulate Hindu political demands was first made by Lajpat Rai, in a confidential circular to Hindu politicians dated December 13, 1924. It reported on negotiations Gandhi had conducted with Muslim and Hindu politicians during a trip to the Punjab in early December. Gandhi placed great stock in mediating a

⁷⁹ Bakshi, p. 103; Jayakar Papers File 478, Item 130.

⁸⁰ As cited in Bakshi, pp. 98 and 101.

communal accord in the Punjab, for he believed that that province was at the root of India's communal conundrum."⁸¹ Lajpat Rai, the other Punjabi Hindu politicians, and Malaviya--who apart from Gandhi was the only non-Punjabi to take part in the negotiations--were on an opposite course. They were determined to "nationalize" the Punjabi conflict. They hoped to use the national-political weight of the Hindus to counter the power that the Muslim politicians in the Punjab enjoyed, under the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, as the acknowledged representatives of the province's majority community. Gandhi's entreaties notwithstanding, Malaviya and the Punjabi Hindu politicians insisted that before a settlement could be reached in the Punjab, Hindus across India had to determine their attitude to communal political representation and the allocation of jobs on a communal basis.

Wrote Lajpat Rai in his December 1924 circular,

The only all-India Hindu organisation which can be expected to deal with these questions is the Hindu Mahasabha. ... The proper occasion for it is the extraordinary session of the Hindu Mahasabha to be held at Belgaum during the Congress week, where it may be possible to arrange for a permanent machinery to clarify and crystallise Hindu public opinion on all political questions.⁸²

At Belgaum a 23-member committee was indeed established "to ascertain and formulate Hindu opinion on the subject of

⁸¹ "... the moment the Hindus and Mussalmans in the Punjab were united," declared Gandhi in December 1924, "there would be Hindu-Muslim unity all over India." CWG, Vol. XXV, p. 411.

⁸² Jayakar Papers, File 478, Item 130.

the Hindu-Muslim problem in relation to the question of further constitutional reform."⁸³ Chaired by Lajpat Rai, the committee was representative of a wide spectrum of political forces both in and outside the Congress. Its members included Rajendra Prasad; the Maharashtran Tilakites M.R. Jayakar, B.S. Moonje, N.C. Kelkar and M.S. Aney, who were then allied with the Swaraj Party; S. Satyamoorthi and T. Prakasam, Swarajists from Madras Province; Jairamadas Daultram, the founder of the Sind Hindu Sabha and a close associate of Gandhi; the influential U.P. talaqdar Sir Rampal Singh and the U.P. zamindar and banker Lala Sukbhir Sinha; the ex-Liberal U.P. minister C.Y. Chintamani; and Narendra Nath, the leading anti-Congress Hindu politician in the Punjab.

The proposal that the Hindu Mahasabha undertake the defence of so-called Hindu political interests proved popular. The attendance at the Hindu Mahasabha session in 1924 Belgaum was greater than that at the Indian National Congress session, although Gandhi himself presided over the Congress proceedings."⁸⁴

That the Mahasabha was embarking on a new course was widely recognized. In moving the resolution calling for the establishment of the "Hindu demands" committee, Satyamoorthi said, "that it was for the first time giving a distinct political orientation to the activities of the Hindu

⁸³ As cited in Bakshi, p. 101.

⁸⁴ Malhotra, p. 72.

Mahasabha. The Sabha would not only be confined to the social and religious uplift of the Hindus, but would also focus and express Hindu opinion on political problems."⁸⁵

In relaunching the Hindu Mahasabha, Malaviya had argued that the Congress could not achieve genuine Muslim-Hindu unity alone. A durable alliance would be possible only when the Hindu community had become organized and strong through the building of the Hindu Mahasabha. Now, Malaviya and the Mahasabha argued that the INC could not be trusted to arrive at a just communal settlement. The defence of "Hindu" political interests necessitated that Hindus organize and formulate a political program independently of the Congress.

Within weeks of the Belgaum conference, Chintamani publicly asserted that the Hindu Mahasabha was the authoritative voice of Hindus. At an all-parties conference held in Delhi in January 1925, he insisted that any settlement of the communal question would not be acceptable to Hindus unless approved by the Mahasabha. Chintamani withdrew his condition only at Gandhi's insistence.⁸⁶

Less than two years later, as will be discussed below, most of those elected to serve on the sub-committee to formulate Hindu political opinion opposed the Congress-Swaraj Party in the 1926 council elections. One of the major reasons they gave for doing so was that it could not be trusted to

⁸⁵ As cited in Bakshi, p. 102.

⁸⁶ Page, p. 122.

safeguard Hindu interests. Yet, in his appeal to the Belgaum conference to make the Mahasabha a vehicle for promoting Hindu political demands, Malaviya had insisted it was not a rival to the Congress. The Hindu Mahasabha's "object was to strengthen and supplement the Congress."⁸⁷

On the recommendation of Lajpat Rai's committee, the Hindu Mahasabha, at its annual session in Calcutta in April 1925, condemned communal representation in national institutions and public services, calling it "harmful and detrimental" to the creation of a "united nation."⁸⁸ One year later at its Delhi session, the Mahasabha reiterated its opposition to both separate electorates and communal representation, opposed "any piecemeal revision of the Lucknow Pact", and said it should be made illegal "for any Provincial Government to discriminate by caste or creed in respect of acquisition of civic rights or posts in public services."⁸⁹

The Hindu Mahasabha made a pretense of championing liberal-democratic principles. Its leaders boasted that, unlike the Congress, the Mahasabha unequivocally opposed communal electorates and the communal allocation of jobs and promotions.⁹⁰ This was a sham.

To Muslim communalism, the Hindu Mahasabha counterposed

⁸⁷ As cited in Eakshi, p. 98.

⁸⁸ Prakash, 1938, p. 170.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 174.

⁹⁰ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 80.

Hindu communalism. "If the Hindu community does not wish to commit political Hari Kiri," urged Lajpat Rai, "it must move every nerve to be communally efficient."⁹¹ "We aim at nationalisation," Narendra Nath, told the 1926 session of the Hindu Mahasabha,

but assume for the present a communal attitude because that has been forced on us by circumstances."⁹² ...

The Muhammedans' interests are being treated as a separate class ... and this has forced upon us the consideration of Hindu interests as a separate class."⁹³

Only a small layer of elite Muslims had pressed for separate electorates, yet the Hindu Mahasabha held all Muslims responsible for their introduction. At the same time, the Mahasabhites placed less and less blame on those who wielded state power, who had made communalism part of their system of imperial control and enshrined it in law--the British colonial authorities. At the height of the Non-Co-operation movement, Bande Mataram, a newspaper edited by Lajpat Rai, warned its readers that the British Indian government was exploiting the Moplah rebellion to stoke communalism. "The official versions of the Malabar incidents are full of mischief and malice."⁹⁴ Three years later, Lajpat Rai said India's colonial rulers should not be held responsible for communalism.

⁹¹ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 253.

⁹² Prakash, 1938, p. 97.

⁹³ IAR, 1926: V. 1, p. 398.

⁹⁴ Thursby, p. 139.

While sharing the belief that the latter have had a hand in it, I cannot help saying that Muslim Maulvis, Maulanas and Associations have had a much larger, in fact a lion's share, in it, though, of course, it is not meant that the Hindus are quite innocent.⁹⁵

Notwithstanding its avowed opposition to the communal division of government largesse, the Mahasabha insisted that as long as things were on offer communally, Hindus should receive their "rightful" share.

nothing is more loathsome than the struggle for posts and positions; but the thing is not ... the doing of the Hindus. But the Hindus are not angels. ... no amount of declamation and denunciation will prevent me from protecting and defending the interests of the Hindu community.⁹⁶

In February 1925, the Punjab Hindu Sabha petitioned the provincial government to allocate ministries on a communal basis and establish a convention giving the Hindu community a say in the appointment of "Hindu" ministers.⁹⁷ Later that year, the Oudh Hindu Sabha protested when a Muslim was appointed to a vacant cabinet post, arguing that as the former minister was a Muslim, it was a Hindu's turn.⁹⁸

In arguing against communalism, the Mahasabhites quickly strayed from liberal-democratic principles and began invoking claims of wealth and status. A meeting convened by the Punjab

⁹⁵ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 192.

⁹⁶ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 80.

⁹⁷ Page, p. 89.

⁹⁸ Peter Reeves, Landlords and Governments in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of their Relations until Zamindari Abolition (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 125.

Hindu Sabha to protest against the Punjab Municipal Amendment Act condemned Fazl-i-Husain for "ignoring the claims of trade, commerce, property and the rate-paying capacity and lay[ing] undue emphasis on population [in determining representation] ..."⁹⁹ The Bengal Hindu Sabha, some years later, opposed the demands of Muslim communal politicians for a statutory Muslim majority in the provincial legislature by extolling the cultural accomplishments of Bengal's Hindus.

The Hindus of Bengal stand foremost in the whole of India in the field of art, literature and science, whereas the Muslim community in Bengal has not so far produced a single name of all-India fame in these fields. ... Political fitness cannot be divorced from [the] larger intellectual life of the Nation and in political fitness the Mussalmans of Bengal are vastly inferior to Hindus ...¹⁰⁰

The Hindu Mahasabha, at its 1926 session, emphatically opposed the ending of central government rule in the North West Frontier Province and the introduction of democratic reforms. The Mahasabha leaders claimed central government rule was necessary for the defence of India, but their real concern was preventing the establishment of another Muslim-majority provincial government. "One need not be a prophet to predict" wrote the Muslim legislators who were championing the N.W.F.P. reform issue in the Central Assembly, "that the moment the reforms are granted" the communally-minded Hindus

⁹⁹ B. Cleghorn, "Religion and Politics: The Leadership of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha Punjab and Maharashtra, 1920-1939," in Leadership in South Asia, ed. B.N. Pandey (New Delhi: Vikas, 1977), p. 402.

¹⁰⁰ As cited in Dixit, Communalism, p. 163.

who pretend that "they ask for the abolition of communal representation and separate electorates only because their existence is incompatible with nationalism ... will begin to clamor as vociferously as ... 'the most greedy Mussalman' for separate communal representation."¹⁰¹ In fact, the Hindu Mahasabha was demanding "adequate and effective representation" for the N.W.F.P Hindus "in the Provincial Council, and the Central Legislature and in the Services" long before any reform was enacted.¹⁰²

From all that has been said thus far--concerning the Mahasabha's depiction of Muslims as aggressors, its vehement promotion of shuddhi and Hindu "rights," and its appeals to Hindu solidarity--it should be apparent that, as one of its foremost leaders said, anti-Muslim sentiment was the Mahasabha's life-blood.¹⁰³ A July 1927 incident, however, sheds light on the chauvinist bigotry publicly promoted by the stalwart defenders of liberal-democratic principles who stood at the Mahasabha's head. N.C. Kelkar and D.V. Gokhale, the editor of The Mahratta and a prominent Mahasabha leader, organized a 4,000-strong meeting in Poona to protest the marriage of Miss Malinibai Panandikar, "from one of the foremost [Hindu] families in Maharashtra" to a Muslim.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Page, p. 133.

¹⁰² IAR, 1931: V. 2, p 255.

¹⁰³ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 209.

¹⁰⁴ Jayakar papers, File 436, Item 108.

The Hindu Mahasabha and Communal Violence

The most palpable expression of mounting communal tensions in British India was the rise in communal violence. In the first twenty-one years of the century there had been 16 major violent clashes between members of different religious communities.¹⁰⁵ In the five years 1923 through 1927, 112 communal riots erupted, riots which left 450 people dead and 5,000 injured.¹⁰⁶

Communal riots were peripheral to communal politics. They did not give rise to the conception that different religious communities have different and conflicting socio-political interests. The antagonism between "Hindu" and "Muslim" political communities did not rise from the streets to the council chambers, but rather began with educated men and filtered downwards to the masses.

The riots of the 1920s, however, played a significant role in polarizing and embittering communal relations. Communalist politicians pointed to them as proof of the perfidy of the other community and of the need to organize on communal lines. Disputes concerning religious observances, which hitherto had seldom had more than a local significance, were now proclaimed focal points in a pan-Indian struggle for

¹⁰⁵ Thursby, p. 118; B.B. Misra, The Indian Political Parties. An Historical Analysis of Political Behaviours up to 1947 (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 191.

¹⁰⁶ Report of Indian Statutory Commission, V. 1--Survey (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1930), p. 27.

power. Communal riots, thus, became "one of the instruments and agencies" for the spread of communalism.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, there is evidence that while the communal clashes of the 1920s looked like those in earlier periods they were of a different kind. Sandria Freitag, the author of a detailed study of urban riots in the United Provinces, one of the principal centers of communal violence, argues that the riots of the 1920s, although they were more frequent and engulfed more cities and districts than those in earlier periods, were "more often small-scale, staged confrontations than massive collective expressions of public opinion."¹⁰⁸

The Hindu Mahasabha publicly deplored communal rioting. But while mouthing support for Hindu-Muslim unity, it invariably blamed Muslims for initiating the violence and restricted its relief efforts to Hindus. Local Hindu Sabhas arranged for the legal defence of Hindus prosecuted for their role in communal riots and, as in the case of those convicted for damaging life and property during riots in Nagpur in 1927, collected funds to pay their fines and demanded the release of those imprisoned.¹⁰⁹

The leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha were frequently

¹⁰⁷ Chandra, Communalism, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ Freitag, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ Prakash, 1938, pp. 245-246. See also the letter from M.R. Jayakar to L.B. Bhoptakar, another Mahasabha leader, requesting he organize legal defence for Hindus facing charges arising out of a communal riot in Indore. Jayakar Papers, File 436, Item 92.

accused of instigating communal violence. The nature of communal rioting makes it extremely difficult to verify specific charges. It is indisputable, however, that the Mahasabha with its militant assertion of Hindu "rights" and promotion of Hindu self-defence did much to foster a climate conducive to communal violence.

In a report prepared for Gandhi on the communal disturbances that rocked Allahabad in October 1924, J. Nehru, then the General Secretary of the All-India Congress Committee, concluded:

the contributory causes here have been the same as elsewhere--Sangathan and Algiol [Muslim "volunteers"], separate akharas--and the deliberate preaching of distrust and fear. The local Hindu Sabha consists of a number of very narrow-minded persons with little ability or power even to organize the Hindus but able enough to increase the dislike of the Musalmans.¹¹⁰

A Congress investigation into the 1932 Cawnpore riot documented how the promotion of Sangathan and Shuddhi and their Muslim counterparts, Tanzim and Tabligh, during the 1920s had transformed religious festivals from intercommunal gatherings into militant demonstrations of communal-political strength.

Both communities invited communal leaders from outside to fan the fire of communalism ... Hindus began to preach to their co-religionists the boycott of Muslim festivals, and so the Muslims began to preach the boycott of Hindu festivals. Bands of communal volunteers sprang up on either side. During Holi celebrations, new and unheard-of Chaukis were brought out by a section of Hindus, for example, one depicting the persecution of Haqiqat Rai by Muslims. ...

¹¹⁰ J. Nehru Selected Works, Vol. 2, 1972 Series, p. 188.

Thus, by ... 1926, most of the links of joint social life in Cawnpore had been snapped ...¹¹¹

Music Before Mosques: Disputes over the playing of music near mosques sparked at least 31 major riots between 1923 and 1928.¹¹² Prior to the 1920s, such disputes, as those concerning religious procession routes, had been settled locally. The Hindu Mahasabha played a leading role in politicizing these disputes, in making them tests of the respective religious communities' national-political strength. In October, 1925, the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee condemned local authorities for altering Hindu procession routes and banning processions outright so as to prevent communal clashes. Muslim opposition to the playing of music near mosques, declared the Mahasabha, "is not based on any real religious feelings but is due entirely to communal" fervor.¹¹³ A month later, the Working Committee called "upon all Provincial and Local Hindu Sabhas to render all necessary guidance and assistance to Hindus" whose religious rites and processions were interfered with by either Muslims or the government.¹¹⁴ This second resolution was adopted by the

¹¹¹ A History of the Hindu-Muslim Problem in India. Being the report of the Committee appointed by the Indian National Congress to enquire into the Cawnpore Riots of March 1931, Reprinted in Roots of Communal Politics, ed. N. Gerald Barrier (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1976), pp. 238-239.

¹¹² Thursby, p. 21.

¹¹³ Jayakar papers, File 435, Items 44-45.

¹¹⁴ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 47.

annual session of the Hindu Mahasabha in March 1926. But shortly after, at its meeting of May 9-11, 1926, the Working Committee, took an even more extreme position on the intertwined issues of religious procession routes and music before mosques. It appealed to the government of India to issue a determination that "the objection to music passing in the ordinary course before mosques is not a valid objection and that it shall not be upheld by any officer of the Government." This was coupled with a warning that restrictions on Hindus' right to use the King's Highways "will be a perennial source of quarrel and strife between Hindus and Musalmans which it will not be possible for the Government to prevent and which will become the means of much undeserved loss and suffering to peaceful citizens."¹¹⁵

In two instances, the role played by Hindu Mahasabha leaders in fomenting controversies over procession routes and music before the mosques and the link between their agitation and communal violence has been documented.

In the second half of 1923, B.S. Moonje built the Nagpur chapter of the Hindu Mahasabha into a significant force by organizing resistance to a government ban on religious processions, imposed after the playing of music near mosques had led to communal clashes.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 187.

¹¹⁶ The formation of the Nagpur Hindu Sabha and its role in the conflict over the playing of music before mosques is discussed by Cleghorn, p. 408; D.E.U. Baker, Changing Political Leadership in an

For a fortnight, Moonje and the Secretary of the Nagpur Hindu Sabha, Dr. K.B. Hedgewar¹¹⁷, led a civil disobedience campaign against the ban. Local notables, including pandits, doctors, pleaders and merchants sought arrest and were, in fact, detained. Then, when the government bowed to the satyagraha campaign and withdrew the ban, Moonje and the Nagpur Hindu Sabha organized musical processions, guarded by lathi-wielding men, to march past the city's mosques.¹¹⁸ Needless to say, this was viewed by Nagpur's small Muslim community as a provocation. From November 20 to 27, 1923, Nagpur was rocked by communal fighting. That Moonje anticipated his actions would lead to violence is indicated by a letter he sent in Dec. 1923, boasting of the outcome of the conflict:

I am glad to tell you that I have been able to organize the Hindus of Nagpur for self-defence. It was a sight for the Gods to see when well-built Hindus about five thousands strong with big lathis in their hands paraded

Indian Province (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979) p. 110; and W.K. Andersen and S.D. Damle, The Brotherhood in Saffron. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 32-33.

¹¹⁷ Two years after the Nagpur riots, Dr. Hedgewar (1889-1940) founded the R.S.S., which by the late 1930s was India's largest communal militia. Hedgewar was for many years a close associate of Moonje. According to The RSS Story, a pro-RSS text, Moonje was "like an elder brother to Dr. Hedgewar for decades." K.R. Malkani, The RSS Story, p. 115. The RSS's ties to the Mahasabha will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

¹¹⁸ Baker, Changing Political Leadership, p. 110.

the streets of Nagpur.¹¹⁹

... Besides in two well-organised street fights the Hindus succeeded in repelling the attacks of the Mahommedans.¹²⁰

Allahabad was the home base of the main factions in the U.P. Congress Committee in the 1920s, of both the Malaviya and Nehru families. It was also one of the flashpoints in the music before mosques controversy. The Allahabad Hindu Sabha which was controlled by Malaviya, helped ensure that from 1924 through 1926 the Hindu claim to a right to play music before mosques was the crux of debate in local Allahabad politics.¹²¹

There is considerable circumstantial evidence that the Malaviya family provoked the riot that erupted in Allahabad in October 1924 during the Ram Lila procession.¹²² That in the months prior to the event the Allahabad Hindu Sabha aggressively promoted Hindus' right to honor their gods as they saw fit is a matter of public record. Prior to the Delhi Unity Conference, the Allahabad Hindu Sabha declared it would not be bound by its decisions. In 1925, Malaviya and other Hindu leaders rejected a government proposal that called for Muslims to close fifteen of the seventeen mosques on the Ram

¹¹⁹ Hasan, Nationalism, p. 238.

¹²⁰ Cleghorn, p. 408.

¹²¹ The events in Allahabad and, in particular, Malaviya's use of communal confrontation as a means of undermining political support for the Nehrus, his rivals, are discussed by Pandey, pp. 118-120, and Page, The Ascendancy of the Congress, pp. 80-83.

¹²² Page, p. 81.

Lila procession route, in exchange for a guarantee not to play music before the two remaining mosques. Government officials had no doubt Malaviya and his supporters were responsible for the perpetuation of the conflict. According to a 1926 government report:

The real reason why Hindu-Muslim relations are worse in Allahabad is because of [the] Malaviya family and their followers, who constitute the Hindu Sabha. This body with its doctrine of sangathan has aroused an aggressive spirit, which has spread into the small towns and villages.¹²³

Contemporary observers and recent historical studies have argued that the real object of Malaviya's offensive on the music before mosques issue was to undermine the Nehrus' standing among Hindus, to portray them and the Swaraj Party as a whole as "soft" on Hindu rights.¹²⁴ "To a very large extent," wrote the Commissioner of Allahabad Division, "the whole movement has been political, with a view to its result on the coming elections."¹²⁵

The authors of the Congress report on the 1932 Cawnpore riot undoubtedly had events like those in Nagpur and Allahabad in mind when they observed that the addition of music before mosques "to the list of occasions for rioting was well-designed to serve its purpose. While the cow question could come up only once a year ... the mosque question could be

¹²³ Hasan, Nationalism, p. 242.

¹²⁴ Pandey, The Ascendancy of the Congress, p. 120 and Page, p. 84.

¹²⁵ Pandey, Ibid., p. 119.

available everywhere and at all times."¹²⁶

Re-evaluating Hindu-Muslim Unity

In 1922-1923, the leaders of the Hindu Mahasabha had claimed its revival was necessary to create the basis for a viable Hindu-Muslim alliance. But as the communal strife intensified, they began to question whether Hindu-Muslim unity was possible or desirable. Increasingly, Mahasabha leaders accused the Muslims of seeking domination over Hindus. N.C. Kelkar told a special session of the Mahasabha in December 1925, that he was "one of those the least affected" by communalism. Then in the next breath, he accused Muslims of having designs on ruling India:

The Mahommedans have already begun to advance a claim for complete separation of every political interest all along the line in the body politic of India, so that the identity of Moslem Raj may be effectively emphasized and its integrity rapidly developed.¹²⁷

A year earlier, Lajpat Rai had penned a series of thirteen articles on "The Hindu-Muslim Problem."¹²⁸ No doubt he considered these articles restrained and even-handed. After all, he conceded sangathan would likely result only in increased estrangement between the two communities; acknowledged that the "only thing that keeps" the Hindu Sabha movement "alive" is anti-Muslim sentiment; criticized the Arya

¹²⁶ A History of the Hindu-Muslim Problem in India (Report of the Cawnpore Riot Enquiry Committee), p. 272

¹²⁷ IAR, 1925: V. 2, p. 351.

¹²⁸ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, pp. 170-222.

Samaj, with which he had long been associated, and other Hindu revivalist groups for fomenting "aggressive communal feeling"; urged Hindus to change their religious practices "in the interests of peace and neighborly goodwill"; and appealed to them not to "make much fuss" about government appointments.¹²⁹ But the articles were imbued with communalist sentiment and could not but further embitter communal relations. Lajpat Rai laid most of the blame for communal strife on India's Muslims, while arguing that India had been brought closer to Swaraj principally because of the efforts of "Hindu Nationalists."¹³⁰ Most contentious of all was Lajpat Rai's assertion that only through civil war would the Muslims ever be persuaded to give up separate communal electorates and his proposal that the Punjab, and possibly other provinces, be partitioned on communal lines.¹³¹ These

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 209, 203, 181 and 216.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 220.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 210 and 212-213.

K.K. Aziz, the author of a major study on the development of the concept of Pakistan, calls Lajpat Rai's proposal "a landmark," "the first clear scheme" for the partition of India into separate states. (History of Partition of India. Origin and Development of the Idea of Pakistan, Vol. 1, p. 145) Unquestionably, Lajpat Rai's proposal was significant. It underscores that the logic of Hindu and Muslim communalism was the same: territorial partition. But Aziz's claim that Lajpat Rai was toying with a Pakistan-type solution to the Hindu-Muslim problem in 1924 is an exaggeration. It is based on a misinterpretation of Lajpat Rai's remark that a reorganization of the provinces of India on religious-communal lines would mean "a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India." "The Lion of the Punjab" was proposing the partition of provinces in a federal India, not the creation of separate national states.

statements placed, to say the least, a question mark over the prospects for Hindu-Muslim unity.

Jayakar too was having doubts. He told a confidante that Gandhi had "aimed at a most artificial and unreal unity between Hindus and Muslims" and, in so doing, had awakened "sentiments and impulses in the latter community which like Frankenstein, it is now very difficult to allay."¹³²

By the middle of 1926, Ramanda Chatterjee, editor of the distinguished Modern Review and a Hindu Mahasabha sympathizer--he presided over its 1929 session--was publicly questioning whether Hindu-Muslim unity was essential to the national struggle, whether the Muslims wanted unity, and if it might be obtainable only at too high a price.¹³³

A further indication of the hardening or radicalization of communal sentiment within the Mahasabha was the growing support for Bhai Parmanand. Once a leader of the Ghadar revolutionary-terrorist movement, then an active participant in the Non-Co-operation movement, Parmanand was by 1925 an unabashed proponent of Hindu nationalism:

Resistance and Non-Cooperation may be very good and attractive methods, but for our immediate problem they are of no use. In order to cope with the methods adopted by the Muslims, Hindu youths should assemble under the flag

¹³² M.R. Jayakar, The Story of My Life, Vol. 2, (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1959), p. 630.

¹³³ Milton Israel, "Ramanda Chatterjee and the Modern Review. The Image of Nationality in the National Press", National Unity. The South Asian Experience, Milton Israel (ed.), p. 41.

of Hindu nationalism.¹³⁴

In 1926 'almost all' the provincial Hindu Sabhas nominated Parmanand to be President of the Hindu Mahasabha, but, under pressure from Lajpat Rai and Malaviya, he stood down in favor of Narendra Nath.¹³⁵

The Mahasabha leaders' reappraisal of the prospects for Hindu-Muslim unity went hand-in-hand with a reappraisal of the prospects for swaraj. On occasion, they asserted Hindus would persevere alone, but these were hollow declamations. Were not the very same speakers warning that Hindus were so feeble they were threatened with extinction? More to the point were the suggestions that the defence of Hindus' political rights might require a delay in the struggle for swaraj and the warnings that swaraj might not even be in the Hindus' best interest. "The Hindus," declared Kelkar "cannot afford to lose their integrity even in the name of Swarajya."¹³⁶

Hindus not only wish to attain political Swaraj in India, but they also wish to have their proper share of it, remaining Hindus. ... Swaraj will not be worth having if we cannot purchase it with any price less than the loss of Hinduism itself.¹³⁷

In his presidential address to the Mahasabha's 1926 session, Narendra Nath called for a vigorous assertion of Hindu interests.

¹³⁴ Malhotra, p. 173.

¹³⁵ Prakash, 1938, p. 27.

¹³⁶ IAR, 1925: V. 1, p. 353.

¹³⁷ IAR, 1925: V. 1. p. 398.

We cannot refrain from devoting serious thought to the consideration of those interests simply out of fear that such a course will give rise to controversy and may delay the achievement of the goal of Swaraj.¹³⁸

III -- The Hindu Mahasabha and the Factional Struggle in the Congress

In the years 1922-1926, the period between the collapse of the Non-Co-operation campaign and the revival of the nationalist movement in the agitation against the Simon Commission, the Hindu Mahasabha figured prominently in the factional struggle in the Indian National Congress.

To delineate the many Congress factions and their involvement in the Mahasabha is beyond the scope of this study.¹³⁹ A brief look at three Congress groupings, however, can provide an indication of the complexity of the Congress-Mahasabha relationship.

Malaviya and his supporters used the Hindu Mahasabha as a factional tool against their main rivals in the U.P. Provincial Congress Committee, the Nehru-led Swaraj Party. The Hindu Mahasabha also provided them with a vehicle through

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Material on this topic can be found in Richard Gordon, "The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian National Congress, 1915 to 1926", Modern Asian Studies, V. 9, 2 (1975); B. Cleghorn, "Religion and Politics: The Leadership of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha Punjab and Maharashtra, 1920-1939", Leadership in South Asia, (ed.) B.B. Pandey; David Page Prelude to Partition; and various regional studies of Congress and nationalist politics, including D.E.U. Baker, Changing Political Leadership in an Indian Province: The Central Provinces and Berar 1919-1939; S.L. Malhotra, Gandhi: An Experiment with Communal Politics. (A Study of Gandhi's Role in Punjab Politics, 1922-1931); and Gayanendra Pandey, The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh 1926-34.

which they could work with the Liberals, who had quit the Congress in 1918, and with an even more conservative group of zamindars and talagdars. Malaviya's Swarajist rivals, it is true, occasionally collaborated with the Liberals in the Councils. But Malaviya saw the Liberals as more than a sometime ally. He hoped to effect a reunion between the Liberals and the INC, as the prelude to reasserting moderate-liberal authority over the Congress.

In the Punjab, the Hindu Mahasabha was a means for Lajpat Rai and his Congress supporters to join with more conservative Hindu politicians in waging communal-political battle against Fazl-i-Husain and his government-supported Unionist Party. Like the Punjab Hindu Sabha, the Punjabi wing of the Congress was based in an urban Hindu community that was dominated economically and politically, by the merchant-money lender and professional classes. These groups claimed to be under communal attack, partly because that was how they perceived their predicament and partly because such claims were an effective means of rallying support from Hindus throughout India. That there was a communal or pro-Muslim dimension to Fazl-i-Husain's policies is indisputable.¹⁴⁰ His Unionist Party, however, was first and foremost a party of landlords. By championing the interests of rural property-holders against urban moneylenders, the Unionists maintained an inter-communal alliance of Muslim, Jat (Hindu) and Sikh

¹⁴⁰ Page, pp. 69-71.

landlords. Punjab's beleaguered urban Hindu elite--Swarajist, moderate and loyalist--responded by mounting a communal common front. The Punjab Hindu Sabha played an important role in promoting a Hindu boycott of Punjab's municipal councils, which began in June 1923 in Lahore and continued until February 1926.¹⁴¹ In the committees of the Punjab Hindu Sabha, Lajpat Rai worked alongside one-time Congress moderates, such as Dr. Gokul Chand Narang, loyalists such as Raja Narendra Nath and the Hindu nationalist Bhai Parmanand.

The Punjab Hindu Sabha was the most militantly communal wing of the Hindu Mahasabha. "In the Punjab," wrote Narendra Nath to Chintamani in June 1926, "there are parties more on communal than political lines.

I for one cannot join any political party unless that party undertakes to protect the just and legitimate rights of the Hindus of the Punjab. As a matter of fact that is the attitude of all the Hindus of the Punjab and that is why no political party takes root."¹⁴²

In Maharashtra--the Marathi-speaking regions of Bombay Province and the Central Provinces and Berar--the Hindu Mahasabha was led by Congressmen who had been close associates of the late Lokamanya Tilak and who, from 1923 until the end of 1925, were Swarajists. Of these the most important were Moonje, until the latter part of the 1920s the leading figure in the Provincial Congress Committee for the Marathi-speaking region of the Central Provinces; M.S. Aney, the most important

¹⁴¹ Cleghorn, pp. 401-402.

¹⁴² Richard Gordon, pp. 182-183.

Congress politician in Berar; N.C. Kelkar, a Swaraj legislator and the leader of the Tilakites in their Poona stronghold; and M.R. Jayakar, the Swaraj Party leader in the Bombay Provincial Council and a key figure in political circles in Bombay City.

As we have seen, Moonje spearheaded a campaign to build the Mahasabha in his home town of Nagpur. Elsewhere in Maharashtra, however, the Hindu Mahasabha was not a major force. Of 362 Hindu Sabha branches in August 1924, just 22 were in the Bombay Presidency and 16 in the Central Provinces.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, through their participation in Mahasabha conferences and committees--including the subcommittee that first formulated Hindu political demands--the Tilakites did much to bolster the Hindu Mahasabha on the all-India stage.

If the Tilakites devoted scant time and energy to building up the Mahasabha's membership in the 1922-26 period, it was because they controlled the Congress apparatus in Maharashtra, or at least much of it. For the Tilakites, the Mahasabha was a means of pressing for a change in the Congress's Hindu-Muslim policy. They also found its propaganda for Hindu unity useful in combatting the growth of the non-Brahmin movement.¹⁴⁴

Although the Tilakites worked closely together, they had different concerns reflecting their different regional bases.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁴⁴ Cleghorn, pp. 409-410 and Hasan, Nationalism p. 240.

Moonje and Aney, for example, crossed swords over the latter's demand that Berar, a revenue surplus-area, be given the status of a separate province. While they promoted Hindu political demands, they also appealed to Indian nationalism and regional-linguistic and caste identities. When M. Nehru clashed with the Tilakites over the office-acceptance issue, Kelkar accused him of "anti-Maharashtran bias."¹⁴⁵

Of the Tilakites, and indeed of virtually all the Congressmen active in the Hindu Mahasabha in this period (1922-26), one could say what Francis Robinson has said of the Muslim politicians who led the Khilafat movement. Their communalism was functional; it did not yet constitute the axis of their entire political program:

they were concerned with a wide range of provincial, class and sectarian interests many of which knew no communal divisions. In their endeavours to promote these specific interests different Muslim politicians adopted the Muslim identity when it was useful, and discarded it when it had served their purpose.¹⁴⁶

Nevertheless, in four short years, as was to be revealed in the debate surrounding the 1926 council elections, the Hindu Mahasabha had gone a long way toward becoming a communal political movement dedicated to promoting a Hindu political-identity and consciousness in direct opposition to the national-secular consciousness advocated by the Congress.

¹⁴⁵ Jayakar Papers, File 406, Item 12.

¹⁴⁶ F. Robinson, p. 353.

The Hindu Mahasabha and the 1926 Elections

The 1926 elections precipitated a political realignment in the Congress. At year's end, the Congressmen in the leadership of the Mahasabha--Malaviya, Lajpat Rai and the Tilakites--were all united in a political coalition opposing the Congress-Swaraj Party. And this coalition extended to Mahasabhites, like Narendra Nath, who were longtime opponents of the Congress. On the other hand, many loyal Swarajists, men such as Rajendra Prasad and his Bihari colleague Krishna Singh, were severing their ties to the Mahasabha.

From the cessation of Non-Co-operation in 1922 through the 1926 elections, the Congress was convulsed by conflicts over its attitude to the legislative councils. First Congressmen disputed whether they should enter the councils and then, once they did, whether they should mount "uniform, continuous and consistent obstruction" or try to work the Councils and even seek office. An important undercurrent in this debate was the communal question. Many of those who advocated the Congress work the councils argued that obstruction had enabled Muslim communal politicians to gain the government's favor and pursue policies detrimental to Hindu interests. The proponents of office acceptance tended to be those most concerned with gaining access to the spoils of office and the communal dispensation of patronage.

When 1926 began, the Mahasabha leaders were badly

divided as regards the coming council elections. The Tilakites had just broken with the Swaraj Party because of its prohibition on office acceptance and were in the process of creating a new political vehicle. Membership in their Responsive Co-operation Party, however, was to be strictly limited to Congressmen. Lajpat Rai, who had recently won a by-election to the Central Assembly, was negotiating his formal entry into the Swaraj Party. At the end of January, he became the Swaraj Party's Deputy Leader. Malaviya, meanwhile, was plotting the establishment of a new Nationalist Party, that would unite the INC and the Liberals. In late February, he announced his resignation from the Independent Party, a loose coalition of conservative Congressmen, and began campaigning for the creation of such a party. Last but not least, Parmanand and Rajendra Nath were agitating for the Hindu Mahasabha to field candidates in the elections in opposition not just to the current Congress leadership, but to the Congress itself. The Congress, they claimed, had brought the Hindu community to the brink of ruin, by sacrificing Hindu interests in pursuit of the mirage of Hindu-Muslim unity.¹⁴⁷

At the December 1925 Cawnpore Congress, Motilal Nehru had tried to shore up the Swaraj Party by placing its work under direct Congress supervision and by reviving the "national demand," which the Swarajists had used to great effect on their entry into the councils after the 1923

¹⁴⁷ Prakash, 1938, p. 27.

elections. Still, the defection of the Tilakites and the campaign of many Hindu Mahasabha branches, particularly in the Punjab and U.P., to label the Swaraj Party as "pro-Muslim" had left it weakened. When the Swaraj Party equivocated on supporting a motion in favor of democratic reforms in the N.W.F.P., two Muslim members of the Central Assembly quit the party and charged Nehru had bowed to pressure from Lajpat Rai because he needed his "support against Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Hindu Sabhas at his back ..."¹⁴⁸

It was in this climate of intense political maneuvering that the Hindu Mahasabha met in annual session in Delhi in mid-March. Among the resolutions before it was one calling for the Mahasabha to field its own candidates in the November elections to ensure that Hindu interests would be safeguarded in the councils. So worrisome did M. Nehru deem this proposal, that, although not a Mahasabha member, he delayed his departure from Delhi for a week in the hopes he would be able to address the conference.¹⁴⁹ Within the Mahasabha, the opposition to the resolution was led by Nehru's deputy, Lajpat Rai. He argued that the entry of the Hindu Mahasabha into the

¹⁴⁸ Page, p. 134.

¹⁴⁹ Ultimately, M. Nehru was unable to deliver his views in person, but a statement that he drafted was read to the delegates by the Punjabi Swarajist Lal Duni Chand. In his statement, Nehru opposed basing a political programme on communal interests, warned the entry of the Mahasabha into politics would undermine its efforts to create an effective organization uniting all castes and classes of Hindus, and urged that, rather than oppose the Congress, the Mahasabha join it en bloque. IAR, 1926: V. 1, pp. 407-408.

field of politics would mean the Mahasabha had abandoned Indian nationalism in favor of Hindu communalism. In an article penned just days before the Mahasabha session, he wrote, "I am in favor of organizing the Hindu community, strengthening and solidifying it religiously, socially and economically, but I do not favour the idea of Hindus setting up a separate political existence of their own."¹⁵⁰ When Lajpat Rai failed to convince a meeting of the subjects committee to desist, he walked out and threatened to quit the Mahasabha if the resolution were not withdrawn.¹⁵¹

However, "a large element from the Punjab," led by Parmanand and Rajendra Nath, the Mahasabha's new Working President "and backed ... by the landlords of the United Provinces" were adamant that the Mahasabha challenge the Congress.¹⁵² Indeed, in a bitter tirade against the Congress in an open session, Parmanand called on Hindus to suspend the struggle for swaraj "and all other activities for five years" in order to concentrate on strengthening the communal organisation of Hindus. "Let us protect our rights and stand against their sacrifice by the National Congress."¹⁵³

Malaviya publicly asserted the right of the Mahasabha to

¹⁵⁰ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 1, p. Liv.

¹⁵¹ Hindu Outlook, June 5, 1945.

¹⁵² Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 141.

¹⁵³ IAR, 1926: V. 1, p. 401.

stand its own candidates. But only after he had effected a compromise, with the support of the Tilakites. Subsequent events suggest that this compromise did not require any real concession on Malaviya's part. Malaviya wanted to use the Mahasabha to influence the Congress and challenge its leadership. He did not want the Mahasabha to become a rival to the Congress.

The "Resolution on Council Entry" sanctioned local Hindu Sabhas to agitate against candidates considered "undesirable" and "harmful to Hindu interests"--in other words, gave them ample leeway to fan opposition to Malaviya's Swarajist opponents. It also established, as Lajpat Rai explained in a newspaper article, that "as a general rule, the Sabha shall not set up any candidates. ... As long as there is even one candidate who can be trusted to take good care of Hindu interests, no special candidate can be set up on behalf of the Mahasabha."¹⁵⁴

Parmanand, Rajendra Nath and a section of UP landlords, nevertheless, remained determined to field Hindu Sabha candidates. One month after the Mahasabha session, the Working Committee responded favorably to requests from the Punjab and Oudh Hindu Sabhas that they be delegated the power to field candidates "where necessary to safeguard Hindu interests."¹⁵⁵ In May, the Working Committee approved, after

¹⁵⁴ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 142.

¹⁵⁵ Jayakar Papers, File 435, Item 168.

making minor modifications, an "Election Pledge" proposed by the Punjab Hindu Sabha. Candidates who signed the pledge committed to "do all in ... [their] power to protect the interests of the Hindu community ..." and promised they would resign if the Hindu Sabha deemed they had failed to uphold Hindu interests.¹⁵⁶ At its June meeting, the Working Committee gave its response to the rejection of its demand that Congress legislators be free to vote according to their conscience on communal matters. The Provincial Hindu Sabhas were directed "to take necessary steps ... to safeguard Hindu interests in the coming election."

Those in attendance at these three Working Committee meetings, one of which was held at Delhi and two in the Punjab proper, were almost exclusively leaders of the Punjab Hindu Sabha. Malaviya attended just one of the three meetings. No Tilakite came to any of them, although Moonje, Kelkar and Aney had been co-opted onto the Working Committee at its May meeting.

This was a period of intense pre-election preparation for both Malaviya (whose efforts to effect an alliance with the Liberals had foundered because of their refusal to accept the Congress creed) and the Tilakites. While putting together their respective political machines, they were also involved in protracted negotiations with M. Nehru and his Swaraj Party over the possibility of a joint slate. That they failed to

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

attend the meetings of the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee underscores how little stock they placed in the Mahasabha as a political vehicle.

Nehru, for his part, adopted a two-track policy. In negotiations that continued until early September he offered concession after concession to his Congress opponents. But Malaviya was adamant there should be no party line on communal questions, whether in the interest of preserving the Lucknow Pact or any other communal compromise. The Tilakites were just as determined to force the issue of office acceptance. Nehru's second course of action was to try to turn the Hindu Mahasabha's election resolution to his advantage. The Bihar Hindu Sabha endorsed the entire Swarajist slate, which was headed by Rajendra Prasad. Swarajists in UP tried to engineer a similar endorsement, using a clause in the Mahasabha constitution that allowed any twenty Hindus to elect a delegate, to try to pack a Hindu Sabha conference. But their scheme was discovered and thwarted.¹⁵⁷

In August the Agra and Outh Hindu Sabhas established election boards. These boards and the Hindu Sabhas limited their activities, however, to tarring the Swarajists as pro-Muslim and, in the case of M. Nehru, a "meat eater," and to promoting the candidates of the Independent Congress Party, the electoral bloc that Malaviya officially launched in September. All Independent Congress Party members had to

¹⁵⁷ Pandey, The Ascendancy of the Congress, p. 122.

pledge to uphold the Congress creed. Yet its candidates included many of the conservative landlords who in the spring had been pressing for the Hindu Sabha to contest the elections. Among the ICP's most prominent supporters was Rampal Singh. Its chief financial backer and one of its star candidates was the Calcutta magnate, G.D. Birla. Attracted both to Gandhi's piety and Malaviya's muscular defence of Hindu interests, Birla gave substantial sums of money to both the Hindu Mahasabha and Gandhi's constructive works program.

Lajpat Rai's defection from the Swaraj Party in late August and subsequent entry into the ranks of ICP paved the way for a similar compromise in the Punjab. At the Mahasabha session in March, Lajpat Rai had taken particular exception to the charge that M. Nehru had damaged Hindu interests. Now he declared, "I have come to share the belief of many other Hindus that the Swaraj Party ... is distinctly harmful to the Hindus ..."¹⁵⁸ Rajendra Nath and his supporters in the Punjab Hindu Sabha soon rallied behind the ICP. Parmanand appears to have been the lone dissenter. That Malaviya, Lajpat Rai and Narendra Nath had combined--they in fact constituted the ICP election board--led their opponents in the Punjab Provincial Congress to exclaim: "The wisdom of a known reactionary, coupled with the sagacity of a deep and law abiding constitutionalist, combined with the waning ardour of the comrade of Tilak who abhorred all such compromises, will

¹⁵⁸ Motilal Nehru Selected Works, Vol. 5, p. 687.

decide the fate of the people in our ill-fated province."¹⁵⁹ What bound these erstwhile political adversaries together was their defence of "Hindu interests," their fixation with the struggle for communal advantage. The ICP election manifesto pledged that when a "reasonable" compromise proved impossible to reach in a communal controversy, ICP legislators would act "in the interest" of the communal "community" to which they belonged.

The ICP formed an electoral pact with the Tilakite Responsive Cooperation Party, which fielded candidates in the Marathi-speaking areas and in Bengal. The Tilakites, however, made little use of the Hindu Mahasabha in their electioneering. Nor did they mount an aggressive communal campaign like that waged by the ICP in association with the Agra, Oudh and Punjab Hindu Sabhas. The Tilakites did, on occasion, accuse the Swarajists of caving in to Muslim "aggression," but Kelkar was concerned that the Tilakite Responsivist Cooperation Party not be too closely identified with Hindu communal interests.¹⁶⁰

In the debate in the Mahasabha over its attitude to the council elections there were three positions, reflecting the past, present and future of the Mahasabha. In March, Lajpat Rai upheld the Hindu Mahasabha's professed policy of political neutrality, arguing the Mahasabha's entry into politics would

¹⁵⁹ IAR, 1926: V. 2, p. 71.

¹⁶⁰ Cleghorn, pp. 410-411.

be detrimental to Indian nationalism and subvert the Mahasabha's attempts to unite all Hindus. By August, he was allying himself with Malaviya, who was unabashedly using the Mahasabha to muster political support for his campaign against the official Congress electoral party. Malaviya, to be sure, had previously used the Mahasabha as a weapon against his political rivals. The Mahasabha's role in the 1926 elections however was of a different order. In 1924-25, the Mahasabha had formulated Hindu political demands. Now it was promoting politicians who vowed to champion those demands and disparaging those who opposed communal political polarization. Still, Malaviya, like his Tilakite allies, did not want the Hindu Mahasabha to take the political field against the Congress.¹⁶¹ Parmanand did, and in this he represented the Hindu Mahasabha's future. My purpose in drawing attention to this distinction is not to provide an apologia for Malaviya. His agitation for communal self-defence, promotion of shuddhi, cynical manipulation of the music before the mosque issue, and communal attack on the Congress contributed mightily to the communalization of Indian politics, and helped pave the way for the emergence of Parmanand and other more extreme communalists within the Mahasabha. At issue in the

¹⁶¹ It could of course be argued that it was mere expediency that led Malaviya not to use the Hindu Mahasabha as his electoral party. However, the fact that in 1934 and in 1937, when he could hardly have entertained hopes of capturing control of the Congress, Malaviya continued to oppose the Mahasabha standing candidates clearly indicates that he placed definite limits on the Mahasabha's political role.

distinction between Malaviya and Parmanand is the Mahasabha's evolution into a self-conscious, communalist political party. Malaviya and, for that matter Lajpat Rai, while promoting "Hindu interests" acknowledged the existence of a "national interest" that might not always entirely coincide with the Hindu viewpoint. The Hindu Mahasabha of the late 1930s would assert that Hindus were "the nation."

The 1926 elections underscored that the "defence of Hindu interests" was leading to a wider and wider breach between the Mahasabha leaders and their Congress comrades. Contained within the concept "Hindu political demands" was an alternative political program. Still, at this stage, the Mahasabha was far from an ideologically uniform movement. It had formulated certain demands in respect to communal representation and hiring and made the defence of Hindu interests a popular slogan. But its "Hindu demands" had the character of a bargaining position for future intercommunal and constitutional negotiations; they were not held to be the fount of all political activity. As a movement, the Mahasabha had yet to define what importance it attached to these demands, what was their relationship to the political equation as a whole. Still, the warnings that swaraj might best be delayed indicated that the intensification of the struggle for communal privileges in the middle class was causing the Mahasabha to revise its attitude to the British Indian government. Moreover, as noted earlier, there was a direct

connection between the legislative councils and communal questions. Lajpat Rai's break from the Swaraj Party was precipitated by its walkout from the legislatures. Such tactics Lajpat Rai argued would "spell disaster" for the Hindus because they would lose out in the struggle within the councils for communal advantage.

What would be the position of the Hindus ... 10 or 20 years hereafter if the present alliance of the government and the Muslims continues and the Hindus continue to allow themselves to be influenced by the mentality of non-cooperation and boycott? In my judgement there will be only one result of this policy, viz., that the Hindus will come to occupy a position of inferiority and subordination.¹⁶²

Significantly, the Tilakite Jayakar had argued in favor of office acceptance on similar grounds a year earlier:

My party in Bombay is getting absolutely impatient of continuing any further its beggarly politics--beggarly in the sense of being devoid of all power, control, responsibility and patronage. They say, if we were in office, we would have beaten down sectional opposition (of the non-Brahmins, for instance) by being of use to them in their limited ambitions, but not having any power or control we have to continue to carry on our feeble fight in minority and lose on every occasion.¹⁶³

Narendra Nath, for his part, sought to draw the government's attention to the readiness of the advocates of Hindu interests to serve as government allies. In December 1926, he wrote the Punjab Governor, Sir Malcolm Hailey: "The defeat of the Swaraj Party is due to the Hindu Mahasabha people. In other words so far as the Punjab is concerned Hindu

¹⁶² Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 319.

¹⁶³ Jayakar Papers, File 405, Item 102.

Sabha and moderate politics are convertible terms ..."¹⁶⁴

For the Mahasabha--and this would become more explicit in subsequent years as it developed into a communalist-political opponent of the INC--independence was secondary to a favorable settlement of the communal question. The defence of "Hindu interests" drove it to seek an alliance with the British Indian government against the Muslims.

In relaunching the Mahasabha, Malaviya had claimed it stood for Hindu-Muslim unity and would work alongside the Congress for Swaraj. By 1926 the Mahasabha leaders publicly doubted the feasibility of Hindu-Muslim unity, stood in opposition to the Congress, and counselled that the fight for swaraj must not be allowed to interfere with the cooperation with the government needed to ensure Hindus their just share of communal spoils. From a campaign to maximize Hindu's numerical-political strength, disguised as a religious movement, the Hindu Mahasabha had moved to formulating Hindu political demands to place pressure on the Congress, and then in 1926 to opposing candidates it deemed inimical to Hindu interests.

Many Congressmen attended sessions of the Mahasabha. However, it rapidly became clear the Hindu Mahasabha was a redoubt for a group of more conservative Congress politicians, most of whom had been active in nationalist circles before the Congress directly challenged British rule and embraced mass

¹⁶⁴ Cleghorn, p. 404.

politics.

As the Hindu Mahasabha retreated from its earlier commitment to Hindu-Muslim unity, it came under increasing attack from sections of the Congress for inciting communalism. In response to these charges, the Congressmen who led the Hindu Mahasabha made three arguments. Two of these we have had occasion already to mention: that the Hindu Mahasabha was not in fact communal for it opposed communal electorates and hiring and that the communal-political agitation of the Muslims gave Hindus no choice but to respond in kind-- "communalism had been thrust upon us.". The Mahasabha leaders' third argument was that the Hindu Mahasabha, far from inciting communalism, actually served as a bulwark against a more extreme form of communalism. Communal hatred was inevitable "when every post in Govt. services and every other political privilege is demanded on communal grounds."¹⁶⁵

The only way to minimise the evil is that the Hindu Sabha movement should be under the guidance of Nationalist leaders, so that they may keep it within proper limits.¹⁶⁶

In the years following 1926 Hindu communalism appeared to subside. This however was not due to the efforts of the Congress politicians active in the Mahasabha but to the renewal of mass nationalist agitation. The Mahasabha itself moved toward a more extreme communalism; so extreme, that in 1928 Malaviya withdrew from active participation in the

¹⁶⁵ Jayakar Papers: File 435, Item 80.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

movement. Keeping the communal tiger "within proper limits"
had proven no easy matter.

CHAPTER 2

"SOLE SPOKESMAN" FOR HINDU INTERESTS, 1927-1934

Four years after its relaunching, the Hindu Mahasabha appeared to be a major force in British Indian politics. In the November-December 1926 elections to the central and provincial legislatures, the Mahasabha proved effective in mustering votes for the Congress right wing, organized in the Independent Congress and Responsivist Co-operation Parties. The Congress dissidents in the Mahasabha leadership--Malaviya, Lajpat Rai, Moonje, Kelkar, Aney and Jayakar--all won seats in the Central Assembly. The Congress-Swaraj Party, the INC's official parliamentary wing, remained the biggest party in the Central Assembly, with some 40 members, but the Nationalist Party formed by the ICP and Responsivist legislators comprised the second largest group, with 20 MLAs. In three provinces, the Punjab, the United Provinces and the Central Provinces, the right-wing dissidents outpolled the official Congress candidates, and in the Central Provinces the ICP-Responsivist alliance elected sufficient numbers to the Provincial Council to form a ministry. A measure of the potency of the Mahasabha's agitation for the election of candidates committed to "safeguarding Hindu interests" was its impact on the Mahasabha's opponents in the Congress-Swaraj Party. As the

election campaign progressed, Motilal Nehru and his Swaraj Party "gave way" to communal pressures and "adopted something of a Hindu communalist position."¹ Such was M. Nehru's disappointment, particularly with the "veritable rout" of Swarajists in the United Provinces, that he considered resigning his seat in the Central Assembly and the presidency of the Swaraj Party.²

The 1926 elections, however, proved to be the crest of the wave, the highwater mark in Hindu Mahasabha support and influence. Not until World War II, when it benefitted from the patronage of an embattled British Indian government and the Congress was a proscribed organization, would support for the Mahasabha again appear so widespread or fervent. Never again would politicians associated with the Mahasabha wield such influence in the Indian National Congress nor would the Mahasabha figure so prominently in the factional struggles within the Congress.

In the 1930s, Hindu Mahasabha leaders such as Bhai Parmanand and Indra Prakash, the editor of the Mahasabha weekly, Hindu Outlook, lamented that the Mahasabha had failed to capitalize on its popularity in 1926. If only its leaders had recognized that the time had come for the Mahasabha to

¹ G. Pandey, The Ascendancy of the Congress, p. 122.

² Selected Works of Motilal Nehru, Ravinder Kumar and H.D. Sharma, eds. (New Delhi: Vikas, 1982-1993), Vol. 5, p. 490; M. Hasan, "Communalist and Revivalist Trends in the Congress," in Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India, ed. M. Hasan, 2nd ed. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1985)

cease functioning as an adjunct of the Congress and assumed responsibility for taking up all political questions from the "Hindu point of view", "the nation" would have been saved "from many a pitfall".³

This is wishful thinking. The support accorded a Hindu Mahasabha that acknowledged the Congress's role as the country's preeminent and only truly national political organization can in no way be taken as indicative of the support that the Mahasabha would have enjoyed had it directly challenged the Congress. Indeed, in the subsequent period, when the Mahasabha, or at least a significant faction within it, opposed key Congress initiatives in the struggle for Indian self-rule, the Mahasabha suffered a sharp decline in support. Many Congressmen were ready to use the Mahasabha to press for a change in the Congress leadership's policy on the communal question and to wage communal-political struggle against their Muslim adversaries. But when the search for communal advantage led the Mahasabha into open conflict with the Congress they withdrew.

Secondly and more importantly, in 1927 the political conditions that had facilitated the Mahasabha's growth began to break up. In short, Indian politics swung left.

This shift was in part precipitated by the attempt of Britain's Tory government to block further concessions to the

³ B. Parmanand, "Presidential Address to the 1933 Hindu Mahasabha session," as cited in Prakash, 1938, p. 131. See also Prakash, 1938, p. 59.

movement for Indian self-rule by seizing control of the constitutional review process embodied in the 1919 India Act.⁴ The Tories' scheming galvanized nationalist opposition to British rule and caused much of the Indian political elite to temporarily join forces in a boycott of the Simon Commission. Such was the militancy generated by the Simon Commission boycott that the INC passed a resolution demanding complete independence just two years after the 1926 elections had indicated that the Congress right-wing was in the ascendant.

The year 1927 also marked the beginning of an unprecedented wave of worker unrest. By the end of the following year, according to the Director of the Intelligence Bureau of the Government of India, "there was hardly a single public utility service or industry which had not been affected in whole or in part, by the wave of communism which swept the country."⁵

With the revival of the national movement and the emergence of a combative working class, the focus of politics shifted away from the legislative councils, where the right-wing and communalism were disproportionately strong. Because

⁴ The Act stipulated that ten years after its taking force the British government had to appoint a commission to review the working of India's constitution and consider further reforms. The Tories, fearful that they might soon lose power to a Labour Party more sympathetic to Indian aspirations, set up the Statutory Commission two years early so they could determine its composition. They named not one Indian Commissioner.

⁵ As cited in Bipan Chandra and M. Mukherjee et al, India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947 (New Delhi: Viking, 1988), p. 219.

of the restricted franchise and the system of separate electorates, the Councils gave exaggerated importance to the concerns of the middle class in general, and to disputes over the communal allotment of jobs and patronage in particular.⁶

In the years 1922-26, the Hindu Mahasabha had exerted increasing pressure on the Congress. Now the pull was mainly in the other direction. As the left-wing in the Congress was reinvigorated by the Simon Commission boycott and by the emergence of a radical youth movement that looked to S.C. Bose and J. Nehru for leadership, the Hindu Mahasabha was thrown on the defensive and wracked by division. At issue were two inter-related questions: what attitude to take in the escalating conflict between the Congress and the imperial government over the reform of India's constitution and the Mahasabha's stand on the forging of a new inter-communal accord to replace the Lucknow Pact.

In the debates and disputes over these questions, the Punjab Hindu Sabha repeatedly opposed Congress policy. It consistently adopted an extreme communal position, placing the struggle for communal advantage before the winning of Indian self-rule. Often the Punjab Hindu Sabha succeeded in rallying support from other Hindu Sabhas, particularly those in Sind and the North West Frontier Province, where economically-

⁶ In evaluating the results of the 1926 elections, it is important to bear in mind that just 7% of the adult male population had the right to vote in Provincial Council elections, and the percentage allowed to vote in Central Assembly elections was considerably smaller.

advantaged Hindu minorities feared constitutional reform would reduce their political power. But when the Punjab Hindu Sabha did not prevail in the councils of the Mahasabha, it pursued its own course, sometimes in direct violation of binding Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee decisions.

The Hindu Mahasabha and the Indian Constitution, (1927-29)

During the years 1927 through 1929, intense discussion took place among Indian politicians on a communal agreement that would replace the Lucknow Pact and be incorporated in a new Indian constitution. The All-India Hindu Mahasabha was one of the principals in these negotiations. Some contemporary political leaders and some historians have charged that the Mahasabha was responsible for the failure of the intercommunal negotiations. These claims will be discussed below. What is indisputable is that the negotiations had a major impact on the Mahasabha.

When the negotiations began, the Mahasabha demanded that it be recognized as the Hindus' sole spokesman on communal-political questions. The most vocal advocate of this position, at least among the Congress Mahasabhites, was Dr. B.S. Moonje. Dubbed the "club-wielder" Moonje by sections of the Muslim press because of his frequent calls for Hindus to organize lathi-armed "self-defence" corps,⁷ Moonje was elected

⁷ Shan Muhammad, ed., The Indian Muslims. A Documentary Record (1900-1947) (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1980-1994), Vol. 9, p. 202.

Hindu Mahasabha president at its 1927 Patna session.

Because of Moonje's reputation as an extreme communalist the Congress leadership tried to block his election. That endeavour having failed, moderate Congress Mahasabhites prevailed on Moonje not to deliver his presidential address.⁸ His extemporaneous remarks, however, proved provocative enough. Moonje accused the Muslims of "dreaming of absorbing the whole of India ... into Muslimstan," said he had no faith in communal negotiations, for "unity based on the principle of bargaining can never succeed," and urged Hindus to cease calling for Hindu-Muslim unity. "Leave the Muslims severely alone," counselled Moonje, "so that they might realize their folly, and in dejection ... throw themselves at our feet ..."⁹

The Mahasabha session rejected all four of the conditions that a group of Muslim politicians led by M.A. Jinnah had set for Muslim consent to the abolition of separate electorates and urged the Congress leadership not even to consider Jinnah's proposals. "In the opinion of the Mahasabha any discussion on the part of All-India Congress Committee at this stage will be premature and harmful."¹⁰

⁸ Prakash, 1938, p. 61.

⁹ "Extracts from the Presidential Address to the 1927 session of the Hindu Mahasabha," in Dharmaveer Dr. B.S. Moonje Commemoration Volume, N. G. Dixit et al, eds. (Nagpur: Centennial Celebration Committee, 1972), pp. 130-131; K.K. Aziz, History of Partition of India (New Delhi: Atlantic, 1988), Vol. 2, pp. 139-140.

¹⁰ IAR, 1927: V. 1, p. 423.

The following month Moonje warned the Congress leadership that it should confine itself to ratifying agreements negotiated by the leaders of the communal organizations. He wrote the Congress Working Committee:

I have to request you on behalf of the Hindu Mahasabha to confine your resolutions at present only to what has been mutually accepted by the Hindus and the Moslem leaders. As for the reconciliation of the differences that still exist ... a Round Table Conference may be arranged between the Moslem leaders and those of the Hindu Mahasabha, for if the Congress were to adopt any resolutions concerning these details before the differences on them are reconciled the Congress may not only fail in achieving its object but I am afraid undesirable complications may arise ...¹¹

The Congress ignored Moonje's threats. On May 18, 1927, a meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at which Moonje and several other Mahasabhites, including Jayakar and Kelkar, were present, endorsed an amended version of Jinnah's proposals. Reaction from disgruntled Mahasabhites was swift. Two days after the meeting, Moonje issued a press release "to clarify" his position. The Mahasabha President said that if called to vote on the Congress motion clause-by-clause he would dissent from parts of it. Soon after Moonje issued a circular to Mahasabha leaders in response "to several letters expressing dissatisfaction at what is alleged to be giving away of the Hindu cause by the Hindu Mahasabha leaders."¹²

This would not be the last instance in which the Congress Mahasabhites came into conflict with the Mahasabha

¹¹ Jayakar Papers: File 436, Item 91.

¹² Ibid.

rank-and-file. During the next two years concessions made by Mahasabha leaders at Congress meetings or All-Party conferences would be repeatedly overturned by Mahasabha committees and conferences. In the former forums, the Mahasabha leaders came under intense pressure to agree to a settlement which could form the basis for a renewed offensive for swaraj, and in the latter not to compromise "Hindu interests." Who was leading whom became a question difficult to answer.

As Jinnah's 1927 proposals, which came to be known as the "Delhi Proposals", formed the basis for the communal or Unity negotiations it is necessary that we consider them and the Hindu Mahasabha response briefly.

Jinnah said he and his supporters would agree to the abolition of separate Muslim electorate if a third of the seats in the Central Legislature were reserved for Muslims (they made up one-quarter of India's population); Muslims were guaranteed a majority of seats in Bengal and the Punjab; Sind was separated from the Bombay Presidency and accorded the status of a province; and reforms were introduced in Baluchistan and the N.W.F.P. to give them administrations along the same lines as all other provinces.¹³

Jinnah stipulated that the Delhi proposals had to be accepted in toto. The Hindu Mahasabha rejected them in toto. It opposed any "weightage." If there was to be communal

¹³ The Nehru Report, p. 18.

representation, it should be strictly according to population and available only to minorities. Baluchistan and the N.W.F.P. were "too backward" for democratic reforms. Sind should not be made a province, because provinces should not be formed on a communal basis.

There is no question the Delhi proposals were imbued with a communal spirit. The Muslim communal politicians hoped to increase the number of provinces in which Muslim majorities wielded political power, both to bolster the position of the Muslim political elite in those areas and to serve as a counterweight to Hindu communal strength elsewhere in India.

The Mahasabha responded in kind. Under the cover of solemn declarations about the principles of responsible government, the Mahasabha maneuvered for communal advantage. Consider one of its principal demands: a "uniform" electoral franchise. The Mahasabha was quite willing to accept a franchise that discriminated against the poor and the uneducated. What it could not countenance was a franchise that set different property and education qualifications for Hindus and Muslims. Why did the Mahasabha place such emphasis on a uniform franchise? Because it had the potential to boost Hindu political strength. For complex historical reasons, a larger proportion of Hindus were wealthy or educated than Muslims, particularly in the Muslim majority provinces. A uniform but restricted franchise, if coupled, as the Mahasabha advocated, with joint electorates and no reservation of seats

for the majority community of any province, would have considerably increased the political leverage of the Hindu elite in the Muslim majority provinces.

Another case in point is the Mahasabha's opposition to the separation of Sind. The Mahasabhites conceded that the provincial boundaries of British India did not take into account the linguistic-ethnic make-up of the population, were rooted in dynastic politics and administrative convenience. They supported the redrawing of provincial boundaries, but when it came to Sind they would brook no compromise. Although in 1920 the Congress had implicitly recognized that Sind constituted a distinct region within India by sanctioning the establishment of a Sind Provincial Congress Committee, the Mahasabha waged a vigorous campaign against the separation of Sind from 1927 until 1935, when it was established as a separate province under the new constitution. Something of the tenor of the Mahasabha campaign is indicated by a brief the Sind Hindu Sabha presented at Westminster. It characterized the entire Muslim population of Sind as bandits. "The organized gang dacoities in the Sukkur district," wrote the Sind Hindu Sabha, "show that the Sind Muslims continue to be almost as intolerant as they were in the forties of the last century."¹⁴

¹⁴ Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, 1972 series, Vol. 6, p. 167. For background to the Sind debate see M. Hasan, "The Communal Divide: A Study of the Delhi Proposals" in Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in India, ed. M. Hasan, pp. 282-286 and 295.

The appointment of the Simon Commission spurred efforts to reach a communal agreement, particularly given the assertion of the Secretary of State for India, Lord Birkenhead, that India's political leaders would never agree on a constitution. At the same time, the Commission's appointment increased the stakes in the communal negotiations, for it now became clear that they would have a direct bearing on a major reform of the constitution.

The appointment of the Simon Commission caused a fissure in the Hindu Mahasabha. The Congress Mahasabhites, particularly Malaviya and Lajpat Rai, threw themselves into the boycott campaign. However, the opposition to the Commission extended far beyond the Congress. Even the leading U.P. taluqdar Rampal Singh was an enthusiastic boycotter.¹⁵ During the December 1927 Congress session, the Hindu Mahasabha met in special session to pass a resolution that called "upon the people to boycott the Commission at every stage and at [sic] every manner."¹⁶ Malaviya, who presided over the session, declared "... this Hindu Mahasabha was never brought into existence as a communal organization to fight against any community. It is national to the core. Nationalism is as much the creed of the Hindu Mahasabha as Hinduism itself."¹⁷ To underscore the Mahasabha's eagerness to forge a united

¹⁵ Reeves, p. 148.

¹⁶ IAR, 1927: V. 2, pp. 333-334.

¹⁷ IAR, 1927: V. 2, p. 332.

opposition with their Muslim brethren, the session passed a resolution on the music before mosque issue, which, given the Mahasabha's previous record, was truly extraordinary for its conciliatory wording. In 1925 and 1926, the Mahasabha had urged Hindus not to acquiesce before any attempts to limit their religious processions. Now it pledged to ascertain the feelings of Muslims on the music before mosques issue and to seek "to persuade the Hindus in all parts of the country to meet their wishes."¹⁸

The Punjab Hindu Sabha, under the leadership of Bhai Parmanand and Narendra Nath, defied the boycott and cooperated with the Simon Commission. Nath submitted a "Memorandum on rights claimed by Hindu minority in the North-West of India" to the Commission and joined fellow Mahasabhite G.K. Narang on the Punjab [Legislature] Auxiliary Committee for the Simon Commission. In a letter to Malaviya, Nath justified the Punjab Hindu Sabha's stance by pointing to the actions of the Muslim communalist politicians. Nath argued that since the Punjab Muslim League and a faction of the All-India Muslim League led by the Punjabi politician Mohammad Shafiq were participating in the government's constitution-making process Punjabi Hindus had to do likewise. They could not allow their case to be lost by default.¹⁹ In other provinces a minority

¹⁸ IAR, 1927: V. 2, p. 334.

¹⁹ Cleghorn, p. 412. The Punjab sections of the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League spearheaded the drive within their respective organizations for cooperation with the Simon Commission.

of Mahasabhites joined in the work of the Simon Commission. Most noteworthy of these was Sir Sankaran Nair, who served as President of the Indian Central Committee to co-operate with the Simon Commission.

With the Simon Commission boycott rallying broad support, the Congress convened an All Parties Convention in February, 1928, to discuss a self-rule constitution for India. Under extreme pressure from the Congress leadership, the Mahasabha leaders accepted that some minorities might require exceptional treatment for a temporary period, but continued to raise objections to all four of the Delhi proposals.²⁰ Nevertheless, the majority in the Mahasabha felt its leadership was too accommodating. At the 1928 Mahasabha session Malaviya found himself isolated because he was not prepared to give an ironclad commitment that he would oppose the separation of Sind, preferring to wait for the report of a Congress subcommittee specifically appointed to investigate the issue. Thereafter, Malaviya and his supporters withdrew from active involvement in the Mahasabha. To the Mahasabhites' chagrin, with Malaviya went G.D. Birla and control of The Hindustan Times.²¹ By December 1928, relations between Malaviya and Moonje had deteriorated to such an extent

Just 5 days after the establishment of the Simon Commission, the Punjab ML voted to cooperate with it. Page, pp. 159-161.

²⁰ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 444.

²¹ Prakash, 1938, p. 327.

that they were feuding over whether the Congress or the Mahasabha had a greater claim to Lajpat Rai's legacy and the right to raise a memorial fund in his honor.²²

In April 1929, the Mahasabha suffered a further debilitating split, this time over the Nehru Report. The previous summer, a committee comprised of representatives of the major parties and communal organizations, including the Mahasabhite M.S. Aney, had reached agreement on a proposed constitution for India, known as the Nehru Report. In September, an emergency meeting of the Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee endorsed the Nehru Report, but not before the Mahasabhites had secured an important amendment to the Report's recommendation that Sind be allowed to become a separate province, if that was the will of the majority. Under the amendment, the separation of Sind was to take effect only when the entire Nehru Report became law. This was a crucial difference. Neither the Muslim nor Hindu communalist politicians expected the Nehru Report to be adopted in the near future. In any event, as subsequent events were to show, they were not ready to support civil disobedience to hasten its enactment.

For the Punjab Hindu Sabha the amendment concerning Sind was of little consequence. At Parmanand's urging, the Punjab Hindu Sabha mounted a vigorous campaign to defeat the Nehru Report, openly flouting a ruling of the Mahasabha Working

²² Jayakar Papers: File 436, Items 262, 264, 267 and 272.

Committee that its decision to support the Report was binding "on all subordinate organizations."²³ Feeling pressure from the Punjab Hindu Sabha and fearing that the Congress leadership might make further concessions to Jinnah, Lajpat Rai declared in late October, shortly before his death, that the Mahasabha would countenance no substantive changes to the Nehru Report. He warned that if the Muslims persisted in seeking to amend the report, "the Hindus will be perfectly justified" in rescinding their support.²⁴

And that is what the Mahasabha did at its 1929 session, held in Surat March 30-April 1. A motion moved by Moonje and seconded by Parmanand declared that since "Muslim opinion, as represented in the All-India Moslem Conference held at Delhi during the Christmas week," had rejected the Nehru Report, the Mahasabha was withdrawing the concessions it had made during the negotiations and reverting to its "original, essentially nationalistic position."²⁵

That Moonje was intent on burying any further intercommunal negotiations along with the Nehru Report is demonstrated by his choice of Parmanand to second his motion and by the resolution he brought before the Surat conference immediately after the debate on the Nehru Report was concluded. This second resolution repudiated the conciliatory

²³ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 443.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 445.

²⁵ IAR, 1929: V. 1, p. 359.

stance on the music before mosques question that the Mahasabha had adopted in the initial days of the Simon Commission boycott.²⁶

There was much opposition at the Surat session to the withdrawal of the Mahasabha's backing for the Nehru Report. The vote on the resolution had to be taken twice and when the President declared it carried there was a "loud uproar and disorder."²⁷

Only a year earlier, at the 1928 Hindu Mahasabha session, the Sind delegation had led the opposition to Malaviya, demanding that the Mahasabha resist any scheme to separate Sind from the Bombay Presidency. But at the Surat session, Dr. Choitram, the head of Sind Provincial Congress Committee, and his followers adamantly opposed Moonje's and Parmanand's call for the Mahasabha to rescind its support for the Nehru Report. They argued that the Nehru report had been two years in the making and, even more importantly, was to serve as the basis for a renewed drive for independence. For the Mahasabha to withdraw its support would undercut the INC's preparations for a new campaign of civil disobedience. Soon after Dr. Choitram and his group exited from the Mahasabha.

Moonje's actions also caused widespread dissatisfaction in the Tilakite camp. Indeed, the events at Surat can be said to have been the beginning of the end of the Responsivist

²⁶ IAR, 1929: V. 1, p. 361.

²⁷ Ibid.

Cooperation Party. Aney and Kelkar stood by the Nehru Report. Jayakar was so angered that Moonje had substituted a motion to rescind the Report for the more moderate resolution that he had drafted, he considered resigning as President of the Bombay Hindu Sabha. Jayakar considered the Surat resolution unwise because it allowed the Mahasabha's Muslim adversaries to place the blame for the collapse of the negotiations on the Mahasabha and because he believed it had reduced the Mahasabha's influence in any future "Unity" talks. "We have no trump card to play with, having disclosed all our cards at Surat."²⁸

From what has been written above, it should be apparent that the majority of Mahasabhites were, to say the least, not eager for a communal settlement. This writer, however, does not believe it worthwhile to make a minute dissection of the communal negotiations to apportion blame between the Muslim and Hindu communal politicians.

First, even if one grants that the Mahasabha alone stood in the way of a Hindu-Muslim Unity Pact that only raises the question: why was the Mahasabha given a de facto veto by the Congress and the other parties to the talks? The Congress leadership, which as we have seen was intimately tied to that of the Mahasabha, equivocated on waging a struggle against Hindu communalism. The Muslim communalists, for their part, found in the Mahasabha a convenient foil.

²⁸ Jayakar Papers File 437, Item 102.

Secondly, the communal negotiations were based on fundamentally false premises since the communal question could not be arbitrarily separated from all other political questions. To suggest that it could, was to accept the communalists' claim that the communal question was beyond politics and was rooted, not in a clash of socio-economic groups with different interests, but in differences of culture and ethno-racial temperament. The communal question was only one of the political questions that divided the Congress from the Hindu and Muslim communalist politicians. The communalist viewpoint generally coincided with a conservative outlook on socio-economic questions and a loyalist or moderate attitude to British rule. As the Congress Inquiry into the 1931 Cawnpore Riot observed, the Congress by accepting the communalist leaders as bona fide representatives of the communities that they claimed to represent, boosted the communalists' stature and helped them conceal the real interests for which they spoke.²⁹

By the end of 1929, a hardline faction led by Moonje and Parmanand had consolidated its leadership of the Mahasabha. It had done so at the cost of much of the Mahasabha's Congress support and of Moonje's position in the Congress.³⁰ Never

²⁹ Report of the Cawnpore Riots Enquiry Committee, p. 227.

³⁰ Moonje and his supporters lost control of the Central Province (Marathi) Provincial Congress Committee in 1928-29 after a bitter factional struggle in which, for a time, there were rival Congress Committees. The All-India Congress apparatus, controlled by the two Nehrus, recognized the Committee led by Moonje's

again would the Congress invite the Mahasabha to participate in intercommunal negotiations.

Although both Moonje and Parmanand had reputations as "aggressive communalists," their partnership was shaky. In addition to considerable personal animosity, they had differing views on important political questions. In a brief account of the Mahasabha's history published in 1945, Parmanand reproached Moonje for not breaking decisively with Malaviya and other "traitors" to the Mahasabha cause and transforming the Mahasabha into a political rival of the Congress.

Dr. Moonje ... had not the courage to be on one side. He wanted to maintain his position by sticking to the Mahasabha. But he had no courage to speak against those Hindu [Congress] leaders who had given him a lift in the public life. For three or four years the Hindu Mahasabha remained in this state of suspense.³¹

The Hindu Mahasabha, Non-Cooperation and the Round Table Conferences

In the fall of 1929, Britain's newly-elected Labour government announced that it would convene a Round Table Conference in London to discuss India's political future. This initiative, which amounted to a tacit admission that the Simon Commission had been a failure, initially won the approval of Indian leaders from across the political spectrum. But when the British government indicated it was not prepared

opponents.

³¹ "Internal Revolution in the Mahasabha," Hindu Outlook, January 2, 1945.

to negotiate India's attainment of Dominion status, Gandhi and the Nehrus withdrew their support. To the dismay of the Congress right wing and the Hindu Mahasabha leadership, the Indian National Congress voted at its December 1929 Lahore session to reject the government offer of negotiations and to launch a campaign of civil disobedience aimed at winning complete independence.

The Punjab Hindu Sabha openly opposed the Second Congress Non-Cooperation movement. In urging Hindus to spurn the Congress campaign, Parmanand made three claims: although the Congress spoke in the name of all Indians it was the Hindus alone who bore the brunt of the struggle for swaraj; the Hindus had not sufficient strength to prevail in the face of the combined opposition of the Government and "the Muslims"; the "constant agitation and opposition to the Government" was diverting Hindus from the task of consolidating their strength for the communal clash that would erupt when power ultimately passed into Indian hands.

The agitation is sure to end in failure because the Hindus alone cannot reach the goal, being without strength and organization.³²

Suppose the British rule is withdrawn from any of these provinces, are the Hindus there strong enough [to] defend their simple human rights against the aggressiveness of their Muslim neighbors? ... The Muslims ... pursue quite a different policy. They believe in cooperating with the British to consolidate their own power, and to render themselves fit for taking over the

³² "The Hindu National Movement", 1931, reprinted in Hindu Outlook, June 17, 1941.

charge of administration when the time arrives.³³

Parmanand stood as a candidate in the September 1930 Central Assembly elections, which the Congress boycotted, and won election from his home district in the Punjab. How far the Punjab Hindu Sabha was ready to extend its policy of cooperation was underscored by the appointment of Gokul Chand Narang, a leading Mahasabhite and member of Narendra Nath's National Progressive Party, to the post of Minister for Local Self-Government. The Punjab Hindu Sabha had repeatedly accused the dominant party in the Punjab Council, the Unionist Party, of Muslim communalism. But in order to be better placed to secure Hindu traders and professionals their "fair share" of government largesse, it supported an alliance with a Unionist-led ministry, even as that ministry was working with British Indian authorities to quell the Congress civil disobedience movement. "The main object" of the National Progressive Party, admitted a report on the work of the Punjab Hindu Sabha, "has been to safeguard and fight for the interests of the Hindus in the Punjab and for this reason co-operation or non-co-operation with the Government has always been of secondary importance" to it.³⁴

Moonje and the other Congressmen who remained in the Mahasabha leadership joined the Non-Cooperation movement, but only reluctantly. In this they were far from alone. The

³³ Continuation in Hindu Outlook, June 24, 1941.

³⁴ Prakash, 1938, p. 359.

Congress right-wing having waged a long struggle for Council entry was loathe "to go back to the wilderness." It participated in the civil disobedience movement grudgingly and only after the movement had struck a chord among large sections of the populace and assumed a mass dimension.

Moonje resigned his seat in the Central Legislative Assembly when compelled to do so by other members of the Responsivist Co-operation Party.³⁵ The Mahasabha's Working President then briefly toyed with the idea of having some of his associates contest the by-elections under the banner of the Hindu Mahasabha, for he feared that the non-Brahmin party would capture the seats vacated by the Congress supporters.³⁶

Ironically, while the Mahasabhites were either openly opposing the Non-Cooperation movement or lending it tepid support, Muslim communalist politicians were exhorting their co-religionists not to join the movement on the grounds that the Congress was in the pocket of the Hindu Mahasabha. Speaking at an All-India Muslim Conference in Bombay in April 1930, Muhammad Ali urged Muslims to stand aloof from the Congress campaign: "Gandhi is working under the influence of the communalist Hindu Mahasabha. He is fighting for the supremacy of Hinduism and the submergence of the Muslims."³⁷

³⁵ Baker, Changing Political Leadership, p. 103

³⁶ Cleghorn, pp. 414-415.

³⁷ As cited in Dr. Padmasha, Indian National Congress and the Muslims, 1928-1947 (New Delhi: Rajesh Publications, 1980) p. 65.

The leading Congress Mahasabhites joined the Non-Cooperation movement so as to maintain their Congress posts, which they hoped would later prove useful in returning the Congress to a more moderate course. But as the Congress persisted with its challenge to imperial rule and as the Non-Cooperation movement took a more radical form, the Congress Mahasabhites and their non-Congress associates grew more apprehensive and agitated. The landlords in the U.P. Hindu Sabha were nothing short of livid when in October 1930 the Congress launched a no-tax campaign in which U.P. tenants and landlords were urged to withhold payment of rent or revenue. Rampal Singh complained that the Congress was preaching "communism" to the tenants: "Almost everyday meetings are held in rural areas in which property rights are attacked."³⁸

In the summer of 1930, Jayakar and the Liberal leader Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru worked with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin, to try to persuade the INC leadership to participate in the Round Table Conference. When this initiative failed, Moonje decided to break ranks with the Congress and attend the Conference. In November 1929 Moonje had said that if it proved impossible to forge a communal pact, the Hindus should wage the struggle for Dominion Status "alone ... but in a spirit of unalloyed nationalism and let the Muslims try and get what they want from the government to satisfy their communalism ..."³⁹ Now,

³⁸ Reeves, p. 178.

³⁹ IAR, 1929: V. 2, p. 342.

fearing that the Muslim communalists would win favors from the British by participating in the Round Table Conference, he took a different stance. For "Hindu leaders" such as himself to boycott the Conference--even though it was designed to thwart Indian demands for self-rule--would be dangerous, because it would be detrimental to "Hindu interests."

I must have my protest recorded and carry the message of the Hindu Mahasabha right up to the heart of the British Empire. I cannot let them make another Hindu-Moslem pact behind the back of the Hindu Mahasabha. My protest and dissent must be there.⁴⁰

Moonje and the other British Indian delegates to the first session of the Round Table Conference (November 12, 1930-January 19, 1931) attended on the invitation of the government, not as representatives of their respective organizations. Nonetheless, the Hindu Mahasabha was clearly identified with the Round Table Conference and aligned with the government against the Congress. In addition to Moonje, three other Mahasabhites attended: the Punjab Hindu Sabha leader Narendra Nath and two of Moonje's Responsivist associates, M.R. Jayakar and S.B. Tambe.

Ultimately, three sessions of the Conference were held. Prior to the second session--the only one in which the Congress participated--Moonje had a resolution placed before the Mahasabha that named him its sole representative at the

⁴⁰ Moonje Diary, August 29, 1930, as cited by Baker, Changing Political Leadership, p. 103.

Conference.⁴¹

In its submissions to the Round Table Conference, the Hindu Mahasabha made a show of its opposition to communalism, but this was belied by its own insistence that representation at the Conference should be on a communal basis. The Mahasabha charged that the Muslims were "overrepresented" and chastized the British government for failing to invite even one Sind or N.W.F.P. Hindu. "The Hindu Mahasabha," declared its 1931 Akola session, "emphatically protests that the representation of the Hindus, in the same communal sense in which Muslims are represented on [sic] the Round Table Conference, is inadequate and highly defective ..."⁴²

Moonje told the conference it was "impracticable" to establish in the N.W.F.P. and Baluchistan even the truncated and deformed legislative council system extant elsewhere in India.⁴³ He also brought to London the Mahasabha's campaign against the separation of Sind. When the Sind Sub-Committee appointed at the first Conference session of the Round Table Conference ruled in favor of establishing Sind as a separate province, Moonje said its decision had been "ex parte" because

⁴¹ Hindu Outlook, November 4, 1941.

⁴² IAR, 1931: V. 2, p. 258.

⁴³ "Memorandum By Dr. B.S. Moonje" (Submitted at the First Session of the Round Table Conference and Resubmitted at the Second Session) Indian Round Table Conference (Second Session) 7th September, 1931-1st December, 1931. Proceedings of Federal Structure Committee and Minorities Committee, p. 559. Hereafter IRTC (Second Session).

no Sind Hindu had attended its deliberations. In two submissions at the Second Session he suggested that if the government did not overturn the decision, the Mahasabha might lend its support to a proposal by the two Sikh delegates for the partition of the Punjab on communal lines.⁴⁴

At the first session of the Round Table Conference, Moonje did raise two new proposals--League of Nations arbitration and application of the League's Minorities Treaty to India's communal problem.

The Sabha is willing that the whole of the Hindu-Muslim problem should be referred to individuals, or to a body like the League of Nations, who have dealt with such questions in the past and have experience of them in other countries ... and who will have the courage to solve them impartially."⁴⁵

The choice of the League of Nations was not arbitrary. As Moonje explained, "On a perusal of the arrangements made by the League of Nations in the case of many minorities in new provinces formed in Europe after the War, it will be clear that in no case have any claims been allowed like those the Muslims are putting forward in India ..."⁴⁶

The Mahasabha's advocacy of League arbitration was denounced by many of its opponents as a betrayal of India's aspirations for self-rule. In reply, the Hindu Mahasabha

⁴⁴ See "Memorandum on the Congress Formula of Communal Settlement", p. 549, and "Supplementary Statement by Dr. B.S. Moonje," p. 562, IRTC (Second Session).

⁴⁵ "Memorandum By Dr. B.S. Moonje", IRTC (Second Session), p. 560.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

noted that India had been a founding member of the League and asserted its admission had been a significant step toward recognition of India as an equal in international affairs.⁴⁷

Following the breakdown of the communal negotiations at the first Conference session, leading Muslim politicians accused Moonje, Jayakar and the Mahasabha of preventing an agreement.⁴⁸ R.J. Moore, who has made an exhaustive study of the Round Table Conference, says, Moonje "exerted great influence at the Round Table Conference simply by saying 'No' ..."⁴⁹ Yet he argues that had a pact been reached along the lines discussed during the Session, it would likely have collapsed due to opposition from Muslim hardliners.⁵⁰

At the Second Session (September 7-December 1, 1931), Moonje and the lone delegate mandated to speak on behalf of the Congress, M.K. Gandhi, took radically different positions. The Congress pressed for the abolition of landlord and other special interest constituencies and for full adult suffrage, because it believed that a universal franchise was essential

⁴⁷ See C.Vijiaraghavachariar's Presidential Address to the 1931 session of the Hindu Mahasabha, IAR, 1931: V. 2, p. 242.

⁴⁸ For example, see the January 1, 1931 letter of M. Ali to Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald, Muhammad, The Indian Muslims, Vol. 10, p. 44; the July 21, 1932, letter of Jinnah to Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, cited in V.B. Kulkarni, M.R. Jayakar (New Delhi: Government of India, 1976), p. 201; and Abdulla Muhammad Zakullah Khan, "The Communal Award and Its Critics," Muhammad, The Indian Muslims, Vol. 10, p. 96.

⁴⁹ R.J. Moore, The Crisis of Indian Unity, 1917-40 (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 122.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 158.

to satisfying "all the reasonable aspirations, not only of the Mussulmans, but also of the so-called Untouchables--of Christians, of laborers and all classes."⁵¹ The Hindu Mahasabha said it had "no objection to a further widening of the franchise and even adult suffrage."⁵² But this was a pretense. The demand the Mahasabha "emphatically insist[ed]" upon was that the franchise "should be uniform for all communities in each Province irrespective of the fact whether it does or does not reflect in the electoral roll the proportion in population of every community in the Province."⁵³

On other questions the differences were even greater. The Hindu Mahasabha held that the British Indian government and the imperial regime could and should play a significant role in the resolution of the communal problem. Thus Moonje advocated that in some Muslim majority provinces the Crown retain control of law and order and several other subjects and that the Governors be invested with wide powers of disallowance.⁵⁴ The Mahasabha's support for Governors' powers, argued Jawaharlal Nehru, gave the British Raj a

⁵¹ IRTC (Second Session), p.61 and pp. 59-60.

⁵² IAR, 1931: V. 2, p. 254.

⁵³ Ibid.; "Supplementary Statement by Dr. B.S. Moonje," IRTC (Second Session), p. 561. For a discussion of the communalist character of this demand see above, p. 107.

⁵⁴ See for example, the resolution on "Frontier Reforms" passed by the 1931 Mahasabha session, IAR, 1931: V. 2, p. 255.

pretext for imposing restrictions on the authority of the Councils that "would inevitably apply to all provinces."⁵⁵ The Mahasabha's appeals for the British to serve as the Hindu minorities' guardian were "not only narrowly communal but also anti-national and intensely reactionary."⁵⁶ Like similar demands from the Muslim communalists, they dovetailed with the British claims that Indians were not fit for self-rule, that the British Indian government was the lone bulwark against communal strife and chaos. This was no small matter. By the time of the Round Table Conference, the "communal question" had become the principal ideological justification for continued British rule.⁵⁷

While the Mahasabha laid the blame for communal conflict on Muslim aggressiveness, the Congress held that the communal problem was compounded by, if not rooted in, colonial rule. Therefore Gandhi, after again attempting in the fourth week of the Second Session to mediate a solution to the communal problem, proposed that the issue be put aside pending the drafting of a new Indian constitution that would provide "an honorable and respectable framework for the freedom of India."⁵⁸

The solution [to the communal tangle] can be the Crown of

⁵⁵ J. Nehru, Vol. 6, p. 167.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 168.

⁵⁷ Chandra, Communalism, pp, 82-83; Freitag, p. 79.

⁵⁸ IRTC (Second Session), p. 543.

the Swaraj constitution, not its foundation--if only because our differences have hardened, if they have not arisen, by reason of the foreign domination. I have not a shadow of doubt that the iceberg of communal differences will melt under the warmth of the sun of freedom.⁵⁹

Gandhi's proposal was rejected by the Muslim delegates, representatives of several other minorities and by the chairman of the Minorities Committee, the British Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald. All insisted that India's constitution could not be reformed until a solution had been found to the communal conundrum. In a final attempt to break the deadlock, Gandhi proposed that a settlement be arbitrated by a government-appointed judicial tribunal or some other third party. Moonje then came forward with a proposal of his own--the British Prime Minister should be the arbiter.⁶⁰ Moonje's proposal appeared cut from the same cloth as Gandhi's. Indeed, the Mahatma responded by saying that the Congress would accept arbitration by the British Prime Minister if Macdonald were to give an undertaking that communal representation would be limited to India's Muslim and Sikh communities.⁶¹ The Prime Minister refused to give such an undertaking. This turn of events could hardly have come as a surprise to Gandhi. In his speeches to the Minorities

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 530.

⁶⁰ See January 1, 1931, letter of M. Ali, in Muhammad, The Indian Muslims, Vol. 10, p. 42; Asutosh Lahiry, "Dr. Moonje a Mighty Politician," Moonje Commemoration Volume, p. 66.

⁶¹ B.P. Sitaramayya, The History of the Indian National Congress, p. 833.

Committee, the Congress leader had all but accused the British government of having designed the Conference in order to produce communal deadlock. The British, charged Gandhi, had chosen delegates who were unrepresentative of the mass of Indians and had encouraged every community to press its maximum demands by announcing that all constitutional advance was conditional on a communal settlement.⁶²

Gandhi's willingness to entertain Moonje's proposal can at most be seen as a temporary retreat from the Congress's position that the solution to the communal problem lay in a struggle against the imperial system. A month after the conclusion of the Second Round Table Conference, the Congress resumed its campaign of civil disobedience.

Conversely, Moonje's proposal for a communal settlement dictated by the British Prime Minister was consistent with the general direction in which the Mahasabha had been evolving. At the Round Table Conference, as detailed above, the Mahasabha sought to use the British Indian state as a counterweight to the Muslim communalists. Furthermore, the Mahasabha had repeatedly opposed Congress initiatives on the grounds that they might alienate the British authorities and cause them to favor the Muslim communalists. Some Mahasabhites such as Parmanand and Nath forthrightly argued for the Hindus to abandon Non-Cooperation and instead seek to supplant the Muslim communalists as government allies.

⁶² IRTC (Second Session), pp. 530 and 543.

The conditions Ramsay Macdonald set for accepting Moonje's arbitration proposal--that all the members of the Minority Committee should consent and pledge to abide by his decision--were not met. Nevertheless, the British Prime Minister subsequently used Moonje's proposal to justify dictating a settlement.

Announced in August 1932, the Communal Award "caused bitter disappointment" among the Mahasabhites.⁶³ The Award "manifestly favours one party over the other," declared the Mahasabha Working Committee.⁶⁴ The Mahasabha, looking through its communalist prism, perceived the favored party as the Muslims. In fact, the Award left the vast majority of Muslims (and Hindus) disenfranchised. What may be said of the Award is that it favored the claims of the Muslim communalist politicians over those of their Hindu communalist adversaries. But this was an effect, not the aim, of British policy. The purpose of the Award was to frustrate nationalist opposition to British rule by encouraging communalism and provincialism and, in particular, to undercut the claim of the predominantly Hindu-supported Indian National Congress to represent India. But the logic of the communal equation was that the demands of the Muslim and other "minority" communalist politicians could only be accommodated by rejecting those of the Hindu communalists, as well as those of the Congress.

⁶³ Lahiry, p. 66.

⁶⁴ IAR, 1932: V. 2, p. 322.

The Communal Award provided separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, and the Depressed Classes. In the seven provinces in which Muslims were in a minority, "weightage"--a share of seats greater than the Muslim population--was provided to Muslim voters, i.e. to the Muslim elite. However, to the Mahasabhites' dismay, in the Bengal and Punjab, where Hindus were in the minority, Hindu voters did not benefit from weightage. In fact, the number of "General"--that is Hindu--seats fell substantially below the Hindu share of the population. Although Ramsay Macdonald did not concede the Muslim communalists' demand for statutory majorities in the Punjab and Bengal, he allotted sufficient Muslim seats to give "the Muslims of Punjab and Bengal the possibility of dominance in their own provinces. This was the objective for which Fazl-i-Husain [then the most powerful Muslim politician in India] had worked throughout the period of constitutional reform ..."⁶⁵

The 1932 session of the Mahasabha, held one month after the issuing of the Communal Award, "unreservedly condemned the decision of the British government" and proposed "in the place of the Premier's Award an international communal award" as embodied in the Minorities Guidelines of the League of Nations.⁶⁶ During the session, there was much excitement over

⁶⁵ Page, p. 257.

⁶⁶ IAR, 1932: V. 2, p. 327.

the "fast to the death" Gandhi had launched to force the repeal of the section of the Award that provided separate electorates for Depressed Class voters. Even so vehement a critic of Gandhi as Parmanand admitted that when he learned of the fast "for the first time the thought came to my mind that Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest living Hindu."⁶⁷ Parmanand's elation, however, turned to anger, when he perused the terms of the Poona Pact, the agreement that Gandhi reached with the Untouchable leader Dr. Ambedkar. What infuriated Parmanand was that in exchange for Ambedkar renouncing separate electorates, Gandhi had rewarded Depressed Class voters with more than double the seats provided in the Communal Award. Subsequently, Parmanand sharply criticized Moonje for having endorsed the Poona Pact on behalf of the Mahasabha.

The Hindu Mahasabha attacked the Communal Award from two standpoints. It condemned separate electorates and weightage as inimical to democracy, while simultaneously demanding, in the name of "fairness," that all the privileges accorded the Muslim minorities in the seven majority-Hindu provinces be extended to the Hindu minorities in Bengal and northwest India. The Bengal Hindu Sabha demanded the Hindu community be accorded "sufficient weightage" to ensure that the number of Hindus in the Provincial Legislature at least equalled the number of Muslims. The Sind Hindu Sabha argued that the Hindu community, although only a quarter of the province's

⁶⁷ IAR, 1933: V. 2, p. 207.

population, should receive no less than 40% of the seats in the Provincial Council.⁶⁸

The Mahasabhites also demanded that communalism be extended and systemized. In his submission to the Joint Committee of the British Parliament studying the government's White Paper on Indian Constitutional Reform, Bhai Parmanand advocated a three-way partition of the Punjab.⁶⁹ The 1933 Mahasabha session made a veiled threat that Hindus would demand communal "separation of the purse" if the Award was not rescinded. By 1936, Dr. Radhakumud Mookerjee, a Hindu Mahasabha vice-president, was urging the Bengal Hindu Conference to press for communal separation of education, administration and taxation. "Let the Hindus and Muslims [of Bengal] frankly organize themselves as separate nationalities from top to bottom, each fostering its own national culture by its own resources, and then let them unite in an All-Bengal Federal Assembly."⁷⁰

The Communal Award also prompted the Mahasabhites to intensify their campaign for a strong Crown presence in Muslim-majority provinces. The Sind Hindu Sabha argued that if Sind became a province its Governor must have "special powers of interference, superintendence [and disallowance] ...

⁶⁸ IAR, 1934: V. 1, p. 307-308; 1935: V. 1, p. 337.

⁶⁹ Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform (Session 1932-33), Vol. 2, C, p. 1414; as cited by Cleghorn, p. 412.

⁷⁰ IAR, 1936: V. 2, p. 265.

to safeguard the minorities and to see that trade, commerce and industry are not unduly taxed by the Legislative Council, dominated by the Muslim zamindari interests."⁷¹

The wave of anti-Communal Award sentiment in the Mahasabha caught Moonje in its undertow. Criticized by his Mahasabhite colleagues for his work at the Round Table Conference, "Moonje himself confessed he had failed to arouse Hindus to 'the Muslim peril.'"⁷² In 1933, he stepped down as Mahasabha Working President.

The Program of the Hindu Mahasabha, Revisited

Maximizing Hindu Numerical-Political Strength: The Hindu Mahasabha continued to place great emphasis on maximizing the numerical-political strength of the Hindu community. Another reason that the Mahasabhites objected to the second Congress Non-Cooperation movement was that the boycott of British institutions ran counter to the Mahasabha campaign to boost Hindu population figures in the 1931 decennial census. In the first months of 1930, the Mahasabha initiated a campaign to ensure "that in the coming census operations no injustice is allowed to be done to the Hindus community in the matter of counting numbers."⁷³ Hindu organizations and "Hindu workers" were urged to press for the

⁷¹ IAR, 1934: V. 1, p. 311.

⁷² Baker, Changing Political Leadership, p. 103.

⁷³ The Modern Review, April 1930, p. 554.

hill and forest tribes that had been listed as Animists in previous censuses to be classified as Hindu and for all Hindu sects to be shown "under one heading, although their sectional number [of adherents] may also be shown separately."⁷⁴ At its next All-India session, the Mahasabha adopted a resolution that condemned "the policy of the Government in arranging census statistics in such a way as to lessen seemingly the number of the Hindu population of Hindusthan by enumerating various Hindu sections and communities as non-Hindus."⁷⁵ The Mahasabha campaign to swell the count of Hindus in the census was sufficiently widespread to merit comment by the Census Commissioner for India, J.H. Hutton, in the introduction to the 1931 Census:

the energetic propaganda by the Hindu Mahasabha ... practically amounted to an advocacy of returning as Hindu every person whose religion could not be found to have originated outside India.⁷⁶

Fears that Untouchables might convert to other faiths to rid themselves of Hindu caste disabilities continued to preoccupy the Mahasabhites. Indeed, their fears were heightened. Not only were Untouchable political organizations emerging, but Muslim communal politicians were lending support to the Untouchable organizations' demands for separate

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ As cited in Prakash, 1938, p. 188.

⁷⁶ Census of India, 1931, p.385. See also p. 1 and pp. 379-387.

representation and electorates."⁷⁷ Mahasabha sessions routinely appealed for caste disabilities to be removed, but the Mahasabhites' reformist zeal remained tempered by concerns about maintaining the support of the orthodox. Because of Santanist opposition, the Mahasabha did not go on record as supporting either caste intermarriage or interdining. N.C. Kelkar and other leading Mahasabhites had frequently urged the government to rule that religious conversions would be considered valid only when supervised by the state; yet, in the name of opposing state interference in religious affairs, they opposed the Hindu Temple Entry Bill.

The Mahasabhites sought to cultivate relations with the tiny Untouchable elite. Of particular interest is an agreement Moonje struck with Dr. Ambedkar, President of the Depressed Classes Federation. The Moonje-Ambedkar Pact was precipitated by Dr. Ambedkar's threat to lead the Untouchables out of Hinduism and into an as yet undetermined rival faith.⁷⁸ It graphically illustrates that for the Mahasabhites religious doctrine and even religious affiliation were subordinate to political interests.

Under the pact, the Mahasabha pledged not to oppose the defection of Dr. Ambedkar and his followers from Hinduism and

⁷⁷ See in particular, "Provisions for a Settlement of the Communal Problem, Put Forward Jointly by Muslims, Depressed Classes, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans", otherwise known as "The Minorities Pact." IRTC (Second Session), pp. 550-555.

⁷⁸ In the 1950s, Dr. Ambedkar spearheaded a movement among his fellow Mahars to convert to Buddhism.

to support their continuing to enjoy the political rights granted Untouchables under the Poona Pact, if they in turn agreed "to embrace Sikhism in preference to Islam and Christianity" and to oppose Muslim attempts to draw "the Depressed Classes into the Muslim fold."⁷⁹ Under this scheme, Untouchables who converted to Sikhism and had the right to vote were not to be added to the separate Sikh electoral list; nor were these so-called neo-Sikhs to seek office by contesting the Sikh seats. Rather, the provisions of the Poona Pact were to continue to apply. All Untouchables, those who became Sikhs and those who remained Hindus, who were entitled to vote--a fraction of the entire community--would do so as part of the General (i.e. Hindu) Electorate. The reserved seats for the Depressed Classes would be filled by Untouchables (Hindu and Neo-Sikh), but elected from the General (Hindu) electorates.

In an open letter to Moonje, M.C. Rajah, the leader of a rival Untouchable organization, accused the Mahasabha of having devised a means of segregating the Untouchables from Hindu society, while retaining them as fodder for the communal-political power struggle. Rather than working to remove caste disabilities, "you are dissecting the Depressed Classes and affiliating them religiously to the Sikhs while retaining them politically as Hindus."⁸⁰ It would be

⁷⁹ IAR, 1936: V. 2, pp. 276-277.

⁸⁰ IAR, 1936: V. 2, p. 279.

understandable, wrote Rajah, "if as President of the Hindu Mahasabha you placed the spiritual welfare of the Depressed Classes first and foremost and thought of their social and economic welfare next and lastly thought of them as a political factor. Your solicitude for the place of the Depressed Classes in the political scheme ... exposes the interested nature of your concern for these Classes."⁸¹

Hindu "Self-Defence": In his maiden speech as Mahasabha President, Moonje had urged the Hindus of Bengal to recognize that they would not be able to effectively pressure the government until they developed "the lathi cult" and proved capable "of putting down the mischievously aggressive mass hooliganism" of the Muslims.⁸² Not all of Moonje's speeches were as inflammatory, but under his leadership and that of Bhai Parmanand the Mahasabha continued to agitate for Hindu "self defence." Only now it coupled the establishment of ashkras and Hindu volunteer corps with initiatives aimed at "militarizing Hindudom." The Hindu Mahasabha constitution was amended to include among the Mahasabha's "Objects" improving "the physique of the Hindus" and promoting "martial spirit amongst them by establishing military schools and organizing volunteer corps."⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² "Extracts from Moonje's Presidential Address to the 1927 Patna Session", Moonje Commemoration Volume, p. 130.

⁸³ The Hindu Mahasabha Constitution, Jayakar Papers, File 65, Item 5.

Throughout this period the Mahasabha functioned in close association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [the Union of National Voluntary Service.] Founded by Dr. Hedgewar, a close personal friend and longtime political associate of Moonje, the R.S.S. had emerged by the mid-1930s as a shadowy Hindu militia, "organised on lines strongly reminiscent of the Italian blackshirts," and with a membership in the tens of thousands.⁸⁴ R.S.S. members often provided security at Mahasabha rallies and conferences. At its 1932 session the Hindu Mahasabha passed a resolution applauding Hedgewar's efforts and urging "R.S.S. branches to be established in all provinces."⁸⁵ From a study of R.S.S. and Hindu Mahasabha records, the authors of a scholarly history of the R.S.S. have concluded that Mahasabha support was critical in establishing the R.S.S. as an effective organization:

Prominent members of local Hindu Sabhas would introduce R.S.S. organizers to potential recruits and donors, provide organizers and housing and the R.S.S. with a meeting area. This led many members of the Mahasabha, including Dr. Moonje, to conclude that the R.S.S. would function as the youth wing of the Mahasabha. Events were to prove them wrong.⁸⁵

"Defending Hindu Economic Interests": Perhaps the most important new element in the Mahasabha program was the

⁸⁴ B.D. Graham, "Syama Prasad Mookerjee and the Communalist Alternative," Soundings in Modern South Asian History, ed. D.A. Low (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p.334.

⁸⁵ Prakash, 1938, p. 199. A similar resolution was passed at the 1937 Hindu Mahasabha session. Jayakar Papers, File 65, Item 90.

⁸⁶ Andersen and Damle, The Brotherhood in Saffron, pp. 39-40.

promotion of "Hindu economic interests." This took two forms: opposing the increasingly radical socio-economic demands of the Congress and of the emerging peasant and labor movements and assisting Hindu traders and shopkeepers in commercial competition with Muslim rivals.

In his presidential address to the Mahasabha's 1929 session, Ramanda Chatterjee decried the growing militancy of workers and peasants. In the "higher interests of the Hindu community," he urged them to accept arbitration and conciliation, rather than "take the war-path in Occidental fashion."⁸⁷ The 1933 Mahasabha session passed a resolution that deplored class conflict in far stronger terms, an indication of the alarm among the Mahasabha's landlord and middle class supporters over the Depression's impact on class relations and at the growth of a socialist current in the Congress. In a veiled reference to the no-rent campaign the Congress had mounted in U.P. between 1930 and 1932, the resolution condemned "any movement" bent on abolishing landlordism or capitalism. "Such movements," warned the Mahasabha, "will further accentuate divisions and subdivisions bringing about class war which will ultimately retard all progress and make redemption of India impossible."⁸⁸

In the communal disputes of the 1920s over the use of

⁸⁷ IAR, 1929: V. 1, pp. 357-358.

⁸⁸ Prakash, 1938, p. 205.

public spaces and religious practices, local Hindu Sabhas often called on Hindus to boycott Muslim-owned stalls and shops and even Muslim hawkers. The Congress Committee that investigated the 1931 Cawnpore Riot heard testimony about a mutual economic boycott mounted by Hindu and Muslim communalists that lasted for some two years. Ram Rattan Gupta, a Cawnpore Hindu Sabha officer and a member of the Executive Committee of the United Provinces Chamber of Commerce, said that after a communal riot in 1927,

social and economic boycotts began between the two communities; Hindus boycotting Muslim vegetable-sellers, churiwalas, Rangrezes, and others; and the Muslims boycotting Hindu cloth-merchants, halwais, tambolies, grocers and others, and each community arranging for such shops being opened by the members of their own community."⁸⁹

Initially a tactic in local communal power struggles, the economic boycott was taken up by traders and shopkeepers as a commercial weapon. In an August 1929 letter, the Secretary of the Matunga Hindu Sabha urged M.R. Jayakar, President of the Bombay Hindu Sabha, to mobilize Hindu consumers and organize Hindu trade organizations to "prevent the trade passing into the hands of rival faiths."⁹⁰

What efforts are being made by the Mahommedans to capture the trade from the Hindus will be clear to you by one small instance and that is of the fruit trade which is rapidly passing away into their hands. Wherever one moves he will find the Mahomedan hawkers doing a very profitable business. Even in predominantly Hindu localities such as Girgaum, Grant Road, Parel and Dardar the Hindus have to

⁸⁹ A History of the Hindu-Moslem Problem in India (Report of the Cawnpore Riots Enquiry Committee), pp. 242-243

⁹⁰ Jayakar Papers, File 437, Item 137.

depend on these hawkers for their minor necessities which [sic] were previously wholly in the hands of Hindus."⁹¹

The concerns of the Secretary of the Matunga Hindu Sabha were at least partially addressed. "The Dardar Hindu Sabha was successful," boasts the 1938 volume A Review of the History and Work of the Hindu Mahasabha, "in creating an initiative among the Hindus to patronize Hindu shopkeepers and hawkers in preference to those of other communities."⁹²

Under the harsh economic conditions of the 1930s, shopkeepers and traders became an important new base for communal politics. Boycott and "Buy Hindu" campaigns initiated and supported by the Hindu Mahasabha did much to further the communalization of everyday life.

The Hindu Mahasabha, the Congress and the 1934 Elections

In December 1924 Madan Mohan Malaviya had told a special session of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha, "It would be a shame if any Hindu opposed the Indian National Congress."⁹³ Yet in the years that followed, the Mahasabha was a relentless critic of the INC's policy of Hindu-Muslim unity and repeatedly opposed key Congress initiatives. It withdrew its support for the Nehru report. The Mahasabha Working President broke the Congress boycott of the first Round Table Conference. With the resumption of the Congress civil disobedience movement,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Prakash, 1938, p. 251.

⁹³ Bakshi, p. 98.

following the failure of the Second Round Table Conference, the breach between the two organizations grew still wider. The Mahasabhaites publicly campaigned for an end to Non-Cooperation and a return to the Councils. "The Hindus," declared the President of Mahasabha's 1932 session, "will lose at every point" if they do not send representatives to the Councils "to guard their communal interests as well as to guard against anti-national interests."⁹⁴ Moreover, the Mahasabha voiced no protest against the state repression of the Congress, although it was unprecedented, involving the arrest of 70,000 satyagrahis and the adoption of a battery of draconian ordinances.⁹⁵

Yet throughout Moonje's presidency of the Mahasabha (1927-33) and for some years after, the Mahasabha's relation to the Congress was ambiguous. Many in the Hindu Mahasabha continued to swear allegiance to the Congress. For them the Mahasabha was auxiliary to the Congress, not a substitute for it.

The 1929 Mahasabha session, which withdrew support for the Nehru Report, amended the Mahasabha constitution to provide for an augmented political role. The old constitution had included in the sixth clause of its "Objects" a commitment "to take steps for the religious, moral, educational, social,

⁹⁴ IAR, 1932: V. 2, p. 326.

⁹⁵ Selected Works of J. Nehru, Vol. 6, p. 169.

economic and political interests of the entire community."⁹⁶
The amended constitution gave much greater weight to the Mahasabha's political obligations, but at the same time stipulated that its role was limited. "The Hindu Mahasabha," declared the 1929 constitution, "shall enter politics only when Muslim or other non-Hindu communities impelled by sheer communalistic selfishness, shall strive to jeopardize Hindu interests or the attainments of swaraj in this land."⁹⁷

Later that year, in a letter advising Narendra Nath how to present the Mahasabha's case during a visit to England, Moonje wrote:

the Hindu Mahasabha ... generally leaves politics to the Indian National Congress but reserves to itself the right of interfering in politics to prevent any special encroachments on the Hindu rights by other communities or to exert its steadying influence on the Congress when it strays from the path of pure unalloyed nationalism in its desire to placate the Muslim community⁹⁸

Three years later, Moonje advanced a similar view in a report to the Mahasabha, "Gandhi and the Congress represent the politics of India and the Mahasabha ... the Hindus in their social and religious problems."⁹⁹

Bhai Parmanand, the leading advocate of Hindu nationalism in the Mahasabha, had been agitating for a break

⁹⁶ Lajpat Rai Writings, Vol. 2, p. 243; Bombay Presidency Hindu Sabha Constitution, Jayakar papers, File 435, Item 8.

⁹⁷ Jayakar Papers: File 438, Item 228.

⁹⁸ Jayakar Papers: File 437, Item 42.

⁹⁹ "Report on Lisbon Mission," in Moonje Commemoration Volume, p. 109.

with the Congress since the mid-1920s. Even before he officially became the Mahasabha's Working President at the October 1933 Ajmer session, Parmanand had secured a significant amendment to the Mahasabha constitution. In 1930 the Mahasabha had defined its "Aim" in a manner consistent with its claim to be a socio-cultural organization. The Mahasabha sought "the revival of ancient Hindu culture, Hindu Ideals and propagation of Hindu (Vedic) Dharma for the benefit of the Hindus specially and humanity generally."¹⁰⁰ The "Aim" included in the Mahasabha constitution of March 1933 was manifestly political. The Mahasabha sought "the maintenance, protection and promotion of Hindu race, Hindu culture and Hindu civilization for the advancement and glory of Hindu Rashtra [the Hindu nation]."¹⁰¹

In his presidential address at Ajmer, Parmanand called on Hindus to abandon the Congress, Non-Cooperation, and, for the foreseeable future, the goal of Indian self-rule. "We are, as if, at the parting of the ways. ... Congress with its theory of Swaraj though Hindu-Muslim unity and civil disobedience goes entirely out of the field."¹⁰² The Hindus, said Parmanand, confronted an "alliance between the British government and the Muslims." It had proven impossible to woo the Muslims from this alliance, because "the power of gift is

¹⁰⁰ Jayakar Papers: File 437, Item 228.

¹⁰¹ Jayakar Papers: File 65, Item 9.

¹⁰² IAR, 1933: V. 2, p. 204.

in the hands of the government" and because of the communal "Moslem mentality." If the Hindus were to avoid falling under "double slavery" and a "Muslim autocracy," they had only one option: to try to supplant the Muslims as British allies.¹⁰³

I feel an impulse in me that the Hindus would willingly cooperate with Great Britain if their status and responsible position as the premier community in India is recognized in the political institutions of new India.¹⁰⁴

To bring about such an alliance and infuse the Hindu community with Hindu national consciousness, Parmanand proposed the Provincial Hindu Sabhas work the constitution in defiance of the Congress, stand candidates in the coming elections, and capture the Central Assembly and Provincial Councils.¹⁰⁵

In castigating Congress policy and advocating Council entry, Parmanand was voicing the sentiments of most Mahasabhites. In calling for the Mahasabha to transform itself into a political party, he was not.

Shortly after the Ajmer session, Kelkar presided over a conference of Tilakites that established a new political vehicle, the Democratic Swaraj Party, to maneuver within and place pressure on the Congress. Its membership limited to those who accepted the Congress creed, the DSP pressed for an end to non-cooperation and the scrapping of the Congress's

¹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 204-206.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 206.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 206-207.

"extremist" socio-economic programme. In short, it aimed to become the Maharashtra parliamentary wing of a much moderated Congress.¹⁰⁶ Jayakar favored the establishment of a right-wing party outside of the Congress, uniting the Liberals, Mahasabhites and those conservative Congressmen ready to break with the Congress. The party he envisaged would not have made the "defence of Hindu interests" the axis of its program.¹⁰⁷ The Mahasabha's landlord patrons in the United Provinces, meanwhile, were working with their Muslim counterparts to establish a political vehicle through which to counter the INC's pro-tenant agitation. For them, the Mahasabha remained merely one of several fields of operation.

Further complicating the situation was the emergence of a faction within the Congress, led by the one-time Mahasabhites Malaviya and Aney, that wanted the Congress to contest the 1934 Central Assembly elections on a program that included opposition to the Communal Award. Parmanand held Malaviya chiefly responsible for the Mahasabha having lost the initiative after the 1926 elections. But Malaviya's opposition to the Communal Award could not be ignored. Unlike the Congress Mahasabhites, Malaviya and Aney had retained their positions in the Congress leadership. In 1933, admittedly when many first rank Congress leaders were in jail, Malaviya had been named to preside over the annual Congress session and

¹⁰⁶ IAR, 1933: Vol. 2, pp. 253-260.

¹⁰⁷ Jayakar Papers: File 408, Items 76, 137 and 140.

Aney had served as the INC's Acting President.

Parmanand thus found himself forced to pursue the very policy against which he had repeatedly railed--vying to influence the Congress. Kenneth Jones dates the Mahasabha's conversion to Hindu nationalism from Parmanand's election as President.¹⁰⁸ Certainly, Parmanand espoused Hindu nationalism from the Mahasabha rostrum in 1933. But only in 1937 did the Mahasabha complete its organizational and ideological break from Congress.

At the end of July, 1934, after the Congress leadership had reaffirmed its policy of neither accepting nor rejecting the Communal Award, Malaviya resigned as co-president of the Congress Parliamentary Board and Aney quit the Congress Working Committee. The Hindu Mahasabha Working Committee hailed their decision as "bold and courageous" and proposed negotiations with Malaviya and Aney on forming a new party to contest the 1934 Central Assembly elections.¹⁰⁹ Parmanand told a London Times correspondent that Malaviya would form a Nationalist party and urge his followers to support Hindu Mahasabha candidates in any constituency where his new party did not have a candidate.¹¹⁰ But Malaviya was no more willing to have the Hindu Mahasabha challenge the Congress in

¹⁰⁸ "Politicized Hinduism: The Ideology and Program of the Hindu Mahasabha," Religion in Modern India. Second Revised Edition. Robert D. Baird, ed. (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), pp. 254-256.

¹⁰⁹ IAR, 1934: V. 2, p. 307.

¹¹⁰ B.D. Graham, "The Congress and Hindu Nationalism," p. 174.

1934 than he had been in 1926. The Congress Nationalist Party that he and Aney founded was open only to Congressmen. Moreover, in those constituencies where the CNP did not have a candidate it supported the official Congress candidate. Moonje, who in March had written that he feared Malaviya "will again ... ask us to surrender to the shrewd Mr. Jinnah," stood as a CNP candidate.¹¹¹ Parmanand attended the CNP's founding conference, but declined to join since he refused to belong to a party affiliated to the Congress.¹¹²

In the 1934 elections the Hindu Mahasabha urged a vote for the CNP and, in Maharashtra, for the Democratic Swaraj Party. The Mahasabha also pledged "not to oppose such candidates of the Congress Parliamentary Board as get permission from the Board to fight and vote against the Communal Award."¹¹³

The election results were a bitter disappointment for the Hindu Mahasabha. The CNP won eleven seats, the majority of them in Bengal; the DSP none. Bhai Parmanand was the lone member of the Central Assembly elected on the Hindu Mahasabha ticket.

The defence of Hindu communal-political interests had brought the Mahasabha into ever greater conflict with the Congress. Yet its stance in the 1934 elections paralleled

¹¹¹ Jayakar Papers, File 408, Item 88.

¹¹² Prakash, 1966, p. 52.

¹¹³ "Hindu Election Manifesto", IAR, 1934: V. 2, p. 308.

that it had taken in 1926. Once again, the Mahasabha promoted a grouping of rightwing Congressmen led by Malaviya.

Why did the Congress continue to exert such a hold on the Mahasabha? The principal reason is obvious. The Congress was British India's only mass party. Although the second Non-Cooperation movement failed to win India's independence, it captured the support of much of the Indian populace. Gujarat was Gandhi's political stronghold. Still, the difference in the impact the Non-cooperation movement had on the Gujarat Hindu Sabha and the Mahasabha movement as a whole was one of degree, not kind. "From our province, young and old, everybody joined the [Non-Cooperation] movement and thus the [Hindu] Sangathan movement slackened and till 1935, the Provincial body worked very little."¹¹⁴ By 1934, the Mahasabha leaders were a demoralized lot. Lamented Moonje, "Because the Hindus are steeped in the feeling that they cannot get swaraj without the sturdy cooperation of the Muslims ... [they] will allow themselves to be taken again ..."¹¹⁵

Lacking a strong base of popular support, the Mahasabha needed a strong self-conception, if it were to challenge the Congress. In this period, however, the Mahasabha was also ideologically weak. The ambiguity in the Mahasabha's relation with the Congress was paralleled by and, I would argue, in

¹¹⁴ Prakash, 1938, p. 280.

¹¹⁵ Jayakar Papers: File 207, Item 1.

part rooted in, ideological ambiguity. While Parmanand espoused Hindu nationalism and urged the Mahasabha to challenge the Congress, the majority of the Mahasabhites clung to the concept of the Mahasabha as the sole spokesmen for Hindus only on communal-political questions. Implicit in the latter conception was the idea that there were other, "national" interests. In practice the Mahasabhites repeatedly put the struggle for communal political advantage before support to the Congress in the struggle for Indian self-rule. Moonje, among others, had gone so far as to say Swaraj was not worth having unless Hindu interests were assured. But the relation between "Hindu" and "national" interests had not been rigorously defined.

The idea that there could be both national and communal-political interests was not unique to the Hindu Mahasabha. It arose out of one reading--the Congress leadership of the 1930s would argue a false reading--of the initial discourse of Indian nationalism. India's pioneer nationalists had spoken of an India comprised of Hindu + Muslim + Christian + Parsi and other communities.¹¹⁶

In sum, the evidence from the turn of the century points, on the one hand, to a political vision of emerging or potential unity based on common interests of all Indians. On the other hand, it indicates the existence of a vision of society as already formed into discrete communities, each with its own priorities and interests and each with the right to determine its own ('social') future: 'India'

¹¹⁶ Pandey, The Construction of Communalism, p. 210.

was 'Hindu' + 'Muslim' + 'Sikh' + 'Christian', etc. ...¹¹⁷

In short, the question soon arose: was the definition of India as being comprised of "Hindu + Muslim + Christian + other communities" descriptive or prescriptive? Was the Indian nation comprised of the adherents of several faiths or was it the union of several religious corporate groups?

Although from radically different perspectives, the Congress, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha all came to reject this earlier nationalist vision during the 1930s. Declared Gandhi in 1930, "Whilst we may staunchly adhere to our respective faiths, we must be in the Congress Indians first and Indians last."¹¹⁸ Somewhat later, the Muslim League asserted that the Muslims were not a minority, not a constituent part of the Indian nation, but a nation unto themselves. The Mahasabha for its part proclaimed that the Hindus and the Indian nation were one and the same.

The concept of the Mahasabha as the sole spokesman of Hindus on communal questions confined it to an auxiliary role. Before the Mahasabha could emerge as a self-conscious political party it had to develop a new self-concept.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 231.

¹¹⁸ CWG, Vol. XLII, pp. 379. As cited in Antony Thomas, Mahatma Gandhi and the Communal Problem: From the Khilifat Movement to Quit India ((New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1983), p. 19.

¹¹⁹ The Hindu Mahasabha's claim to be the sole spokesman for Hindus interests was not equivalent to Jinnah's post-1937 demand that the Muslim League be recognized as the sole spokesman for the Muslims. By then, Jinnah had decisively broken with the "communalist" reading of the concept of the Indian nation advanced

Conclusion

In the years 1927 through 1934, as in the period discussed in Chapter One, the evolution of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha was to the right of Indian politics. The Mahasabha persisted on this course although it meant, after the shift in the political climate in 1927, sailing into a headwind. With Indian politics dominated by Congress-led campaigns for Indian self-rule, the Mahasabha was increasingly marginalized. According to the official history of the Mahasabha this was "a fateful period ... a period of struggle, opposition, isolation, self-determination and consolidation."¹²⁰

The Congress, following the failure of its efforts in the late 1920s to forge a communal-political pact, developed a new approach to the question of Hindu-Muslim unity. On occasion it held discussions with the leaders of the Muslim League and other Muslim groups. However, it increasingly favored a strategy of seeking to establish communal unity from below, by stressing the common socio-economic interests of the mass of Indian peasants. Through the Second Non-Co-operation Campaign, Gandhi hoped not only to pressure the Raj to grant India self-rule, but also to "take the attention of the nation off the communal problem and to rivet it on things that are common to all Indians, no matter to what religion or sect they

by the founders of the INC.

¹²⁰ Prakash, 1938, p. 60; 1966, p. 34.

may belong."¹²¹

The Mahasabha, on the other hand, responded to the collapse of the 1927-29 communal negotiations by turning further to the right. In increasingly strident terms it denounced the Congress for diverting Hindus' attention away from the struggle for communal advantage and for antagonizing the government and "driving it into the hands of the Muslims." Declared Kelkar, who had been a Congressman for three decades, "The weakness of the Hindu community proceeds from no other real cause than their inner urge to secure or wrest power from the government."¹²²

Yet for all the Mahasabhites' fulminations against the Congress, the Mahasabha remained in its orbit. The Mahasabha had neither the popular support nor the ideological clarity and cohesion to challenge the organization that had the support of the vast majority of politically active Hindus.

The Mahasabhites' alliance with Malaviya in the October 1934 elections did not mean they had ceased hankering for a Hindu-British alliance. Having failed to convince the British Parliament to amend the Communal Award, the Mahasabhites called, at their 1935 session, for the "Emperor of India", King George V, to intervene in the constitution-making process.¹²³ Responding to Parmanand's call for a Hindu-

¹²¹ CWG, Vol. XLII, pp. 383-384, as cited in Thomas, p. 19.

¹²² IAR, 1932: V. 2, p. 326.

¹²³ IAR, 1935: V. 1, p. 334.

British alliance, Jawaharlal Nehru, wrote, "If this is the attitude when the Hindu Mahasabha feels that it has lost all along the line, in so far as the Communal Award is concerned, one wonders what its attitude will be when a petty favour is shown it by the government."¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Selected Works of J. Nehru, Vol. 6, p. 168.

CHAPTER 3

"THE NATIONAL POLITICAL ORGANIZATION OF HINDUDOM," 1935-1939

At the invitation of Bhai Parmanand, Madan Mohan Malaviya rejoined the Working Committee of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha in 1935 and, in December of that year, presided over its Seventeenth Session. The Mahasabha's alliance with Malaviya and his Congress Nationalist Party (CNP) proved, however, to be short-lived.

Malaviya supported the Raja of Tirwa, Durga Narayan Singh, when the latter's leadership of the United Provinces' Hindu Sabha was challenged by a rival faction associated with the Cawnpore industrialist Sir J.P. Srivastava. The Srivastava group, which won the backing of the Mahasabha leadership, claimed that Tirwa had betrayed "Hindu interests" when he had accepted a position in the leadership of the National Agriculturalists' Party of Agra that made him the subordinate of a Muslim, the Nawab of Chatari.¹

Malaviya also clashed with the Mahasabha leadership over the Untouchability question. To the consternation of many

¹ IAR, 1935: V. 2, pp. 307-309; Reeves, pp. 217-218; Prakash, pp. 237-238. Srivastava took a quite different position when it came to accepting a post in a provincial ministry headed by the same Nawab of Chatari. For four months in 1937 he was Chatari's Finance Minister (Reeves, p. 229).

Mahasabhites, Malaviya, in his capacity as President of the Mahasabha's Seventeenth Session, ruled out of order a motion that promoted inter-caste dining as a means of eradicating the stigma of Untouchability.²

But what led Malaviya and the Mahasabha leadership to finally part ways were differences over the Hindu Mahasabha's attitude towards the Congress. Malaviya was outraged when the Mahasabha refused to congratulate the Congress on the occasion of its golden jubilee.³ More importantly, he remained adamant that the CNP should function as a faction of the Congress and that the Mahasabha should not transform itself into a political party. The Mahasabhites, for their part, considered the INC's refusal to campaign against the Communal Award, even after it was incorporated into the 1935 India Act, unpardonable.

By October 1936, relations between Malaviya and the Mahasabha leadership had degenerated to the extent that Malaviya's supporters were not allowed to sit as delegates at the Mahasabha's annual session. Malaviya's nephew, Krishna Kant Malaviya, a CNP member of the Central Assembly, and several other of Malaviya's associates were greeted with taunts when they sought to enter the Mahasabha Pandal at the beginning of the Session's second day. A scuffle ensued.'

² Gupta, p. 308.

³ Ibid.

⁴ IAR, 1936: V. 2, p. 259.

Later Parmanand told the session "it would be suicidal" for Hindus "to entrust their interests to the Congress Nationalists."⁵

"Fundamental and Unadjustable Differences" with the Congress

At Parmanand's urging, the Hindu Mahasabha intervened in the 1936-37 provincial elections, the first to be held under the new constitution, and put up candidates against the Indian National Congress in at least seven of India's eleven provinces.⁶ The Mahasabha campaign was not directed nationally, nor did the Mahasabha issue a national election program. The various provincial Hindu Sabhas mounted their own campaigns and struck their own alliances. In the Bombay Presidency, the Mahasabhites worked through the Tilakite Democratic Swaraj Party, which, unlike Malaviya's CNP, no longer made any pretense of being a Congress faction. To Parmanand's disappointment, most of the U.P. landlords who patronized the Mahasabha threw their money and electoral support behind the National Agriculturalists' Parties.⁷ The NAPs (there was one for Agra and another for Oudh) had been established to defend the interests of the landlords, Hindu and Muslim, against the Congress. In 1935, Rampal Singh had observed that many U.P. landlords keep "two arrows to the

⁵ Ibid., p. 261.

⁶ "Hindu Mahasabha Election Bulletin," Jayakar Papers, File 65, Item 52.

⁷ Prakash, 1938, p.240.

string of their bow. Their one foot is in the Hindu Mahasabha, the Muslim League, the Muslim Conference or similar sectional institution and the other in the National Agriculturalists' Party."⁸ In the 1936-37 elections, most of the landlords chose to fire the National Agriculturalists' arrow.

Throughout his tenure as Mahasabha Working President, Moonje had portrayed the Mahasabha as an auxiliary to the Congress. Now he championed the Mahasabha as a political opponent of the Congress. The "Election Manifesto" that Moonje drafted on behalf of the Nagpur Hindu Sabha repeated the Mahasabha's standard denunciations of the Communal Award and of the INC's policy of "renunciation and surrender" to the Muslims.⁹ However, in explaining why the Mahasabhites had lost hope of ever seeing the day "when the Congress may grow wiser" and "join hands in co-operation with the Mahasabha," Moonje pointed not to the communal issue, but to the growth of the Congress left-wing. The election of the "communist" Jawaharlal Nehru to the Congress presidency, wrote Moonje, meant that the Mahasabha's differences with the Congress were becoming "fundamental and unadjustable."¹⁰

The results of the 1936-37 provincial elections were a

⁸ As cited by Reeves, p. 217.

⁹ "Nagpur Hindu Sabha's Election Manifesto," Jayakar Papers, File 65, Item 71.

¹⁰ Ibid.

bitter disappointment for the Mahasabhites. In the seven Hindu-majority provinces the Congress scored a great victory. In all of these provinces, with the exception of tiny Assam, the Congress formed ministries as soon as it had won assurances from the Viceroy that the Provincial Governors would use their reserve powers only in exceptional circumstances. None of the 21 Mahasabhites who stood for election in the U.P. was elected.¹¹ Reporting on the results in the Central Provinces, Moonje wrote, "We have fought our election on the manifesto of the Hindu Sabha. . . . But we have been swept off the board."¹² Four Democratic Swaraj Party candidates were elected in Bombay, two to the 26-member Legislative Council and two to the 175-member Legislative Assembly.¹³ The Hindu Mahasabha did marginally better in the four Muslim-majority provinces. There the Mahasabha's cries of "Muslim domination" found a response among Hindu professionals, traders and money-lenders who had been losing out in the communal power struggle. In Bengal, where the Hindu Mahasabha had never been a significant force, it took one seat in the Legislative Council and two in the Assembly.¹⁴ In the N.W.F.P., the only Muslim-majority province captured by the Congress, a Hindu-Sikh Nationalist Party, comprised of the

¹¹ Prakash, 1938, p. 240; Reeves, p. 224.

¹² Jayakar Papers, File 65, Item 72.

¹³ Misra, pp. 311-313.

¹⁴ Ibid.

Mahasabhites and Sikh communalists, won seven seats.¹⁵ In the Punjab, candidates nominated by the Mahasabha's "Hindu Election Board" won 11 seats, as compared to 18 for the Congress and 95 for the Unionist Party. The Mahasabhite delegation in the Punjab Legislative Assembly soon split however. Narendra Nath and seven others Mahasabhite legislators favored continued cooperation with the Unionist Ministry, while Gokul Chand Narang and two others went into opposition.¹⁶ Only in Sind did the Mahasabha outpoll the Congress. The Mahasabha won eleven of the sixty seats in the Sind Assembly, the Congress eight.¹⁷

The Mahasabhites were far from alone in their discomfort at the election results. The responses that two despondent anti-Congress groups gave to the INC's electoral triumph were a major influence on the Mahasabha's subsequent development. Prior to the elections, the U.P. landlords, the dominant force in the U.P. Provincial Council since its establishment, were confident that the newly-formed Agriculturalists' Parties would constitute an effective counterweight to the Congress.¹⁸ This was a colossal miscalculation. The Congress won 133

¹⁵ Ayesha Jalal, The Sole Spokesman. Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Partition (London, Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 29; "Hindu Mahasabha Election Bulletin," File 65, Item 52.

¹⁶ Cleghorn, p. 418-419; Jalal, p. 23.

¹⁷ Misra, pp. 312-313.

¹⁸ Reeves, pp. 225-226.

Legislative Assembly seats, 125 of them from general constituencies, the NAPs but 25, including just eight from general constituencies. This electoral rout caused the landlords to realize that the traditional politics of influence had been superseded. The emergence of Congress-led and independent kisan (peasant) movements and the extension of the franchise--the 1935 India Act had more than doubled the electorate--made it impossible for the landlords to defend their interests through parties openly identified with them. The NAPs having proven a failure, the U.P. landlords now fired what Rampal Singh had described as their second arrow--communal politics. The landlords turned to the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, particularly when the Pant Congress Ministry took up the question of land reform.¹⁹ Indeed, as a Muslim League report admitted, so strong was the opposition of some Muslim zamindars to the Congress they were ready to provide the Mahasabha with their money and votes.²⁰ A similar phenomenon was to be observed among the province's leading industrialists. Lord Wavell, the Viceroy in the latter stages of World War II, recorded in his diary a conversation that he had in 1944 with the Cawnpore industrialist Sir J.P. Srivastava, then a minister in his cabinet and a prominent

¹⁹ Rizvi Gowher, Linlithgow and India. A Study of British Policy and the Political Impasse in India, 1936-1943 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1978), p. 93; Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, p. 83.

²⁰ "The Pirpur Committee report," Muhammad, The Indian Muslims, Vol. 11, p. 10.

supporter of the Agriculturalists' in the 1937 elections:

Srivastava ... today told me that after the Congress success at the polls and assumption of office in the United Provinces in 1937, the leading industrialists--all, I think, Hindu--got together and decided to finance Jinnah and the Muslim League and also the Mahasabha, as the extreme communal parties, to oppose Congress who they feared might threaten their financial profits.²¹

In the 1936-37 elections, the Muslim League won 109 of the 482 Muslim seats across India, but just 4.4% of the Muslim popular vote.²² An organization rooted in the traditionally influential Muslim elite of the U.P., the League was not a major force in the Muslim-majority provinces of the north-west.²³ In the Punjab, the Unionist Party retained the favor of the Muslim electorate by combining communal favoritism with pro-landlord policies and Punjabi provincialism. The League, its support concentrated in the Congress-dominated Hindu-majority provinces, thus found itself excluded from a share of power everywhere but in Bengal. It responded by becoming more aggressively communal and waging a vitriolic campaign against the Congress. The League accused the Congress ministries of suppressing the Muslims and held up the INC's refusal to recognize the League as the sole spokesmen of India's Muslims

²¹ Lord Wavell, The Viceroy's Journal, ed. P. Moon, as cited in Claude Markovits, Indian Business and Nationalist Politics 1931-1939 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 161.

²² Jalal, p. 32.

²³ Ibid., p. 1-34; Hardy, The Muslims of British India, pp. 157-60; Ian Talbot, Provincial Politics and the Pakistan Movement. The Growth of the Muslim League in North-West and North-East India 1937-1947 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

as proof of its Hindu communalism.

The "radicalization" of the Muslim League was paralleled by, and helped propel, the Mahasabha's turn to an even more extreme strand of communalism. The closer the Congress came to implementing socio-economic reform, the more the Mahasabhites levelled hysterical communal attacks on the Congress, in part because they saw communalism as an effective tool for mobilizing popular support, in part because they saw their privileges as bound up with a religiously-consecrated "natural order." Like the Muslim Leaguers, the Mahasabhites saw the increasingly radical rhetoric of their communal adversaries as confirmation of their worst fears and repented by adopting an even more extreme communalist stance.

Whereas previously the strength of the Congress had impeded the Mahasabha's break from it, now, paradoxically, the Congress's electoral triumph spurred on the Mahasabha's consolidation as a rival political organization.

V.D. Savarkar and "Hinduvta"

Many have attributed the increase in the Mahasabha's support after the 1936-37 elections to the appeal and energy of V.D. Savarkar, Parmanand's successor as Hindu Mahasabha President. According to a pamphlet issued by the Indian National Congress in 1948, the "role of Mr. V.D. Savarkar in the development of the Mahasabha needs emphasis ..."²⁴

²⁴ N.V. Rajkumar, Indian Political Parties (New Delhi: All-India Congress Committee, 1948), p. 115.

[Savarkar] found the Mahasabha an impotent body, without a clear-cut programme and without any mass support. He immediately descended on the Mahasabha platform with a virile program for the regimentation of the Hindu community. He had a fertile brain and a brilliant tongue. ... It should be admitted that his stand influenced large masses of Hindus.²⁵

A former revolutionary terrorist, Savarkar was by all accounts a dynamic figure. The pro-Congress Amrita Bazar Patrika described him as "a man with a mission. The faith that burns in him throws a halo all round and he seems ... like a conquering hero ..."²⁶ In 1910, at the age of 26, Savarkar had been charged with leading a terrorist conspiracy against the British Raj. He spent the next fourteen years in prison, then a further thirteen years confined by government order to his home district of Ratnagiri. In 1937, the Democratic Swarajist legislator and Mahasabhite Jamnadas Mehta made the dropping of all restrictions on Savarkar's movements and political activities a condition of his accepting a post in Khan Bahadur Dhanjishah Cooper's interim ministry in the Bombay Presidency.²⁷ During the years of his internment, Savarkar, although forbidden from engaging in political activity, had developed close ties to the Mahasabha through his brothers. Babarao Savarkar, his elder brother, had

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The Mahratta, Jan. 5, 1940.

²⁷ Keer, Veer Savarkar, p. 221. Keer's biography is lacking in analysis and overly sympathetic to its subject and his Hindu nationalist ideology. It does, however, provide useful information about Savarkar's life and political career.

established the Ratnagiri Hindu Sabha. His younger brother, Dr. N.D. Savarkar, was active in the Hindu Sabha in the Dardar district of Bombay City.²⁸

Undoubtedly, Savarkar brought to the Mahasabha much energy, as well as a reputation as an indomitable opponent of British rule. That Savarkar succeeded in rallying the Mahasabhites behind his Hindu nationalist program, something Parmanand had attempted but failed to achieve, and was able to transform the Mahasabha into a potent opposition to the Congress cannot be explained, however, merely from the standpoint of Savarkar's dynamism. The increasingly frenzied opposition of sections of the traditional elite to the Congress's emergence as a governmental party and the backlash that the Muslim League's more strident communalism provoked among a section of Hindus provided Savarkar with a constituency for his extreme communalist politics.

Savarkar's most important contribution to the development of the Mahasabha as a political party was to infuse it with his "Hinduvta" ideology, which gave it a comprehensive communalist political program that distinguished it radically from the Congress. At the first three annual sessions of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha at which Savarkar presided--he was to deliver the presidential address at seven

²⁸ Keer, p. 167. In 1925, Jayakar had petitioned the Bombay government to allow Savarkar to attend the founding conference of the Bombay Presidency Hindu Sabha. His request was denied. Jayakar Papers, File 435, Items 73 and 76.

successive sessions--he elaborated the meaning of Hinduvta. Although Savarkar had first propounded his "Hinduvta" doctrine in a pamphlet of the same name written in the early 1920s, it bore a striking similarity to the fascist strain of nationalism so prevalent in the Europe of the 1930s.²⁹ Noxious as was Savarkar's doctrine, it was clear and consistent and had a certain logical integrity. It provided the Mahasabha with a fully-formed definition of a Hindu political identity and a clear mission. Previously, the Mahasabha had asserted that there were "Hindu interests" as well as national or Indian interests. It even claimed that if the Muslims would only forsake their communal demands, the Mahasabha would confine itself to socio-cultural issues. Now the Mahasabha asserted that a Hindu political identity had to be made the basis of all politics.

From the local details of the music and the mosque right up to the question of Indian federation ... we should openly and separately take up a stand as Hindus and support, oppose or take every step in the interests of Hindudom alone. Our politics henceforth will be purely Hindu politics fashioned and tested in Hindu terms only, in such wise as will help the consolidation, freedom and life-growth of our Hindu nation.³⁰

For Savarkar, "Hinduvta," a term which can be roughly translated as "Hinduness," denoted a "Hindu polity" the polity

²⁹ Hinduvta, sometimes also called The Essentials of Hinduvta, can be found in Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya (Poona: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, 1964), Vol. 6, pp. 1-91. The key elements of Savarkar's concept of a Hindu political identity are found on pp. 54 and 73-75.

³⁰ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, p. 88.

of the "Hindu nation."³¹ The Hindus of India, declared Savarkar were "a Nation by ourselves," not a mere community, co-equal with other communities.³² "It is absurd to call us a community in India. The Germans are the nation in Germany and the Jews a community. ... the Hindus are the nation in Hindusthan, and the Moslem minority a community."³³

Savarkar's concept of who comprised the Hindu nation had a religious element, but he insisted it was a political definition, for it demarcated not a religious but a political community. For Savarkar, the Hindu nation was comprised of all who regarded and claimed "this Bharat-bhoomi from the Indus to the Seas" as "their Fatherland and Holy land."³⁴ Savarkar's definition thus incorporated one of the principal tenets of the Mahasabha's program--that all who believed in a faith indigenous to India should be considered as Hindus for political purposes--but he criticized that definition as being imprecise, as being more that of a religious than a political body.³⁵ A Hindu political identity, insisted Savarkar, had to rigorously distinguish between those who adhered to one of the faiths of Hinduism--eg. Buddhists in Japan--and those who were Hindus in a political sense. Those who made up the Hindu

³¹ Ibid., p. 132.

³² Ibid., 37.

³³ Ibid., p. 84.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

nation were doubly bound to India, as it was both their holy land and their fatherland. They were linked to India not only by religious ties, but "by the ties of a common culture, a common language" and "a common history."³⁶

By the same token, Savarkar's two-part definition excluded India's Muslims and Christians--who by virtue of their language, ethnicity and history were rooted in India--from the "Hindu nation." Indian Muslims and Christians, claimed Savarkar, had a divided allegiance, for the holy lands of their respective faiths lay outside India. Consequently, they could not be part of the Hindu nation. India's Muslims and Christians constituted alien minorities, and as minorities had to recognize that India was the nation of the Hindus. In a "free India," they would be accorded political rights on par with the Hindus, or so claimed Savarkar, but only on sufferance, only "provided they avow and owe an exclusive and devoted allegiance to the Hindusthani State."³⁷

According to Savarkar, only in Travancore (Kerala) did the Christian minority "seem to cherish some political design against the Hindu state and it is only there that we shall have to treat them with some political distrust by not allowing them too much latitude in the state affairs and offices ..."³⁸ The Muslims, however, were a special case.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 159.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 91.

They would have to be zealously watched for "at least a century to come" for they were a potential "anti-national minority," "a constant danger threatening internal peace."³⁹

The History of Canada, of Palestine, of the movement of the young Turks will show you that in every state where two or more such conflicting elements as the Hindus and Moslems happen to exist as constituents, the wiser of them has to keep its exclusive organisation intact, strong and watchful to defeat any attempt at the betrayal or the capture of the national State by the opposite party; especially so if that party has extraterritorial affinities.⁴⁰

Savarkar's doctrine took the communal politics practised by the Mahasabha since its revival in 1922 to their logical conclusion. But it also incorporated many of the Mahasabha's traditional arguments and claims. Leading Mahasabhites had long argued that the Muslims had a divided allegiance and that Hindus had a greater stake in India than any other community since the Hindu faith was centered in India. Mahasabha leaders had frequently said that the only swaraj that would be worth winning would be a swaraj in which Hindu interests were secured. Their claim that the communal mentality of the Muslims made Hindu-Muslim unity impossible, was embellished by Savarkar and made part of his argument that the Congress's nationalism was based on a false notion of "territorial nationalism." Like previous Mahasabha presidents, Savarkar argued that the Muslim mindset, not British colonial policy, was at the root of the communal problem.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 151.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

The adoption of Hinduvta nevertheless entailed a redefinition of the Hindu Mahasabha's mission. No longer did the Mahasabha make a pretense of being a religious socio-cultural organization. It was the political expression of the Hindu nation, the Hindu "polity" in embryo. Its concern was not Hindu virtue, but the Hindu nation.

The Mahasabha is not in the main a Hindu-Dharma Sabha, but it is pre-eminently a Hindu-Rashtra-Sabha and is a Pan-Hindu organization shaping the destiny of the Hindu Nation in all its social, political and cultural aspects.⁴¹

Dr. Ambedkar, in his 1946 book Pakistan or Partition of India charged that Savarkar had propounded the "two-nation" theory well before the Muslim League adopted the Pakistan Demand at its 1940 session.⁴² This claim has since been repeated by others.⁴³ In his Presidential addresses to the Mahasabha's 1937 and 1939 sessions, Savarkar did suggest that two nations existed on the Indian sub-continent, but in those same addresses he repeatedly insisted that the Muslims were a mere community and India indivisible.⁴⁴ It is not necessary

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 10-11.

⁴² B.R. Ambedkar, Pakistan or Partition of India (Bombay: Thacker, 1946), p. 131.

⁴³ M. Mujeeb, "The Partition of India in Retrospect," in C.H. Philips and Wainwright, eds., The Partition of India. Policies and Perspectives 1935-1947 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 406-414; Ramji Lal, Political India, 1935-1942. Anatomy of Indian Politics (Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1986), pp. 61 and 83

⁴⁴ "India," Savarkar told the Mahasabha's 1937 session, "cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogeneous nation, but on the contrary there are two nations in the main: the Hindus and the Muslims in India" (p. 32). In his address to the 1939 session he said the "refusal of the Indian Moslems to merge in

to strain at Savarkar's words to prove that the Muslim and Hindu communalists were intrinsically bound to one another. Civil war and/or Partition flowed logically from the Hindu communalists' exclusion of the Muslims from the Indian nation, from the Mahasabha's proclamation that the one-quarter of India's population that was Muslim should be relegated to the status of pariahs.

The Politics of the Hindu Mahasabha, 1937-39

Under Savarkar's leadership, the Hindu Mahasabha intensified its attack on the Indian National Congress. Whereas once the Mahasabha had acknowledged the Congress to be the country's foremost national organization, it now asserted that the Hindu Mahasabha "is the only national organization in the country and there is no other national politics than that of the Hindu Sabha ..."⁴⁵ Indeed, in the late 1930s the Congress virtually replaced the Muslim communalists as the principal target of Mahasabha vilification. Moonje railed against the Congress's Muslim Mass Contact Campaign, warning that the influx of Muslims into the Congress would result in it being "metamorphosed into a Muslim League."⁴⁶ Savarkar accused the Congress of offering blank cheques to the Muslims,

a common National unit leaves the Hindus negatively too, as a Nation by themselves" (p. 137).

⁴⁵ "Congress and Hindu Mahasabha," resolution adopted by Hindu Mahasabha's Nagpur session, reprinted in Hindu Outlook, Jan. 11, 1939, p. 9.

⁴⁶ As cited by Ramji Lal, p. 61.

while it castigated the Hindus, "Get looted but don't report, get stabbed but don't shriek."⁴⁷ The Mahasabhites implored Hindus to give not a penny or a vote to the Congress and to elect only Hindu Sangathanists. Yet, when the Congress Working Committee invoked a never-before used provision in the Congress constitution allowing it to effectively bar from membership anyone belonging to a communal organization, and proscribed members of the Mahasabha or Muslim League from serving in any official Congress position, the Mahasabhites were outraged.

The Mahasabha denounced the Congress provincial ministries for throwing "the whole society out of gear" by encouraging the workers and peasants to organize and implementing tenant legislation and other reforms.⁴⁸ It also condemned the U.P. Congress ministry for suppressing "Hindu rights," because it forbade certain Hindu religious processions after a spate of communal riots, and of failing to protect "Hindu life and property."⁴⁹ The Muslim League made similar charges, only it condemned the Congress ministry for failing to protect the Muslims and for not curbing the

⁴⁷ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, p. 46.

⁴⁸ "The U.P. Government's Failure," Hindu Outlook, April 26, 1939, p. 3.

⁴⁹ "Failure of the U.P. Government," Hindu Outlook, March 8, 1939, p. 5.

activities of the Hindu Mahasabha.⁵⁰

Under the heading "Programme of the Hindu Mahasabha," the Hindu Outlook summarized its differences with the Congress:

The Congress aims at the destruction of the Hindus while the Hindu Mahasabha stands to make them the rulers of this country. ... The Congress intends to set up a communistic state and disturb the peace and unity of this country with class warfare while the Hindu Mahasabha aims at the creation of a solid Hindu Empire from the Peshwar down to Cape Comorin. ... the Congress teaches the Hindus to fear the Muslims and to respect their communal demands: and we believe it is here, if there is anywhere, that the Hindu Mahasabha justifies its existence with its bold conception of "Hindu Superiority."⁵¹

The first Mahasabha session that Savarkar presided over adopted a resolution urging the British Indian government to expedite the implementation of the Federation sections of the 1935 India Act. The Federation had been designed by the British with the intent of frustrating Indian demands for self-rule. It gave the hereditary rulers of India's Native or Princely States the right to appoint 40% of the members of the upper chamber of the Federation's Parliament and 30% of the members of the lower chamber. Moreover, Federation and the transfer of even a small measure of increased responsibility to Indians was only to take effect when a large number of the

⁵⁰ Padmasha, Indian National Congress and the Muslims, 1928-1947, p. 139.

⁵¹ "Programme of the Hindu Mahasabha," Hindu Outlook, June 21, 1939, p. 4.

Native States had agreed to join.⁵² The Mahasabha urged those princes who were Hindu to bring their states into the All-India Federation and urged the British to compel them to join because it saw the Federation as a means of thwarting the schemes of the Muslim communalists to form a federation of Muslim provinces. Federation was thus viewed by the Mahasabha as the constitutional embodiment of a potential anti-Muslim Hindu-British alliance.

The Mahasabha's endorsement of a constitutional scheme that accorded India's princes a large measure of power over British India and placed them under no obligation to provide their subjects with elementary democratic rights, however, was not merely a matter of tactics. The Mahasabha embraced the Princes, the most reactionary element in Indian society, as "pillars of Hindudom." Declared Parmanand, "I believe that the Princes are the flesh of our flesh and the most essential part of our body politic."⁵³ When in 1938 the Congress belatedly initiated a movement for democratic rights in the Native States, mounting a civil disobedience campaign in two of them, the Mahasabha rallied to the Princes' defence. Its 1938 annual session declared:

the Congress policy of coercion and interference in the internal administration of the Indian States, under the

⁵² Manoranjan Jha, Role of the Central Legislature in the Freedom Struggle (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1972), pp. 214-220.

⁵³ "Our Sympathies are with the Hindu States," Hindu Outlook, March 15, 1939, p. 1.

plausible slogan of responsible government, is not genuine and in as much as the Congress activities in the matter are restricted to and concentrated only in the Hindu States ... are of the nature of harassment ...⁵⁴

As the Congress campaign gathered strength, the Mahasabha indicated its support for police action to defend the Princes' autocratic rule. An editorial in Hindu Outlook said:

[The states] can't afford ... [their] people to play the childish game of the Congress and they must put down such activities with a strong hand. ... The Princes have to see that revolutionary ideals do not enter the States and that their people develop their institutions more with orderliness than with speed.⁵⁵

To counteract the Congress "Native States' Peoples' movement," the Mahasabha mobilized support from across India for a civil disobedience campaign in the Princely State of Hyderabad. The Arya Samajist community in Hyderabad had initiated a campaign to protest governmental discrimination against Hindus and indeed there was much evidence that Hyderabad's Muslim ruler favored his co-religionists.⁵⁶ The campaign only became a large-scale agitation, however, because of the support mobilized by the Hindu Mahasabha from across India, first under the guise of the Civil Liberties Union of

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ "The States and their Importance," Hindu Outlook, March 28, 1940.

⁵⁶ Ian Copland, "'Communalism' in Princely India: The Case of Hyderabad, 1930-1940," MAS, V. 22 (1988), p. 787. Copland's article discusses the Mahasabha's intervention in Hyderabad at some length.

Poona and then in its own name.⁵⁷ Ultimately, the agitation in Hyderabad proved to be the largest civil resistance campaign that the Mahasabha ever mounted. The Mahasabha spent at least 70,000 Rupees transporting civil resisters to Hyderabad. Some 4,000 Mahasabha supporters were jailed for breaking Hyderabad's laws.⁵⁸

The Hindu Mahasabha's defence of the Hindu Princes pleased the Mahasabha's landlord supporters for it was an affirmation of hereditary and aristocratic privilege. It accorded with the interests of big industrialists such as Sir S.P. Srivastava in an even more direct sense. Following the formation of the Congress ministries, Srivastava and other industrialists shifted new investment to the Indian States, where wages and taxes were lower and labor legislation all but non-existent.⁵⁹

The Hindu Mahasabha repeatedly invoked the treatment meted out to the German Jews as a warning to India's Muslims. The Third All-India Hindu Youth Conference even passed a resolution entitled "Muslims to be Treated Like Jews."⁶⁰ The Mahasabha opposed the Congress's demand that Jews fleeing persecution in Europe be given refuge in India. "India,

⁵⁷ "Civil Resistance Movement in Berar," Hindu Outlook, May 3, 1939, p. 14.

⁵⁸ Hindu Outlook, May 31, 1939, p. 16.

⁵⁹ Markovits, p. 165.

⁶⁰ "Resolutions Passed by the 3rd All India Hindu Youth Conference," Hindu Outlook, Jan. 25, 1939, p. 8.

declared Savarkar, "must be a Hindu land, reserved for the Hindus."⁶¹ The Hindu Outlook, for its part, regurgitated anti-semitic propaganda.⁶²

The Mahasabha's economic program, which Savarkar first elaborated in his address to the 1938 Mahasabha session, also appears to have been inspired by European fascism.⁶³ The Mahasabha's policy of "National Coordination of Class Interests" resembled the corporatist doctrines of Benito Mussolini. Italy's fascist-corporatist state suppressed the trade unions and socialist parties, then established joint councils of employers, fascist union officials, and government bureaucrats, to "regulate" class conflict in the "national interest."⁶⁴ Savarkar likewise said it was the state's duty to ensure the economy is not damaged by "the selfish class interest of either the capitalists or laborites." If diminishing profits threaten the development of India's industries, the state must stand ready to impose wage

⁶¹ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, p. 92. In 1947, Savarkar hailed the establishment of the state of Israel and advocated that the new state occupy all of British Palestine for he saw it as counterweight to Moslem power. Ideologically he justified his position by pronouncing Israel to be the Jews "Fatherland and Holyland." See "Independent Jewish State," Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya, Vol. 6, pp. 558-560.

⁶² See for example "The Sayings of Famous Men About the Jews," which cited among others Martin Luther, Richard Wagner, and Franz Liszt, Hindu Outlook, Jan. 25, 1939, p. 14.

⁶³ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, pp. 182-189.

⁶⁴ Alexander De Grand, Italian Fascism. Its Origins and Development (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 80.

reductions.

In short the claims of capital and labor will be so coordinated from time to time so as to enable the Nation as a whole to develop its National Industry and manufacture and make itself self-sufficient.⁶⁵

Savarkar said private property should in "general be held inviolate" and stipulated that if the State ever found it necessary to expropriate a company in the interests of developing the national economy "reasonable recompense" must be provided. All strikes or lockouts that threatened the country's economic strength would be outlawed and referred to state arbitration or failing that "quelled."⁶⁶

The final tenets of Savarkar's economic program were protection for "national industries against foreign competition" and the defence of Hindu economic interests through "Hindu swadeshi," that is the boycott of goods not produced by Hindus and the exclusive patronage of Hindu-owned shops.

With the eruption of World War II, the British Empire faced its gravest crisis. In an action that underscored India's subjugated state, the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, declared India to be at war without consulting, let alone obtaining the consent of, India's political leaders. He then promulgated a series of ordinances that gave the government extraordinary powers to prohibit meetings and demonstrations,

⁶⁵ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, p. 188.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

censor the press and detain persons without trial. While the Congress felt duty bound to protest the actions of the Viceroy, the Mahasabha rallied to the government's support. In a resolution adopted September 10, 1939, the Mahasabha Working Committee pledged support to the British war effort and condemned the Congress for making its support for the British conditional on the granting of self-rule to India or at least a substantial measure of self-rule.⁶⁷ One month later, while the Congress debated whether to resign all its provincial ministries to protest British policy, the Mahasabha was rewarded by the British Indian government for its stand. Savarkar, whose 27 years of imprisonment and internment had ended little more than two years before, became the first Mahasabha president invited in that capacity to an audience with the Viceroy.

⁶⁷ IAR, 1939: V. 2, 1939, p. 344.

CONCLUSION

With V.D. Savarkar's assumption of the Presidency of the All-India Hindu Mahasabha and the Mahasabha's adoption of his "Hinduvta" ideology, the transformation of the Mahasabha into a communal political party was complete. Revived in 1922 by leading Congressmen as an avowedly non-political organization devoted to the socio-cultural reform of the Hindu community, the Mahasabha had become, by the late 1930s, the principal Hindu-communalist party in British India and, as such, an implacable opponent of the Congress, its inclusive pan-Indian vision, and its struggle to end British rule.

The Mahasabha's evolution was a complex process, involving a struggle of tendencies. By 1926 there was already much support within the Punjab Hindu Sabha for Parmanand's proposal that the Mahasabha field candidates against the Congress and forsake Indian nationalism in favor of promoting "Hindu consciousness."

The development of the Hindu Mahasabha can be best conceptualized if it is seen as a three-stage process. The first stage roughly corresponded with the years 1922-1926. In this period, the Mahasabha was led by Congress stalwarts Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lajpat Rai and ostensibly favored the forging of a Hindu-Muslim alliance to secure Swaraj. The

Mahasabhites' claims to support Hindu-Muslim unity and oppose communalist politics were belied, however, by their fixation with maximizing Hindu numerical-political strength, especially their championing of the shuddhi conversion movement, and by their exhortations to Hindus to accept no compromise in the music before mosque controversy.

Under the presidencies of Dr. B.S. Moonje and Bhai Parmanand (1927-1937) the Mahasabha passed through a second stage in its evolution. In the inter-communal negotiations of the late 1920s, the Mahasabha claimed to be the sole spokesmen for "Hindu political interests." It demanded recognition as the representative of the "Hindus" in negotiations pertaining to communal political representation and the communal allotment of public service jobs and education grants.

The pursuit of advantage in the communal-political struggle led the Mahasabhites to increasingly oppose Congress initiatives in the struggle for Indian self-rule. In 1927, the Punjab Hindu Sabha defied the Mahasabha leadership and cooperated with the Simon Commission. In 1932 the Mahasabhites not only stood aside from the second phase of the Second Non-Cooperation Movement, they failed even to protest the British Indian authorities' savage repression of the Congress.

Doubts concerning the feasibility and advisability of a Hindu-Muslim alliance had by now been transformed into convictions. The Mahasabha urged Hindus to abandon attempts to forge unity with India's Muslims and to curb their pressure

for Indian self-rule, so as to prevent the Muslim communalists from monopolizing the perks that fell to those who cooperated with the British. Speaking at the Mahasabha's 1933 session, Parmanand articulated what had been for some time the unstated policy of the Mahasabha. Hindus should counter the Muslim communalists' alliance with the British by offering the colonial authorities a Hindu-British alliance.

During his tenure as Mahasabha president, Parmanand pressed for the Mahasabha to break with the Congress, but his efforts were impeded by the Congress's political strength. Paradoxically, the 1937 elections and the ascent of the Congress to a share of political power led many of the Congress's right wing opponents to turn to the Mahasabha as a potential political opposition movement. Savarkar's "Hinduvta" ideology provided the Mahasabha with a comprehensive Hindu communalist ideology and a program radically opposed to the Congress.

Prabha Dixit, one of the few scholars to have studied the Mahasabha's development, claims,

Despite chauvinistic elements in Savarkar's ideology, it cannot be termed Fascist ... The right of minorities to co-exist with the Hindus was never denied. The attack was directed against those privileges which gave the minorities more political strength than warranted by their numbers.¹

In the late 1930s Savarkar and the Mahasabhites flirted

¹ Prabha Dixit, "The Ideology of Hindu Nationalism." In Political Thought in Modern India, eds. Thomas Pantham and Kenneth L. Deutsch (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1986), p. 134.

with European fascism. Still, whether "fascist" is the best concept to describe their particular brand of extreme right-wing politics, which coupled defence of Princely and landlord privilege, with chauvinism, militarism and vehement hostility to the labor, peasant and socialist movements, is open to debate. Nevertheless Hinduvta was by any definition an anti-democratic ideology. To accept Savarkar's claim that in a Mahasabha-led India the Muslims would have been accorded equal rights is one step away from accepting the Mahasabha's own claim that it was a non-communal organization.

"Hinduvta" was a Hindu supremacist doctrine which would have made India's Muslims into a new oppressed caste whose fundamental political rights were to be dependent on their acknowledging the exalted place of the Hindus and Hindudom in India. The Hindus, explained Indra Prakash, "cannot take this country as jointly owned" with the descendants "of ex-Hindus" and "barbarous invaders," "...the country cannot belong to them; if they are to live here, they must live here taking for granted Hindusthan is the land of the Hindus, of no one else."²

In claiming the Mahasabha was simply trying to reverse the privileges awarded "the minorities," Dixit ignores the record of the Hindu Mahasabha. As demonstrated repeatedly in this thesis, the Mahasabhites' claim to uphold democratic principles was a sham. They championed only those principles

² Ibid., p. 133.

that furthered their communalist aims and, as long as privileges were on offer communally, they insisted on having the "Hindu share."

Last but not least, Dixit ignores the Mahasabha's concept of collective communal responsibility, and its corollary collective communal punishment. Savarkar repeatedly pledged that a "Hindu Sangathanist Ministry" would make Muslims under its jurisdiction suffer for any action deemed to have hurt "Hindu interests" anywhere in India. The Hindu sangathanist ministers, said Savarkar, will "tell the Fazlul Haques and Hyat Khans that if your governments are not doing justice to the Hindus, our Ministers will take retaliatory measures against the Muslims."³ "Knowing that every attempt to tyrannize the Hindus is sure to recoil on themselves ... the Moslems will learn to behave as good boys."⁴

How did Dixit arrive at her analysis? The above citation provides a clue. She has adopted the communal outlook, holding that communal political representation and communal hiring were privileges awarded "the minorities." In fact, they benefited only the Muslim elite.

One of the conclusions arising from this thesis is the connection between communalist and right-wing politics. One of the fictions promoted by the communalists was that the communal question was above politics. In reality, communal

³ Hindu Outlook, June 21, 1939, p. 5

⁴ Savarkar, Hindu Sangathan, p. 106.

identities were employed by the British as part of their system of imperial control and by various elite groups seeking power within that system. Those Indians, Hindu or Muslim, who became absorbed with the promotion of such communal interests inevitably became caught in the orbit of the British regime.

The Mahasabha was a failure as a political party. That does not mean, however, it left no imprint on Indian politics. It played a major role in the communalization of politics, providing the Muslim communalist politicians with a much needed foil. The Mahasabhites contributed significantly to the tragic events that surrounded the 1947 Partition. To cite but one example: scholars agree that Shyamaprasad (S.P.) Mookerjee, the Bengali politician who succeeded Savarkar as Mahasabha president, spearheaded the movement for the Partition of Bengal along religious-communal lines when it became clear that India as a whole was to be partitioned.⁵

The ideological and organizational roots of the BJP, the current Official Opposition in the Indian Parliament, lie in the Hindu Mahasabha. Indeed, over the past decade the BJP and other right wing forces have sought to revive Savarkar's

⁵ Joya Chatterji, Bengal Divided. Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 230-231 and 249-257; Bidyut Chakrabarty, Bidyut, "The 1947 United Bengal Movement: A Thesis Without a Synthesis," The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. 30. Leonard A. Gordon, "Divided Bengal: Problems of Nationalism and Identity in the 1947 Partition," In India's Partition. Process, Strategy and Mobilization, ed. Mushirul Hasan, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

Hinduvta ideology.

It is this author's hope that this historical inquiry may contribute to an understanding of Hindu communalism and thus assist in the struggle against it.

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- A. Personal Papers
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