

'The World's Best Minority': Parsis and Hindutva's ethnic nationalism in India

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Abstract

There is an assumption that nationalist movements which are constituted by an ethnic majority are hostile towards all minorities, so how does one account for such a movement's affection for one minority and hostility for another? In this paper I explore this question using the case study of a Hindu nationalist movement in India called Hindutva which simultaneously expresses hostility towards Muslims and affection for another minority known as the Parsis. I argue in societies that imagine themselves as plural there is a type of nationalist thought premised upon the existence of both exemplary and threatening minorities. An exemplary minority is imagined as loyal and acculturating, illustrating both how a minority should relate to the majority and why other minorities are threatening. While an historical argument enables the distinction between the majority and minorities, a plural hierarchy of minorities is enabled by mythical stories of coexistence and conflict.

Keywords

Nationalism, minorities, Hindutva, Parsis, India, Muslims

Introduction

We had always been hospitable. Anyone was welcome to stay here.

But all of them were required to act up to our national codes and

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conventions. Several centuries ago, when barbaric hordes of Arabs and Turks invaded Persia, some Parsis left their motherland and sailed forth with their Holy Fire and Holy Book and landed at Surat. King Yadava Rana welcomed them with open arms and consulted the Shankaracharya of Dwaraka Math as to how to accept them. They were asked to give up beef-eating, respect mother-cow as an object of national faith and live here in peace. These followers of Zaratushtira have kept up their promise even to this day.

Madhavrao Sadashivrao Golwalkar (1966, 114-5)

The above story is from a book by one of the progenitors of an ethnic nationalist movement in India called Hindutva. The movement asserts the Hinduness of the Indian nation as the majority ethnic group and is founded on hostility to Muslims. The story expresses this hostility and a Hindu majoritarianism but also affection for another minority community called the Parsis. Golwalkar, a founder of the Hindutva ideology, uses the Parsis to illustrate how Muslims should relate to Hindus and to imagine India as a hierarchically plural nation where minorities are conditionally accepted.

The existing scholarship on nationalism, minorities and Hindutva does not explain an ethnic nationalist movement's affection for a minority. In this paper I seek to fill this void by advancing a theory to understand nationalist movements that imagine themselves as plural. I use Hindutva's fondness for the Parsis to reflect upon the assumptions that underpin the scholarship on nationalism and the relationship between the majority and minorities. Scholars have argued that the creation of a majoritarian ethnic nation is detrimental for the minorities who are excluded from it (Triandafyllidou 1998; Wimmer 2002; Rouhana 1998; Tan 2001; Staerklé et al. 2010). It has been argued that Hindutva is antagonistic towards non-Hindu communities (Thapar 2007, 193,196; S.

Sarkar 1993, 166; Engineer 2004, 1379; Kumar 2013; Appadurai 2006) seeking to create a singular Hindu identity where minorities are forcibly assimilated into a uniform national Hindu culture (Prakash 2007, 188; Clarke 2002, 95; Jaffrelot 2011, 39). How does one reconcile the scholarly argument that Hindutva are hostile towards minorities with their affection for the Parsis? Why are some minorities referred to affectionately and others disparagingly? Is it exclusionary to demand that minorities and migrants publicly profess loyalty and acculturate the symbols and practices of the majority? The discursive use of different types of minorities is not unique to Hindutva or India. In the United States of America the term Model Minority has gained currency to describe the experience of minorities who are not discriminated against. Pettersen (1966) first described Japanese Americans as a model minority. Subsequently the term has been applied to other migrant groups and most recently to Indians (Richwine 2009). The applicability of this thesis has been debated (Tang 1997; Chou and Feagin 2008). Anecdotally in Australia I have observed similar expressions of affection for one migrant minority and hostility towards another.

My point of entry into these debates is to illuminate a form of nationalism in which exemplary and threatening minorities are comparatively constituted and the majority is imagined against both. The exemplary minority possesses the traits which all minorities should have and they illustrate how minorities should relate to the majority. These traits depend upon the political requirements of the majoritarian movement. The exemplary Other is a symbol of what the threatening Other should, but cannot be. They are not imagined in isolation but against each other; the Parsis are exemplary because Muslims are threatening and vice versa. The use of exemplary minorities is not benign; it is not a testament to inclusiveness as it is bound to the exclusion of other communities.

For Hindutva, minorities are imagined in a fluid hierarchy from the exemplary Parsis to Jews, Christians and lastly Muslims. These relationships are constituted by rhetorically questioning the minority's loyalty and demanding they acculturate the symbols and practices of the majority.

The same rhetorical question produces different responses depending upon which minority the question is posed. The answer is prefigured by how it has previously been answered. It is the remembering of a story of coexistence or conflict. The questioning of Parsi loyalty and the demand that they acculturate is part of a tradition that is at least four hundred years old. It is their dominant story explaining how they came to be. In the story their loyalty is questioned, their acculturation is demanded and they respond with an affirmation. To question the Parsis' loyalty is to affirm it. The question and demand is an expression of their agency that constitutes them as a unique entity that is favourable for the Hindu majority. This is not the case for Muslims. The question and demand is asked by others of them, it denies their agency. For more than a century the question of their loyalty has evoked equivocation or a claim of disloyalty. To question their loyalty is to deny it. Whether a minority is exemplary or threatening has little to do with whether they are in fact loyal or do acculturate. The question and answer does not reflect the practice. Rather it is part of a process that imagines a relationship relative to other communities. It negotiates the meeting points and differences as well as the majority's affection or hostility towards the minority.

For ethnically diverse societies from India, to Australia and the U.S.A, an exemplary minority enables an imagination of the society as plural and accepting. In the case of India, the Hindu majority is not only imagined against threatening Others of Muslims and Christians but also the exemplary Others of Parsis and Jews. The threatening Other defines the majority nation by what it is not, that Hindus are not Muslims. It enables an imagination of a monolithic Hindu bloc. The exemplary Other is used to imagine the Hindu nation as plural in its acceptance of diversity, but it is a pluralism predicated on a hierarchy with Hindus as paramount.

Parsis and Hindutva's ethnic nationalism

Hindutva is highly influential in India. It is comprised of a section of largely upper caste Hindus and is distinct from the religion of Hinduism (Jaffrelot 1993). The Bharatiya Janata Party

(BJP) is the political wing of this movement (Hansen 1999, 10) and in the 2014 national elections the BJP was elected and Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister of India. Modi has spent his entire adult life advancing the Hindutva ideology (Teltumbde 2014; Jaffrelot 2008). Prior to his election as Prime Minister he was the Chief Minister of the state of Gujarat, which has been described as the 'Laboratory of Hindutva' (Spodek 2010, 349). Several authors argue that a pogrom or state sanctioned violence against Muslims occurred in 2002 whilst Modi was Chief Minister, although his culpability is disputed (Spodek 2010, 363; Berenschot 2011, 181–182; Patel 2002, 4826; Sarkar 2002, 2874); Ashis Nandy (2002, 106) has described Modi as fitting the clinical diagnosis of a fascist and a Muslim leader described his model of governance as one of marginalisation (Seervai 2014).

I draw upon Christophe Jaffrelot's (2011, 44–45, 85) reading of Hindutva as an ethnic nationalist movement in order to explicate it and the scholarly framework for understanding such movements. Jaffrelot destabilises the popular position that Hindutva is an anti-secular movement. For an example of such a position see Amartya Sen's comments (Guha 2014). Jaffrelot argues that Hindutva constructs 'Hindu identity and the Indian nation by drawing upon European theories. The nation is defined by race, religion, language and a sacred land encapsulated in the phrase 'Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan' (Jaffrelot 2011, 45). In this schema Hindus are defined as an ethnic group. Such an approach enables Hindutva actors to sidestep the unanswerable question of what Hinduism is. It decouples the question of Hindu identity from a definition of Hinduism. In Hindutva thought, the Indian nation has been weakened by Muslim and British conquest. For Hindutva, the Indian nation is defined by a threatening Other of Muslims and Christians.

Hostility to Muslims is central to the founder of the movement, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar who invented the term Hindutva. Savarkar began his political career opposing British rule in India for which he was jailed for two consecutive life terms. In prison he came into contact with Muslims involved in the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement that developed from 1919 in the wake of

the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. This contact transformed him from a revolutionary into a Hindu nationalist. He became convinced that Muslims, with their pan-Islamic sympathies, were more of a threat to Hindus than the British.

Hindutva took form in the 1920s against and in parallel with the secular nationalism of the Indian National Congress. They each represent a different strand of nationalist thought. Broadly the Congress subscribes to Mahatma Gandhi's conception of India as a collection of equal religious communities. Secular in this sense does not mean a separation of religion and state, rather the state did not privilege one religion over another. Although it has been argued that there is a form of soft Hindutva within the Congress, it is generally understood that it is not the Hinduness that constitutes India, the nation is not constituted by an ethnic group or one religion, rather the secular nationalism of the Congress seeks to address each community's distinct traditions and desires. The difference between them can be seen in the origins of Hindutva as a splinter group within the Congress opposed to Gandhi's alliance with the Khilafat movement. Whilst Gandhi used a Hindu idiom to express his political agenda this did not preclude supporting a pan-Islamic movement. The Hindutva group was eventually ejected from the Congress due to its radical communal ideology. Today the foremost Hindutva political party, the BJP and the Congress are political opponents (Jaffrelot 2007, 14, 17). One of the key contemporary differences emerging from ethnic and secular imaginations of the nation can be seen in the language they and their supporters use to describe each other. The Congress are derided as "pseudo-secularists" for their support of special status provisions for minority communities such as personal law relating to divorce. In turn the BJP are derided as "communalist" for advancing the interests of one community over another.

However, both Hindutva and the Congress share a similar conception of India as divided into a majority and minorities. Appadurai (2006) and Pandey (1999) have both pointed out, the conception of ethnic majority and minorities developed by borrowing the language of parliamentary democracy and jurisprudence. It is the ascribing of terms developed in the context of temporary

political majorities and minorities to the permanency of ethnicity. It is numerical strength that determines who is a minority and who is a majority legally, politically and nationally. Muslims and Parsis are minorities in India because they are numerically less than Hindus. Conversely, in Pakistan and Bangladesh it is Muslims who are the majority and Hindus the minority. For the Congress the Indian nation is constituted by both majority and minority communities, for Hindutva it is the majority who constitute the nation. It is important to note that majority and minorities are mutually constituted, there can be no question of majority and minority without the existence of the other, If there were no minority communities there can be no majority. (Pandey 1999, 608)

In Hindutva thought the majority Hindu Indian nation and its minorities are delineated by an historical argument. The title page of Savarkar's (1923) seminal book, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* defines a Hindu as 'a person who regards this land of Bharatvarsha, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle land of his religion'. Savarkar distinguishes Hindus from non-Hindus by the Indic or non-Indic origins of a community's religion. Hindus embody the Indian nation because their religion originated in India and they are the most numerous (Jaffrelot 2011, 45). Christians and Muslims, as followers of non-Indic religions were assigned subordinate positions in a Hindu nation (Pirbhai 2008, 39). Scholars have understood history as an integral component of the Hindutva ideology; the Hindu nation is defined by it, Muslims and Christians excluded by it (Thapar 2007; Michael Gottlob 2007, 181–3; Nandy 1995, 64–65). An historical definition includes all Hindu castes, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs, Dalits and Adivasis as Hindus because their religions are of Indian origin. Such a definition excludes Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Jews because their religions are of foreign origin.

Yet Hindutva does not represent a threat to the Parsis. The Parsis are a tiny ethno-religious community of Zoroastrians who claim descent from Iranians who fled religious persecution in the centuries following the Islamic conquest of Iran. They are the world's foremost adherents of a religion that is at least three thousand years old which once dominated what is now the Middle East

and Central Asia. Today they number about 61,000 in India and are disproportionately wealthy. While initially reticent about Modi and the BJP, the Parsis have recently begun to support him. Numerous Parsis expressed their support for Modi to me during fieldwork in India during 2013; also see (Sunavala 2014). The BJP together with the Congress have supported efforts by the community to reverse their demographic decline. Both parties have supported various efforts to preserve and publicise the community's achievements and unique culture (India-Asia News Service 2014; Chakrabarty 2013). The absence of a threat posed by Hindutva towards the Parsis is illustrated by a story a Parsi told to me about his father's experience with the Shiv Sena, an ethnic nationalist movement in the Hindutva fold. For a study of Shiv Sena see (Lele 1995). During the 1992-3 Hindu-Muslim riots in Mumbai his father was driving to the airport to greet a guest and came to a temporary road block run by Shiv Sena members. They pulled his father from the car believing him to be a Muslim because of his beard. They ripped his shirt off and saw that he was wearing the sacred shirt and thread that identify him as a Parsi. The Shiv Sena workers apologised and let him go. I was told that the Shiv Sena is not hostile towards Parsis because when the founder of the movement first came to Bombay he stayed with Parsi friends. This is not to suggest that all Parsis support Hindutva. Many socially conscious Parsis I have interviewed are appalled by the ideology of Hindutva and the actions of Modi, but they do not perceive a threat to themselves.

Savarkar, Modi and other Hindutva actors have consistently expressed a fondness for individual Parsis and the community as a whole (Savarkar, n.d.; Savarkar 1984; Golwalkar 1966; Madhok 1970, 33). In 2011 Modi commissioned the construction of 'World Heritage Centres for Religious Harmony' in the Gujarati villages of Udvada and Sanjan (Dna 2011). These centres celebrate Parsi heritage in Gujarat and India. Modi said at the announcement 'When the world's smallest minority gives a political leader a standing ovation, no greater stamp of approval is required.' (Sunavala 2014) When Modi was Chief Minister of Gujarat he recited a version of the Parsi story at a press conference to announce his successful inducement of a Parsi industrial

conglomerate's planned new car factory (The Economic Times 2008). In 2013 the Parsis were celebrated as 'The World's Best Minority' by Modi's state government in a play performed as part of an annual celebration of the creation of the state known as Gujarat Day.

Hierarchical pluralism

How does one account for Hindutva's expressed affection for Parsis? As Jaffrelot's analysis suggests, Hindutva seeks to create a uniform Hindu bloc through the use of a threatening Other of Muslims. But the ethnic nationalist argument does not account for Hindutva's affection for the Parsis. I argue the Hindutva discourse on minorities is premised upon an imagination of the Indian nation as hierarchically plural. Different communities are imagined relative to each other in hierarchy from Hindus to Parsis then Jews, Christians and lastly Muslims. Parsis are exemplary because Muslims are threatening. Muslims enable an imagination of the Hindu nation as unitary and Parsis enable an imagination of it as plural and munificent. This was succinctly expressed by Golwalkar when he wrote of India 'here was already a full-fledged ancient nation of the Hindus and the various communities which were living in the country were here either as guests, the Jews and Parsis, or as invaders, the Muslim and Christians.' (Golwalkar 1966, 119)

Modi's government, Savarkar, Golwalkar all use the Parsis to illustrate that they are not hostile to minorities but to the actions of minorities that threaten Hindus. Savarkar expressed a hierarchical pluralism in a 1938 speech. It was delivered shortly after his release from 27 years imprisonment. Savarkar said 'The Hindus will assure them all that we hate none, neither the Moslem nor the Christians nor the Indian Europeans but henceforth we shall take good care to see that none of them dares to hate or belittle the Hindus also.' (Savarkar 1984, 31) Of the 32 points in the speech, Muslims are directly addressed in ten, and indirectly in eight. Savarkar argues that Muslims are hostile to Indian territorial nationalism for four reasons. First, because they 'have not as yet grown out of the historical stage, of intense religiosity and the theological concept of state'.

Second, they 'divide the human world into two groups only; The Moslem land and the enemy land.' Third, Muslim theologians look upon Hindus as the most damned. Fourth, they are conscious 'that they entered India as conquerors and subjected the Hindus to their rule.' (Savarkar 1984, 27–28)

In point 25 of his speech he addressed the place of non-Muslim minorities in the Hindu nation. Non-Muslim minorities are constituted relative to Muslims and the threat they pose to the Hindu nation. A minority's place in the hierarchy is gauged by their loyalty and commonality with Hindus (Savarkar 1984, 31). Savarkar's hostility to Muslims was inversely matched by his affection for Parsis illustrated by his affection for his Parsi friend Madame Cama (Savarkar, n.d., 13, 19, 22, 28; Savarkar 1984, 13, 31). The first minority he addressed are the Parsis, whom he said

are by race, religion, language and culture most akin to us. They have greatfully [sic] been loyal to India and have made her their only home. They have produced some of the best Indian patriots and revolutionists like Dada Bhai and Madam Cama. They will have to be and therefore, shall be incorporated into the common Indian State with perfectly equal rights and trust.

(Savarkar 1984, 31)

In the writings of Savarkar and Golwalkar, Christians and Jews switch places depending upon the requirements of the present. In Savarkar's 1938 speech Christians followed Parsis because they have 'no extra-territorial political designs against India, are not linguistically and culturally averse to the Hindus and therefore, can be politically assimilated with us. Only in religion they differ from us and are a proselytizing church.' (Savarkar 1984, 31–2) Third are Jews, of whom he says 'they are too few, have given us no political or cultural troubles and are not in the main a proselytising people.' (Savarkar 1984, 31–2) At this time Savarkar was wary of the Jews due to Congress' proposal to allow a Jewish colony in India. He said in response to the proposal 'India must be a Hindu land, reserved for the Hindus.' (Savarkar 1984, 31–2) In the later writings of

Golwalkar, when this threat had passed and acculturation had become a significant differentiator, Christians and Jews switch places (Jaffrelot 2007, 101). Then, Savarkar came to Muslims, writing, 'So far as the Moslem minority is concerned...we must watch it in all its actions with the greatest distrust possible.' (Savarkar 1984, 31–2)

Contemporary Hindutva supporters also imagine Parsis in contrast with Muslims. One of the organisers of the 2013 Gujarat Day play told me an interview that 'the Parsis are the most patriotic minority especially compared to Muslims,' and that, 'most importantly they are not anti-Indian like Muslims.' Responding to a question about how Modi's new national government proposed to take Muslim welfare forward, the new Minister of Minority Affairs Najma Heptullah from the BJP, who is married to a Parsi, said 'Muslims are not minorities. Parsis are.' (Times News Network 2014)

Remembering stories of loyalty and disloyalty

As Jaffrelot and others have argued, Hindutva actors use an historical argument to differentiate between the Hindu majority and minorities, but this is not the case for a differential relationship between minorities which is established by the requirements of the present and by a remembered story. That is, history establishes the relationship between the majority and minorities but it is not used to differentiate minorities into a hierarchy. Rather for Hindutva, it is the memory of the relationship; it is the remembered past that differentiates between minorities. Memory is malleable to the requirements of the present; it is a mythical organisation of the past. Contemporary relationships are projected back in time rather than understanding the present in terms of an evolving past. Parsis and Muslims are differentiated by comparing two stories, a Parsi story of coexistence and a Muslim story of invasion, a Parsi story of acculturation and loyalty with a Muslim story of forcible conversion of Hindus to Islam and disloyalty. It is a comparison of mythical pasts as if they were historical pasts.

Comparing mythical stories denies the unique historical relationship each community has had with Hindus. Muslims ruled much of South Asia in the centuries before being deposed by the British. Muslims developed a set of strategies for coexisting with Hindus that was premised upon Muslim control of the polity. Parsis have not ruled anywhere since their 655CE defeat in Iran that precipitated their flight to India. In India they have always been a tiny community who have had to negotiate with the ruling community and polity. They have had to supplicate themselves before Hindu, Muslim and British rulers in order to negotiate their elite status. Their position is premised upon deft negotiations with another community who are politically and militarily more powerful. Parsis have developed a highly successful set of strategies for these negotiations in which the questioning of their loyalty is not a denial but an expression of their agency.

These strategies are encapsulated in a multivalent Parsi story that remembers the munificence of the political elite. Hindutva actors draw upon that remembered story and rework it for their own benefit. The remembering of a story of Parsi loyalty and Muslim disloyalty has its own historical development. The story by Golwalkar that began this article is a revision of a Parsi story that was first written in a 1599CE poem known as the *Qesse-ye Sanjan*, or the Story of Sanjan. For a translation of the poem into English see Williams (2009). Over many centuries Parsis have narrated various versions of a story that describes a first encounter with Hindus that trade's asylum for a profession of loyalty, commonality and acculturation. All versions of the story recount an exodus from Iran due to religious persecution and an arrival by boat in a Gujarati village. The dominant contemporary Parsi version of the story is the 'Sugar in the Milk'. It narrates a meeting between a Hindu king and Parsis in which the king presents the Parsis with a glass full of milk to symbolise that the land has no room for them. A Parsi stirs sugar into the milk to symbolise that they will mix in and sweeten the society without displacing the milk. It is most commonly narrated orally but also appears in scholarly narratives, historical novels and films, children's books, paintings, poems and websites (Kamerkar and Dhunjisha 2002, 27; Nanavutty 1980, 40–1; Sidhwa

1991, 46–9; Khan and Metha 1998; Shroff and Mehta 2011; J. Patel, n.d.; Joshi 2003; Cama 2014).

Parsis and Hindus use the encounter and the conditions of asylum to negotiate, guide and elucidate the contemporary similarities and differences between the two communities. The pact for asylum explains to contemporary Parsis their syncretic fusion of Zoroastrian, Iranian and Hindu practices. Axelrod (1980) and Williams (2009) read the story as a myth that guides the Parsis. The past is invoked to guide a mutually beneficial relationship in the present. It is a morality tale, a myth where the meaning changes depending upon the context and requirements of the present. Whereas Parsis invoke a mythical past to negotiate their survival, Golwalkar, Savarkar and Modi have a different moral purpose. They use the past in order to bring about a Hindutva vision of India as a hierarchically plural Hindu nation.

From the *Qesse-ye Sanjan* until today the questioning of Parsi loyalty is pluralistic in its inclusiveness of the community. Questioning loyalty is rhetorical as Parsis can never profess anything but loyalty. In the *Qesse-ye Sanjan* a Parsi priest affirms their loyalty to the Hindu King saying 'We are all friendly to the land of Hend (India), we'll slash your enemies in all directions.' (Williams 2009, 87 Verse 163) Later in the poem, Parsis join forces with Hindus against an invasion by Muslims. During colonial rule Parsis professed loyalty to the British. In the first work of modern Parsi history that was produced in the year following the 1857 rebellion against British rule the author wrote, 'Throughout the rebellion in the East the Parsees have maintained an unshaken loyalty to the British.' (Karaka 1858, x) In 2011, Modi prodded the Parsis to return to Iran, to which a Parsi replied, 'We don't want to go to Iran. We like India. We want to be here. It is our country.' (Mehta 2011) Although the loyalty of the Parsis shifts, they are publicly understood to be loyal. It is not that Parsis are loyal, rather it is the public remembering of loyalty in the form of a story.

The demand that a community profess loyalty and acculturate is not necessarily exclusionary when it is and has always been answered in the affirmative and is a story that expresses that community's agency. For Parsis, the question of loyalty enables difference; it

negotiates the meeting points and distinctness of Parsis and Hindus. The question of loyalty is not asked of people whose ancestors have assimilated and become Hindus, because they are no longer a distinct people. The Parsis were not the first Iranian Zoroastrians to migrate to India. Pre-Parsi migrants from Iran became a Hindu caste and ceased to be identifiably Zoroastrian or Iranian. They are known as Maga Brahmins (Kamerkar and Dhunjisha 2002, 8). It is only scholars who have uncovered the Maga Brahmins' Iranian ancestry. Their loyalty is not questioned because they are Hindus. If Parsis had ceased to be Zoroastrian and distinct from Hindus, there would be no Indian Zoroastrians. The question of their loyalty is not only symptomatic of their difference but also constitutive. It enables them to be simultaneously Parsi, Zoroastrian and Indian.

Whereas the story about Parsis remembers them as loyal, the story about Muslims remembers them as disloyal. For Muslims the rhetorical question of their loyalty to post-colonial India is answered with denial because of a remembered story of disloyalty. Their loyalty has previously been denied. Muslims are imagined as repeatedly invading Hindu India and destroying temples (Thapar, 2005). The final chapter in their disloyalty to India is their role Partition. Pandey (1999) argues that the contemporary question of Muslim loyalty is tied to the existence of Pakistan and the idea of Muslim and Hindu nations. With the 1947 partition of British India into Pakistan and India, the question of the loyalty of Muslims who remained in India and largely supported the creation of Pakistan comes into question. A Muslim in India is forever responsible for the actions of his ancestors, who may or may not have been members of the Muslim League's campaign for Pakistan. The individual becomes responsible for the actions of their co-religionists. The charge of loyalty to Pakistan and disloyalty to India is one that Indian Muslims can never adequately counter. For Muslims the question of loyalty can only be answered with a denial of Islam, a denial of loyalty, or at best equivocal support.

The story of Muslim disloyalty denies their historical experience in India. They have not always been imagined as disloyal. In the period where Muslims were the sovereigns there was no

question of their loyalty or disloyalty. British colonial power was primarily supplanting Muslim rule across much of North India and following their conquest they sought a profession of loyalty. It is with the 1857 uprising against British rule by Hindus and Muslims that Muslims are first imagined as disloyal. This uprising was opposed by the Parsis. For the British, the Parsis were loyal and Muslims were disloyal and it is this colonial era imagination of both that Savarkar drew upon.

Remembering acculturation

Whereas for Savarkar it is stories of loyalty and commonality that are the basis for differentiating between minorities, for Golwalkar it is also the minority's public acculturation of Hindu symbols (Jaffrelot 2011, 46). He expressed this in the story that began this article in which Parsis were required to accept Hindu symbols such as respect for cows. As the question of loyalty simultaneously includes Parsis and excludes Muslims, so too does the demand to acculturate and be commensurable. Again, the comparison denies their very different historical experiences and is the remembering of a story designed to exclude Muslims. It is not a neutral demand.

Zoroastrianism and Brahminical Hinduism have a shared origin, they are familial. The oldest religious texts of both Hindus and Zoroastrians are composed in mutually intelligible coeval languages. They have a common ancestral Indo-Iranian religion from which they are both derived. They have diverged and there are differences but their common root provides a fertile ground for a discourse of acculturation and commensurability. The similarities and differences enable a comparative exposition of each tradition in their early stages. Zoroastrians and Hindus have engaged in a productive comparative dialogue for many centuries. Parsis and Hindus have been translating Zoroastrian ideas into a Hindu idiom even prior to the 1599 *Qesse-ye Sanjan* in the form of the Sixteen Sanskrit Slokas (Williams 2009, 233; Verse 167-181 Williams 2009, 87–91). From the 19th century both drew upon philology to understand both of their traditions historically (Chattopadhyaya 1894; Desai 1904; Hodivala 1925; Chapekar 1982). In the story by Golwalkar that

began this article, the Hindu king demanded that the Parsis respect the cow. This is an adaptation of the Parsis own tradition. In the *Qesse-ye Sanjan* the Parsi priest says to the Hindu king 'We offer our respect to fire and water, and likewise to the cow, the sun and moon.' (Williams 2009, 87 Verse 169) The demand to acculturate does not entail a demand to shed Zoroastrianism. It is the public adaptation of certain practices of a familial tradition. The similarities and differences are constitutive.

In contemporary Hindutva thought Parsis and Muslims are distinguished by their acculturation. In an interview the playwright of the 2013 Gujarat Day play lauded the Parsis' contribution to the states culture as pioneers of Gujarati journalism, drama and their celebrated poets. He exalted the nationalist Parsis involved in the freedom struggle and his Parsi friends. It was not only in their contribution to Gujarat but in his words, that they 'have become 100% Gujarati'. For him Parsis have acculturated the traditions of Gujarati Hindus. He recounted the ancient links between Iran and India, of the Iranians who featured in the Indian epic the *Mahabharata* and the customs that Parsis and Hindus shared. There was a commonality between the Parsis traditions and his own Hindu traditions.

This is not the case for Muslims for whom the demand to acculturate Hindu symbols is a demand to shed Islam. The ancestors of South Asian Muslims have come to Islam through a variety of complex processes from migration to conversion (Eaton 1985; Eaton 1993). Muslims often share cultural expressions with Hindus of the same ethnicity while parting with those radically incompatible with Islam. Given that the difference between Muslims and Hindus belonging to the same language group is primarily in religious practice, the demand to acculturate is a demand to shed Islam. If Muslims concede and discard Islamic practices and symbols they become good Muslims, but only for a transitory moment. In this denial they cease to be Muslim and are subsumed at the bottom of the Hindu caste system. If they retain any outward expression of Islam, they are an anti-national threatening minority. This is not to suggest that there are no grounds for a dialogue

between Hindus and Muslims. Such a dialogue is ongoing in India, but it is not one of acculturation and it is not one that Hindutva draws upon.

The Hindutva story of Muslims in India is the antithesis of acculturation because it remembers forced conversion and the destruction of temples. An official involved in the annual Gujarat Day play said 'Parsis don't create problems over religion and are not violent.' The religious problem he alludes to is conversion; an exemplary minority does not proselytise. Parsis generally do not accept converts to their religion of Zoroastrianism. With proselytisation, Muslims and Christians do not seek to adopt Hindu practices but negate them through conversion. Christian and Muslim proselytising is intimately tied to Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot, 2007, 233). For Hindutva conversion presents two problems. First is that their movement is founded on the idea of a majoritarian Hindu nation, the gradual erosion of that numerical ascendancy undermines the argument for a Hindu India. The second is in a democracy a Hindu nationalist movement requires a Hindu majority if it is going to form government (Menon, 2003, 43). Comparing the acculturation of Parsis and Muslims is comparing the incomparable. It is comparing a story of coexistence with a story of exclusion in order to advance a contemporary political agenda.

Conclusion

The ethnic nationalist framework for understanding movements such as Hindutva explains how a majority ethnic group is imagined against a threatening Other but it does explain their affection for some minority communities. While the use of threatening minorities establishes the nation as unitary, the use of exemplary minorities by ethnic nationalists movements such as Hindutva or terms such as Model Minorities enables the imagination of a plural society. A nationalist movement in an ethnically diverse society needs an exemplary minority in order to imagine the self as plural. Parsis serve this purpose, they illustrate the munificence and plurality of Hindus.

An exemplary minority establishes why other minorities are threatening. In plural societies an exemplary minority is predicated on the existence of a threatening one. In India, Parsis are exemplary because Muslims are threatening and vice versa. The exemplary minority is the model of what other minorities must but cannot become. Its use in India does not address Parsis, but Muslims exhorting them to follow the Parsi example.

Whether a minority is exemplary or threatening has little to do with their actions, rather it is determined by the political requirements of the present and how the demand to be loyal and acculturate has previously been answered. These are rhetorical questions and demands. A hierarchy of minorities is established by remembering a story of loyalty and acculturation that denies each community's historical specificity. It is a denial of how each person and community came to find themselves in the situation they are today. It is the use of a politically charged remembered story in the guise of a historical understanding.

For ethnic nationalists a story of coexistence is tied to a story of conflict. When a story of coexistence that uses a treaty trading refuge for loyalty and acculturation is used on its own it can constitute a community as a unique entity and negotiate the similarities and differences between the majority and minority communities. But when that story is read against another of disloyalty its effect is to exclude. The comparison is not problematic for the exemplary minority, but it is for the threatening minority. The use of the exemplary minority, or model minority is not benign, it is an assault on those already discriminated against in order to imagine the self as plural.

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