Chapter Two

"AN IMPOSSIBLE FACTOR": MUSLIM AS A CRITICAL-SUBJECT POSITION

The "communal patriots" among Hindus treated [the communal patriot among Muslims] as a prisoner in the dock, and loudly complained of him as an impossible factor in the scheme of India’s future.

—Mohamed Ali.¹

Historical as well as popular accounts of Muslim-Hindu relations of the first half of this century generally credit Mohammad Iqbal (1876-1938) with having written "the first manifesto of the two-nation theory which was later elaborated . . . by Chaudhari Rahmat Ali² and accepted as the basis of the foundation of a separate state for the Muslims (Pakistan) by Mohammad Ali Jinnah."³ In 1930, Iqbal, the poet-philosopher of the Indian subcontinent, advisor and close intellectual companion of Jinnah, gave the historic presidential address to the annual session of the Muslim League at Allahabad. In his address he suggested that the Muslim majority areas in the North-West might be given autonomy so that Islamic norms could be followed, thereby triggering off a desire/demand for Pakistan. Having set the theme in play, Iqbal withdrew from public/political life due to illness.

¹ "The Communal Patriot," in Select Writings and Speeches of Maulana Mohamed Ali, ed. Afzal Iqbal (Lahore: Shaikh Mohammad Ashraf, 1944) 67. All emphases in this chapter, unless otherwise mentioned, are as in source.
² Rahmat Ali along with three others in Cambridge, on 28 January 1933, appealed "in the name of our common heritage, on behalf of our thirty million Muslim brethren who live in PAKSTAN—by which we mean the five northern units of India, viz. Punjab, North-West Frontier Province (Afghan Province), Kashmir, Sind and Baluchistan" for support "in our grim and fateful struggle against political crucifixion and complete annihilation" for a separate Muslim state because "[o]ur brave but voiceless nation is being sacrificed on the altar of Hindu Nationalism not only by the non-Muslims, but to the lasting disgrace of Islam, by our own so-called leaders," "Now or Never, Are We to Live or Perish For Ever?" cited from appendix iv of The Foundation of Muslim Nationalism, vol 1 of Pathway to India's Partition by Bimal Prasad (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999) 289.
However, much earlier than 1930, in his *Shikwa* (first recited by Iqbal in 1909 at a gathering in Lahore), the protagonist asks: “Why amongst Muslims is worldly wealth rarely found?” (44). Lamenting the decline of Muslim power, the protagonist requests that God “[c]onvert India’s millions who still in temples dwell” (54). In the companion poem *Jawab-i-Shikwa* (first recited in 1913), God responds to the complaint and in return rebukes his people of faith:

You are *one people*, you share in common your weal and woe.

You have one faith, one creed and to one Prophet allegiance owe.

You have one sacred Kaaba, one God and one holy book, the Koran.

Was it so difficult to unite in one community every single Mussalman?

It is factions at one place; divisions into castes at another.

In these times are these the *ways to progress* and to prosper? (73; emphases added)

The message of the poem is clear: the people of the faith ought to be one people and such unity unmarred by factions and castes is the only way to progress. Ever since Iqbal, Muslims in India have been haunted by the theme of pan-Islamism and the charge of owing their primary allegiance to a world-community of Islam rather than the proto-nations they actually inhabit. Moreover, such allegiance has often been read as antagonistic, as constituting an aggression on the sovereign integrity of specific nations. Nonetheless, it is also evident that the rebellion of 1857, claimed as the first war of independence even by extreme Hindu nationalists, and the Malabar uprisings of 1836-1921, are instances that substantiate the argument that Islam has continued to be a source of inspiration for concerted and concrete socio-political

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4 Apart from Iqbal, Choudhry Rahmat Ali’s pamphlet *Now or Never* (1933), SA Latif’s *Muslim Problem in India* (1938), *The Confederacy of India* (1939) by “A Punjabi,” Sikander Hayat Khan’s *Outline for a Scheme of Indian Federation* (1939), the Aligarh professors’ (Syed Zafarul Hasan and Mohammad Afzal Husain Qadri) proposal (1939) and Abdullah Haroon’s plan (1940) are some of the 70 such schemes proposed between 1858-1940 by Indian Muslims; cited from *Pakistan Resolution Revisited*, eds. Kaniz F Yusuf, M Saleem Akhtar and S Razi Wasti (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1990) fn. 60, 579.
transformations. Although Hindutva ideologues continue to work with and for the idea of an India without Islam, India would not be the same without it. Indeed, it is essential to perceive Islam as structural to the idea of India. Furthermore, Islam in India is something that did not go away with Pakistan. It is a major contention of this thesis that the concept of pan-Islamic separatism or communalism is not a productive framework for an understanding of Islam in India. Considerable effort, therefore, goes into a critical examination of the narrative of separatism and communalism that invariably structures accounts and interpretations of Islam in India. My aim is to set up an alternative problematic that might enable us to re-assemble the nation in other terms.

In the first two sections of this chapter, I focus on writers such as Akeel Bilgrami and Javeed Alam who engage with the question of Islam in India through an emphasis on the category

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5 It is important to keep in mind the history of Islam in a world context as well as the particular history it has had in the Indian subcontinent. Islam evolved out of a Bedouin society in Mecca in Saudi Arabia early in the seventh century AD. Despite earlier Jewish and Christian attempts, star and idol worship flourished among the various societies in Arabia, and Mecca, where the Kabah is housed, primarily a place of trade as well as a place of pilgrimage for all the nomadic tribes, was central to the evolution of Islam. Born into this society—to Amina and Abdullah, of the Hashimi clan of the merchant tribe of Quraish in Mecca—on 22 April 570 or 571 AD, was Muhammad ibn Abdullah—not much is known about the early life of this man who was to be known later as the messenger of God and who found a well-codified religion—who later married Khadija, a widow engaged in trade and who was among the first of a small group to accept the messenger. Muhammad became a searcher for truth, a solitary wanderer among the hills and was in the habit of retreating regularly to a cave in the hills to pray and meditate. On one of these occasions, when he was in his forties, Muhammad became aware of a presence that informed him that he is the messenger of Allah. Thereafter he preached to a small group of people, a group that steadily increased in number, the message of Allah. “Allah” was the name of one of the local Gods, and in the course of another retreat the first divine revelation happened. Muhammad was asked by the presence to recite/read in the name of the lord who created man out of a mere clot of congealed blood and taught man the use of that which he knew not; which appear as the opening verses of sura xcvi 5. Over the next twenty years these revelations in rhythmic prose continued and were communicated to his followers who compiled them to form 114 suras (or chapters) with some 6,616 verses called the Quran. Whatever be the socio-psychology of the act of revelation, the very inception of Islam might also be traced to a socio-political imperative. The Quranic verse (xiii, 11), “Verily never / Will God change the condition / Of a people until they / Change it themselves,” is read as enjoining Muslims to think of themselves as a political community with salvation here as well as in the hereafter. This socio-political imperative, contrary to popular perception, was not one of intolerance. Syed Alam Khundmiri points out, “Islam was, perhaps, the first religion which accepted the fact of plurality of faiths.” See, fn. 1, 86 in “Some Problems of Inter-Religious Understanding,” in Secularism, Islam, Modernity, ed. MT Ansari (New Delhi: Sage, 2001). He cites the verse “O ye / That reject faith: / I worship not that / which ye worship. // Nor will ye worship / That which I worship / To you be your way / And to mine,” Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation, The Meaning of the Glorious Quran, cxix, 1-6.
“modern.” In the third section, I engage with the manner in which the problem has been presented by some of the leading writers on Islam in India—such as Francis Robinson and Rafiuddin Ahmed—to examine the manner in which the overall framework of pan-Islamic separatism regulates their critical interventions in the field. In this section I also discuss other key theoreticians such as Ayesha Jalal, Syed Alam Khundmiri and the writers of the Subaltern school, whose interventions have significantly shifted the frame in which the question of Islam in India has been studied. The last section will offer a critique of the notion of self/other in order to work out the possibilities for a re-conceptualization of community with respect to Islam in India.

I

Working within a secular-modern framework, Akeel Bilgrami\(^6\) formulates the problem in these terms:

It is because their commitment to Islam today is to a large extent governed by a highly defensive function that moderate Muslims find it particularly difficult to make a substantial and sustained criticism of Islamic doctrine; and this . . . leaves them open to be exploited by the political efforts of absolutist movements, which exploit the doctrine for their own ends. Their defensiveness inhibits them with the fear that such criticisms would amount to a surrender to the forces of the West, which have so long shown a domineering colonial and postcolonial contempt for their culture. Thus it is that the historically determined function of their commitment, the source of their very self-identity, loops back reflexively on Muslims to paralyze their capacities for self-criticism. (835)

\(^6\) Akeel Bilgrami, “What Is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 18.4 (Summer 1992) 821-842. This essay was republished in Gyanendra Pandey, ed. *Hindus and Others* (Delhi: Viking, 1993) 273-295. All citations are from the former.
However, Bilgrami’s category of a “moderate” Muslim, occupying the interstitial space between what he calls the first person, the orthodox believer, and the third person, the purely secular, seems problematic to me because a Muslim in India would anyway be drawn apart by the socio-political tensions so much that s/he would have little option but to align with the secular or translate back onto the first person, defensive, even fundamentalist, position. In addition, the Muslim who could obtain to the third person secular position would be, even if for the moment we set aside the issue of religious affiliation, be marked by gender, class, even caste, in such a manner that the internal critique from this position would be counterproductive. One has only to remember the controversial *Satanic Verses* episode\(^7\) here to understand the complexity of the problem. Bilgrami’s formulation of a “moderate” Muslim, mapping it onto a modernist problematic, marks the (immoderate) Muslim as always-already fanatical and fundamentalist, and burdens Muslims with guilt that has to be purged through self-criticism.

Bilgrami in his analysis of the cultural identity of the Muslim minority in India adopts the “customary aggressive secular stance of those with communist leanings.” He hears the *defiant* words “I am a Muslim” from his lips in a hostile neighbourhood with a pre-dominantly lower-middle-class Hindu population in India (822). In a revealing footnote, he comments that there is “no interesting common thread running along through [the] different contexts” in which a person with “antitheological views” would identify him/herself as a Muslim. Some other occasions that he documents are those of *shame* at the action of other Muslims, as in the case of Muslim response to Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, and that of *concern*, as about the future of

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\(^7\) The Rushdie episode has a curious footnote: when Rushdie’s predicament had prompted a playwright, Brian Clark, to write a play about it, Rushdie rushed towards legal remedies, apart from personally expressing his anger and resentment to the playwright. Rushdie’s response to Brian Clark’s play is thus a telling comment not only on Rushdie himself but also on what are regarded as genuine grievances and the ways they might be re-(ad)dressed. See, for more details, Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) chapter 8, fn. 9, 283-284.
Muslims in some hostile area, like in parts of India or England. Going against Bilgrami’s prescription, and deploying an existentialist frame, I would identify a common thread through all such variegated contexts, one of negative relation to a world-community of Islam. Though Bilgrami’s examples are not exhaustive, it would be interesting to juxtapose the three contexts outlined by Bilgrami. The first one is in a local context where the individual acknowledges the socio-cultural aspect of his/her identity and moves (though the defiance may be more defensive than aggressive) towards the communitarian, and is one of affirmation and affiliation. The second is in a global context where the individual tends to disavow such a communitarian identity and effect a withdrawal into itself and therefore is one of differentiation and distancing. The third is in the context of contiguity where the act is one of moving from a community to another similar one and is one of affinity (though not yet an alliance) and association. It should be noted that defiance is against something, shame is for something that one/another individual/community has done and maybe empathic and concern is sympathy for others like oneself who are less fortunate. If the first is assertive of one’s communitarian identity, the third one is apprehensive and anxious of itself, and others like itself, while the second one is ashamed of itself in that others like itself are doing what they are doing. All three acts are tied to the notion of a community by negative strands, and even within this framework there is a possibility that it is the local defiance that is causing such anxiety in the global context, as is the case with the Rushdie affair. Moreover, the individual, marked by defiance, shame and concern, in the above contexts is working with a modern secular world-outlook and a non-political definition of his/her identity/community. Such a perspective only lends to a negative marking of the

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community and produces a negative relation to it, the final result of which is a bemoaning of the vulnerability, if not the absence, of secularism in Islamic communities and state-formations that has given rise to Islamic revivalism and fundamentalism. I suggest that it might be useful to adopt different strategies and return to the modern-secular state and civil society formation from the vantage of Islamic revivalism, whereby the latter can be better engaged with and understood as also a response to the crisis within the modern-secular frame. A case in point is that of Iran. The question that Foucault, while welcoming the Iranian revolution and its Islamic spirit, asked: "What is it about what happened in Iran that a whole lot of people, on the left and on the right, find somewhat irritating?" points to the fact that religion may very well be the "spectre . . . haunting" modernity at large, being the "spirit of a world without a spirit." Foucault adds: "Many here and some in Iran are waiting for the moment when secularization will at last come back to the fore and reveal the good, old type of revolution we have always known. I wonder how far they will be taken along this strange, unique road, in which they seek, against the stubbornness of their destiny, against everything they have been for centuries, 'something quite different'" (224).

13 Foucault notes: “People always quote Marx and the opium of the people. The sentence that immediately preceded that statement which is never quoted says that religion is the spirit of a world without spirit. Let’s say, then, that Islam, in that year of 1978, was not the opium of the people precisely because it was the spirit of a world without a spirit,” in Lawrence D Kritzman, ed. Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings (New York: Routledge, 1988) 218.
Bilgrami’s “moderate” Muslim is very much in keeping with his overall theoretical position that sees Islam, especially Islamic personal law, in urgent need of reform.  

His project has been to provide internal arguments appealing to the substantive values of historically situated Muslim populations to convince them to conclude in favour of internal reform.  

Bilgrami’s answer to the question why Muslims have to be convinced would be that secularism in India has remained a statist invention and an imposition from above that did not become a part of Hinduism or Islam as a substantive contested political commitment to be negotiated, one with the other. However, unlike Ashis Nandy—for whom the Gandhian version of secularism was connected to Indian reality, while the Nehruvian version remained a modern intrusion into an essentially traditionalist religious population—Bilgrami argues for a future for the Nehruvian vision. The flaw in Nehru’s vision, according to Bilgrami, was not that it was a modern intrusion, rather Nehru’s fault was an “unwillingness to acknowledge that there are religious communitarian voices in politics.” This unwillingness stemmed from “a prima facie understandable fear that to acknowledge them would be to encourage and entrench them.” Pointing to the dangers of a valorization of Gandhian “way of life” that contained Brahminical elements, Bilgrami argues that the failure of secularism is methodological, rather than conceptual. That is, the flaw was not in the vision but in the particular manner in which it was implemented by the state, for “separation of religion from politics has to be earned, not assumed at the outset” (393).

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14 Elsewhere, he notes that the “secular stance had been quite blind to the need to democratize Muslims, so that they did not get hijacked into the narrow and elitist communal direction that Jinnah’s politics was aiming to direct them” (416).


In this context, one wonders why it has to be either Gandhi or Nehru. As I have argued in the first chapter, Nehru, as evidenced by his interactions with Mohamed Ali and the episode of his “secular” and “sacred” baths, was deeply aware and uneasy about his professed secularism. Savarkar, Jinnah and Ambedkar, oddly clubbed together by Nandy as “believers in public but... not... in private,”18 embody the conflicts involved in any such separation. As against Bilgrami’s notion of “internal arguments” to convince Muslims to conclude in favour of internal reforms, I would place my contention that, though the communities of Islam in India have different orientations, they are all already marked by a particular experience of modernity, secularism and nationalism. In Bilgrami’s frame, the notion of “reform” is clearly a product of secular-modernity, whereas I believe that any theorization would have to be counterpointed with studies of the modern framework in terms other than those set by itself; that is from the perspective of Islam and its experience of the secular modern nationhood. In the first chapter I examined the figure of Mohamed Ali in terms of his autobiographical pursuit as well as his notion of identity within the various educational/reform initiatives of the community and the nationalist movement. My discussion attempted to thematize attempts by various Muslims, individually as well as collectively, to modernize Islamic thought in the context of the subcontinent. I drew attention to the complexity of these moves because of the complication involved in belonging to two circles of equal size. Though this process may also have had revivalist elements, what I argue is that Islam’s sense of its world history energized itself not in terms of a separatist aspiration. Rather, what was imagined was a federation of the Indian states, rather than a repetition of the “singular” European-modern nation form. This implied also a critique of the modern-secular and its separation of religion and politics. Whereas Hindu communal aspirations in its attempt to define itself in new terms generated an Islamic other,

Muslim aspirations drew on Islamic notions of superiority and strength. Whether these revivalist movements by themselves would have resulted in irresoluble antagonism between these communities is a moot question. What was more important was that the modern secular frame of nationalist aspiration meant a repetition of the European moment and the relegation of a religion to the private sphere. The confused and contradictory nature of the nationalist project is best personified in Gandhi, who imagined a modern political and secular community that would also be a Ram Rajya. Caught between the communal aspirations of the Hindu and Muslim communities, the Congress was forced to aspire an India in which the Hindu and the Indian circles coincided.

As Partha Chatterjee has argued using Lenin, Gandhi’s thought can be seen to be “based on a false, indeed reactionary, theory of the world-historical process,” and “refuses to acknowledge a theory of history at all. In either case, it would be variant of [what Lenin called ‘economic romanticism’]” (Chatterjee, 98). However, Gandhi’s critique of modernity and civil society “is one which arises from an epistemic standpoint situated outside the thematic of post-Enlightenment thought” (Chatterjee, 100). Hence, it is difficult to see how one can succeed in combining Gandhian thought with the other routes of Enlightenment modernity. For, Gandhism maintained “a fundamental ambiguity [in] its relation to nationalist thought, in the way in which it challenged the basic premises on which the latter was built and yet sought at the same time to insert itself into the process of a nationalist politics” (Chatterjee, 113). The contradictory outcome is symbolized by the Khilafat movement that triggered off a decade of widespread communal riots all over India, surpassed only by those accompanying the partition of the Indian

Critics, 321-344.
subcontinent. In this framework, Gandhian moves emerge, not as a simple laudatory attempt to involve the masses in the anti-colonial struggle, but as a conscious attempt to establish an ideological means for bringing people en masse in order to pave the way for “the political appropriation of the sub-altern classes by a bourgeoisie aspiring for hegemony in the new nation-state” (Chatterjee, 100).

Unlike Bilgrami, Javeed Alam\textsuperscript{21} approaches the issue of Islam not from within but from across the larger problematic of modernity and the “failure” of the Left is one of his central concerns. The crucial difference from Bilgrami is that for Alam modernity can be refashioned, though he would term the process as recovery. The issue of Islam in India, Alam acknowledges, cannot be separated from the singular form/logic of Indian nationalism which in turn is tied in with the singular logic of western modernity. Therefore, he proposes that we ought to disengage from the dominant version of modernity in the West, which, as the blurb puts it, is only “a hand-maiden of capitalist global drives,” and has also pre-determined the non-European experience of (post)colonial modernity. From such a perspective, he identifies three forms of reaction to modernity within the social sciences in contemporary India. The first is a sharp attack on modernity as an unacceptable phenomenon imposed on the Third World countries. According to him, this form has two variants: one views colonialism as concomitant with modernity and theorizes both as historically inseparable (3);\textsuperscript{22} the other variant is a more general attack on modernity located in the critique developed by post-structuralist or post-modernist writers:\textsuperscript{1} However, the two variants often collapse into each other (as, according to Alam, in the case of


Sudhir Chandra) in the context of the Third World. The second form consists of an *attack on some of the values central to the post-Enlightenment thought*. This set of critics attack specific doctrines such as secularism or rights discourse as well as general philosophical beliefs such as universalism or truth claims of various kinds. This, according to Alam, is an anomaly since if secularism is rejected as alien, notions of democracy or equality also should be set aside. The third form of attack may be labeled a *rejection of the inherent conceptions of modernity*, like the idea of progress. Alam states that entrenched modernity, the historically embodied form of Enlightenment, is only one of the possible paths modernity could have traversed and hence there is no necessary relation between the features of modernity as it exists and entrenched modernity.

In each of these forms of attack, the other is constituted “by reactions to Modernity and the role of the West as the harbinger of Modernity, the other face of which is colonialism” (6). Alam argues: “Modernity, as constituted in its initial phases, is historically not realizable without some notion of the Other,” understood as the “non-modern,” though “not necessarily another country or society” (7). Modernity’s task then is to globally become one with what is not itself, the latter being “integral to the project called Modernity in its original form.” This “what is not [yet] itself” (7), or “the Other entailed in the Enlightenment” (8), he calls the *philosophic other*. Capitalism’s affiliation to modernity makes it “overcome and assimilat[e], by force if need be,” “[a]ll the different, non-capitalist economic systems” into its fold. Such non-capitalist systems, or “the other entailed in the logic of capital” (9), he calls the *economic other*. As against the non-volitional mode of swallowing other non-capitalist systems, a phase of extended reproduction, capital’s onward march makes it *will* “consciously now to capture, penetrate and establish political rule over other societies” (9). Alam argues that though colonialism is not

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22 All writings influenced by Edward Said (for Alam, Partha Chatterjee exemplifies this mode) and also those that
possible without capitalism, the latter need not have led to colonialism. "The mode of colonial constitution of the Other is, therefore, detachable from Modernity even if it came in the baggage of colonialism to our societies" (11). This other, forcibly imposed by colonialism, and not via the power of reason, he calls the *sociological or colonial other*.

Alam seems to be positioned in a non-self-reflexive position outside or above the archive of knowledge he theorizes about. His claim that "[w]hat became essential and strategic for colonialism was not entailed in the logic of Enlightenment" (11) does not stand even the colonial other's scrutiny. The colonial other has to be read not merely as a corollary of but as the necessary pre-condition for capitalism's development, and the Enlightenment in fact can be productively read as setting up a thematic elaboration of its logic. From such a perspective, the contention that in order "[t]o move forward, the Third World has to move backwards and laterally to seek the sources of the new potentialities with which the modern can be created" (42) seems to be an impossible and even unnecessary option, because modernity is framed as an elusive goal in the horizon to which the Third World has to be progress. The very title of Alam's book "living with modernity" as if it was something outside itself gives an idea of how he perceives India and modernity. In such a frame, modernity will continue to be an overarching concept that sets the terms of the debate while remaining above the debate.

The parallel Alam draws between universalizability and proselytization reveals the underbelly of his argument. He writes: "Universalizability is for modernity what proselytization is for many religions" (7). For him, the "universal" is still a viable concept and sooner or later all "others" are products of indigenism (Ashis Nandy, in his view, is an example) come under the first variant.

23 Thematic, as defined by Partha Chatterjee, are the justificatory structures; the "nature of the evidence it presents . . . the rules of inference it relies on . . . the set of epistemological principles it uses to demonstrate the existence of its
will be translated into it. All that is required is for the "western intellectual establishment, rather than merely ranting against Modernity, [to] open up to ideas emanating from the rest of the world which seek to compete for universality" (49). Such debates, according to Alam, will somehow lead to a truer universality if they take place outside the realm of power. However, it is difficult to see why, even if such intellectual exchanges could take place in a shared language of our times, they need result in a universal endorsement of universalities. As Talal Asad\textsuperscript{24} has pointed out:

The idea that cultural borrowing must lead to total homogeneity and to loss of authenticity is clearly absurd. . . . As with translations of a text, one does not simply get a reproduction of identity. The acquisition of new forms of language from the modern West—whether by forcible imposition, insidious insertion, or voluntary borrowing—is part of what makes for new possibilities of action in non-Western societies. Yet, although the outcome of these possibilities is never fully predictable, the language in which the possibilities are formulated is increasingly shared by Western and non-Western societies. And so, too, the specific forms of power and subjection. (13)

Alam's metanarrative of "identity in difference" does not examine how entrenched modernity has predetermined, to use Althusser's term, the ideological apparatuses and their operations.\textsuperscript{25} Such pre-determination has resulted in a state where difference is viewed as anathema. Alam does not take into account the "uncoevalness" of cultural translations.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{26} For a discussion of the lack of coevalness in our conception of time, see, Johannes Fabian, \textit{Time and the Other} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).
This becomes evident when we consider Islamic encounter with modernity. The attempts of Syed Ahmad Khan, Ameer Ali (1849-1928), the Ali brothers, Chaudhari Rahmat Ali (1897-1951) and Iqbal were to modernize socio-cultural institutions across rather than away from religion. What thwarted this process was the singular manner in which nationalist aspirations were enunciated. I would agree with Alam that the imagined nation was not coterminous with the civil society, but would stop short of his statement that the "absence of the conditions but the presence of terms of the debate based on them, left us with unbounded confusion and seeds of chauvinism" (112). Alam’s latter statement is from a perspective that thinks of Indian history as marking a failure to live up to the expectations of the secular-modern. Rather, I would argue that the Indian experience brings out the inherent contradictions within modernity. From such a perspective, Alam’s argument that “Islam became within India what the non-West was to entrenched Modernity” (117) does not sufficiently account for the Muslim issue. This becomes clear when we examine Alam’s explanation for the reason for Islam becoming the national other:

The language in which Islam speaks (that of Semitic religions in general) is not spontaneously comprehensible to those immersed in the Hindu tradition, and vice-versa. Earlier, prior to the encounter with the modern, these traditions co­ existed side by side and had little to say to each other except at the local level. When religion, in the context of deepening Modernity, becomes central to the public sphere this would have damaging consequences. (111)

From Alam’s own analysis, we can infer that the problem is much more deep-rooted than Alam conceded, for what is at stake is the question of religion in the rational ethos of the modern nation which is part and parcel of secular-modernity.
Against the Foucauldian "empty notion of resistance," Alam places the "anti-modernist Gandhian project, which is backed by "an elaborate theory, almost a science, of resistance," as "a viable platform and not a barren recipe" (41). Alam attempts to substantiate this claim by offering an analysis of the Muslim response to modernity through a study of Indian nationalism and the cultural foundations of the Indian nation. He notes that there is a discrepancy between the claims of early nationalist writings and their inner thrust. Necessary as it was to counter the colonial falsification of the past of a whole people, the theme of the foreigner, Alam rightly notes, applied to the British and later extended to Muslims runs through the writings of Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) to HLV Derozio (1809-1831), and in a more strident and loaded form in the writings of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) and Vivekananda (1863-1902). However, with these writers, as with the elite Muslim writers like Syed Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) and Iqbal, according to Alam, the move from cultural assertion to political platform of nationalism was a dangerous one. Hence, he argues that the "forms of Hindu and Muslim struggle were not dissimilar but their trajectory and target were quite different," in that the Muslims showed "a pronounced disinclination to combine with others, especially when that entailed nationalist action against the British" (90). Though he ignores the earlier initiatives of Islamic thinkers like Sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1562-1624) and Shah Waliullah (1703-1762), Alam is able to see the structural similarity between the early leaders of the Hindu renaissance from Ram Mohan Roy to Derozio who depended upon the colonial government for support for many of their reform initiatives (91) and "the Muslim elite [which was] only beginning to take shape and [was] trying to find a foothold in society at large and within their own communities".

27 Elsewhere, Alam notes that though the common feature of interventions by various Islamic leaders was a move away from theological arguments towards more democratic, a more "'healthier' version of Islam," it also had "far-reaching disastrous consequences" (181).
He recognizes that Muslims sought "equality not vis-à-vis the British rulers but mainly with the Hindus, and the internal logic of the situation dictated that they then stay on the side of the British, who as arbiters in the situation, could tilt the flow of concessions in their favour" (90). As a consequence the political position that the Muslims took was not, by and large, anti-colonial. One the one hand, he points out that Akbar's categorical assertion that this created the seeds of later separatism leading to Pakistan will remain an unsettled question (90). On the other hand, he concedes that by the time of the formation of modern elite from among the Muslims, nationalist and/or proto-nationalist tendencies were clearly consolidating into an anti-colonial critique and a politics was emerging with "disastrous consequences; the distance between Muslims and Hindus turned into a separatist politics among the Muslims since the formation of the Muslim League in 1906" (95). The only difference between Akbar and Alam in this regard seems to be the latter's claim that "there is no casual link between this and the demand for sovereign Pakistan in 1940" (95).

Retooling the secular-modern is an essential aspect of Alam's Marxist perspective. Though he is stringent in his critique of the Indian communist movement for its blindness to the existence of other "religio-cultural streams" within nationalism (119) as it uncritically followed the state-propounded version of nationalism, his conceptual apparatus is still that of the Marxism of the Indian Left of which he is a part (120). His argument, hidden in a footnote, is that the Left should re-open its "undeclared moratorium" that came into effect after the vigorous debates of 1942 to 1974 and pay more attention to the other strands that are part of our nationalist legacy (fn. 23, 166). The immediate task for us, then, seems to be to free ourselves from communalism.

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Alam notes: "This unequal ascendance of the elite based on their religious affiliations in the long run had far-reaching repercussions on relations between the Hindus and the Muslims, and between the Indian people in general and the British colonialists. It also set a pattern of politicking out of which we as a people have not yet fully emerged" (86).
that has been encouraged by the state and which has led to a "withdrawal of the people into their respective communities" (161). As a result, argues Alam, we are witnessing the constant fusion of the communal into the national, or "the collapse of the national into the communal . . . in [a] manner which . . . fills the public space" (161). What Alam seems to be moving towards is a position where one acknowledges various religio-cultural seams of which our nationalism is composed of only to work towards their obliteration.

Given the conceptual tools of his engagement which do not re-recognize religion, it is not surprising to find Alam shifting away from engaging with the Christian ethos and telos that underwrites modernity, entrenched or otherwise. The Enlightenment project and its formulation of a philosophical other is hardly separate from the economical or sociological/colonial other. Rather, one might argue that it was encounters with anthropological others that were constitutive of modernity and, further, of the public/private domains. Though he agrees that "[t]he problem with entrenched Modernity, backed by the power of capitalism, has been its myopic incapacity to see anything other than its own Self" (34), Alam seems to think that contemporary modern consciousness has

through philosophical reflections and reflexive social interactions slowly developed a capacity to absorb the features which inhere in what was the unfamiliar Other. It is this continuing absorption of the traits of other cultures which now allows for the absolute opposition between Self and Other to be overcome. We are now in a situation where the Other is becoming constitutive of the Self. (34)

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What Alam is setting up is a single narrative of global capitalism in the modern world and, as the title of his third chapter, "Rendering Modernity Communicable," reveals, he draws on "a Habermasian story of the progressively liberating aspects of secular, bourgeois society" (Asad, 202). That is why, following a Marxist teleology, he deplores "the ghastly role of religion acting as sole spokesman [sic] of the nation" (45). The secular agenda of the western instance neatly separates religion from the public sphere, but nevertheless the former continued to influence and inform the latter. There have been plenty of insightful studies investigating the promise and failure of Indian secularism. By positing a secular state and a secular subject, which has to be fashioned from the material of a subcontinent now narrativized and read as a nation in retrospect, and by eliding the notion of difference, Indian secularism actually breeds communalism. In other words, the problem inherent in any deployment of the logic of the supplement or supplementary logic is at work here and communalism can be read as the necessary supplement of the logic of a secular state. By refusing to accept any responsibility for the "sin" of sundering the "mother country," the secular state "treats" communalism as aberrance, an irrational outburst, and a disease, which it must control if not cure. And belying its professed secularism, the practices of the secular state and its policing of communalism actually engenders communalism. Alam's neat compartmentalization of religion and politics and the underlying Marxist notion of the nation as a necessary evil in the onward march of a Hegelian history, leads him into difficulties when he addresses the problems of Muslims in contemporary India. After analyzing the different trends within Muslim communities within India, he makes the suggestion that "[i]t will be good if the Muslims get drawn into the struggle against [subservience to

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International Finance Capital] and in the process *shed the Muslim label in the act of making political choices*" (149; emphasis added). While ready to acknowledge and address the economic disadvantage and cultural alienation faced by Muslim minority in India, he can only envisage a future for the Muslims of India if they willingly shed whatever makes them what they are. Contrary to Alam’s formulation, Islam, in my conceptualization, is fabricated as the other of western modernity and the other of nationalist thought in postcolonial India. Islam is India in the position of being the other’s other in the sense that national itself is the other of European modernity. In terms of religion and community, Muslims in India symbolize the inverse of enlightened western rationality as well as the difference within the nation.

Alam’s refusal to acknowledge modernity as a historic-specific phenomenon disables him from politically engaging with Indian, leave alone Muslim, modernity. Hence, his critique is that of an India “living with” modernity in order to establish a truly secular state. In this schema the choices made by Muslims as Muslims are not political choices, for religion has been displaced from state to the civil society, the domain of “independent individuals . . . who are related by law just as men in the estates and guilds were related by privilege” and where “man, as member of civil society, inevitability appears as unpolitical man, as natural man” (Marx, 233). Given Marx’s perspective that religion is the “spirit of civil society. . . . It is no longer the essence of community but the essence of difference. It has become the expression of the separation of man from his community, from himself and from other men, which is what it was originally. It is now

35 The verb used “shed” echoes Marx: “Once Jew and Christian recognize their respective religions as nothing more than different stages in the development of the human spirit, as snake-skins cast off by history, and man as the snake which wore them, they will no longer be in religious opposition, but in a purely critical and scientific, a human relationship.” Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (1843), in *Early Writings*, intro. Lucio Colletti, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975, 1984) 213.
only the abstract confession of an individual oddity, of a *private whim*, a caprice" (221), a complete human emancipation also implies emancipation from religion. The concluding lines of Marx's analysis of the Jewish question emphatically point out:

Since the real essence of the Jew is universally realized and secularized in civil society, civil society could not convince the Jew of the *unreality* of his *religious* essence, which is nothing more than the ideal expression of his practical need. Therefore ... in present-day society we find the essence of the modern Jew not in an abstract but in a supremely empirical form, not only as the narrowness of the Jew but as the Jewish narrowness of society.

As soon as society succeeds in abolishing the empirical essence of Judaism—the market and the conditions which give rise to it—the Jew will have become *impossible*, for his consciousness will no longer have an object, the subjective basis of Judaism—practical need—will have become humanized and the conflict between man's individual sensuous existence and his species-existence will have been superseded.

The *social* emancipation of the Jew is the *emancipation of society from Judaism*. (241)

In keeping with the liberal-Marxist orientation, Alam's work seems to move towards making the Muslim impossible. This becomes evident when, unlike Bilgrami, he does not have to choose between Gandhi and Nehru. Rather, Alam credits Gandhi with successfully bridging the gap "between the middle classes and other elite on the one hand, and the toiling masses on the other"

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35 Elsewhere, Marx has written: "*Religious* suffering is at one and the same time the *expression* of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people." The task of history, according to Marx, is to establish the "*truth of this world*" by making the "*other-world of truth*" vanish. "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their *real* happiness"; from the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in *Early Writings*, 244.
(119-120. Moreover, Gandhi’s “complex notion of Swaraj,” which involved everyday life of ordinary people, allowed the secularized and somewhat radical version of nationalism and national consciousness, as represented by Nehru, to grow and crystallize with the contending forces of that time” (120). Governed by his concern for the peasantry and the masses, Alam’s frame makes Islam into that which has to be modernized through an awareness of the other resources of modernity.

Alam’s central concern is around the question: “Can a right to a way of life be claimed on behalf of a community when the exercise of the same is denied to the individual?” Or, in other words, does a community that does not grant the “right to exit” have the right to exist? Alam’s considered answer that communities cannot continue to act as “collective personalities,” and what is required is a “framework of assumptions to build justifications of what is permissible within the claims of the community” (344) falls under the purview of the multiculturalist perspective. The liberal position requires the state to continue to function as the source of power and arbitration. Against the Marxist perspective that power is located in the state and is made effective by the ideological state apparatuses, Foucault, as Deleuze elucidates, has maintained that the state only “appears as the overall effect or result of a series of interacting wheels or structures which are located at a completely different level, and which constitute a ‘micropolitics of power’” (25). Hence, what has to be addressed is not so much “ideology”—for Foucault ideology does not constitute “the struggle between forces,” but “only the dust thrown  

36 Alam goes on to add that Gandhi’s notion of swaraj “allowed the removal of untouchability and Hindu-Muslim friendship as one composite blend within the nationalist platform” (120; emphasis added). The semantic ambiguity here, probably a printer’s devil, is instructive.
37 Javeed Alam, “Public Sphere and Democratic Governance,” 327, in Multiculturalism, 323-347.
38 As Partha Chatterjee notes, even within the multiculturalist debate in the West, Will Kymlicka, in Liberalism, Community and Culture (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), has argued for “differential” rights to be allocated on the basis of culture; Chatterjee, “Secularism and Toleration,” 368, in Secularism and Its Critics, 345-379.
up by such a contest" (29)—but power since it is a relation between forces and as such passes
through the dominated and the dominating. It is from such a perspective that I have tried to re-
cognize the Muslim, from Syed Ahmad Khan to Mohamad Ali, as embodying a critical-subject
window on secular-modernity.

Partha Chatterjee deploys the Foucauldian notion of “governmentality” in order to think through
the impasse, and poses a series of similar questions: “Could a collective cultural right be used
as an instrument to perpetuate thoroughly illiberal practices with the group? Would individual
members of such groups have the right to leave the group? If an individual right of exit is
granted, would that not in effect undermine the right of the group to preserve its identity? On the
one hand, if a right of exit is denied, would we still have a liberal society?” (368). Chatterjee
comments that the limit of liberal-rationalist theory is reached when it is pointed out that “what is asserted in a collective cultural right is in fact the right not to offer a reason for being different”
(371). Thus, it is at the disjuncture between sovereignty and governmentality that minority
cultural assertion takes place and he charts out a case for intracommunity sites from which
individuals can speak to itself and to others outside. Chatterjee is aware that his postulation
can be criticized as being romantic, and acknowledges, in Vivek Dhareshwar’s phrasing, that the
“thinking of community remains, and will remain, impoverished because our imaginary and our
institutions have so far found no place for it.” Chatterjee envisages a time when our theoretical

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40 Unlike the theories of Max Weber, the Frankfurt School and Jurgen Habermas, “governmentality” does not lend itself to notions of state as a domain of coercion and civil society as the zone of freedom; rather it brings out the interplay between coercion and consent where disciplinarity, sovereignty and governmentality are always at work.

41 Bilgrami, in a postscript to his “Secularism, Nationalism, and Modernity,” notes that his call for “internal arguments” have often been conflated and confused with that of Chatterjee and clarifies his position as one of “emergent and negotiated secularism” (408) where “internal reform can happen on a statist site” (410) that is poised between liberalism that depends on external reasons embodied by a state for reforms within community and communitarianism that claims intracommunity democracy.

42 Vivek Dhareshwar, Politics and History after Sovereignty,” 413, in Multiculturalism, 400-422.
language will allow us to talk of community and state at the same time and when capital will find its resting place in community.\textsuperscript{43}

Dhareshwar articulates a critique of Chatterjee’s ambivalence towards the notion of community when the latter speaks of the polysemy of the pre-modern. This weakness, according to Dhareshwar, stems from Chatterjee’s use of Sudipta Kaviraj’s\textsuperscript{44} notion of “fuzzy” and “enumerated” communities (fn. 36, 419). The “question of community,” in Dhareshwar’s perception, “is a question \textit{par excellence} of [political] modernity” (421-422) and we need to evolve a “theoretical sense of a political language at the moment of its emergence” (422). He suggests, “a new principle of community might enable us to overcome the impasse created by the discourses of sovereignty and market” (422). In this endeavour, he draws on Jean Luc Nancy’s novel idea that modern society was not built on the ruins of community, rather “community, far from being what society has crushed or lost is \textit{what happens to us . . . in the wake of society}.\textsuperscript{45} Nancy’s characterization of community as “resistance itself” (Nancy, 35; cited, Dhareshwar, 416) opens out the possibility of reading Islam, with its inseparability of public and private spheres, of politics and religion, and its deep-rooted connection between individual and community, in a different way. Such a mammoth task is beyond the scope of this dissertation, though I will try to address some related issues in the last section of this chapter and the third chapter.


\textsuperscript{44} Sudipta Kaviraj, \textit{The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of the Nationalist Discourse in India} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Others less sympathetic and more critical than Alam have noted that it was Gandhi’s emergence on the political scene that worked as a catalyst in Jinnah’s gradual shift away from the notion of a unified India towards a divided Indian subcontinent, whether such a shift, as Ayesha Jalal has remarked, was a deliberate ploy that played out of Jinnah’s hands or not. Jalal suggests that Gandhi used the pro-Khilafat Muslims to “capture” the Congress, much to the discomfort of Jinnah. Such a “fusion of religion and politics had left Jinnah cold in the wings. He denounced Gandhi for causing schism and split ‘not only amongst Hindus and Muslims but between Hindus and Hindus and Muslims and Muslims [and in fact] in almost every institution’ that the Mahatma had anything to do with.” He warned, “Gandhi’s programme would lead to ‘complete disorganization and chaos.’” In December 1920, Jinnah, the first president of the All India Muslim League had commented (to Durga Das, a prominent writer): “Well, young man—I have nothing to do with this pseudo-religious approach to politics. I part company with the Congress and Gandhi. I do not believe in working up mob hysteria. Politics is a gentleman’s game.”

From such a position, into the late 1930s, we find Jinnah adopting Muslim dress for significant public addresses. This must be seen in conjunction with how Gandhi’s attire and ideal of Ram Rajya were viewed by other communities. In his presidential address at the Lahore session of the Muslim League in 1940, Jinnah openly stated:

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46 According to Jalal, the demand for Muslim majority state should be seen “as a bargaining counter, which had the merit of being acceptable (on the face of it) to the majority province Muslims, and of being totally unacceptable to the Congress and in the last resort the British too. This in turn provided the best insurance that the League would not be given what it now apparently was asking for, but Jinnah in fact did not really want,” The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 1994) 57.
It is extremely difficult to appreciate why our Hindu friends fail to understand the real nature of Islam and Hinduism. They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality. . . . They have different epics, different heroes, different episodes. Very often the hero of one is a foe of the other and, likewise, their victories and defeats overlap. To yoke together two such nations under a single state, one as a numerical minority and the other a majority, must lead to growing discontent and final destruction of any fabric that may be so built up for the government of such a state.  

As against conventional method of stressing the Nehru-Jinnah power struggle, Akbar S Ahmed and Jalal have tried to read the history of the Indian subcontinent from a Gandhi-Jinnah angle. We should also remember here that Iqbal and the Ali brothers who initially opposed Jinnah in the 1920s and supported Gandhi were to turn around in their affiliations by the 1930s. The issue of Dalits is another instance: Ambedkar supported the move for Pakistan and explained the reasons for Jinnah doing what he had to do.  

So, on the one hand, Gandhi is perceived as playing the communal card, thereby forcing Jinnah, whose parents also hail from Gujarat, to make politics into an un-gentlemanly game, whereas, on the other, he is played up as resisting any such communalized politics. A glaring example of this confusion is exemplified by the following set of statements by Gandhi:


on 24 September 1921, Gandhi wrote that “[t]he brave [Ali] brothers are staunch lovers of their country, but they are Mussulmans first and everything else afterwards. It must be so with every religiously-minded man.” Four months later, after news of the magnitude of the Malabar Mappila rebellion has trickled in, on 26 January 1922, he writes: “Nationalism is greater than sectarianism. And in that sense we are Indians first and Hindus, Mussulmans, Parsis, Christians after.”'

Jalal is among the first historians who have attempted to theorize the overemphasis on the framework of separatism in studies of Islam in the subcontinent. Indeed, it would be a truism to state that the Muslim figures as more than a minority in Indian discourses on Islam; Islam haunts the nation, whether it is credited with an inherent pan-Islamic or communal inclination or post-national affiliation, Islam in the Indian subcontinent continues to be read as embodying the other of nationalism and of modernity at large. One of the reasons for such insistence in the historiography on Muslim separatism, as Jalal notes, could be because “the debate has deliberated on the issue of Muslim ‘nationhood’ rather than on the ambiguities surrounding the demand for Muslim ‘statehood’” (93). Pointing to the uneasy fit between the notions of a Muslim state within the nation and a separate nation, she writes: “While the insistence on national status for Indian Muslims became a non-negotiable issue after 1940, the demand for a wholly separate and sovereign state of ‘Pakistan’ remained open to negotiation as late as the summer of 1946” (93). She concludes that the “scholarly blindness to this is a product of the double mental barrier, both against maintaining an analytical distinction between ‘nation’ and


‘state’ and expunging the *telos* of partition from interpretations of the historical evolution of the demand for a ‘Pakistan’” (93).

Jalal critiques, what is often shorthanded as, the Subaltern Studies’ approach because by paying exclusive attention to the domain of peasant politics, they fail to see the interconnections that it has with the elite domain. Though she may grant that the Subaltern Studies group’s initiative was a strategic attempt to balance a lopsided historiography of India, Jalal argues that “subaltern consciousness is shaped by too many contending identities to allow for an unquestioning privileging of the ‘communal’ element within it” (90). She points out that “communal consciousness” itself has undergone “far greater recent and dramatic historical change” (91) than is acknowledged by the Subaltern historians. Unless their aim was to hold “subaltern consciousness and violence” as “responsible for the partition of India, and that is surely not the intention, there can be no adequate explanation for the post-colonial transition which does not address the calculations and miscalculations of those located at the highest level of politics” (91).

She observes that the 1947 “partition” was hardly the ultimate goal of Muslim politics, and that the metamorphosis of a minority community into a “nation,” in the face of discrepancies based on class, regional and ideological differences that permeated the discourse and politics of Muslim identity, was “designed more as a powerful rhetorical device than an accurate statement of the reality” (91).

Amplifying on Jalal’s critique that the Subaltern Studies’ project does not take into account the interconnections and effects on each other that the elite and subaltern domains have, I would argue that the notions of self and community in Muslim communities, even those of “subaltern”
Muslim communities, do not exactly match those of the "subaltern." This has ramifications when issues of secular-modern nation form come into play. Unfortunately, even a path-breaking work like Partha Chatterjee's *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* fails to take the Muslim position vis-à-vis nationalism and modernity into account.

In his later work, Partha Chatterjee\(^56\) has argued that, though it is difficult for Indians to have an easy relation with modernity, because belying our aspirations is the fear evoked by the modern as its victims, we should now muster the courage to reject the modernities established for us by others (210). Syed Alam Khundmiri points to the peculiar situation in India:

> The problem in India is the modernization of the majority, the Hindus, who will ultimately determine whether India is going to be a modern State or a State governed by medieval Hindu values. Indian Muslims can accelerate the process of modernization, if they accept the suggestion that the values of secular democracy are more in tune with a higher ethical ideal than futile attempts to recapture past politico-legal traditions which are neither in tune with modern times nor can be shared by their contemporaries belonging to different faiths. Indian society can only be modernized on the basis of a value system which can be shared by all its members and such a value system can emanate from the humanist tradition of the contemporary world alone.\(^57\)

Khundmiri identifies two powerful myths, that of national mainstream and of cultural identity, that is behind India's problem. When "[t]he way of the life of the dominant majority is as decadent as the ways of the so-called minorities" (280), he argues that the myth of a national mainstream, which is another name for the tyranny of the majority, only gives birth to other


myths that sabotage the drive towards the modernization (which for him is at times synonymous with the secularization) of the country. Similarly, the Muslim myth of a cultural identity fails in the face of the non-homogeneity of Indian Muslims. He argues for the need within Islam to re-theorize its institutions in terms of history, but acknowledges that Islam in India is threateningly pushed to a position that forecloses such an opening. Following the Dalit theorization of the backward communities as being kept away from modernity and out of the nation, and the resurgence of a nationalist anxiety and the populist re-assertion of a constructed sacred cartography of the nation through the Sangh Parivar's rath yathras in the wake of the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, one could argue that the nation has to be theorized not from the weaknesses of its dominant ideology. Maybe that fundamental anxiety of the nation can only be overcome by a theorization of the nation from its margins, from the other minor positions. Maybe Chatterjee's postulation of moments of departure, manoeuvre and arrival of the Indian nation needs to be further amplified in that the Muslim response to post-Enlightenment thought was to re-cognize itself in terms of a moment of arrival (an arrival at modernity, viz. Syed Ahmad Khan) a moment of manoeuvre (mobilization; Ali brothers) and a moment of departure (out of the Indian nation; Jinnah).

As against earlier works that focused on the composite identity of Muslims in India, recent work—especially by Francis Robinson on the United Provinces, and by Rafiuddin Ahmed on Bengal—has stressed the need to understand linguistic and regional cross-currents that

60 By the 1871 census, 40 percent of the fifty million Muslims in the Indian subcontinent lived in Bengal.
determine the political identity of Muslims. Though they throw light on the variations within the Muslim world, what one misses out on in such studies is the larger picture wherein disparate communities, regardless of their majoritarian or minoritarian status locally were linked together by a minoritarian experience in terms of Islam across the Indian subcontinent. It is this link which inflected world-Islam as well as its expression at the national and the local levels. Such studies, through their uncritical deployment of overarching concepts such as the “modern,” “secular” and “separatism” often result in reading the local in terms of a pre-given, universal. The overemphasis on the local, which is seen through the universal, prevents such studies from offering theories which link local histories of Islam with larger contexts. To take one example, “it is futile to look for a simple explanation of the origins of political separatism either in the historical conflict of Hinduism and Islam or in the so-called government policy of ‘divide and rule’ [or] in the constitution-making processes, including the growth of representative institutions.”61 Instead, the reasons for the growth of Islamic separatism are traced, somewhat simplistically, to the ideological propaganda of the religious leaders who “lack[ed] vision and proper understanding of the economic and political problems” but who were yet able to manipulate ordinary Muslims because of their “ignorance, fanaticism and naiveté” (190). In contrast to Ahmed’s fanatic-explanation, Francis Robinson62 argues that Islam could be secularized along the Weberian lines of disenchantment leading to “fragmentation and conflict, [and] the emergence of multiplying strands of conflicting thought, which come eventually to include those challenge Islam as total ideology” (129). He cites the case of Mushirul Hasan,63 whose work stresses the underlying differences between various Muslim communities rather than any mythical Muslim unity. Working within the frame of a secular nationalist future,

62 Francis Robinson, Islam and Muslim History in South Asia.

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Mushirul Hasan moves towards a point from where religion becomes “just another form of culture” (Robinson, 129). However, Robinson’s own narrative of the process of secularization within Islam implies that for such a process to successfully take root Islam has to be left alone in a kind of ideal ahistorical space without “the pincer threat of Western domination from without and Hindu domination from within” (129). Robinson’s reading of Islam thus also characterizes it as a failed secularization.\textsuperscript{64} The central point of contention is whether the political domain is to be understood as a separate domain or whether it should be read as being influenced by other socio-cultural dimensions, and hence whether to interpret Muslim political leaders as not manipulating, but also being manipulated by other social elements. Robinson argues that Muslims in India were not a nation if we go by the standards applied to modern European nations since they had no racial homogeneity and little common history. But what gave birth to separatism among Indian Muslims was the common experience of British imperial rule.\textsuperscript{65} Hence, it was the turning back of the Indian people to define themselves in historical and cultural terms that generated a religious revivalism among both Hindus and Muslims (346-347). Further, Muslim separatism was also helped along by the colonial government’s initiatives, though the intention of the government moves was not deliberately directed at fostering communal hostility. Robinson’s analysis of the ulema during the Khilafat movement throws light on the rivalries among them so that “they could only move at different times” as well as on how Gandhi was

\textsuperscript{64} Especially Mushirul Hasan, \textit{Legacy of a Divided Nation: India’s Muslim’s since Independence} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

\textsuperscript{65} Critiquing the Brass thesis of nation-formation as “one in which objective differences between peoples acquire subjective and symbolic significance [and] are translated into group consciousness, and become the basis for political demands” (Paul Brass, \textit{Language, Religion and Politics in North India} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974) 43), Robinson points out that Indian Muslims should be considered as being “less free to choose than Brass suggests” (Robinson, 169). If Muslims emphasized their difference from the Hindus it was because of forces outside their control: Muslims “did not generate Islamic historical symbols to fight rising Hindu power but found them already forged and ready for use as a result of the process of coping with British domination and countering Christian civilization” (169). However, Robinson’s own work is directed to modifying the Brass thesis in very much the same manner in which Brass himself suggested modifications to the Deutsch thesis. Robinson’s difference with Brass is on the central importance accorded to the Deutsch thesis (see, K Deutsch, \textit{Nationalism and Social
wooed by different sections as he himself was seeking alliances so much that the "Mahatma, in fact, was won for the Muslims and not the Muslims for the Mahatma" (352). The Khilafat movement initially spearheaded by Abdul Bari's section of Firangi Mahal was taken over by the Deoband only after Gandhi and the Congress had moved in. Thus, Robinson's rich analysis of politics, at the local level of the United Provinces in order to understand the politics at the higher level, points to the fact that "Muslim politicians were separatist only in a limited sense" (353). However, the alliance of the priest and the politician during the Khilafat movement in which "the modern politician has been overwhelmed by religious passion, [thereby] deflecting him from his purpose" (356) and the British fear of Muslims and their initiatives to "improve" them, thereby better organizing them (355), are the factors which strengthened the separatist content among Indian Muslims and is contained within the Islamic notion of community.

Religion has to be theorized as more than an-other instance of a pre-modern opiate of an ideology or an early stage in society's development that has to be ideally discarded. Arguing against Louis Dumont's notion of medieval religion as an analytical category though it pervades other categories in actual practice, Talal Asad has argued that religion does not have the same essence today as it had in the middle ages. Religion does not exist as a transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon because what we read as religion is, at any given point, an assemblage or an amalgam of diverse practices, forces and representations. Critiquing Clifford Geertz's anthropological and universalist definition of religion, Asad goes on to add:

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65 Robinson, Separatism Among Indian Muslims, 345.


Yet this separation of religion from power is a modern Western norm, the product of a unique post-Reformation history. The attempt to understand Muslim traditions by insisting that in them religion and politics (two essences modern society tries to keep conceptually and practically apart) are coupled must, in my view, lead to failure. At its most dubious, such attempts encourage us to take up an a priori position in which religious discourse in the political arena is seen as a disguise for political power. (28-29)

He contends that there cannot be a universal definition of religion, not just because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but precisely because that definition is itself the historical product of discursive processes. In a very interesting take on Kant’s seminal essay “An Answer to the Question: ‘What is Enlightenment?’” Asad remarks that Kant “proposes both a sociological limit (the literate, scholarly minority to whom the privilege of public criticism belongs) and a political one (the conditions in which one must refrain from open criticism)” (204). If Foucault’s reading stresses the Enlightenment notion of self-elaboration and an autonomous individual who can publicly argue and privately obey, Asad argues Kant’s attempt was tied in with the forcible redefinition of religion as belief and personal identity as personal matters belonging to the emerging space of the private life. Religious toleration enforced by the state as a prerequisite of a peaceful society is now being read as “a political means to the formation of strong state power that emerged from the sectarian wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries rather than the gift of a benign intention to defend pluralism” (206).69

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69 “If religious diversity could be forcibly eliminated, so much the better, Lipsius urged; if that was impossible, then religious toleration should be enforced by the state,” comments Asad, following Tuck, Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives, ed. S Mendus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
Asad's contention points to the danger of reading Islam in India in a purely teleological fashion in the manner of a series where each new instance is a result of earlier events. What is important is to pay attention to the logic of the series itself; more than how each new moment becomes an instance because of the preceding ones, we should also concentrate on how each new instance disrupts and disarranges the preceding moments. From such a perspective, pan-Islamic separatist tendencies is too easy a label to cover the different tendencies and debates within the nationalist/communal formation.

IV

The discussions so far seem to point to the possibility of Islam being marked with an "otherness" within the nationalist frame. Hence, it would be instructive to situate the issue of Islam, as an "other," in the context of the significant body of work, especially by Hannah Arendt, on the Jewish question. Of special interest to us here is the major difference in how the self/other problematic is played out in relation to Judaism as against Islam in India. Briefly stated, Judaism is generally perceived as menaced, whereas Islam is narrativized as the menace. This is partly because of the historical context of the successive emergence of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Whereas Christianity was able to successfully represent itself as the new and better faith, Islam's similar claim only increased hostility towards it. Also, significant is the sudden shift in the core of, what may be loosely described as, world-civilization, that moved from the central Mediterranean to the peripheral Atlantic towards the end of the first century. This shift coincided with, if not initiated, according to Samir Amin, the closure of the feudal world and emergence of capitalism. This also required the newly formed western centre to establish a

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71 In this regard, see, Max Weber's controversial thesis (1904) about Protestant ethics playing a significant role in determining the spirit of capitalism, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).
history of itself, which it did by tracing its roots back to Greece, seemingly taking a giant leap over historical time and Judeo-Islamic world. But, whereas Judaism and Islam were systematically, till very recent times, weakened by the unequal relation forced upon them by the Christian world, after the Iranian revolution of 1979 there has been what is often labeled as an Islamic resurgence in the world-context, adding an allure which exists alongside an aversion as is evidenced by the prevailing cultural representation of Islam as a pre-modern other. The menace of Islam is also in that, given its history of intellectual engagement with linguistic, socio-cultural, political, juridical, scientific, philosophical, spiritual and theological matters, it is possible that it would have engaged with the transition out of feudalism on its own terms, rather than follow the western trajectory, and thus would have asserted its political power by advancing on the technological side. Rather than a political onslaught, Judaic thought, as in the post-structuralist thought, has concentrated on closer examinations of some of the premises of western thought. For example, considering the problem of knowledge and history, "constituted through attempts to re-inscribe a place for, and a relation with, the other as other, outside the sphere of mastery and therefore, logically speaking, both infinite and beyond the scope of knowledge," Emmanuel Levinas writes:

Western philosophy coincides with the disclosure of the other where the other, in manifesting itself as a being, loses its alterity. From its infancy

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72 Recent works by Martin Bernal and Paul Gilroy have detailed this move; see, respectively, Black Athena (London: Vintage, 1987) and The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994).

73 I can only gesture towards this body of work by enumerating some of the names. Following the Translation movement (around 750 AD) when Greek scientific and philosophical texts were translated into Arabic, Ibn Hanbal (d. 855), al-Kindi (d. 870), al-Junaid (d. 910), al-Hallaj (d. 922), al-Ashari (d. 935/936) and Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) pioneered philosophical enquiry in medieval Islam. Ibn Sina (Latinized form Avicenna; d. 1037) and al-Farabi (d. 950) dominated the scene thereafter. This spirit was kept alive by al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Rushd (Latinized form Averroes; d. 1198), ar-Razi (Latinize form Rhazes; d. 1209), Ibn al-Arabi (d. 1240), Rumi (d. 1273), Ibn Taymiya (d. 1328), Sirhindi (d. 1624), al-Afghani (d. 1897) and Abduh (d. 1905).

philosophy has been struck with a horror of the other that remains the logical outcome of this underlying allergy of philosophy.\textsuperscript{75}

Levinas' project is not to repeat the conjuring act of western thought that reduces the other to a replication of itself; he objects to the implicit violence in the process of knowledge that involves an appropriation and sublimation of the other into the self. Moving away from ontology towards ethics, Levinas tries to theorize an "other," an alterity, in all its primacy and irreducibility.\textsuperscript{76} The other emerges, not on the ontological dimension, but in our actual and practical relation with others, entailing an ethical responsibility on our part to the others. In this manner, the other is also the infinite within oneself. This becomes clearer if we look at Levinas' conception of language. Rather than embodying the order of the self-same, language, which is more than a system of logic or representation, enables us to open out to the authority of the infinite other and establish relations with such others. The radical alterity of the other is preserved in language that in a primordial sense is the original communication that all conventional language presupposes.\textsuperscript{77}

Reading "signification in general as infinity—that is, as the existence of alterity," Levinas perceives that it is "the Other speaking in me which enables me to become a self in language; in other words, through language, the Other enables me to have an identity."\textsuperscript{78} In order to escape from the "imperialism of the same," Levinas opposes the notion of freedom—which entails an individual identity that configures the other as threat unless appropriated and neutralized as the self-same—to that of justice—which respects the alterity of the other. Levinas, thus, proposes a notion of ethics, of knowing and understanding the other as other with due respect to it. However, given the trajectory of Islam, I would argue that the self and the other cannot mos\textsuperscript{---}


often maintain a dialogue, and even if they manage to do so, the terms of the dialogue would be loaded in favour of the white western male. Hence, a more appropriate root to trace would be the deployment of the other in the colonial context.

Homi Bhabha's foreword to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* adds a further dimension to the debate. Retrieving Fanon from the Sartrean frame, Bhabha celebrates the new horizon opened up by Fanon's use of Lacan. The latter's psychoanalytic language enables questions of a colonial consciousness and identity—which are made invisible within the framework of class, for example—to be raised with a telling starkness. "The emergence of the human subject as socially and psychologically authenticated depends on the negation of an originary narrative of fulfillment, or of an imaginary coincidence between individual interest or instinct and General Will." "Forms of social and psychic alienation and aggression—madness, self-hate, treason, violence—can never be acknowledged as determinate and constitutive conditions of civil authority, or as the ambivalent effects of the social instinct itself. They are explained away as alien presences, occlusions of historical progress, the ultimate misrecognition of Man" (foreword, xiii-xiv). But this myth of social cohesion, of the alignment of self and society, is undermined in the colonial condition. The black, enslaved by his/her inferiority, and the white, enslaved by his/her superiority, enact a Manichaean delirium and behave alike in accordance to a neurotic orientation. Identity is never an a priori, it is ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality, hence, the ever-present desire for the other in order to see, to fix cultural

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81 Homi K. Bhabha, foreword to *Black Skins*, xvii. This foreword is incorporated in "Interrogating Identity: Frantz Fanon and the Postcolonial Prerogative," *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994, 1995) 51; unless mentioned otherwise, all further references are from this text.

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difference in a containable, visible object. "The desire for the Other is doubled by the desire in
language, which splits the difference between Self and Other so that both positions are partial;
neither is sufficient unto itself" (50). Bhabha identifies three conditions that underlie an
understanding of the process of identification in the analytic of desire. Firstly, to exist is to be
called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus. The self becomes visible only in
the space marked by an-other's gaze. This process is visible in the exchange of looks between
the native and the settler that structures their psychic relation in a paranoid fantasy of possession.
Secondly, the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space
of splitting. The slave desires to occupy the place of the master, but wants to retain his/her own
place, giving a sense of being in two places at once, not wanting to abandon this, not able to be
that, be there: black skin, white masks. Thirdly, the question of identification is never the
affirmation of a pre-given identity; it is always the production of an image of identity and the
transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The black views the white as an-other, and
defines him/herself in opposition to it, identifying with this other image. The discursive
conditions of an imaged identity become clearer when we analyze the constitution of the image
itself. The image makes present something that is absent; it is a repetition, "a metaphorical
substitution, an illusion of a presence, and by that same token a metonym, a sign of its absence
and loss" (51). "Identification, as it is spoken in the desire of the Other, is always a question of
interpretation, for it is the elusive assignation of myself with a one-self, the elision of person and
place" (52).
The theoretical frameworks outlined hitherto posit the other as “actualized in real characters, variable subjects,” but the question of Islam in India remains outside its ambit because whereas the colonial other per se can in turn reverse the equation, Islam is in the position of being the absolute other of the colonial-modern self and the normative other of the native-national self. The points of resistance or recuperation are impossible exercises from such a position as is evident when we consider the example of Syed Ahmad Khan which seems to fit Bhabha’s notion of the colonial other. The discourse of the other, Bhabha writes, produces ambivalence in colonial and colonizing subjects because of an inner dissension within colonial discourse which is structured according to the conflictual economy of the psyche. Consider the phenomenon of mimicry. In the face of the imposition “turn white or disappear” a section of the colonized peoples construct a stereotype that will be recognizably the same as the colonizer. This is not wholly a reassuring experience, either for the colonized or for the colonizer, for mimicry is at once resemblance and menace. The mimic man is only a partial representation of the colonizer, white but not quite. This grotesquely displaced image of himself, the familiar transported to distant parts, uncannily transformed, disrupts and subverts the identity of that which is being represented. The gaze, the “surveillance returns on the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and the ‘partial’ representation

83 I draw upon David Lelyveld’s description in Aligarh’s First Generation: Muslim Solidarity in British India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978; New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-6 for the following: In the aftermath of the 1857 rebellion which shattered the Muslim communities in India, the fifty-two year old, royalist Syed Ahmad Khan traveled to London in 1869 in order to “prepare a refutation of British attacks on the history of Islam by using the wide range of sources available to his adversaries” (3). However, going over The People of India, a publication of the India Office, and making sense of the English descriptions by the help of his sons, he was shocked to find “photographs of nearly naked men or people in unfamiliar dress” (6). One of the later volumes depicts an Aligarh District landholder who is described as having “features [that] are peculiarly Mahomedan, of the centralasian [sic] type; and while they vouch for the purity of his descent, exemplify in a strong manner the obstinacy, sensuality, ignorance, and bigotry of his class. It is hardly possible, perhaps, to conceive features more essentially repulsive” (6; Lelyveld cites the latter description from J Forbes Watson and John Wilson Kaye, eds. The People of India, III, no. 139 [London: India Museum, 1868-1875]).
rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence" (89). “What is particularly interesting about the description,” writes Robert Young, “is the way in which the whole question of agency gets moved from a fixed point into a process of circulation: the colonizer performs certain strategies in order to maintain power, but the ambivalence that accompanies the attempt to fix the colonized as an object of knowledge means that the relation of power becomes much more equivocal. Mimicry at once produces power and enables the loss of agency.” Thus, the colonized becomes the agent of menace, resulting in paranoia on the part of the colonizer and the site of colonial identity becomes a site of fixity as well as fantasy, discernible even in the colonial discourse of power. However, though the Muslim might have become an agent of menace in both colonialist and nationalist discourses, Syed Ahmad Khan’s experience was not one of power without agency. Given the special place reserved for Islam vis-à-vis the crusades and the erstwhile Mughal rulers, it is not surprising that Syed Ahmad Khan returned to India with a redoubled determination to distance his community from the other natives by bringing them to modernity. Though his “trip to England [may have been] above all an effort to see himself and the people with whom he identified through an outsider’s perspective,” an outsider who “was rich and powerful, and had by now virtually unassailable political dominance over his homeland” (Lelyveld, 9), his response was not just to return to India and re-construct or resurrect an Indian Islamic identity. What Syed Ahmad Khan set out to do was to initiate concrete and concerted moves to bring Islam into modernity, moves which exceed categorization as mimicry. Drawing on Islamic thought and heritage, he could postulate an engagement with modernity on terms other than those of the European modern. Other Muslim leaders, especially Mohamed Ali, also set out a critique, which rather than postulating Islam as inferior or inimical to modernity, showed the ability of Islam to modernize its

85 Robert Young White Mythologies, 147.
institutions without relegating religion to the private world of a self. Such a critique also articulates a different conception of religion as not something to be hidden away, but as a factor determining one’s identity. Herein lies the crucial difference between Syed Ahmad Khan, the Ali brothers and Jinnah’s initiative on the one hand and the Gandhian take on modernity on the other. However, nationalist politics in India was by then keying up for the construction and circulation of a demonic figure of Islam. Caught between the Hindu-Muslim-Dalit communitarian initiatives and within the notion of community that was a “backward-looking petty-bourgeois utopia” and pulled by the inherent inconsistency of nationalist engagement with modernity, the Gandhian initiative yielded contradictory results. One such project was Gandhi’s persistence with the mass campaign that was tied in with the Khilafat struggle, despite criticism from various sources. One of the most significant events of the Khilafat movement is the 1921 Malabar uprising that, I argue, formed a watershed in Indian history. While different castes and communities were brought into nationalist politics by the multiprongs of the Khilafat initiative, Non-cooperation agenda, removal of untouchability and cow protection, after the Malabar rebellion, Gandhi was shocked by the mass “violence” he had helped unleash. Another significant event in this series of mass violence is the Chauri Chaura attack on a police station. Both these events rupture the narrative of Indian nationalism and bring into relief the other side of mass mobilization. Gandhi, to the chagrin of almost all other leaders, called off the Non-cooperation movement immediately after the Chauri Chaura event. It is my contention that the Malabar Mappila rebellion played a decisive role in determining Gandhi’s attitude to the Muslim

86 Partha Chatterjee, Nationalist Thought, 98.
87 See, Shahid Amin, Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994) for an analysis of the historiographical amnesia associated with the killing of 23 policemen as well as its transformation into a trope of peasant violence.
88 The importance accorded to General Dyer’s order to fire at an unarmed crowd on 13 April 1919—the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in which 379 people were killed, as per the government estimate—in the nationalist narrative and textbook history is ironic. Most often the nationalist textbook narratives of history, if at all, refer only to the Wagon tragedy (death due to suffocation of 67 of the 100 Mappila prisoners sent from Tanur to Coimbatore in a wagon

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demands for communal representation. Thereafter, especially after the Nehru report and Hindu nationalist fear of Muslim communalism, the two nation option was the only one remaining in the horizon of possibilities for Hindu as well as Muslim leaders, nationalist or otherwise. The 1921 rebellion and the various widespread riots that followed it determined the course history was to take. With the formation of Pakistan and the violence associated with it in popular perception—reinforced by historical narratives of partition as a loss or betrayal—“Muslims” in India came to be emblematic of an excess within the state. This prejudice against Muslims is strengthened by accounts which construct them as invaders; the “true” history in this version rules out any possibility of recounting a shared past and ends by questioning their patriotism. Arriving on the scene of history at such a juncture, the options for a Muslim are very limited. There is an urgent need for serious attempts by Muslims themselves to critically engage with Islam and with the interplay of various forces in the transition of several societies to Islam in various regions of the subcontinent. The question of Islam and the questions raised by Islam are increasingly becoming important today at the national as well as the international level. This positional vitality—which Islam shares with postcolonial perspectives of gender, caste, race and class—would be best put to use if the force of its critique is centrifugal as well as centripetal.

However, it has become virtually impossible for a Muslim to engage with Islam, given the space s/he occupies within the community and the space that that community occupies in the larger context of Indian nationalist aspirations. Faisal Fathehali Devji has drawn attention to the plight of the Muslim in India who, he notes, “represents a fundamental anxiety of nationalism”

which had no ventilation). The brutal figures of 10,000 dead, 50,000 imprisoned, 20,000 exiled and 10,000 missing, the toll of the 1921 Malabar rebellion as per unofficial estimate, is never mentioned.

99 The official number of riots in the 1921-1931 decade is 39; cited by Gyanendra Pandey, Construction of Communalism, 234, from Cawnpore Riots Enquiry Committee Report (1931) reprinted in NG Barrier, Roots of Communal Politics (Delhi, 1976) 228.

90 Faisal Fathehali Devji, “Hindu/Muslim/Indian,” Public Culture 5.1 (Fall 1992) 1-25.
itself: of the nation as something unachieved” (1). Two things follow from this: one, all problems which threaten the nation get mapped on or displaced to the Muslim, and two, Muslims themselves bear the burden of the communal in their psyche and re-mark themselves as victims and aggressors. Devji remarks that the actual contest that is taking place is between a secular state nationalism and a Hindu nationalism. Hindu nationalism, which is the only forceful form of resistance to the secular state, is interested in the Muslim only because Muslims allow themselves to be used as vote banks by the established parties. Of course, the failure of Muslim parties to form any meaningful strategies of representation is indeed a real problem; perhaps there were no historical/political opportunities for such an opening. This failure could also be a result of the perception on the part of the Muslim leadership that Muslims form a single monolithic entity in India; whereas the truth is that from Mappilas to Meos there exists a wide range of differences within the Muslim. To loop back, Hindu nationalists target Muslims because the latter thwart the formers’ efforts to engage with the secular nation-state. However, by refusing to read the problems underlying its avowed secularism, the secular state refuses to engage with Hindu nationalism and reads communalism as an irrational conflict that it must control if not cure. Thus, Muslims “constitute only the site of struggle between two forms of nationalism” (7). A result of this is that all serious engagement with Islam—something like the scholarly debates of the earlier part of this century between Hindu and Muslim theologians—disappeared absolutely. Now it no longer matters what different Muslim communities in different states perceive of themselves and their predicament; “an essentialized identity is simply imposed” (8) on them. Since the decision made by a large number of Muslim peoples to stay on in India in 1947 was never understood by “Indians” as a rational choice, during wars, and, in a more quotidian manner, during cricket matches, Muslim support for Pakistan cannot be considered a rational choice, since reading such support as a rational choice would entail interpreting this “unpatriotic” act as resistance and as an attempt at self-determination, which
would expose the nation-state as a failure and a lie. Thus, burdened with a deep-seated anxiety of the national form as well as targeted at in the world-historical context, Muslims are increasingly represented as repositories of irrationality and violence, which leads to the creation of a siege mentality that forecloses any attempt at serious and considered engagement with Islam or within Islam.

A way out of such an impasse would be to articulate a deeper and sharper critique of the "modernity at large" that would open out the historic location and specificity of modernity itself. Stressing the inadequacy of modern instruments for such a theoretical analysis, Samir Amin points out that till Renaissance "Europe belonged to a regional tributary system that included Europeans, Christians and Moslems." However, this Mediterranean system that prefigured the capitalist world system shifted its centre toward the shores of the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean region became its periphery. "The new European culture reconstructs itself around a myth that creates an opposition between an alleged European geographical continuity and the world to the south of the Mediterranean" (10-11). Amin shows how both Christianity and Islam successfully carried out a first revolution that allowed both Christianity, initially a religion of popular revolt, and Islam, created on the margins of the civilized Orient, to form the central axis of a rationalist metaphysical construct conforming to the needs of an advanced tributary society. At this time, the "characters" of these religions are so similar that it is indeed difficult to qualify ibn-Rushd as Moslem, Maimonides as Jewish, and Thomas Aquinas as Christian. They are of the same

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92 Ibn-Rushd (Latinized form Averroes; d. 1198), Moses Maimonides (d. 1204), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).
intellectual period, understood one another, critique each other, and learn from one another wholeheartedly. (134)

However, unlike Islam, Christianity carried out a second, bourgeois revolution⁹³ that effected a gradual consolidation of what can be termed the modern thought, as opposed to a medieval thought of metaphysical preoccupation, and whose universalizing impulses forced it to construct a pure and perennial spatio-temporal chart of itself. An offshoot of this separation of church and state apparatuses, whereby rules other than religious ones govern our social lives, was the autonomy of the civil society. “The concept of autonomous political life and thus of modern democracy and the concept of social science result from this autonomy of civil society” (81). A direct consequence of this autonomous field of civil society is the secularist agenda whereby “entire areas of social life are henceforth conceivable independently of one another” (82).

However, capitalism as a potential world system, capable of universal dissemination, emerged after there was a “consciousness of its conquering power” (73) that was to lead to colonialism and unequal development of capitalism (113). “The subsequent unfolding of the history of capitalist conquest of the world showed that this conquest was not going to bring about a homogenization of the societies of the planet on the basis of the European world” (75). Rather, this conquest progressively created a growing polarization that reveals the internal “contradiction [which is] insurmountable within the framework of the capitalist system” (75). Apart from attempting to hide its own machination and draw attention away from its mode of production,

⁹³ The first cultural revolutions were that of reconciling Hellenistic scholasticism with the newly emergent of faiths (41-43). According to Samir Amin, the greater part of Europe was located at the periphery of the Mediterranean tributary system that called for an ideology, secular in its initial formulation but later on made sacred, for justifying itself in terms of universalism. This periphery became the centre later on because “peripheral tributary societies experienced less difficulty than central tributary societies in advancing in the capitalist direction” (9). For a discussion on the implications of Amin in terms of the Asiatic mode of production, see, Gayatri C Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1999) 86-111.
accumulation and expansion,\textsuperscript{94} and the construction of an internalized technology of control, capitalist-secularist thought also instituted "a revolution in the interpretation of religion" (8) whereby its own essentialization and supposed exclusion of religion makes it impose essentialities on the other religions that it encounters. As Gauri Viswanathan\textsuperscript{95} has argued, modern secularism reduces religion to a mode of social organization that is prior to the emergence of the nation (preface, xii). Reduced to being a pre-modern entity in a nation run under the auspices of a supposedly secular state, religion continues to be an unassimilable and resistant marker of political difference. Secularization in the colonies remains a flawed project . . . because of the absence of an emancipatory logic that steers a once monolithic religious culture into the gradual absorption of pluralized groups into the nation state. Secularization in India has always been a fraught process driven by unresolvable tensions, due partly to the fact that parliamentary reform, which enabled religious minorities in England to be absorbed as citizens, failed to perform a comparable function in India [where] state formation is basically incorporation of subjects into a colonial state and, following national independence, into a hegemonic state in which the social relations sanctioned by colonialism continue virtually uninterrupted. (13)

Such reduction of religion has resulted in theorizations which seem to follow either Marx's notion of religion being the opium of the people or "Freud's assessment of religion as equivalent...\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{94} Samir Amin comments: Its "tendency towards standardization collides with the limits imposed by unequal accumulation. This unequal accumulation accelerates tendencies toward homogenization at the center, while it practically destroys them for the great mass of people at the periphery, who are unable to gain access to the modern mode of consumption... Actually existing capitalism has therefore become a handicap to the progress of the forces of production on the world scale, for the mode of accumulation that it imposes on the periphery excludes the possibility of the periphery 'catching up'" (139).

\textsuperscript{95} Gauri Viswanathan, \textit{Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief} (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
to the stage of childhood in historical development, ‘to be outgrown in a civilizing adolescence.’\(^9\)\(^6\) Hence, as Susan Harding\(^9\)\(^7\) has argued, “[i]t seems that antiorientalizing tools of cultural criticism are better suited for some ‘others’ and not other ‘others’—specifically, for cultural ‘others’ constituted by discourses of race/sex/class/ethnicity/colonialism but not religion” (cited by Viswanathan, preface, xiv). Christianity, delegated to the private sphere in western modernity, is henceforth read as a question of personal faith by choice, and this schema cannot “see” the close imbrication of politics and religion as in Islam. Constituted as modernity’s a priori other per se, Islam, its own mediations with the modern being erased, is made to repeat itself as the absolute other of the Indian modern and the Indian nation. Vivek Dhareshwar\(^9\)\(^8\) has pointed out that being a theory-oriented religion, Christianity cannot tolerate the otherness of the other, and is compelled to transform the other practices it encounters into a variation of itself (217).

In this context, one might also turn to Deleuze, who has asserted the need to conceptualize an a priori other as constitutive of the space and time of identity before conceptualizing the concrete other. This other, a priori or otherwise, necessitates a readjustment, a realization of a possible world whose expression the other is, in the quality of our world.\(^9\)\(^9\) According to Deleuze, the other is neither an object in the field of my perception nor a subject for whom I become an object. The other is initially a structure of the perceptual field, without which the entire field could not function as it does. The a priori other as structure is the expression of a possible world.

\(^9\)\(^6\) Gauri Viswanathan, preface, xii; citing David Lawton, Blasphemy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 144.
\(^9\)\(^9\) This is different from the formulation of Levinas that posits an absolute other that needs to be known and represented.
The expressed possible world can really exist, but in the structure it exists because of the expression and has no existence outside of that which expresses it. My frightened face, for example, indicates/implicates something that frightened it, but that which frightened me exists in the field only as the reason and result of my frightened face. In the field of perception the other is not one structure among others, it is the structure, which conditions the entire field. "It is not the ego," writes Deleuze, "but the Other as structure which renders perception possible" (61).

The fundamental effect of the structure-other is to make a distinction between one's consciousness and its object. But the appearance of the other—of possible worlds—tips one's consciousness into an "I was." In the presence of the possible world of the other, one's consciousness coincides only with a past world. "If the Other is a possible world, I am a past world" (61). The other as structure conditions/constitutes the space of perception and creates a temporal distinction between consciousness and its object.

In the Other's absence, consciousness and its object are one. There is no longer any possibility of error, not only because of the Other is no longer there to be tribunal of all reality—to debate, falsify, or verify that which I think I see; but also because, lacking in its structure, it allows consciousness to cling to, and to coincide with, the object in an eternal present. (62)

In the absence of the other, consciousness, rather than being the light cast upon objects, becomes a pure phosphorescence of things in themselves, and an ethereal double of each thing detaches from things and appears in this light. But this absence of the other, the dissolution of its structure, disorganizes the world, disrupts the perspective, disorients the self and results (as Deleuze remarks is the case with Crusoe who construes Friday not as an other, but as wholly other) in perversion. The other is the grand leveller (63), the structure-other precedes the look, the look only marks the moment at which someone happens to fill the structure (fn. 2, 265).
Islam. I suggest, can be perceived as an absolute a priori other of modernity whose acknowledgement would render modernity opaque. From such a perspective, it is possible to postulate a critical position for Islam, especially in India, and not merely in terms of a minoritization. The Muslim in India is more than a minority who needs to be protected by the nation-state; s/he is also the a priori other of the modern national-secular in that it is the clearing of Islam that made Indian nationalism arrive at a nation-statehood in the first place. As Aamir Mufti as argued, "[t]he problematic of Muslim identity in colonial India exceeded the categories within which nationalism sought to contain it. . . . this excess had been excised. Before ‘Muslim’ could become ‘minority,’ the majority of the Muslims of India had to be turned into non-Indians" (117-118). It is in this context that I argue that a Muslim in India is a rem(a)inder of certain historical processes, a leftover from the partition of the Indian subcontinent to form the nation states of India and Pakistan. That is one of the reasons why the choice of a vast number of Muslims to stay in India is yet to be understood as a rational political choice. This choice of India by Muslims, amounting to about 12 percent of India’s current population, is hardly given serious consideration and is retained as another instance, reinforcing


101 Aamir Mufti goes on to add: “The task of critical scholarship is to make possible a conceptual framework for a rethinking of ‘India’ in which ‘Muslim’ does not function as the name of minority. The obverse of this critical imperative is that Pakistan itself has to be scrupulously recognized, in the Saidian sense of that word, as an Indian—and not simply South Asian—polity and society. (This is a matter of more than mere terminology. Or, rather, it is entirely a question of terminology, and, in this case at least, terminology is everything. For it is precisely in the language of geopolitics and regionalism that the nation-state seeks to normalize the Partition of 1947, translating the religio-communal conflict of colonial India into the ‘secular’ and hence acceptable antagonism of mutually hostile nation-states.) No attempt to think critically about and beyond the present impasse can bypass a genealogy of postcolonial citizenship” (118-119).

102 In 1947, an estimated 40 percent of the total Muslims in the Indian subcontinent chose to remain in India. It should be remembered that it was the Muslim leadership in the minority provinces that felt insecure and asked for a majoritarian state, while the Muslims in majoritarian provinces were happy to continue where they were. Also, this is all the more serious since this decision should be considered in the light of developments which saw talk of a secular Pakistan giving way to the idea of an Islamic Pakistan. Another separate secular state had no real rationale behind it and only made everybody uneasy, since it exposed the political (and personal) power struggle at work, shaping the nature of the subcontinent’s future freedom.
the national imaginary, of an emotional response by an irrational community. A Muslim in India is hence a “leftover” as well as “excess,” a residual presence and a repository of irrationality in the body politic of the Indian nation, and is thus perceived and narrativized. In the perception of the Indian nationalists, what constitutes the nation is hence an identity, “Indianness,” and the difference was exorcised in the form of a different nation where different people chose to go. What was elided in the process of nation building by a supposedly secular state becomes clearer now: the notion of difference. This explains to a large extent the particular form taken by the Hindu right parties and the speed and spread of the Hindutva forces; for being, as perceived by some, the only powerful political counter power in India to the weakened (because it is a) secular state, the Hindu right’s critique of the secular state attacks its inherent contradictions. The fact that communities are caught in the crossfire seems to be of not much consequence to the parties. This repression of difference continues to haunt the nation and returns in the form of communal violence or riots. Hence, what I argue for is an urgent agenda to redefine the nation in terms of a difference which should be seen as constitutive of the nation form, and by this I do not mean that the identities of a Muslim and a Hindu should be further pulled apart to polarize the nation, but that they should both be pressurized to redefine themselves in the light of an understanding of the self/other/other’s other problematic at work in our socio-cultural preconceptions and pre-occupations. My contention is that Muslims are critical subjects because of the particular nature of their, historically determined, self-identity, and it is absolutely essential for us to pay attention to and “hear” such subjects, from Syed Ahmad Khan to Syed Alam Khundmiri, as have been successful in traversing this conflictual terrain; those, who in translating themselves successfully to and fro between different imperatives, in being able to

103 According to the 1981 census, Muslims constitute 11.4 percent (75.5 million) of the Indian population. For more details, see, Myron Weiner, “India's Minorities: Who Are They? What Do They Want?” in State and Politics in India, ed. Partha Chatterjee (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997) 459-495.
articulate a critique from Islam as well as of Islam, retain a double-edgedness peculiar to their situation.

A Muslim in India, I argue, has hence to reconstitute him/herself as a critical subject.\textsuperscript{104} However, this does not mean that there is only one position, one slot, for this subject to occupy. Nor does it mean that each of these positions is without internal conflicts. A Muslim is a critical subject not by virtue of his/her religious concerns but because of the burden of colonial and nationalist policies and practices, that is, as the result of political and historical circumstances. However, for this critical subject to assume a critical function what is required is for it to acquire a Janus-face: one face which constantly probes and prods the hegemony of the national self-hood, and the other which critically engages with its own constituted otherness. But what thwarts this process is, I feel, the historical contingencies in and through which Islam evolved in India. A political perspective that re-opens the singular trajectory of our nation by engaging with various socio-cultural and political factors played out in local historic specific contexts, I hope, will help us come to terms with the problems besetting us. Such a take on the history of the subcontinent will enable Muslims to reconstitute themselves as critical subjects fulfilling a critical function for the nation. It will force “us” out of the siege mentality that predetermines “our” thoughts and actions and help demolish the monolithic image of a monstrous community that has been at the international as well as national level imposed upon “us.”

\textsuperscript{104} I borrow this phrase from Lyotard, despite his decree that in the postmodern condition the critical subject is henceforth an improbable function; see, Jean-Francois Lyotard, \textit{The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge}, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) 13. A “critical subject” would be one whose subject position works against the grain of grand hegemonizing narratives. Women, post- or neo-colonial peoples, minorities, Dalits and the subaltern classes would, by virtue of their “location,” be critical subjects.