The Setting

The face of the two-year-old girl has come to occupy a permanent corner of my mind. Every now and again it rises to the surface of my consciousness. Some of these occasions are predictable. There is little mystery when the disfigured face flashes across an inner screen while I am reading about, or seeing on television, episodes of violence between racial, religious, or language groups in different parts of the world. I can also understand, even as I resent, the little girl demanding attention whenever people talk of Hyderabad, whether they are praising its old-world charm and the deliciousness of its cuisine or lamenting its lost feudal glories. The connection of the face with other contexts is more obscure. Why does it suddenly bob up when a man in therapy is telling me of a painful encounter with his boss at work or a female patient weeps as she recalls memories of her humiliation at the hands of an elder sister? I know I will have to go through a long chain of associations to lift this veil of obscurity. I am rarely in the mood to make this effort since the girl is not a welcome tenant. She is a squatter.

I first saw the face in a newspaper photograph accompanying a report on the Hindu–Muslim riots in Hyderabad in December 1990. When I finally began this study in the following year, I encountered this particular photograph again and again in newspaper and magazine clippings. It had become the dominant image of that particular carnage. I do not know whether the girl is a Hindu or a Muslim, although a Telugu paper, championing the Hindu cause, identifies her as a Hindu. What you see in the photograph is the unkempt hair, matted with dust, of a child from the slums and then, shockingly, the deep gash of the scythe across the top of her face. The

wound, not yet healed into a scar, starts at the right temple, cleaves the corner of the eyeballs and the bridge of a rather flat nose, to peter out in the sands of the left cheek. The stitches are not the careful job of a well-paid professional. They bespeak a harried resident doctor trying to cope with an overflow of the wounded and the dying in the emergency room of a run-down government hospital. The stitches are uneven crosses across the face, hasty scrawls of someone anxious to get over with a silly game of noughts and crosses. One arm of the girl is around a cushion, seeking comfort without finding it. The right side of the face and the injured eye rests against the edge of the cushion as she looks out through the left eye at the camera, the world, and, if I am not careful, at me.

There is an unfathomable numbness in her expression, the aftermath of a cataclysm that has shaken the little body and soul to a depth unimaginable for me. I try to look through the child's eyes at what must have appeared as a phalanx of giants, with black strips of cloth covering the lower halves of their faces, come crashing through the splintered front door. She sees one of the men raise an axe and club her father down, the sharp edge of the weapon catching him in the back of his neck as he turns and tries to flee. She sees him disappear as he falls, and the men close in with knives, scythes, and wooden clubs. She sees her mother standing transfixed and then hears her make a sound between a sharp cough and a scream as a spear slices through the base of her throat. The girl takes a step toward her mother when the scythe is swung. There is a burning pain beyond all her experience of pain. Blood streams into the eye and, then, oblivion.

I imagine, in that particular moment when her consciousness began the distinctive spiral which ends in the loss of all accustomed moorings, that the universe revealed its secret to the little girl. She caught a glimpse of the immeasurably vast stretch of indifference surrounding the pinpoint of light we call a human life and from whose odds and ends—birth, death, bodily functions, sexual feelings, relationships with parents, siblings, children—we desperately keep on trying to construct a meaning.

I shake my head to free myself of these fantasies and again turn to the photograph of the child with a stony face and one uncomprehending eye. I

am aware that my flight of imagination is a failure rather than a success of empathy. The sheer magnitude of the violence done to her is too oppressive for me to employ that crucial tool of my trade, without which no psychoanalyst can grasp and make sense of what is going on within another person. Perhaps this is so because the child is so patently a victim. She is pathetic because she has been flattened by fate. Empathy requires its addressee to be tragic, someone who has helped to bring fate upon herself and was thus fate's active even if unwitting collaborator rather than its passive victim. Tragedy at least preserves a memory of one's agency and therefore holds out the hope of its eventual recovery. The unmitigated passivity of pathos, on the other hand, is a dead weight that tugs down at the spirit of everyone who comes in its contact. I cannot empathize with the child because I must defend myself against her pathos. It is far easier for me to pity her. Pity is distant. The girl's face, then, is not haunting but nagging, like a child beggar or a leper with his insidious whine, evoking an angry guilt that will not let you shout at the wretch, 'Disappear! Die!'

At the outset, then, I am apprehensive whether I will be able to bring the essence of psychoanalytic sensibility to bear upon my conversations with the victims of the riots, as well as to my interviews with the agents of violence, the men who stab, bludgeon, and burn. It is not enough for me to take up the clinician's stance and, for instance, speculate upon the little girl's eventual fate: namely, if she survives the poverty and the neglect of a disfigured orphan (who is a female to boot) and grows up into an adult, she will become fearful of expressing any anger, will be easily startled by any physical surprise, and will have incomprehensible impulses to injure herself. I want to do more but am afraid that I will do much less as I leave my accustomed clinical moorings to enter the world of social violence with nothing more than what is called a psychoanalytic sensibility.

The core of the analyst's sensibility does not lie in clinical expertise or in a specific way of observing and interpreting people's words and actions. It does not even lie in a perhaps easier acceptance of the gulf between people's ideals and their behaviour, in the analyst's greater difficulty in summoning up righteous indignation or his reluctance to carry out a lover's quarrel with the

world. The core is empathy. Empathy is the bridge between the serene reserve of the clinician striving for objectivity and the vital, passionate and vulnerable person who inhabits the clinician's body. Empathy makes me, as an analyst or scholar, step out of the anonymity of an impersonal enterprise and constantly recognize myself in it as a human being of flesh and blood. Without its vital presence, I fear that the creative tension between objectivity and impassioned involvement, between the stoic and the emotionally responsive perspectives, will be lost.

Shifting Perspectives

I began this study with a description of the reactions evoked in me by the little victim of the Hyderabad riot in the conviction that not only the observer but also his state of consciousness belongs to the description of the phenomenon he seeks to describe and understand. The father, with his new Polaroid camera, photographs the child. As he holds up the print, the child is first pleased and then puzzled.'But, Father,' the child asks, 'where are *you* in the picture?' The father could at least have extended a leg to get his foot into a corner of the photograph.

Whereas quantum physicists realized the importance of the interaction of subject and object in the comprehension of reality—'We cannot describe the world as if we did not belong to it,' was the credo of the pioneers[1]—this recognition has not generally taken place in the social sciences. Most social scientists have continued to exclude their own subjectivity from descriptions of psychological and social reality. They have not felt the need for putting imaginative flesh on academic bones. Subjectivity has been regarded as irrational. At best, it is irrational not in the sense of being against reason or constituting the not-understood but of being outside reason.

Perhaps the social scientists were unwittingly forced to choose a more convenient strategy when they kept the subject strictly separate from the object, since an attempt to grasp a more holistic world, the 'really real', through the inclusion of their own subjectivity would have led to a degree of

complexity which could have bordered on chaos. Psychoanalysts, however, were compelled to abandon this Cartesian stance because of the very nature of their discipline. Whereas in the early years of psychoanalysis, the feelings aroused in the analyst by the patient—countertransference—were thought to contaminate the analyst's objectivity, to be eliminated through a rigorous self-analysis, it was soon realized that the analyst's subjectivity was an essential source of information about the patient. In other words, the analyst understands the patient only in so far as he or she understands the disturbance the patient evokes in himself or herself. As the analyst follows the patient's productions and their effects the analyst must be both an observer and the object of observation. Whether it is the individual patient or large collectivities, we still see with our experiences, hear through our memories, understand with our bodies. In my own account of religious violence, it is these different yet interdependent modes of engaging with the persons and events of this study, the keeping alive of the tension between the immersive and reflective parts of my self, the quest not to let the experiencing self get buried under the agenda of a self that would rather organize and interpret the experience, that I seek to capture in my writing of this book.

The City: 'Unparalleled in the World'

The city of Hyderabad was conceived of as the new capital of the Deccan kingdom of Golconda after the old fortress city a few miles away became congested and unhygienic due to an acute shortage of water.[2] Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah, the founder of the city, named it Bhagnagar after his beloved Hindu mistress, Bhagmati. Officially renamed Hyderabad after her death—Hyder being the title given to her by the king— Bhagnagar continued to retain its popular name. Even a hundred years after its founding in 1589, travellers' accounts continued to refer to Hyderabad by the name of Mohammed Quli's beloved Hindu mistress.

Four hundred and two years old at the time of this writing, Hyderabad was envisaged by its founder to be a city 'unparalleled anywhere in the world and

a replica of heaven on earth'. The benevolent ruler, with artistic sensibilities and literary tastes, who liked to flaunt his sensual excesses in verse, had the good sense to entrust the task of giving his vision a concrete shape to his prime minister, Mir Momin. The minister, who had grown up in the garden city of Isfahan in Persia, planned the new capital on the lines of the city he had loved as a child and brought in architects and builders from Persia to carry out the grand design. Mir Momin's plan favoured a gridiron pattern with two main intersecting roads, each sixty feet wide, which divided the city into four quarters. The northwestern quarter adjacent to the intersection was reserved for the royal palaces and the eastern quarter for the residences of the prime minister and the nobles of the realm.

For the houses of the commoners, twelve main zones, spread over an area of ten square miles, were allocated. Each of these mohallas had schools, hospitals, mosques, inns, and gardens— with vegetable and fruit markets at the periphery—in an effort to make every mohalla self-sufficient. Later, during the short period Hyderabad came under Mughal rule, the construction of a protective wall around the city was started. Completed by Asaf Jah in 1740, the wall had twelve gates which closed nightly at eight and opened at the crack of dawn.

The main roads were lined with fourteen thousand double-storeyed shops, and there were separate areas earmarked for state offices, public buildings, and foreign embassies. The pride of the public buildings were the Jami mosque and the Char Minar ('four minarets')—a square edifice with four broad and lofty arches and a minaret, 220 feet high, at each corner—which has come to symbolize old Hyderabad and the faded glory of its Islamic heritage. Located at the centre of the walled city, at the intersection of the two main highways, it was from Char Minar that the imperial power of the Qutub Shahis emanated outwards.

The French merchant and celebrated traveller Jean-Baptiste Tavernier came to Hyderabad in April 1641, during the reign of Abdulla Qutub Shah, who succeeded his father Mohammed Quli to the throne of Golconda in 1611 and ruled till 1672. Tavernier describes the city thus:

A large river bathes the walls of the town on the south-west side, and flows into the Gulf of Bengal close to Masulipatam. You cross it at Bhagnagar by a grand stone bridge [Purana Pul], which is scarcely less beautiful than the Pont Neuf at Paris. The town is nearly the size of Orleans, well built and well opened out, and there are many fine large streets in it, but not being paved—any more than are those of all other towns of Persia and India—they are full of sand and dust; this is very inconvenient in summer....

When you have crossed the bridge you straightaway enter a wide street which leads to the King's palace. You see on the right hand the houses of some nobles of the court, and four or five *caravan sarais,* having two storeys, where there are large halls and chambers, which are cool. At the end of this street you find a large square, near which stands one of the walls of the palace, and in the middle there is a balcony where the King seats himself when he wishes to give audience to the people. The principal door of the palace is not in this square, but in another close by, and you enter at first into a large court surrounded by porticoes under which the King's guards are stationed. From this court you pass to another of the same construction, around which there are several beautiful apartments, with a terraced roof, upon these, as upon the quarter of the palace where they keep the elephants, there are beautiful gardens, and such large trees, that it is a matter of astonishment how these arches are able to carry such a weight....

On the other side of the town, from whence one goes to Masulipatam, there are two large tanks, each of them being a coss in circuit, upon which are some decorated boats intended for the pleasure of the King, and along the banks many fine houses which belong to the principal officers of the court.[3]

Hyderabad was cast in the mould of other medieval cities of the Islamic world. Imposing public buildings and palaces were to line its main streets. Secondary streets then led to self-contained neighbourhoods or mohallas, with their narrow winding lanes often ending in blind alleys, small open squares, and densely packed low-rise houses with inner courtyards, many of them surprisingly spacious. The city was also Islamic both in population and in its mainstream culture which had roots in Arab, Turkish, and, especially, Persian ways of life. Since the Qutub Shahis were Shias, with strong links with their coreligionists in Iran, a great number of Persians streamed into Hyderabad over the years to seek their fortunes. The most important positions in the administration of the kingdom were held by Persians who had a tremendous impact on the art, architecture, literature, and culture of

Hyderabad for nearly 200 years after its foundation. With the establishment of the Asaf Jahi rule, Persian influence declined a little but nevertheless continued to shape the hyderabadi way of life, at least among the upper classes. Tavernier notes the fair countenance and good stature of its Muslim inhabitants as compared to the dark complexion of the surrounding peasantry, presumably Hindu, who had their assigned, mostly humble, places in the feudal order and whose native Telugu culture existed only at the fringes of the dominant Islamic ethos. In the cultural pecking order, the Persians were right at the top, followed by Turks and other central Asian immigrants. Native-born Indian Muslims felt inferior to both and were keen to establish the existence of Persian or Turkish blood in their lineage, a mind-set which has persisted till very recently. The anthropologist S. C. Dube quotes Hindus in the villages of Shamirpet outside Hyderabad in the 1960s saying: 'A Hindu untouchable of yesterday becomes a Muslim today: and tomorrow he will start proclaiming that his forefathers lived in Arabia!'[4] Because of the Brahminical notions of pollution, the few Hindus who aspired to share the dominant cultural ethos could do so only on a limited basis.

The Perso-Islamic domination of Hyderabad's cultural and social life does not mean that Hindus were excluded from administrative positions and from a share of political power. Talented Brahmins and later the Kayasths could rise to high positions in the court. Another French traveller François Martin, tells us of the heartburn among the Persian, Pathan, and Deccani nobles at the elevation of the Brahmin Madanna, who had become the most powerful minister of the king at the time of his visit.[5] Hindus were to hold high positions in the civil and revenue administration of the state well into the early period of the Asaf Jahi dynasty in the eighteenth century.

As the construction of the new capital gathered pace and the grand design of the city began to unfold, Mohammed Quli could not have imagined that the lowly Hindus would one day threaten its Islamic cultural suzerainty or that the city's decline was already presaged by an insignificant event taking place at the outer edges of his dominions. I refer, of course, to the entry of what would later be called the 'modern West' through the East India

Company, which began setting up a 'factory' in the port city of Masulipatam in 1611.

For almost a hundred years, the city flourished in an approximation of Mohammed Quli's vision. Even making allowances for travellers' hyperbole, Hyderabad seems to have deserved the accolades that came its way as not only a great but also a gracious city, with considerable hedonistic charm. Its Islamic ethos was not of the puritan kind but of the more pleasure-loving Persian variety. Martin gives appetizing details of his dinner on the evening of 28 June 1681 with a Persian noble at Hyderabad's court—in fact, the brother-in-law of the king.[6] The number and quality of the dishes served on this memorable occasion far surpassed the fare of court feasts in Turkey. Every quarter of an hour, at the ringing of a bell, fresh glasses of wine were served. Female dancers entertained the guests and were offered as companions for the night as farewell gifts by a generous host.

Martin's evening, however pleasant for the participants, is not particularly remarkable. Irrespective of the period of history or region of the world, sensual indulgence has been a hallmark of the wealthy and the powerful, of what soap television today calls 'the lifestyles of the rich and the famous'. What is more interesting about Hyderabad is the percolation of hedonism into the lower strata of the city's population and its satisfactory partnership with the ends of commerce as well as the interests of the state. Tavernier, an epicure who loved good food and wine tells us:

> There are so many public women in the town, the suburbs and in the fortress, which is like another town, that it is estimated there are generally more than 20,000 entered in the Darogha's [the Commissioner of Police] register, without which it is not allowed to any woman to ply this trade. In the cool of the evening you see them before the doors of their houses, which are for the most part small huts, and after the night comes they place at the doors a candle or a lighted lamp for a signal. It is then, also, that the shops where they sell *tari* [palm toddy] are opened. The king derives from the tax which he places on this *tari* a very considerable revenue, and it is principally on this account that they allow so many public women, because they are the cause of the consumption of much *tari*.[7]

Another Frenchman, Thevenot, notes the liberty enjoyed by the women of Hyderabad. Their marriage contracts had a clause that the wife would retain complete freedom of movement and could even drink tari if that was her desire!

In 1685, Hyderabad was plundered by the Mughals. Two years later, it was annexed to the Mughal empire by Aurangzeb, but the period of its relative obscurity was brief. In 1725, Nizam ul Mulk, the Mughal's viceroy in the Deccan, made himself virtually independent of his nominal overlord. Hyderabad again became the capital of a dynasty, this time that of the Asaf Jahis ('equal in dignity to Asaf, the minister of King Solomon'), the title given to Nizam ul Mulk by the hapless emperor of a rapidly unravelling Mughal empire.

The threat to the fortunes of the walled city (the walls themselves were demolished in the 1920s to relieve traffic congestion), however, did not arise from the quick changes that were taking place on India's political map during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The impending danger was more from the process of modernization which picked up pace in the wake of the British conquest of India. Although the Nizam's suzerainty over his dominions was spared—he became a subordinate ally of the British in 1798 —the political, economic, and administrative importance of the old city was now fatefully set on a course of slow erosion. With the coming of the railway in 1874 and the establishment of an incipient industrial base through the setting up of railway repair workshops and a textile mill, it was clear, at least in hindsight, that the northern part of the city outside the fortified walls held the key to Hyderabad's future.

The shift northward, across the Musi river, was accelerated by the floods of 1908 and the plague of 1911 which led the Nizam to move his residence and administrative offices out of the walled city to the north of the river. The ruler's example was soon followed by most of his nobility. The final blow to old Hyderabad was, of course, the integration of the state with the republic of India after the country's independence from British rule. This meant not only the dismantling of the Nizam's administrative machinery but also the disappearance of the feudal economic base on which most of the old city's

population had subsisted. In addition, many of the Muslim elite fled out of Hyderabad, mostly to Pakistan. The old city was well on its way to becoming a ghetto. As Ratna Naidu in her sociological study of Hyderabad has observed, 'Deprived of economic opportunities with the dismantling of the feudal structure, and deprived of its elite, who are usually the powerful spokesmen for the enhancement of civic amenities, the walled city as an area languishes in multiple deprivation.'[8] The deprivation is not only material but also psychological and cultural.

Culturally, the history of Hyderabad is witness to a process of ever increasing heterogenization. Although the Hindus were always a part of what was essentially a Muslim city, their native Telugu culture was clearly a subordinate, 'low' culture in the preeminently Islamic scheme of things. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many cultural groups migrated to Hyderabad from other parts of the country and even, as in the case of the Arabs, from as far away as the Middle East. The Arabs, like the Marathas, came to Hyderabad to soldier in the Nizam's army. The trading communities of the Muslim Bohras from Gujarat and the Hindu Marwaris from Rajasthan became prominent in the city's commercial life. Then there were the Kayasths and the Khatris from north India, traditionally the backbone of many an Indian state's administration, who played a similar role in the Nizam's affairs of state. These groups tended to cluster together in separate enclaves where they could follow their own ways of religious and community life. This is not to say that individuals did not leaven their traditional lifestyles with the dominant Perso-Islamic culture. Many (especially the Kayasths, who are well known for their identification with the masters they have so ably served, whether the ruler be British or Muslim) would cultivate an appreciation of Urdu poetry or adopt the sartorial style of sherwani, the long buttoned-up coat with a high round collar and gumi topi, a cousin of the Turkish fez. They would prefer Hyderabad's distinctive cuisine and its gracious modes of public address and speech. Yet, on the whole, the lifestyles of the various groups in the rest of the population—their customs, mores, architectural styles, food habits—remained distinctive. In the seventeenth century, for instance, in the inns set up by the Qutub Shahis for poor

travellers, Muslims received a dole of bread, rice, or vegetables already cooked whereas 'the idolaters, who eat nothing which has been prepared by others, are given flour to make bread and a little butter and as soon as their bread is baked they cover it on both sides with melted butter.'[9] As in the rest of the country, in the medieval period, Hindus and Muslims shared activities and experiences in the public realm 'even though in private they were completely segregated, almost opposed to each other.'[10] In short, it was a multicultural coexistence rather than any merger into a single, composite culture; Hindus and Muslims lived together separately. They were more than strangers, not often enemies, but less than friends.

After Hyderabad's integration with independent India, the heterogenization percolated even into the mohallas as Hindus began to replace the Muslims who had left for Pakistan. Thus from 1951 to 1961, the Muslim population of the old city declined from 69 per cent to 55 per cent while the Hindu population increased from 21 per cent to 40 per cent, a trend which began to be reversed only after the violence between the two communities became endemic. The recurrent bloodletting in the past fifteen years has had the demographic consequence that Muslims from the outlying areas began to flee to the old city as if to a fortress while the Hindu exodus was in the reverse direction. Currently, the Muslim population of the old city is estimated at around 70 per cent.

Contemporary Hyderabad is certainly not a city for those with a partiality for nostalgia. The Musi river is now a stinking sewer without the sewer's saving grace of flowing water which at least keeps the garbage moving. It is but a marshy tract between the old and the new cities, with slime-covered puddles and a sewage-borne creeping, crawling, and buzzing life which, to me, makes Hyderabad the mosquito capital of India. Like the river, there is no longer an old city' of medieval Islam. Leprous beggars asking for alms in the name of Allah are still to be found but the nobles, taking the evening air dressed in flowing muslin robes, are long gone. There are no carriages clattering on the unpaved streets or groups of veiled women, hinting at suppressed laughter and whispered assignations, gliding through the brightly lit bazaars redolent with strong flowery perfumes and the smell of fresh horse

droppings, the shops stocked with choice wares from Persia, Arabia, and the rest of Hindostan.

Today, the old city is barely one step ahead of being a vast ghetto of over a million people, living in settlements, bastís and mohallas, that are homogeneous in their religious and caste compositions. Small houses stacked side by side line winding alleys which are negotiable only by foot or bicycle. Goats, dogs, and chickens, coexisting in the harmony of the chronically hungry, rummage through the refuse littering the open spaces. Unemployed young men stride purposefully through the lanes, even if the purpose is only to buy a cigarette from a corner shop or to impress any hidden female watcher with their purposeful mien. Children play the staple games of the poor—hopscotch for the girls while the boys run after an old bicycle tyre, kept rolling in a wobbly motion as much by their excitement as by the strokes of the stick propelling it forward.

The economic picture of the walled city, described by Naidu, is dismal.[11] The working population is around 30 per cent of the total number of inhabitants. The largest number, about a third, are skilled and semiskilled artisans engaged in the traditional occupations of weaving, pottery, sandal making, and food preparation. About a quarter of the working population earns its livelihood from casual daily wage work, as pushcart vendors of vegetables and fruits, hawkers of trinkets, pullers of rickshaws, scavengers, and other low-prestige occupations such as watchmen and messenger boys in government offices. The fabled earnings of the Muslims who went to work in the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf have brought only minor changes into the lives and the living standards of their families. They have provided only a temporary respite from pervasive economic hardship. The Gulf connection of the Muslims has had more social and cultural rather than economic consequences; for instance, it has resulted in the greater pan-Islamic pride which is visible in the sleek new mosques that have recently been built in the Muslim-dominated areas of the walled city.

The city is poor, but its poverty is more a general unkemptness and disorder than drabness. Economic deprivation has not smothered Hyderabad's vitality or dulled its desire for vivid definition. Even in destitute

mohallas there are startling splashes of colour. Here, only the front door has been painted; there, the wooden shutters of a small window. Green, the colour of the faithful, is the most preferred. It ranges in hue from a bilious green to the freshly planted paddy green of those gleaming new mosques of the last two decades. Occasionally, there is a swathe of sunflower yellow across a house front, but another universal favourite of both the Hindus and the Muslims appears to be a cheap metallic blue, the colour of the sky on glossy religious posters. Hyderabad's bazaars and the houses of its well-to-do citizens favour ornamental wrought iron grills for the shutters of their shops and gates. The work is intricate and distinctive, giving the impression of swirling curlicues and scimitars, of Persian calligraphy cast in iron.

Hindus and Muslims: Versions of the Past

My aim here is not to write a history of Hindu–Muslim relations in Hyderabad during the preceding 300 years. It is both more modest and in some ways more ambitious. It is modest in that I would like to get for myself and convey to the readers a general impression of the way Hindus and Muslims have felt about each other, whenever they have felt as Hindus and Muslims or, in other, more psychological words, whenever overarching religious identities have become salient and dwarfed other group identities through which individuals also experience themselves. It is difficult because historians are of little help in an enterprise which is so contentious and where the interpretation of historical data is so inseparable from the historian's own political aims, ideological commitments, and the strong emotions these commitments often generate. Yet some sense of this past is utterly necessary for my enterprise, considering the myriad reflections in which I was to encounter it in the present. In an ancient country like India, where collective memories reach back thousands of years, cultural psychology can never be as ahistorical as it may be in a young country like the United States. Cultural psychology in India must necessarily include the study of the psychic representations of collective pasts, the way collective memories are

transmitted through generations, and the ways the past is used as a receptacle for projections from the present.

The chief protagonists of the debate on the past of Hindu–Muslim relations which excites so much contemporary passion are the secularist (both Hindu and Muslim) on the one side and the Hindu nationalist on the other, with the Muslim fundamentalist and the Hindu revivalist on the sidelines, trying to inject their particular brand of venom into the proceedings. The debate has momentous consequences, its winner aiming at nothing less than the capture of India's political soul and the chance to shape its destiny in the coming decades.

The secularist faction—framer of India's constitution and politically ascendant since the time of Nehru—comprises most of the Western-educated liberal and leftist intelligentsia and is greatly influential in academia.[12] Hindu and Muslim, the secularist avers, are relatively recent categories in Indian history. Before the late nineteenth century, overarching religious entities and identities such as Hindu and Muslim did not exist. Among the Hindus, there were various sects frequently at odds with each other; nor did Indian Muslims constitute a monolithic Islamic collectivity. The secularist goes on to draw a picture of widespread Hindu–Muslim symbiosis of the precolonial and early colonial periods and the development of a syncretic popular religion, especially at the village level, which borrows elements both from Islamic practice and Hindu ritual while it reveres Muslim saints as much as Hindu holy men.

The secularist view makes a clear-cut distinction between the terms 'religious' and 'communal', the latter is not used in its Anglo-American lexical sense, meaning someone who is altruistic and civic-minded, but in its specifically Indian meaning of one whose exclusive attachment to his or her community is combined with an active hostility against other communities which share its geographical and political space. Whereas religion is seen solely as a matter of personal faith and reverence for a particular set of icons, rituals, and dogmas, communalism is a more collective affair which involves a community's politics and economics as much as its faith. Communalism not only produces an identification with a religious community but also with

its political, economic, social and cultural interests and aspirations. This identification is accompanied by the strong belief that these interests not only diverge from but are in actual conflict with the interests of other communities.

In this view, the precolonial and early colonial period conflicts between Hindus and Muslims were rare. Whenever they occurred, they were essentially religious in nature, that is, the conflicts were over religious symbols such as the route or form taken by a religious procession, issues of control over temples or mosques, and so on. Twentieth-century conflicts, on the other hand, have been initiated by communal ideologies and are basically over clashing economic interests. In the secularist view, even the religious persecution of Hindus by such eighteenth-century monarchs as the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb or, later, by Tipu Sultan in south India, were dictated by reasons of state rather than the communal ideology of any particular ruler. Aurangzeb's discrimination against Hindus and the destruction of their temples is interpreted as an attempt to reformulate the ideological basis of the late Mughal state, while Tipu's attacks on Hindu temples and the Hindu culture of the Kerala Nayars was more a deliberate act of policy rather than of religious fanaticism.[13]

The secularist holds that communalism, and the consequent large-scale violence between Hindus and Muslims, began to spread in the late nineteenth century chiefly because of colonialism.[14] To counter a growing Indian nationalism, he argues, the British followed a 'divide and rule' policy by deliberately strengthening Muslim communalism. The rapid diffusion of nineteenth-century Hindu revivalism and of pan-Islamism in the following century, again the products of Asia's colonial encounter with the imperial West, was another reason for the rise of communalism. Yet another factor was the decline of the syncretic warrior of the eighteenth century, who had been forged in the mixed bands of soldiers, Hindu and Muslim, who served various kings, again Hindu or Muslim, or foraged on their own in the anarchic political conditions which prevailed in India as the Mughal empire unravelled.

The basic fabric of India, though, remains syncretic, a commingling of Islamic influences with Hindu traditions. Hindus and Muslims are not divided along any cultural or social-psychological lines except in the narrow area of personal faith.

The Hindu nationalist argues that a fundamental divide between Hindus and Muslims is a basic fact of Indian history which is ignored by the secularist.[15] The Hindu nationalist would support the contention of the French anthropologist Marc Gaborieau, that Hindus and Muslims found their identity in the deepest sentiments of opposition between the two, sentiments that are traceable throughout the nine centuries of Indo-Muslim history, from the writings of the Arab traveller Al-Beruni in the eleventh century to Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan in the twentieth.[16] The Hindu nationalist is thus in basic agreement with Pakistani historians who too support the 'two nations' theory and label Akbar, the syncretic Mughal monarch who is a hero to the secularist, as an apostate to Islam.

In the Hindu nationalist view, the conflict between Hindus and Muslims is squarely religious, indeed theological. Its roots lie in Islam's exclusive claim to truth and its refusal to grant equal status to Hindu beliefs and doctrines. Islam's division of people into believers and infidels and the world into arenas of peace—*dar-ul-Islam*—and of conflict—*dar-ul-harb*—which led to terrible cruelties against the Hindu infidel's person and religious shrines over hundreds of years, cannot be erased from the Hindu collective memory. Moreover, the Hindu nationalist maintains, the Muslim continues to persist in intolerance, in the belief that all that is outside the Qur'an is an error if not an abomination. The Hindu nationalist avers that secularists seem to direct their arguments and appeals only toward the Hindus since they are firmly rejected by the Muslims who seek identity in their own religious tradition and personal laws even when those go against the very fundamentals of a secular state. The roots of Hindu–Muslim conflict lie in Muslim religious intolerance, Muslim failure to outgrow a medieval bigotry, and the inability to learn, in the absence of guidelines in the Qur'an, how to live in a state which is not Muslim-controlled.

To summarize: the story of Hindu–Muslim relations takes on different hues depending upon the colour of the ideological lenses through which it is viewed. For the liberal historian or one with leftist leanings, the story is bathed in a roseate glow of the precolonial golden age of Hindu–Muslim amity. For these storytellers, the tale is of a commingling and flowering of a composite cultural tradition, especially in art, music, and architecture.[17] It is the story of a gradual drawing closer of Hindus and Muslims in the forms of their daily lives and of an enthusiastic participation in each other's festivals. In this vision, there is little room for conflict between the communities. Sporadic outbreaks of violence needing some explanation are almost never religious in their origin but dictated by local economic interests and political compulsions. To the conservative Hindu nationalist, on the other hand, for whom the Hindu saffron and the Muslim green do not mix to create a pale pink, the rift between the two communities is a fundamental fact of Indian history. They see Hindu–Muslim relations framed by a thousand-year-old 'civilizational' conflict in which the Muslims, militarily victorious and politically ascendant for centuries, tried to impose Islamic civilization on their Hindu subjects through all means, from coercion to bribery and cajolery, and yet had only limited success. The composite civilization, according to this view, was limited to small sections of the population around the Muslim courts and to court-patronized arts like music and architecture. It also included some Hindus who adopted the Persian-inspired language and ways of life of their rulers. The vast majority of Hindus kept their civilizational core intact while they resentfully tolerated the Muslim onslaught. In this view, the outbreaks of violence between the two communities were inevitable whenever Muslim dominance was threatened; the rage of the denigrated Hindu, stored up over long periods of time, had to explode once historical circumstances sanctioned such eruptions.

Between Enemy Lines

To look critically at any aspect of Hindu–Muslim relations today is a task fraught less with difficulty than with trepidation. As political passions run high, a commitment to either the secularist or the Hindu nationalist view is considered almost mandatory. Any critique which is seen as deviating from the one or the other easily invites the epithets of 'cryptofascist' from one side and 'pseudosecularist' from the other. Both 'crypto-' and 'pseudo-' are angry words, the former connoting a base veiling of real intent, the latter alluding to a fake or malicious deception. Yet, as important as it is to stand up and be counted, there is still a place for standing aside and counting, something I intend to do when examining the two different views of the Hindu–Muslim past. For, ideally, the psychoanalyst is essentially an onlooker and commentator on the worlds of love and hate. Still somewhat starry-eyed after so many years in the profession, I see the psychoanalyst standing outside the fray, unmoved by the violent passions that swirl all around: his only intellectual commitment to a questioning that does not seek answers but encourages reflection, his suspicion evoked by ideals excessively noble and ideas particularly *en vogue,* his interest aroused by all that is tabooed. It is comforting for me to remember—to counteract my guilt at not being able to live up to the ideal—that an analyst is also compassionate toward ideals which one falls short of, including his own, since I know my own emotional involvement in the issue will not always allow me the neutrality I may strive for.

Let me begin with the fallacies of the secularist position which, I believe, has underestimated the extent of the historical rift between Hindus and Muslims and has thus invited a backlash to its Panglossian view of the past. In other words, the secularist has tended to downplay the dark side of Hindu–Muslim relations in India. Scholars sympathetic to this viewpoint have pointed out that Hindu–Muslim conflicts are not only a product of the colonial period but also occurred in precolonial times and were often also communal—in the secular understanding of the term—rather than religious.[18]

In the medieval period, even the Sufis, the Islamic mystics who are so often held up as examples of 'composite culture', the syncretic Muslims *par excellence,* had serious limits to their tolerance. In the question of faith they

were unequivocal about the superiority of Islam and the hellish fate in store for the Hindu infidels on judgement day. As Muzaffar Alam puts it: 'Indeed, in relation to Hindus, often it is difficult to distinguish between an orthodox theologian [the obstreperous mullah of Hindu imagination] and a liberal mystic.'[19] Many a Sufi was openly hostile to the religion and social practices of the Hindus, paranoid—even at the zenith of Muslim power—that the Hindus would obliterate Islamic laws, Islam, and the Muslim community if they ever captured political power. Alam summarizes the Muslim side of the Hindu–Muslim equation thus: 'An average literate Muslim believed that Islam and Hinduism belonged to two radically diverse traditions and that the twain would never meet.'[20] To emphasize the sense of separate identities, of the distance between the two communities, even common social practices came to be known as Hinduwani and Musalmani.[21] Thus although Hindu and Muslim identities were not as fixed and continuous over time as the Hindu nationalist believes, neither were these identities absent as claimed by the secularist. In the medieval period, for large sections of people, Hindu and Muslim identities were intermittent rather than continuous, occasionally flowering rather than perpetually in full bloom, evoked whenever religious symbols and sentiments moved to the forefront of conscious concern, which was mostly when they were perceived to be threatened or under actual attack.

The secularist underestimation of the aversion between Hindus and Muslims and the denial of the existence of any kind of collective, cultural identities in the past derives, I believe, from the reliance of many historians and political scientists on objective rather than subjective experiential data, which is more often mined by the anthropologist. To illustrate this, let me take the earlier example of Tipu Sultan, whose destruction of some Hindu temples and persecution of certain Hindu groups are objectively considered as motivated by his suspicion of the loyalty of these groups and of the temple priests' close ties to the Hindu house of Wodiyar which Tipu and his father had replaced. Tipu did not go on any general anti-Hindu rampage and in fact even supported some temples with donations from the state coffers.

There is another, unwritten version of these incidents which has gone into the making of what I would call the 'cultural memory' (a term I prefer to

'collective memory') of many Hindus. Cultural memory is the imaginative basis for a sense of cultural identity. For isn't imagination not a memory of vital moments of life freed from their actual, historical context? Cultural memory, too, is a group's history freed from rootedness in time—it is as much imagination as the actual events that go into its construction. The cultural memory of Tipu's actions (as of Aurangzeb's) has a markedly different flavour from that which one reads in history texts. A very different realm of experience and distinctive emotion is evoked in a believing Hindu who reads or hears about Tipu forcibly circumcising Brahmins and compelling them afterwards to eat cow's flesh as an unequivocal token of their loss of caste. That Hindu shares the indignation of his seventeenth-century compatriots at Tipu's destruction of the temple and their relief when they are finally rid of 'the yoke of this tyrant'.[22] Indeed, it would be odd to expect, as the secularist sometimes seems to do, that such a deeply religious people as the Hindus would have understood the mysterious workings of Tipu's *raison d'état* and not reacted with disgust and horror to what clearly seemed to be a brazen attack on their religious sentiments and cherished symbols of faith.

The ethnographers of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, who were also the cultural psychologists of their eras, are preeminently the European travellers. Generally looking down upon India and its peoples from the heights of European superiority, the travellers are especially contemptuous of the Hindus, who are mostly referred to as idolators or Gentiles, whereas the Muslims, clearly identified as such, are more familiar to the Christian and thus less an object of mystery or scorn. Lacking in any knowledge of the country's religious traditions, the travellers' interest is excited by what appear to them as strange Hindu ceremonies, rituals, and customs—with an emphasis on the temple courtesans, burning of widows, and orgiastic religiosity.

From the travellers, then, we can only get pointers to Hindu–Muslim relations by paying attention to casual observations and throw-away remarks that are adjunct to the European's main interest in describing to countrymen at home the political and economic situation of India and the unfamiliar

manners and mores of its inhabitants. Thus, for instance, we get the following observation from the French traveller, François Bernier, who travelled in the Mughal empire between 1656 and 1668:

> The tenth incarnation (of Vishnu), say the Gentiles will have for its object the emancipation of mankind from the tyranny of the Mahometan, and it will take place at a time when according to our calculation, Anti-Christ is to appear; this is however but a popular tradition, not to be found in their sacred books.[23]

Such scattered remarks, lacking the necessary context, cannot be taken as an accurate description of Hindu–Muslim relations. They do, however, make us doubt the picture of widespread amity, while pointing to the existence of many sullen Hindus resentful of Muslim rule, if not of the 'Mahometans'.

The exception to most other travellers is Abbé Dubois, a French missionary who spent thirty years (1792–1823) in the south of India. As a man of the cloth, the Abbé is naturally convinced of the superiority of his faith over the religions of India. Yet he also displays a compassionate understanding for the customs of the people he observed so closely for so long. Most of the time he is remarkably fair. Abbé Dubois is a natural ethnographer, with a stance toward his 'fieldwork' which would meet the approval of any graduate school of anthropology.

At first glance, Dubois's work seems to support the secularist contention that the conflict between the Hindu and Muslim was not communal but religious, no different from the quarrels between various Hindu sects. And indeed it is true that religious strife is as Indian as mango pickle. Yet when we compare the internecine strife of Hindu sects with the violence between Hindus and Muslims, the difference between the two is obvious. Here, for instance, is the Abbé's description of a 'riot' he observed between the followers of Vishnu and those of Shiva:

> According to Vishnavites it is the height of all abomination to wear the lingam [the sign of Shiva]. According to their antagonists whoever is decorated with the *namam* [the sign of Vishnu] will be tormented in hell by a sort of fork similar in form to this emblem. These mutual recriminations often end in violent

altercations and riots. The numerous bands of religious mendicants of both sects are specially apt to provoke strife. One may sometimes see these fanatics collected together in crowds to support their opinion of the super-excellence of their respective doctrines. They will overwhelm each other with torrents of abuse and obscene insults, and pour forth blasphemies and imprecations, on one side against Shiva, on the other Vishnu; and finally they will come to blows. Fortunately blood is seldom shed on these battle fields. They content themselves with dealing each other buffets with their fists, knocking off each other's turbans, and much tearing of garments. Having thus given vent to their feelings, the combatants separate by mutual consent.

That these religious dissensions do not set the whole country ablaze, occasion those crimes of all kinds which were for centuries the result of religious fanaticism in Europe and elsewhere, is due no doubt to the naturally mild and timid character of the Hindus, and especially to the fact that the greater number compound with their consciences and pay equal honour to Visnu and Siva. Being thus free from any bias towards either party, the latter serve as arbitrators in these religious combats and often check incipient quarrels.[24]

The description of this riot reveals a ritualized, gamelike quality which combines passion with restraint. It is a ritualization of antagonisms, what Erik Erikson called 'a creative formalization' which helps to avoid both impulsive excess and compulsive self-restrictions.[25] The Vaishnavites and the Shaivites engage each other in both interplay and combat, practising 'a form of war which can occur only among those who are at peace.' In contrast, the Hindu–Muslim conflicts have no such playlike quality, pervaded as they are by deathly intent, with the burning down of houses, demolition of temples, mosques, and shrines.[26] Their vocabulary is of mortal enmity, victory, and defeat, a combat that must lead to humiliation and grievous wounds to the collective self of one group or the other.

I have already mentioned that the Hindu nationalist may well be overestimating (in contrast to the secularist underestimation) the existence and strength of overarching Hindu and Muslim religious identities in India's precolonial past. The Hindu nationalist is, I believe, also overestimating the role of doctrinal differences between Islam and Hindu beliefs for the difficulties in the relations between the two communities. To me the Hindu–Muslim rift appears as much the consequence of a collision between two

collective narcissisms, between two equally grandiose group selves, each convinced of its civilizational superiority, as of differences in matters of faith. Abbé Dubois brings out clearly the injuries to group narcissism, the wounds to collective vanity sustained in the Hindu–Muslim encounter:

> The Brahmins in particular cherish an undying hatred against the Mahomedans. The reason for this is that the latter think so lightly of the pretensions of these so-called gods of earth; and, above all, the Mahomedans do not scruple to display hearty contempt for their ceremonies and customs generally. Besides, the haughty Mussulmans can vie with them in pride and insolence. Yet there is this difference: the arrogance of a Mussulman is based only on the political authority with which he is invested, or on the eminence of the rank he occupies; whereas the Brahmin's superiority is inherent in himself, and it remains intact, no matter what his condition in life may be. Rich or poor, unfortunate or prosperous, he always goes on the principle ingrained in him that he is the most noble, the most excellent, and the most perfect of all created beings, that all the rest of mankind are infinitely beneath him, and that there is nothing in the world so sublime or so admirable as his customs and practices.[27]

The Hindu nationalist may also be overestimating the depth of the Hindu's historical aversion to the Muslim which was perhaps more prevalent in the upper castes where Muslim religious intolerance came up against the Brahminical conviction of Hindu superiority. Dubois remarks:

> But if Brahmins cannot with any justice be accused of intolerance in the matter of religion, the same can certainly not be said in regard to their civil usage and customs. On these points they are utterly unreasonable.... Though they have had to submit to various conquerors who have proved themselves to be their superiors in courage and bravery, yet in spite of this, they have always considered themselves infinitely their superior in the matter of civilization. The Mahomedans, who can tolerate no laws, no customs, and no religion but their own, used every advantage which conquest gave them in a vain attempt to force their religion on the people who had succumbed to them almost without resistance. But these same Hindus, who did not dare to complain when they saw their wives, their children, and everything they held most dear carried off by these fierce conquerors, their country devastated by fire and sword, their temples destroyed, their idols demolished, these same Hindus I say, only displayed some

sparks of energy when it came to changing their customs for those of their oppressors.[28]

What excited Hindu hostility was as much the Muslim assault on his lifestyle as on his idols. As we shall see later, the Hindu's shocked disgust, for example, at the Muslim eating of beef, then as now, is a far more potent factor in Hindu–Muslim relations than Islam's reputed intolerance.

The Hindu nationalist, I believe, also overemphasizes the impact of ten centuries of Muslim domination. The explanation for the Hindu's negative sentiments toward the Muslim as lying in a subjugated people's 'natural' resentment is not wholly convincing if we remember that such aversion was negligible in the case of the British. In spite of the fact that the raj was economically exploitative, funneling wealth out of the country, whereas during the Muslim rule wealth stayed within, the latter evokes a hostility not due to the former. Political subjugation and economic exploitation, it seems, played less of a role in determining the Hindu reaction because the Hindu collective identity, however nebulous, was crystallized around shared religious symbols rather than based on political or economic structures. Muslims were perceived to be outragers of Hindu religious sentiment and mockers of their faith whereas the British were, at worst, indifferent. Granted that the British too ate beef—a practice deeply repugnant to most Hindus— but they were too few and carried out their private lives holed up in bungalows and barracks which were shielded from public scrutiny by high walls and thick hedges. In contrast, the Muslim lived cheek by jowl with the Hindu. This proximity created the potential for the emergence of new cultural and social forms but also occasioned simmering resentment and nagging friction. The British beef-eater was remote, almost abstract. The Muslim butcher in his blood-flecked undervest and lungi, wielding a huge carving knife, was a very visible part of a town's life, a figure of awe and dread for the Hindu child and of a fear-tinged repulsion for the adult. The Englishman remained a stranger, the Muslim became the Other.

Looking at the Hindu–Muslim encounter as decisively coloured by the facts of dominance and subordination, by aggression and resistance, by the

zero-sum game of winners and losers, the Hindu nationalist pays homage to the influential paradigm in contemporary historical, anthropological, and political science writing which considers power as the main axis around which all relations between groups are structured. The impressive work that has resulted through the emphasis on power, especially on the inequality of colonial and imperial relations, has been invaluable. But as Raymond Grew points out, this very emphasis also tends to obscure and often ideologize the processes of assimilation, transformation, reassertion, and recreation, which too are inherent in all cultural encounters.[29] The Hindu–Muslim encounter has been no exception.

The gulf between the two opposing views of the Hindu–Muslim encounter is not a matter solely of interest to scholars and political propagandists but is reflected in and vitally influences many facets of contemporary consciousness. Much of the Indian heritage—monuments, art, music, legends, history—which people of an earlier generation were accustomed to regard as noncontroversial has suddenly become hotly contested. As an example, let me take the legend of the founding of Hyderabad. For those subscribing to the syncretic school, this legend is the narrative embodiment of an essential Hindu–Muslim amity in the past. The story itself is a *mythos,* seeking to convince through the power of aesthetics and symbolism, and is a counterpoint to the *logos* of formal thought on Hindu–Muslim relations which is routinely employed by the social scientist. The tale goes thus:

> Sultan Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah (1580–1612) was the grandson of Sultan Quli Qutub Shah, founder of the Qutub Shahi dynasty. In 1579, when still a prince and just fourteen years old, he fell in love with Bhagmati, a commoner [and a Hindu], an extraordinarily talented and beautiful dancer. She lived across the river Musi in the village of Chichlam, some distance away from the royal fortress at Golconda. Every evening when dusk fell, the prince stole away from the palace grounds to meet his beloved across the river. One day a terrible storm broke and the river was in spate. Fearing that his lover might drown, the prince braved the turbulent rising waters and saved Bhagmati. Compelled to accept his son's choice, the king, Sultan Ibrahim, had a large stone bridge built across the Musi to enable Mohammed Quli to court the dancer. Known today as the Purana Pul ['old bridge'], it stands mute witness to this story. On his accession to the

throne, Mohammed Quli married Bhagmati and in her honour built a splendid new city on the site of the village Chichalam. He called the city 'Bhagnagar' or the 'City of Good Fortune'. Bhagmati later took the name of Hyder Mahal and Mohammed Quli renamed the city as Hyderabad.[30]

It is not surprising that, whereas history discerns the origins of Hyderabad in the mundane facts of congestion and lack of water in the old fortress capital of Golconda, legend attributes the founding of the city to the sublimity of a prince's love for a commoner. What is more relevant to our purpose, however, is the way Hindu nationalists interpret the legend today. They see in the tale yet another illustration of the fundamental Hindu–Muslim divide. 'All the story tells us,' says a militant Hindu, active in the campaign to have Hyderabad revert back to its original name of Bhagnagar, 'is that the Mussulman has always fucked our women whenever he has wanted to, as he has fucked us over the centuries. If he deigned to take one of our women into his harem, he could not tolerate her remaining a Hindu but forced her to convert to Islam. Where are the stories of Hindu princes marrying Muslim wives?' This particular interpretation of the legend is not about how a youth's erotic obsession for a girl flowered into the deep love of a mature man, or about an era of close Hindu–Muslim relations which permitted, even when they did not encourage, love across religious persuasions. For the Hindu nationalist, the legend is about Hindu defeat and a collective shame wherein the community's most beautiful and accomplished women had to be ceded to the Muslim conqueror.

Finally, what is the truth? As far as I can see the truth is that there are two overarching histories of Hindu–Muslim relations—with many local variations —which have been used by varying political interests and ideologies and have been jostling for position for many centuries. In times of heightened conflict between the two communities, the Hindu nationalist history that supports the version of conflict between the two assumes preeminence and organizes cultural memory in one particular direction. In times of relative peace, the focus shifts back to the history emphasizing commonalities and shared pieces of the past. Many of the cultural memories which were

appropriate during the conflict will retreat, fade, or take on new meaning, while others that incorporate the peaceful coexistence of Hindus and Muslims will resurface. And so it goes, on and on.