“IN DEFENCE OF OUR *DHARMA*”: ARTICULATIONS OF NATIONAL COMMUNITY IN *MANUSHI*

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ABSTRACT

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"In Defence of Our *Dharma*": Articulations of National Community in *Manushi*

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Loriliai Biernacki

In Indian public culture, the women's rights journal *Manushi* has been an important voice in the negotiation of the definition of national community. At three key sites – instances of communal violence, the Shah Bano Supreme Court case, and the rise of Hindu nationalism – the contributors to *Manushi* advance a minority discourse that emphasizes the performative nature of community to articulate a national community that honors individuals' complex identities and welcomes people of all religious affiliations. The key strategies employed, particularly by editor and author Madhu Kishwar, include deconstruction of Hindu nationalist rhetoric, advocacy for the separation of religion and politics, and challenging the authenticity of Hindu nationalist religiosity. I conclude by considering strategies for current fights against nationalism.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

India's 2014 general elections culminated in a shocking victory for Narendra Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party, overtaking the Congress-majority government that ruled for decades prior. Though winning a sweeping number of seats and the head position of Prime Minister, the elections were not uncontroversial; Modi's reputation struggled from the fallout during his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat during the 2002 riots that killed hundreds of primarily Muslims citizens, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has long been recognized as a Hindu nationalist party. In December of 2019, the Indian government passed the Citizenship Amendment Act, which has been recognized by many Indian activists as an attack on Muslim citizenship.[1] The occasion even led the American-published *The Atlantic* to publish an article asking "Who Is an Indian?" What it means to be Indian and who is accepted into that title has long been contested, and the question of Muslim belonging in this identity has been at the forefront of defining Indian identity at least since the creation of Pakistan at the time of India's Independence.

With an increasingly powerful Hindu nationalist government at the head of India, it is imperative to continue probing the question of who belongs in India and to examine how India came to this point. I argue that at three key sites of contestation – instances of communal violence, the Shah Bano Supreme Court case, and the rise of Hindu nationalism – the journal *Manushi*, a leading voice in women's rights in India, consistently advanced a minority discourse that focused on demonstrating the performative, daily experiences of people in the nation to challenge Hindu nationalist's pedagogical discursive narrative of the nation as an historically linear, progressive reality.

[1] Abby Seiff, "The controversy behind India's Citizenship Amendment Act," February 7, 2020, https://www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=CB835381-29A6-40DB-894D-CC77BFBA07E2

My argument relies on several concepts from Thomas Blom Hansen and Homi Bhabha. In *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India,* Hansen seeks to bridge the gap between two schools of thought on the rise of Hindu nationalism – that which emphasizes political strategy, and that which prioritizes religious sentiment – by advancing an analysis of Hindu nationalism's success through what he terms "public culture." Public culture is the space opened up by democracy that allows for a cacophony of voices to advance, critique, and negotiate notions of national identity.[2] This space allows us to consider the multifaceted ways that Hindu nationalism is articulated and enacted, along with the myriad responses to it. I locate *Manushi* in this space of public culture as a minority discourse fighting to undermine nationalist narratives of the nation.

Building from Benedict Anderson's foundational notion of the nation as an imagined community,[3] Homi Bhabha further analyzes the narrative formations of the nation and problematizes the definition of its people as a linear, homogenous, horizontally imagined community. Rather, he argues that the 'the people' of a nation emerges as a double narrative movement,

> where the nation's people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical 'objects' of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin *in the past*, the people are also the 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as that sign of the *present* through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process.[4]

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[2] Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London; New York: Verso, 1983).

[4] Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 145.

Rather than a linear, compounding creation of the nation, Bhabha emphasizes the temporal tensions arising from the ideas of nation as given and pre-formed, on the one hand, and in daily reproduction, on the other. It is important to note that the literal reproduction of the nation's people places women[5] at the center of national creation and character; women as mothers are expected to bear and rear children that uphold the ideal notion of the nation.[6] With Bhabha's distinction between the pedagogical and performative strategies of national definition, and Hansen's explication of deeply ambiguous popular subjectivities that are expected to hold allegiances to both the (liberal, modern) democratic state and ('backwards', traditional) religious traditions, we can bring out the ambivalent nature of women as modern subjects in India.

Further, Bhabha explains a minority discourse as that which "contests genealogies of 'origin' that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges that the status of national culture – and the people – as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life."[7] Minority discourses then draw attention to the complex, performative space of nation creation to disrupt narratives that utilize accumulative historicist notions to claim power. As we will see, *Manushi* articulates a minority discourse by highlighting the performative nature of community boundaries and the nation. Focusing on lived experiences of women and the marginalized, *Manushi* disrupts the pedagogical narrative of nationalists by drawing attention instead to the recursive, repetitive acts that come to constitute the nation. Their focus on

[5] It is worth noting here that this role of women is limited to cisgender women that can have children, which may marginalize other women's positions in the reproduction of the nation.

[6] Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

[7] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 157.

embodied actions as constitutive of identity and community undermines the BJP's historicist narrative of an originary Hindu claim to land justifying Hindu nationalism.

Founded by a women's group based at Delhi University in 1977, *Manushi* quickly became a leading voice in women's rights activism in India and remained so through several decades, until they were forced to cease publication in 2006. I chose *Manushi* as the primary source of this project due to its reputation as the most popular women's rights journal in India. *Manushi* is self-described as a "Forum for Women's Rights and Democratic Rights," highlighting their dual-focus on specific gendered issues as well as more general concerns about democracy.[8] *Manushi* features submissions from writers across India as well as across the globe, providing a multiplicity of viewpoints on various issues and highlighting especially problems faced by rural women in India.

The founding editors of *Manushi* are Ruth Vanita and Madhu Kishwar, and Kishwar remains the editor of the journal to this day. Madhu Kishwar, famous for her women's activism in the late twentieth century, has recently become a controversial figure, most notably for her endorsement of Narendra Modi in 2014[9] and for a selection of her posts Twitter which many see as antithetical to her previous activism.[10] Despite these changes, Kishwar is now attempting to revive the print journal of *Manushi*, bringing the future role of the journal into question.

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[8] "Home," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://www.*Manushi*.in

[9] Special Correspondent, "Modi is being demonised: Madhu Kishwar," last modified May 19, 2016, https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/bangalore/modi-is-being-demonised-madhu-kishwar/article5815901.ece.

[10] "Activist Madhu Kishwar's Tweet Leaves Feminists Stunned [Social Media]," The Times of India, November 21, 2013, https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/docview/1461273596?accountid=14503.

Nationalism, and particularly religious nationalism, has been a concern for feminists for the past several decades, with the field of feminist critiques of nationalism coming into its own in the late 1980s and 1990s. As right-wing nationalist governments and policies are on the rise, it is imperative to consider what we can learn from past gender-sensitive responses to nationalism and to ask how women's rights movements grapple with the interrelationship between gender, the state, and religious traditions. Given Madhu Kishwar's later turn towards more conservative politics, *Manushi* also offers a fertile ground for considering how feminist arguments against nationalism stand the test of time.

I argue that through *Manushi* there are three key sites of contention and negotiation of national community: instances of communal violence, the Shah Bano Supreme Court case, and the rise of Hindu nationalism. In each of these cases, *Manushi* advances a minority discourse by using a rhetorical strategy that highlights the performative in order to articulate an inclusive national community that honors individuals' complex identities.

Methods and Methodology

To understand *Manushi*'s priorities and positions, I read and analyzed one issue of the journal per year, from 1979 through 2006, to capture a snapshot of the journal's priorities each year. In my initial readings, I focused on the role of religion in the articles: where is religion being talked about? What is being identified as the problem and solution in each article? Where and why is religion implicated in the problem or solution? This is where it became clear that the contributors to *Manushi* largely discuss religion not as a set of practices or belief, but instead as it functions as a political identity, particularly in the context of Hindu nationalism. Many of the authors view religion as a tool manipulated by political actors, rather than an essentially oppressive institution on its own. In times of conflict, when national identity and community was

in flux, *Manushi* consistently utilized this distinction to articulate a message of solidarity and belonging.

The field of religious studies has a long history of Orientalist scholarship which objectifies and flattens 'non-Western' religious traditions, often either analogizing them to Christian traditions and structures or presenting practitioners as backwards superstitious folk worshippers.[11] The field of feminist studies, particularly work done by white American feminists,[12] also has a history of representing women in Asia as always already religious, under the thumb of oppressive patriarchal religion and in need of saving.[13] I aim to contribute to the work undoing that perception, by carefully considering where, when, and why we see the women's movement engaging with religion and asking how women themselves understand the role of religion in their lives and liberation movements. I view individuals, communities, and religious traditions as culturally contingent and historically shaped within discourses of power, and utilize postmodern and transnational feminist methodologies to analyze culturally specific issues while recognizing structural similarities and what lessons may be generalizable.

I am guided in this work by Chandra Mohanty's "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited" and Uma Narayan's *Dislocating Cultures*. Narayan's work reminds me of the necessity to avoid cultural essentialization through the attribution of an unbridgeable gulf between cultures and I

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[11] Richard King, "Orientalism and the Modern Myth of 'Hinduism'," *Numen* 46, no. 2 (1999): 146-185, accessed June 13, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/3270313.

[12] See Asha Nadkarni's *Eugenic Feminism: Reproductive Nationalism in the United States and India* for an analysis of the relationship between American and Indian feminists.

[13] Uma Narayan, "Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism," *Hypatia* 13, no. 2 (1998): 86-106, accessed June 13, 2020, www.jstor.org/stable/3810639. See also Lila Abu-Lughod's "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others" (2002), Chandra Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" (1986), and Mrinalini Sinha's "Refashioning Mother India: Feminism and Nationalism in Late-Colonial India" (2000).

am inspired by Mohanty's call to recognize the particular as an example of the universal, while not using the universal to erase the particular.[14] It is important to note that I am a young, white American woman composing this thesis in the United States, on the land of the Cheyenne, Ute, and Arapahoe nations. This positionality places me in the lineage of colonizers, and I remain cognizant of this fact throughout my research. Given the colonial history of knowledge creation for administration, the Orientalist and colonial lineages of religious studies itself as a field, and the history of white feminists exploiting women of color's struggles, I want to make clear that my goal in this project is not to 'save' Indian women or to claim to know the best way to challenge Hindu nationalism, but rather to listen to and amplify Indian women's voices to assist in identifying what arguments are most effective in challenging fundamentalist nationalism, a challenge that is facing women across the world.

Chapter Outlines

The first chapter of the thesis will focus on situating *Manushi*. *Manushi*'s history will be explained, focusing on the foundational goals and projects of the journal as well as the current efforts to revitalize the journal. To situate *Manushi,* we will consider the history of colonialism in India and nationalist responses to colonialism to highlight how colonial governmentalities and nationalist responses continue to inform Hindu nationalist rhetoric as well as *Manushi*'s responses to it. We will also situate *Manushi* in feminist scholarship, both in India and internationally to consider the way that the journal is shaped by and in turn shapes women's rights movements in India and abroad.

[14] Chandra Mohanty Talpade, "'Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," *Signs* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2003): 505.

With the journal situated, chapter two will turn to the first site of contention: communal violence. I argue that in their response to communal violence, the authors of *Manushi* advocate for an inclusive national community by displacing the seemingly primordial category of religious community to instead emphasize the contingency of communal sentiments on political conditions. Based on my research of the journal, most *Manushi* writers argue that communal violence is not an outcome of religious irreconcilability, but rather the manipulation of these sentiments for political purposes. By challenging the basis of the conflict, these writers seek to expose the political motivations and machinations behind the violence to undermine its potency and instead demonstrate the performative nature of community boundaries.

In the next chapter, we will turn to the Shah Bano Supreme Court case. This case is widely recognized as a foundational court case in defining secularism in India and how religious bodies are legislated by the state. I will demonstrate that while many used this case as a chance to denigrate Muslim treatment of women, *Manushi* claims instead that the controversy was not truly about a concern for Muslim women's rights, but rather an excuse to discriminate against Muslims. In their articulation of this point and emphasis on gender-based solidarity, Kishwar again advances a vision of national community that includes Muslims and Hindus alike.

Chapter four will consider the rise of Hindu nationalism. The Hindu nationalist movement relies on categories and subjectivities shaped by British colonialism and subsequently carried into the postcolonial independent state.[15] With communal subjectivities in place, the Hindu nationalist parties mobilize feelings of anxiety to stoke discrimination against Muslims and craft a national identity that is inextricably linked to being Hindu, ambiguously defined. However ambiguously defined, Hindu nationalism is rooted in a sense of belonging to land

[15] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 19.

which is often used to exclude Muslims who are depicted as invaders. *Manushi*, particularly in Madhu Kishwar's self-published articles, challenges this ideology through several strategies, including the deconstruction of Hindu nationalist rhetoric highlighting its parallels with colonial thought, advocacy for the separation of religion and politics, and challenging the Hindu nationalists' religious authenticity.

The last chapter will conclude by bringing this project into the current moment of Hindu nationalism, global nationalism, and the future of the *Manushi* journal. We will consider the lessons we can learn from *Manushi* in challenging nationalism across the world.

CHAPTER ONE: SITUATING *MANUSHI*

Colonial History and Nationalist Responses

Indian nationalism first became popular under British colonial rule. Beginning in the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries, Indian nationalism gained traction as a way to resist colonialism and argue for an independent nation. Certain colonial governmentalities and aspects of nationalist responses remain relevant through our contemporary moment and are essential for understanding the current moment. Most prominent are the colonial view of India as not a united nation, but a collection of discrete groups, the methods of governing these groups, and the nationalist belief in India's spiritual superiority, particularly as found in Hinduism.[16]

As Thomas Blom Hansen explains in *The Saffron Wave,* colonial rule in India was organized around a double discourse; on one hand, the masses were seen as irrational, traditional, and in need of governance, and on the other, the educated middle classes and leaders were seen as possible interlocutors and open to negotiation.[17] There was thus a rough bifurcation between the elite and the subaltern, "premised on social rank and on mastery of western conceptual languages rather than on space and 'tradition.'"[18] The elite often aligned themselves with the British and worked with the colonizers in governing the masses.

The double discourse of the religious masses versus the educated elite made the subjects of colonial rule deeply ambiguous; on one hand, one was assumed to be a citizen with access to due process and universal penal code, and on the other, one was assumed to be a member of a

[16] It is important to note that colonialism is a deeply complex, multifaceted process that functions on many registers. The form that colonialism took within India is not homogenous or universal, and neither were nationalist responses.

[17] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 32.

[18] Hansen, 33.

religious community, attached to customs. To manage these ambiguous subjects, then, "The solution pursued was to encapsulate these ungovernable religious sentiments into designated institutions, and see to it that these potentially explosive sentiments were not made the basis for political mobilizations by 'irresponsible' members of the 'educated class.'"[19] This took the form of the creation of distinct personal laws, derived from religious tradition and applying to family matters, on the one hand, and a universal, secular criminal code, on the other. The association of personal laws with the domestic sphere and particularly in matters regarding women (such as those pertaining to marriage and inheritance rights) highlights the ambiguity of women's positionality in the tension between the modern democratic state and religious tradition.

There was further a discourse of the Indian people as inherently divided; not a united nation but rather a collection of discrete, often competing communities. However, as historian Mithi Mukherjee insightfully demonstrates in her work *India in the Shadows of Empire*, the 1857 revolt in India demonstrated the possibility of widespread collaboration amongst the people to overthrow the Empire. The Empire then learned that "All the sources, therefore, of that national unity and identity – cultural, political, historical – had to be systematically deconstructed and meaningless; indeed, the very idea of India had to be rendered meaningless."[20] This 'divide and rule' strategy became a necessary component of British rule in justifying their role through an imperial discourse of the Empire as a neutral party assisting India in reaching the ability to self-govern; the more the people were divided, the more they 'needed' the British.[21] Mukherjee compellingly argues that the British developed an imperial discourse of justice as equity, which

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[19] Hansen, 33.

[20] Mithi Mukherjee, *India in the Shadows of Empire: A Legal and Political History (1774-1950)*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009): 91.

[21] Mukherjee, *Indian in the Shadows of Empire*, 206-207.

"came to be the operational, administrative category of governance and was based largely on the discursive reconfiguration of India as a society of warring groups that needed an exterior and therefore neutral and impartial force to rule over it in the name of justice."[22] This strategy was mobilized as a legislative principle which took communities as the foundational unit of the government.[23] Through projects such as the census, the British forced Indian subjects to identify themselves with a particular religious group or caste, and thereby solidified and ossified these categories as they were then utilized to determine legal rights, enfranchisement, education, or employment.[24] In activism, "The discourse of social justice, in turn, assumed the divided nature of the civil society and the need for the exteriority of the state to civil society."[25] This has left a legacy in the reification of the idea of India as a nation of discrete communities, as the identity categories offered by the British are still inhabited and are often mobilized by political figures, and, as Mukherjee argues, the discourse of justice as equity is embedded in the current Indian Constitution.[26]

We can thus see that the colonial government largely influenced the image of Indian society in the minds of both the colonizers and the colonized. Collapsing and solidifying local religious customs into a singular law system and ossifying religious and caste identities, these governmentalities created subjectivities which eventually came to see these categories as self-evident. These categories, particularly the rigidification of religious law and communities, are essential to understanding the scene the *Manushi* emerges out of and responds to.

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[22] Mukherjee, 74-75.

[23] Mukherjee, 98.

[24] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 35.

[25] Mukherjee, *India in the Shadows of Empire*, 103.

[26] Mukherjee, 190.

It is critical as well to consider nationalist responses to colonial rule. One of the most influential writers analyzing nationalist responses to colonialism is Partha Chatterjee, who argues in his 1986 text *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* that nationalist thought proceeded in three moments; departure, maneuver, and arrival. The main thrust of his argument is the nationalist recognition of an inherent difference between cultures alongside the belief that Indian culture could be modernized.[27] He argues that Indian nationalists admitted that the West may be materially advanced, but could not match the superiority of Eastern spirituality, and thus that a modernized India would also be inflected by its religious traditions.[28]

Chatterjee analyzes the choice of Hinduism as a national religion that would serve as the rallying point and marker of Indian identity for the nationalists; "two elements combined to identify Hinduism as a likely candidate which could provide Indian nationalism with a viable cultural foundation of nationhood: first, the possibility of a large popular basis, and second, the very identification by modern Orientalist scholarship of the great spiritual qualities of classical Hinduism."[29] Hinduism therefore served as the most powerful basis for national solidarity, due to its large number of followers, though this required a reformation of Hinduism due to the high number of local variations; "the true *dharma* had to be extracted out of the impurities of folk religion and then disseminated among the people."[30] This fueled the creation of a unified Hinduism that would be easier to draw on to appeal to the masses.

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[27] Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986): 30.

[28] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, 80.

[29] Chatterjee, 75.

[30] Chatterjee, 77.

In his article "The Nationalist Resolution to the Women's Question" Chatterjee further explicates the ways that this was manifested in nationalist thought by creating a strong distinction between the outer/public realm, where the West's materiality undeniably excelled, and the inner/private realm, where Indian spirituality excelled and could be protected. Attacks on Hindu family laws by the colonial government were then strongly challenged, in an attempt to shield tradition from modernization. This also served to place women's rights at the center of defining national identity, as many of the debates around laws affecting the domestic sphere were linked as well to women. Protecting women and the domestic realm became key to defending the unique character of the nation. This association of women with the character of a community will be especially relevant to our discussion of the Shah Bano case, a case which forced India to reckon with the governance of families and especially women through religious personal laws.

Chatterjee has faced criticism of his work, most notably the critique that he denies nationalist thinkers any creative agency by depicting their discourse as essentially derivative, thus placing the agency on the colonial government. He has also been criticized for suggesting there was ever a singular 'woman's question' or a resolution to it, but his analysis of the distinction between the inner and outer realms has been generally accepted and adopted, and this is the main take-away for us.[31] The use of women's rights as a site for contestations over power and the definition of the nation will track through our contemporary moment and is again crucial for understanding where the writers of *Manushi* are located.

[31] For a review of critiques and his response, see Partha Chatterjee, "Women and nation revisited," *South Asian History and Culture* 9, no. 4 (2018): 380-387, accessed June 13, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2018.1535548.

Women's Movements in India and Abroad

To understand this moment of women's rights activism[32] and its engagement with religion, we must consider the historical context of women's rights movements in India, as well as international feminist movements. There are three "phases" of Indian women's movements.[33] *Manushi* emerged out of the second phase of Indian women's movements and continued through the third phase, in fact acting as a major figure in the third phase.

The first phase of women's rights movements in India began in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries and continued through the fight for Indian independence. Emerging out of the conditions of colonialism, the Indian women's movements has transnational origins. Nandini Deo explains, "The state to which petitions were addressed by activists was the United Kingdom, while Indian women were the intended beneficiaries of activism, and the activists consisted of a cosmopolitan elite whose commitments to social service and social justice crossed borders with ease."[34] Implicated in colonial power structures, women's activism necessarily required interfacing with the colonial state. Scholars have shown, as well, how Victorian ideas of purity and womanhood were projected onto Indian women and Indian women were used as 'pet projects' of European and American feminists.[35] The colonial image of the Indian woman in need of saving was used by British feminists as justification for their involvement in the imperial project; in fact, they often drew on narratives of mistreated Indian women to make the point that

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[32] Given some activists' discomfort with the term "feminist" and its western implications, I will generally use the phrase "women's rights movements/activists."

[33] Nandini Deo, "Indian Women Activists and Transnational Feminism over the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Women's History* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 149.

[34] Deo, "Indian Women Activists," 151.

[35] Siobhan Mullally, "Feminism and Multicultural Dilemmas in India: Revisiting the Shah Bano Case," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 675-76.

the British denial of woman's suffrage was a sign of their own backwardness, making imperial identity central to British feminist movements.[36]

During this phase, and continuing through at least the second phase, Indian women's movements were intimately related to other social movements; at this time with religious and anti-colonial nationalist movements. In 1875, Dayananada Saraswati established the Arya Samaj, a religious reform society centered on the Vedas and attempting to demonstrate the superiority of Hinduism over Abrahamic religions.[37] Given the colonial discourse that represented Hinduism as patriarchal and oppressive towards women, part of the strategy in challenging these representations was relying on Vedic texts to promote women's education and oppose dowry and child marriage. Thus "a feminist consciousness and aspirations for national self-determination went hand in hand, leading to the twin foci of the movement on collective independence and individual educational attainment."[38] Women's equality was therefore seen as integral to national independence, at least for these groups. Mohandas Gandhi, in the early twentieth century, also appealed to women in India to join the *satyagraha* movement and often spoke of them as naturally better *satyagrahis*. Gandhi effectively drew mass numbers of women into the political sphere, many for the first time, in the fight for national independence.[39] At this foundational stage of women's rights movements, religion, gender, and national identity are established as interconnected identities.

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[36] Antoinette M. Burton, "The Politics of Recovery" in *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), accessed July 20, 2020, https://search-ebscohost-com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1558&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[37] Deo, "Indian Women Activists," 153.

[38] Deo, 154.

[39] Aparna Basu, "Women in Gandhian Mass Movements," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 1 (February 2018): 127-33.

After Independence, the women's movement entered its second phase, from 1947 through the end of Indira Gandhi's Emergency in 1977. With more open avenues for collective action, many women's rights activists moved more into secular organizations.[40] In this post-Independence period, "The agenda of the women's movement shifted as a result of changing domestic political alignments as well as the transformations wrought by the new transnational networks of feminists that were burgeoning around the globe."[41] The Indian women's movement then remained transnational; though their appeals were no longer directed to the British government, they may be directed at transnational feminist networks or be inspired by women's movements in other countries such as the growing women's movement in America. It is at the end of this phase that *Manushi* is founded; the impetus for the journal was in fact Gandhi's Emergency. During this time, trust in the government plummeted, particularly in relation to reliable news media and a perception of an increasing gap between the needs of the masses and the actions of politicians.

This gap between the people and those serving them is an issue of great importance in the third phase of Indian women's movements, from 1977 through the present. The function of the United Nations and international NGOs at this time also considerably shifted the goals and tactics of women's organizations. In order to appeal to and be accountable to NGO funding, organizations needed to alter their approaches and priorities to align with those of the funding agencies.[42] Focusing more on gender as a site of solidarity and decentering other social justice concerns, Indian women's rights activists created an autonomous movement that allowed them to

[40] Deo, "Indian Women Activists," 156.

[41] Deo, 152.

[42] Deo, 161.

create solidarity with feminist activists across the world. Deo explains that the activists in these movements tend to fall into two kinds of civic actors: "The first kind consists of those groups that are all-volunteer. They have no paid staff and small budgets, which translates into a requirement that members or workers in those groups be highly committed to the ideology of the group."[43] This is the camp that *Manushi* falls into, as they refused to accept any institutional donations and functioned primarily on volunteer work, precisely to maintain the journal's integrity and message. Their website asks only that volunteers are committed to the project, and contributors to the journal were often unpaid. "The other type of group," on the other hand, "is the one that received foreign funding. [...] Since they have access to a form of external support, they do not invest much energy in mobilizing new women to support their organization."[44] This arguably leads to a disconnect between Indian women and the groups that are purportedly acting in their favor, as the groups' allegiances are more directed to the source of funding. *Manushi,* funded primarily by individual donations and subscription fees, did also enjoy the benefits of international funding through subscriptions, especially through Western universities. The diffuse nature of this funding, however, may have allowed the editors to maintain more autonomy in the goal of their journal. It is worth noting that this is also the same time that feminist critiques of nationalism came into its own as a subfield of feminist theory, particularly "Third World" feminism and nationalism. In the early 1990s, many Indian feminists were publishing impactful works on the rise of Hindu nationalism and theoretical work on the gendered implications of nationalism. Dalit feminism was a burgeoning field as well, challenging monolithic ideas of

[43] Deo, 160.

[44] Deo, 160.

"woman" and highlighting the intersectional nature of gender, class, and caste.[45] This is important context for *Manushi* as we can now see the landscape the journal was in and what types of pressures were on women's movements at the time as well as their various modes of response.

While women's movements became more secular and autonomous in the second and third phases, by no means did religion become unimportant; not in the least because of the integral role religious identity played in defining the nation with the contemporaneous creation of Pakistan and independence of India. The creation of the secular nation of India was accompanied by mass communal riots, and this cannot be seen as separate from women's rights concerns. In her study of Indian women's organizations, Geetanjali Gangoli found that "Fundamentalist projects therefore underscore patriarchy by projecting and promoting 'tradition' views of women as mothers and wives, and controlling women's appearance through impositions of dress codes."[46] Challenging religious fundamentalism is therefore integral to protecting women's rights and is an important part of Indian women's rights organizations. At the same time, women's movements have not been immune from perpetuating problematic ideologies. Minority women in the movements, including Dalit and Muslim women, have pointed to ways that women's movements use Hindu symbols as representations of female strength and (perhaps unwittingly) collapse 'Hindu' and 'Indian' into one identity.[47] Understanding the role of religion is thus integral in Indian women's rights movements.

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[45] Anandita Pan, "Embracing Difference: Towards a Standpoint Praxis in Dalit Feminism," *South Asian Review* 40, no. 1-2 (2019), 35-36, DOI: 10.1080/02759527.2019.1593746.
[46] Geetanjali Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms: Law, Patriarchies, and Violence in India* (Burlington, Vermont: Aldergate, 2007), 12.

[47] Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms*, 12.

The History of *Manushi*

In June 1975, Indira Gandhi declared a National Emergency in India, imposing nationwide press censorship and suspension of civil liberties and democratic rights. During the 21 months of the Emergency, news was unreliably transferred through official channels, but often effectively spread through word of mouth and informal networks, carrying stories of marginalized communities' fights against government greed, whether that be environmental degradation, sexual violence at the hands of police, or unjust agricultural policies.[48] Becoming aware of these instances of resistance, some members of a women's group based at Delhi University decided that it was necessary to aid in the dissemination of this information to educate themselves and others on the challenges faced by India's marginalized communities, particularly rural women.[49] In order to do so, the group, led by Madhu Purnima Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, founded the journal *Manushi* in 1978, and published the first volume of the journal in January of 1979.[50]

Manushi was first published during "a new phase of activity and debate on democratic rights, civil liberties, social justice, and women's rights issues after a lull of about three decades following national independence."[51] The name of the journal is derived from the Sanskrit term for human (*manush*) with a feminine marker and contains several nested meanings. The *Manushi* website explains:

> The word *Manushi* at its simplest was coined to mean the humane as well as the feminine principle in humanity. The emphasis is on humanity, not manhood, because we feel

[48] "The Impetus for Starting *Manushi* Magazine," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://www.*Manushi*-india.org/theimpetusforstarting*Manushi*.htm#.

[49] See note 47 above.

[50] See note 47 above.

[51] See note 47 above.

> 'manhood' has too often been expressed through violence, warfare aggression and domination. *Manushi* is also close to the *manasi*, which means 'of the mind or intellect.' In Bengali, when spelt as '*Manoshi*', it means 'dear to heart.'[52]

The founders thus chose the name with its many valences in mind, hoping to suggest a nonviolent feminine principle as well as heart- and mind-based activism. *Manushi*'s founders indeed hoped to bridge the gap between analysis and activism, seeking to produce analysis informed by real-life experiences and engagement with communities on the ground.[53] In this research and activism, they draw their inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, and "believe that truth, non-violence and compassion are the most reliable criteria to judge the worth of any idea or action."[54]

With these goals, from 1979 through 2006, *Manushi* was published every other month. Run almost entirely on volunteer work and money collected through subscription fees, the journal refused to accept any money from political institutions or through sexist advertisements to ensure that the message of the journal was not influenced by any outside forces and would remain an independent entity.[55] For the first ten years of publication, *Manushi* was published in both Hindi and English, though lack of resources eventually forced the editors to publish the journal solely in English.[56]

The journal is associated with a few other organizations under the name *Manushi*. The founders established the *Manushi* Trust and *Manushi Sangathan* as well, "a forum for organising

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[52] "The Name and its Meaning," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://www.*Manushi*-india.org/brief-history.htm#name.

[53] "*Manushi* – A Journal about Women and Society," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=1102.

[54] "*Manushi* Journal," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=153.

[55] "Mobilizing Support and Finances," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=153&pgno=3.

[56] "*Manushi* Journal," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=153.

citizen's groups for action on specific issues. [*Manushi Sangathan*] works for all democratic reforms that will promote greater social justice and strengthen human rights for all, especially for women."[57] This organization comprises the activist side of the *Manushi* group. Their goals, listed on their website, include activism on behalf of women as well as otherwise marginalized communities and general political work.

> Particularly pertaining to women, they hope to:
>
> bring special focus to women's rights while integrating them in all our work on social, political and economic reforms; undertake Public Interest Litigation and provide legal help for women; strengthen women's rights in the family, especially property and land rights; and evolve effective strategies to enhance the participation of women and marginalized groups in politics and public affairs.[58]

It is clear through these goals that they are seeking to politically empower women and advocate on behalf of women in political and economic reforms. Beyond the special concerns of women, though they certainly consider the ways that women are particularly impacted by these institutions, they seek to:

> strengthen the citizenship rights, human rights and civil liberties of our people, especially of those from vulnerable communities and those living in rural areas; work for a bottom-up agenda of economic reforms, so as to make it possible for our people to generate a decent livelihood through dignified, honest, hard work and their own entrepreneurial genius without being harassed, humiliated, or forced to make payoffs; campaign for electoral reforms to free our politics from the clutches of money and muscle power; find ways to help prevent ethnic conflicts and recurring riots in India and evolve just and humane norms for co-living and effective power sharing between various communities; lend support to peoples' struggles for basic survival needs; and lend support to all those who work to bridge the rural-urban divide in India and make agriculture a prosperous occupation.[59]

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[57] "*Manushi* Sangathan," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=68.

[58] See note 56 above.

[59] See note 56 above.

These goals show that there is a real concern about political efficacy and the ability for the marginalized, particularly rural, to be heard in politics and to succeed economically. The corruption of politics and lack of economic mobility are interconnected in this view and the founders of *Manushi* therefore aim to lend basic monetary support to people that need it, as well as advocating for them on the political stage and fighting to make political changes to root out corruption and greed. A clear issue of concern is government actions uninformed by the lives of the people; another place that we can see Gandhi's influence on the founders as they seek to reverse this by soliciting articles from and travelling to various, particularly rural, communities to learn about what the people want. Gandhi became famous for putting himself in the shoes of those he sought to represent, particularly poor and rural people, and we can see the impact this method had on the founders of *Manushi*. Though it becomes a main focus of the journal *Manushi*, communal conflict is mentioned only briefly, and only named "ethnic conflicts and recurring riots," which they seek to ameliorate by creating "effective power sharing between various communities." The writers of *Manushi* will discuss the general phenomenon of communal violence as well as the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that took place after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. In doing so, the authors often do not speak of the conflicts as religiously motivated but rather the result of political manipulations of communal sentiments.

In 1991, Ruth Vanita left the journal to pursue an academic career in the United States, while Kishwar remained the primary editor of the journal through 2006.[60] According to Madhu Kishwar, political corruption and anti-street vendor violence eventually brought an end to the

[60] Anita Anantharam, "East/West encounters: 'Indian' identity and transnational feminism in *Manushi*," *Feminist Media Studies* 9, no. 4 (2009): 463.

Manushi journal. In 2004, *Manushi* organized a protest for street vendors' rights in Delhi, and Kishwar reports that the legal protection offered by *Manushi* led street vendors to cease paying monthly bribes from local mafia, which then turned the mafia against them.[61] The costs of the violence leveled against the street vendors and the new infrastructure built by *Manushi* depleted the organizations' funds and forced them to cease publication in 2006.[62]

When I began this project in the winter of 2019, this was all the information that was published about *Manushi*'s tenure. In March of 2020, however, I returned to the *Manushi* website to find that Madhu Kishwar updated it, stating that three years previously someone had offered to fix up their website but instead corrupted it and denied members of *Manushi* any access to the website. Kishwar has now obtained control over the website and is in the process of updating the site. She refers to the website as an electronic publication, though the website is currently still under work and therefore not very organized, mostly featuring news articles. One is still able to access the *Manushi* archives through the website, and Kishwar is mobilizing to revive the print publication. On the new website, features have been added to the (mostly unchanged) story of the journal to include topics such as the "Need to Revive and Re-position the Journal *Manushi*." This is an interesting addition, as Kishwar has in recent years sparked controversy for her sympathy to the Hindu right in India, which many view as inherently anti-feminist (though Kishwar herself never identified as a "feminist," she is a very prominent women's rights activist).[63]

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[61] Madhu Kishwar, "How the Battle for Street Vendors' Rights Endangered Our Lives and *Manushi* Journal," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/articleList.php?catId=152

[62] See note 60 above.

[63] See Kishwar's "Why I Am Not a Feminist," published in *Manushi*. Kishwar considers "feminist" to be a term of Western import that does not reflect her own work with Indian women.

In this subsection, Kishwar explains her goal is to "transform [*Manushi*] into an enduring institution that can survive its founders."[64] To achieve this, the group requires:

> a larger range of contributers through systematic networking and outreach; resources to commission special studies and reports; required staff to keep track of the latest scholarship and developments in various fields, increase its outreach substantially and diversify its readership profile as well as that of its contributors; more vigorous [*sic*] in carrying in-depth and realistic accounts of various movements for change, as well as news of those NGOs and civil society organisations that are doing sustained meaningful work, and have a solid track record; paying close attention to civil society's own institution, including several caste and community based organisations doing valuable work for social reform; and produce several more volumes of essays from back issues of *Manushi* for which there is an active demand from mainstream publishers.[65]

A common theme in the new website is this slight flaunting of *Manushi*'s achievements, such as their "active demand from mainstream publishers" and lists of *Manushi*'s accomplishments. This may be read as an attempt to draw in financial donors or volunteers, or perhaps an attempt to reclaim the *Manushi* name as Kishwar has fallen out of favor with many women's rights activists in light of her sympathy to Narendra Modi and seemingly anti-feminist statements on Twitter. When appointed as an outside expert for the Department of Arts and Aesthetics at Jawaharlal Nehru University in 2017, for example, students protested her appointment,[66] and similarly in 2016, Kishwar claimed that Centre for the Study of Developing Societies discriminated against her for her viewpoints and denied her institutional affiliation.[67] It

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[64] "*Manushi* – A Journal about Women and Society," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=1102.

[65] See note 63 above.

[66] Johanna Deeksha, "Madhu Kishwar on JNU post issue: They're acting like I was selling Chole-Bhature in Sarojini Nagar Market before this," *Edex Live*, May 10, 2017, https://www.edexlive.com/live-story/2017/may/10/madhu-kishwar-on-jnu-post-issue-theyre-acting-like-i-was-selling-chole-bhature-in-sarojini-nagar-m-423.html.

[67] Ipsita Chakravarty, "I faced 'humiliation and discrimination' in the 'Left citadel' of CSDS, says Madhu Kishwar," *Scroll.in,* May 2, 2016, https://scroll.in/article/807520/i-faced-humiliation-and-discrimination-in-the-left-citadel-of-csds-says-madhu-kishwar.

will be interesting to see in the coming years how these developments in regard to fundraising and public perception affect the journal of *Manushi*.

There are also revised goals of *Manushi* on the updated website. Some of these goals include the republishing of *Manushi*, production of audio and visual aids to assist in activist work, and environmental work.[68] There is a notable increase of attention to communal interreligious conflict, with three goals:

> promote culturally sensitive studies of our civilizational heritage through the Indic Studies Project, undertake studies on neglected aspects of our cultural and religious heritage, its sources and strengths as well as of oppression; organize dialogues on contentious issues between various communities (for example, topics such as the reform of personal laws, honour killings, and consensually acceptable grounds for religious conversions) that require urgent solutions; and undertake prompt, in-depth and non-partisan investigations whenever there is a violent outburst of hostility between communities to understand in detail the factors that produce such destructive reactions and try to build bridges of communication between estranged communities so that they can appreciate each others legitimate grievances and restore peaceful co-living.[69]

We see that the final goal is similar to the community-concerned one from the original list, and there is still a resistance to name these religious issues, which is an intriguing and certainly purposeful choice. Kishwar may not see these issues as religious, but rather communal or political, which is a position I will explore throughout this project. Her approach therefore emphasizes non-partisan interventions and dialogues that allow groups to reach common ground and establish peaceful coexistence.

Perhaps most notable is the Indic Studies Project, an offshoot of *Manushi* that aims to promote "culturally sensitive studies of *our* civilizational heritage" [emphasis added].[70] *Manushi*

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[68] "About *Manushi*," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=1512.

[69] See note 67 above.

[70] See note 67 above.

views current education in India as indelibly stamped with the mark of colonialism, and in need of a revitalization of indigenous theories and scholarship about Indic civilization.[71] The traces of colonial education alienate educated elites from the majority of the population and foster a view of the less-educated as "backward." Kishwar sees this as "a major reason that most social and political reform measures tend to be top down by design,"[72] again pointing to the necessity of a bottom-up approach to politics to protect the rights of the masses. Undoing these perceptions requires a new model of education to "promote and encourage genuine study of our religion and culture" which "amidst people for whom their inherited faith systems and cultural values are a living reality, is likely to result in more relevant and deeper forms of scholarship."[73] The "our" in the previous statement seems to refer to uncovering this history of India, though who is included in that vision of India is less clear in the program's description of the need to promote "genuine study of *our* religion and culture" [emphasis added].[74] India is a vast expanse of land with variegated communities and religious traditions, and has never had one singular "religion." The singular use of "our religion" signals an essentialization of Indian culture that calls for questioning, particularly in light of the recent shift towards Hindutva. Hindu nationalist rhetoric often equates Hinduism with India's land, and use claims of historical Muslim invasions to exclude Muslims from the Indian national community. Though this is often challenged in the

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[71] "*Manushi* Indic Studies Project," *Manushi*, accessed June 13, 2020, http://*Manushi*.in/about.php?id=1107.

[72] See note 70 above.

[73] See note 70 above.

[74] See note 70 above.

journal *Manushi*, Kishwar's more recent political shifting brings into question what she is referring to as 'our' religion and culture and highlights what political implications this carries.[75]

For this project, I will primarily be examining and analyzing *Manushi* articles from its original publication period of 1979 to 2006, though I will also ultimately consider the implications of my analysis in light of these new developments and current political state of India.

[75] Unfortunately, the Indic Studies Project's website appears to be hacked and/or compromised and information on the group is limited. The group has been significantly connected, however, to the Infinity Foundation in New Jersey; a group that is closely linked to the Hindu American Foundation which sparked controversy in 2006 for attempting to revise textbooks to present a more favorable image of the history of Hinduism. See more in: *Religious Studies: A Global View* edited by Gregory D. Alles (2008) and Visweswaran et. al. "The Hindutva View of History, Rewriting Textbooks in India and the United States" (2009).

CHAPTER TWO, SITE ONE: COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

The first site of contention that figures prominently in *Manushi* is communal violence. Communal violence generally refers to violence enacted by one religious community against another; most commonly involving Hindu and Muslim communities, though extending to Sikh communities as well. These moments of violence or tension present a poignant site for the articulation of national community: will the violence be used as a reason to vilify a group and exclude them, or will groups reach out for dialogue and solutions? What becomes particularly salient through this question and through the articles in *Manushi* is how this conflict is even defined and understood: is it, in fact, a religious issue or a political issue? Can the two be entirely separated? I argue that through these articles, most writers in *Manushi* craft a vision of an inclusive national community that moves beyond communal violence and seeks to probe the "real" motivations behind the violence. The journal is not univocal and contains dissenting positions, but I will argue that the authors decenter the role of religion and instead focus on political motivations, challenging the pedagogical tactics of Hindu nationalists by highlighting the performative nature of community boundaries. The pedagogical nationalist narrative focuses on an originary claim to land, as well as the contemporaneous formation of Pakistan and India's independence, to argue that Muslims and Hindus are two clearly distinct communities, and that Hindus have the right to rule the land. The performative discourse in *Manushi* instead demonstrates the ways that boundaries between Muslim and Hindu communities are constructed and maintained to undermine the historicist narrative.

Let us first turn to the 1981 article, "Men Riot, Women are Imprisoned: Report from Biharsharif and Ahmedabad" by Mani Mala, a gendered analysis of the consequences of communal violence. This is one of the first articles published on communal violence, and Mala

certainly departs from what we will see other writers argue, in her conviction that religion is the source of the conflict rather than politics. Mala does, however, helpfully highlight the ways that the restriction of women's movement performatively maintains boundaries between Hindu and Muslim communities.

Mala argues that violence and heightened religiosity are mutually reinforcing; due to recent violence, she writes, "Now people of both communities have started thinking that the only way to strengthen their respective religions is to cling more fiercely to their own tradition and rituals. They say that if they neglect their rituals and customs, they will grow weak and the Muslims will grow strong."[76] Because of communal violence, religious traditions are seen as under threat and this creates an anxious clinging to the tradition and increased ritual activity. This intensification of attachment to the religious tradition in turn heightens communal sentiments. This circular relationship contributes to the definition of the religious communities against each other; the strength of Hinduism necessarily comes to rely on the threat of Islam and the need to protect against it. This reflects a common method of solidifying community identity: an Other is identified or constructed and blamed for perceived 'lacks' in the original community.[77] This is the same logic that will be expanded upon by Hindu nationalists, who argue that Muslims and Hindus cannot peacefully inhabit the land together.

Mala analyzes the gendered impacts of communal violence through women's roles in their communities and their lack of participation in the construction of religious practices and texts. She explains that many women are prohibited from visiting women of other religious communities by their male family members, and that fear of communal violence thus serves as a

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[76] Mani Mala, "Men Riot, Women are Imprisoned: Report from Baharsharif and Ahmedabad," *Manushi* no. 9 (1981): 12.

[77] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 61-62, 67.

justification for keeping women in the home. The home, she points out, is often not actually safer; but the threat of outside violence is presented as worse than possible domestic violence at home. The control of women, to Mala, is ultimately tied to religion and men's power in this sphere. Religious activity is gendered in Mala's eyes as a primarily male pursuit; though women participate, Mala views them as confused by their religiosity. "Blinded by religious superstition," she writes, "women have not been allowed to question the exploitative hierarchy within their own religious community, therefore they begin to be intolerant towards one another."[78] Women are figured as overtaken by religion, unable to see the inequality right before their eyes and by extension, intolerant towards others they view as embedded in hierarchy. Women are not even beneficiaries of the tradition, but instead, "It is clear that these religious texts of the various communities represent a strange disease. [...] All that woman creates is being madly destroyed but these religious texts, the creations of men, are as strong as ever like the chains choking the pulse of society."[79] While presenting men as the source of these problems, it is interesting that Mala only attaches "blind superstition" to women, implying that men's intolerance towards other religious groups is instead a struggle for power or coming from a concern over the longevity of their traditions. This seems to suggest that men's anxiety about religious tradition and consequent violence against other communities is somewhat justified, or at least rational, while women's feelings towards other women are attributed to a sort of blind faith. Women are presented as having little to no agency in patriarchal, oppressive religious communities.

While this is based in the reality of religious texts often being authored and interpreted by men, as well as roles of religious authority often being restricted to men, this problematically

[78] Hansen, 13.

[79] Mani Mala, "Men Riot, Women are Imprisoned," 13.

reinscribes notions of women as lacking agency. Mala perhaps unwittingly delegitimizes women's religious participation through this attribution of a type of false consciousness and reinstates the notion of the religious masses that must be governed. This problematically undermines women's possible agentic participation in communal hostilities, but Mala does helpfully highlight the ways that the conflict between communities is created performatively in daily acts. She shows how the protection of women is used as a justification for keeping women in the home, even when their home is not actually a safer space. We see how the repetitive denial of the ability to associate with women from other religious communities maintains the distinctions between communities and shapes women's ability to relate to each other across religious lines. Mala thus attentively points towards the daily maintenance of divisions between communities and the way that this maintenance is placed on the shoulders of women.

In most of the other articles, we see the writers of *Manushi* analyze communal violence as driven by political forces, particularly in the later publications when Kishwar begins to publish more articles about Hindu nationalism. In the January-February issue of 1985, editors Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita published the co-authored article, "The 1984 Elections: United We Fall - Into the Trap of Manipulators." The article does not take on a specific instance of communal violence, as other articles do, but rather focuses on recent elections to analyze communal violence as a mobilization of religious sentiments by political figures.

The 1984 elections in India were held shortly after the assassination of Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards, which sparked the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that killed around 3000 Sikhs.[80] The Indian National Congress won many seats in parliament and Rajiv Gandhi was

[80] Saifuddin Ahmed, "The Role of the Media during Communal Riots in India," *Media Asia* 32, no. 2 (2010): 104, accessed June 13, 2020, https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/01296612.2010.11771982.

named Prime Minister, as the Bharatiya Janata Party also won its first two seats in Hanamkonda and Mahesana.[81] Though Kishwar and Vanita do not directly discuss the BJP, they analyze the increasing role of communal sentiments in the Congress (I)'s victory.

In this article, Vanita and Kishwar argue that the mobilization of communal sentiments and anti-Muslim rhetoric was key to the Congress (I)'s success. They explain, "Many traditional RSS supporters swung over to the Congress (I) simply because this time the Congress (I) came out openly as a party which would keep minorities 'in their place' and teach them the lesson which the Hindu majority is so eager to teach everyone, namely, that minorities can stay in India only on the terms dictated by the majority."[82] Here Kishwar and Vanita foreground religious affiliation, in its particular position as a primary political identity in this majoritarian democracy. An important distinction here, their argument is not that the Congress (I) mobilized Hinduism to empower or inspire the people to vote for them, but rather that the Congress drew on the communal subjectivities (constructed under colonialism) to create a division between the majority and minority religious groups. As Mukherjee and Hansen highlight, after centuries of colonial governmentalities dividing religious communities and the continuing discourse of justice as equity, popular subjectivities view other religious communities as threatening and, in the context of a majoritarian democracy, this can lead to demonization and discrimination against religious minority groups. Kishwar and Vanita therefore claim,

> The real purpose of the Congress (I) propaganda against Pakistan is to whip up communal sentiment against Muslims in India. The anti Pakistan [*sic*] sentiment invariably becomes indistinguishable from anti-Muslim sentiment. Hindus begin to see

[81] Mohak Gupta, "BJP Foundation Day: Party's rise to power from 2 MPs in 1984 to 282 in 2014," *India Today*, April 6, 2017, https://www.indiatoday.in/fyi/story/bjp-foundation-day-modi-vajpayee-1984-congress-969890-2017-04-06.

[82] Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, "The 1984 Elections: United We Fall – Into the Trap of Manipulators," *Manushi* no. 26 (Jan-Feb 1985): 5.

> Muslims as antinational [*sic*], as Pakistani spies, and to demand that a strong government keep the minorities under control.[83]

While individual communal sentiments may be truly rooted in a subjectivity created by colonial governmentalities, the manipulation and mobilization of these sentiments by the Congress (I), in Kishwar and Vanita's eyes, is entirely purposeful and politically motivated. In this moment, the Congress (I) utilizes the pedagogical rhetorical strategy of treating the nation as an object, drawing on the originary distinction between Pakistan's and India's creation to articulate an Indian national identity that is defined against Pakistan. Muslims are figured as Pakistani or anti-national even within India, bringing the 'Other' into the nation. Against this exclusivist vision of national community, Kishwar and Vanita highlight the political tactics and motivations of the party to undermine their claims and instead articulate an inclusive national community.

In the same volume, Vanita and Kishwar published a report by Lalita Ramdas called "Lest We Forget…," chronicling the writer's experience in a Sikh asylum camp created in the wake of the riots. This article reverses the dominant narrative of Sikhs as violent and instead emphasizes the behavior of Hindus in response to Gandhi's assassination to demonstrate the hypocrisy of politicians that call for a united nation while discriminating against minorities. Ramdas therefore emphasizes the performative daily re-creation of the nation to disrupt the narrative of Sikhs as violent and the nation as secular.

From her experience at the asylum camp, Ramdas recounts, "What was remarkable was that in spite of their grief, their despair, their anger against the murderers of their families, and the inhuman conditions in which they were forced to live, the Sikhs in the camp were never once

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[83] Kishwar and Vanita, "The 1984 Elections," 6.

communal in their attitude towards us, the predominantly Hindu volunteers."[84] This reverses the dominant narrative that Sikhs were the instigators and perpetrators of violence, and emphasizes instead the kindness and humanity of those in the asylum camp. Simply publishing an account that presents such a sympathetic and heartfelt image of the Sikh community is a rhetorical move by *Manushi* to articulate an inclusive national community, especially powerful in light of the common responses to the riots. Ramdas explains these responses,

> What has been truly frightening, however, is that so many educated, well off people in our society, particularly Hindus, both young and old, people who hold senior positions in the government and administration are today taking what I would call a Hindu extremist stand on the whole tragic happening. Remarks like 'they deserved it' and 'we cannot let them take over this great country of ours' have been heard by so many of us over and over again in the past months.[85]

She thus turns the critical eye back onto Hindus and highlights the intolerance of many, pointing to the blame placed on Sikhs and the presumption that India belongs to Hindus. This reversal of the representations of Hindus and Sikhs is a powerful statement that effectively challenges the rhetoric of political parties that place all the blame for communal violence on minority communities and instead calls for the dominant group to take responsibility for their repetitive acts that alienated and victimized Sikhs.

There is another important tension that emerges in this article; the tendency for those who advocate for a united, secular nation to also participate in this discrimination against Sikhs. Ramdas writes, "It is tragic that these very people hypocritically vote for a 'united, secular India'"[86] and "Because every Sikh is a shadow of Bhindranwale. Because every Sikh is a Khalistani, and hence a traitor. This is the death of secularism in this country. So much for 'unity

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[84] Lalita Ramdas, "Lest We Forget…," *Manushi* no. 26 (Jan-Feb 1985): 13.

[85] Ramdas, "Lest We Forget…," 13.

[86] Ramdas, 13.

in diversity,' so much for 'national integration' and other hollow slogans."[87] Ramdas excoriates Hindu politicians and, as she terms them, Hindu extremists that proclaim Hindu superiority or blame Sikhs for the violence committed against them, and refuses to accept this as a genuine definition of secularism. The ambiguous and contested definition and understanding of secularism will be considered throughout this project - in Ramdas, we see a definition of secularism that certainly requires openness and equality for minority religious communities, and a refusal to equate a Hindu nation with a secular nation. Ramdas instead emphasizes the contradiction between the rhetoric of secularism and communal violence to undermine politicians' claims to secularism so long as it is based in Hinduism and propaganda that uses Gandhi's assassination as an example of Sikhs' alleged volatility. The empty promises of the campaign are recognized and discarded in favor of a national community that is able to accommodate all religious communities. This challenging of the conflation between Hinduism and secularism, we will see, becomes a key move in challenging Hindu nationalism as it continues to gain power under the guise of secularism.

In volume 36, we find Sonal Mehta's "'We Know the Weapons Will Finally Turn on Us': Recurrent Anti Muslim Violence in Ahmedabad." This article recounts a recent festival that resulted in violence: "On June 9, the 101st *rathyatra* was to take place, and it was the third time that communal violence rocked the city as a fall out of the *rathyatra*. This was probably the bloodiest communal violence in the history of this city."[88] Mehta shows us the on-the-ground contestations of national community in the wake of conflict and the different rhetorical strategies utilized by various individuals of different social locations.

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[87] Ramdas, 14.

[88] Sonal Mehta, "We Know the Weapons Will Finally Turn on Us: Current Anti Muslim Violence in Ahmedabad," *Manushi* no. 36 (1987): 7.

Following the Shah Bano case (to be discussed in more detail later), which was used against the Muslim community as an example of their alleged mistreatment of women, Mehta records a heartbreaking reaction to the violence from a Muslim man, who says to her, "Hindu eyes were flooded with agony for Shahbano. Aren't all these also Banos? Where have those Hindus gone? Where has their sympathy for Muslim women gone?"[89] Here we see an interesting implication of gender politics; the man draws the gendered protection of Shah Bano to highlight the hypocrisy of Hindus' responses to the court case as opposed to communal violence. As we have also seen in the colonial context, women are often used as representatives of a community and its traditions and honor, and mistreatment of women in a community can be used to claim that the entire community's ethos is corrupt. While many Hindus claimed to be sympathetic toward this one woman, the concern was not extended to all Muslim women and the violence done to them through communal violence. The Muslim man in this conversation highlights that concerns about Shah Bano were not really about the concern for Muslim women's safety, but about the reputation of Hindu and Muslim communities, and a way to assert power over Muslim communities. This is an example of the performative narrative of the nation, as this man points to the difference of action in response to the Shah Bano case and the recurrent anti-Muslim violence. The nation is not an object in this narrative, but something that is being constantly re-produced through actions that either embrace or neglect Muslims, emphasizing their precarious status in the nation.

Mehta also quotes Bharat Vyas, a member of the Hindu Raksha Samiti, as saying "If Muslims want to live in Hindustan, they will have to become Hindus. I don't believe in

[89] Mehta, "We Know the Weapons," 10.

compromises and peace committees."[90] This again utilizes the pedagogical narrative of the nation, claiming an originary "Hindustan" that Muslims inherently do not belong to in order to justify continued violence against them. Returning to Hansen's analysis of public culture, we can see these statements as public contestations over power and national community; the Muslim man utilizing the gendered case of Shah Bano to call on Hindus to be more compassionate, and Vyas pushing the narrative of a Hindu nation. The Hindu man is more easily able to draw on a historical claim to the land, while the Muslim man, at least partially because of his positionality, is more attuned to the daily acts that define whether or not he belongs to this nation, and the precarity of this position. It is important to remember, as this story shows us, that these are not just about abstract ideas of the nation and national community, but have real concrete effects on which people (and especially which women) are considered part of the national community and therefore beneficiaries of its protections. This also shapes the subjectivities of citizens and their own understanding of their belonging.

The most profound and effective way that the writers of *Manushi* demonstrate their inclusive vision of India in the face of communal violence is through their deconstruction of Hindu nationalist rhetoric and the mechanics of Hindu majoritarianism. They point to the performative nature of communities, and to the way that Hindus are able to use their majority status to pass as universal and even secular.

Kishwar thus reports on a Convention on Communalism in 1986, "while most of the delegates who happened to belong to minority communities assumed the role of spokespersons for their communities, the Hindus present seemed to be present either in their individual capacity or as representatives of their organisations and did not assume that they represented the Hindu

[90] Mehta, 11.

community."[91] This demonstrates an important way that Hindu nationalism gets elided under the guise of secularism; because of their majority status, Hindus automatically inhabit the status of an individual, as their religious identity is already the presumed norm. This additionally protects Hindus against claims of communalism, while Muslims, on the other hand, are already marked as 'different' by virtue of their religious identity, and thus are associated with a particular group and its associated stereotypes, including being anti-national or "Pakistani spies" as we saw in the article by Kishwar and Vanita. This is reflected further in the discussion Kishwar reports on; "A common grievance of all the minorities was that while the Hindu majority is assumed to be patriotic, any sign of dissent by a minority is perceived as not only an affront to the majority, but is also dubbed antinational."[92] Again, Hinduism is associated with the nation in the form of patriotism; to be a Hindu is to be proud of the nation, to love the nation, whereas holding any other religious identity makes the subject automatically suspicious, anti-national, and communal. This shapes the subjectivities of the national subjects and determines what actions - political, religious, or otherwise - are acceptable for members of various communities, placing undue burden on religious minority groups to perform their patriotism to avoid suspicion or even violence.

Lastly, in her article "Ways to Combat Communal Violence: Some Thoughts on International Women's Day," Kishwar explains, "the rioters, killers, and looters almost always get protection, patronage and encouragement from the government machinery and politicians. This has made the battle between Hindus and Muslims very unequal since the government and

[91] Madhu Kishwar, "Convention on Communalism," *Manushi* no. 37 (1986): 26.

[92] Kishwar, "Convention on Communalism," 26.

the political machinery is dominated and controlled by the Hindu majority."[93] The Hindu majority's power is not just numerical but also reflected in political power and backing that makes communal violence possible and even encouraged for Hindus. By identifying these institutional backings and rhetorical strategies of Hindu nationalists who blame minority communities for communal violence, contributors to *Manushi* effectively undermine these points in favor of articulating an inclusive national community.

In these articles, demonstrating the daily effects of communalism in religious communities and asylum camps, the authors challenge the pedagogical Hindu nationalist narrative. Rather than accepting the idea that these conflicts are based in long-standing historical conflicts between religious communities, they interrogate the historical colonial lineage of the conflicts to point to their relatively recent nature and highlight the performative upkeep of these distinctions. By stressing the strategies of politicians that 'Other' Muslims, the daily life of Sikhs in the asylum camps, and women being restricted in their movement due to communal violence, the writers "continually evoke and erase [national narratives'] totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual – [and] disturb those ideological maneouvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities."[94] The authors emphasize instead the daily reality and performance of communal relations and thus produce a discursive split in the narration of the nation, challenging the narrative authority of the pedagogical.

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[93] Madhu Kishwar, "Ways to Combat Communal Violence: Some Thoughts on International Women's Day," *Manushi* no. 62 (Jan-Feb 1991): 9.

[94] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 149.

CHAPTER THREE, SITE TWO: THE CASE OF SHAH BANO

Mohammed Ahmed Khan v Shah Bano Begum was a major Supreme Court case in recent Indian history and played an important role in establishing the relationship between religious traditions and the state. In 1978 Shah Bano, a 62-year old woman, was forced out of her home by her husband. When he ceased paying her maintenance two years after the fact, she appealed to a local court for maintenance under the universal Criminal Procedure Code which guarantees any destitute women maintenance from their husbands. Shah Bano's appeal was approved, but her ex-husband, Mohammed Khan, then filed a petition to take the case to the Supreme Court, arguing that the judgment violated Muslim personal law which only required three months of maintenance after divorce. In 1985, the Supreme Court controversially reached their verdict in favor of Shah Bano. While the public debated whether this showed the need for a Universal Civil Code (UCC), Madhu Kishwar argues in an article for *Manushi* that this issue is used to divide religious communities rather than protect women's rights, and that there ultimately needs to be a UCC alongside personal laws to allow women to choose how they wish to be governed. This case foregrounds the need to recognize difference and the ambiguity of the modern subject.

The issue at the core of this case is the extent and limits of personal laws based on religious tradition. Secularism is built into the Indian Constitution, though it is often contested what secularism really means or looks like in a nation that did not have the same developmental trajectory as non-colonized western nations, where secularism originally developed. Whereas in America, for example, secularism is often understood as a full separation of religion and state that takes the form of governmental neutrality in relation to religion,[95] in India, secularism does

[95] It is important to note that, as Talal Asad has shown, this is not a passive position but rather an active negotiation of the 'proper' place of religion in public life.

not involve such a hands-off approach by the government. Rather, the government has specific codes based on religious tradition for the governance of religious communities, so that Hindu marriage and divorce is governed according to Hindu tradition while Muslim marriage and divorce is governed according to Muslim law.[96] This can be traced back to the colonial era, when the "division between public and domestic spheres was given legal sanction by the Warren Hastings Plan of 1772, which provided that Hindus and Muslims in the Indian sub-continent were to be governed by their own laws in disputes relating to inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious institutions."[97] This division between family-related personal laws governed by religious tradition and a universal criminal code was partially for the ease of colonial administration as well as reflecting the belief of the British that religion must be privatized for the creation of a secular public sphere in order to modernize. This legacy finds its continuation in the Indian Constitution through the discourse of justice as equity, "deployed not for the benefit of the individual – as in the historical juridical deployment of equity – but rather to provide substantial justice to the larger group – whether community, caste, tribe, ethnic, or linguistic group."[98]

The colonial system of personal laws was developed along the principle of noninterference; the colonial state was not to "interfere" into the personal law of any community without a demand from that community.[99] Interference was understood to refer to the reform

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[96] Rajeev Bhargava, "What is Indian secularism and what is it for?," *India Review* 1, no. 1 (2002): 19-29.

[97] Siobhan Mullally, "Feminism and Multicultural Dilemmas in India: Revisiting the Shah Bano Case," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 24, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 675-76.

[98] Mukherjee, *India in the Shadows of Empire*, 199.

[99] Rina Verma Williams, *Postcolonial Politics and Personal Laws: Colonial Legal Legacies and the Indian State* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006; Oxford Scholarship Online, 2012), 9, doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195680140.001.0001.

(modernization), codification (creating a uniform code that would leave little room for interpretation), or unification of personal laws.[100] Importantly, what it meant to interfere was contingent on the "demand from the community," a highly ambiguous qualifier with no specific reference for measuring "demand." This ambiguity allowed the administration to pick and choose which opinions to rely on, so that changes to personal law were often shaped by administrative needs and goals.[101]

The large, complex, and controversial task of codifying Hindu or Muslim personal law was largely avoided until the twentieth century.[102] In the late 1920s, however, American Katherine Mayo published *Mother India*, arguing that the sexual practices of India (particularly child marriage) were the cause of the unruliness of the nation and proof that they needed to be governed by the Empire.[103] This created an uproar in India, and created the conditions for mobilization to codify and reform personal laws to challenge this depiction, in addition to existing desires for reform.[104] At the same time, the Muslim League was arguing for the creation of a Muslim nation, and in 1937, the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act was passed, codifying personal laws to apply to all Muslims in India.[105] This "was a bold move to

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[100] Williams, *Postcolonial Politics and Personal Laws*, 9.

[101] Williams, 10.

[102] Williams, 10.

[103] Eleanor Newbigin, "The Codification of Personal Law and Secular Citizenship: Revisiting the History of Law Reform in Late Colonial India," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 46, no. 1 (January 2009): 93, accessed July 20, 2020, doi:10.1177/001946460804600105.

[104] Newbigin, "The Codification of Personal Law," 95.

[105] Newbigin, 95.

assert the Muslim community's claim to be fit for self-rule," and "reinforced the League's assertion that the Indian Muslim community was a united and distinct entity."[106]

After achieving independence, Nehru supported the reform of Hindu personal laws as a necessary step in modernization and fostering national unity.[107] The Hindu Code Bill, though supported by the All-India Women's Conference, the women's wing of the Congress, and several local organizations, was not uncontroversial.[108] Though support for the bills was ultimately marginal, Nehru argued that this was not a case of interference, but that occasionally the progressive minority needs to pave the way for a more moderate or conservative majority.[109] In 1955 and 1956, then, the government passed four reform bills: the Hindu Marriage and Divorce Bill, the Hindu Succession Bill, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Bill, and the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Bill.[110] These bills, among other things, allowed Hindu women to divorce their husbands and to inherit property, fueling the notion of (Hindu) women's equality as tied to national progress.

The same effort to systematically reform Muslim personal law, however, was never undertaken, though there were several cases that brought the scope of personal law into question in similar circumstances as Shah Bano. The government became aware of some Muslim men divorcing women to avoid paying their maintenance after three months.[111] The Criminal Penal Code only stated that men were responsible for supporting destitute wives, not ex-wives, so

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[106] Newbigin, 95.

[107] Williams, *Postcolonial Politics and Personal Laws*, 106.

[108] Williams, 108.

[109] Williams, 98.

[110] Williams, 104.

[111] Williams, 128.

Indira Gandhi "amended the definition of 'a wife' in Section 125 of the Cr.P.C. to include any woman who had been divorced and not remarried."[112] Many Muslim leaders challenged this as an act of interference, leading Gandhi to amend Section 127 to instead create the option to void Section 125 if a man had already fulfilled his maintenance duties according to personal law.[113] In two court cases, however, the Supreme Court upheld the right to maintenance under Section 125 and decided that the maintenance to support one's ex-wife extended beyond three months.[114]

When Shah Bano's case went to the Supreme Court, then, her application relied on Section 125.[115] Her ex-husband, on the other hand, argued that the matter should be handled by Muslim personal law, which would only require him to provide maintenance for the three-month period following the divorce.[116] The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that Shah Bano was entitled to maintenance under section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.[117] In a surprising departure from precedent, the Court did not simply state that the secular code overruled the personal law, which had been previously established, but instead embarked on an interpretation of *shari'ah* (Islamic law) to decide whether there was any conflict between Islamic code and the secular code.[118] They finally concluded that there was no conflict, relying on a more egalitarian

[112] Williams, 128.

[113] Williams, 128.

[114] Williams, 128.

[115] Mullally, "Feminism and Multicultural Dilemmas in India," 678.

[116] Mullally, 678.

[117] Mullally, 678.

[118] Mullally, 679.

interpretation, and that in cases of conflict, "the Code of Criminal Procedure would override the personal laws of religious communities."[119]

After the Supreme Court's decision was announced, along with the liberal interpretation of *shari'ah* and the statement that the Criminal Procedure Code overrides personal law, the Muslim Personal Law Board issued a resolution calling on Muslims across India to protest.[120] People protested in large numbers but were met with violent backlash from Hindu communities; violence which eventually led Shah Bano to disavow the Court's decision. Prime Minister at the time, Rajiv Gandhi, supported the Supreme Court decision until at least August 1985 but, by December of the same year, changed his position.[121] Many view this as a response to electoral losses in two state, including a Congress candidate losing to a Muslim candidate from the Janata Party. This loss demonstrated that Muslims may not support the Congress after this decision, so to appeal to Muslim voters and maintain power, Gandhi proposed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights in Divorce) Bill (MWB).[122] The MWB held that matters of maintenance would be governed by Muslim personal law and that a husband would not have to support his wife after three months; rather, the responsibility would fall ultimately on the community. This bill, quickly passed, "was described by opponents and even some supporters as hastily drafted and flawed, even with respect to classical Muslim law."[123]

It is important to note the function of the principle of noninterference here; the Supreme Court ruling was viewed by the government as interference only after protests and electoral

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[119] Mullally, 679.

[120] Williams, *Postcolonial Politics and Personal Law*, 130.

[121] Williams, 131.

[122] Williams, 132.

[123] Williams, 132.

losses, and Gandhi's government effectively decided that "conservatives represented 'real' Muslim opinion about the *Shah Bano* decision without systematically trying to determine popular opinion among Muslims at large."[124] This shows a clear contrast with the Hindu Code Bill, where the progressive minority was considered more important than the majority opinion. Here, the conservative opinion was chosen as the 'real' one, reinforcing narratives of the Muslim community as more conservative and resistant to reform.[125]

This case and the subsequent passing of the MWB sparked many intense debates around the proper way to govern religious subjects, particularly in the context of Hindu majoritarianism and a rising Hindu nationalist movement. Women's rights activists were divided about the proper course forward - some supported a secular UCC that would protect women's rights regardless of religious tradition, some favored reform of personal laws, and some feared that reform or a UCC would actually undermine Muslims' rights as a religious minority in India. The issue was nuanced by the rise of the Hindu right, complicating the question of what it means to protect all minority women's rights. Given these differences, it is productive to think through *Manushi*'s handling of this case with the question posed by Homi Bhabha:

> How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonist, conflictual and even incommensurable?[126]

This question points us towards the negotiation of needs between communities that may have similar histories but distinct contemporary needs, which may be at odds with each other. The

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[124] Williams, 14.

[125] Williams, 18-19.

[126] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

way to handle this differentiation of needs is at the core of the Shah Bano case, and *Manushi* provides us an example of the strategies of representation and empowerment that can arise in these situations. Their strategies, we will see, involve emphasizing women's role in the performative maintenance of communities and the shifting markers of their difference.

The most substantial article covering the Shah Bano case was published in *Manushi* in 1986, after the announcement of the verdict and Shah Bano's subsequent self-distancing from the case. The article, authored by Madhu Kishwar, is entitled, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim?: The Shahbano Controversy." In this article, Kishwar points out the weaponization of the case against Muslims, arguing that anti-Muslim bias is hiding under the façade of concern for women's rights. She writes,

> Do not most husbands in our society exercise this privilege, regardless of their religion or lack of religion? By singling out Muslim men and Islam in this way, Justice Chandrachud converts what is essentially a women's rights issue into an occasion for a gratuitous attack upon a community. The entire tone of judgments gives one the erroneous impression that other communities in India have a perfectly egalitarian and secular law.[127]

This strategy of empowerment emphasizes the shared histories of women in both Hindu and Muslim communities, arguing that the abuse of women by husbands is an experience that crosses religious traditions and cannot be limited only to treatment of Muslim wives by Muslim husbands, emphasizing solidarity among women. She points as well to the common equivocation of Hindu law, secular law, and egalitarianism that becomes a powerful tool in the hands of Hindu nationalists. She continues, "Once again women are being used by men of different communities to settle scores with each other,"[128] highlighting the use of women as a site of contestation between men. Her language harkens back to a shared experience of women, again emphasizing

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[127] Madhu Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim?: The Shahbano Controversy," *Manushi* no. 32 (1986): 4.

[128] Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim?," 4.

their shared history to challenge attempts to divide Hindu and Muslim women. The controversy around the case, in this view, was not truly about Shah Bano's rights or ensuring gender equality but was rather a ground for conflicts between Hindu and Muslim men and the representation of their communities.

Personal laws have thus been constructed as markers of difference and identity for religious communities, especially Muslims; markers which are always shifting, and "[create] a set of images, both in the self-image of different members of the Muslim community, and in the perception of other actors including the State, different political parties, and individuals."[129] By focusing on personal laws primarily in the context of Muslim laws and leaving Hindu personal laws unquestioned as the norm, Muslims are marked as different (a precarious position which informs governmental and personal perceptions of what it means to be Muslim) -- and the concern with women's rights is lost.

This case, with its focus on difference and the meaning of equality in difference, was impactful for Indian women's rights activism. The recognition that there is no monolithic category of "woman" but rather that women are differentiated by their various other identities, particularly religious affiliation, class, and caste, was pushed to the forefront.[130] Those concerned with women's equality had to grapple with what equality looks like for women of different social locations and affiliations. The view of difference as a deviation from a presumed norm and the subsequent use of difference to justify discrimination and oppression is deeply problematic, and as Bhabha reminds us, "The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of

[129] Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms*, 33.

[130] Pan, "Embracing Difference," 42.

difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities."[131] The representation of Muslim women as 'different' needs to be interrogated as a construction – but it also needs to be grappled with as an existing construction that has real, tangible, legal impacts on Muslim women. Difference must therefore be problematized while also being taken seriously in projects such as crafting equal legislation.

As Kimberle Crenshaw explained in her seminal article "Mapping the Margins" (in which she explicates the now-famous term intersectionality)[132], legislation that does not account for the multilayered nature of women's identities inevitably leaves some to fall through the cracks. She considers the case of immigrant women as victims of domestic violence in America and demonstrates the ways that American marriage fraud legislation required women to stay married for two years before becoming a resident, discouraging victims of abuse from reporting or leaving their partners as they risked losing the chance at American citizenship.[133] This is a unique experience created by one's existence as an immigrant woman, not simply immigrant or woman, and is further compounded by lack of access to resources because of institutional barriers. Similarly, Shah Bano's case is unique to her experience as a Muslim woman and prominent activist, which shapes her awareness of both traditional community expectations, the legal channels available to her, and her ability to access these channels. Crenshaw discusses as well the pressures that African American women face as representatives of a marginalized community in the United States; if they are victims of domestic violence, for example, they must

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[131] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2.

[132] While "intersectionality" was coined by Crenshaw in 1989, it is important to note that the concept of Black women having specific experiences due to the specific combination of (at least) race and gender has a long genealogy in Black feminism. The concept was also discussed in movements across the world, including Dalit feminism, before the term itself was used.

[133] Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 34, no. 6 (July 1991): 1247-50.

weigh reporting against the possible consequence of contributing to a negative perception of African American men as violent.[134] Shah Bano's case clearly parallels these concerns, particularly with her later self-distancing from the case and ultimate rejection of the maintenance she was granted in the face of violence against her community.

Insights such as these emerge as well in Dalit feminism. Dalit feminism grew in response to homogenizing mainstream Indian feminism, which often does not account for differences among women and rather represents the specific issues of upper-caste and upper-class Hindu women.[135] Finding this insufficient in explaining their own experiences, Dalit women began to theorize about their experiences using intersectional analyses focusing particularly on gender, class, and caste.[136] Prominent Dalit feminist Ruth Manorama recounts, "How can Ruth bring that important word! Of course, I did not write much in my paper on intersectionality in 1987, about the Dalit woman, the downtrodden among the downtrodden, I brought that interface of caste, class and gender."[137] In addition to noting the specific and compounded oppression that Dalit women face at the intersection of caste, class, and gender, she highlights the use of women and their bodies as a site of violence and contestation between men and communities. Manorama explains that when a woman is raped, "It is as if the culprits have taken the property, the victim, owned by the community of the victim. So in all wars women have been raped. In India, the

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[134] Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins," 1252-58.

[135] D. Jyothiramai and K. Sree Ramesh, "African American Womanism Speaks to Dalit Feminism: Special Reference to Telugu Dalit Women's Literature," *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities* 9, no. 1 (2017): 140.

[136] Jyothiramai and Ramesh, "African American Womanism Speaks to Dalit Feminism," 142-143.

[137] Dev N. Pathak, "Making Sense – With Ruth Manorama: A Dalit Feminist Activist," *Antyajaa: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 1, no. 1 (2016): 107-108.

caste war continues like that."[138] The reality of Dalit women's bodies used as a way to assert power over the community and to strengthen caste distinctions must be grappled with in feminist analyses. Monolithic categories such as 'woman' or 'woman's experience' erase the differences between women and their experiences *as* 'women' and is not a productive beginning site for activism. Women's rights activists must, instead, listen to the experiences of women from various social locations to consider how gender inflects and is inflected by class and caste, among other points. Only then can activists craft resistance that uplifts *all* women.

While the terminology developed differently, perhaps partially due to the Dalit women's lack of access to institutional education, Dalit feminism importantly utilizes intersectional analyses to engage with the complexity of identity in indigenous terms. Kishwar, we see, emphasizes this understanding of difference at several points throughout *Manushi*, where she argues for honoring individuals' complex identities, and in this article, uses the case of Shah Bano to consider how to craft legislation that protects all women's rights. This moment is a clear example of *Manushi* as a minority discourse. Bhabha explains that minority discourse "acknowledges the status of national culture – and the people – as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life."[139] With this case, we see the pedagogical representation of the nation as a singular, existing unit clash with the reality of the differences between women and the performance of belonging to any specific community.

To grapple with these differences, then, women's rights activists must consider the different experiences of women and their different relationships to the state and governance

[138] Pathak, "Making Sense," 107.

[139] Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 157.

when weighing the options of a secular code or personal laws. Scholar Geetanjali Gangoli considers the relationship between secularism and personal laws in more depth, explaining, "The authors of the [Status of Women] report concluded that there was an urgent need to implement a UCC, on the grounds of national integration, modernisation and gender parity."[140] These justifications all recapitulate colonial claims. Claiming aUCC as a prerequisite for modernisation echoes the call for the privatization of religion as a necessary step in modernisation. Similarly, the claim that a UCC is needed for gender parity is a perhaps misguided assessment of equality as sameness, and further ties the rhetoric of women's equality to national integration and modernisation. Given these complicated and intertwined relationships between modernization, secularization, and gender equality, gendered personal laws become central to the definition of national community; which of course, cannot be disentangled from women's role as the symbols of their communities and of the nation. This is further compounded by Shah Bano's position as a member of a minority community which is already in a position of precarity.

Recognizing this connection between colonial governmentalities and the current situation, Kishwar draws an insightful and intriguing connection between the Shah Bano case and British colonialism in India. She writes,

> After the British succeed in firmly establishing their rule in India in the nineteenth century, one of the main ideological weapons they used to justify their domination over Indians was to claim they had a mission to reform what they characterised as the 'uncivilised' and 'backward' state of Indian society. They arrogated themselves a 'civilising' role. Their favourite symbol of the 'unreformed' state of Indian society was the plight of Indian women. Customs such as Sati, child marriage, female seclusion, and ban on widow marriage were used as proof of the backward state of Hindu society, much in the same way as Hindus today are using burkah, *talaq*, and other discriminatory aspects of Muslim personal law and practice to 'prove' how barbaric and backward Muslims and Islam are.[141]

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[140] Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms,* 44.
[141] Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim?," 6.

To draw attention to the unfair criticism leveled at Muslims during the time of this case, Kishwar draws on the common history of colonialism to highlight the way some Hindus' actions were mimicking those of colonizers. This further points to the use of women's rights as a site for asserting power over a community rather than actual concern for the women; a point that is highlighted by Lata Mani's groundbreaking analysis of British concerns over *sati*.[142] This is a powerful rhetorical tool that moves beyond gendered solidarity and reminds Hindus of their colonized past to call on them to reject repeating the same practices. Emphasizing common history over differences by drawing on shared experiences of gendered oppression and colonialism, Kishwar's national community reaches across religious lines.

Closely related to women's representation of the nation is their identification with religious tradition. As bearers of children and therefore reproducers of culture, women are instrumental in the continuation of religious tradition and thus their protection is associated with the protection of tradition.[143] When some Hindus denigrate Muslim men for their treatment of Muslim women, they are often doing so to raise the integrity of their treatment of their 'own' women as a signpost for the superiority of Hinduism over Islam. Referencing work done by Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran, scholar Irene Gedalof explains,

> while men become citizens and claim democratic rights in the public space of modern civil society, they still depend for their identity on a sense of rootedness in older forms of community, which, in modern India, tend to centre on the family and what they call a 'religio-cultural fringe.' [...] A tension is therefore set up between women's identity in/as the closed stable space of community and their demands for democratic rights as citizens in the open-ended space of civil society.[144]

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[142] Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[143] Asha Nadkarni, *Eugenic Feminism*, 20. See also Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), and McClintock (1991).

[144] Irene Gedalof, *Against Purity: Rethinking identity with Indian and Western feminisms* (New York City, New York: Routledge, 1999): 60.

This echoes the double discourse established by the colonial state and the creation of the ambiguous subject with ties to both modern democracy and religious tradition. This tension is clearly demonstrated in Shah Bano's case, as her attempts to claim her democratic rights stokes indignation in her community for therefore challenging the stability of the tradition. Women are made to perform as the symbol of the community and negotiate their needs against their community needs -- an especially difficult position when one is a member of a minority group and must weigh personal benefits against negative communal consequences.

We see this as Kishwar writes

> [Shah Bano] said this judgment seemed to be creating conditions for *danga prasad* or riots, and she did not want to be the cause of anti Muslim riots. Thus, even while strongly acknowledging the injustice done to her as a woman, she felt compelled to give up her struggle in order to save her community from attack by Hindu communalists. She was made to feel as if asserting her rights as a woman, she was exposing her already very vulnerable community to further attack.[145]

Kishwar again emphasizes solidarity based on gender and foregrounds gender-based commonalities rather than religious communalism. Shah Bano's precarious position as a minority woman is emphasized as well, pointing to the burden placed on women to negotiate the consequences of her rights against making her community vulnerable to violent attacks. The problem then is not only the unjust traditional law, but the violent consequences that accompany speaking out against the custom.

Kishwar explicates the Hindu right's manipulation of the case:

> Hindu communalist bodies like the Shiv Sena and RSS have issued statements demanding a common civil code in the interests of national unity. But what they mean by national unity is clear from their statements. For instance, RSS chief Balasaheb Deoras, said on November 9, 1985, that the main purpose of the RSS is Hindu unity and it believes all citizens of India should have a 'Hindu culture.'[146]

[145] Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim?," 5.
[146] Kishwar, "Pro Women or Anti Muslim?," 11.

She explicitly identifies the idea of national community being advanced by Hindu nationalist groups: a nation that is defined through Hinduism, ambiguously defined alternatively as religion, culture, or 'way of life.' Further, "Most Hindus seem to believe that their law is 'secular and Indian' and not 'religious' at all. But the fact is that Hindus continue to be governed by Hindu personal law in such matters as marriage, divorce and succession."[147] This highlights again the ability of majoritarian politics to disguise themselves as universal, in this case also implying secular. To ameliorate this situation, Kishwar declares,

> The Hindu community has to learn to enter debate and discussion about the affairs of the minority communities without engaging in physical and cultural aggression. Statements such as 'if the Muslims don't want this change, let them go to Pakistan' are based on the arrogant assumption that this country belongs only to Hindus and others can stay here only on their terms. Such an approach, far from bringing about 'national integration' will tear the country and its people apart. We have to understand that conservative Muslims and Christians have as much right to be citizens of this country as do conservative Hindus.[148]

She importantly places the burden of rectifying the situation onto the Hindu majority, rather than placing more responsibility onto the minority religious group to protect themselves. Drawing attention to the Hindu right's hypocrisy in claiming to be concerned with 'national integration' while stoking antagonism against Muslims, she also points to the pedagogical rhetoric of national integration functioning as a way of using women's issues to assert the need for sameness between communities over equality in other forms. To bridge the gap between these positions, she ultimately proposes the development of a UCC alongside personal laws, giving women the option to choose how they would prefer to be governed.

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[147] Kishwar, 8.

[148] Kishwar, 12.

Mithi Mukherjee argues that, following independence, the Indian polity has been shaped by "two primary historical legacies – the Congress discourse of imperial justice and the Gandhian legacy of non-violent mass movement. It is the dialectic of these two legacies that has determined the nature and dynamics of postcolonial politics in India."[149] The imperial discourse of justice as equity, taking community as its foundational unit and maintaining the distinction between criminal and civil code, is at work in the arguments for personal laws and upholds the notion of India as a nation of discrete, incompatible communities. A UCC, however, would take the individual as the foundational unit with the Gandhian aim of empowering individuals. The negotiation between these two is necessarily complicated by their long discursive genealogies and how deeply entrenched the notion of discrete communities has become.

It is important to note that "To speak only of exclusion in this context [of legislation] is, however, to tell only part of the story. These [domestic personal] laws, and the power relations of which they are a part, *produce* women as subjects of a particular kind, and these women's activities in turn *enable* the production of particular community identities."[150] It is important to challenge the association of women primarily with their religious traditions, a perception enabled and reinforced by personal laws, while also recognizing that these laws and discourses have created significant differences between Hindu and Muslim women's identities. This claim holds true in both the Shah Bano case specifically and the rise of Hindu nationalism more generally.

In the Shah Bano case, we see that the laws governing women, of course, demarcate what they are able to do and the allowed forms of action for them, which are also culturally and religiously prescribed; Muslim women were, in this case, not to seek maintenance after a specific

[149] Mukherjee, *India in the Shadows of Empire*, 222.
[150] Gedalof, *Against Purity*, 180.

time period. By appealing to the courts for maintenance, Shah Bano challenges these limits and troubled the norms of the community; simultaneously produced by and producing new modes of being a Muslim woman. She is aware of the Islamic tradition that allows for the cessation of maintenance after three months, but as a democratic citizen is also aware of the secular law she can appeal to for what she considers the just continuation of her maintenance. Deciding to prioritize her democratic rights, Shah Bano expands the meaning of being a Muslim woman; beyond following tradition, Muslim women can also prioritize their democratic rights. This process in turn enables a production of community identity; and as we see, she is policed for pushing the boundaries of the community identity. She is instead pressured into accepting the traditional law, thereby undermining her claims to her democratic rights. Indeed, the very use of this case as justification for discrimination against Muslims demonstrates how communities are represented and defined by individual actions.

Though the case opened up the possibility for other Muslim women to appeal for maintenance, and even established the precedent in the courts for the primacy of the secular code over personal law, it also demonstrated the consequences that the women and their community would face if they chose to do so. As Gedalof continues, "it seems that in order to legitimate those particular community identities, women's bodies and behaviour need to be controlled and discursive constructs of Woman need to be promoted as a stable, unchanging, and pure ground of those identities."[151] We can understand through this the policing of Shah Bano as a representative of the Muslim community - because she is a member of a marginalized community, it is even more important that her behavior be controlled and stable. The character of the community is under intense scrutiny and attack, so the policing of any subversive actions is intensified to

[151] Gedalof, 203.

protect and present the community's idealized image of themselves - Shah Bano is under pressure to perform properly. Due to this threat, the community is also in a precarious position that creates a sense of anxiety over the future of the community, leading to a clinging to tradition that falls on the shoulders of women.

In the larger sense, the production of subjects through exclusion is also applicable to the definition of India as a 'Hindu culture.' Rhetoric of this type shapes the ways that individuals and communities relate to each other and to the state; the nation is not simply defined, but also produced. As we have seen, to be Muslim automatically figures as a mark of 'difference' and questionable loyalty to the nation. This 'difference' is in fact used to make Muslims an 'Other' for the Hindu nation to be defined against, shaping not only the creation of the nation, but of the subjectivities of its subjects. Thus limits are placed on how all Muslims can present, understand, and produce themselves as national citizens, and especially on Muslim women who must navigate the tensions between the expectations placed upon them by their religious communities and the democratic state. In a 2008 study of Muslim women's organizations, in fact, Nida Kirmani found that at least one organization emphasized Muslim identity only because "whether one is a practising Muslim or not, she will be identified and placed as a Muslim as a 'forced identity' by society."[152] In this reification of difference, along with Kishwar's analysis of Hindu men as reenacting colonial rhetoric against Muslim women, we can see again the lingering governmentalities of colonialism.

The Shah Bano case was a foundational moment in defining the future vision of Indian national community and how it would relate to religious groups, setting the precedent for the

[152] Nida Kirmani, "Beyond the Impasse: 'Muslim Feminism(s)' and the Indian Women's Movement," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 45, no. 1 (Feburary 2011): 15-16.

secular criminal code to overrule religious personal laws. While feminists and women's rights activists held varying views on the need for a UCC versus personal laws, Kishwar shows us how this case served Hindu right discrimination against Muslims and their attempt to use the moment to advance an articulation of national community that excludes Muslims on the basis of their treatment of women. Hindu nationalists utilized the case to perpetuate claims of a strict delineation between Hindu and Muslim communities, and how they treat their women, but Kishwar challenges this pedagogical narrative by instead bringing out the performative reality of women's oppression across religious communities and the burden placed on women to uphold the image of their community. Highlighting instead the historical, patriarchal, and colonial commonalities of Hindu and Muslim women's oppressions, as well as the pressure placed on Shah Bano to performatively represent her community, Kishwar argues for a national community that guarantees equality for all women, Muslim and Hindu alike.

CHAPTER FOUR, SITE THREE: THE RISE OF HINDU NATIONALISM

The topic that ultimately occupies the most space in *Manushi* is the rise of Hindu nationalism. Its beginnings are seen in the early articles about communalism and reports on Hindu nationalist success in elections. *Manushi* responds strongly to the rise of Hindutva, particularly through Madhu Kishwar's own articles as Kishwar takes over the editorial board following Vanita's departure in the 1991. In these articles, Kishwar attempts to undermine Hindu nationalists through several strategies, including the deconstruction of Hindu nationalist rhetoric, advocating for the separation of religion and politics, and challenging the authenticity of the Sangh Parivar's religiosity. Before turning to the increasing success of Hindutva in the late twentieth century, it will be helpful to review the historical context of the movement.

In the early twentieth century, a new kind of nationalism became popular in Europe. This nationalism was not only turned inward, but was deeply engaged with the 'Other', "[trafficking] in celebrations of national glory and adventure, connecting the nation to conceptions not merely of domination, but of a philosophical anthropology that insisted that domination and subordination made up the shared design in which both nations and individuals participated."[153] Rapid modernization and increasing rationalism allowed for a teleological discourse of progress that could be utilized in a pedagogical narrative of the nation to argue for a nation's superiority over others based on their position in the trajectory of "progress."[154] Disillusioned responses to modernity that emphasized tradition combined with this discourse to present a discourse of

[153] Lawrence Rosenthal and Vesna Rodic, Introduction to *A Storm before the Great Storm: New Faces of a Distinctly Twentieth-Century Nationalism,* ed. Rosenthal and Rodic (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 2.

[154] Rosenthal and Rodic, "Introduction," 3.

nationalism that depicts the nation as having some essential cultural characteristic which has lasted through its progression.[155]

After spending time in Europe, V.D. Savarkar drew on similar arguments made by German nationalists at the time to coin the term Hindutva, encompassing the ideas that "Hindus constituted a distinct civilization in which a primordial Hindu existence was the natural order"[156] and that "Hindutva is not a word but a history" and refers to a Hindu "way of life" rather than religion. As scholar Janaki Bakhle explains, Savarkar argues that "'Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race.' The quotidian behavior of Hindus, their cultural habitus, even their political opinions all come under the term *Hindutva*, whether they like it or not and whether they identify themselves as Hindu or not."[157] The understanding of race here is tied to the notion of geography and of being from the land, as well as blood relation. Importantly, this brings all Indians under the umbrella of being "Hindu," at least at first glance. In Savarkar's later work and in the Hindutva movement writ large, it becomes clear that Muslims are not included in this vision. This move of totalizing Hindu identity erases difference and the possibility of personal choice of religious identity - "The logic is inclusive and accretive, escalating to the idea of a superreligion that ignores sectarian and even confessional divides (monists, pantheists, theists, and atheists), and ties everyone together by blood."[158] As Bakhle demonstrates, Savarkar rests his definition of Hindutva on a mythologized

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[155] Rosenthal and Rodic, 3-5.

[156] Sitara Thobani, "Alt-Right with the Hindu-right: long-distance nationalism and the perfection of Hindutva," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 42, no. 4 (2019): 752, accessed July 20, 2020, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2018.1468567

[157] Janaki Bakhle, "Country First? Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (1883-1966) and the Writing of Essentials of Hindutva," *Public Culture* 22, no. 1 (January 2010): 159, accessed June 13, 2020, *https://doi-org.colorado.idm.oclc.org/10.1215/08992363-2009-020*.

[158] Bakhle, "Country First?," 161.

landscape of India, blood relation, and reverence for the land of India which is then equated with reverence of Hindu gods.[159] Given the common narrative of Muslims as invaders of India and not truly 'of the land' or belonging to the same families of blood relation, this can effectively exclude them from the national picture. This is an inherently ambiguous picture of Hinduism; it is described as a way of life that can be undertaken by anyone and accept anyone into its fold, appearing vast and inclusive, while also requiring an affection for the land and its sacred qualities which perniciously then requires individuals to accept Hindu sacred myths and becomes actually exclusive.

Though the term Hindutva was first used in 1923, the ideology did not become mainstream or widely politically powerful until the 1980s. So we must ask: what conditions created the space for Hindutva to gain popularity? Scholars have attributed the success to various causes including an appealing religious draw, smart political strategizing, and/or juridical decisions. By utilizing Hansen's conception of the public culture, we can take a multifaceted approach to consider the many avenues that Hindu nationalists used to gain legitimacy, as well as the voices that challenged them.

Hansen tracks the development of Hindu nationalism in India, including the Hindu Mahasabha and Muslim League advocates for nations based on religious community, Gandhi's syncretism that attempted to use a type of perennialism to create a national spiritual harmony, and the attainment of Independence.[160] In the 1930s as the movement for Independence was gaining traction, Nehru and other leftists "developed the idea of the Indian nation as an abstract, modern (synthetic) ideal that could transcend older forms of identifications with community and

[159] Bakhle, 163-166.

[160] Bakhle, 45.

caste by relegating them to the realm of the irrational and pre-modern, and eventually render them irrelevant."[161] Thus in Nehru we see the continuation of the colonial privatization of religion as a requirement of modernity, along with the distinction between the elite and the 'masses,' figured as blinded by superstition. In this image, the origin of the strong identifications with religious community and caste, stoked by the British, is unchallenged. It is rather accepted that rational, educated, modern individuals will accept religion as privatized belief and those that still cling to religious community and caste are dismissed as irrational. This again reinscribes colonial notions of religious practice, particularly practices that are localized and disconnected from religious texts, as backwards, superstitious, and a sign of the need to be governed. Note here that the association of women with tradition therefore leads to their association with the premodern and irrational, as well. This association, furthermore, is not homogenous but applies differentially to women of various social locations; to be an upper-caste Hindu wife of a progressive Hindu man that encourages education, for example, may make it easier to privatize belief and be perceived as a modern subject. A woman of lower-caste living in rural regions, however, may engage in more localized and ritualistic behavior that is seen as 'superstitious' and 'backwards'. The brunt of bearing tradition and the connotations associated with it is therefore left on the backs of marginalized women.

As Chatterjee points out, however, nationalists also rallied around Hinduism as an Indian identity. Hansen explains, "To most brands of nationalists, regardless of their secular-rational or religious-national idiom, Hindu culture constituted, paradoxically, both the impediment (in its old, disperse form), and the solution (in its reformed, nationalized, or synthetic forms) to the

[161] Bakhle, 46.

final realization of nationhood."[162] The impediment, then, is identified as the religious masses (again associated most strongly with women) that practice regional rituals and uphold what is considered folk, superstitious practice, while the solution is a reformed Hinduism that can be applicable to all individuals regardless of the school of Hinduism they practice and thereby serve as a national identity. This strategy again places women in a precarious location as both objects of pedagogical historicism and performative bearers of tradition.

With this context in mind, let us turn to the major articles in *Manushi* that concern Hindutva, written primarily by Kishwar herself. Through these articles, we will see that Kishwar's main approach to undermining Hindu nationalism utilizes at least three methods: highlighting the BJP's tactics of chauvinism, advocacy for the total separation of religion and politics, and challenging the authenticity of the Sangh Parivar's religiosity. The method of highlighting the BJP's tactics is a critical educational approach to highlight the contradictions and harmful premises of Hindutva. Through deconstruction, one can better challenge their arguments and remain more mindful of the harmful ideas and consequences of the movement. Once deconstructed, Kishwar's main challenge to the Sangh Parivar is the inappropriate mixing of religion and politics, which serves to advance her additional argument that the Sangh Parivar's Hinduism is inauthentic.

The article about the 1984 elections discussed earlier was the first article that pointed to the electoral success of ideology similar Hindu nationalism, though this success was limited. By 1990, the Sangh Parivar (a collection of Hindu nationalist groups coming out of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh [RSS], including the Vishva Hindu Parishad [VHP] and the BJP) had gained in popularity and Hindu nationalists were actively campaigning. With this backdrop,

[162] Bakhle, 67.

Kishwar published "In Defence of Our *Dharma*," an article focusing primarily on the BJP and the ambiguous definition of secularism.

Run along with the article are excerpts from BJP speeches which were also recorded and sold as cassette tapes. Among the quotes from the speeches are declarations such as "October 30 will decide your fate. On this day it will become clear whether Hindus or Muslims will live in this country" and "Your strength has been divided. Unite across caste, province, language, breaking these three artificial walls… Those who severed the arms of Mother India -- For those hypocrites there is no place here. They should leave this Bharat. This Hindustan is not theirs."[163] These quotes both clearly demonstrate the BJP's stoking of fear and hatred against Muslims. They show that the BJP is arguing for a mono-religious nation and calling upon Indians to transcend caste, province, or language-based identities, but not religious identity. This can be seen to suggest that religious identity is not able to be transcended, again resorting to the image of religious communities as primordial, and to Hindus as having the sole rightful claim to the land.

They claim as well, "Those [Muslims] who value their religion more than their nation, they can never be nationalists. And those who treat religion as a personal matter [Hindus] can never be communalists. Hindus cannot be communalists because those who give pride of place to their religion cannot be communalists."[164] Here we see the sentiment again echoed that Muslims cannot belong to the national community inherently on the basis of their religious identity. Muslims are figured as prioritizing their religious affiliations over the nation, while

[163] Madhu Kishwar, "In Defence of Our *Dharma*," *Manushi* no. 60 (1990): 4.

[164] Kishwar, "In Defence of Our *Dharma*," 4.

Hindus are depicted as unable to be communal because their loyalty is to the land. The BJP further declares,

> Those Muslims who stayed behind could do so because of the tolerance and large heartedness of the Hindus. Any non-Hindu who lives here does so at our mercy (*kirpa pe jee rahaa hai*). [...] In future we have to prove that only those who honour Hindu womenfolk and holy men, believe in Hindu culture, Hindu history and gods and goddesses can stay in Hindustan.[165]

Muslims in India are depicted as "staying behind" after Partition and as belonging only at the mercy of Hindus; mercy which can then be retracted at any time. This once again rests on a pedagogical historicist strategy that emphasizes the "originary" claim of Hindus to the land. The ambiguous distinction at the core of Hindutva between Hindu 'culture' and 'religion' is made clear in the equivocation of Hindu history with belief in Hindu gods, goddesses, and holy men.

At this point in time, the BJP was focused on the Ram Mandir movement. This movement is based on the idea that the historical birthplace of the Vedic hero Ram could be traced back to a place called Ayodhya, where Muslim conquerors allegedly ruined a temple to Ram and established the Babri Masjid in its place. To rectify this perceived attack on Hinduism, the BJP fiercely advocated for the demolition of the Babri Masjid, eventually successfully calling on followers to tear it down with their own tools in 1992. Kishwar argues that the Ram Mandir movement is mainly supported by the English-educated middle class, writing,

> The liberal, secular intelligentsia is rooted more in the western liberal tradition and is often unable to comprehend, leave alone appreciate, the sentiments and cherished beliefs of India's diverse peoples. Their attitude is often similar to that of the erstwhile colonial rulers who contemptuously dismissed the social, religious, and cultural beliefs of the Indian people as superstitious mumbo-jumbo.[166]

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[165] Kishwar, 6.

[166] Kishwar, 2.

She thus draws an explicit connection between the ossification of religious and caste identities by the British and by the new political middle class, because of their colonial education. As the governmentalities that allowed them to gain political power, the middle class was invested in these power structures. In the 1980s, however, increased social mobility empowered rural and lower class people, creating a sense of anxiety in the middle class that their power was being challenged.[167] Kishwar thus claims "The real agenda of the BJP is capture of state power for the purpose of implementing the politics of revenge. Even though they use the rhetoric of protecting the 'Hindu way of life,' the BJP-RSS-VHP combine has kept its followers deliberately ignorant of their cultural heritage."[168] The Sangh Parivar then, for Kishwar, is adopting and perpetuating colonial tools, including deliberate education that mystifies India's history, to promote a false Hindu identity based on colonial projections and constructions rather than 'authentic' Hindu tradition.

To demonstrate her point, Kishwar writes, "[My students] are not even aware of the existence of different regional and community versions of the Ramayan. It is almost impossible to get them into a discussion on the great epic. There is only one aspect of the Ram Mandir movement that excites them -- taking revenge on the Muslims. The Ram Mandir movement is grounded not in the love of Ram or Ramayan but in the hatred of Muslims."[169] Again, we see Kishwar distinguishing between religion as a mobilizing force and the manipulation of religious imagery and attitudes as a political tool, again along the lines of the rhetorical linearity of religion against the performative reality of localized traditions. The religious inauthenticity is

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[167] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 144-45.

[168] Kishwar, "In Defence of Our *Dharma*," 3.

[169] Kishwar, 3.

proven, in her eyes, by the lack of knowledge about the religious basis for the claims being made. She further interrogates the use of the Ramayan and specifically Ram by the BJP, writing,

> Ram's date or place of birth cannot possibly be ascertained with accuracy. But the BJP Combine insists on reducing him to the status of someone who lived at a specific time at a specific place because they are desperate to model their belief on Islam and Christiantiy, religions that emphasize the significance of offering a place and time of birth for their founders, Prophet Mohammad and Jesus Christ.[170]

Rather than a genuine attempt to ascertain the location of Ram's birth for worship, Kishwar identifies this movement as an attempt to model colonial religious forms. Notably, she aligns Islam and Christianity and suggests that the BJP is attempting to mimic Islam, even though the goal of the movement is to destroy a mosque.

Kishwar interestingly engages with religion in her arguments around this topic. She writes of the Sangh Parivar, "they are obsessed with mobilising Hindus as a political force to subordinate and terrorise non-Hindus in India. Their *dharma* is nationalism, not Hinduism,"[171] drawing a strong distinction between 'true' religiosity and the manipulation of religion by political actors and emphatically placing the BJP in the latter category. "Many secularists see the BJP as promoting an unhealthy religiosity," she writes. "Nothing could be further from the truth. The BJP-RSS-VHP game is to selectively use Gods from the Hindu pantheon to practise their brand of murderous nationalism."[172] She thus refuses to view the BJP as enacting genuine religiosity, instead identifying gods as pawns in the BJP's "game." This shows an idea of religion that is closed off and resistant to adaptation; simply the political use of religious imagery strips the imagery of its religiosity for Kishwar. Kishwar's strategy here is two-fold: first, shift

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[170] Kishwar, "In Defence of Our *Dharma*," 5. At this time, Kishwar was teaching at Delhi University.

[171] Kishwar, 5.

[172] Kishwar, 7.

the responsibility for conflict and violence onto politics rather than religion, and secondly, enforce this claim by denying that the religious tradition itself does not encourage this type of action and therefore is clearly being appropriated by political actors. While earlier strategies, as we saw in the articles about communal violence, emphasize the political nature of the conflict above the religious, here Kishwar begins additionally addressing and dismantling the idea that politics could be legitimately religious, and specifically that *these* politics could be legitimately *Hindu*. She instead depicts religion as its own sphere that political actors are can reach into and take imagery to appropriate for their own use. In her view, this is intertwined with the BJP's mimicry of colonial maneuvers, as she writes, "The Hinduism being propagated by the RSS-BJP Combine resembles the many brutal periods in the history of Christianity and Islam when they wreaked destruction and massacred many peoples in proselytising and conquering all over the world."[173] "Hinduism," on the other hand, "united the animate with the inanimate. There are strong voices within the Hindu tradition which forbid violence even to animals and plants, leave alone human beings."[174] She therefore contrasts the violence of Christianity (the religion of the colonizers) with the peaceful nature of 'true' Hinduism. It is important to note here that she includes Islam as a violent tradition, echoing Hindu nationalist talking points of Muslims invading and destroying India and Hinduism. This type of comparison easily alienates Muslim women, revealing a blind spot in her articulation of national community that probably comes as a function of her privilege as a Hindu woman. She elaborates on the distinction between the Abrahamic religions and Hinduism and its potential political implications:

> Unlike the gods of Semitic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the gods of the Hindus are not jealous gods. We Hindus have an easy relationship with our gods. [...] All this and more has provided a good deal of space for dissent and diversity within the

[173] Kishwar, 9.

[174] Kishwar, 9.

> Hindu religious and cultural tradition which counteracts some of its oppressive aspects. Hinduism also has the unique tradition of worshippers allowed to judge the actions of their gods as they would those of ordinary human beings. [...] Since Hindus do not even hesitate to pass judgment on the wrongdoings of their gods, it is unlikely that Mr Advani and company will manage to get away with their manipulations for too long. Much stronger voices will arise against this Combine's machination from among the Hindu fold than from the Muslims.[175]

Here Kishwar seeks to disentangle 'authentic' Hinduism from the BJP's Hinduism, particularly by highlighting the differences in the relationship between god(s) and people in the Abrahamic traditions as compared to Hinduism. Because Hinduism is so multivocal and allows for individual relationships with gods that are not particularly strict but rather leave room for dissent, she argues Hindus will recognize that the BJP's Hinduism is inauthentic and is basically nonsensical. It is notable here that she launches this argument from the basis of Hinduism and is directly critiquing the BJP for misrepresenting the tradition. It is not only the inappropriate use of religious imagery that is the problem, then, but also the incongruity of the use of the religion with what Kishwar perceives to be its true message.

To further uncover the truth of Hinduism from its colonial and nationalist manipulations, and to further separate religion and politics, she writes,

> we need to restore the sanctity of our religious places and get the politicians out of them. The distortions brought about in the system of temple management during British colonial rule need to be rectified. Traditionally, religious places in India were not subservient to a distant political authority. [...] We need to work out clear rules about the governance of religious places and property, keeping politicians away from taking over religious places and ensuring they remain in the hands of the worshippers.[176]

She thus traces the issue back to the roots of colonial rule with religious management becoming a government job and argues for the restoration of the separation of state and religion, interestingly also a feature of secularization and modernisation. Similarly, she claims,

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[175] Kishwar, 10.

[176] Kishwar, 14.

> The Hindu community can be mobilised to save its culture and religion from being distorted beyond recognition only if they are aware of it. In the name of promoting secular education, the Western educated elite has deliberately promoted ignorance about India's rich heritage. The task of promoting respect and creating adequate facilities for the learning of our varied religions and cultural traditions cannot and should not be left to the government. It's best undertaken by social and cultural organisations functioning outside the government patronage system.[177]

She continues to advance her argument for the distinction between religion and government or politics, again tracing this back to colonial modes of education. The problem is a lack of awareness about India's diversity, she argues; a lack that has been purposely constructed by colonialists and recycled in the hands of Hindu nationalists. Interestingly, however, several of the organizations under the Sangh Parivar umbrella began as cultural organizations outside the realm of politics, and this is identified in at least one article in *Manushi* as being a reason for their success because they were able to establish community roots.[178] With this entanglement of community interests and politics, it is not evident that the separation of religion and politics is ever fully possible or even desirable.

The responses to this article, as to all articles in *Manushi*, were varied. A section of each issue of *Manushi* is dedicated to sharing these responses, with or without a response from the editors. In Hansen's terms, we can see this as a microcosm of the public culture; a place where ideas and identities are contested and negotiated. The public culture is valuable for its confluence of identities; people from all kinds of different backgrounds, experiences, and social locations have the space to contest ideas and advance their own visions of national community. In itself, this section allows for deeper consideration of the particular rather than the homogenizing narratives of nationalism. This is an important space for voices such as those concerned with the

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[177] Kishwar, 15.

[178] Kishwar, "Ways to Combat Communal Violence," 4.

women's movement along with those concerned about increasing nationalism and the collapsing of identities into a national identity above all else.

One response, from Vasantha Surya of Madra, expresses, "You lay the blame on politicians alone. I think the religious leaders in the spotlight have mostly shown a clear acquiescence in the BJP-RSS-VHP position. [...] What is this strange thing called 'Hindutva'? This faith is essentially inclusive; it is not exclusive."[179] This reader challenges Kishwar's strict delineation between the good of religion and the evils of political manipulation, though ultimately leaves the premise of Hinduism's inclusivity unquestioned. Another reader, Sandip Bandyopadhyay from Calcutta, does not accept the claim so easily. He writes,

> I see no reason why you should harp on your being Hindu. Ram did stand for some high spiritual ideals but there was the other side also which you didn't discuss. I know that Ram is revered as a god by the Harijans, the progeny of Shambuka. But whether they have internalised Ram on their own, or whether the model has been thrust upon them, thanks to the ingenious working of the Brahminisation process, is a question that needs to be seriously probed. The moot question is: whether what passes for Hindu tolerance is really tolerance or a clever bid to swallow up everything that poses a threat to its existence. Religious texts at least do not corroborate your view that 'Hindu gods are not jealous gods'. The punanas and the Mangalkavyas (written in medieval Bengal) give ample proof of jealousy between one god and the other.[180]

This reader productively challenges Kishwar's historical analysis of Hinduism, pointing to the Brahminisation process and the need to consider what effect it has had on current interpretations. Here we can see the grievances of Dalit feminists; Kishwar's historical analysis of Hinduism that does not trouble the position of Dalit women or take their issues into consideration. Bandyopadhyay problematizes her claim that Hindu gods are not jealous and points to the way that Hinduism's alleged inclusivity can actually lead to what Bakhle terms a 'superreligion' that ignores internal divides and forces everyone to adopt the identity of Hindu. This forced adoption

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[179] "Letters to *Manushi*," *Manushi* no. 62 (1991): 23.

[180] "Letters to *Manushi*," 23.

of the Hindu label is a main feature of Hindutva, which erases difference and instead homogenizes all identities in an attempt to homogenize the nation and have individuals prioritize their common national identity above all else. This is precisely the point that Kishwar often pushes against, and that Dalit feminists push against: the simplification of identity. In her attempt to salvage the image of Hinduism from its political manipulations, however, Kishwar falls into the same pattern in her insistence on Hinduism's inclusivity.

We should note here that one of the main features of both Orientalism and modernism, particularly with regards to religious traditions, is the concern with the 'original,' and the idea of the original being the authoritative source of the tradition. While Kishwar does not explicitly argue for a return to the original texts and in fact does emphasize living local traditions, she also emphasizes the importance of uncovering the true meaning of religious texts from the damage done by colonialists. Implicit in this argument is the idea that there is an original, more authentic Hinduism that can be discovered and returned to. This is how she was understood by at least one reader, who wrote, "Your genuine fundamentalism -- that is a return to the roots, to the original works of the scriptures -- is at the same time clever, enlightening, honest, and leads to a revival of respect for the human rights, I hope."[181]

Kishwar's strategies for challenging the Sangh Parivar's authenticity include highlighting the short time span of certain practices, ideas, or imagery and highlighting the BJP members' lack of knowledge about religious texts. Her critiques often involve the claim that the BJP's Hinduism is based off 'semiticized' versions of Hinduism. The 'semiticization' of Hinduism in her eyes can be traced back either to the Arya Samaj's reform (an attempt to make Hinduism appear more like an Abrahamic tradition) or to continuing colonial modes of education. She

[181] "Letters to *Manushi*," *Manushi* no. 62 (1991): 25.

argues that the Sangh Parivar is invested in maintaining these modes of education to keep the true history of India a secret from its constituents and therefore to keep people unaware of the diversity that was once accepted and enjoyed in India. This is a further attempt by the Sangh Parivar at simplifying and homogenizing Hinduism and India itself in order to prioritize national identity; if constituents are not aware of the possibility of diverse flourishing, they will be more susceptible to Hindu nationalist points that encourage simplified national identities over the honoring of complex identities and multiple affiliations.

Kishwar thus advances an argument for a more 'authentic' version of Hinduism, based on Vedic texts and regional versions of those texts. This can be seen as part of the bottom-up approach that is foundational to *Manushi,* and further a recognition of the performative nature of religious traditions. A major theme in *Manushi*'s goals is listening to communities to correct corrupt politics; an honoring of the complexity on the ground that can then make its way up to legislation and governance that respects and accounts for the multiplicity of social locations. With Hinduism, similarly, local versions of a religious text are viewed as authentic, while corrupt politicians are figured as unable to be genuinely religious. This aligns with a common understanding in India that religion is a moral vocation while politics are amoral.[182] This line of reasoning is effective as it draws on the shared history of colonialism to highlight continuing modes of domination.

This may be viewed as Kishwar articulating a distinction between a Gandhian notion of religious practice and the Savarkarian definition of a religious nation. Gandhi's movement, as persuasively argued by Mithi Mukherjee, was based on a discourse of renunciative freedom that

[182] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*, 8.

had the final goal of renunciation of the self and absorption into the larger whole.[183] This discourse does not then require the nation to be built on Hindu religious principles, but instead has the aim of "enlightened anarchy" and self-rule.[184] It did not problematically mix religion and politics because the culmination of the process was a renunciation of self that freed the definition of the nation from being tied to a particular religious tradition. The Savarkarian conception of a religious nation, in contrast, rests on the definition of the nation as essentially Hindu and thus governed by Hindu tradition. Kishwar is drawing from Gandhi's legacy, and living forms of Hinduism, to argue that the more authentic form of Hinduism is found in the people and thereby challenge the BJP's representation of Hinduism.

Several court cases around the time of these articles set new precedent for Hindu nationalist activities. Scholar Saumya Saxena argues that what came to be known as the *Hindutva* cases of the 1990s laid the groundwork for Hindutva to successfully enter the political arena under the guise of secularism. After the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992, riots broke out across the nation and the national president of the Janata Party, S.R. Bommai, challenged the emergency provisions in riot-affected states.[185] These provisions dissolved the state government and the Article invoked, Article 356, was the same that had been invoked dozens of times by Indira Gandhi to dissolve state governments that she did not agree with. The judgment of the case limited the scope of the Article to prevent its abuse and required that the Article only be invoked when there is a breakdown of constitutional machinery.[186] In this case,

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[183] Mukherjee, *India in the Shadows of Empire*, 151-153.

[184] Mukherjee, 179.

[185] Saumya Saxena, "'Court'ing Hindu Nationalism: law and the rise of modern Hindutva," *Contemporary South Asia* 26, no. 4 (2018): 380.

[186] Saxena, "'Court'ing Hindu Nationalism," 380.

this meant the Court had to grapple with the definition of "secular" in the Constitution. In deciding this case, it became clear that

> it was not the definition of secularism alone that had to be laboured but its implementation -- not merely for the sake of single constitutional commitment, but also in relation to preambular commitments to equal citizenship, national integrity and fraternity that secularism enabled. [...] Thus, while *implementing* secularism the Supreme Court concluded, 'In matters of State, religion has no place. No political party can simultaneously be a religious party'.[187]

Secularism then is not an abstract commitment, but rather a concept that must be implemented in order to maintain other commitments in the Constitution. Talal Asad has produced impactful work on the nature of secularism arguing that it is not a lack of religion in the public sphere but rather state regulation of the proper places for religion, and here we see the Indian Supreme Court undertaking this exact question of the appropriate spaces religion can be brought into. The Court, in this case, decided that religion and politics must not be congruous, and the sustained campaign of the BJP to demolish the Babri Masjid was therefore condemned.

In 1990, the success of BJP members after the aggressive speeches like those quoted in the previously discussed article led opposing candidates who had lost to challenge the BJP's rhetoric in court, filing three petitions against candidates of the BJP and Shiv Sena.[188] The three cases are what came to be termed the *Hindutva* cases of 1994. With the understanding of secularism established in the Bommai case that required religion and politics to be kept separate, Hindu nationalists needed to separate Hinduism from Hindutva in order to legally utilize Hindutva ideology in their campaigns. In the *Hindutva* cases, the Court did indeed accept the definition of Hindutva to mean "way of life" rather than religion. The Court decision, quoted by Saxena, explains

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[187] Saxena, 382.

[188] Saxena, 384.

> Considering the terms 'Hinduism' or 'Hindutva' per se as depicting hostility, enmity or intolerance towards other religious faiths or professing communalism, proceeds from an improper appreciation and perception of the true meaning of these expressions [...] The *mischief* resulting from the misuse of the terms by anyone in his speech has to be checked and not its permissible use. It is indeed very unfortunate, if in spite of the liberal and tolerant features of 'Hinduism' recognised in judicial decisions, these terms are misused by anyone during the elections to gain any unfair political advantage.[189]

This decision thus gave the BJP the ability to use Hindutva freely under the guise of being a cultural term rather than religious, and allowed Hindutva to be such a wide, generalized term that it could reference anything, even secularism. Notably, the language used in this Court decision sounds remarkably similar to the arguments presented by Madhu Kishwar. Though Kishwar challenges Hindutva, she emphasizes the "liberal and tolerant" features of Hinduism in her arguments, echoing Hindu nationalist talking points. As highlighted earlier, these liberal and tolerant features are what allow Hindu nationalists to claim members of other religious identities and erase difference. The decision also points to a separation of religious bigotry and political manipulations of religion to cause bigotry, by distinguishing the 'mischief' arising from the misuse of the term rather than problematizing the term itself. This parallels Kishwar's argument that Hinduism is not the problem, but rather the manipulation of it by political actors. In this model, Hinduism is still valorized, and it is here, I argue, that we may see how Kishwar's line of thinking eventually became more sympathetic to the Hindu right. While her version of Hindu authenticity is importantly tied to the performative realities of localized traditions and various interpretations of teachings, Kishwar uses this to make an argument for the tolerance and inclusivity of Hinduism that is also a key mechanism for Hindu nationalist expansionism. This can pedagogically gloss over various distinctions within Hinduism and between religious traditions in a manner that can contribute to a vision of Hinduism as always accommodating

[189] Saxena, 385.

against a more exclusivist and narrow image of Islam, which is not similarly challenged in Kishwar's writing.

Three years after "In Defence of Our *Dharma*" and one year before the *Hindutva* cases, Kishwar published the article "Religion at the Service of Nationalism: An Analysis of Sangh Parivar Politics." Immediately in the title it is clear Kishwar is maintaining her strict delineation between true religious actions and the nationalist actions of the Sangh Parivar, based on a dichotomy she has constructed between religion and politics. With the Ram Mandir movement still in the spotlight, though after the demolition of the mosque, she repeats her claim that this is the farthest thing from excessive religiosity with the evidence, "The priest of the disputed Ram mandir at Ayodhya accuses them of embezzling crores of rupees which they collected through donations in the name of Ram."[190] The lack of offerings made at the temple (openly admitted by members of the Sangh Parivar) and the alleged manipulation of the religious site are demonstrations, for Kishwar, of the non-religious nature of the organization. "Moreover," she writes,

> the RSS-BJP support base of activists and leaders in the north comes largely from an Arya Samaj background. This nationalist reform movement, which began in the late nineteenth century, sought to purify Hinduism of all 'evils' like idol-worship and make it resemble Islam and Christianity. But today many Arya Samajis are enthusiastic supporters of the campaign to install one more idol of Ram Lalla at Ayodhya -- not because they have suddenly become devotees of Ram but because they hope to use Ram as a symbol to unify all Hindus as a political community.[191]

The Sangh Parivar did indeed have many prominent members that were previously involved with the Arya Samaj, perhaps unsurprisingly as a continuation of the project of crafting a nationalized

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[190] Madhu Kishwar, "Religion at the Service of Nationalism: An Analysis of Sangh Parivar Politics," *Manushi* no. 76 (1993): 2.

[191] Kishwar, "Religion at the Service of Nationalism," 2.

Hinduism.[192] Kishwar points to the reforms of the Arya Samaj and the usage of Ram as a political tool due to his status as the most widely revered and accessible god throughout various Hindu schools and castes to undermine the authenticity of the Sangh Parivar by pointing out the hypocrisy in their views. She presents them as bending to whatever need is at hand; whether it is more fruitful to draw connection between Hinduism and Islam and Christianity, as it was in colonial times, or whether it is more politically salient to utilize certain gods in order to mobilize around them. She thus throws into question the authenticity of their religiosity and maintains that the Sangh Parivar is *political*, not religious; designations she clearly considers mutually exclusive.

Proceeding to argue against Hindutva, she turns to an historical analysis, as the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims are often justified on a historical (pedagogical) basis. She writes, "the present day Hindu-Muslim conflict is not really a religious conflict, nor is it rooted in medieval history, as is often assumed."[193] Her evidence for this includes the Bhakti and Sufi movements, which she claims "built enduring bridges between the two contrary faiths and softened some of their confrontations on many theological issues," and that "none of the prominent disputes are of a theological nature. The contemporary Hindu-Muslim conflict is primarily the product of late nineteenth and twentieth century politics."[194] By denying the claims to historical conflict, Kishwar then shifts the burden of the conflicts onto late colonial politics, in which the British solidified antagonistic communities. She also effectively undermines the claim that these are truly religious conflicts.

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[192] Hansen, *The Saffron Wave,* 77.

[193] Kishwar, "Religion at the Service of Nationalism," 3.

[194] Kishwar, 3.

Turning her focus to the Sangh Parivar, Kishwar scrutinizes their agenda. She claims again that "In their attempt to unite all Hindus around the Ram mandir issue, the Sangh parivar is trying to semiticise Hinduism and to make it resemble those aspects of Christianity and Islam [to] become globally powerful and contributed to the evolution of strong nation states."[195] Whereas we have seen her previously point to a 'semiticization' of Hinduism, here she explicitly ties the motivation behind such reform not to appeasing colonial forces, but instead to assist in the creation of a strong nation-state and the belief that there is something in Christianity and Islam which can drive this. Again, note her inclusion of Islam in this paradigm. While not attempting to stoke communal sentiments, and in fact encouraging the opposite, Kishwar clearly maintains a distinction between Hinduism and Islam and the types of acts she believes they encourage. She does not seem to acknowledge the alienating effects that this has on Muslim women, or Dalit women and other women that Hinduism has not been so peaceful and beneficial towards. Her emphasis on multilayered identities, unfortunately, is not brought to bear on this analysis.

Kishwar also denounces nationalism in India along with the respect it enjoys; "The excessive respectability accorded to nationalism in Third World countries is due to the legitimacy it enjoys in the hegemonic West," she argues, "which is the homeland of this ideology as well as its association with the patriotism evoked by anti-colonial movements."[196] She thus challenges the dominant narrative that nationalism is a natural and perhaps even desirable ideology to develop under colonialism and distinguishes between nationalism and patriotism. To her, nationalism is not a helpful ideology but rather one that is copied from the West and harmful

[195] Kishwar, 4.
[196] Kishwar, 5.

to Third World countries, regardless of whether it is cloaked in respectability and anti-colonial resistance. "The Parivar's agenda," she claims, "is to remould the people of this country into one monolith called 'Indians' (also called Hindus). The assumption behind the Sangh Parivar's homogenising effort is that once people become 'proper Indians,' they will have to overcome other multilayered, contending loyalties and learn to put the nation before self."[197] This interpretation clearly aligns with the excerpt from BJP speeches in which it is claimed Hindus cannot be communal. The Sangh Parivar's goal, then, is to collapse each person's multiplicity into one identity: Indian, meaning Hindu. Only then can a national community come into being on this shared basis.

She further extends her argument that the Sangh Parivar is not genuinely religious. She writes,

> A religious person would want to retain the autonomy and sanctity of religious institutions. The manner in which the Parivar has brought politics into the religious sphere and hijacked religious symbols for electoral and other political purposes shows that their concern is not religious at all. Nor are the Parivar's leading lights well versed in religious texts or theology.[198]

Here, her reasoning is that a 'truly' religious person would want to maintain the distinction between religion and politics, perhaps between the spiritual and the worldly. She thus sees the Parivar as encroaching on religious spaces, and their use of religious symbols for politics along with their lack of knowledge of traditional texts is enough to prove to Kishwar that they are not truly religious. Their ideology, she writes, "is secular in so far as its concerns are thisworldly and political rather than spiritual and religious."[199] This suggests that Kishwar sees a necessary

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[197] Kishwar, 4.

[198] Kishwar, 4.

[199] Kishwar, 6.

distinction between religion and politics, fundamentally because religion is meant to deal with the ‘spiritual’ and politics with the 'this-worldly'. Further,

> Ram is presented as a national hero and not as a Hindu god. The propaganda speeches of its leaders forever emphasise: ‘Announce it boldly to the world that anyone who opposes Ram cannot be Indian.’ The Sangh Parivar is not saying that a Ram opponent cannot be a Hindu. VHP propaganda insists that ‘every person who lives here will have to flow with the tide. Ram-Krishna will have to be accepted as the national ideals’, not, it should again be noted, primarily as *religious* ideals.[200]

Here the distinction between religion and politics is applied to the symbolism of Ram. Ram is not even being used as a religious symbol, she argues, but rather a national symbol; one which nevertheless functions to exclude members of other religious communities in this configuration of the nation. Again, she argues that this is appropriation of religious imagery without religious intent.

Because Kishwar refuses to accept the conflation of Hinduism with India, or politics and religion, she cannot accept that the imagery could be authentically religious and political. Similarly, she claims “The most sacred deity of the Sangh Parivar is the Bharat Mata (Mother India). [...] The national flag is more sacred to them than any *Ramdhvaj* or temple. The national anthem and Vande Mataram are in their view more sacred than any religious *bhajan*.”[201] Again, the conflation of Hinduism and the secular, and by extension Hinduism and the nation, allows the Sangh Parivar to present ambiguously secular imagery as sacred, and indeed to claim that this imagery and symbolism *is* sacred. Kishwar’s refusal to accept this point, on the other hand, allows her to see this as appropriation and faux religiosity. She again turns to lack of historicity as a sign of inauthenticity:

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[200] Kishwar, 8.

[201] Kishwar, 9.

> Only in recent years has the Vishwa Hindu Parishad tried to get Bharat Mata accepted as an all India deity, as a part of ritualising Hindu nationalism. In 1983, the VHP undertook an Ektamata Yajna (sacrifice for unity) which travelled through India performing sacrifices to Bharat Mata in Hardwar. It enshrines various deities, warriors, 'martyrs' and satis, gurus and sants, all of whom are interpreted through the Sangh Parivar version of history, religion, and culture within the framework of Hindu nationalism.[202]

Thus the short amount of time that the Bharat Mata was considered sacred (ten years at the time of publication) is proof for Kishwar that this religiosity is constructed and fake. It is noteworthy that this plays into the pedagogical strategy of emphasizing historicity over daily performativity, which may have influenced her later sympathy to Hindu nationalism.

Lastly, she considers the issue of Indian unity and secularism. Kishwar, as we have seen, staunchly upholds the separation of religion and politics, while the Sangh Parivar's conflation of Indian and Hindu identity allows them to slip into a conflation between Hinduism and secularism. Kishwar writes, "Similarly, our 'secular' appeals demanding that religion be kept out of politics do not make much sense, for the Sangh Parivar is actually fighting a secular battle using select religious symbols to give their movement an ethnic flavour as an aid for mass mobilisation for political purposes."[203] It is interesting to note here that her insistence on the Sangh Parivar's 'actual' secularity plays into the same notion of Hindutva that allows it to pass as secularism after the *Hindutva* cases. She further complicates the question, going on to write, "This is why the leftist and secularist appeals for national unity are not able to counter the BJP's plank of Hindu *rashtravad*. The Sangh Parivar is saying essentially the same thing -- 'put the nation before religion.' In their view, all those who put religion above the nation are traitors."[204] The question of what it means to put religion above the nation is salient; does it mean to separate

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[202] Kishwar, 9.

[203] Kishwar, 19.

[204] Kishwar, 19.

religious and national identity, or to accept that your national identity is also a religious one? With the conflation of the nation and Hinduism, following any religious tradition other than Hinduism (however ambiguously defined) will automatically figure as putting religion before nation, whereas accepting Hinduism will always be associated with the nation and therefore one cannot be seen as putting religion above nation. Because of its relation to land and acceptance of Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs into the Hindu fold, this effectively excludes Muslims from the national community as they will always be seen as putting religion above nation.

Surprisingly, given her skepticism and distaste for colonial structures, the separation of religion and state or politics Kishwar is championing is also a western understanding of secularism. As Asad has demonstrated, this modern understanding of secularism is based in western Christian traditions which developed in a way that led to the bracketing of religion as a matter of personal belief which can therefore be separated from public life and the 'secular sphere.'[205] Religion itself as a category is similarly based in western epistemologies which often were tied to the invasion and conquering of 'backwards' nations. When colonialists reified teachings and texts as the authoritative measures of a 'Hindu religion,' they inevitably missed and erased local complexities and collapse a complicated, regionally variant system into one category that could be called what the British understood as 'religious' and furthermore, as *one* tradition rather than a multiplicity. Given the ambiguity of this translation and the continually unsettled definition of 'religion', as well as 'secular', it is perhaps unsurprising that Hindutva would be able to slip through the cracks as a 'Hindu way of life.' What does it mean, after all, to distinguish between a 'religion' and a 'way of life'? The Indian Constitution defines neither

[205] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993): 42-43.

religion nor secularism, and "To the extent that the Court actively defines 'religion', it typically has done so through the art of negation -- by distinguishing essential religious practices from the 'secular' jurisdiction of the state."[206] In one case regarding the Aurobindo society, the Court ruled on the basis that "a religious denomination cannot encompass others in an inclusivistic manner; it must require the abandonment of other religions for one to join it.'"[207] Religion then is defined through the requirement to shed one's previous religion -- while a 'way of life' can be freely adopted and is therefore secular. In a postcolonial Hindu majoritarian democracy grappling with the lasting effects of colonial governmentalities and communal subjectivities, we can thus understand the push to maintain a strong distinction between religion and politics as an attempt to prevent the religious majority from abusing the ambiguous definitions of 'religious' and 'secular' to obtain and abuse governmental power.

The last article I will consider is the 1996 publication "Who Am I: Living Identities Vs Acquired Ones," again authored by Madhu Kishwar. While not directly confronting Hindutva, in this article Kishwar considers various identity categories, their mutability, and thus their ability to be mobilized and manipulated by politicians. This article is her most direct explanation of the need to honor multilayered identities and push against the nationalist urge to collapse all identities into a national identity. She instead argues that we need to honor the intersectional nature of our identities.

Kishwar identifies a few "fixed and immutable" identities, including biological parentage and native land. She interestingly considers "native land, village, or locale where a person is born or reared" as fixed, while "those based on nationality, religion, [or] language" are considered

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[206] Jennifer Coleman, "Authoring (in)Authenticity, Regulating Religious Tolerance: The Implications of Anti-Conversion Legislation for Indian Secularism," *Cultural Dynamics* 20, no. 3 (2008): 257.

[207] Minor as quoted in Coleman, "Authoring (in)Authenticity," 259.

acquired and mutable.[208] This seems to suggest that one's fixed and immutable qualities are those that someone else assigns, i.e. parents decide where to have and raise children, while mutable qualities can be changed by individual will. In this piece, she articulates further her idea of the past that should be informing the future path to unity. She writes, "when I say that I don't accept the Partition, I don't advocate undoing it by another war. All I mean to say is that it was based on a false idea that Hindus and Muslims are not just two communities but separate irreconcilable nationalities. [...] What happened in our subcontinent in 1947 is merely one instance of this European disease."[209] She thus draws the connection between the solidification of social categories and respectable nationalism under colonialism to the present political situation.

In contrast, she claims,

> In the subcontinent, as long as Hindus and Muslims believed that they were two religious-cultural communities living and sharing a common soil, they could easily work out decent traditional norms for co-living on the basis of other common layers of identity such as language, village, and culture. The moment the virus of ethnic and secular nationalism invaded us from the West, religious differences began to be dragged into the realm of secular politics and came to be used as the basis of mobilising communal monoliths. Thereafter, multilayered identities were made subservient to this single, voracious identity and politicians could convince themselves that Muslims and Hindus were hostile monolithic communities incapable of peaceful co-existence.[210]

Kishwar thus locates nationalism at the intersection of religion and secular politics, harkening back to the 'divide and rule' strategy of the Empire to argue that it was not until western nationalist practices came to India that religious differences were significant. This was the first step in simplifying identities, and nationalists have further exploited this to make one identity

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[208] Madhu Kishwar, "Who Am I?: Living Identities Vs Acquired Ones," *Manushi* no. 94 (May-June 1996): 6.

[209] Kishwar, "Who Am I?," 9.

[210] Kishwar, 9.

point *the* identity of the nation through nationalism. One of the possible identity points that would have allowed communities to connect is gender, but now

> too often gender identity is voluntarily suppressed by women in favour of community identity when they feel that their group is under siege or attack. Their primary concern then becomes the safety of their children, men, and homes. In this situation, they are often unable to empathise with the pain and suffering of women from the other community on the basis of their common gender identity. In fact, the divide is even harsher because it is not their making. Neither is the process of reconciliation in their hands.[211]

This echoes the earlier Mala piece that suggested that communal violence and religiosity made women suspicious towards women of other religious communities, but Kishwar claims that women both "voluntarily" suppress their gender identity in favor of communal identity *and* yet that the divide is "not of their making" because the violence between the groups (presumably enacted by men) forces them to focus more on their community. Because the divide is, in Kishwar's eyes, caused by the (repetitive, performative) actions of men, women are helpless to begin "the process of reconciliation."

Communal violence thus becomes the impetus for the construction of an Indian identity based on Hinduism, as it forces individuals to value certain identity categories above others; particularly, to view one's religious identity as the most important. Kishwar asserts,

> The moment a person or a group begins to subjugate multilayered identities in favour of one particular identity, especially if that identity is acquired politically and asserted as a nationality primarily in opposition to some other group, rather than used for self expression and internal cultural bonding, it becomes a sure recipe for civil strife and inter-group enmity likely to tear any society asunder.[212]

Levelling her most explicit argument against Hindu nationalists and in favor of her own clear articulation of national community, she concludes:

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[211] Kishwar, 11.

[212] Kishwar, 16.

> whenever someone's assertion of identity is loaded with overblown praise for one's own group, and hatred for some other group, whenever competition and tit-for-tat becomes the real motivating factors in identity consolidation and political struggle in nations, whenever our leaders try to make us paranoid or aggressive vis a vis others in asserting a particular part of our identity (whether based on caste, religion, gender, language, or region), we should subject such ideas and leaders to thorough scrutiny and check out whether we are being manipulated into imagining dangers from others or is there a real objective basis. Such leaders are in all likelihood goading us towards harming others to achieve their own self-determined goals rather than protecting our legitimate interests.[213]

Kishwar directly identifies and confronts the mechanism of collapsing identities, implicitly pointing to the construction of the threatening Muslim 'Other'. Here she troubles the basis of communal subjectivities that are perpetuated and mobilized by political actors and encourages others to examine the reasoning behind their attitudes towards other groups. Interrogating these attitudes, she argues, one will find that the dangers being peddled by politicians do not actually reflect a concern for the people but rather are based in the interests of the powerful.

Kishwar's main strategies of challenging Hindu nationalism are clear: deconstruction of Hindutva rhetoric, and arguing for a separation of religion and politics that additionally works to undermine the authenticity of the BJP's religiosity. While effective and creating an important point about the need to separate religion and government in a majoritarian democracy to avoid the oppression of religious minorities, Kishwar's focus on Hinduism as an inherently diverse religion has the power to alienate Muslim women and slip into Hindu nationalist talking points.

Kishwar's strongest and most radical point in challenging Hindu nationalism is in the 1996 "Who Am I?" article, as she pushes individuals to question their subjectivities, the forces constructing them, and the daily performance that maintains them. Her call to confront one's own identity and to honor the multiplicity of identities and affiliations each person has contains

[213] Kishwar, 17.

the power to unsettle communal sentiments and challenge the Hindu nationalists' image of primordially incommensurable communities.

CONCLUSION

I hope to have shown that at these three key sites of contention – instances of communal violence, the Shah Bano Supreme Court case, and the rise of Hindu nationalism – the writers of *Manushi* consistently advance a minority discourse that emphasizes the performative in order to undermine the pedagogical narrative of Hindu nationalists and advocate for a national community that honors individuals' complex identities and aims to uplift everyone. In each of these sites, we see the writers grappling with the legacies of colonialism, particularly in regards to law and communalism. As we have seen, the imperial discourse of justice, embedded in the Indian Constitution, has perpetuated the notion of India as a nation of discrete communities and necessitated that social justice advocates speak in the same language, complicating the project of challenging communalism. Kishwar, now openly sympathetic to Hindu nationalism, has complexly navigated these tensions throughout the years, and shows us the difficulties of engaging with these terms while resisting endorsing them.

The future of *Manushi* may depart from what we have seen in the past decades, though the emphasis on scholarship on India *by* Indians will certainly remain a key pillar of the journal. This has the power to be important decolonial work; as we have seen through Kishwar's critiques, colonial modes of governance and particularly education have formed the roots of communalism and created colonized knowledge systems. The process of decolonization, as understood by Walter D. Mingolo, begins with this recognition, and then

> moves from there to build structures of knowledge that emerge from the experience of humiliation and marginalization that have been and continue to be enacted by the implementation of the colonial matrix of power. […] We must begin to imagine such alternatives from the perspectives and consciousnesses unlocked in the epistemic, ethical and political domain of the geo- and bio-political loci of enunciation and action.[214]

[214] Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 492, accessed July 20, 2020, DOI: 10.1080/09502380601162647.

Decolonizing knowledge is thus a critical strategy to create change and to challenge nationalism. Decolonizing knowledge, however, does not mean that all work needs to be done by Indians and that their identity as Indian will make their work decolonial; rather, decolonial scholarship must unsettle colonial categories and epistemologies. A key tactic for challenging these categories, as we have learned through *Manushi*, is disrupting the pedagogical narratives of nationalists by continually bringing performative lived experience to the fore. This requires the same bottom-up approach and creative activism that *Manushi* championed, drawing from the methods of Mahatma Gandhi and attempting to think outside of the given colonial categories.

Challenging nationalist rhetoric through representation of the performative reality of lived experience continues to be an imperative strategy.[215] Seen in movements such as the Ram Mandir movement, nationalists craft an accumulative historicist narrative that claims one group's rightful belonging to the land and homogenizes the nation to unify against a constructed 'Other.' It is thus necessary to consistently highlight the lived experiences of those in the nation and the true complexity of their lives and communities to disrupt this homogenous image and undermine teleological narratives. The tensions between the performative and the pedagogical open space for creative action and contesting narratives that fuel the ongoing imagining of the nation. Representation of daily life and bringing Muslim issues into mainstream discourse is identified as a key strategy by the Muslim Rights Forum, one of India's largest Muslim women's rights organizations, as it assists in challenging homogenizing stereotypes and disrupts pedagogical

[215] Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Introduction: Critical Methodologies and Indigenous Inquiry" in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, eds. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (New York: Sage Publications, 2008): 12-15.

rhetoric.[216] Building networks across religious lines is also a major goal of the organization, to help in breaking down the communal antagonism rooted in 'divide and rule'.[217]

As Arundhati Roy wrote in the aftermath of the Gujarat riots in 2002,

> [Fascism is] about the slow erosion of civil liberties, about the unspectacular day-to-day injustices. Fighting it means fighting to win back the minds and hearts of the people. […] It means putting your ear to the ground and listening to the whispering of the truly powerless. It means giving a forum to the myriad voices from the hundreds of resistance movements across the country which are speaking about *real* things – about bonded labor, marital rape, sexual preferences, women's wages, uranium dumping, unsustainable mining, weavers' woes, farmers' suicides.[218]

While nationalist, pedagogical narratives emphasize simplified, grand claims of the nation, it is important to remember that the actual functions of nationalist governments also function through daily actions and gradual changes to governmental, social, and economic systems. While the pedagogical narrative carries an idealized trajectory of the nation, this is carried out on the ground in the form of discrimination against individuals, developmental projects that displace and dispossess marginalized communities, and disenfranchise communities. It is thus necessary to be attentive to the particular struggles that nationalism attempts to elide in its homogenization of the nation in order to constantly bring attention back to the people and their realities, as well as recognizing the systemic connections between various struggles and creating networks of solidarity.

These networks of solidarity and governmental accountability must be global, as well as the continuing work in epistemological decolonization. In our current state of globalization,

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[216] "The Journey," *Muslim Women's Forum*, accessed July 20, 2020, http://muslimwomenforumindia.com/home-1/who-we-are/.

[217] See note 211 above.

[218] Arundhati Roy, "Democracy: Who Is She When She's at Home?" in *My Seditious Heart* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2019), 172.

nationalist governments rising to power across the world have the ability to support and protect each other, making all national and transnational challenges to these governments imperative. The United States has seen calls to nationalism in Trump's declarations of "America First" and Brazil has heard Bolsonaro's calls of "Brazil above everything else. Trump's campaign slogan of "Make America Great Again" clearly demonstrates the pedagogical narrative that draws on an idealized, homogenized past, while many activists drew on the performative reality of discrimination against people of color to ask "who was America great for?" Though these examples are less religious than Hindu nationalism in India, the call to prioritize the nation and national identity above all else remains. These governments are not isolated; Trump has praised both Modi and Bolsonaro and has even referred to Modi as "the Father of the Nation," a title usually bestowed upon Mahatma Gandhi. Particularly important in the alignment of United States and Hindu nationalism is the scapegoating of Muslims. Allowing governments that actively vilify, encourage violence against, and take actions against Muslims' rights to gain power threatens the safety of Muslims across the world, while leaving their options for asylum dwindling. To challenge this, we must work against these governments, holding each of our own nations accountable – whether that means producing and promoting decolonial work, refusing to patronize companies that contribute to global inequality, or fighting for more representation in media – and recognize the similarities in our struggles. We must recognize that difference is not essential and not inherently negative; rather, it is a source of power when we are able to articulate our particularities while recognizing our common struggles and the systems that uphold oppression. This will mean developing specific responses to nationalisms while sharing tools and skills across global networks, and remaining open to alternate epistemologies that may challenge western systems of knowledge. As *Manushi* has taught us, it will mean recognizing our

complex, multilayered identities, and insisting upon honoring them to best empower ourselves and each other.

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