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Introduction:
Beating the Retreat

> The European in considering India has not only to
> deal with a people of alien history, traditions, climate,
> and habits, but with differing modes of thought, fun-
> damental assumptions and standards of value.
> —Percival Spear, *India, Pakistan and the West*

> The British in India have understood as much of the
> country as is necessary for policing it, but no for-
> eigner has ever adequately understood our land.
> —S. N. Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism*

PERMANENCES AMID THE INESCAPABLE FLUX

In January 1987 I had the privilege of attending for the first time an annual ceremony held in New Delhi on the occasion of the various activities related to Republic Day (26 January), a ceremony entitled "Beating the Retreat." It is an old British military ceremony, trans-formed now by the Government of India into a ceremonial remem-brance of Great Britain's withdrawal from power in India on 15 August 1947 and the transfer of power to the Sovereign Democratic Republic of India which finally became official with the adoption of The Constitu-tion of India on 26 January 1950. The ceremony occurs at sunset on the great avenue at the base of the hill leading to South Block and North Block (the main buildings of the government's ministries). As one looks up the hill towards the government buildings, one sees in the distance

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the looming presence of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the official residence of the president of India and formerly the home of the viceroy. One also sees the turbaned soldiers of the Camel Corps with their magnificent red and gold uniforms and mounted on their splendid camels on the high walls of South Block and North Block. Looking the other way down the avenue, one sees the majestic India Gate.

Just before sunset, government officials with their families, the diplomatic community, and various invited guests arrive at the ceremonial enclave. When everyone is seated, a motorcade of Ambassador cars arrives, bringing the various members of the cabinet and the prime minister of India. Shortly thereafter, the president of India arrives accompanied by a platoon of cavalry guards. The president is then ushered to a great throne-chair placed in the center of the avenue and facing up the hill. For a few moments there is an uneasy silence and the spectators simply absorb the extraordinary panorama—the deep red and purples of twilight, the camels silhouetted on the high walls of the government buildings against the gathering darkness, and the shadowed dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Then, from a distance one hears the first faint sounds of music as the Pipe and Drum Corps begins its slow march down the hill, followed after a few minutes by the Army, Navy, and Air Force bands. The bands play separately, demonstrate their various disciplined maneuvers, and then finally, all together assemble directly in front of the president of India and the leadership of the Government of India. At the moment of the setting of the sun over the horizon, the bands then play together some final tunes before "beating retreat" back up the hill, one of which tunes is the music for the old Christian hymn:

> Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
> The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide;
> When other helpers fail, and comforts flee;
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me.[1]

I was profoundly moved on that occasion, and among the many impressions I had, I want to mention three which are relevant by way of introducing the theme of the present book. First, as a student of Sanskrit and Indology, I found myself reflecting upon this strange embodiment of the contrast of tradition and modernity—on one level (hidden or latent), one of the world's oldest collection of cultures with its *kāvya* (formal poetry), *vyākaraṇa* (science of grammar), *purāṇa* (old tales), *itihāsa* (tradition), *darśana* (philosophical reflection), its Yogins and *sādhu-s* (holy men) and pilgrims, and its plurality of tongues old and

new, still "abiding" into the last decades of the twentieth century; on another level (apparent or manifest), that same culture celebrating its identity by cloaking itself with the symbols of imperial power, pageantry and ritual reenactment borrowed from the "eventide" of Western civilization's expansion to the ends of the earth, namely, the British Raj, symbol par excellence of the hoped-for Pax Britannica.

Second, as a student of the history of religions, I was aware of the strange juxtaposition of the state and religion. Here was the modern, secular nation-state of India with its largely Hindu and Muslim population and with its continuing agony over religion on almost all sides (Sri Lanka in the South, Bengal and tribal difficulties in the Northeast, Kashmiri and Punjabi separatism by Muslims and Sikhs in the Northwest), nevertheless celebrating and remembering its emergence into freedom after centuries of imperial domination with the music of an old Christian hymn, "Abide with Me."

Third, and finally, as a student of comparative philosophy, I vaguely recalled the passage in the writings of Alfred North Whitehead in which the old Christian hymn "Abide with Me" somehow played a role. At the actual time of the ceremony, I could not quite recall the passage, and it was some weeks later when I had returned to the United States and to my personal library that I finally found the passage. It is from *Process and Reality*:

> The best rendering of integral experience, expressing its general form divested of irrelevant details, is often to be found in the utterances of religious aspiration. . . . Accordingly we find in the first two lines of a famous hymn a full expression of the union of the two notions in one integral experience:
>
> > Abide with me;
> > Fast falls the eventide.
>
> Here the first line expresses the permanences, 'abide,' 'me' and the 'Being' addressed; and the second line sets these permanences amid the inescapable flux. Here at length we find formulated the complete problem of metaphysics. Those philosophers who start with the first line have given us the metaphysics of 'substance'; and those who start with the second line have developed the metaphysics of 'flux.' But, in truth, the two lines cannot be torn apart in this way; and we find that a wavering balance between the two is a characteristic of the greater number of philosophers.[2]

Later, in the concluding passages of *Process and Reality*, Whitehead returns to the theme of the old hymn:

> In the inescapable flux, there is something that abides; in the overwhelming permanence, there is an element that escapes into flux. Permanence can be snatched only out of flux; and the passing moment can find its adequate intensity only by its submission to permanence. Those who would disjoin the two elements can find no interpretation of patent facts.[3]

The present book is an attempt to analyze and understand the relation between the state and religion in India, and the ceremony "Beating the Retreat" is diagnostically interesting by way of illustrating the problems involved in such an undertaking. From one point of view, it can plausibly be argued that "Beating the Retreat" is typical of the sorts of patriotic rituals that any modern nation-state undertakes periodically in order to show forth its founding myth and to legitimate its contemporary identity as an independent nation-state. In this sense there is nothing especially "Indian" about "Beating Retreat," and one thinks of K. M. Panikkar's comment shortly after independence: "Clearly, our new democratic, egalitarian and secular state is not built upon the foundations of ancient India, or of Hindu thought."[4] Many interpreters would agree with this assessment, and would trace the intellectual origins of the modern state in India to the influence of Western democratic ideas that became operative on the subcontinent in the middle and latter portions of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (the Gandhian nationalist movement and other reformist and revolutionary movements of the first half of the century). Western science and technology, the rationalism and skepticism of the Enlightenment, the industrial revolution, humanist liberalism, Marxism, democratic socialist theories, pragmatism, and so forth, all were important conceptual frameworks in the minds of the Indian elite who wrote the Constitution for India's "Sovereign Democratic Republic and Union of States." Moreover, to the extent that the British made use of older Mughal models of imperial administration (for example, revenue collection, judicial procedure, and so forth), at least in the early phases of the Raj, one can also point to Muslim influences in the formulation of the notion of the state in South Asia.

In a similar manner it can be argued that the modern Indian notion of religion and the closely related notions of secularism and the secular state are ". . . not built upon the foundations of ancient India, or of Hindu thought," and that there is, again, therefore, nothing espe-

cially "Indian" in the ritual ceremony of "Beating the Retreat." That an old Christian hymn, "Abide with Me," should provide the culminating point of the ritual reenactment is more than a little symptomatic in this regard. Modern Indian notions of religion derive from a mixture of Christian (and mainly Protestant) models, Orientalist and largely Western reconstructions of India's religious past, and nineteenth century indigenous reform movements most of which were defensive reactions against the onslaught of Westernization and Christian missionizing. "Neo-Hinduism" and "Neo-Buddhism," rather than being authentic products of India's ancient cultural heritage, are really much closer in spirit to traditions of late-nineteenth century European notions of universal religion or liberal Protestant religion. Moreover, even prior to the modern period, India's notion of religion was shaped for many centuries by an alien, non–South Asian tradition, namely, Islam. Thus, to write about the relation between the state and religion in India or to interpret the meaning of "Beating the Retreat" is in one important sense not to write about traditional or Hindu India at all, except perhaps for the most recent period since Independence when Western or non–South Asian notions of the nation-state and religion were fully embraced by the newly emergent state of India. In other words, the task of writing about the relation between the state and religion in modern India is really one of identifying a set or network of ideas that originate mainly outside of South Asia but become exemplified in the subcontinental region when an entity called "India" emerges as a "secular" nation-state in 1947.

   One can push this point one step further by asserting that "Beating the Retreat" is not only not especially Indian, at least in its explicit and manifest celebration of the state and religion, but that prior to the modern period there was no such thing as "India" at all. As John Strachey baldly put it in his *India*, published in 1888:

> . . . there is not, and never was an India, or even a country of India, possessing, according to European ideas, any sort of unity, physical, political, social or religious.[5]

Ainslie Embree, commenting on this remark by Strachey, goes on to say:

> Strachey and the authors of *Hobson-Jobson* were speaking for a class that knew India well, but who were convinced that the India of the late nineteenth century was a political artifact created by

British imperial power and that it was essentially artificial, with its existence dependent upon the careful exercise of that power.[5]

A philosophical statement of the same sort of viewpoint is the famous comment by Hegel: "A State is a realization of Spirit, such that in it the self-conscious being of Spirit—the freedom of the Will—is realized as Law . . . if China may be regarded as nothing else but a State, Hindoo political existence presents us with a people, but no State."[7]

The key phrase for understanding Strachey's point as well as Hegel's, and indeed for understanding "Beating the Retreat" as a ritual celebration of "India" as a modern nation-state is, of course, the phrase "according to European ideas" (in the Strachey quote), and it is important to recognize, at least at the starting-point of any inquiry, that the basic notions of the state and religion in modern India derive from non–South Asian sources and that to the extent that India has defined itself as a modern secular, nation-state, it has only existed as such since 1947 (or, perhaps better, 1950, when its Constitution became law).

That, however, can only be the starting-point of the inquiry, for it must also be recognized that this is very much the "flux" side of Whitehead's permanence-flux metaphor and that this non–South Asian "flux" is unfolding within the "permanence" of that assimilative matrix known as Indic civilization that stretches back over millennia. As Whitehead puts it: "In the inescapable flux, there is something that abides; . . . and the passing moment can find its adequate intensity only by its submission to permanence."[8] In the case of South Asian Indic civilization, the "permanence" that "abides" is massive, all-encompassing and in many ways the antithesis of India as a modern secular nation-state. Interestingly enough, and perhaps understandably so, the ceremony "Beating the Retreat" makes no reference whatever to this "permanence" side, or putting the matter another way, "Beating the Retreat" neglects to portray that *from* which retreat is being made. It is almost as if modern India is acting out a double retreat; on one level, the retreat of the British, on another level, modern India's retreat from its own heritage, its own "permanence." The ceremony would have us believe that one modern nation-state retreats and another modern nation-state emerges in its place. That, of course, is true enough, but the repression (in the psychoanalytic sense) of the "permanence" side in the ritual transaction is truly staggering in its scope, and it is hardly a matter for surprise that there has been a good deal of "the return of the repressed" since 1947 (with the intensity of symptoms increasing in inverse proportion to the distance from Independence).

To shift from the Whiteheadian "permanence-flux" metaphor to an Indic metaphor (to be found in both Hindu and Buddhist thought), it is as if there are two levels of truth in contemporary India, one level representing the changing, empirical dimensions of everyday life (*saṃvṛti-satya*), another level representing what truly *is*, or what truly is the case—namely, the level of absolute truth (*paramārtha-satya*). The Advaita Vedāntins tended to interpret the former or empirical level as ultimately illusory or, at least, as ontologically uncharacterizable, while the latter is what truly is the case as qualityless (*nirguṇa*) Brahman; and they often illustrated the notion of more than one level of truth with the analogy of the rope-snake, wherein the terrified reaction of a person apparently (but wrongly) perceiving a snake immediately disappears when the same person recognizes that the perception is mistaken and that, finally, there is only a rope. The Mādhyamika Buddhists tended to interpret the changing, empirical level as the set of all possible and meaningful discursive statements that can be derived from the ordinary experiences of everyday life, while the level of absolute truth (or what truly is the case) is an ultimate intuition of voidness or emptiness (*śūnyatā*) in terms of any attempt to extrapolate discursive accounts beyond their limited and relative contexts. Regardless of their differing valuations of the relative and the absolute, however, both traditions stressed the importance of both levels of truth and the crucial need to discriminate one from the other, and in this sense the Hindu-Buddhist notion of two levels of truth comes close to the "permanence-flux" metaphor of Whitehead. In other words, whether one argues that the "flux-level" of India as a modern secular nation-state is ultimately illusory (à la the Hindu Vedāntin, a John Strachey or a Hegel) or is, rather, a provisional, empirical formulation that has a certain plausibility within an appropriate context (à la the Mādhyamika Buddhist or the Whiteheadian), all would surely agree that it is crucial to take full account of the "permanence-level" of Indic civilization within which the "flux-level" operates and to attempt to understand the manner in which the permanence-level and flux-level interact historically, ontologically and epistemologically. In the idiom of Whitehead: "Those who would disjoin the two elements can find no interpretation of patent facts."[9] In the idiom of Hindu and Buddhist discourse: those who would fail to distinguish between the two levels of truth are ignorant and insufficiently discriminating (*avidyā, aviveka*).

As mentioned earlier, the present book is an attempt to analyze and understand the relation between the state and religion in India, and I have used "Beating the Retreat" as a point of departure by way of

suggesting that my interest in the relation between the state and religion in modern India is not just with respect to the current social, economic and political aspects of the relation, although, of course, there will be continuous reference throughout the book to these dimensions, but, rather, to the concern about the manner in which the much more elusive and subtle relation between the state and religion in modern India plays itself out within the larger framework of Indic civilization as a whole. I am interested, in other words, in a double set of relations, the relation between the state and religion in modern India and the relation of that relation to Indic civilization as a whole, and I want to argue that the narrative of the former, that is, the relation between the state and religion in modern India, only becomes intelligible when interpreted in relation to the narrative of the latter, that is, the narrative of Indic civilization as a whole. There is, as it were, a double narrative unfolding simultaneously, a continuing *double entendre* in historical understanding that is often elusive and puzzling. W.H. Morris-Jones had something similar in mind when he formulated his metaphor of "a play within the play" with respect to understanding Indian politics:

> One very general way of putting the problem is to point out that the student of Indian political institutions soon forms the impression that the main thing he has to learn is that nothing is ever quite what it seems or what it presents itself as being. . . .
> The observer of Indian politics will not look at his subject for long before he gets the feeling that he is missing something. This feeling can perhaps be described only by metaphors. . . .
> Such a feeling with regard to Indian politics is perfectly justified; what the observer has so far not taken into account is a play within the play.[10]

Before turning to the problem of interpreting the "play within the play," however, it will be helpful to provide a brief picture or snapshot of present-day India together with a discussion of the manner in which certain crucial terms will be used in the book, namely, "state," "nation-state," "civilization," and, of course, "religion." Also, it will be helpful to indicate at the outset the theoretical perspective from which the present book emerges. So let us turn, then, to these preliminary matters.

PRESENT-DAY INDIA: AN INTRODUCTORY PROFILE

Demography

The Census of India for 1991 indicates that the total population of the country has reached 843,930,861, making India the second largest nation in the world (after China with its population of 1,160,017,381).[11] About 16 percent of the total population of the world is in India. China and India combined account for just under 40 percent of the population of the planet. India's population growth rate for the past decade has been 23.5 percent. In actual numbers this means that over 160,000,000 have been added to the population in the last ten years, an addition that is more than the total population of Japan. Between 1947 (the date of India's independence from the British) and 1981, the population of India doubled. Given the current growth rate, by the year 2011 the population of India will most likely double again (over the 1981 figure of 665,287,849) to more than 1 billion, 330 million. Possibly, given present growth rates and the relative youthfulness of India's population (40 percent under 15), the population of India will surpass that of China at some point fairly early along in the next century.[12]

To the overall figure of roughly 844,000,000, one should perhaps also add another 10 million for the Asian Indian "diaspora," that is, Asian Indians (frequently referred to as "NRIs" or "non-resident Indians") that do not currently reside in India, with the largest concentrations (of 100,000 or more) in Sri Lanka (1,350,000), Malaysia (1,209,500), South Africa (821,000), the United States (815,447 as of 1990), the Persian Gulf region (800,000), the United Kingdom (675,000), Guyana (500,000), Trinidad (421,000), Fiji (326,015), Burma (300,000), Canada (200,000), Singapore (159,000), the Netherlands (102,000) and East and Central Africa (just under 100,000).[13]

India now has the third largest military in the world, stands about twelfth in total GNP, is roughly fifteenth in industrial production, ranks third in the world in its number of technical and scientific personnel, and can boast a middle class of nearly 150,000,000.[14] Literacy in India, according to the recent 1991 census, has increased to 52.11 percent (roughly two-thirds male and one-third female), up from the 36 percent of the 1981 Census. Sex ratio for 1991 is 929 females for every 1,000 males, down from 1981 and considerably down from the optimal 950 or higher required to sustain a context "favorable to females" in India.[15]

Per capita income is one of the lowest in the world: $340, according to 1991 World Bank figures, or, in other words, fourteenth from the bottom of the nations that currently make up the United Nations.[16]

Much of the population still endures poverty and social deprivation. This grouping includes the "Scheduled Castes" (usually referred to as "untouchables" and making up 15% of the total population), "Scheduled Tribes" (indigenous tribal groups making up about 7.5% of the population), and the so-called "Other Backward Classes" (groups higher than "untouchables" and "tribals" but lower than the high or "forward" castes and numbering anywhere from 25% to 50% of the total population). The so-called "forward" or high castes make up about 18 percent of the population, including such caste groups as Brahmins (3.5% of the total population), Rajputs (3.9%), Bhumihars (2.02%), Vaishya-Banias (1.8%), Kayasthas (1.07%), Jats (1%), and so forth, and coinciding to a large extent with the growing middle class.[17]

Government

The Preamble to the Constitution of India, which came into force on 26 January 1950, describes the country as a "SOVEREIGN SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC."[18] The original 1950 text of the Constitution used only the words "sovereign democratic republic." The addition of the terms "socialist" and "secular" came by way of the forty-second amendment to the Constitution Act of 1976, enacted, it should perhaps be noted, during the national emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi from June of 1975 through January of 1977. The president of the Republic (a largely ceremonial office) is officially head of state. The head of government is the prime minister, and the prime minister and all other ministers must be duly elected members of Parliament. There is an upper house of Parliament known as the Rajya Sabha or "Council of States," whose members are elected indirectly (by the various State Legislative Assemblies) or by appointment, and a lower house of Parliament known as the Lok Sabha or "Assembly of the People," whose members are directly elected. The country, in other words, is basically a parliamentary democracy, with an independent judiciary and a remarkably free press.

In addition to the Union or central government, India is made up of twenty-five states and seven Union territories. Each state has a governor, who is appointed by the president, and a popularly elected Legislative Assembly (and in some states a Legislative Council as well) with a chief minister. The chief minister is the head of administration. Each Union territory is administered by the president through an

appointed administrator. The term of office for the president as well as popularly elected state and Union representatives is five years.

Languages and Cultural Regions

The twenty-five States and seven Union territories range from the state of Jammu and Kashmir in the far North (in the cold foothills of the Himalayas and bordering Tibet and China on the East and Pakistan on the West) to Tamil Nadu in the far, subtropical South (almost reaching to Sri Lanka), and from the dry, arid states of Gujarat and Maharashtra in the West (bordering on the Arabian Sea) to the damp states of West Bengal and Orissa in the East (touching on the Bay of Bengal). Eighteen official languages are recognized by the Constitution: Hindi (spoken by just under 40%), Telugu (8.2%), Bengali (7.8%), Marathi (7.5%), Tamil (6.8%), Urdu (5.3%), Gujarati (5%), Kannada (4.1%), Malayalam (3.9%), Oriya (3.5%), Punjabi (2.8%), Assamese (1–2%), Kashmiri (.5%), Sindhi (.3%), and Sanskrit (the classical, learned language spoken only by some pandits), and the three most recent additions to the list, Nepali, Konkani and Manipur. Most of the languages of the North are in the Indo-Aryan family of languages, namely, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Oriya, Punjabi and Kashmiri. The languages of the South are usually characterized as Dravidian languages, namely, Kannada, Malayalam, Telugu and Tamil. In addition, English is recognized as an official language (spoken perhaps by 3% to 5%), and both Hindi and English are approved for official, government communications.[19]

Apart from these official statistics about language, however, it should be noted that the actual linguistic texture of India is even more complex than the official picture indicates. The Anthropological Survey of India, for example, in its first report of the new "People of India" project, has identified the staggering number of 4,599 distinct communities in India and as many as 325 languages in 12 language families with some 24 different scripts.[20] Moreover, most of the communities surveyed did not consider themselves indigenous or non-migrant. In other words, in the folklore and history of the various communities, most consider themselves as having come to India from outside the subcontinent. Nevertheless, the survey also found that an "all-pervasive sense of Indianness prevails through the linguistic, cultural and ecological diversities of the communities of the country."[21]

The country as a whole is made up of 600,000 villages, some 4,000 towns, over 400 administrative districts and 12 major urban centers of over a million, namely, Calcutta, Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Kanpur, Pune, Nagpur, Lucknow and

Jaipur. Just over 25% of India's population is urban; roughly 73% is rural. The greatest density of population is in the northern "Hindi heartland" states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which together account for over 25 percent of the entire population of the country.

One way of simplifying the rich complexity of India's multicultural, multilinguistic and multinational texture is to identify certain key regions that have tended to coalesce and interact with one another historically and continue to do so even now in the latter part of the twentieth century. More will be said about each of these regions in the sequel (see chapters 2 and 3), but suffice it for this introductory profile simply to identify the basic regions as follows:

1. *The Northwest region*, involving Indus Valley cultural traditions, Brāhmaṇical, Hindu-Buddhist, Muslim and Sikh cultural traditions together with the Punjabi, Urdu, Kashmiri and Hindi literary traditions of the Indus region and the Punjab area, and including the states of Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh;
2. *The "Hindi heartland" region of north central India*, involving Hindu-Buddhist, Jain and Muslim cultural traditions together with the Hindi and Urdu literary traditions of the Ganges River basin and the Gangetic plain, and including the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan;
3. *The Northeast region*, involving Hindu-Buddhist, Muslim, tribal and Christian cultural traditions together with the Bengali, Oriya and Assamese literary traditions of the large states of West Bengal and Orissa and the smaller, newly emerging tribal states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim;
4. *The Western region*, involing Jain, Muslim, Parsi, and Bhakti Hindu and Maratha cultural traditions together with the Gujarati and Marathi literary traditions of the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra;
5. *The Southern region*, involving Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian cultural traditions together with the great Dravidian language traditions in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam of the States of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Goa.

Geography and Climate

The Northwest region of the subcontinent is the location of the first of the two great river systems of North India, namely, the Indus River. Originating in the high Himalayas in the far north, the Indus River finally turns south and eventually empties into the Arabian Sea. The Indus River region together with its five tributaries (the Jhelam,

Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Satlaj) came to be known as the "land of the five rivers" or the "Punjab," and the region as a whole was the site of the first major civilization in South Asia known as the Indus Valley civilization (to be discussed later). The other great river system, namely, the Ganges, is further to the east in the north central region, like the Indus also originating in the Himalayas in the far north, then flowing south and east through what is now the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal and finally emptying into the Bay of Bengal. The vast north central plain, known as the Gangetic plain or the Ganges River basin, is the other major site for the development of civilization in North India. This eventually became what we know today as the "Hindi heartland." It is also the region in which the classical culture of India took shape. Both river systems, the Indus and the Ganges, provide much of the water that is essential for survival in India.

In addition to the two great river systems, the peoples of the subcontinent are also dependent on the monsoon, the "winds" that bring the season of rains. From late September or early October through May, there is very little rainfall in most parts of northern and central India. By the end of May most of north India has become a dry inferno. Then, in June the winds blow from the Indian ocean in the south, gradually forming rain clouds that issue in the heavy monsoon rains that fall from June through September. Prior to the coming of the monsoon, temperatures in north India can easily reach 110 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. By late September, after several months of monsoon rains, the intense heat begins to subside, and one moves into the season of autumn or "winter" (roughly October or November through February). In north India, therefore, there are basically three seasons: (1) the dry season culminating in the intense heat of May (March through May), (2) the rainy season of the monsoon (June through September), and (3) a cooler autumn or winter season (October or November through February). The natural environment of the subcontinent, though characterized by extremes of temperature and a contrasting variety of climatic features, is nevertheless lush and fertile overall, so long as the monsoon makes its annual appearance. When the monsoon fails to appear, however, the lush productivity quickly disappears, and the spectre of famine haunts the land.

South India is separated from north India in the middle of the subcontinent by the Vindhya mountains, nowhere near as high as the Himalayas but nevertheless a significant natural barrier that has been partly responsible for some of the historical differences between the cultures of north and south India. South of the Vindhyas is the Deccan ("south") plateau and further to the south, the Tamil plain and the

region of Kerala. Climate on the Deccan plateau is generally moderate and comfortable because of its elevation. The Tamil country, on the other hand, as well as the region of Maharashtra and further south is largely subtropical, always hot but not having the extremes of heat typical of north India. Two other mountain systems should also be mentioned, the Western Ghats ("steps") which border the west coast of India from south of the Vindhyas down to Cape Comorin and provide the backdrop for the narrow and fertile coastal region known as the Malabar coast (famous for its spice production), and the Eastern Ghats which border the east coast of south India and provide the backdrop for the coastal region known as the Coromandal coast. As mentioned earlier, South Indians are often referred to as Dravidian peoples whose languages (Tamil, Telugu, and so forth) and ethnic backgrounds differ considerably from the peoples of the north, although there has been a great deal of mixing throughout the entire history of the subcontinent.

Political Economy

India is best described as a low income, semi-industrialized, mixed economy, partly capitalist and partly socialist, an economy in which the central government controls the "commanding heights" and is highly interventionist in the organized sector of the economy by way of encouraging import substitution and a self-reliance strategy of rapid industrialization. Currently a vigorous program of economic liberalization is being pursued together with much greater attention to the agricultural sector, but it will be many years before liberalization will seriously alter the basic structures of the political economy of present-day India. Since independence in 1947, India has had a series of five-year economic plans, the first for 1950–56 and the current eighth plan running from 1990 to 1995. Basic or primary industrialization was accomplished during the second and third five-year plans, and by the end of third five-year plan an elaborate legal and bureaucratic structure was in place that enabled the state to control almost the whole of the organized economy. According to Lloyd I. and Susanne H. Rudolph,

> After primary industrialization (second and third five-year plans, 1957–67), two-thirds of the workers and the industrial capital in the organized economy and all of the finance capital are in the state sector, conditions that help make private capital and organized labor dependent on the state.[22]

The modern (industrialized) sector of the economy, however, is only about 10% of the total economy. The traditional economy accounts for the remaining 90%, 67% of which is in agriculture and 23% of which is made up of small-scale trade, cottage industries, and so forth.[23]

The modern, industrial sector of the economy produces 24% of the country's income. The agricultural sector represents 39% of the national income, and the remaining 37% derives from services of one kind or another.[24] In terms of income distribution, some 34% of all wealth is held by the top 10% of the population. A full 50% of wealth is held by the top 20%. The bottom 40% of the entire population controls only 16% of the wealth.[25] Similar imbalance occurs in terms of land distribution, although the worst inequities were eliminated by the land reform efforts of 1950 which eliminated the group of "quasi-feudal" landlords (*zamindars* and *jagirdars*) who for centuries had been intermediaries between the state and the cultivator.[26]

Even with land reform, 39% of all land is still held by 6% of the rural population who were and are large landowners, and another 10% of the land is owned by some 33% who were and are small landowners. What emerged as something new as a result of land reform is a group of what the Rudolphs have called "bullock capitalists," a group of self-employed, self-funded "yeoman"-like farmers who have a pair of bullocks and a small parcel of land and have benefitted from the "green revolution."[27] These new bullock capitalists represent some 34% of the rural population (and at least 25% of the total population) and control some 51% of the land. The category of "bullock capitalist" (an economic notion) largely overlaps with the category of "backward classes" (a status notion), and throughout the decades of the 1970s and the 1980s this group has been becoming more and more politically visible and influential.[28] Finally, it should be noted that some 27 percent of the agricultural population is landless.[29]

Regarding the 10 percent of the modern economy, the government controls fully two-thirds. All basic and heavy industry is in government hands together with the infrastructural components of transportation (railways, airlines, roads) and communications (telephone, telegraph, radio, television, and so forth). All financial institutions, banks and insurance, are government-controlled as is almost all industrial and finance capital. Almost all higher education institutions (including some 142 universities, 9 of which are "central" or national universities and the remainder of which are state institutions, enrolling some 3.5 million students), and hence, most research and development and almost all teachers, scientists, technical personnel and intellectuals, are under direct government funding and supervision. Fully two-

thirds of all employment in the organized sector is public employment.[30] Among the 100 largest firms in India, the 8 largest are public. Eighteen of the top twenty are public, as are 24 of the top 30. Among the bottom 50, 35 are private.[31] Clearly the state controls the "commanding heights" of the economy, or, as the Rudolphs put it: "Private capitalism in India is dependent capitalism."[32]

As the Rudophs also point out, such thorough-going control of the "organized" economy in India has led to (a) the "marginality of class politics," (b) the state as a "third actor" in any analysis of economic development, and (c) "the predominance of centrist politics." Regarding "marginality," the point is that the modern notion of class-oriented "workers" is so small (only about 3% of the work force) that their influence is severely limited. Regarding the state as "third actor," the point is that in any economic context, in addition to "owners" and "workers," one must also take account of the overwhelming importance of the state as the "third actor." Finally, regarding "the predominance of centrist politics," the point is that since independence, India's political parties on the national level have been largely "centrist" and "pluralist," the paradigmatic example being, of course, the Indian National Congress Party (founded first in 1885) which has for the most part ruled India since independence (under the prime ministerships of Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and currently, P.V. Narasimha Rao).

> Among the Indian state's sources of strength has been a centrist pattern of partisan politics that minimizes the political salience of major cleavages. The country seems agreed ideologically on secularism, socialism, and democracy, on the merits of a mixed economy—part socialist, part capitalist—and on a nonaligned foreign policy.[33]

It must be continually kept in mind, however, that this "persistent centrism" and "pluralism" pertains for the most part to the modern sector of Indian social reality, that is to say, to little more than a small portion of the political economy and to the small elite group of secular, modern leaders (hardly more than 3–5%) who have ruled the country since independence. It was primarily Jawaharlal Nehru who first fashioned the ideology of centrism and pluralism with its components of secularism, socialism, democracy and non-alignment, and it was Nehru who successfully fashioned the requisite political coalition that would enable the small elite group of secular, modern leaders to

rule. The Rudolphs have aptly described how Nehru accomplished this.

> The Nehru settlement had been based on a coalition of urban and rural interests united behind an essentially urban-oriented industrial strategy. Its senior partners were India's proportionately small but politically powerful administrative, managerial and professional English-educated middle classes and private-sector industrialists. Private-sector industrialists welcomed the freedom from foreign competition and dependency that was enabled by the second and third five-year plans' import substitution and industrial self-reliance strategies. The English-educated middle classes manned the senior services, built and managed the public-sector industries, and staffed large firms in the modern private sector. The junior partners in the Nehru settlement were the rural notabilities, mostly large landowners who survived intermediary abolition and blocked the passage or implementation of land ceilings legislation. They consented to the import substitution and industrial self-reliance strategies, middle class control of the central government, and the advantages that accrued to urban elites and organized workers on condition that they themselves control the state governments.[34]

This arrangement worked well up through the decade of the 1960s and had its electoral base in the Congress Party's successful centrist and pluralist coalition of most of the forward castes (including almost all of the professional English-educated middle classes and private-sector industrialists), large landowners and key minority constituencies (Scheduled Castes or untouchables, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims). This Congress coalition has never been a majority, but until recently it has provided a sufficient plurality to insure the formation of a series of reasonably stable governments.[35] As mentioned earlier, however, with the emergence of the "bullock capitalists" and/or the "Other Backward Classes," namely, that sizable segment (ranging from 25% to as much as 52% of the total population) of "middle peasants" below the forward castes but higher than the "Scheduled" groups (untouchables and tribals), the so-called centrist and pluralist consensus has begun to unravel.[36] The recent emergence in the 1970s and 1980s of conservative Hindu groups, the growing defensiveness of minority groups in India, the increasing intensity of communal conflict and violence throughout the subcontinent, and the development of separatist movements in the Punjab, Kashmir and elsewhere, are all symptoms to some extent of the

breakdown of the centrism and pluralism of the Nehruvian ideology and political consensus.

Another way of putting the same point is to suggest that India, like a number of other low-income developing countries, has since independence been functioning with "dual economies" that are now beginning to come into conflict. The notion of "dual economies" has been described by E. Wayne Nafziger as follows:

> Virtually all low-income countries and many middle-income countries are *dual economies*. These economies have a traditional, peasant, agricultural sector, producing primarily for family or village subsistence. This sector has little or no reproducible capital, uses technologies handed down for generations, and has low marginal productivity of labor (that is, output produced from an extra hour of labor is less than the subsistence wage).
>
> In the midst of this labor-intensive, subsistence, peasant agriculture (together with semisubsistence agriculture, petty trade and cottage industry) sits a capital-intensive enclave consisting of modern manufacturing and processing operations, mineral extraction, and plantation agriculture. This modern sector produces for the market, uses reproducible capital and new technology, and hires labor commercially (where marginal productivity is at least as much as the wage).[37]

Moreover, these "dual economies" tend to have their own unique political idiom, as has been pointed out by Dipesh Chakrabarty:

> . . . one can discern two kinds of political 'languages.' One is the language characteristic of the project of nation-building and involves the rituals of the state, political representation, citizenship, citizens' rights, etc. This is part of our colonial heritage and it is what Indian nationalism owes to the colonial experience. The other language derives its grammar from relationships of power, authority and hierarchy which pre-date the coming of colonialism, but which have been significantly modified by having been made to interact with ideas and institutions imported by British rule. . . . [I]t would be fair to say that historically the first language has been by and large a privilege of the Indian elite classes, while the lives and aspirations of the subaltern classes have been enmeshed on the whole in relationships articulated in the second.[38]

If one keeps in mind that the elitist, modern sector of the economy and its accompanying political ideology represents only a small portion of the social reality of modern India, whereas the newly mobilizing traditional dimensions of the economy and its accompanying political ideologies (including new religious movements), or what Immanuel Wallerstein would call the "anti-systemic forces" of the social reality of modern India, represent the overwhelming majority of the people of the subcontinent, one begins to get some sense of the historic significance of the great social struggle beginning to act itself out in present-day India.[39]

Religions

According to the 1981 Census of India, the percentage breakdown of the various "world" religions in India was as follows: Hindu—82.64%; Muslim—11.35%; Christian—2.43%; Sikh—1.96%; Buddhist—.72%; Jain—.48%; and Other Persuasions—.42%. The category "Other Persuasions" included Parsis (71,630 in 1981), Jews (5,618 in 1981), tribal traditions (roughly 500,000 in 1981), and so forth.[40] Rounding off the percentages and projecting the rounded off percentages on the population of India in the recent 1991 Census of India (namely, 843,930,861 or about 840,000,000), a reasonable rough estimate of membership in various "world" religion groupings would be the following:[41]

Hindus	690–700,000,000 (82% or 83%)
Muslims	95–100,000,000 (11.5% or 12%)
Christians	20,000,000 (2.5%)
Sikhs	16,000,000 (2%)
Buddhists	6,000,000 (.75%)
Jains	4,000,000 (.50%)
Other	4,000,000 (.50%)

Hindus

The so-called "Hindu" percentage is something of a problem, since it includes Scheduled Castes ("untouchables") and Scheduled Tribes ("tribals") that together account for some 23.5 percent of the total population. If one were to assume that many low-status groups would hesitate or prefer not to identify themselves with the category "Hindu," this could lower the "Hindu" total to as low as 500 million, or, in other words, not much more than 60% or 62% of the population. If one then combined the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes with the other minority religious groups (Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and

Other), the non-Hindu or minority percentage would be 38% to 40%.[42] Much depends, of course, on precisely what is meant by the term "Hindu" and we shall return to this issue at greater length in chapter 4.

By way of an overall approximation, it can be said that about two-thirds of all Hindus are Vaiṣṇava-s (followers of Viṣṇu or one of his incarnations as Kṛṣṇa or Rāma); about one-third would be Śaiva-s (followers of Śiva) or devotees of the goddess (Śākta-s). These traditions are found throughout India, but it is probably fair to say that Vaiṣṇava traditions (especially the traditions of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa) are particularly strong in the northern Hindi heartland region of north central India as well as in the Northeast region around the state of Bengal and the western region of Gujarat and Maharashtra. Śaiva traditions are particularly strong in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the southern region but also in Kashmir in the far Northwest region and in the Northeast region in and around Bengal.

There are several hundred monastic orders within the various Hindu traditions, and estimates run from 1 million to as many as 15 million regarding the number of persons involved in the "professional religious" or monastic life in India.[43] The most famous monastic order is the Daśanāmi (literally meaning "the ten-named" or, in other words, an order with "ten named subdivisions"), founded by the great Vedāntin philosopher, Śankara, probably some time in the eighth century of the Common Era and continuing down to the present, with centers in all the major regions of present-day India, the membership of which is overwhelmingly high-caste Brahmin. In addition, there are numerous other *sampradāya-s* or "orders" belonging to the various Vaiṣṇava and Śaiva groups all around India, as well as various independent monastic groups and a great variety of individual itinerant *sādhu-s* ("holy persons").

In addition to these traditional forms of Hindu spirituality, there are also many varieties of what can be called reformist and revisionist Neo-Hindu religious groups whose emergence in the nineteenth and twentieth century largely represent Hindu India's reaction to Western civilization, secularization, modernization and Christian missionary efforts (and all of which will be subsequently discussed).

The anthropologist, Agehananda Bharati, has usefully distinguished three levels of Hindu religion: (*a*) "village Hinduism" made up of "grassroots," "little tradition" Hindu spirituality, characterized by belief in local demons and spirits, eccentric varieties of magico-religious practices, shamanistic traditions of ecstatic experience, but with some observance of all-India mainline Hindu practices and festivals; (*b*) literate or scripture-based "Sanskrit, Vedic Hinduism," also "grass-

roots" Hindu spirituality but of a learned, "great tradition" variety, represented by Brahmin priests, pandits (traditionally trained scholars), itinerant ascetics or monastic practitioners; and, finally, (*c*) the "renaissance Hinduism" or Neo-Hinduism of what Bharati calls the "urban alienate," or, in other words, a portion of the new urban middle class, characterized by the modernized, reformed and often Westernized Hindu spirituality of *gurus* such as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Satya Sai Baba and many others.[44] Bharati's levels, of course, are not to be taken as hard scientific categories based on survey research. They are, rather, a rough heuristic overview of some of the more obvious types of Hindu social reality.

Assuming, as mentioned above, that the category of "Hindu" includes at least about 500 million (or, in other words, some 60% to 62% of the total population and not including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as "Hindu"), possibly as many as 3% to 5% could be included in the category of "renaissance Hinduism" or Neo-Hinduism (or, in other words, between 15 and 25 million, most of whom come from the "forward" castes and many of whom are English-speaking); possibly 13% to 15% could be included in the category of literate, scriptural "Sanskrit or Vedic Hinduism" (or, in other words, between 65 and 75 million, and again largely made up of the higher or "forward" castes, with possibly some few knowing English but with most speaking a modern, regional language such as Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, and so forth); and the remainder could be included in the category of "village Hinduism" (or, in other words, just over 400 million and largely belonging to the Other Backward Classes or other low-status persons). These, of course, are only rough approximations. Hindus represent a majority in almost all States and Union Territories with the exception of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, in which Muslims represent a two-thirds majority, the state of Punjab, in which the majority (60%) is Sikh, and the tribal States of Nagaland and Meghalaya, in which there are majorities (80% and 53% respectively) of (largely Protestant) Christians.

Muslims

Muslims have been involved in the life of the subcontinent as far back as the seventh century of the Common Era, and even during the long centuries of Muslim rule (first by the Turko-Afghan Muslims of the Delhi Sultanate, 1206–1526, and later by the migrant Iranians and Persianized Afghans and Turks of the Mughal period, 1526–1757), the Muslim population was never more than a minority. Even at the time

of Partition in 1947, only 24 percent of the population was Muslim. After partition, when the Muslim populations of Punjab and Bengal were split off from India (to form Pakistan) only the state of Jammu and Kashmir continued to have a majority Muslim population. Moreover, the social and cultural make-up of Muslims in India has always been exceedingly diverse, with only a small elite ruling in north central India and another small elite in what is now Andhra, the remainder of the community being made up of urban artisan groups, petty traders, and peasant agrarian communities. The largest concentrations of Muslims are in Assam (24%),[45] West Bengal (21.5%), Kerala (21.3%), Uttar Pradesh (15.9%), Bihar (14.1%), Karnataka (11%) and Andhra Pradesh (8.5%). Moreover, Muslims tend to be concentrated in urban areas—for example, Hyderabad (38%), Lucknow (29%), Varanasi (26%), Allahabad (24%), Kanpur (20%) and concentrations above the national average in Calcutta, Bombay, Bangalore, Ahmedabad, Agra, Jaipur, Indore and Jabalpur.[46] Roughly two-thirds of all Muslims in India are followers of Sunni Islam (approximately 65 million); one-third follow Shi'a Islam (about 35 million). There is also a small community (less than 200,000) of the heretical Ahmadiyas (a dissident Shi'a group in the Punjab region, founded in 1889, with a following also in Pakistan as well as outside the subcontinent in Africa and the United States).

Christians

Christian traditions have been present in India since at least the sixth century of the Common Era and possibly even earlier. The Malabar Christian community (also called the "Thomas Christian" community) in Kerala and Tamil Nadu claims to have been founded by the Apostle Thomas who purportedly was martyred in what is now Madras in 52 of the Common Era. This is probably a legendary account, but there is some evidence that Christian communities may have been present in south India by the middle of the fourth century, and certainly by the middle of the sixth century.[47] These early Christian communities were of the Orthodox Syrian tradition with ties to both Nestorian and Monophysite traditions in the region of Antioch in Syria. Roman Catholicism came to India with the coming of the Portugese in 1498 and the mission work of the Jesuits, St. Francis Xavier (1506-1552), Robert de Nobili (1577-1656) and others, largely in south India. Protestant missionary work first began with Danish Lutherans at the beginning of the eighteenth century and gained great momentum eventually at the end of the eighteenth century and thereafter with the coming of the Baptist,

William Carey, to the Danish settlement at Serampore near Calcutta in 1793.

Among the estimated 20 million Christians in India, nearly half (over 9 million) are Roman Catholic and follow either the reformed Roman rite or the Syro-Malabar rite (a Syriac liturgy, permitted by Rome, for those in the Orthodox Syrian tradition who have become converted or are in communion with Rome).[48] Nearly 8 million Christians are Protestant, with many belonging either to the united Church of North India (a union of Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists and Disciples of Christ dating from 1970, and with a membership numbering about 500,000) or to the united Church of South India (a union of Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Dutch Reformed, dating from 1947, and with a membership of 1,500,000). Both united Churches are in communion with the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar (numbering about one million members), an autonomous Orthodox group that broke away from Syrian Orthodox Church in the nineteenth century. The Syrian Orthodox Church itself or the "Thomas Christian" community numbers about 1,500,000. In addition to these main groups, there are numerous independent Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican and Pentecostal churches in India. The majority of all Christians (some 60%) in India are to be found in the southern states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. As mentioned above, they also represent majority populations in the small tribal states of Nagaland and Meghalaya. They are also found in the state of Goa (31%), the State of Manipur (26%) and in the Union Territories of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (26%). For the most part, Indian Christians derive from the lower classes and castes, many from tribal and untouchable groups.

Sikhs

The Sikh tradition is a relatively recent addition to India's potpourri of religious traditions. Founded in the Northwest region (the Punjab area) by Guru Nanak (1469–1539) at the beginning of the sixteenth century as an interesting blend of both Hindu devotionalism and Muslim (mainly Sufi) piety, it attained a more distinctive definition at the time of its final or tenth successor-guru, namely, Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), who (*a*) proclaimed that the living tradition of Gurus was to be replaced by the Sikh holy book, the "Ādi Granth" or Guru Granth Sahib ("Book of the Lord"), (*b*) introduced the notion of the "Khālsā" (the "pure" community), a sacred, militant fraternity into which committed followers were initiated by means of a kind of baptismal ritual (called *amrit-dhārī* or "taking the nectar"), and (*c*) required

those who had been baptized to take a new surname, "Singh" ("lion"), and to observe the symbolic "five K's" (*pañj-pakke*), namely, *kes* (unshorn hair), *kanghā* (comb), *karā* (steel bangle), *kirpān* (dagger) and *kacch* (special cloth shorts or underwear).[49] Thereafter those who had taken "baptism" and become part of the Khālsā came to be known as *kes-dhārī* ("wearing unshorn hair"), while those who had not taken baptism and not joined the Khālsā were referred to as *sahaj-dhārī* or "non-Khālsā Sikhs" or simply the "not yet committed." Much of the religious sentiment of the Sikhs closely parallels Hindu devotional piety, but it resembles Islam in its clear monotheism and its rejection of any representation of the deity. The Sikhs also reject many aspects of the traditional caste system, although caste-groupings do play a role in Sikh politics and religion—for example, urban-based "forward" caste Khatris in rivalry with rural-based and "forward" caste Jats, or again, low-caste or "scheduled caste" Sikhs who seek entitlement benefits along with Hindu "scheduled castes," and so forth.

The Sikh tradition is probably closer overall to Hindu traditions than to Muslim traditions, and it is not unusual for Hindus to think of the Sikh tradition as a subset of Hindu traditions. Moreover, intermarriage is often allowed between Sikh and Hindu families, something that would never occur between Hindus and Muslims.[50] At the same time, however, it is generally the case that Sikhs, especially the *kes-dhārīs* but probably most others in the community as well, since before independence in 1947, have clearly wanted to differentiate Sikh traditions from Hindu traditions, both in terms of politics and in terms of religion. The Sikhs attained a measure of political independence in 1966 when the two new states of Haryana and Punjab were formed, the former of which is a largely Hindu, Hindi-speaking part of the southeastern portion of the old Punjab region and the latter of which is a largely Sikh, Punjabi-speaking part of the northwestern portion of the old Punjab region. The new state of Punjab has a majority Sikh population of 60 percent (roughly 12 million) with its distinctive regional language of Punjabi (and even a distinctive script known as Gurmukhi or "language of the Gurus"), and minority Hindu and Muslim populations of 38% and 1% respectively. There are many Sikhs, however, outside the state of Punjab. As many as 4 million live in the States of Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and the Union Territory of Delhi, and there is a sizable Sikh "diaspora" outside of India in Canada, the United States, Great Britain and West Germany.

Even with majority status in the new state of Punjab and with their own distinctive political party called the Akali Dal (the "eternal party"), however, the Sikhs have found it difficult to attain a unified

voice either in politics or in religion. Indeed, it was Indira Gandhi and her Congress Party who first brought the extremist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale into political prominence in order to divide the Sikh vote and to increase the influence of the Congress Party in the Punjab.[51] As is well known, the attempt proved to be a disastrous miscalculation, and eventually Mrs. Gandhi had to send the Indian army into the sacred precincts of the Golden Temple in Amritsar in June of 1984 (Operation Blue Star) in order to uproot Bhindranwale and his followers who had taken refuge there. This in turn triggered the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi by her own Sikh body guards in October of 1984 and the subsequent slaughter of innocent Sikhs in Delhi by enraged Hindus and other communal elements. Since that time there has been a growing hard-core of extremists in the state of Punjab and elsewhere (within India and within the Sikh "diaspora" outside of India as well) who want not simply local autonomy within India and recognition as a distinct non-Hindu religious community, but, rather, who demand a separate state in the region to be known as "Khalistan" ("Land of the Pure"). These militant separatists or Khalistani Sikhs represent only a small minority—current estimates by the Government of India put their number at little more than 2,000[52]—but they exert widespread influence over the political life of the state of Punjab and continue to terrorize both the Sikh and Hindu population of the state, although in the last year or two (1993–94) the level of violence has subsided considerably.

Buddhists

The Buddhist tradition, of course, is one of the oldest non-Hindu or non-brahmanical religious traditions in India dating back to the time of its founder, Gautama (ca. 563–483 B.C.E.), in the north central region of the Gangetic plain in what is now Bihar and the foothills of the Himalayas in the southern part of Nepal. The Buddha rejected Vedic ritualism and the authority of Brahmin priests and, instead, taught a moderate "middle way" of disciplined meditation. Buddhist traditions have a rich history on the Indian subcontinent, ranging from its early or Theravāda ("tradition of the elders") forms which helped in providing the political and religious ideology of *dharma* ("law," "righteousness," "doctrine") for India's first period of imperial unification under the Mauryan emperor, Aśoka (269–232 B.C.E.), through various Mahāyāna ("great vehicle") forms in the first centuries of the Common Era, and finally into later highly ritualistic Tantric or Vajrayāna ("thunderbolt vehicle" or "diamond vehicle") forms from the sixth through the tenth

and eleventh centuries. Buddhist traditions were prominent on the
Indian subcontinent. Early along, they were exported to South and
Southeast Asia (largely in Theravāda forms), and eventually to Tibet,
Central Asia, China, Korea and Japan (largely in Mahāyāna and Tantric
forms), thus becoming a broad, cross-cultural religious tradition on
analogy with the two other broad, cross-cultural religious traditions,
the Christian and the Islamic.

In the land of its birth, however, namely, India, Buddhist tradi-
tions became for the most part extinct after about the fourteenth cen-
tury of the Common Era, partly because of the onslaught of the
Turko-Afghan Muslim invaders from the tenth century onwards
which caused thousands of Buddhist monks to be slaughtered or to flee
into Tibet and Central Asia, but partly also because many of its distinc-
tive ideas and practices were simply absorbed by the larger Hindu cul-
ture. In any case, when one hears about Buddhists in present-day India,
it must be kept in mind that there is almost no continuity between pre-
sent-day Buddhists in India and the historic traditions of Indian Bud-
dhism. To be sure, Indian nationalists both before and after
independence were fully aware of the rich contribution that Buddhist
institutions and ideas have made to the larger cultural identity of India,
and since independence, various Buddhist show-place monasteries
(supported by Buddhist followers from Thailand, Japan, and so forth)
have been maintained in and around Sarnath, the suburb of the famous
city of Banaras, where Gautama the Buddha purportedly first taught
his four noble truths and his eightfold path.

Buddhists in present-day India, however, represent two quite dif-
ferent orientations, both highly political and both largely reintroduc-
tions of Buddhist traditions into India. Moreover, both reintroductions
occurred in the decade of the 1950s. The first has to do with modern
India's great untouchable leader, B. R. Ambedkar (1891–1956). Born to
the untouchable Mahar caste in the state of Maharashtra in western
India, Ambedkar received a solid education and legal training in Bom-
bay (University of Bombay), New York City (Columbia University)
and London (University of London). He became a spokesman for
India's untouchables and was a major critic of Gandhi and the
Congress-led nationalist movement because of its overreliance on
Hindu ideas and institutions.[53]

Ambedkar detested everything Hindu but agreed to serve in
Nehru's first cabinet as Minister of Law. He also agreed to chair the
drafting committee for India's new constitution and was instrumental
in helping to fashion the final constitutional document. Through the
years he became more and more attracted to Buddhist ideas, since the

Buddhist tradition was an indigenous and authentic tradition of Indian religion that repudiated the authority of the Brahmins as well as the trappings of the caste system. In 1951 he resigned his cabinet post, travelled to Buddhist countries, lectured and wrote about Buddhism. On 14 October 1956 he led a mass conversion to Buddhism of thousands of untouchables in the city of Nagpur in Maharashtra.[54]

Although Ambedkar himself died soon thereafter, the conversion movement he started spread rapidly among untouchable communities, and within a few years some 4 million people, largely Scheduled Castes or untouchables in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh, had converted to Buddhism.[55] Ambedkar was also instrumental in laying the groundwork for a new political party, the Republican Party, specifically designed to serve the needs of Scheduled Castes and other low-status persons. Because of Ambedkar's premature death, the political party has not had any longterm or lasting significance, although it did generate an untouchable political awareness in independent India that has taken a variety of forms in more recent years. At any rate, among the 6 million Buddhists in present-day India, the overwhelming majority are these Neo-Buddhists from the Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra and elsewhere.

The other dimension of the re-introduction of Buddhist tradition into present-day India, of course, is the presence of His Holiness, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, together with the remnant of the Tibetan Buddhist community.[56] The People's Republic of China "liberated" Tibet in 1950, and in 1959 when the Tibetan rebellion in Lhasa against the Chinese was viciously repressed, the Dalai Lama together with thousands of monks fled to India. The Tibetans were given asylum by Prime Minister Nehru in Dharmasala in the northern state of Himachal Pradesh, and since that time the Tibetans have been working diligently to preserve Tibetan Buddhist culture in India and to prepare a Tibetan political movement looking towards a return to Tibet as well as some sort of political settlement with the People's Republic of China.

Jains

Unlike the Buddhist tradition which largely became extinct in India and had to be reintroduced, the Jains have been a small but influential presence in India since their founding in the sixth century B.C.E. by Vardhamāna ("he who is bringing prosperity"), also called Mahāvira (the "great hero").[57] There is some evidence that Jain traditions may be even older than Buddhist traditions, possibly going back to the time of the Indus Valley civilization, and that Vardhamāna rather than being a

"founder" per se was, rather, simply a primary spokesman for a much
older tradition.[58] Like the Buddhist traditions, the Jains represent a dis-
sident tradition in India. That is to say, like the Buddhists, they too
reject the Vedic sacrificial system and the authority of the Brahmin
priests, and encourage or teach, instead, a mendicant life of disciplined
meditation. Also like the Buddhist traditions, the origins of the Jain tra-
ditions are in the north central region of the Gangetic plain in what is
now Bihar and the southern part of Nepal. There were a number of
other mendicant groups in the same region in the sixth and fifth cen-
turies B.C.E., and these various dissident traditions are referred to as
śramaṇa-groups or "wandering ascetic"-groups. Jain traditions differ
from Buddhist traditions and some of the other śramaṇa-groups by
being much more extreme in the pursuit of ascetic practices. Jains are
usually credited with introducing the notion of "non-violence" (ahiṃsā)
towards all living things and the tradition of vegetarianism in India.

     As early as the fourth century B.C.E., a great schism occurred
among the Jain ascetics which continues to divide the community
down to the present day. A section known as Digambaras ("sky-clad")
which requires a strict, ascetic life including even the giving up of all
clothes or garments, hence the name "sky-clad" or naked, broke away
from a more moderate section known as Śvetāmbaras ("white or cot-
ton-clad") which is willing to make compromises with ordinary con-
ventional society and is also willing to allow women into the
mendicant life.[59] Eventually the Digambaras migrated to south India, to
southern Maharashtra and Karnataka, whereas the Śvetāmbaras
migrated to the western region of India, the areas of Gujarat, Rajasthan,
western Madhya Pradesh and northern Maharashtra. This distribution
of the two main sections of Jain traditions continues to a large extent
down to the present, and the 4 million Jains in present-day India tend
to be settled for the most part in the western regions (Gujarat,
Rajasthan and northern Maharashtra) and southern regions (Kar-
nataka, and so forth) of the subcontinent, although smaller groups may
also be found in almost every region of India, especially in major urban
centers like Delhi and Bombay. They have traditionally been involved
in trade and commerce (both before modernization and after), espe-
cially in Gujarat and Rajasthan. They tend also to be highly educated
and urban-based, although in south India there is a sizable rural popu-
lation of Jain farmers.[60]

     One interesting historical question is why the Jains were able to
survive in India for so many centuries down to the present day,
whereas the Buddhists became for the most part extinct after the four-
teenth century. Part of the answer relates to royal patronage at certain

crucial times in the regional histories of western India and southern India. Another part of the answer relates to the extreme puritanical attitude of Jains that has always given them a definite sense of being separate from the larger Hindu environment. A third part of the answer, possibly a major part, relates to certain strategic compromises that Jains were able to make in the areas of ritual behavior, adherence to local customs, and a willingness under certain circumstances to engage in intermarriage with certain Hindu groups. Moreover, the Jain monastic traditions have always maintained close ties with their larger lay communities, and Jain writers, monks and intellectuals have addressed themselves in detail to problems of maintaining the Jain identity within the larger sea of Hindu India.[61]

Parsis and Jews

At least some mention should be made of two additional religious communities in present-day India that are rapidly becoming extinct but have been in former years identifiable and influential. As mentioned above, in the 1981 Census of India, these groups were listed under the category of "Other Persuasions," the number of Parsis being put at 71,630, largely in the city of Bombay and its environs, and the number of Jews being put at 5,618, including the so-called Malayalam-speaking "Cochin Jews" of Kerala, the so-called "Baghdadi" Jews of the northern cities, and the so-called Marathi-speaking "Bene Israel" ("Children of Israel") in Maharashtra (mainly Bombay).[62] In earlier years there were well over 100,000 Parsis in Bombay, and at the time of independence in 1947 there were well over 25,000 Jews. Since the founding of the state of Israel, however, most Jews have left India for Israel, and when the calculations for the 1991 Census of India are published, it may well be the case that there are no longer any Jewish communities in India beyond some few families in Bombay, Calcutta and Pune.

Evidence indicates that Jews first came to India around the thirteenth century along the Malabar coast (the region of Kerala) and were involved largely in trade and commerce.[63] Others settled further to the north in the region of Maharashtra. Some have suggested that the Jewish presence in India is as old as the presence of Christianity, but such a claim is difficult to document. In addition to trade and commerce in modern India, Jews have also been involved in manufacturing, civil administration and the military. They have been largely urban-based.

Parsis are also rapidly disappearing, since one can only be a Parsi if descended from a Parsi male; in other words, there is no possibility of conversion to the Parsi faith by a non-Parsi. The name "Parsi" is a

Gujarati form of "Persian" and refers to a small refugee band of Zoroastrians who came to the northwestern coast of India (Maharashtra, in and around the Bombay area) some time in the tenth century C.E. after prolonged persecution following the Arab Islamic conquest of Iran.[64] Over the centuries the Parsis have built and maintained their sacred "fire temples" (some of which are said to have maintained continuous fire for over a thousand years) and the well-known "towers of silence" in which the dead are placed to be devoured by vultures so that the earth is not polluted by the flesh of the dead. The Parsi community became highly Westernized during the nineteenth century and has played a major role, especially in western India but elsewhere as well, in the development of India as a modern, industrialized state. Being itself a separate caste or ethnic group, it has been free from many of the restrictions that hindered the modernization of many traditional Hindu castes.

This, then, concludes my attempt to sketch an introductory profile of present-day India. It is, to be sure, little more than a preliminary snapshot of a great civilization struggling to survive and to develop itself into a modern, industrialized nation-state, able to support its massive population and to overcome the cruel inequities of its precolonial and colonial past. Obviously "religion" or, perhaps better, the so-called "world religions" loom large in the awareness of the people of modern India, and how the people of modern India understand their "world religions," and even more important, how they negotiate the relations between the various "world religions," on the one hand, and between the "world religions" and the "state," on the other, will be important variables in determining the long-term viability of India as a modern, industrialized nation-state.

But let me move on now quickly to complete this introductory chapter by briefly saying something about some issues of definition and theoretical perspective to be followed in this study.

The Term "Religion"

What begins to become clear even in this rapid and introductory survey is the remarkable diversity within the various "world religions" in India, a diversity so rich in texture that one begins to question whether it is legitimate to make any generalizations at all about the various "religions," and even more than that, to question the very validity of the categories or names employed. To be sure, it might be argued that such labels have at least a heuristic naming utility that enables us to

identify certain large populations for purposes of intellectual analysis, but it might well be countered that even as naming terms they are not identifying certain large populations as much as they are identifying overly broad abstractions about certain large populations, overly broad abstractions that finally hinder any serious attempt at intellectual analysis. Robert Frykenberg has argued along precisely these lines with respect to the use of the terms "Hindu" and "Hinduism":

> . . . in what is now often referred to as "popular Hinduism"; what is called "temple Hinduism"; . . . "bhakti Hinduism"; . . . "village Hinduism"; ...and "tribal Hinduism"; not to mention other local-istic forms of Indian culture and religion which some think of as being quintessentially "Hindu"—the term "Hinduism" has been and still is often compounded and confused with any or all of the above usages. The result has been a jumbling and scrambling of signals. Vagueness of usage has led this concept into trackless deserts of nonsense.[65]

Peter Hardy has made a similar observation about Islam in India:

> The entry of Muslims into South Asia by so many and separated doorways and their spread over the subcontinent by so many dif-ferent routes, over a period of centuries, ensured that Islam would present itself to the peoples of South Asia in many differ-ent epiphanies seen from many angles. Neither to its own adher-ents nor to non-Muslims in South Asia has Islam seemed monochromatic, monolithic or indeed mono-anything. It has indeed been said that Islam in South Asia has been united only by a few common rituals and by the aspirations of its scholars.[66]

I am inclined to go even further than Frykenberg and Hardy and to argue that much the same can be said about all of the other so-called "world religions" in India as well, including Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism, Judaism and Parsiism (or Zoroastrianism). These designations are for the most part little more than conventional labels that have almost no referential or theoretical validity whatever. Each is a singular label disguising what is in reality a pluralist array of cultural traditions. As Wilfred Cantwell Smith has shown, such singular labels ("Hinduism," and so forth) are products of the reifying intellectualism of the European Enlightenment.[67] Frits Staal has pushed the issue even more radically, arguing that even the term "religion" itself is little more than a proper name or label derived on analogy from pre-modern Jew-

ish, Christian and Islamic models and then uncritically projected on to cultural traditions in which the label does not fit in any meaningful sense. The term "religion," in other words, is not a general or generic notion such as "language" or "culture," but only a naming term.[68]

Both W. C. Smith and Frits Staal suggest that the use of "world religions" discourse as well as the use of the term "religion" be abandoned or set aside. I would fully concur with the former suggestion, but I would not concur that we stop using the term "religion." Because a term has been uncritically used or applied need not entail that the term be dismissed or eliminated. A better approach might be to set forth a theoretically and analytically useful reinterpretation of the terms at issue, and wherever possible, to reduce the former, uncritical discourse to a meaningful, critical account of what is at stake. I shall attempt such a reinterpretation of the notion of "religion" in chapter 4 of the present book. I mention this important issue now in this introductory chapter in order to make clear that my use of the term "religion" in the sense of "world religions" in this chapter is only a preliminary starting-point that will be reworked in the sequel.

THE TERMS "STATE," "NATION-STATE" AND "CIVILIZATION"

There is no need to enter into detailed theoretical discussions about the meaning of the terms "state," "nation-state" and "civilization," but there is a need to make clear how the terms are being used in the present book. In this regard I have found the discussions of Ernest Gellner, Anthony Giddens and Ravinder Kumar to be especially helpful, the first two by way of providing useful general discussions about the notions "state" and "nation-state" and the latter by way of providing a useful perspective about the notion of "civilization" and the manner in which these various terms apply to India.

Turning first to the notions of "state" and "nation," Gellner offers the following definitions:

> . . . the state is the specialization and concentration of order maintenance. The "state" is that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order (whatever else they may also be concerned with). The state exists where specialized order-enforcing agencies, such as police forces and courts, have separated out from the rest of social life. They *are* the state.[69]