

## The Secret Life of AnOther Indian Nationalism

Nationalism is among the most influential ideas that has shaped the ‘Metamorphoses of the Political’ in the long twentieth century. *The Secret Life of AnOther Indian Nationalism* focuses on exclusivist Indian nationalism and identifies its distinction from inclusivist nationalism. It highlights shifts in ‘anOther Indian nationalism’ over the last two centuries as the geopolitical context has transitioned from the Pax Britannica to the Pax Americana and its war on terror. The book braids the following three strands together: first, a majoritarian nationalist ideology called Hindutva; second, the making of popular history as a precolonial epic is highlighted, depicting the defeat of the last Hindu emperor by a conquering Muslim sultan purportedly leading to eight centuries of Hindu enslavement; and third, the ‘reconversion’ of a community by the Visva Hindu Parishad with consequences for lived Hinduism and Indic civilisation with its complex identities.

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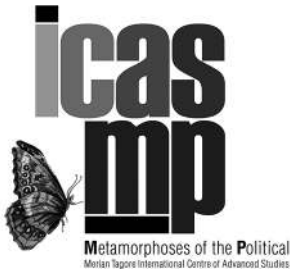
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# The Secret Life of AnOther Indian Nationalism

*Transitions from the Pax Britannica  
to the Pax Americana*

Shail Mayaram



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For Arvind who has been part of this and many other journeys  
*jab koī bāt bigar jāye, jab koī muškil par jāye*  
*tum denā sāth merā hamnawā ...*

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## Abbreviations

AAR	<i>Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han</i>
ANM	Auxiliary Nurse and Widwife
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CERI	Centre de Recherches Internationales (Centre for International Studies), Paris
EAC	Extra Assistant Commissioner
EIC	East India Company
EOH	<i>Essentials of Hindutva</i>
HPP	<i>Hindu-Pad-Padashahi; Or, A Review of the Hindu Empire of Maharashtra</i>
IOR	India Office Library and Records
IWI	<i>Indian War of Independence, 1857</i>
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
RASB	Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner
RJB	Ram Janmabhumi
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SDM	Sub Divisional Magistrate
SGE	<i>Six Glorious Epochs of Indian History</i>
UIT	Urban Improvement Trust
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad

## Preface

This is a book about the making of the modern ultra-nationalist Hindu self. The emergence of ultra-nationalism did not just suddenly come about in the 1980s, leading to the Bharatiya Janata Party's consolidation of one-party dominance replacing what used to be the Congress system and, in addition, creating a unipolar ideological universe. Scholars such as John Zavos have tracked the origins of Hindu nationalism to the 1920s. Many identify it with the publication of Savarkar's *Essentials of Hindutva* in 1923. Ashis Nandy sees its beginning in Tagore's novel *Gora* (1907). I argue that the publication of Colonel James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajast'han* in 1829–32 had an electrifying effect on vernacular nationalism. In its aftermath the fields of literature and history both became sites of national devotion.

The process has had a long gestation over a couple of centuries. The temporal frame examined in this book is 1812 to 2014, from Tod's Report on the Pindaris to what has been called New Hindutva and its coming to power with the election of Narendra Modi. In no case has there been a unilinear trajectory; indeed, there have been many setbacks as from Champaran through Chauri Chaura and the early 1940s when a more multicultural nationalism held sway. Surely the politics leading to Partition and its aftermath again demonstrated the strength of hyper-nationalism reacting to the Muslim League's demand for greater representation.

On colonialism my intervention relates to two arguments posed in the public debate on the topic: that it was a different form of imperialism grounded, first, in the idea of race and, second, in the modern idea of religion that could be used to bolster sovereignty through divide and rule. Colonial modernity produced new organisational forms that mobilised Hindus, Muslims and others. The British Empire played a diabolical role resorting to partition in four troubled regions, Ireland, India, Palestine and Cyprus and fostered identity politics. The deeper problem was the colonisation of the Indian mind. Two ideas, in particular, played havoc in the subcontinent. The idea of History and of Religion, both in the upper case.

Regarding history the question is: how does Prithviraj become the 'last Hindu emperor' of India? Surely this is a fictive history that seeks to ignore the Vijaynagara empire. How is Pratap made into a nationalist both in popular literature and in school textbooks as also the victor in the battle of Haldighati? How does Vinayak Damodar Savarkar become a 'freedom fighter'? The battle is over young minds, and over visions for India's future.

Although this is a book on only one strand of Indian nationalism and Gandhi's articulation of nationalism is invoked primarily as a counter foil to Savarkar's nationalism, there has been a palette of Indian nationalisms including peasant nationalism as Subaltern Studies reminded us. In southern India there was the Dravidian nationalism of Periyar that emphasised self-respect and rationalism, focused on language, and was 'anti-religion'. M.S.S. Pandian pointed out that Periyar attacked 'essential Hinduism' grounded on the unity between Hindu and Brahman fostered by the orientalist view of the centrality of Brahmanism to Hinduism. In northeast India there is both the longstanding tradition of Manipuri nationalism and Phizo's vision of a larger Naga nation, which is a variant of ethnic nationalism. Naga nationalism is intensely theological ('Nagaland for Christ') and, as Bimol Akoijam commented, the idea of the Naga nation was a product of colonial rule. The British supported the idea of a Crown Colony even after the decolonisation of the subcontinent. Naga nationalism envisages the ethnicisation of Manipur, to be divided into Meitei-, Naga- and Kuki-dominated territories. The Government of India has, thus, emerged as mediator between these two competing nationalisms, Manipuri and Naga.

Apart from nationalism, two parallel stories figure in this work—one of caste formation including the politicisation of caste, but also its ethnicisation. Hence the second story is that of religion formation. Religion and history form components of the metamorphoses of the political in the long twentieth century. I must confess that in using the categories Muslim Merat and Hindu Rawat I also contribute to the reproduction of boundaries.

There have undoubtedly been many shifts in hyper-nationalist thought. The story of community has likewise undergone many transitions. This book reveals a complicated story regarding identity. While some have been seduced by the magic of epic history and nationalist icons, some others who have resisted conversion constitute 'backsliders'. There are still others who have preferred the comfort zone of cosmological imaginaries. While hyper-nationalism described the subcontinent as Punyabhumi, there is an implicit reaction from those who prefer to characterise it as Madatbhumi, a conception of the Divine as loving and caring and intrinsically helpful in alleviating pain. This is where the Abrahamic and the non-Abrahamic meet in Indic civilisation, the monotheist and the pagan, the orthodox and the heretical.

My interlocutors will assert that this is a story largely on the Hindu side. This is a legitimate criticism. In defence I might state that the role of the Tablighi Jama'at to counter the Shuddhi movement of the Arya Samaj among the Meos is a story I have told in *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity*. That was a work on the Meos, but also on the working of Deoband and the Jamiat Ulama-i Hind. The Tablighi Jama'at has been particularly active in countering the Vishva Hindu Parishad by organising ijtimas, or congregations (most recently in Ajmer in 2019). Ironically, the Meos, earlier called jahil (theologically backward) by Islamists, are the purveyors of Islamic ideologies among the Merat. Locally there is constant reference to the

multiplication of mosques and the ‘Taliban’ villages. Articles on modes of contemporary Islamic da`wa and on the many ways of being Muslim that draw on my work in Merwara will be part of another book on political and non-political Islam.

Gandhi formulated a critical Hinduism as distinct from a monolithic Hinduism constructed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. New Hindutva attempts to appropriate Gandhi, hence Narendra Modi’s ban on David Lelyveld’s book that described Gandhi as homoerotic. The project of critically looking at our past and our future must continue. We must continue the quest for new categories and fresh ways of thinking, including about nationalism. Vinoba Bhave made a distinction between two kinds of emotion, one involved in rashtraprem, or love for one’s country, and the other in rashtravad, the ideology of the nation. Let love, however, not make us blind.

Delhi  
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Shail Mayaram

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Both official archives and local non-institutional 'archives' house collections with a wherewithal of local histories and pamphlets, newsletters and magazines that tell us much about the shaping of vernacular nationalism and popular history. Finally, there are cultural and oral archives that include oral-written and genealogical traditions as also individual and community oral histories that intimate both cooptation and contestation over memory.

## Fieldwork

The fieldwork for this book began in the Ajmer district of Rajasthan in 1995 and continued intermittently up to 2009. The initial phase was supported by a larger project of the International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo; the India studies being coordinated by Ashis Nandy, 1996–7. Subsequently a larger cross-cultural project on Asian cities that I coordinated, called *Communities in Interaction: Discourses of Conflict, Conversion, and Coexistence in Cosmopolitan Contexts*, was supported by the Ford Foundation, New Delhi. It involved extensive individual and group interviews and travel through several villages.

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