Multiculturalism, Immigrant Religion, and Diasporic Nationalism: The Development of an American Hinduism

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Hinduism has undergone several modifications in interpretation, practice, and organization in the United States in the process of being institutionalized as an American religion. While Hindu American spokespersons espouse a genteel pluralism and attempt to use Hinduism to secure a place at the American multicultural table, they also use the ideology of multiculturalism to justify and legitimize a militant Hindu nationalism. Drawing on this contradiction, the article develops a theoretical model to explain 1) why multiculturalism often seems to exacerbate émigré nationalism, and 2) why religion is often involved directly or indirectly in this process.

Although multiculturalism was never formally adopted as a national policy in the United States (unlike in Canada and Australia), the recognition that this country comprises citizens from diverse backgrounds, whose identities and cultures need to be publicly acknowledged and respected, has been "a policy rubric" in a variety of arenas for over a decade (Newfield and Gordon 1996:76–7). Despite being an ubiquitous term, there is no clear understanding of what multiculturalism really means. Consequently, it has been alternately appropriated and critiqued by activists and scholars from the right and from the left (see Gordon and Newfield 1996) and by racial and ethnic groups seeking to exploit the contradictions embedded in the conception and practice of multiculturalism. This article focuses on one such contradiction: why it is that multiculturalist policies, despite their intended goal of facilitating the integration of immigrants and winning their loyalty, seem to often do the reverse, strengthening immigrant attachment to the ancestral homeland and giving rise to diasporic nationalism.

This contradiction has been noted by several scholars. Thus, Yossi Shain (1999), who asserts that multiculturalism "ties U.S. identity to international politics and transnational movements" (p. xiv), argues that this occurs because, "[e]thnic involvement in U.S. foreign affairs may be seen as an important vehicle through which disenfranchised groups may win an entry ticket into American society and politics" (p. x). Other scholars refer to the resources and space for the institutionalization of ethnic and religious organizations provided by multiculturalism (Faist 2000:214), the marginalization and stigmatization experienced by immigrants which may be articulated by the identity politics of multiculturalism (Anderson 1998: 74; Mathew and Prashad 2000; Rajagopal 2000), or the contemporary postnational and globalized context which exacerbates such politics by promoting "translocal solidarities" and "cross-border mobilizations" (Appadurai 1996:166).

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While these arguments provide insights into why multiculturalist policies often lead to greater homeland loyalty and involvement, they cannot satisfactorily explain the phenomenon. An important but generally neglected issue is the role that immigrant religion tends to play in this process. Not surprisingly, immigrant religion and religious institutions are directly involved in the endorsement and sponsorship of religious nationalism in the home countries (Bhatt 1997; Dusenbery 1995; Ghamari-Tabrizi 2001; Kelley 1993:83; Tatla 1999). However, immigrant religion has often played a very important indirect role in supporting homeland politics even when the nationalism that is being supported is ostensibly secular. For instance, in the United States, immigrant mobilization around homeland issues has taken place through the use of religious organizations and religious symbols in the case of the anti-Castro movement of Cuban Catholics (Tweed 1997), the homeland-oriented activism of groups like Dominican and Polish Catholics (Bernstein 1992; Jacobson 1995:38; Levitt 2001:136), Armenian and Greek Orthodox (Dekmejian and Themelis 1997), Sri Lankan Tamil separatists, Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims, Mexican, Irish, Arab, Israeli, Sinhalese, and Croat immigrants (Appadurai 1996:158–77; Bernstein 1992; Bhatt 1997) and even Chinese and Korean Christian Americans who redefine their ethnic identity to be congruent with their Christian beliefs and practices (Chai 2001; Yang 1999). In all of these cases, the imbrication of religion has deeply affected and complicated the direction and nature of immigrant political mobilization.

This article develops a theoretical model to explain 1) the relationship between multiculturalism and émigré nationalism, and 2) why religion is often involved, directly or indirectly, in this process. Although many of the arguments I make can be applied more broadly to Western multicultural countries, I will focus primarily on the United States, since the formulation and practice of multiculturalism differs somewhat from country to country. I use the support for Hindu nationalism among Hindu Indian American leaders who are vociferous advocates of pluralism in the United States to provide an example of some of the contradictions of multiculturalist politics and to make my larger argument.

By Hindu Indian American leaders, I mean specifically those leaders and activists who are members of non-sectarian, pan-Hindu American organizations that claim to represent and speak for all Hindus in the United States. As we will see, these organizations tend to be organizationally or ideologically linked to the Hindu nationalist *Hindutva* (Hinduness) movement. Following Steven Vertovec (2000), I refer to the articulation of Hinduism by such spokespersons as "official" Hinduism since it is most directly concerned with formulating what Hinduism and being Hindu mean, particularly in the American context. I distinguish this "official" Hinduism from "popular" Hinduism, or the beliefs and practices of the mass of Hindus in the United States, which for the most part have to do with recreating, maintaining, and transmitting religion, culture, and values. This article focuses primarily on the two seemingly contradictory sides of "official" Hinduism. However, an important argument is that, due to the nature of the diasporic situation, self-styled spokespersons of the religion and their supporters have become the central authority and hegemonic voice that Hinduism has so far lacked, defining Hinduism, Indian identity, history, and the obligations of good Hindus. Thus, the discourses of "official" Hinduism are increasingly manifesting themselves in the self-definitions and explanations of lay Hindu Americans.

Data and Methods

The primary data for this article comes from an eight-year study and book in progress on the new forms, practices, and interpretations of Hinduism in the United States. As part of this research, I conducted ethnographic research in 12 Hindu organizations, representing the five major categories of Hindu Indian institutions in the United States: *satsangs* (local worship groups), *bala vihars* (local educational groups for children), temples, Hindu student organiza-

tions, and Hindu umbrella groups in Southern California and New Jersey. Besides participating in the activities and programs of the organizations, I also interviewed the leaders and many of the members (over 120 first and second generation Hindu Indian Americans in all). I supplemented my fieldwork with a few months of research in India in 1997, studying the connections between Hindu American organizations and Indian groups.

In addition, I have followed the activities of the Hindu Indian community around the country over the past eight years by reading several Indian American newspapers (*India West*, *India Post*, *India Journal*) and the international magazine, *Hinduism Today*, published from Hawaii. Since the year 2000, when the Internet became a major site of Hindu American activity, I have also been monitoring four Internet discussion groups devoted to Indian or Hindu related topics (*Indian Civilization*, *Indictraditions*, *Hindu Reform*, and *Indian Diaspora*), the popular Internet magazine for the Indian diaspora, *Sulekha.com* (hosted in the United States), and several Internet websites devoted to Hinduism.

Hindu Indian American spokespersons promote themselves as "patriotic Americans" and espouse a "genteel multiculturalism" (Rajagopal 2001:267) emphasizing the tolerance and pluralism of Hinduism, as well as its contribution to American society and to solving global problems. However, they also use the discourse of multiculturalism to promote a militant Hindutva movement, replete with diatribes against Muslims, Christians, and secular Hindus (in India and the United States), in some cases going so far as to call for the total expulsion of Muslims and Christians from India[1] or the "nuking" of Pakistan.[2] Even more paradoxically, in the name of their rights as a global minority, American *Hindutva-vadis* (supporters of Hindutva) demand a Hindu state in India which would deny Indian minority groups many of the basic rights that Hindu Indians enjoy in the United States, and which makes their activism possible. Although Hindu Indian Americans are a special case in many ways, I demonstrate that an analysis of the relationship between American multiculturalism and the reactionary homeland politics that sections of the Hindu American community endorse, provides theoretical insights into how and why the two are interrelated.

Arjun Appadurai (1996) and Benedict Anderson (1998) make clear that incendiary ethnic nationalism is not unique to Hindu Americans. In fact, Anderson (1998:73–4) maintains that U.S. diasporas seem to support reactionary, anti-democratic forces more often than the progressive. He therefore takes a somber view of "long distance nationalism," describing it as a "menacing portent for the future" since it "creates a serious politics that is at the same time radically unaccountable" (p. 74). While Shain (1999) recognizes that U.S. diasporas are often "critical players in defining the national identity and political ethos of their homelands," he sees this as positive since he believes that U.S. diasporas generally support progressive politics, and "market the American creed [of capitalism, secularism and democracy] abroad" (p. 8). I argue that the type of diasporic politics that a group supports and its outcome depend on a variety of home and host state factors, and that therefore both reactionary and progressive outcomes are possible.

After a discussion of the theoretical model in the first half of the article, I turn to an analysis of the Hindu Indian American case where I show that although the two faces of American Hinduism—genteel multiculturalism and militant Hindu nationalism—appear to be very different, they are interlinked. I argue that the two self-presentations grow out of the contradictions of being part of a professionally successful but racialized minority group in contemporary multicultural America. Both are strategies to obtain recognition and validation within American society—one drawing on a model minority discourse, celebrating the achievements of Hindu culture and Hindu Indian Americans, and the other drawing on an oppressed minority discourse, highlighting a history of victimization and the need for

1. From the website of the Hindu Unity organization. Retrieved June 23, 2003 (http://www.hinduunity.org).
2. Indian Civilization and Indictraditions discussion groups.

recompense and self-determination. I conclude by pointing to some of the implications of this interrelationship.

The Theoretical Model

Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition

Multiculturalism permits, even demands, the construction of a *public* ethnic identity, as opposed to a purely private one (Taylor 1992). Consequently, the "struggle for recognition" is now becoming the central form of political conflict in multiculturalist societies (Fraser 1998:11), spurring ethnic formation and mobilization among a range of groups. This phenomenon in turn has given rise to a burgeoning literature on the socially constructed aspects of ethnicity (Nagel 1994, 1995; Olzak 1992; Roosens 1989) which emphasizes that ethnicity is not the immutable, primordial essence that it appears to be, but instead is fluid, amorphous, and constantly being reinvented. Critics point out, however, that most formulations of multiculturalism appear not to be aware of this insight and instead operate with an essentialized conception of ethnicity, according membership and participation in the societal "mosaic" to individuals as members of hermetic groups, groups which are expected to manifest homogenous, "authentic" cultures which its members know, practice, and are proud about (Caglar 1997; Heller 1996:28; Modood 1998:378–9; Stratton and Ang 1998; Vertovec 1996, 2001).

This has several implications. Firstly, individuals face pressure (both from the wider society and from within the ethnic community) to organize into groups on the basis of cultural similarity and to have ethnic representatives "speak for the community" and its concerns. Secondly, the need to have a distinctive, coherent heritage to "celebrate" puts pressure on members of ethnic groups to be ethnic in certain formulaic ways, including *constructing a monocultural homeland in order to be part of a multicultural society.* Since the distinction between ethnic pride and ethnic chauvinism is often blurred, the cultural eulogization demanded by multiculturalism can sometimes shade into ethnic jingoism. At the same time that multiculturalism legitimizes having "ethnic pride," it also legitimizes a rhetoric of "victimization." Mitch Berbrier (2002) points out that the victimization rhetoric has made a minority status desirable today since it lays the blame "for the problems of minority groups upon the dominant culture" (p. 555), and has resulted in "grievances being addressed through the apparatus of the state" (p. 556). Berbrier (1998, 2002) shows how ethnic identification has become such an important and acceptable source of cultural capital in contemporary America that ethnic activists from groups as diverse as deaf individuals, gays, and white supremacists have reinvented themselves as cultural minorities by invoking the tropes of "heritage-preservation" and "ethnic pride" on the one hand, and of "victimization" on the other.

Thirdly, since recognition claims are based on the supposed uniqueness of the group's culture, they tend to emphasize group differentiation (Fraser 1997:25). At the same time, ethnic groups have to maintain a delicate balancing act between maintaining their separateness and distinctiveness and accommodating American norms and practices. If they remain too distinctive, they face hostility and repression, while they face the danger of losing their identity as an ethnic group if they assimilate too much (Mauss 1994:4–7).

Finally, due to the fact that official "recognition" can secure a group social, economic, and political resources in a multicultural society, ethnic entrepreneurs work to obtain such recognition for their group by making their homelands and ethnic cultures visible to the public and appropriate candidates for the venerable culture and identity that they profess. They do this through cultural displays and parades (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994:74–5), sponsoring academic area studies programs and endowed chairs (Dekmejian and Themelis

1997:42–3), and by forming political lobbies to promote the image and interests of the homeland and influence foreign policy decision makers (Dekmejian and Themelis 1997). The pivotal role that national origin plays in community formation, ethnic pride, and individual identity in the United States also provides a strong incentive for members of ethnic groups to get involved (directly or indirectly) in social and political activism in the homeland.

Religion, Ethnicity, and Multiculturalism

Tariq Modood (1998) points out that there has been a "theoretical neglect of the role of religion" in multicultural societies, which "reflects a bias of theorists that should be urgently remedied" (p. 387). Although often overlooked in the literature on immigrants and multiculturalism, within the sociology of religion, it is now well understood that religion and religious institutions often play a central role in the process of ethnic formation, particularly for immigrants to the United States. While national or regional origin is officially recognized as the criterion of ethnicity, particularly in American society, it has traditionally been religion that has been viewed as the most legitimate basis for community formation and expression, since maintaining a religious identification is not politically threatening to an American identity (Herberg 1960; Warner 1993; Williams 1988; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). The literature on contemporary immigrant religion in the United States indicates that religious organizations become the means of maintaining and expressing ethnic identity not just for non-Christians like the Hindus, but also for groups such as Chinese Christians (Yang 1999), Korean Christians (Hurh and Kim 1990; Min 1992), and Maya Catholics (Wellmeier 1998).

Since religion in the United States defines and sustains immigrant ethnic life, religion and religious organizations become more important in the immigrant context than in the home country (see Williams 1988), increasing the power of such organizations to construct and impose authoritative versions of ethnicity. Having to be the repository of ethnicity also transforms immigrant religion (Yang and Ebaugh 2001). Immigrant religions experience changes in organization and in interpretation. Religious institutions generally become the primary ethnic and community centers for immigrants and manifest increasing congregationalism and lay leadership (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Kurien 1998; Warner 1993, 1998; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). As de facto ethnic institutions, most immigrant religious organizations also develop regional and national associations to unify the group, define their identity, and represent their interests. Consequently, different religious groups tend to develop definitions of nationality from their own perspective, resulting in variations in the construction of homeland culture and identity along religious lines (Kurien 2001; Min 1992; Yang 1999).

Migration, Marginality, and Émigré Nationalism

Two other factors independently strengthen homeland affiliation and religious involvement as well as the relationship between the two—the "migration dynamic" (the psychosocial consequences of migration), and the experience of racism and marginality—and feed into the politics of recognition of multiculturalism.

The process of migration by itself can often give rise to immigrant nationalism, even when the official policy of the host society is assimilation. Firstly, the personal, cultural, and social dislocation caused by migration often strengthens immigrant nostalgia for home, which feeds into nationalist romanticism (Appadurai 1996; van der Veer 1995:7). Secondly, relocation to a different context frees people from many of the social, cultural, and mental constraints they face at home and also forces the imagining and articulation of personal and group identity (Appadurai 1996; Eikelman and Piscatori 1990). Thus, immigrants often embrace wider identifications than at home (Park 1921:495; van der Veer 1995:7).

The process of migration can also independently strengthen religion and religious institutions. Discussing the European immigration to the United States at the turn of the twentieth

century, Timothy Smith (1978) poetically describes how the disruptions and existential questions raised by resettlement in a new environment resulted in the "intensification of the psychic basis of religious commitment" (p. 1174) among immigrants, and concludes, "[f]or this reason, I shall argue, migration was often a theologizing experience" (p. 1175).

Immigrants also manifest a stronger attachment to the homeland when they experience a hostile reception in the receiving country. Studies have shown that such a reception tends to trigger a process of "reactive ethnicization" (Portes 1999:465–6) where home country culture and traditions are reaffirmed and acquire a heightened significance as a self-defense mechanism against discrimination (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Juergensmeyer 1979, 1988; Østergaard-Nielsen 2001a:263). Thus, part of the reason for the rise of nationalism among European immigrants in the United States in the early decades of the twentieth century was the xenophobia that the large scale immigration aroused among more established American groups (Handlin 1951:295–7[3]; Hobsbawm 1987; Jacobson 1995).

The experience of racism and marginalization can also push immigrants toward religion and religious institutions, since for racial minorities, emphasizing a religious identity can be one way to avoid being identified on the basis of race (Busto 1996; Rajagopal 1995). Religious institutions also help immigrants cope with marginalization by providing fellowship, social services, and leadership positions to compensate for the downward mobility many of them experience (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Min 1992).

Multiculturalism, Immigrant Religion, and Diasporic Nationalism

In short, my argument is that multiculturalism provides the impetus, legitimacy, and space for the development of ethnic mobilization around home country culture and interests. Since religious organizations become the preferred means for immigrants to maintain and develop ethnic identities, much of this process of group formation and mobilization is accomplished by using religious organizations and symbols. The process of migration and the experience of marginalization intensify the emotional attachment to the homeland and increase the importance of religion and religious institutions. This combination of forces tends to lead to the development of an expatriate nationalism that attempts to rewrite the past, reconstruct the present, and reshape the future of the homeland in ways that are congruent with the religious identity of the group. This argument is summarized in Figure 1.

Globalization has strengthened ethnic nationalism by increasing the scale and scope of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups can develop and mobilize across national boundaries due both to large-scale international migration and the dominance and accessibility of the electronic media. The presence of wealthy expatriate communities around the world, and the ease and speed of global financial transfers, allow groups to mobilize and move resources very quickly in support of their causes.

However, there are a variety of forces that determine the direction and effectiveness of immigrant nationalism and its impact on host and home societies, such as the majority or minority status of the group both in the homeland and the host country (see Kurien 2000, 2001), the host country state and politics, and the home country state and politics, and thus mono-causal explanations or normative discussions regarding whether transnational political practices are "good" or "bad" are best avoided (see also Østergaard-Nielsen 2001b:21). In the Hindu American case, a conjunction of factors—Hindus being a majority in the homeland, but a racial and religious minority in the United States, their perception that the American administration has long manifested a pro-Pakistan tilt (Lal 1999:144–5), anti-Islamic sentiment in the United States, the history of Hindu nationalism as a reaction to Western colonialism and racism, its recent resurgence in India and the encouragement of diasporic Hindu

3. Handlin (1951:295–7) argues that this xenophobia led some European immigrants to support the extremist politics of Mussolini, Hitler, and Zionism.

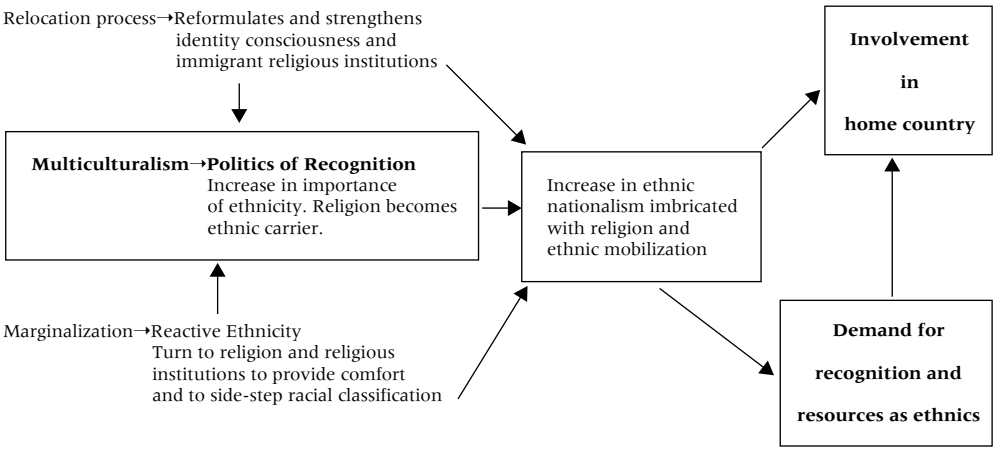

Figure 1 • ***The Relationship between Multiculturalism and Diasporic Politics***

nationalism by the current government—have all contributed towards shaping the pattern of Hindu American mobilization in the United States and its impacts. This will be discussed further in subsequent pages.

Background to the Primary Research

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, people of Asian Indian background numbered 1,678,765. They were also one of the fastest growing communities in the country, with a growth rate of 105.87 percent between 1990–2000. Although relatively small in terms of numbers, Indian Americans often wield a disproportionate influence since they are among the wealthiest and most educated foreign-born groups in this country.[4] There are no official figures on the religious distribution of Indians in the United States. Hindus constitute more than 80 percent of the population in India,[5] but it is likely that they are a much smaller proportion of Indian Americans since Indian religious minorities, particularly Sikhs and Christians, are present in much larger numbers in the United States. Estimates of the proportion of Indian Americans from a Hindu background range from 45–65 percent (Fenton 1988:28; Hofrenning and Chiswick 1999; Min 2000).

While the term "Hindutva" literally means "Hinduness," in practice it has come to refer to the Hindu nationalist movement and therefore has a negative connotation in most secular and non-Hindu contexts. Thus, many Hindu activists in the United States, although embracing many of the central premises of the movement, prefer to deny that they are Hindutva supporters. In this article, I define a Hindutva supporter or a Hindutva-vadi, as a militantly

4. According to the 1990 census, the median family income of Indians in the United States was $49,309, well above that for non-Hispanic whites, which was $37,630 (Waters and Eschbach 1999:315); 43.6 percent were employed as either professionals (mostly doctors and engineers) or managers; and 58.4 percent had at least a Bachelor's degree (Shinagawa 1996:113, 119).

5. This is based on census reports that count Dalit groups (former "untouchable" castes) as Hindu. However, many Dalits object to their being included within Hinduism.

Hinducentric individual 1) who defines (in theory or practice) Indian civilization, culture, and traditions as Hindu *and* makes political pronouncements, strategies, and agendas based on this premise, and 2) whose pro-Hindu agenda in practice means an anti-Muslim and anti-Christian platform. Hindu nationalism in India first emerged as a reaction to British colonialism and was explicitly codified in the 1920s. The first major Hindu nationalist organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS, The National Indian Volunteer Corps) was established in 1925 to serve the cause of Hindu unity and defense. In the postcolonial period, Hindu nationalism achieved a resurgence from the late 1980s with the Ram temple movement (see below), spearheaded by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council), which was founded in 1964 as a transnational organization to promote Hinduism and Hindu unity among Hindus in India and abroad. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP, the Indian People's Party), established in 1980, was able to capitalize on this resurgence and achieve a meteoric ascendancy by adopting Hindu nationalism as its central plank in the late 1980s. The party was in power in India at the head of a coalition government since 1998. The different, interlinked organizations at the core of the Hindu nationalist movement are collectively referred to as the Sangh Parivar (the family of [Hindu] organizations).

The rise of contemporary Hindutva mobilization has been characterized by periodic state supported anti-Muslim (and increasingly anti-Christian) mobilization and violence in India. The most serious uprising took place in December 1992, at the height of the Ram temple movement during which a sixteenth century mosque (which Hindutva supporters claim was built by a Muslim emperor over the birth-place of the Hindu god Ram) was demolished in preparation for the building of a Ram temple at that spot. More recently, in 2002, the state of Gujarat witnessed what several groups of independent investigators have characterized as an organized, state-sponsored pogrom against Muslims which killed over 1,000 people, ostensibly in retaliation against a Muslim mob attack on a train carrying Hindu activists and their families.[6] After the violence had been brought under control, Muslims in Gujarat were warned by members of the VHP that if they wanted to return to their villages, they should "do so as a subject, not an equal" and that they should learn to "live like a minority" (Waldman 2002). The Gujarat riots were followed by a state election at the end of 2002, in which the BJP won a landslide victory. Jubilant at this outcome, the VHP leader Pravin Togadia, vowed that this "experiment of the Hindutva lab" which was successfully concluded in Gujarat, would be repeated throughout the country and also pledged that India would be converted into a "Hindu *Rashtra* "(state) in two years (*Hindustan Times* 2002; *Rediff.com* 2002).

For Hindutva proponents, the Vedic age (conventionally dated between 1500–1000 B.C., but dated at least as early as 3000 B.C. by Hindutva supporters) represents the essence of the Indian culture. Thus, Hindutva-vadis view Indian culture and civilization as Hindu, whose true nature and glory was sullied by the invasions of Muslims and the British, and the postcolonial domination of "pseudo-secular" Indians who actively discriminated against Hindus (by instituting affirmative action programs for minority religions and lower castes). According to the Hindutva perspective, these historical wrongs can only be righted by a state that is openly and unashamedly Hindu. Hindus are defined as those for whom India is homeland and holyland. Thus, the definition includes groups like the Sikhs, Buddhists, and Jains whose religions originated in India (although these groups themselves frequently resist this classification), but excludes Indian Muslims and Christians who are often described as "foreigners" despite the fact that both groups are comprised almost entirely of indigenous members and both Islam and Christianity have existed in India for well over 1,200 years. The Hindutva movement also stresses the greatness of Hinduism and Hindu culture, the importance of Hindu unity, and the need to defend Hinduism and Hindus against discrimination, defamation, and the pressure to convert to other religions. For instance, the need for Hindu nationalism

6. Some of the independent commissions seemed to think that the Godhra incident was only a pretext and that the pogrom had been planned earlier.

and Hindu self-assertion is justified by the argument (dismissed by most analysts) that Hindus will soon be reduced to a minority in India due to the proselytizing activities of Muslim and Christian missionaries and the higher fertility rates of Indian Muslims.

The Hindutva movement has resulted in a great interest in re-examining Indian history. The revisionist history of Hindu nationalists has focused on two primary issues. Firstly, it argues that Hinduism is several thousand years more ancient than conventional historical accounts have acknowledged, making it the oldest culture known to mankind. Hindutva scholars therefore claim that India is the "Cradle of Civilization" and the homeland of the Aryans, the group from which Europeans are believed to have descended (see Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley 1995; Rajaram and Frawley 1995). The second issue that Hindu nationalist scholars have focused on is a reexamination of the period of Muslim domination in India. Here, the goal is to show that many of the negative features of Hinduism (such as the change in the position of women from the Vedic period) were brought about as a result of Muslim invasions and that the period of Muslim domination was far more brutal than conventionally acknowledged. According to this perspective, it was due to the "tolerance" of Hinduism and the lack of unity of Hindus that the "genocide" of Hindus by Muslims and the subsequent colonization of the country by the British took place. Hence, the movement emphasizes the need for the unity and aggressive defense of Hinduism.

The Development of an American Hinduism

I have argued that the politics of recognition of multiculturalism, together with the migration dynamic and the experience of marginality, increases the importance of religion and religious organizations and leads to ethnic mobilization around religion. We will see how this has taken place in the case of Hindu Indian Americans.

As for many other immigrant groups, religion seems to have become more important for Hindus as a marker of identity in the United States. Many of the Hindu immigrants I interviewed mentioned that they had become more religious in this country, where for the first time, they had to think about the meaning of their religion and religious identity, something they could take for granted in India. Others, who claimed they were not especially religious, nevertheless participated in Hindu organizations for social and cultural reasons, and "for the sake of the children." According to Arvind Rajagopal (1995), a further reason that Hinduism becomes important in the United States is because identifying as Hindus allows the predominantly upper-caste immigrants to side-step their problematic racial location. Hinduism and "Indianness" also seemed to become significant for the second generation during their coming-of-age process (Maira 2002). My own research (Kurien 1998) showed that many second generation Hindu Americans were often forced to come to terms with their cultural and religious heritage when their "brown skins" precluded them from being accepted as "just American" by their peer group.

Unlike most other established religions, Hinduism does not have a founder, an ecclesiastical structure of authority, or a single canonical text or commentary. Consequently, Hinduism in India consists of an extraordinary array of practices, deities, texts, and schools of thought. Due to this diversity, the nature and character of Hinduism have varied greatly by region, caste, and historical period. It is also a religion that stresses orthopraxis over theological belief. For all these reasons, the average Hindu immigrant is often unable to explain the "meaning" of Hinduism and its "central tenets," something that they are repeatedly asked to do in the American context.

Hindu nationalist organizations whose goal in India has been to unite, educate, and mobilize Hindu Indians of different backgrounds in support of Hindu interests were well positioned to take on this role in the United States as well. Several Hindu umbrella organizations have sprung up in the United States. Some, like the VHP of America (VHPA), the Overseas

Friends of the BJP (OFBJP), the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, HSS (the overseas affiliate of the RSS) and Hindu Unity, the affiliate of the militant Bajrang Dal group), are branches of Sangh Parivar organizations in India and are also closely associated with their counterparts in other parts of the diaspora, particularly those in Canada and the United Kingdom. But others, like the Federation of Hindu Associations (FHA) based in Southern California and the Infinity Foundation, based in New Jersey, are independent American Hindu organizations (although they may be interlinked with the former in a variety of informal ways).

Leaders of Hindu American umbrella organizations have been trying to recast and reformulate Hinduism to make it a suitable vehicle for Hindu Americans to use to assimilate into multicultural America. They have taken upon themselves the task of simplifying, standardizing and codifying the religion to make it easier to understand, articulate, and practice (see FHA n.d. a). In the process, a capsulized, intellectual Hinduism is created, very different from the diversity of ritual practices and caste observances that are characteristic of everyday Hinduism in India. Many Hindu American leaders are interested in transforming Hinduism into a global, universal religion, instead of an "ethnic" religion tied to India, and have been attempting to institutionalize "conversion" ceremonies and provide support to Western converts.

In short, when I refer to "the development of an American Hinduism," I mean the many modifications of Hinduism that have taken place as Hindu immigrants and their children develop an ethnic identity and community in the United States. As Armand Mauss (1994:4–7) points out, some of these modifications are the outcome of attempts to accommodate to the American environment by making the religion more compatible with American culture and society. Others arise out of the struggles of being nonwhite immigrants and religious minorities in the United States and try to resist assimilation by emphasizing the distinctness of Hinduism and Indian culture. The contradiction between these two intertwined strategies is embedded in the emerging American Hinduism.

Genteel Multiculturalism

In their public presentations to the Indian American community and to the wider American society, there are certain standard themes that Hindu American spokespersons deploy to characterize Hinduism. These themes, as we shall see below, are carefully chosen to fit into a contemporary, politically correct, pluralist American discourse. For instance, in keeping with the multiculturalist emphasis on "tolerance" (Berbrier 1998), Hindu American leaders describe Hinduism as the only world religion that is truly tolerant and pluralistic (in contrast to religions in the "Abrahamic"[7] tradition) and constantly reiterate the Rig Veda verse (1.164.46), "truth is one, sages call it by different names" to support their claim. Many Hindu American leaders also refer to Hinduism as *sanatana dharma* (eternal faith) to make the point that it is the most ancient and universal of all religions. They counter the negative American image of Hinduism as primitive by arguing that contrary to American stereotypes, Hinduism is actually very sophisticated and scientific (FHA 1995, 1997a, 1997c). Many examples are provided in Hindu American publications and websites to make this point, such as the Hindu conception of the history of the universe as billions of years old and ancient Indian knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, metallurgy, and physics. Again, they object to their religion being characterized as "polytheistic." They point out that although the Hindu pantheon consists of an array of deities, many Hindus believe that all of these deities are different forms manifested by one Supreme Being. Thus, they claim that Hinduism is really a monotheistic religion.

Hindu American leaders also challenge American stereotypes of Hinduism and Hindu culture as patriarchal by arguing that in ancient Hindu India, women were held in great esteem and that Hinduism gives women and men the same rights. The worship of powerful

7. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

goddesses is taken as further evidence of the importance of women within Hinduism. Thus, gender equality and respect for women are claimed to be an integral part of the Hindu tradition (Kurien 1999). Furthermore, they contest the notion that caste stratification is a by-product of Hinduism by maintaining that the caste system was never religiously sanctioned by Hinduism and is not central to Hindu practice (*India Post* 1995). To make the point that Hindus are obligated to treat everyone with equal dignity and respect, they cite the Hindu saying, "the world is one family" and the belief that a spark of the divinity resides in every person. The model minority label is used explicitly by Hindu American leaders who attribute the success of Indians in the United States to their Hindu religious and cultural heritage, which according to them gives them a special aptitude for mathematics and science and also makes them adaptable, hard working, and family oriented.

Most of these themes can be seen in a petition to President George Bush from a Hindu umbrella organization (the Hindu International Council Against Defamation [HICAD]) emphasizing that Hindus were a numerically and professionally significant part of the United States and were model citizens who needed to be included within "America's pluralistic and multicultural traditions." The petition was to protest the exclusion of Hindus from the national prayer service organized in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001. The relevant sections are excerpted below:

> Hindus are very much a part of our nation. We are a hard working people who contribute to the American society, economy, education and quality of life, in a proportion much larger than our numbers. . .
>
> Mr. President, Hindus are a peace-loving people. We never threaten violence against our host country. There is no world-wide Hindu network of terrorists. There are almost a billion Hindus living on Earth. They practice the world's oldest religion (over 8,000 years old).
>
> Non-violence, pluralism, and respect (not just tolerance) of other traditions of worship to the One Almighty God, are integral parts of its [Hinduism's] basic tenets. We are a family oriented people, with very low divorce rates. We are frugal, save for our children's education, and support our elders and extended families. Because of these beliefs, Hindu-Americans are called ideal citizens. (HICAD 2001)

A constantly heard refrain of community leaders is that Hindu Americans should emulate the model of Jewish Americans. As a highly successful group that is integrated into mainstream American society (and now considered to be white) while maintaining its religious and cultural distinctness, close community ties, and connections with the home country, American Jews are viewed as a group that has been able to "fit in" while remaining different. This is the route to success that Hindu Americans also want to adopt in their quest to stake a position in American society. Thus, the FHA has been stressing the need for Hindu Americans to "establish a Hindu defense council like the Jewish defense council [a reference to the Jewish Defense League]" (FHA, n.d. b) and Hindu Student Council leaders in Southern California urged members to network with each other and with members of other Hindu organizations by pointing out that "the Jews have been successful because they are really networked."

Militant Nationalism

However, as indicated, there is another side to American Hinduism. Some members of the Hindu Indian American community (together with a few European and European American supporters) promote a particularly virulent form of Hindu nationalism. This virulence remains largely hidden from the wider American society since it is usually expressed in communications directed at the Indian community in the United States and around the world. After briefly documenting the support for Hindu nationalism among Hindu Americans, I turn to an analysis of the focus and special concerns of the American Hindutva movement to show that the militant nationalism that Hindu Americans exhibit is not just a reflection of home-

land politics, but is "made in America," as a situational response to the realities they confront in this country (Portes and Rumbaut 2001:284).

Scholars like Vinay Lal (1999:149) have argued that despite being a minority, "[t]he Hindutva-vadis have gained ascendancy" among Hindu Indian Americans and that consequently, the Hindutva ideology has obtained more support and less opposition among Hindus in the United States when compared to India (see also Mathew 2000; Mathew and Prashad 2000; Rajagopal 1995). This is difficult to document with any certainty both because of the lack of hard data and because Hindu nationalism in both the United States and India is a constantly growing and changing entity.

It was the strong support for the Ram movement among Hindu Americans that first brought Hindu nationalism in the United States to the attention of scholars. According to Rajagopal (2000:474), Hindu groups in 31 American cities participated in the *Ram Shila Pujans* (rituals to sacralize bricks for the Ram temple) organized by the VHP to raise the money and to sanctify bricks to build the temple, thus contributing substantially toward the financial support of the campaign. For American Hindutva supporters the demolition of the mosque in 1992 was a watershed that symbolized the fact that Hindus who had suffered injustices for so long had finally decided to assert themselves (see FHA 1995:76). The subsequent ascendancy of the BJP as the ruling party in India (1998–2004) further strengthened and emboldened Hindutva-vadis in the United States.

The Hindutva perspective dominates the Hindu and Indian American websites and Internet discussion groups that I have been monitoring,[8] where anti-Islamic, anti-Christian, anti-Western, and anti-secular bigotry seems to be the norm (see also Lal 1999). While the anonymity, lack of censorship, and relatively easy access to the Internet makes it an ideal tool for extremist propaganda, the Hindu nationalist message is also carried by several mainstream Indian American newspapers, such as the Washington, DC based *India Times* (Waghorne 1999:106–7), the New York City based *News India Times* (Mathew 2000:126) and the California based national news weekly, *India Post.* Even fairly liberal papers such as *India Abroad*, *India West*, *India Tribune*, and *India Journal* frequently carry Hindutva opinion pieces, advertisements and letters. Although they claim to be apolitical, Sangh Parivar affiliates in the United States like the VHPA and the HSS regularly sponsor public events where well-known Hindutva politicians from India are the key speakers. In the first few years of its existence, the FHA conferred the "Hindu of the Year" award on some of the most extremist of such leaders at their annual Diwali celebration in Southern California. The leadership has also been openly anti-Muslim, calling in one instance for Muslims in India to be moved to Pakistan, "since history has shown that Hindus and Muslims cannot coexist" (Patel 1998). In his post 9/11 talks at American University and Princeton University (where he was invited to speak as a Hindu representative), Rajiv Malhotra, president of the Infinity Foundation, went on the offensive against Islam.[9] I discovered that the Hindutva ideology had even penetrated some second generation Hindu Americans. For instance, the core ideological leaders of the Hindu Student Council chapter (the national organization was founded by the VHPA) that I studied were strong supporters of the Hindu nationalist movement.

8. The GHEN website sponsored by the Hindu Student Council, the largest Hindu site on the Internet, has a strong Hindutva orientation as can be seen by their discussion forum and their history and culture sections. In addition to the GHEN, and the 1,003 Hindu websites that it provides links to, there are hundreds of other Hindutva websites on the Internet, each with links to several dozens of others. Again, the most vocal contributors to the four Internet discussion groups and the Internet magazine, *Sulekha.com*, that I have been monitoring have supported a Hindutva perspective. Those critical of the perspective have generally been mocked, denounced with choice abuses, silenced, or forced to leave. At the same time, it must be noted that these active participants comprised less than 5 percent of the total membership of all of the discussion groups. Most members never took part in the discussions.

9. From the texts of both talks posted on his discussion group, Indictraditions, on September 25, 2001 and October 4, 2001.

For the most part, "lay" Hindu Americans are uninterested in and to a large extent unaware of Hindutva politics. Only a small minority of Hindus in the United States can be described as Hindutva-vadis, i.e., activists working for Hindu nationalist causes. At the same time, only a small minority of Hindu Americans actively work to oppose the Hindutva movement, mainly members of pluralist Indian or South Asian organizations. In between these extremes lie the vast, silent majority of Hindu Americans. I found that over the past decade, there has been an increase in the tacit acceptance of many of the central tenets of the Hindutva platform by this group, as teachers at satsangs, bala vihars, and temples, parents needing help explaining Hinduism to their children, and second generation Hindus searching for answers to their questions about identity frequently turn to Hindutva organizations and websites for information. This, together with the fact that there have been few public challenges to the revisionist history propounded by these sources, has meant that many Hindutva ideas are gradually becoming well accepted and hegemonic within the Hindu American community, even among apolitical Hindu Americans.

The American Hindutva Platform. As several American Hindutva supporters themselves point out, the Hindu nationalism they now embrace is something they "converted" to in America, not something they brought with them from India. For instance, in Internet groups, and letters to the editor in Indian American newspapers, several people have mentioned that they had to come to the United States to overcome the "pseudo-secularism" they had been conditioned to in India and become "real Hindus." The following e-mail message by an Indian American to an Internet discussion group is typical. After saying that the "Muslims had invited it [the 2002 pogrom in Gujarat] on themselves," the writer continues, "[t]he only solution for India is to make Indian Muslims abjure Islam as much as possible. But can this ever be done if there are so many Hindus who like to behave in this crazy liberal way. I guess you have to be born or spend sufficient time outside India to really shed that self-righteous liberal attitude that people tend to acquire there."[10] Thus, while the American Hindutva platform has many similarities with the platform of Hindutva groups in India, it also has several emphases deriving from the American context that are not central to the Indian Hindutva movement.

Recall that the Hindutva movement first emerged as a reaction to the experience of Western colonialism. It is not surprising therefore that the "Hinduism under siege" Hindutva message, and its emphasis on the need for Hindu pride and assertiveness, is particularly attractive to Hindus in the United States who experience racism and marginality as minorities, a point that self-identified Hindutva-vadi's themselves make (Rao et al. 2003:2). In the United States, Hindutva has become an important magnet for Indians from a Hindu background to coalesce around in their effort to obtain recognition and resources as American ethnics. An important concern of Indian Americans has been their relative invisibility within American society. This invisibility is due to several reasons: their ambiguous racial status, the American identification of the term "Indian" with Native Americans and the term "Asian" with East Asians, and finally, the perception that successive U.S. administrations have followed a pro-Pakistan policy and have relatively neglected India (Lal 1999:144–5). Thus, the central goal of Hindutva groups has been the improvement of the image of Hinduism and of India within American society.

Anti-defamation issues have been an important concern of the VHPA and in 1997, it formed the organization, American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) whose goal was the aggressive defense of Hinduism against defamation, commercialization, and misuse. The organization has been involved in several successful protest campaigns against the use of Hindu deities, icons, and texts by American businesses and the entertainment industry. The success

10. Message 24444, Indian Civilization Internet discussion group, July 21, 2002.

of AHAD was followed by the formation of several other anti-defamation groups around the country, including the Hindu International Council Against Defamation (HICAD) based in New Jersey and (at least at its inception) connected to the Infinity Foundation. Portrayals of Hindus and of India in the American news media have recently become a special target of these anti-defamation groups, who have contacted television networks and program hosts, newspaper and magazine editors to express their concern and outrage against what is perceived to be biased coverage.

I have pointed out that a reconsideration and revision of Indian history has been an important part of the Hindutva movement. Hindu Americans have spear-headed much of this revisionist scholarship, arguing, for instance, that the Aryans were indigenous to India and that some of them subsequently migrated to Europe (most historians believe the homeland of the Aryans was somewhere in the Middle East from where small groups migrated to India and Europe), and that the Vedas were composed much earlier than conventionally acknowledged (Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley 1995; Rajaram 1993, 1995; Rajaram and Frawley 1995) and enshrine knowledge of advanced scientific, mathematical, and astronomical concepts, such as the speed of light, the Pythagoras theorem (Kak 2001), quark confinement, bosons and fermions, gamma-ray bursts (Roy 1999), airplanes, atomic energy, and even the atom bomb.[11] Most of these scholars have been computer scientists, who claim that they have been able to use their Western scientific training and access to modern technology to unlock these ancient secrets. The Infinity Foundation, which focuses on research on and education about "Indic traditions"[12] (and maintains the Internet discussion group "Indictraditions"), has recently taken a leadership role in the sponsorship of some of these and other kinds of Hindu-centric revisionist scholarship.[13] For instance, one of the first major projects that its president, Rajiv Malhotra, commissioned (which was completed in 2001) was a compilation of a database of passages to document the nature of the Muslim (Arab, Persian, and Turkish) invasions of India, based on the accounts of the royal historians who had accompanied the invaders.[14] Since such royal accounts often tend to be vastly exaggerated, these passages would appear to "prove" that such invasions were much more destructive than historians have traditionally acknowledged.

The monitoring and shaping of the presentation of Hinduism and Indian history in American school textbooks and within academia is an important goal of the American Hindutva movement. Here again, the Infinity Foundation and its supporters have been at the forefront. Hindutva proponents bombard scholars who are viewed as being critical of any aspect of Hinduism or of India with hostile e-mails and have even gone to the extent of contacting the administration of their universities in an attempt to get them dismissed from their academic positions or to prevent them from being hired.[15] Supporters are also sent to attend public presentations on Hinduism and India to dispute presentations or books that do not fit in with Hindutva conceptions of history. Details regarding the presentation and the response of the scholars to the questions are then circulated within Hindutva circles and the wider Hindu American community through e-mail bulletins, opinion pieces on Hindu websites, and Indian American newspapers. The Internet Indian American magazine, *Sulekha.com*, has featured several articles critical of Hinduism scholars in the United States. In one such attack, Infinity Foundation President Rajiv Malhotra, who has frequently claimed that American

11. See the web-site (http://www.atributetohinduism.com) retrieved July 20, 2003, hosted by an Indian American.

12. The term de facto means Hinduism (it theoretically includes Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism as well, but in practice there is hardly any reference to these traditions) since it "excludes imported cultures" such as Islam and Christianity. See (http://www.infinityfoundation.com/ECITmissionframe.htm), retrieved July 21, 2003.

13. See, e.g., (http://www.infinityfoundation.com/sourcebook.htm), retrieved April 2, 2004.

14. See (http://www.infinityfoundation.com/ECITindiaresourceframeset.htm), retrieved April 2, 2004.

15. E.g., Paul Courtright, Professor of Religion at Emory University; Jeffrey Kripal, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Rice University. Michael Witzel, a Professor of Indology at Harvard, also indicates that this happened to him (e-mail message to the Indology discussion group).

scholars of Hinduism like to emphasize the negative aspects of the religion, went so far as to argue, "History shows that genocides have been preceded by the denigration of the victims. . . The time has come to ask: [a]re certain 'objective' scholars consciously conspiring, or unconsciously driven by their Eurocentric essences, to pave the way for a future genocide of a billion or more Hindus. . .?" (Malhotra 2002:15).

The Relationship between U.S. Multiculturalism and the American Hindutva Mobilization

As I have argued, the rise in ethnic nationalism manifested by the earlier waves of European immigrants to the United States was a reaction to their feeling of alienation in a new and unfamiliar environment, and to the xenophobic attacks that they experienced. My focus in this section is to show how multiculturalist policies, put in place ostensibly to address these issues and to thereby accelerate the integration of the contemporary wave of immigrants in the United States (e.g., see Sheffer 2003:218) seem to have actually encouraged the Hindutva movement among Hindu Americans I will do this in three ways: firstly by showing how multicultural discourses and policies have directly promoted ethnic nationalism within this group; secondly, by demonstrating that the two faces of American Hinduism are not separate discourses, used by different groups of leaders, or used strategically by the same group of leaders for different audiences, but are instead closely and integrally interlinked; and finally, by demonstrating why contemporary multiculturalist policies have given rise to these contradictory self-presentations.

The Hindu American case makes clear that multiculturalism often provides the motivation and justification for the ethnic nationalism of immigrant groups. Thus, the anti-defamation campaigns, the sponsorship, support, and dissemination of revisionist Indian history, and the attacks against scholars of Hinduism have all been made in the name of multiculturalism and minority rights. As Ajay Shah, the convener of AHAD, maintains, "In seeking the honor of Hindus and demanding they not be ridiculed . . . we are being good Americans. In our fight for Hindu dignity, we are championing American pluralism" (qtd. in Pais 2001). The Infinity Foundation describes its mission as encouraging "contemporary society to rise above narrow cultural chauvinism and to appreciate the contributions to World civilization made by non-Western cultures" and the President, Rajiv Malhotra, has invariably framed his critiques of Hinduism scholars in the United States as an attempt to prevent "hate speech" and to enlarge American multiculturalism (Infinity Foundation n.d.). As a final example, I draw on a HICAD petition, this one protesting the planned showing of two films critical of Hindu nationalism by the American Museum of Natural History in New York in February 2002 as part of their exhibit, "Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion." The petition emphasized the need "to educate the cosmopolitan population of the greater New York area and the rest of the USA to respect all our neighbors who might be following diverse religions and traditions" and went on to argue that,

> [t]he screening of these anti-Hindu movies will be considered by Hindus in the USA and all over the world as an insult to their faith. As an analogy, please consider if it would be appropriate to stage a documentary on Osama bin Laden and the destruction of the World Trade Center in an exhibit on the elements of Islamic devotion; or a documentary on slavery, colonialism, Christian crusades, white supremacy, Holocaust, Auswitcz, or killings of native Americans, in an exhibit on Christian devotion. (HICAD 2002)

Multiculturalist policies have reinforced Hindu nationalism in two other ways. The need to find "ethnic spokespersons" to represent the community in a multicultural society has led to many extremist Hindutva activists being legitimized and being made into celebrities by mainstream American politicians at the behest of Hindu umbrella groups. For instance, Narayan

Kataria, RSS worker and senior figure in the militant Hindu Unity group (see Murphy 2001) which advertises on its website that it is "determined to get Muslims and Christians out of Bharat (India) by whatever means possible" and has a "Black List" of people critical of Hindutva which includes prominent figures such as the Pope,[16] was conferred a Declaration of Honor by Helen Marshall, President of the Borough of Queens, New York. Marshall also declared March 12, 2003 to be "Narayan Kataria Day."[17] Again, Moorthy Muthuswamy, nuclear physicist and director of the Hindutva oriented Indian American Intellectuals Forum (see their website at www.saveindia.com, retrieved July 24, 2003) who argued in an article that Indian Muslims should be banned from employment and business in India and prevented from voting unless they "reverted to Hinduism" (Muthuswamy 2003), was part of a delegation that met with U.S. Counter Terrorism Department officials on the issue of cross-border terrorism, a fact he touts while making the argument that he is an "expert" on Islamic terrorism.

The need to bring the homeland into prominence in a multicultural society where resources are tied to the recognition of ethnicity, can also explain the enthusiastic response of many Indian Americans to the nuclear testing conducted by the BJP government. Scholars argue that this enthusiasm was due to the fact that nuclearization brought India into the limelight as a country with the technological ability to develop nuclear weapons and the willingness to stand up to American double-standards (Mathew and Prashad 2000:528; Rajagopal 2000:486–7).

In short, while it is tempting to believe that we can separate the two aspects of American Hinduism as discourses employed by different groups, or as discourses that are strategically used for different audiences (external versus internal), my argument is that the militant nationalism that many Hindu American leaders exhibit can only be understood if we see it as integrally intertwined with the multiculturalism that many of the same individuals profess. This can be seen by the fact that both discourses are frequently used simultaneously at Indian American gatherings and in discussion groups. In an Internet message to a Hindu discussion group on September 30, 2001, an Indian American justified the destruction of the Babri mosque in India and the attempts to build a Ram temple where it stood by arguing that the temple will be testament to the fact that, "there is one thing in Hinduism which is the most crucial need of this century—TOLERANCE of other religions/faiths" (Capitals in the original). Again, the vituperative diatribes against Islam and Christianity that appear on the discussion groups are generally to make the case that both religions are "closed" and "intolerant," in contrast to Hinduism which is tolerant and pluralistic.

Since the two discourses are interlinked, it is not a coincidence that there are many similarities between the multiculturalist Hindu and the Hindu nationalist discourses. For instance, the tolerance, antiquity, and sophistication of Hinduism that the multiculturalist discourse emphasizes draw heavily on Hindu nationalist constructions. Again, it is these very qualities of Vedic Hinduism that are used to justify the Hindutva demand for a Hindu state in contemporary India, so that Hinduism can once again be restored to its former glory. Furthermore, both discourses draw on the Jewish American model. Hindutva proponents in the United States, refer to a Hindu "holocaust" (perpetrated mostly by Muslim invaders) which is described as "unparalleled in history, bigger than the holocaust of the Jews by Nazis."[18] Recently, there have been calls to build "Hindu Holocaust Museums" to document and keep alive the memory of these historical atrocities. The argument made is that, as in the Jewish case, the constant reminder of the Hindu holocaust would help to unite Hindus and would also secure them the recognition and respect of the international community.[19] This argument is also

16. See (http://www.hinduunity.org/hitlist.html), retrieved June 4, 2001.

17. "March 12 Proclaimed Narayan Kataria Day in Queens." *India Post*, April 11, 2003, p. 6.

18. Francois Gautier (http//:www.mantra.com/holocaust/HinduHolocaustMuseum), retrieved June 26, 2003.

19. For instance, see the Nation of Hindutva website (http:www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/9089), retrieved May 12, 2003.

used to emphasize the need for Hindus to have a religious homeland like Israel. For instance, according to Rajiv Malhotra, "by using this precedence (U.S. support for Zionism), it could be systematically argued that Hindus are likewise entitled to a homeland of their own, given how they faced centuries of plunder by invaders from the Middle East, with far worse genocides than the Jews faced."[20] Finally, the tolerance and pluralism of Hinduism is often emphasized as a strategy to differentiate Hindus from Muslim immigrants. While this was done subtly in the petition to Bush discussed earlier,[21] this point was also conveyed much more aggressively by Hindus around the country in a post September 11, 2001 mobilization. Many wrote letters to politicians and the media, called into radio and television talk shows, and spoke up at town meetings to make strongly anti-Islamic and anti-Pakistani statements (Kurien forthcoming).

I now turn to a discussion of why contemporary multiculturalist policies seem to promote these two contradictory self-presentations in the Hindu American case. A common critique of multiculturalism from the left is that, although the pressure for multiculturalism in the United States grew out of the demands of racial minorities for a more inclusive culture and society, focusing on cultural diversity has currently become a way to sidestep the issue of racism and unequal structures. The premise of Western multiculturalism is that there is no longer a dominant culture and that society is made up of a "mosaic" of equally valued cultures. The reality, of course, is very different. Faced with the discourse of multiculturalism, and the reality of racism, Hindu Americans develop a two-sided strategy for recognition that on the one hand emphasizes their success as model ethnics, but on the other hand stresses a history of oppression. Recall that the dual strategy of "ethnic pride" and "ethnic victimization" is typical of groups seeking to be recognized as "minorities" within the contemporary multiculturalist framework (Berbrier 1998, 2002). Not surprisingly, in the Indian American case, this dual strategy is modeled on Jewish Americans—a minority religious group which has achieved integration with the white majority. Hindu Americans also frequently draw on black and feminist discourses to point to similar experiences of marginalization, and to argue for the importance of a positive presentation of Hinduism and Indian culture and for more "practicing Hindu" scholars to be represented in academia.[22]

The combination of a multiculturalism that demands the celebration of ethnicity and a racism that denigrates non-western cultures makes Hindu Americans very sensitive to perceived or real "slights" which could explain the emotional intensity of the anti-defamation campaigns. Both multiculturalism and racism also heighten the importance of a positive reconstruction of homeland culture. Indian immigrants construct an idealized past because they recognize that the present is problematic. Rajagopal (2001) quotes the President of the VHPA as saying, "Every time they go to India, they feel disgusted—they see the dirty streets and the dirty bathrooms. They don't want to identify with India. But they can take pride in Hindutva" [which rests on being part of an ancient civilization] (p. 267). Since professional Indian Americans internalize the value placed on material progress, scientific development, and gender equality in contemporary America, these are central elements in the glorious past that they invoke. They also recognize that it is at least partly the sophistication and antiquity of ancestral culture that ranks groups within America's stratified system. Thus, the characterization of ancient India as the "Cradle of Civilization" (Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley 1995) and the homeland of the Aryans is a means for Indian Americans to distinguish themselves

20. E-mail message to Indictraditions discussion group, dated September 4, 2001.

21. For instance, it points out that "There is no world-wide Hindu network of terrorists" and later goes on to argue that "many Americans do not know the difference between Hinduism and Islam; they lump them together as foreign religions. Your help in bringing the recognition to Hindus as a peace-loving people who are an integral part of our society, would go a long way in educating Americans about Hinduism" (HICAD 2001).

22. A point made repeatedly by Rajiv Malhotra in the Indictraditions discussion group and in his public presentations.

from other American minority groups by demonstrating their ancestral racial and cultural ties with Europeans.

The Relationship between the American and Indian Hindutva Movements

It is now well understood that much of the financial support for the Hindutva movement in India comes from the United States (see Anderson 1998:73; Mathew 2000; Prashad and Mathew 2000:529–30; Rajagopal 2000:474). In November 2002, a number of social activists and academics in the United States released a meticulously researched report arguing that right-wing Hindu American groups had been diverting some of the millions of dollars earmarked for non-religious humanitarian causes toward supporting extremist groups in India, such as those behind the Gujarat violence (Sabrang Communications 2002).[23] The U.S. administration was allegedly investigating these charges (Rajghatta 2003). This financial support has given Indian Americans tremendous clout within the Hindutva movement and the Indian political system, and thus the BJP has shown particular interest in cultivating its overseas base through special programs. In January 2003, it yielded to a long-standing demand of Indians abroad and announced that it would permit dual citizenship.

There are some indications that Indian Americans have made important contributions to the ideological platform of the Hindutva movement as well, from the contemporary formulation of the concept of "Hindutva,"[24] to the "Hinduism under siege" discourse and the fears of being reduced to a minority (Thapar 2000:608–9), and the syncretic Hinduism that the VHP began to promote in the 1980s (Rajagopal 2000:471 and 2001:245–6). In fact, some writers suggest that it may not be a coincidence that the VHP emerged as a Hindu nationalist organization only in the 1980s after a decade during which it had been primarily active overseas (Rajagopal 2001:245–6; van der Veer 1994:134–7). In the past few years, Hindu American revisionist scholarship has had a very significant impact on the "history wars" taking place in India. Very soon after taking office in 1998, the BJP began appointing scholars sympathetic to the Hindu nationalist version of history to key national academic bodies and to revise school textbooks. Well-known Indian historian Irfan Habib points out in a report published by the Delhi Historians' Group (2001) that Hindu American scholars are often cited as experts by the BJP and their Hindutva supporters, and comments caustically that the claims regarding the extreme antiquity of the Vedas and the scientific achievements of ancient Indians are "truly a case of genuine 'Indian Tradition'. . . manufactured in the United States. The inventions grow apace so rapidly that one is not surprised when one reads that though the Vedic Indians did not build any Pyramids here, they yet taught the Pharoahs of Egypt to build them!" (pp. 16–7).

Several journalists have also speculated that the recent belligerence of the VHP is due to its overseas support. The VHP has gone so far as to accuse the leaders of other Sangh Parivar organizations like the BJP and the RSS (including the then Indian Prime Minister) of being "pseudo-secular" Hindus and has also taken a militant attitude toward Hindutva. According to one such journalist (Pani 2003:A4), this might be because the VHP's transnational base makes it more insistent on the necessity of "a hardline Hindu state as a symbol of pride for

23. An independent study conducted in the United Kingdom came to much the same conclusion about Hindu organizations in that country. (See the report by Jonathan Miller of Channel Four in Britain. Retrieved December 12, 2002 [http:www.channel4.com/news/homez/stories/20021212/guj/html].) Not surprisingly, these charges have been denied by the groups involved and the persons making such claims have been vilified by Hindutva supporters.

24. I discovered that the central essay on the BJP website on the BJP philosophy, entitled, "Hindutva: The Great Nationalist Ideology," was written by Mihir Meghani, a founder of one of the early chapters of the HSC and a current VHPA activist.

Hindus all over the world" and less concerned about the cost of communal tensions within the country.

Conclusion

Using the case of Hindu Indian Americans, this article has examined the relationship between the formulation and practice of American multiculturalism and the support for ethnic nationalism by immigrants. By presenting a more nuanced picture of the implications of such nationalism, this research points to the limitations of those studies which see such nationalism as either uniformly positive or entirely negative. The interrelationship between multiculturalism and immigrant nationalism is important to understand since it can have several potentially contradictory implications for the ethnic American community, for the wider society, and for the home countries.

In the Hindu Indian American case for instance, ethnic nationalism provides the resources for members to be aware and "proud" of their heritage and culture, to network and mobilize, to resist prejudice and racism, and consequently to be successful in multicultural America. However, working within the multicultural framework to construct an ethnic nationalism only sidesteps but does not alter the reality of racism and subordination, since it frequently prevents the formation of coalitional alliances between minority groups and even among groups belonging to the same ethnic group. For instance, the Hindutva movement has reinforced tensions between Hindu and non-Hindu Indian Americans and between Hindutvavadis and secular Hindus.

Ethnic nationalism may also divert the attention of ethnic leaders from dealing with the substantive concerns of the community. As aggressive Hinduness has become the means to obtain status within the Indian American community and visibility outside the community, dozens of individuals and organizations claiming their mission to be the defense of Hinduism have tried to garner publicity for themselves in the past few years by finding a Hindu cause to champion, most often the pursuit of companies who have insulted Hinduism through their portrayals of Hindu deities and icons. Thus, issues such as the treatment of immigrants and immigration laws, health care, schooling, and discrimination which affect most Indian Americans in more serious ways are neglected. Again, the discourse of "authenticity" of both multiculturalism and ethnic nationalism puts a lot of pressure on individual members to conform to the celebratory version of culture that is on display. For instance, Indian American feminists have pointed out that the gender equality and family values that are said to distinguish Indians from other groups suppresses the reality of patriarchy as well as the diversity and dissent that exists within many Indian American families (Abraham 2000; Bhattacharjee 1992; DasGupta and Dasgupta 1996).

If Hindu nationalists become accepted as the public voice for all people of Indian ancestry in this country, there could be a variety of consequences. The politicization of Indian Americans (largely through the Hindutva movement) has already brought about significant shifts in American foreign policy toward India and Pakistan, with the administration adopting a significantly more pro-India position than in the past (at least until the events of 9/11/2001). Tensions created within the Indian American community due to the efforts of Hindutva leaders to define and articulate "Hinduness" but also "Indianness" could spill over to the wider society as all sides in the conflict (Hindu, Muslim, and Christian Indian Americans) are forging alliances with other American groups, leading to the exacerbation of religious tensions within the United States and the development of competing ethnic lobbies (Kurien 2001).

Since Hindu Indian Americans wield considerable influence among the leadership and masses in India and in other diasporic Hindu communities, they will undoubtedly shape the face of global Hinduism. Diasporic Hindu nationalism has already had profound impacts on Indian society and politics and will be crucial in determining the success of the Hindutva

movement and the future of religious minorities in India. The rise of Hindu nationalism can also have serious international implications as the nuclearization of India and Pakistan (a by-product of the competing religious nationalisms of the two countries) has demonstrated. On the positive side, however, Hindu nationalism has also influenced individuals to establish and support several social service and humanitarian projects in India.

American ethnic groups will be very important in shaping the contours of religion, society, and politics in the United States as well as the international arena in the next century. The Hindu Indian American case highlights some of the dilemmas faced by multicultural societies trying to institutionalize pluralism. Vertovec (2001) points out that, while recent commissions in the United States and the United Kingdom have formulated newer versions of multiculturalism that have attempted to move away from the bounded, cultural essentialism of previous Western approaches to recognize the multiplicity of individual identities, what he describes as the "container" model of the nation-state has still been largely retained. He therefore calls for the concept of multiculturalism to be "loosened" to recognize the complexity of globalization, transnationalism, and a diversity of attachments (see also Bauböck 1994; Laguerre 1998; Ong 1999; Soysal 1994). If such a broadening and loosening of multiculturalism could also address the issue of racism and bring about a change in the conception and treatment of non-white and non-western ethnic communities, it would go a long way toward reducing the reactive extremism of such groups.

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