

**Processes of Religious Reconstruction among Britain's South Asian minorities:
a reflection on the contemporary dynamics of reverse colonisation**

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Our age is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization, and above all, by the disenchantment of the world. Its resulting fate is that precisely the ultimate and most sublime values have withdrawn from public life. They have retreated either into the abstract realm of mystical life or into the fraternal feelings of personal relations between individuals. ... Nor is it a matter of chance that today it is only in the smallest groups that you find the pulsing beat that in bygone days heralded the prophetic spirit that swept through great communities like a firestorm and welded them together. ... If we attempt to construct new religious movements without a new, authentic prophecy, this only gives rise to something equally monstrous in terms of inner experience, which can only have an even more dire effect. Academic prophecies can only ever produce fanatical sects, but never a genuine community. (Weber, *Science as a Vocation* 2004 [1919]: 30)

During the course of the past half century the religious and the cultural landscape of the British Isles, and especially that of its major cities, has been transformed. Just as English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish settlers transported their own distinctive conceptual and religious premises into the 'New World' as they established innumerable ethnic colonies in the course of two centuries of imperial expansion, so the latest phase of globalisation has precipitated an equally significant ideological inflow in the reverse direction, thus turning the tables on those who had come to consider themselves to be the only legitimate masters of the universe. The multiform challenges to which these transgressive initiatives 'from below' have given rise are currently being felt throughout the developed/Euro-American world, where they are proving to be no less severe in conceptual (and hence in moral and religious) terms than they are in the more mundane spheres of economics, politics and demography.

Although European imperial expansion was legitimised as a 'civilizing mission', largely on religious grounds, by the time this process began to be reversed ideological assumptions in the greater part of the Euro-American world had undergone a sea-change, most especially amongst its intellectual elites. In pursuit of the vision of rational modernity unleashed by the enlightenment, all expectations that religion might continue to provide the foundation for a significant degree of socio-political (as opposed to personal) inspiration was at least in principle swept to one side, on the grounds that its speculative foundations would face a lingering death in the face of the steady advance of rationalistic secularism.

This vision overlooks several key features of the contemporary world order. Firstly, the disenchanted world of enlightened ‘modernity’ which Euro-Americans have constructed around themselves is by no means so a-religious as its users routinely imagine, given that the conceptual roots of the enlightenment lay, as Weber was acutely aware, in the premises of Northern Europe’s Protestant reformation; secondly, such a vision overlooks the key ideological role played by Christianity in legitimating the process of Euro-American colony-formation, such that it was used to explain (or rather to explain away) the patterns of unequal exchange which were thereby precipitated; and thirdly, and most egregiously, it overlooks the multiplicity of ways in which the subjects of imperial hegemony took the opportunity to creatively combine the resources of their own indigenous conceptual traditions with those to which they had been introduced by Christian missionaries, on the basis of which they began to develop of all manner of strategic ideological initiatives, many of which were religiously inspired, the better to challenge, and ultimately to undermine, the hegemonic premises which underpinned the whole Imperial exercise. Viewed from this perspective, it should come as no surprise that processes of mobilisation which have precipitated the dialectics of contemporary globalisation – by now articulated just as vigorously ‘from below’ as ‘from above’ – are also proving to be strongly religious in character: indeed as we enter the twenty-first century issues of religion have almost everywhere emerged as a key conceptual battleground.

Ethnic and religious plurality

Viewed from a *longue durée*, the prospect that religious plurality might precipitate of viciously polarised ‘wars of religion’ should come as no surprise, especially in European contexts. Over and above the Crusades, unmistakably conceptualised as ‘holy war’, the subsequent reformation set off generations of bloody internecine conflict across the length and breadth of Europe, significant echoes of which still remain with us to this day. But even if the Catholic/Protestant disjunction is heading for the dustbin of history, as indeed appears to be the case, the collapse of Empire and the ever-increasing significance of globalisation ‘from below’ has precipitated the emergence of new vectors of ethno-religious polarisation throughout the Euro-American world, thanks to mass arrival of (initially largely unskilled) migrant workers of non-European descent.

At the outset hostility to the settlers’ presence was largely directed at their distinctive physical appearance: in other words towards their ‘racial’ distinctiveness. But once it became apparent that the great majority of settlers (not just in Britain, but across the whole of Western Europe) were drawn from one part or another of the Islamic world, and as the

presence of their ethnic colonies has become steadily more salient, so the debate about the consequent condition of plurality has undergone a sea-change. Whilst hereditary skin colour continues to be utilised as an inescapable social marker, those who differ have found themselves facing an ever more vigorous backlash from the indigenes on the grounds of their commitment to Islam.¹ In so doing they have highlighted the on-going significance of a tectonic fault whose roots are even more ancient than those which underpin the Catholic/Protestant divide: that between European Christendom and its long standing alter, *Dar ul Islam* (Ballard 1996).

Although bucketsful of ink which have been expended – and continue to be expended – on elaborating the threat which Islam, especially in its ‘immoderate’ format – is widely alleged to offer to the fundamental premises of European civilization, remarkably little attention has yet been paid to the actual content of the religious ideas and practices which migrants of Muslim origin (together with their counterparts drawn from other non-Christian traditions) have brought with them from elsewhere, let alone to the extent to which those already diverse practices have been further transformed as settlers and their offspring began to respond to, and above all re-established a sense of meaning and purpose within, the challenging context of the radically distinctive socio-cultural arenas in the midst of which they have established a new set of roots for themselves.

Having observed these developments at first hand during the course of four decades of ethnographic fieldwork in the UK (see, for example Ballard 2011, 2007, 2006, 2000) I am acutely aware of just how complex, multifaceted, dynamic and widely varying these on-going developments have been, no less in ‘religious’ than in more ‘secular’ contexts. But at the same time I have become equally conscious that established vocabulary of religious studies, even when articulated in a ‘World Religions’ format, is often more of a hindrance than help when it comes to making sense of the resultant processes. As a result I began to conclude, along with Fitzgerald (2000), that the established concept of ‘religion’ – at least as routinely understood in the context of Euro-American scholarly vernacular – was in need of a major analytical overhaul if it was to begin accommodate my empirical observations.

This is no place in which to attempt such a comprehensive conceptual overhaul. Rather my objective in this article is to outline some of the key aspects of the analytical and conceptual prerequisites for the implementation of such an overhaul by exploring the central features of the processes of religious reconstruction in which South Asian settlers in Britain have engaged during the course of the past half century by highlighting

- i. The conceptual universe within which the settlers characteristically operated prior to their arrival in Britain
- ii. How and in what directions they reconstructed – and in consequence reinterpreted – those conceptual resources as they and their children set about reconstructing their lives in their new environment
- iii. How and why it is that indigenous observers and commentators have encountered such difficulty in making sense of, and hence of feeling in any way at ease with, those outcomes.

Making sense of ‘religion’: Enchanted and Disenchanted Universes

Standing as we do at the outset of the twenty-first century, public life in Britain, as in most of Western Europe, appears to have become largely secular in character. Hence ‘religion’, at least as commonly understood, plays little if any part in the everyday lives of most members of the indigenous majority. That was not the case in the historical past; nor was it the case for the vast majority of newly arrived settlers from South Asia. For them, as for the inhabitants of pre-modern Britain, premises of a metaphysical kind provided – and for the most part continue to provide – the warp and woof of a taken for granted conceptual order which serves to moralise, and hence to give meaning and purpose to, every component of their everyday lives, right through from the cradle to the grave. In other words the majority of newcomers operated within what Max Weber long ago suggested was best understood as a metaphysically- (as opposed to a rationally-) inspired ‘enchanted universe’.

From that perspective the majority of the settlers operated – and many continue to operate – within conceptual universes of a kind which would have been thoroughly familiar to the followers of medieval Christianity. But in a twenty-first century context those who operate in terms of such premises rapidly find themselves fish out of water, at least as far as the public domain is concerned. It is easy to see why. In the aftermath of the protestant reformation and of the subsequent European ‘enlightenment’, the forces of ‘modernity’ have precipitated an ever greater commitment to achieving a ‘scientific’ understanding of both the social no less than the natural order, with the result that more metaphysical perspectives, and especially the conceptual premises which underpinned them, were pressed steadily further into abeyance, such that they could routinely be dismissed as irrational ‘superstition’. This is precisely what Weber had in mind when he talked a century ago of the way in which ‘the disenchantment of the world’ had led to a condition in which ‘the ultimate and most sublime values been have withdrawn from public life’. He deserves to be congratulated for his perspicacity. Close to a century has passed since he made these observations, during which the onward rush of

rationally and individualistically oriented conceptualisations modernity has led to the emergence of socio-cultural outlooks whose moral and conceptual foundations, such as they are, have been more or less comprehensively bleached of any kind of metaphysical awareness, even in 'religious' contexts (Smith 2002).

Religious education and 'World Religions'

But whilst the steady rise of disenchanting agnostic secularism has steadily undermined the socio-cultural potency of the Church, the phenomenon of religion has not disappeared, either as conceptual category or an institutional presence. Hence whilst congregations have fallen to a fraction of their former size, religious institutions continue to play a vital public role both in times of positive celebration as well as of extreme distress, no less in personal and familial than public arenas. In other words the *institutions* of religion are just still firmly in place: they occupy a legitimate (albeit relatively marginal) place in the socio-cultural order, even if the 'enchanted' dimensions of their more metaphysically oriented conceptual traditions have very largely fallen into abeyance.

Reflecting these developments, 'R.E.' still occupies a formal place in the educational agenda, so when the children of South Asian settlers began to appear in British schools close to half a century ago, they could readily be classified as the followers of one or other of three well-recognised 'World Religions': Hinduism, Sikhism or Islam (Jains, Parsis and Christians largely went largely unnoticed). Moreover the substance of that categorisation was further confirmed when those associated with these traditions began to organise their own distinctive places of worship – *Mandirs*, *Gurudwaras* or *Masjids* as the case may be. But what was much less clear was whether these institutional structures, as well as the activities which took place within them, could be mapped directly onto the formalised accounts of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim practice set out in the 'world religions' literature, let alone onto conventional understandings of the roles which 'Churches', priests and their congregations should be expected to fulfil.

Questions soon began to flow thick and fast on this score. Is keeping one's hair uncut and wearing a turban a *necessary* practice for Sikh men, such that they can no longer be considered to be Sikhs if they fail to do so? To what extent do Pandits, Gyanis and Maulvis exercise authority over those who assembled before them in *mandirs*, *gurudwaras* or *masjids*? Is the routine exclusion of women from the *masjid* an indication that they consequently play no part in the institutionalised dimensions of Islamic practice? Should

recourse to the services of spiritual healers, exorcists and the providers of *tawiz* (amulets) be regarded as a legitimate manifestation of religious practice, or should they be dismissed as irrational superstition? Impressed by claims of ‘orthodoxy’ to which the Religious Studies literature all too often gave an explicit *imprimatur*, many teachers assumed that an affirmative response should be given to all these questions, thereby overlooking the prospect that in the midst of an ‘enchanted universe’ religion is by no means necessarily ‘orthodox’ in character, nor confined to organised acts of collective worship. In the just the same vein, many social policy makers (and local politicians) routinely assumed – and indeed continue to assume – that *Imams*, *Granthis* and *Pandits* fulfil a similar leadership role within, and provided much the same kind of pastoral support for, members of their congregations as those provided as Christian pastors. In doing so they are often mistaken, not so much in the sense that nascent communities lacked leaders, or because support networks of a pastoral kind were absent, but rather because such communities’ preferred institutional arrangements were far from congruent with observers’ taken-for-granted assumption that these would necessarily mirror the contemporary Judaeo-Christian premises.

A view ‘from below’

With historical experience in mind, it should have come as no surprise to find that migrants sought to continue to organise their personal lives according to their own ancestral premises in the aftermath of their arrival, rather than promptly adopting those deployed by members of the population amongst whom they have settled. After all European settlers had no compunction about doing just that during the colonial period. Moreover all the contemporary migrants’ predecessors – whether Saxon, Norman, Huguenot, Jewish or Irish – initially followed exactly the same process of colony construction as have their contemporary counterparts: ethnic plurality is in no sense novel phenomenon in the intrinsically plural jurisdiction of the United Kingdom. But to the extent that this is so, the capacity to engage in cross-cultural navigation is, and always has been, a necessary prerequisite for the maintenance of social cohesion.

No-one is more conscious of this than settlers themselves, especially when they emerge from below, rather than descending hegemonically from above. Moreover the greater the distance they have travelled, no less in socio-cultural than spatial terms, the more extensive, and hence the more perplexing, the differences which the newcomers encounter are likely to be. Hence the steeper the learning curve with which they and their offspring will find themselves confronted. But with this in mind it is worth remembering that no matter how self-contained

Britain's ill-informed external observers may continue to assume such ethnic colonies to be, their members are in practice no sense isolated from the surrounding social order: rather they breathe the same air, live in the same streets, send their children to the same schools, use the same hospitals, and above all make their living in the contexts of exactly the same socio-economic order as members of the indigenous majority. Hence for members of the new minorities, living with plurality is an everyday experience. The moment they step outside their front doors they find themselves faced with the prospect of navigating their way through more or less unfamiliar arenas, whether at school, at work, in seeking medical assistance, taking trips on public transport or merely taking a walk in the Park.

But whilst settlers, and especially their offspring, rapidly become more or less skilled cross-cultural navigators, such that they gain the capacity to act and react appropriately in an ever wider range of socio-cultural arenas, the indigenes typically pay next to no attention to what goes on within the newcomers' self-constructed ethnic colonies. This imbalance has far reaching consequences: whilst settlers, and especially their offspring, rapidly become familiar with the premises in terms of which members of the dominant majority routinely order their affairs, the reverse process is for the most part massively attenuated. As a result most external observers, including all too many academic analysts and social policy makers with a specialist interest in what they inadequately identify as BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) issues, all too often lack the capacity, and above all the conceptual equipment, which would enable them to appreciate the *self-constructed premises in terms of which members of the marginalised minorities routinely order their personal lives*

Whilst this observation holds good across the board (see Ballard and Parveen 2008), for just the reasons which Weber suggests there are few contexts in which the resultant conceptual challenges are more severe than in the sphere of religion. This is not just because the settlers' premises in this sphere – whether labelled as 'Hindu', 'Sikh' or 'Muslim' – are frequently strongly 'enchanted' in character: they are also a product of centuries of largely autonomous interpretation and reinterpretation within the myriad communities of which their users are a contemporary product. Hence settlers' everyday practices often differ significantly from the 'orthodox' prescriptions set out the Hindu *Shastras*, the Sikh *Rehat Maryada* and the Islamic *Shari'a*, and hence from the accounts of their significance set out in much of the established Religious Studies literature. From this perspective 'alterity' means just what it says on the tin: minority lifestyles are unlikely to be susceptible to meaningful analysis if external observers (and/or those trained in externally generated analytical ideologies) adopt a Procrustean

approach,² and consequently uncritically deploy a ready-made set of conceptual categories as a means of making sense of those who differ. The concept of ‘religion’ is no exception to that rule.

An alternative conceptual framework

As anyone who conducts who has conducted ethnographic research in an ‘enchanted’ context rapidly becomes aware, the concept of ‘religion’ – at least in the sense that it is understood from a mainstream perspective in contemporary Euro-American thought – provides an exceedingly blunt analytical tool when it comes to making sense of the complexity, as well as the diversity, of the beliefs and practices with which one finds oneself confronted. That was certainly so in the case of my own experience in the Punjab, and subsequently in the British component of its diaspora, not least because those turned out to include a complex weave of overlaps and differences between the premises and practices of what the textbooks insisted were best understood as three separate, self-contained and hence internally homogeneous ‘-isms’. In these circumstances it was immediately apparent that any attempt to comprehend Punjabi religion within such a procrustean framework not only failed to illuminate, but actively obscured, many of the most interesting features of what was actually going on.³

Expanding on the work of Juergensmeyer (1982) and Oberoi (1994) I set out an alternative perspective in an article entitled “*Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum: four dimensions in Punjabi religion*” (Ballard 2000), which I subsequently extended in two further articles (Ballard 2006, 2011). In doing so I sought to break new ground in two complementary directions. On the one hand by suggesting that popular religious phenomena could be usefully explored on a *regional* basis, most especially in contexts of long-standing religious plurality; and on the other by suggesting that such an exercise also provided an excellent opportunity to step outside the procrustean framework of established Judaeo-Christian analytical categories in favour of a more universalistic perspective which would remain equally applicable across diverse range of religious beliefs and practices. My objective in doing so was to identify, and hence enable me to disaggregate, some analytically distinctive dimensions of everyday religious activity which could be observed within – and not infrequently shared as between – the *panthic*, *kismet*, *dharmic*, *sanskritic* and *qaumic* domains of the Punjab’s three nominally autonomous religious traditions in a manner which might well prove to be universally applicable (see Table 1.).

| <i>Sphere of Activity</i> | Significance | Definition | Arena |
|---------------------------|--|--|------------------------|
| <i>Panthic</i> | Spiritual/ Gnostic inspiration | The ideas and practices deployed by those in search of spiritual and mystical inspiration, invariably under the guidance of a Spiritual Master (e.g. Pir, Yogi, Sant, Swami or Guru) | } Spiritual/ Occult |
| <i>Kismet</i> | Occult/ Making sense of the world | The ideas used to explain the otherwise inexplicable, and the occult practices deployed to turn such adversity in its tracks; both are usually deplo with the assistance of a Spiritual Master. | |
| <i>Dharmic</i> | Morality/ Social order | The moral ideology in terms of which all aspects of the established social and behavioural order is conceptualised and legitimated. | } Social |
| <i>Sanskritic</i> | Rites of passage/ Social reconstruction | The set of ritual practices – and most especially those associated with birth, initiation, marriage and death – which celebrate and legitimate each individual’s progress through the social and domestic order. | |
| <i>Qaumic</i> | Political/ Ethnic mobilisation | The use – and more often than not the reinterpretation – of religious ideology as a vehicle for collective social and political mobilisation. The typical outcome of this process is that an increasingly clearly defined body of people begin to close ranks on a morally sanctioned basis the better to pursue shared social and economic objectives | } Political |

Table 1 Five⁴ dimensions in Punjabi Religion

The application of this model proved to be immensely illuminating. On the hand it provided a means of encompassing all possible manifestations of religious activity in this complex arena, including those which both unsympathetic external observers and neo-fundamentalist reformers routinely dismiss as ‘superstition’, into a coherent analytical framework; and on the other it appeared be applicable well beyond the boundaries of the subcontinent, and hence at least potentially on a universal basis. Moreover the model also assumes that those with access to these distinctive domains will manoeuvre their way through and between these spheres of activity in response to the specific context within which they find themselves. I would also

suggest that as a result of its intrinsically dynamic character the model is of particular utility in diasporic contexts, since it allows one to illuminate the range of (often contradictory) strategies which long-distance migrants, and even more so those that their overseas-born offspring have developed and deployed as they set about devising solutions to the multiplicity of moral, conceptual and existential challenges with which they found themselves confronted.

Padre and Mādri muzhub in an enchanted universe

As is evident from my model, I take the view religious phenomena run way beyond acts of worship performed in public in temples, mosques and shrines. Such activities, no less than public rituals celebrating births, marriages and deaths which take place within them, are intrinsically *intermittent* in character. But whilst such institutional structures consequently stand empty for most of the time, it does not follow that religion is consequently absent from everyday praxis, especially in the context of an enchanted universe. Hence, for example, in South Asian contexts everyone's name is of metaphysical significance, as are the expressions utilised in greetings and partings; likewise one does not tempt fate by expressing certainty with respect to the performance or achievement of any future action, given that success and failure, as well as health and misfortune are held to be profoundly conditioned by occult forces; hence remembrance of, and hence respect for, metaphysical forces – the enchanted universe, in other words – is constantly on everyone's lips.

In such circumstances 'doing religion' is by no means confined to formally constituted places of worship; songs and verses – always a mainstay of preliterate societies – can be recited at any time of day or night, both for inspiration and to ease the burden of hard labour; personal and familial shrines can be found within every household; and all manner of steps are constantly taken to promote propitious outcomes and to keep malevolence at bay. In such circumstances gender distinctions frequently emerge. Hence even when men play a predominant, and in some contexts an exclusive, role in the performance of public rituals, it would be idle to assume that women are excluded from religious praxis. As soon as one takes cognisance of the richness of the propitiatory activities articulated by women, and especially by mothers, in familial and domestic contexts, any such suggestion swiftly evaporates. In the performance of what I have found it convenient to identify as *mādri muzhub*,⁵ In performing that role women not only insert a powerful sense of metaphysically-grounded meaning and purpose into all aspects of the everyday life of the entire domestic group, but also pass those premises on to their children – and no less so to their sons than to their daughters. Hence it is primarily as purveyors of *mādri* (as opposed to *padre*⁶) *muzhub* that mothers and

grandmothers set about socialising their offspring into the social, spiritual and occult dimensions of popular religion.

The roots of religious reconstruction in the UK

During the course of the past half century all the many dimensions of Punjabi religion have been reconstructed in the UK, albeit at differing speeds within differing communities at different speeds in varying contexts, and in response to ever changing range of differing challenges. In the early years of colony construction settlers took relatively little interest in the *qaumic* potentialities of their heritage: they were far too concerned with matters of survival to pay much attention to the prospect of engaging in processes of religiously grounded political mobilisation (Hussein 2000, Aurora 1967); moreover in the absence of wives and children, and little in the way of institutional contexts within which to practice *dharmic* and *sanskritic* activities, these dimensions of religious activity also fell into temporary abeyance. Nevertheless it would be quite wrong to conclude on that basis, that religion played no part in the lives of the early pioneers: rather they looked to that part of their heritage which stood right at the other end of the spectrum: namely in the sense of spiritual, moral and psychological succour on which they could draw from the resources of the *panthic* and *kismet* domains. Neither the availability of priestly specialists or of formally constituted institutions was a prerequisite for tapping into the conceptual resources of an enchanted universe. Hence the pioneers could readily rely on the vernacular poetry of inspirational figures such Nanak and Bulleh Shah as a source of both psychological succour and mystical inspiration, so enabling to generate a sense of purpose in the midst of the trials and tribulations which they were suffering as a result of sacrificially removing themselves from their homelands and their families during the best years of their lives. In doing so they were drawing on a deep-seated trope in the *panthic* dimension of Punjabi religion: namely that that properly appreciated, that the hard grind of everyday life can – if properly appreciated – be readily utilised as a source the most profound levels of mystical inspiration. Hence much of the poetry of this period (vividly translated in Shamsheer 1989) revolves around *ishk*, passionate commitment to one's beloved, and *viraha*, the pain of separation of one's Beloved, no less at a spiritual than at a physical level, deployed in this case as a commentary on the pioneers' experience of hard labour in the mills and foundries of an alien land:

*The parrot of my life is trapped in the cage of separation far away
Dying every day, being born every day*

*If he falls ill he can bear the pain in his body
But how can he banish the pain in the soul?
To what physician can I tell my pain?*

(Surjit Hans)

Or again

*My soul is wounded,
My spirit cries aloud
And the boat of my life
Held back by separation
Cannot come to the shore*

(Svaran Chandan]

But whilst adversity presses in on all sides

*How hard it is to live the bread of sorrow on the tyrants' streets
Losing individuality, we sell our strength, crying out our wares
Without knowledge of how long we have to live
This is oppression's valley of death, where there is no-one to protect us* (Surjit Hans)

The whole exercise is nevertheless underpinned by a positive sacrificial purpose

*To find fuel for the stove of our belly
We endure this life of pain and trouble
To light the path of our children's lives
The oil of our own selves is burnt to feed the lamp*

(Saqi)

Desh Pradesh: the comprehensive reconstruction of meaning and purpose

It was not just separation from their homeland that precipitated poetic expressions of this kind. In the early years of colony construction the sojourners were overwhelmingly male, since they took the view would be as inappropriate as it was inapposite to expose their wives and daughters to the alien, uninspiring, and in their view largely immoral, environment in which they found themselves. But as nascent colonies grew in size, so their members gradually became more confident in their capacity to reproduce a moral universe in *Desh Pardesh*, no matter how hostile and morally corrosive the surrounding social order might be. Whilst the speed with which members of communities of differing origin adopted that view varied enormously, but in due course all eventually took the plunge, and called their wives and children to join them.

As pioneer sojourners set about constructing fully fledged ethnic colonies, the resumption of family life led to a reconstruction of virtually all the familiar social and cultural institutions of their homelands (see Helweg 1986, Shaw 2000, Ballard 1977, 1994, 2003). As far as the religious dimensions of their presence was concerned, the arrival of women and children not only provided a major boost to the *kismet* domain through the re-establishment of *mādrī*

muzhub, but also established an environment whereby activities in the *dharmic* and *sanskritic* domains could at long last be reconstructed in all their complexity. Amongst the older generation at least, all these multifarious activities continue to be practiced to this day. However to the extent that these are invariably performed within the context of the ethnic colony, and most usually in private and domestic contexts, they remain largely unnoticed by external observers. Moreover there is a marked reluctance of ‘insiders’ to bring such practices to the attention of external observers, for fear that they will promptly be dismissed as a manifestation of irrational superstition.

Change and adaptation

Whilst those engaged in the initial phases of colony construction invariably sought to comprehensively reproduce all the most significant values and practices with which they were familiar ‘back home’, it is quite wrong to assume that the outcome is a straightforward carbon copy of the original model. Over and above their tendency to draw on an idealised vision of their childhood experiences, settlers and their offspring are also faced with the task of reconstructing their dreams in a radically different environment from the one in which they were originally deployed: as a result the lifestyles and institutional structures which emerged in the diaspora invariably included all manner of reinterpretations of their ‘imagined traditions’. Given this dynamic, the resultant developments can usefully be regarded as being driven along two distinct vectors: whilst the initiatives developed and deployed by the older generation of settlers can best be described as processes of socio-religious *reconstruction*, those precipitated by their offspring, and by now the offspring of their offspring, are better understood as processes of *reinvention*, in the sense that they have emerged at least one step removed from the original model.⁷

In doing so those were born and brought up in the subcontinent have for the most part relied heavily on the values into which they were socialised back home, in an effort to re-establish a sense of meaning and purpose in the midst of wider social environment which in their eyes to remain as alien, immoral and irreligious as it did at the outset – if not more so. But whilst their offspring are equally heavily involved in a parallel exercise of meaning construction, to which they frequently refer to as the maintenance of ‘my identity’, the challenges they face are far more complex. For those born in the UK, or have who lived here since they were children, Britain is unmistakably ‘home’ – as every visit they make to the subcontinent immediately confirms. The Punjab may be their ancestral home, but it is also an arena in which they feel themselves to be fish out of water. But at the same time ‘home’ is also

markedly contradictory in character. Ever since they can remember those born and raised in the UK they will have found themselves faced with the challenge of negotiating their way between the premises into which they were socialised at home, and the for the most part radically different set of premises with which they were simultaneously expected to conform at school, at university, and indeed the course of all their many interactions with persons and institutions which constitute the wider British social order.

However this is in no way to suggest that members of the younger generation are consequently wracked by problems of ‘culture conflict’. Rather it is to observe that they have had plentiful opportunities to become cross-cultural navigators, and having consequently gained the capacity to become far more adventurous and experienced boundary-crossers than their parents ever could, given their capacity to act and react appropriately in an exceptionally wide range of differently coded arenas (Ballard 1994). However this does not mean that they necessarily view the conceptual codes which they routinely deploy within each of such arenas with an equal degree of respect, or that they are always prepared to go along with all the (often conflicting) demands for conformity with which they are routinely confronted in each of the many arenas in which they participate: rather as skilled cultural navigators they often play both sides against the middle as they develop increasingly cosmopolitan personal lifestyles.

Qaumic imperatives and the attractions of neo-fundamentalism

From this perspective it follows that schooling presents the offspring of immigrant parents with all manner of conceptual challenges, which become all the more intense the further up the educational system they penetrate. These arise not so much because the conceptual and behavioural conventions with which they are expected to conform in the two arenas differ, but rather because their experiences at school (as in the wider social order in general) tend to offer little respect for, and often outright hostility to, the intellectual and conceptual legitimacy of the values into which they are simultaneously being socialised at home. In these circumstances the central issue is not so much the presence of difference *per se*, but rather the lack of positive acknowledgement of, and above all *respect for*, their very beings. Not that this comes as any kind of news to members of the older generation; whilst they have long been aware that the natives of land in which they have settled have a marked tendency to treat them with disdain, they are for the most part only too happy to return the compliment in spades, not least because their hearts are still rooted in the land of their ancestors. But that

option is not open to the younger generation: like it or not, Britain is their homeland, no matter how contradictory their experiences of life within it may be.

The most characteristic response to this dilemma is what can best be described as a condition of double alienation, no less from their parents' premises, which they regularly perceive as being over-traditionalistic and over-timid, than from those proffered by the wider social order, which they perceive as failing to offer them any real degree of respect, despite all manner of duplicitous and patronising pleas to the contrary (Ballard and Parveen 2008). If children find this experience perplexing whilst at primary school, it tends to become much more humiliating once they reach adolescence, especially when it becomes apparent that it is their very status as *persons* which is at stake. To be sure there is always the option of seeking to ignore this kind of negative judgment, and instead to take the view that however distinctive one's heritage may be, one is actually no different from anyone else. But just who are those alters from those who take this view consider themselves to be 'no different'? Careful thought soon reveals the answer: members of the indigenous majority, whom they have implicitly identified as taken-for-granted yardsticks of 'normality'. In these circumstances it should come as no surprise that those who try this option out for size regularly find themselves taunted as having become 'coconuts' (brown outside and pure white inside), on the grounds that they swallowed the conceptual premises the indigenous majority wholesale, regardless of all the inherent contradictions to which the adoption of such a strategy necessarily gives rise.

As a result of these alienating pressures members of the younger generation have begun to close ranks in self-defence, but on a basis which differs significantly from the largely caste and *biraderi*-based – and in that sense 'traditional' – strategies adopted by their parents. But although the younger generation have consequently begun to identify themselves collectively as *apne* ('us') as opposed to the *ghore* ('whites'), their responses are nevertheless becoming increasingly diverse, even as they simultaneously display a marked tendency to back away from, and ultimately to dismiss the legitimacy of, the philosophical foundations of *both* the conceptual orders to which they have been exposed. Amongst other things, this has led to a wave of interest in textually oriented neo-fundamentalist (and in that sense protestant) reinterpretations of their parents' religious traditions, especially amongst educationally successful members of the second and third generations.⁸

Nowhere have these developments become more salient than amongst young Muslims. As followers of the religious tradition attracts the most intense level of hostility from members of

the indigenous majority, a mutually reinforcing spiral of hostility has emerged as between those identify themselves as defenders of the respective merits of the allegedly wholly incompatible conceptual foundations of the ‘English/Christian’ and the ‘Pakistani/Islamic’ religio-cultural traditions. But despite the contemporary salience of this particular disjunction, it would be quite wrong to conclude that the strategic attractions of neo-fundamentalism in this sense are a specifically *Muslim* phenomenon. Limits of space make it impossible to discuss the way in which the death of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in the course of the Indian Army’s assault on the Golden Temple in Amritsar set off a wave of neo-fundamentalist support for Khalistan within the global Sikh diaspora, or the way in which Narendra Modi’s rise to power in Gujarat in the aftermath of the massacre in Godra fuelled a similar wave of support for the intensely chauvinistic premises of the VHP amongst many young Hindus. Indeed I should emphasise that the Islamic manifestation of this strategy was the slowest to make its presence felt in Britain, even if it has subsequently had the widest and most egregious consequences (Ballard 2007).

The roots of Britain’s Islamist revival

Neo-fundamentalist movements are invariably strongly *qaumic* in character. Nominally drawing their inspiration from the past, invariably represented as a return to a ‘purist’ interpretation of the ancient texts in which their tradition is grounded, and hence by-passing all the allegedly misguided ways in all established figures of authority have chosen to interpret them, the ultimate objective of neo-fundamentalist movements is discard all such unhelpful ‘deviance’ to one side, so enabling them to move forward into a better, more equitable, and above all a more just and perfect future.

With this in mind it is easy to see why so many young Muslims in Britain – and most especially those who had successfully pressed their way upwardly through a comprehensively disenchanting educational system which had little if anything about Islam – found the Islamist agenda so attractive. On the one hand it offer an opportunity to up-end, and indeed discredit, the duplicitous socio-cultural agenda into which their education system had sought to incorporate them; and on the other hand it was equally dismissive of their parents’ ‘primitive’ and ‘superstitious’ beliefs and practices, of which their rationalistically oriented education had taught them to be equally scornful. Hence the whole exercise appeared – at least at first sight – to provide them with a viable political platform from which to challenge the unsustainable contradictions with which they felt themselves to be confronted, no less at home, at school and in the world at large.⁹

Multiple sources of inspiration for this agenda were also readily available. Given that school as well as television had now become their principal sources of conceptual as opposed to emotional learning and developments, their mothers' efforts to introduce them to the wonders of Punjabi-style conceptual universe cut very little ice; nor did the lectures given by overseas-trained and hence non-English speaking Maulvis when they went to *Qur'an* classes in the Mosque; and they heard little or nothing positive about Islam in the National Curriculum to which they were exposed school. In these circumstances they lapped up they well-presented English-language commentaries on all aspects of Islam, mostly either produced by Saudi Arabia, or printed in the UK with the assistance of Saudi funding, which began to appear in many mosques, as well as in innumerable Islamic bookshops.

However this eminently readable literature promoted a very different vision of Islam from that practiced by their parents. Whether prepared by followers of *Jamaat-i-Islami*, the *Ahl-i-Hadith*, or of by those of *Deobandi/Wahhabi* persuasion, virtually all of this literature was strongly *Salafi* in outlook, and urged all true Muslims to overlook the past thirteen hundred years of Islamic civilization, and instead to rebuild their lives around the example set by the Prophet himself, as well as his four 'rightly-guided' successors. Moreover if they were interested in *tafsir*, the interpretation of the meaning of the *Qur'an*, they were invited to explore the work of ibn Taymiyyah (1263–1328 CE), who wrote in the midst of the chaos which followed the sack Baghdad by the Mongols, or perhaps better still, to do it themselves. What we have consequently witnessed is the emergence of a generation of Muslims who are comprehensively self-educated in religious terms, since they regard the beliefs and practices of their parents with almost as much disdain as those of the surrounding non-Muslim population. It is from members of this thoroughly untraditional generation, busy seeking inspiration from an ancient past in an effort to build a more perfect future, that all of Britain's suicide bombers have been drawn. This is in no way to suggest that all young British Muslims are proto-suicide bombers. Those who go looking for *shaheedi* in this way are rare and thoroughly exceptional outliers. Nevertheless an ever-growing proportion of young British Muslims share a deep-seated distrust of the established order, and along with this a growing determination to pursue their own agendas, and find to personally meaningful solutions the challenges they so routinely encounter.

This sense of dogged self-determination is having all sorts of consequences, most of them paradoxical. For some it provides the driving force behind a determination to achieve educational and professional success, regardless of the obstacles strewn in the path. For

many, this has proved to offer the beginnings of a way out: a steadily increasing proportion have begun to emerge from the educational system with excellent qualifications, and have begun to climb the ladder of professional advancement. However it is also a route riddled with contradictions: not only are they required to coconut themselves in order to advance, but they also regularly encounter glass ceilings (Ballard and Parveen 2008). In the face of all this a significant proportion of young Muslims, and especially young men, have begun to take the view that the uphill struggle for recognition and success is simply not worth the candle. Several current phenomena serve to highlight these developments.

In the first place it is striking that despite the disadvantages of gender that they face, no less within the ethnic colony than outside it, in proportional terms young Muslim women are currently achieving a greater degree of educational and professional success than their male counterparts – even if they are simultaneously much more likely to publicly assert their distinctiveness by routinely wearing a headscarf. Similarly, and rather more quietly, they an ever increasing number have begun to avoid state prescribed institutional practices. Hence, for example, they begun to eschew formally registered marriages in favour of legally unrecognised *nikah* and to rely on equally unrecognised *shari'ah* based procedures for implementing divorce in a manner which is both inspired and legitimised by those of *Salafi* persuasion. However if young Muslim women have begun to display a marked propensity for success, whilst simultaneously emphasising their distinctiveness, given their widespread adoption the *hijab*, all too many of their male counterparts have begun to display an alarming tendency to move in the opposite direction, sliding through casual employment into drug addiction, and on into criminal activity of one form or another as a means of supporting their habit – much to the horror of their parents. In doing so, such young men relatively rarely exploit members of their own community. Rather they are much more likely prey in one way or another on the *ghore* inhabitants of the surrounding social order, may well generate short term wealth, even if it almost inevitably leads to incarceration in the longer term.¹⁰

An alternative future?

During the course of the past two decades well-educated young Muslims across to the length and breadth of Western Europe, no less than their counterparts throughout the Islamic world have leapt with enthusiasm on *salafist* interpretations of Islam. In doing so they implicitly looked forward to the restoration of *Khilafat*, under whose auspices they could begin to organise their lives in ever greater conformity with exemplary behavioural premises of laid

out in the *Qur'an* and *hadith* – not least in the face of their deep-seated disappointment with both socialist and capitalist visions of the route towards a better future. But as we enter the twentieth century we may well yet be coming to yet another turning point. As Iran's *vilayat-e-faqih* is proving to be just as hegemonic, exploitative and indeed as morally corrupt as the Wahhabi regime in Saudi Arabia, it may well be that efforts to reform Islam on a narrowly neo-fundamentalist basis will similarly begin to run into the sands.

With this in mind one of the most significant developments in the South Asian diasporic contexts may well turn out to be the current resurgence of interest in the spiritual, and hence *panthic*, roots of their traditions. Such developments can readily be detected amongst young Muslims, as well as amongst their Hindu and Sikh counterparts. But if I am right in so thinking, just why should interest in the hitherto comprehensively marginalised *panthic* domain have begun to show signs of resurgence?

The answer, I would suggest, takes right back to the beginning, no less in theological than analytical terms. From a theological perspective it should never be forgotten that the Islamic tradition has always displayed a marked tension between those standing at its more spiritually as opposed to its more behaviourally inspired wings, between which the pendulum of popular practice has routinely swung back and forth over time, as ibn Khaldun long ago observed. Meanwhile Weber's perspicacious remark to the effect that "Academic prophecy will create only fanatical sects, but never a genuine community" may well take us to the heart of a pressing contemporary dilemma, precipitated in this case by our very commitment to disenchanted modernity.

Myopic textualism, whether focused on the *Qur'an*, the Bible, the Ramayana, the Communist manifesto, or indeed the Constitution of the United States, is a feature of all contemporary neo-fundamentalist movements. Moreover its capacity to inspire fanatical sects, as opposed to genuine communities, is only too obvious. From that perspective *jihadi* groups and Tea Parties can perhaps best be understood as millenarian movements, waiting on edge for judgement day, the Mahdi, the restoration of comprehensive personal freedom, the removal of all aliens or some other form of revolutionary salvation. But however strong the rationalised fervour generated within such *qaumically* grounded movements may become, they rarely provide any indication as to how those involved should earn their keep, raise a family, or engage in the quotidian processes of everyday life. So long as the only valid form

of meaning and purpose is to be found in apocalyptic change, as *salafis* and above all the *jihadis* insist is the only answer, , all other concerns fall by the wayside.

It follows that whilst eager young students are regularly attracted to the pursuit of such fanatical visions, few if any maintain their commitment to the cause on a life-long basis: instead they fall back into various forms of domesticity – and in doing so seek out alternative sources of meaning and purpose. But for all the reasons highlighted in this article, when young British Muslims who have enthusiastically joined the ranks of the *jihadis* whilst at University subsequently drop back into a more quotidian universe, they relatively rarely back into the established majority in any straightforward. Rather they tend to explore much more circuitous routes, such that many of them begin to explore the enchanted resources of their religio-cultural heritage – even if their experiences lead them to read and gain inspiration from those resources from a perspective which differs markedly from that deployed by their parents.

In his autobiographical account subtitled *Why I joined radical Islam in Britain, and why I left*, Ed Hussain (2007) provides an insightful account of his many adventures during the course of his own personal journey along just a route, during which rediscovers, amongst other things, the enchanted universe to which his grandfather had introduced him as a child. Putting the sterility of neo-fundamentalism behind him, the closing paragraphs of his book celebrate his rediscovery of meaning and purpose in the Sufi tradition, the *panthic* domain which has long been the lifeblood of Islamic spirituality:

In gatherings remembering the Prophet's birthday, or *mawlid*, replete with metaphysical meanings, they lead lovers of the Prophet in song and emulate the Beloved's exemplary conduct. *Mawlid* gatherings are a highlight of the Muslim cultural calendar across the Muslim world, but are of no significance to Islamists.

Love and attachment to the Prophet is at the heart of a *mawlid* gathering, not the scriptural rigidity and mental paralysis of literalism. For me, the underlying scholarly methodology that endorses the celebration of the Prophet's birthday signifies a more tolerant, inclusive, flexible approach both to scripture and to life.

Without doubt, a British Islam is emerging. It remains to be seen whether it will be in harmony with the world in which it finds itself, or if it rejects and repels it. The direction we take at this critical juncture will determine the type of Islam we bequeath to future generations. The future of Islam is being shaped now (Husain 2007: 285-6).

Yet in contemplating the undoubted significance of these more spiritually-oriented *panthic* developments, which are by no means exclusive to Muslims (or even to South Asians), the force, and the consequences, of neo-fundamentalist developments cannot be overlooked.

Insofar as such initiatives are *qaumic* in character, the objective of such forms mobilisation to is invariably to confront rival and threatening alters of some kind, especially when those alters are also mobilising in *qaumic* terms. The subcontinent in general, and Punjab in particular, is no stranger to such processes of mutual mobilisation (Ballard 1993), which have since been carried over into the UK. But to assume that such forms of mobilisation are a uniquely South Asian phenomenon is to miss the elephant in the room.

In conclusion

Long before Muslims began to establish significant bridgeheads in the United Kingdom, it was the dreaded ‘Papists’ who were regarded as the principal threat to Britain’s, and especially England’s, condition of Protestant integrity; the consequent fantasy that Catholics were secretly planning a seditious take-over of the jurisdiction was strongly reinforced when Irish migrants from ‘across the water’ began to establish thriving ethnic colonies in every major British city during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Ethnic polarisation across the Catholic/Protestant divide was intense in every major industrial city. It follows that the current salience of Islamophobia is anything but unprecedented. But whilst members of the Muslim minority currently occupy a structural similar position which is very similar to that of their Irish predecessors, logic of the antipathy towards them is subtly different, since it is no longer driven by evangelically-minded Protestants. Hence even though popular hostility towards the Muslim minority is frequently articulated in terms of the threat they allegedly offer to ‘Europe’s Christian heritage’, such sentiments gain little if any institutional support from the Church; rather one of the strongest ideological driving forces behind current developments is provided a host of secularly minded, and often feminist, post-Christian militants who form the spearhead of radical but by now thoroughly disenchanting *qaum*.

The dialectics of this process of polarisation have been massively reinforced in the aftermath of 9/11, such that Muslims of all persuasions now routinely find themselves required to defend the evils of stoning, hand-chopping and veiling – and of course of suicide bombing – by Euro-American interlocutors of all sorts; and as Mohsin Hamid argues in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, what option do those subjected to such an onslaught have but to close ranks in self-defence? But in the light of his arguments it should never be forgotten that *qaumic* mobilisation is rarely, if ever, a one-way process: rather it is an open invitation to those against whom mobilisation is directed to respond in an equally *qaumic* form of counter-mobilisation.

There are two prerequisite for the emergence of dialectic processes of this kind: first that those on opposite sides of a potential disjunction should differ in terms of wealth, power and status; and second that those on either side have access to – or failing that find the wherewithal to construct – rival ideological frameworks around which to organise themselves in *qaumic* terms. But whilst religious ideologies in one form or another have often provided the foundation for such processes of *qaumic* mobilisation, especially in European contexts, the Euro-American proclivity for engaging in *qaumic* mobilisation on this basis has clearly survived its disenchantment, since religious alters – and especially Muslims – currently find themselves equally rabid forms of *qaumic* practice, this time articulated and justified on the grounds of secular ‘rationality in our increasingly disenchanted world. As Max Weber rightly predicted, the consequences of these developments – whose roots are no less deeply rooted in the premises of the European enlightenment than in the Protestant reformation – are proving to be deeply destructive, no less in Euro-American than in Islamic contexts.

Moreover if the underlying issues here are ideological in character, we are only likely to be able to unwind these self-reinforcing cycles of mutual mistrust and polarisation when the Euro-American world – which still occupies a hegemonic position in the global order, most particular in comparison with *dar-ul-Islam* – begins to set its current condition of pugnaciously materialistic disenchantment to one side, no less at a global level than in innumerable more localised confrontations. If and when that occurs, we will at long last open up a more realistic prospect of unwinding the increasingly bitter ethno-religious contradictions which have become such a salient feature of the contemporary world order. A major part of that process will not only require us to abandon the hubristic assumption that Euro-American premises – including those rooted in the enlightenment – are *ipso facto* superior to all others, but also, and consequently, that we still have much to learn from those who differ. Only then will we have any prospect of moving forward into a truly a post-modern future inspired, once again, by the more ‘enchanted’ – and in that sense more value-laden – insights of our more generously minded pre-modern ancestors, as well as those of many of our more insightful but still ‘unenlightened’ contemporaries.

Footnotes

¹ Much to the irritation of turban-wearing Sikhs, who regularly find themselves mistaken for Muslims.

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- ² According to Greek mythology, Procrustes, the son of Poseidon, maintained an Inn on the sacred way between Athens and Eleusis, where he invited every passer-by to spend the night in an iron bed. Once such guests had fallen asleep he to work on them with his smith's hammer, either to stretch them to make them fit, or by amputating parts of their legs if they were too tall, because nobody ever fitted the bed exactly,
- ³ Having lived in a Hindu village in Himachal Pradesh for eighteen months carrying out fieldwork which I wrote up for my doctoral thesis at the University of Delhi in the late 1960s, I turned my attention to developments in the Punjab, and especially to the British dimension of its diaspora. In doing so I went on to conduct extensive ethnographic fieldwork in both Indian and in Pakistani Punjab, as well as within Sikh, Hindu and Muslim ethnic colonies in the UK, a process which continues to this day.
- ⁴ Those familiar with the model which I set out in my original paper entitled *Panth, Kismet, Dharm te Qaum* will note that I have since then added a fifth *samskaric* dimension to my model, for reasons which I set out in detail in subsequent paper (Ballard 2011). I make no apologies for adding additional dimensions to my models in this way, for unlike Procrustes, I much prefer to reconstruct my models in such a way as that they better comprehend the facts, rather than readjusting the facts to render them more congruent with my model. I should also emphasise that in building such models my aim is to ensure that they comfortably accommodate all-comers, regardless of their origins or directions of travel.
- ⁵ I have deployed this term (whose literal translation is mother-religion) quite deliberately, to further encourage readers to 'think outside the box', and also to suggest that the term 'mother-tongue' points to a close parallel to this phenomenon.
- ⁶ A double meaning is also implicit in this term: besides being gendered in contradistinction to *mādrī muzhub*, it also points to the Christian missionaries whose evangelical activities have had, as we shall see, a profound influence on the conceptual foundations of activities in this sphere.
- ⁷ It is worth emphasising that so long as one takes the view that 'religion' is best understood as a dynamic rather than as a static phenomenon, and as such subject to a constant process of reconstruction and reinterpretation by its users, there is nothing 'inauthentic' about such developments. Nor is it appropriate to identify such as developments novel: it is simply that the dynamics of change are invariably subject to a significant speed-up in diasporic contexts.
- ⁸ It is worth noting that such developments are by no means unique to the diaspora. Similar developments have also occurred amongst upwardly mobile students, and most especially amongst those studying engineering, medicine and science, throughout the Islamic world.
- ⁹ Lest I should be mistaken, I should emphasise once again that *mādrī muzhub* is no less salient a feature of popular practice amongst Sikhs and Hindus than amongst Muslims: indeed they not infrequently overlap and intersect, especially when it comes to the diagnosis of otherwise inexplicable disasters.

¹⁰ Home Office Statistics show that the number of Muslims in British prisons has risen rapidly in recent years, from 3,681 in 1997 to 10,437 in 2010.

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