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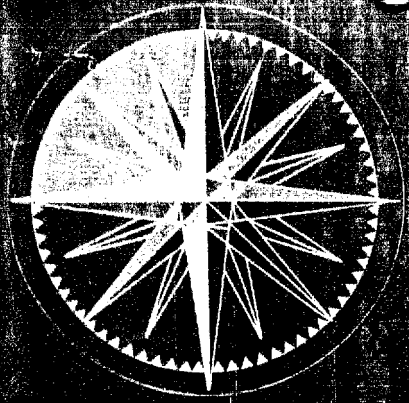
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# SPECIAL REPORT

HINDU-MUSLIM COMMUNALISM IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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## HINDU-MUSLIM COMMUNALISM IN THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Seventeen years after the creation of the independent states of India and Pakistan, relations between the Hindu and Muslim communities of South Asia remain sorely strained. There is little hope of improvement in the immediate future. The recent resurgence of communal violence--which originated in political difficulties in Indian-held Kashmir but quickly spread to both Indian and Pakistani portions of Bengal, more than a thousand miles away--indicates that communalism still is one of the major social and political plagues of the subcontinent.

Over the years, South Asian communalism has taken on an international aspect, since the multitude of unresolved difficulties between the avowedly Muslim state of Pakistan and the predominantly Hindu state of India--the most glaring of which is the Kashmir dispute--are essentially communal in origin and have immediate impact on communal relations inside each country. Conventional diplomacy has not eased these international strains, and each time one of the international sores is rubbed, the old fears, suspicions, and bitter memories are revived. These in turn generate further incidents and domestic pressures which serve to limit further the freedom of maneuver of the two governments.

### Communal Background

The Hindu and Muslim communities have not always been at daggers drawn. During the ten centuries since the first Muslims appeared in South Asia, there have been periods when relations between Hindus and Muslims seemed good. These periods often have been those in which society itself seemed stable and social change was imperceptible. The sense during those periods that social distinctions and discriminations were unalterable served to keep a lid on tensions between the

communities. On the other hand, periods of ferment and change have released communal passions.

The Indian subcontinent has been going through such a period of intense ferment since the turn of the century. In part this results from the general assault on the cultural institutions of both communities by Western ideas, institutions, and values. Of particular importance, however, was the development of an independence movement, most of whose leaders espoused the Western egalitarian concept of "one-man-one-vote."

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Indian Muslims were quick to grasp that they would, under such a system, be relegated to the status of a permanent electoral minority. As early as 1909, they pressed the British into accepting the idea of separate electorates, in which Muslim candidates would be elected by Muslim voters to seats specifically reserved for Muslims. The door was opened; recognition of Muslims as a separate political entity

[redacted] paved the way for the acceptance nearly forty years--and hundreds of communal riots--later of the proposition that India's Hindus and Muslims in fact constituted "two nations" rather than one.

Present Status of  
Minority Communities

Present-day India has about 50 million Muslims, a little over ten percent of the total population. Minority status statistically is not a new experience for Muslims in India. However, the original Muslims

[redacted] established themselves at the top of the social scale and made liberal use of the Hindu talents for commerce and administration that they found available.

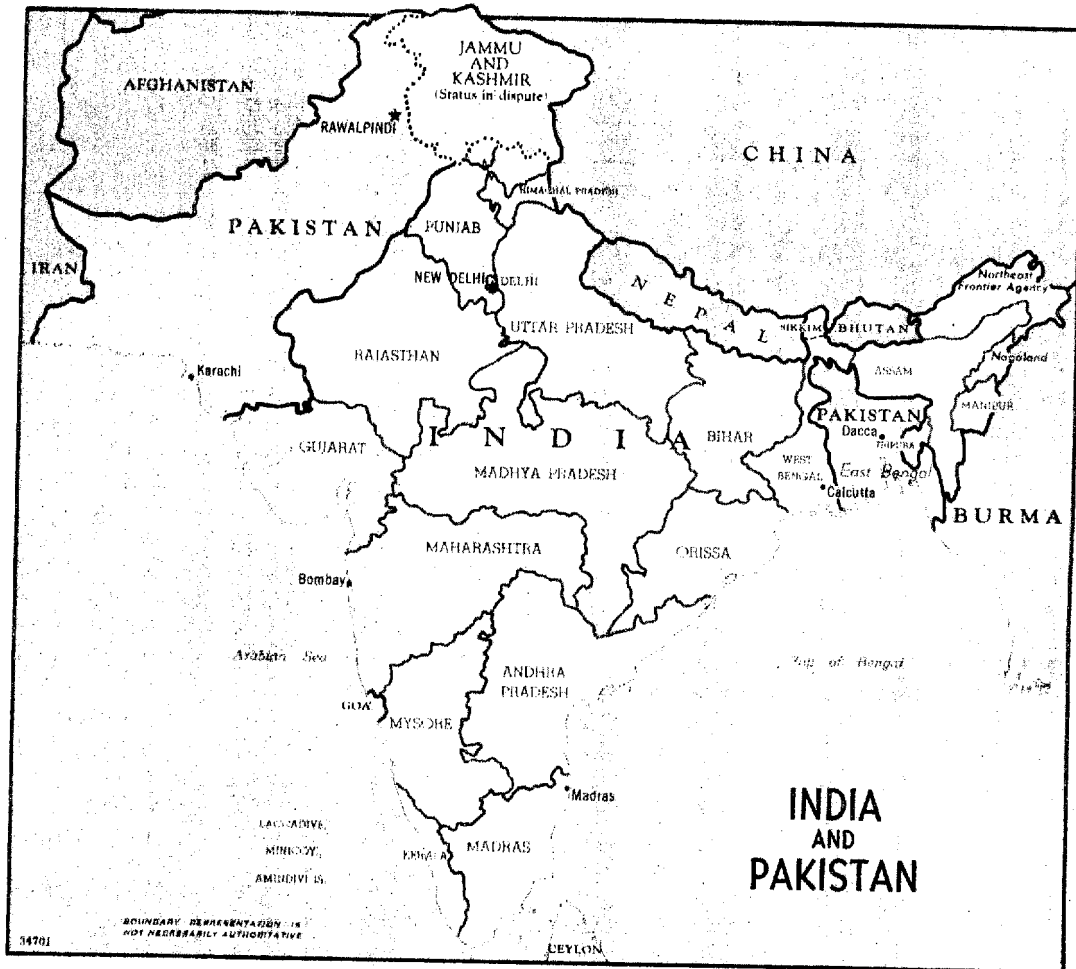
Now, however, after a long slide, the Muslims in India are at the bottom of the ladder. The best of their leaders emigrated to Pakistan in 1947 and,

in many instances, the Muslims still in India retain in Hindu eyes the relatively low caste stigma they had before their ancestors were converted to Islam. Differences in their religious customs, their marriage rites, and their clothing and eating habits continue to set them obviously and sharply apart from the Hindu community. Moreover, long-standing economic and educational disparities in favor of Hindus, reinforced by 17 years of insidious, albeit illegal, discrimination on almost all matters affecting their way of life have left Indian Muslims less able to cope with their general environment than their Hindu neighbors.

In Pakistan the Hindu minority is confined to East Pakistan (East Bengal). Here prevails what is in effect the counterpart of the situation in India. East Pakistan's Hindus--about ten million strong (10 percent of the country as a whole, but 20 percent of East Pakistan)--are at the bottom of the social ladder and find the rungs upward generally barred to them. Their position in fact is probably even worse than that of the Muslims in India, if only because of the poverty of East Bengal and because in Pakistan, which makes no claim to the secularism officially espoused by India, the cards appear more openly and unalterably stacked against them.

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Kashmir and the Relic

In India most public questions take on some communal overtones, whether they involve the distribution of public funds or the creation of job opportunities or the balancing of electoral tickets. On some issues, however, the communal association may be only remote, at least initially. Such was the case recently in Indian-held Kashmir where the mysterious theft of a much revered Islamic relic--purportedly a hair from the head of the Prophet--

triggered widespread riots. The local rioting was not essentially communal. Except by Pakistan, no Hindu complicity in the act was alleged; Hindus and Sikhs, in a characteristic display of reverence for things deemed holy, joined Muslims in mourning the loss; and the violence that shook the capital city of Srinagar was intra-Muslim, directed mainly at the discredited political machine of former Kashmiri Prime Minister Bakshi Ghulam Muhammad.

Yet because the Kashmir problem is basically an extension

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of the unresolved communal problem throughout the subcontinent, any serious threat to stability there touches on sensitive communal nerve endings elsewhere. The state population is predominantly Muslim, but most of it has been under Indian control since 1948 when the then ruling Hindu maharaja acceded to India. For New Delhi, the continuation of Indian rule in Muslim Srinagar has an importance which goes beyond Kashmir's strategic location. It reinforces the principle that India is not a Hindu, but a secular state and denies the validity of the concept that Hindus and Muslims are "two nations." Any gain for the "two-nation" idea would have serious implications not only for simply maintaining law and order but, from a purely political point of view, for preserving peaceful Hindu co-existence with Indian citizens of the Muslim or any other non-Hindu community.

For Pakistan, continued Indian control of the bulk of Kashmir is a denial of the idea which is the very basis for Pakistani's separate existence. Pakistan, therefore, has always stressed the point that Indian authority in Kashmir is Hindu authority resting solely on Hindu bayonets. Any instability on the Indian side, whatever its origin, thus is susceptible of exploitation by Pakistan along communal lines.

#### Repercussions in Bengal

Subsequent developments in Bengal emphasize the sensitive-

ness of the communal implications inherent in the Kashmir dispute and the ease with which communal violence can erupt. Demonstrations in East Pakistan, called a week later to protest the theft of the relic, quickly developed into anti-Hindu violence. The Pakistani authorities acted to suppress it, but not before the communal fever, carried by press and refugee accounts, had swept across the border into the Calcutta area of India. Several days of severe rioting and pillage occurred in Calcutta and surrounding areas of West Bengal. The Indian authorities' initial application of force was neither quick nor substantial enough to contain the disorders. Only the imposition of near-martial law and the arrival on the scene of several thousand troops brought the situation under control.

No sooner had the rioting subsided in Calcutta, however, than new and more widespread violence erupted in East Pakistan, fanned again by refugee accounts of what had happened on the Indian side. This time the destruction was far greater than that caused by the previous outbreaks, and the Pakistani Government had to make a major effort to prevent these disturbances from dwarfing the Calcutta affair.

The potential for renewed violence in Bengal remains high. The over-all death toll probably exceeded a thousand; other thousands have been injured, made

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homeless or destitute. Still others in large numbers fled across the border--Hindus to India, Muslims to East Pakistan. Both governments are assisting their minority communities to re-establish themselves. New Delhi, while hoping to avoid encouraging any mass exodus of Hindus from East Pakistan, has responded to Bengali pressure to liberalize somewhat the immigration process for Hindus who desire to move to India.

An additional complication on both sides, but especially in the Calcutta area, is the economic turn the rioting took. Previous outbreaks of communal violence in Calcutta--even the massive riots of the late 1940s--had taken the form mainly of personal attacks. In recent disorders, the main targets of the roving mobs were the dwellings and shops rather than the persons of the minority community.

In the Calcutta area this reflects the large element of hooliganism which pervaded the disorders. Hoodlums off the streets--"goondas" available to the highest bidder--obviously exploited the disorders for their own gain and pleasure; they also acted as agents for unscrupulous landlords seeking to dislodge Muslim tenants and for such extremist right-wing Hindu parties as the Bharatiya Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha.

#### Communal Parties and Prospects

Political parties organized on communal lines continue to flourish in some parts of India and will continue to exploit such violence as took place in Calcutta. Such parties, however, do not have widespread influence throughout the subcontinent despite the depth of Hindu-Muslim feeling.

In Pakistan there is little future for communal parties; nor are there any issues which they can meaningfully exploit. In West Pakistan, where there are few Hindus, the only parties that could function would be Muslim oriented, but the communal issues they could work with are primarily ones involving Pakistan's relations with India, and on these there is a general consensus. Pakistan's party of independence continues to have considerable influence, not as the communal party which sought a separate state for India's Muslims, but rather as the rejuvenated vehicle of Ayub Khan's rule.

The only place where Hindu parties could function meaningfully would be in East Pakistan, but the martial law period and the continuing close rein which the national and provincial governments keep on potential troublemakers in East Pakistan has to a considerable degree prevented Hindus from acting as a political bloc.

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In India, ruled since independence by Jawaharlal Nehru's secular and still overwhelmingly predominate Congress Party, the secular stance of the government has left an area open to exploitation by communal parties. The Muslim League continues to function in some areas, although except in the south Indian state of Kerala, its influence is minimal. Its presence in Kerala, however, adds one more element to the complex mix of caste and communal considerations which complicate that state's political situation. Anti-Muslim feeling among the Congress Party's local organization and the secular dicta of Congress' national organs--proscribing cooperation with communal parties--are a major factor in the continuing divisions in the non-Communist camp in Kerala in the face of a renewed Communist drive for a return to power there in the next elections.

The Hindu communal parties are considerably stronger, especially in north India where India's Hindus and Muslims live in closest proximity. Both the Jan Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha are outgrowths of the Hindu renaissance of the second half of the 19th century--a reaction to the imposition of Western culture--and both are staunch defenders of traditional Hindu values and

institutions. Despite recent efforts by some younger elements in the Jan Sangh leadership to broaden the base of the party's support by toning down the anti-Muslim character of the party's program, both parties are generally anti-Muslim in their activities and attitudes.

Jan Sangh is much the stronger of the two, running well in several states in the 1962 elections and forming the opposition in the state assembly of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh. Regional considerations, however, plus the fact that Hinduism itself is extremely diverse, have prevented even the well-organized Jan Sangh from capitalizing fully on the extent of communal feeling among India's masses. It is doubtful that any one party could capture national power on a communal platform, although it is equally true that each party, however secular its ideological bent, exploits the communal question in its day-to-day operations--Congress Party minions included.

In fact, it has been Nehru's immense personal prestige and his commitment to a secular state that have been the principal counterweight to more conservative sentiment within his own party on

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communal matters. However well motivated Nehru's successors are on this score, they will be more identifiably Hindu in their demeanor and their emphasis on secularism will carry considerably less weight. It will be up to them to reassure India's Muslims that Congress government will not, in the post-Nehru period, be transformed into a Hindu government, while making it clear to Hindu extremists in the Congress itself as well as in the communal parties that excesses will not be allowed.

Of special importance in this regard will be the neces-

sity for finding a workable alternative to the present political vacuum in Indian-held Kashmir. An over-all solution of Indo-Pakistani aspects of the Kashmir problem is probably no more possible in the present uncertain period of Nehru's convalescence than it was when he was healthy, but a movement toward more internal autonomy for the Indian-held portion seems inevitable. Whatever develops, every Indian leader involved in the Kashmir problem will have the communal considerations, limitations, and potential repercussions foremost in his mind.

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