The mainstream Islamic movements have or are interested in integrating into nation-state politics; it is the new brand of neo-fundamentalists or radical fundamentalists who embody the crisis of the nation-state. They are squeezed between intra-state solidarities and globalisation. The state level is bypassed or ignored. For example, the Taliban does not care about the state—they even downgraded Afghanistan by changing the official denomination of an “Islamic state” to an “Emirate”. In fact, this new brand of supranational radical fundamentalism is more a product of contemporary globalisation than of the Islamic past. Using two international languages (English and Arabic), travelling easily by air, communicating through the Internet and cellular phones, they think of themselves as “Muslims” and not as citizens of a specific country.¹

Away from the glare of the international media, a holy war, in which Islamic Radicalism plays an increasingly important part, has raged in the Kashmir Valley. This Valley is part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, incorporated into the state of India and situated in the far north of the country. In a campaign reminiscent of those waged in Vietnam or Afghanistan, mujahideen (“holy warriors”) face one of the largest fighting forces in the world, the 400,000 troops of the Indian military. The mujahideen drawn from countries throughout the Middle East and elsewhere have gained skills in fighting in conflicts in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Chechnya, Algeria and Bosnia. To counterbalance the disproportionate strength of the Indian Army, they employ guerrilla warfare and violence.²

The Origin of the Kashmir Conflict

Kashmir was one of the loose ends left dangling when the British Empire unravelled. At the time of the 1947 partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, more than 560 princely states had to join one of the two new nations. In most cases geography and religion made the decision simple, but the State of Jammu and Kashmir, a colonial-era patchwork, had a Muslim majority populace and a Hindu ruler. Hoping for independence from India and Pakistan, Maharaja Hari Singh delayed choosing sides for weeks—until he was shaken from his fantasy by an invasion of Pashtun tribesmen. Helpless to oppose them, Hari Singh joined the Indian Union and requested for help. Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, airlifted Indian troops to the region and drove the invaders back to what is now the Line of Control, the de facto border between the two countries. The skirmish was referred to the United Nations and under its terms of 1948, Pakistan was to withdraw its forces from what is now called Azad (free) Kashmir, whereupon India would reduce its troops to a bare minimum. An internationally monitored plebiscite would then determine which nation Kashmir would join. None of it ever happened.³ Both Pakistan and Free Kashmir (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) have encouraged Kashmir’s resistance to Indian rule, and India and Pakistan have gone to war over Kashmir in 1965 and again in 1971. India has consistently blamed Pakistan for perpetuating violence while Pakistan has drawn attention to the shortcomings of the Indian Government, notably in the manipulation of elections and failure to implement pledges to respect Muslim Kashmiri cultural identity. In the 1970s and 1980s the international environment, and in particular the growth of radical fundamentalism, also favoured the growth of insurgency in Kashmir.

From Politics to Violence

India got a sniff of the danger that Islamic Fundamental Radicalism posed as early as 1966 when the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) emerged. In a span of one year, the JKLF hijacked an aircraft from Kashmir to Pakistan, killed a police officer in Kashmir and murdered an Indian diplomat in Britain. The group, however, failed to provoke a popular uprising.⁴ A foundation

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for a continuous radical approach was laid by
1977, in Pakistan, when General Zia-ul-Haq
overthrew Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.
After assuming power he was confronted with
some domestic resistance against his regime, which
lacked popular support. To confront the resistance
he found it politically expedient to use Islam to
validate his regime. In this endeavour he found
a willing ally in the Jamaat-e-Islami, an extremist
Sunnī religious party founded way back in 1941.
He encouraged Afghan Islamist groups based in
Pakistan such as the Hezb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin
Hekmatyar to launch resistance against the Soviet
ally, the People’s Democratic Party. Knowing the
strong American opposition to the expansion of
the Soviet empire during the Cold War, General
Zia intelligently manoeuvred to entice the United
States.  Pakistan thus began a process of
establishing military camps to train militant—a
process which continues to this day. These camps
attracted many Islamic militants from West Asia,
Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and other Muslim
countries. Sponsoring radical elements to support
secessionist groups in India has been part of
Pakistan’s policy for a long time. From 1985
onwards, this policy took a more concrete shape
when Pakistan started training Sikh and Kashmiri
militants together in their military camps. They
were trained to operate in Indian Kashmir. The
first incident of a cohesive radical threat from
Pakistan emerged in February 1992 when
thousands of supporters, many of them members
of the Jamaat-e-Islami led by Amanullah Khan,
marched towards Indian controlled Kashmir with
frenzied cries of: “It’s not important who leads,
but we hope that we will get the first Indian
bullet.” Another war was just averted after
Pakistani Police successfully fired and stopped
the separatists trying to cross the border.
The movement, launched by the JKL for demanding
independence, was hijacked by the Inter Services
Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and transformed into
a campaign of terror. Gradually the movement
was taken over by the Pakistan-sponsored radical
Islamist groups making terrorism, insurgency and
ethnic cleansing their main weapons. By 1990,
Pakistan had trained nearly 30 militant groups to
operate inside Indian Kashmir. Small groups like
the ‘Allah Tigers’ and ‘Al Umar’ were used for
terrorising the local population of the Kashmir
Valley and forcing them to accept rigid Wahhabi
codes of conduct. They forcibly closed down
cinema theatres, liquor shops, and attacked
Christian-run schools.  Hijab (veil) and rigid dress
codes were forced on women. An obsessive desire
among Wahabis to terrorise women could neither
be easily understood nor rationalised.  By 1991,
the insurgency had engulfed the rural area around
Srinagar, and by 1993, the insurgents were able to
establish liberated zones in some built-up areas.
The insurgency had so far been confined to the Kashmir Valley, but in 1994, the mujahideen
moved into Jammu. Here the insurgents used new
tactics, operating out of the sparsely populated
mountain forests. A new organisation, Ikhwan-
ul-Muslimeen (with similar aims and names as
that of its Egyptian counterpart), attacked the
moderate Sufi-Islamic culture of Kashmir with
extraordinary vehemence. The Hizb-i-Islami and
its various subgroups such as Nassir-ul-Islam
and Jamaat-e-Mujahideen were put in charge to
intensify the campaign of terror. To present this
force as an indigenous product, the name of a
Jammu based organisation also called Janbaz-
Mujahideen was adopted. The best-trained and
most audacious terrorist groups in the early
nineties were the Hizb-i-Islami and Harkat-ul-
Jehad. They infiltrated into Indian Kashmir to
confront the security forces.

Away from Kashmir, in 1993, the Islamic
radicals gained worldwide attention by
conducting a series of blasts across Bombay, now
Mumbai, the commercial capital in the west of
India. The Mumbai Blasts’, as these are famously
referred to now, shocked the entire country and
threatened its secular fabric. It was another
significant matter that the Islamic Fundamentalists
targeted the skyscrapers of Mumbai, the very
base of the Shiv Sena, Vishwa Hindu Parishad,
Bajrang Dal and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.
Pakistan’s participation and support for the
shocking serial blasts cannot be better proved
than the presence of Tiger Memmon and Dawood
Ibrahim, believed to be masterminds of the attack,
in Pakistan. The last decade of the twentieth
century has witnessed the most violent phase of
terror meticulously planned and executed by these
mujahideen in India. While the 1990s saw sporadic
incidents of terror mostly restricted to the Punjab
and Kashmir area, violence spread rapidly to
other parts—the North-East, Himachal Pradesh,
Utar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and
even the Capital New Delhi. Communist activity
in Telangana, Naga, Meitei activities, Mizos and
tribals of Tripura, United Liberation Front of
Assam (ULFA) and Bodos in the other North-East
regions have over the years received active moral and financial support from these fundamental and radical groups. Kashmir witnessed the worst of radical violence as terrorist groups virtually ruled the congested urban areas of all the major towns of the Valley. They ordered bandhs and strikes, which brought life to a standstill and created fear. ISI agents had by now penetrated the police and other key elements of the government. Their aim of morally and physically isolating the people from the State was largely achieved. This phase took a tremendous toll of Kashmiri lives and many popular Kashmiri leaders were gunned down for not cooperating with the terrorist groups. From 1992-1994, the mujahideen raided over 13 police stations, taking away more than 100 weapons, radio sets and other supplies. Government stores lost more than 5000 detonators and 8000 gelatin rods to the mujahideen. The international community largely ignored the situation in Kashmir in spite of such ghastly attacks. If the first half (1991-1996) of the decade saw Islamic Radicalism at its worst, the second half (1996-1998) witnessed the international community, especially the United States, wake up to the horrors of Radical Fundamentalism. The abduction of foreign tourists had made the United States realise the follies of supporting Pakistan and abetting these radical groups. With the threat of the Soviet Union absent after its disintegration, Washington felt that the need for Pakistan and its radical fundamentalist groups was not required. As Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalran noted, the disappearance of the Soviet Union from the global strategic framework created the necessity for India to engage with the West and the United States in a more effective manner. The economic liberalisation allowed greater interaction between the Indian and American business communities. India’s rapidly expanding economy, the concurrent growth of India’s military capability and the emergence of an increasingly vocal Indian diaspora coaxed the US into paying greater attention to India.

As John Elliot stated, not only did Bill Clinton repeatedly praise India’s democracy, he also said that he knew it must be difficult to be ‘bordered by nations whose governments reject democracy’. As if that was not enough, he welcomed ‘India’s leadership in the region and the world’. A joint US-India vision statement said the two countries were ‘partners in peace’ with ‘a common interest in and complementary responsibility for ensuring regional peace and international security’.

President Bill Clinton’s second term saw the United States do a turn-around in its South Asian policy. It became sympathetic towards an Indian cause and stopped financial and military help to the radical fundamentalist groups. This saw a significant decrease in violence especially in Jammu and Kashmir. It can be assumed that although this period also saw political instability in India, the Indian governments committed the cardinal mistake of relaxing their guard in Kashmir as far as insurgency and violence was concerned.

**The Kargil War of 1999**

As it unfolded, it was only a peaceful lull before the storm. The radical groups were taking advantage of India’s callousness in the border. In the absence of high alert and vigil, militants under the cover of snow-capped peaks infiltrated the Line of Control and set up bunkers and camps in Dras and Kargil sectors even seizing the strategic Tiger Hills. These events ultimately led to the Kargil war, when the Indian Army resorted to air raids to push back the infiltrators. Although the war ended with an Indian victory, militants struck back with vengeance when they carried out the audacious hijacking of an Indian Airlines aircraft on December 26 of the same year. Maulana Masood Azhar, one of the three hard core militants released during the Kandahar hijacking, soon started the Jaish-e-Mohammad. It went a step ahead of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, the group that had introduced *fidayeen* missions in the Valley, by having human bombs play a role in their operations. The suicide attacks in fact represented the height of fanaticism, as these went against the strict prohibition of suicide in Islam. In May 2000 a 17-year-old school boy drove an explosive-laden car into the headquarters of the Army at Badamibagh. A few days later another foreign militant blew an explosive-laden vehicle he was sneaking inside a camp. Although the year 2000 did not see any major disaster as far as impact was concerned, there was a steady flow of violence in the Valley. Even if insurgency in Kashmir is familiar to everyone most are unaware that it is neither the largest nor the most threatening—the largest being the ISI backed ULFA in Assam. This indeed is a matter of concern for the Indian Government to consider and react.

**September 11 and December 13, 2001**

The sensational attack on the World Trade Center and pentagon in the United States by Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda firmly put radical fundamentalism on the world stage. In spite of India shouting hoarse to the threat radical
Fundamentalists posed, the world especially the United States no doubt awoke to it only after the September 11 attacks. As the United States retaliated by bombing Afghanistan, India was once again a victim of a horrific attack on the Indian Parliament. Although the attack failed, the wheel had turned full circle with the attack on the very symbol of Indian democracy. As Kanti Bajpai, a well-known academician, noted,

Muslim Fundamentalists seem to be fighting a battle among themselves—It seems the Indians are interfering in their agenda.18

The Ayodhya Quagmire

Quite often, the role of religion in the matter of maintaining peace and inter-religious harmony in many countries is considered to be rather a negative one. As Jonathan Swift pertinently pointed out,

people seemed to have enough religion just to hate each other, but not enough to make the people love one another.

While making an analytical study of the irony and paradox of this situation, well-known thinker Colton, referring to the apathy of the people concerned, had observed:

People love to write for their religion, fight for their religion and even die for their religion. They in fact do anything but live for their religion!

Unfortunately, even India, which from time immemorial has been noted for maintaining a unique record of “unity in diversity” based on its ancient philosophy of “Sarva Dharma Samabhav” (respect of all religions), has been adversely affected. General Mir Baqi constructed the Babri Masjid during the sixteenth century, on behalf of the Mughal emperor Babar. The contemporary lay version of how the Babri Masjid got constructed, on one of Hinduism’s most hallowed sites is, of course, that Babar personally instigated the demolition of a Hindu temple situated on the Ram Janmabhoomi after 1526 ad had it replaced with a mosque to celebrate the triumph of Islam over Hinduism. But another version of the Masjid’s origins is that it grew out of a visit that Babar made to Ayodhya in 1528 to pay his respects to a famous fakir, Quazal Abbas Qalandar, who resided there. According to historical accounts, Babar was reluctant to do so, but the fakir prevailed on him and his wish was carried out. If there is any validity of the latter version, then it is apparent that even in the sixteenth century, the first Mughal ruler foresaw the political implications of such a deed.19 Needless to state, Babar was just a Mughal King and as wrongly imagined, was neither an Islamic missionary, nor a Muslim “hero”. It is also a gross misinterpretation of historical facts to state that Muslims in India owed their loyalty to Babar and behaved like his progeny while showing their love and regard for the mosque built in his name at Ayodhya. Regarding Shri Ram, the hero of the ancient epic Ramayana and considered a Hindu God, it would not be correct for anyone to think he belongs to any one particular community. As such it was absurd to draw any comparison between Lord Ram and Babar, and there was absolutely no sense in linking the name of either to the matter.20

Serious trouble erupted in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 when kar sevaks of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad led a frenzied assault on the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, which resulted in its total destruction. It was supported by a variety of groups that espoused the transformation of India into a Hindu-dominated ethno-religious state. The most prominent of these were the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its current manifestation, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It is unfortunate that a matter of religious nature had been allowed to assume political overtones. Everyone who is knowledgeable about the complex inter-relationship between religion and politics in India realised at that time, the moment the Babri Masjid crashed to the ground, a fundamental change had taken place in this relationship. Not only in the modern era, but in the colonial period also, Muslim rulers—despite their fanatical militancy during Islam’s expansionist phase—learned that their powerful onslaughts could bend Hinduism, but not break it.21 In many ways, the Babri Masjid was from its inception emblematic of the dilemmas that confronted attempts to create and maintain systems of government, which could accommodate the social, cultural and religious diversity that all Indian state systems inevitably encompassed. Until the 1992 event, government responses to confrontations between Hindus and Muslims over the site were usually attempts to bring about compromises that would prevent violence and achieve inter-communal reconciliation.22 The 1992 demolition proved beyond doubt that the government’s dilly-dallying in arriving at an amicable solution had backfired badly. Although Muslims were a minority in the country, they were in larger proportion in India than in neighbouring Muslim dominated Pakistan. In fact
India with its Muslim minority population is the second largest Muslim country in the world after Indonesia. This explains the sensitivity of such a controversy, which has grown into a major disaster, staring in the face of every Indian and threatening the peaceful coexistence of Hindus with Muslims. The Muslims were quick to form the Babri Masjid Action Committee, which declared that there would be no compromise about their plan to rebuild their mosque at the disputed site. Unprecedented violence followed. India, the world’s largest democracy, now not only had to fight external threats in Kashmir and the North-East but also the Ayodhya inspired fundamentalists inside the country. A menace that began with an obsession to wrest away Kashmir has slowly but surely spread to other parts of India and threatened its secular existence. This could easily lead to similar fanatical movements within India. And this in the end could prove to be the biggest challenge it might face in its fight for survival.

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