

Scope of Accommodation of Minorities in India:

A Reappraisal of the ‘Nehru Era’

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Abstract: India has embarked on a unique path in its political and institutional development. India devised special arrangements for minorities when drafting its Constitution, following its independence in 1947. Attuned to the fact that India’s path is distinct from that of the West, this research focuses on the difficulties facing Indian Muslims. Muslims had to compromise on their claims of political rights in order to orient themselves in newly arising political circumstances. The debates around the reservation of seats for minorities in the Constituent Assembly revealed how Indian Muslims came to the conclusion to surrender any form of them, entrusting their protection to the actions of national leaders. Assurances that Jawaharlal Nehru gave might have facilitated Muslim politicians to reach such a conclusion. Yet, Nehru’s vision was limited in the face of conservatism within and outside the Indian National Congress.

Keywords: India, Accommodation, Minorities, Muslims, Secularism

1 Introduction

The increase in the number of democratic states has vitalised scholarly debate on how the state should regard the voices of minorities and diversity within the polity. The treatment of minorities has had special meaning in the post-colonial states, because newly emerging democracies are divided societies within their boundaries. These are societies where the democratic system is unfit due to the lack of social homogeneity. Against this background, the exploration of the mechanisms to reconcile the democratic system with diversity has been underway since the 1990s (Lijphart 1991; 2004).

Viewed amongst this contemporary development, India has embarked on a unique path in its political and institutional development. India devised special arrangements for minorities when drafting its Constitution, following its independence in 1947. The country pursued this path long before scholars and policy makers began studies to analyse the adequacy of a sort of ‘power-sharing’ mechanism for divided societies in recent years.

Attuned to the fact that India’s path is distinct from that of the West, this research focuses on the difficulties facing Indian Muslims. It also sheds light on the different tracks of political advancement of two

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potentially disadvantaged groups in India: Muslims and the Scheduled Castes (SC). The two groups are similar in that they are both dispersed across India, and thus cannot claim territorial autonomy, but in political competition, their performances contrast. The SC, a historically discriminated against group, has developed into an active and assertive political force, assuming power at state and regional levels in the 1990s (Pai 2013). On the other hand, many scholars and public reports point out the lack of Muslim presence in legislatures and civil services that has continued to date, a continuation of the marginalisation of the community dating back to the 1950s. The divergence between the two groups has been widening rapidly since the 1980s. Many view the 1980s as a transitional phase in contemporary Indian history. This period saw a mass influx into political competition. The gradual decline of the Indian National Congress (hereafter referred to as the Congress), one of India's major political parties, since the 1960s became evident even at the national level, providing room for the political advancement of new parties, in particular, parties with support bases in specific regions or with caste orientation (Yadav 1999).

What are the difficulties facing Muslims and what are the reasons that they are marginalised politically and socially? As this paper illustrates, even in the Nehru era (1947-1964), often depicted as the most ideal period in the handling of diversity, Muslims had to compromise on their claims of political rights in order to orient themselves in newly arising political circumstances. In the following sections, this paper first considers the recent debate of the Muslim question and specific points of the arguments. It then tackles two questions: 1) How have Muslims adapted to the circumstances surrounding independent India? and 2) What is the hurdle inhibiting the evolution of Muslims into an assertive political force? By exploring these questions, this paper will showcase India's achievements and challenges regarding the political accommodation of Muslims.

2 Recent Debates

Many scholars argue that the marginalisation of Muslims in the political system was prompted by the total abolition of institutional privileges entitled to Muslims in the colonial era (Ansari 2006). Ever since a reform of the Indian Councils Act 1909, Muslims had secured a certain portion of seats in legislative councils through the introduction of separate electorates, and a sort of quota system in civil services introduced in the 1920s. These arrangements guaranteed at least their proportional representation in legislative and administrative bodies. However, these arrangements were not incorporated into the new Constitution, promulgated in late 1949. This change in the treatment of Muslims has generated vigorous argument among scholars, and it has been reinvigorated as a research subject in the midst of political upheaval since the 1980s.

Among the changes in the 1980s, the communalisation of politics cannot be overlooked. A party with the support of Hindu nationalist groups has grown rapidly. The Bharatiya Janata Party¹ (hereafter referred to as the BJP) has expanded rapidly its support base since the 1980s, chipping away at the Congress dominance. The

¹ The party's genesis stems from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh established in 1951. When the Jana Sangh was dissolved in 1980, the BJP was formed by the erstwhile Jana Sangh members in the same year.

rise of the BJP, under the apparent guise of Hindu nationalism, demonstrated that support for political norms such as secularism established by the Congress at the time of independence began to fall apart. Up until the late 1990s, the BJP had developed into an alternative to the Congress, expanding its support base across India. The BJP wrested support from the Congress by making the Constitution and secularism, an essential norm that underlies the Indian Constitution, targets of accusation. The BJP accused the Congress policy of being an appeasement to minorities, calling for true secularism replacing 'pseudo-secularism'. The communalisation of politics was prompted by the rise of the BJP. However, it is also unmistakable that the process was fuelled by the Congress itself (Sheth 2009). Suffering from the gradual loss of support, the Congress had begun to pander to religious majorities. The communalisation of politics also resulted in the resurgence of communal violence. With a spate of violent clashes between religious communities, the crisis of secularism was apparent (Ganguly 2003).

Despite the term 'secular' being almost absent from the Constitution, many argue that independent India was built as a secular democratic state, while the literature shows differing concerns over the concept and its bearing on the political process. Examining the Constitutional debates around the rights of religious communities, Chiriyankandath argues that secularism in India was ambiguously, rather than clearly, defined (Chiriyankandath 2000). With this nature of Indian secularism in mind, Copland problematises the Constitutional framework as potentially open to the exploitation of religious beliefs and affiliations for political purposes (Copland 2010). It gave Hindu nationalist groups a source of accusation, while tempting the Congress leaders to play the religious card to gain the support of minority groups. Meanwhile, Tejani finds a problem with the decisions made in the Constituent Assembly, drawing attention to its bearing on today's issues. For Tejani, focus is not placed on the lack of clarity around secularism or the failure to privatise religion, but on the constitutional limitation of addressing the marginality and exclusion of religious minorities. The Indian Constitution based on secularism 'precluded religious minorities from forwarding claims for equality', thrusting them into the status of 'permanent minorities' (Tejani 2013).

3 Atmosphere at the Moments of Nation-Building

Decolonisation in South Asia accompanied the partition of the Indian sub-continent. Colonial India was divided into India and Pakistan (or Hindu populated areas and Muslim populated areas). Two parties (the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League) failed to resolve the political conflict on the form of state after independence. The Congress sought a united India with religious harmony between the two major communities, Hindu and Muslim. On the other hand, the Muslim League advocated the 'two nation theory', insisting that Muslims must have their own state, i.e. Pakistan. The call for Pakistan was not fully accepted among Muslim leaders, at least when it was coined in the 1930s. However, when the transfer of power to India became a real possibility, Muslim Leaguers began to raise the concept, successfully drawing mass support. Although attempts were made to resolve the conflict, they could not settle a dispute. So, they came to the conclusion to divide the

sub-continent. Yet, the following events are evidence that this partition of the sub-continent did not put an end to the issues affecting Hindu-Muslim relations. Independent India contained over 35 million Muslims in its territory, about 10 per cent of the total population at the time (Hasan 1990). Thus, a long-time dispute concerning the treatment of Muslims has remained even after the partition.

The Cabinet Mission Plan, publicised on 16 May 1946, was a possible solution to avoid the partition and, at one time, was actually accepted by the two conflicting parties. However, this plan was not accepted unanimously among the Congress leaders. For Jawaharlal Nehru, who had replaced Maulana Azad at the helm of the Congress, the plan was undesirable on the grounds that it imagined India as a 'loose confederation' of three sections, granting certain jurisdictions to each unit under the sections. Nehru considered a strong centre to be a desirable form of government under the federal polity. On 10 July of the same year, Nehru made a decisive remark that consequently began the process toward the partition. In a press conference, he stated that the Congress would enter the Constituent Assembly 'completely unfettered by agreements and free to meet all situations as they arise', and responded to another question that 'the Congress had agreed only to participate in the Constituent Assembly and regarded itself free to change or modify the Cabinet Mission Plan as it thought best' (Azad 2009: 164-165). This remark was not kept private. These remarks drew a fierce reaction from the Muslim League, causing them to rescind their agreement to the Cabinet Mission Plan and declare that they would launch direct action to bring Pakistan into existence. Although the British government tried to mitigate the tension between the two parties and bring the Muslim League back to the negotiating table, their efforts could not shift the tide away from the partition.

The partition has resulted in harmful effects on Muslims who decided to remain in India. The birth of Pakistan caused suspicion of Muslims' loyalty to India² and produced anti-Muslim feelings. Khaliqzaman, who was 'handpicked by Jinnah to lead Muslims of India' (Noorani 2003: 5) observed 'the partition of India [had] proved positively injurious to the Muslims of India'³ (Guha 2007: 366-367). It created space for Hindu nationalist groups to become active and advocate their causes. Hindu nationalist groups started to call for the establishment of a Hindu nation in reaction to the birth of Pakistan as an Islamic state. In this setting, Nehru had to warn against communalism⁴ by the majority. For Nehru, the idea of 'Hindu raj' (The term 'raj' means rule.) was narrow-minded. That is why he insisted that every citizen of India has the right to live and call for protection from the state regardless of his religion. He also said that the government must, and will, give full protection to the Muslims, 'if they consider India as their own country and do not look to any outside agency for help' (Nehru Vol. 4: 106). Nehru explicitly stated that India would not become a Hindu state, regarding the call for the establishment of a Hindu state as a reactionary slogan (Nehru Vol. 4: 172).

Yet, anti-Muslim sentiment was not easily suppressed. The partition was followed by migrations of vast

² There was an attempt to seek out 'suspicious' Muslim civil servants. Those who had families or relatives in Pakistan were target as suspicious persons (Guha 2007: 368-370).

³ Soon after the partition, Khaliqzaman went to Pakistan and settled down there (Noorani 2003: 5; Khaliqzaman 1961).

⁴ The term 'communalism' refers to the discord and clash between Hindus and Muslims, or the movement to claim exclusive interests for a particular community.

Muslim populations, including external migration to Pakistan and internal migration within India. From 1946-1950, India experienced a massive migration of rural Muslims to cities in the face of fear, stemming from communal riots and insecurity prevailing in rural areas (Aslam 1990). Among states, Nehru had paid special attention to Uttar Pradesh (UP). In a letter to the premier G. B. Pant, he instructed that threatening and inciting Muslims to leave should be checked and proceeded against⁵ (Nehru Vol. 14(2): 267).

The partition also affected the debates in the Constituent Assembly. The partition was regarded as a result of Muslim electorates and the separatism of minorities. Thus, it resulted in an aversion to the continuation of such claims among members of the Constituent Assembly. Although the Constituent Assembly decided to adopt the reservation of seats under the joint electorates for 'minorities', including Muslims at first, there was no room for the concession of the separate electorates in independent India⁶. Eventually, even the reservation of seats under the joint electorates was fated to be put under review.

4 Orienting Themselves to the New Circumstances

The birth of Pakistan meant that Indian Muslims lost their leadership. Major political figures who commanded the Pakistan movement left India after their new home country was born. The departure of 55 Muslim Constituent Assembly members placed the remaining 28 under enormous pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to India, curtailing their negotiating power at the same time. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, former Muslim League leader and Pakistan's first Governor-General, was not motivated to give guidance to the Muslims in India, leaving them to decide their fate. The last meeting of All India Muslim League was held in Karachi on 14-15 December 1947 and it decided to split up the party organisation into two Leagues for Pakistan and India.

This decision led to the dissolution of the national political platform of Muslims in India. Muslim League members of the Constituent Assembly met in New Delhi on 29 February 1948 and decided to dissolve the League Party in the Constituent Assembly⁷. The same decision was made by some provincial party units. Disbanding their own political party, the majority of Muslim Leaguers chose to join the Congress or work in cooperation with them in response to the call from the Congress leaders. For instance, a Muslim conference,

⁵ Nehru observed that 'the whole atmosphere of the U.P. has been changing for the worse' with regards to religious harmony, and he lamented that 'the U.P. is becoming almost a foreign land'. More specifically, his criticism was thrown at P. D. Tandon, who was working as the president of UP Congress. In a letter Nehru wrote to Pant, dated 17 April 1950, he complained that Tandon was making speeches which were felt to be opposed to the basic principles of the Congress. Ayodhya and Faridabad were centres of communal tension spreading anti-Muslim sentiment into other regions within the province (Nehru Vol.14(2): 293-294).

⁶ That position was clearly expressed in Patel's speech in the Constituent Assembly. Patel said that after agreeing to the separation of the country as a result of communal electorates, he never thought that that proposition was going to be moved seriously. He then continued, as Pakistan was conceded, that 'there would be no attempt to talk of two nations here also' (CAD Vol.5: 225).

⁷ The resolution was not unanimously accepted. 14 out of the total 27 Muslim League members were present at the meeting and 4 members voted against the resolution (Noorani 2003: 69-70).

organised under the Maulana Azad leadership in December 1947, called for the dissolution of the Muslim League and appealed to its members to join the Congress⁸ (Hasan 1988).

Muslim Constituent Assembly members might have recognised the critical circumstances surrounding them. Although the first draft of the new Constitution conceded the reservation of seats for minorities including Muslims rejecting the separate electorate, voices calling for the abolition of any form of political privilege became dominant over time. When Patel sent a report of the Advisory Committee to the Constituent Assembly in May 1949, he described how some members of the Advisory Committee felt that it was no longer appropriate to reserve seats for religious minorities as the conditions had vastly changed since the Advisory Committee made their recommendations in 1947 (CAD Vol.8: 311). Such 'changed conditions' must have been recognised by Muslim politicians. They understood that pursuing the reservation of seats would not be beneficial in the long-term. The introduction of reserved seats was considered un-beneficial in the sense that 'it gives no chance to the minorities to win the good-will of the majority'. For Begum Aizaz Rasul, a female Muslim representative, reservation was 'a self-destructive weapon which separates the minorities from the majority for all time' (CAD Vol. 8: 300).

By surrendering all political privileges Muslims had enjoyed in the past, they entrusted their safety and existence as a collective entity to the actions of Congress leaders, expecting its decisions to result in greater benefits for them. However, to this point, their expectations have not been realised.

5 Path Towards a Secular State?

The assassination of M. K. Gandhi (30 January 1948) must have led Nehru to believe that a stricter measure was required to end communalism. In a public meeting held in New Delhi to mourn Gandhi's death on 2 February 1948, Nehru stated that 'those who preach communalism or maintain private armies would be destroyed, and the government could not and would not tolerate it in the future'. Furthermore, he expressed a desire to create a secular state, 'where one community or group or party will not be permitted to usurp the rights of another' (Nehru Vol. 5: 44). In accordance with this goal, communal organisations, for example the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), were declared illegal bodies, and the nation-wide arrest of communal activists was conducted in February 1948. Rejecting the cry for a Hindu nation, Nehru worked to make India a secular state.

Even in the Legislative Assembly, a resolution to secularise politics was adopted in April of the same

⁸ Around the same time, non-party Muslim organisations too expressed their stance in newly arising political circumstances after independence. For example, Jamiatul Ulama-e-Hind defined its position to act in cooperation with the Congress, rejecting demands including separate electorates and reservation of seats. Yet, the change in position did not mean that the organisation dropped its communal identity. The organisation reacted whenever the Congress government proposed a reform affecting the autonomy of Muslim society, for instance, the attempt to reform the Muslim Personal Law (Hasan 1990: 55).

year⁹. The resolution, moved by M. A. Ayyangar, called for communalism to be eliminated and stated that ‘no communal organization should be permitted to engage in any activities other than those essential for the bona fide religious, cultural, social and educational needs of the community’ (The Statesman [4 Apr. 1948]). It also sought all of the legislative and administrative actions necessary to prevent such activities from occurring. In accepting the resolution, Nehru said that the government would do everything in its power to achieve the objective of the resolution. This resolution also affected the work of the Constituent Assembly. Nehru gave the impression that the Constituent Assembly and the Legislative Assembly were same body, so the Constituent Assembly was to also operate with consideration of this resolution. He also made an important remark on the political rights of minorities, revealing his personal belief that less reservation is better, and saying there are ‘definite communal elements’ in the draft constitution (The Statesman [4 Apr. 1948]).

Despite Nehru’s desire to create a secular state, efforts to make this a reality were compromised by conservatives within and outside of the Congress. Some decisions were made that went against Muslim interests and privileged Hindus at their expense, consequently tarnishing India’s secular image. One of the crucial issues for Muslims was language¹⁰. The Constituent Assembly made a decision to adopt Hindi with Sanskrit letters as the federal administrative language, denying official status to Hindustani, which is a mixed language of Hindi and Urdu spoken among people in the northern part of India. Although the concerns of non-Hindi speakers were in part assuaged by allowing the continued use of English in government work, the decision proved that even influential figures in the Congress were sympathetic to the Hindu chauvinists. State governments also made a decision to disadvantage Muslims. The governments of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (UP) passed acts that granted official language status to Hindi alone¹¹. Nehru noted that governments ‘have taken definite steps to discourage Urdu and have stopped giving aid to schools where Urdu is taught’ (Parthasarathi Vol. 3: 379). Policies that contravened the Constitution became a reality¹².

In the face of declining language status, Muslims were not kept quiet. In 1953, the Urdu regional conference was organised to appeal for an improvement of Urdu status. A constitutional reform was then made to protect the linguistic minorities following the states’ reorganisation in 1956. The reform made it possible to change Urdu status at the state level. The two new articles, 350A and 350B, were inserted into the Constitution. The former required the states to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups, and the president to issue directions for this purpose (Constitution of India). The latter provides for the appointment of a special officer for linguistic minorities to investigate all matters relevant to the safeguards provided for them under the Constitution. The

⁹ *The Statesman* (4 April 1948) reports with the headline: ‘Politics barred to communal bodies’.

¹⁰ The slaughter of cows was another issue of crucial relevance to Muslims. Although Nehru himself opposed the idea that the slaughter of cows should be prohibited across the country, 14 states implemented state bans on cow slaughter in the years immediately after independence in the face of Hindu traditionalism (Wilkinson 2000).

¹¹ The acts were adopted in 1950 and 1951 (Rao 2006: 374).

¹² When the Indian Constitution was enacted, Urdu was recognised as one of the major languages in India and listed in the ‘Eight Schedule’ of the Constitution. The Constitution also guarantees the protection of minority language as a fundamental right.

reform had significant implications, as it 'placed the Urdu question in the broader context of an all India problem of diverse linguistic minorities' (Smith 1963: 427). With these developments, the UP government appointed a language commission to deal with the dissatisfaction of Muslims. However, the commission chaired by Acharya Kripalani did not redress the situation. A report submitted by the commission was not sympathetic to Muslim concerns. Rather, it urged Muslims to integrate into Hindu culture (Brass 1974).

Nehru was apprehensive about the decreasing Muslim representation in the civil services. What concerned him most was that no effort was being made to improve the situation. He believed that in a country like India, they 'must produce a sense of balance and of assurance of a square deal and future prospects in all parts of the country and in all communities of India'. To upset any balance or to emphasise one aspect at the expense of another are thought to result in a lack of equilibrium, dissatisfaction, and frustration among large groups (Parthasarathi Vol. 3: 375-376). Despite Nehru's beliefs, the circumstances of Muslims did not change and their exclusion from civil services has continued without any luck in changing their situation. For Example, in UP, the proportion of Muslims among the senior police force and civil service officers dropped from 40 per cent in 1947 to 7 per cent in 1958 (Wilkinson 2000). The plight of Muslims was not confined to UP alone as figures for the central government and other states show similar low levels of minority representation¹³.

Even in the face of communal riots, it is doubtful that the Congress governments had effectively contained the criminal actions of Hindu mobs. In the 1950s, the number of communal riots had remained low, aside from sporadic clashes in particular regions. When the number began to rise in the 1960s, the local Congress leaders did not intervene as Nehru expected. With the riots that seized Madhya Pradesh in April 1961 in mind, Nehru declared that local Congress leaders made no attempt at all to put down the communal unrest, complaining that they stayed seated in their homes (Smith 1963: 481).

For Nehru, the protection and safety of minorities was important as it was supposed to calm communal tension and support harmony among religions. However, developments in the states showed that reality differed from what Nehru had hoped would occur while at the helm.

6 Muslims in Electoral Politics

There is conventional wisdom that Muslim voters formed a support base for the Congress. It is believed that the party's secular image resulted in Muslims casting their votes for the Congress (Hasan 1988; 1990). Indian Muslims are not a monolithic community, but it seems that they could act united on certain emotional issues and threats to their community. Yet, this does not mean that Muslims always constituted a support base of the Congress. Past election results showed that they changed the party that they supported whenever the Congress acted against their interests (Engineer 1995). The support of Muslim voters must have contributed to the emergence of non-Congress governments in some states after the 1967 election. For example, the Congress

¹³ This trend does not seem to have been reversed. The Gopal Singh Committee, appointed in 1980 to study the status of minorities, confirmed the plight of Muslims. For example, Muslim representation in the central governments services was around 4 per cent overall and less than 2 per cent in the higher ranks (Wilkinson 2000).

fared very badly in UP and Bihar, and Muslims voted against the Congress (Brass 1974: 252-253). In the 1977 general election, Muslims again abandoned the Congress, supporting the Janata Party (Wright 1977). Since the 1990s, Muslim support has moved to another option, which is a non-Congress and non-Hindu nationalist party (Engineer 1995). Thus, there have been cycles of drifting away and returning to the Congress in the history of electoral politics.

What matters here is that the collective claims of Muslims have been made through indirect participatory actions such as voting, rather than directly through organising efforts, with the exception of a few cases. One of these cases was observed in the early 1960s, when there was a collective effort by Muslims to voice their plight and call for government to remedy the situation. From 10-11 June 1961, the 'All India Muslim Convention' was held under the auspices of H. Rahman. The convention condemned communalism and called for the majority community to exhibit tolerance and fairness towards minorities. Their demands included, but were not limited to, more representation of Muslims in government service and better status for the Urdu language. Nehru was aware of this event and he thought that attempting to suppress their feelings would lead to greater frustration. So, he instructed the chief ministers to take measures to respond to Muslim concerns¹⁴. However, his instructions were not taken seriously among the chief ministers. Muslim dissatisfaction grew into the formation of the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (hereafter referred to as the MMM or the Majlis) in August 1964 (Quraishi 1971). This development was generally considered to have been a product of un-fulfilled promises and the inaction of states in controlling communal riots¹⁵. However, the direct cause was the terrible communal riots that broke out in Jamshedpur and Rourkela in 1964.

The MMM was a loose confederation of three major groups: non-Congress Muslims, Muslim politicians associated with the Congress or Jamiatul Ulama-e-Hind, and Jamaat-e-Islami. This development was a notable organisational effort by Muslims in post-partition India and was not confined to particular districts¹⁶ (Quraishi 1971). The MMM was not a political party, but it sought to influence the political process indirectly by extending support to candidates from various parties that shared sympathy for Muslims. For this purpose, the MMM drafted a 'People's Manifesto' that contained nine points including the demand for a system of proportional representation in elections, the protection of the Muslim Personal Law, and the development and recognition of Urdu (Quraishi 1971; Brass 2005: 250-251). The MMM called on Muslims to back candidates who signed a written pledge in support of the program. However, their performance was far from effective, and the loose confederation began to fragment rapidly.

¹⁴ In a letter to chief ministers, dated 27 June 1961, Nehru wrote that 'the fact remains that there have often been difficulties in their way and we have to remove them. This does not mean pandering to communalism, but, doing justice where it is due and, more particular, creating an atmosphere where people feel that justice is done and they have fair chances of advancement' (Parthasarathi Vol.5: 457-459).

¹⁵ Aslam points out some distinct features of the communal riots from the 1960s onwards. They occurred in places where new classes of Muslims emerged and achieved a relative degree of prosperity. Also, he argues that riots appear to be pre-planned, targeting specific properties and places (Aslam 1990: 141-142).

¹⁶ Political activities by Muslims were dormant at that time except in a few cases. An exceptional case occurred in Kerala. Due to the concentration of the Muslim population in the state, the Muslim League could play a balancing role between the Congress and the Communist party, two major candidates for governing party that held power alternately after independence (Brass 1994: 234-235).

The MMM had neither India-wide policy nor a uniform pattern of support. Its three major groups had different motives and relationships with the Congress (Brass 1974: 249-50). It was not explicitly stated that the MMM would oppose the Congress and, except for the UP unit, it held the view that the transformation of the MMM into a political party would undermine its overall character and, furthermore, place it in a controversial position. Empirically speaking, Muslim organisational efforts had invited a backlash and gave Hindu voters incentive to cast their ballots for the Hindu-oriented party (Hasan 1988). In fact, the Jana Sangh, a political front for Hindu nationalists, increased its percentage of votes and its share of seats through the 1960s (Report of Election Commission of India). Especially in UP, the party received 21 per cent of votes and gained 98 seats in the 1967 state assembly election. Both the percentage of votes and seats gained increased compared to the 16 per cent of votes and 49 seats in the 1962 election. Although the party's influence was initially confined to urban areas, it began to expand and consolidate its power.

Whether the MMM had contributed to the creation of the two non-Congress governments in north Indian states after the 1967 elections was another problem. However, the two non-Congress coalitions that received a great deal of Muslim support did not serve Muslim interests. And furthermore, the attempt of the MMM resulted in more votes towards candidates who appealed to Hindi and Hindu revivalism (Hasan 1988: 825). Therefore, it was reasonable behaviour for Muslim voters to return to the Congress in the 1971 general election, having observed the lesson that only a dominant party with secular character could serve their community.

7 Implications of India's Experience

India, specifically during the Nehru era, is depicted as the most ideal example of dealing with the accommodation of diversity. It is true that during the Nehru era the lowest number of communal riots were reported, apart from a few years immediately after independence. What India's experience implies is that stable communal relations depend on the acts of both national leaders and leaders of minorities. National leaders have to recognise the existence and plight of minorities, just as Nehru struggled to make India a secular state and rejected the communalism of the majority, despite cries for a Hindu nation. On the other hand, it requires minorities to orient themselves to the newly developing circumstances. The debates around the reservation of seats for minorities in the Constituent Assembly revealed how Indian Muslims came to the conclusion to surrender any form of them, entrusting their protection to the actions of the Congress leaders. Assurances that Nehru gave might have facilitated Muslim politicians to reach such a conclusion. Yet, Nehru's vision was limited in the face of conservatism within and outside the Congress. The dormant state of religious rivalry observed in the 1950s is in part attributed to the efforts of national leaders. Nevertheless, religious harmony might have been unattainable without more concessions made by minorities.

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