Let me begin by putting before you some of the political and academic concerns that have got many of us (who did not ‘do Muslims’) interested in ‘Muslims-Memories-Histories’.¹

The context clearly has been the movement for the destruction of the Babari mosque at the north Indian town of Ayodhya.² The steady rise in majoritarian politics since the mid-1980s has gone hand in hand with the fabrication of an insistent majoritarian history. Over the two decades these desires have moved from the margins of popular discourse to the center of political deliberations. The descriptive phrase ‘India has a majority of Hindus’ has now been fashioned into the battering ram of Hindu nationalism - an aggressive ideological tool aimed at redrawning the basic contours of an avowedly secular nation-state. Its logic is to enforce the majoritarian idea of the singularity of national history, such that the enactment of historical vendetta against ‘Muslim conquest and rule’ of pre-colonial India becomes simultaneously the condition for the realization of

Indian history, and for demarcating the natural citizens of India. In this view, the Indian citizen has, at the very least, to give assent to the forging of a ‘New Hindu History’—the continual journey of a Hindu-national history whose positivist base is alloyed crucially with religious belief and nuggets dug out from the seams of a single, collective memory. This paper is an intervention in the debate over nation-building and the contest over India’s medieval past.

The sense of belonging—belonging to the present nation—involves a replication of a sense of them and us through icons, stories and narratives. The siring of communities and narratives about long-existent collectivities often take place simultaneously. And they have a duplex (and duplicitous) claim to history and to particularistic remembrances of times past. There has developed in India, especially since the mid-1980s, a powerful current that pulls all public discourse into ‘That may be your History, but this is my/our past’. Extant histories of the Indian landmass, such a view insists, don’t answer to our present needs.

Rather than simply confronting pasts, ingenious or disingenuous with definitive, historical records, history-writing, I argue, must have a place for the ways pasts are remembered and retailed, and for the relationship of such pasts to the sense of belonging. As a practicing historian one must then pose afresh the relationship between memory and history, the oral and the written, the transmitted and the inscribed, stereotypicality and lived history.

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See now Gyanendra Pandey, Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories (Stanford University Press, 2006) which is occasioned by similar, though not identical concerns, felt over the same two decades.
A ‘true history of communities’, to use a slightly tendentious phrase, would be one that sets out to unravel not just what happened between India’s two, or three, or four communities, but also how these communities remember, understand, explain and recount pasts and presents to themselves. We could well replace the term ‘nation’ for ‘community’ in the above statement, and the problem would still remain. This, to my mind, is the significance of the periodic struggle over history primers in our country.

I do not wish to analyze the relationship between popularly fabricated pasts and professionally reconstructed histories in any detail. Rather, I take the Musalmans of Hindustan and the way ‘they’ are remembered as my reference point. My concern in this essay is with the expressive category Musalman. What constitutes the common sense on the North Indian Musalmans? What are the elements of their otherness? What is the relationship between the recognition of everyday difference and attachment to different pasts, such that the antagonists are believed to be carriers of two violently different histories? What is the mix of history, memory, innate difference and the changed context of the present in statements about the resident-Indian Muslims as ‘the other’? The essay seeks to address a clutch of such questions. The argument stretches over long patches of time, with an emphasis on the late-nineteenth century when, as is well-known, community definitions became particularly sharp in northern India.

I am neither a Medieavalist nor an Islamicist. Having made that disclaimer, I wish to put forward the following propositions. What we require is a strengthening of the dialogue between card-carrying Medieavalists and historians of colonial and post-colonial India, with no certified ‘Islalmicist’ accreditation. For,
1. Several constructions of ‘Muslims-Memories-Histories’ have their roots in our late-colonial past and the post-colonial present. C. 1900 United Provinces (present day Uttar Pradesh), when after a rancorous campaign Hindi wins the status of a second language alongside Urdu for use in Courts of law, and 1947 North India, may be flagged as two catalyst and cataclysmic events.

2. Given the heavy traffic between a text-book history of India’s Medieval Past, the invocation and reworking of memories of this past and the demotic ‘public sphere’ within which statements about Muslims and ‘their’ forceful comings and doings are made, we must engage with the ways in which the practicing historians’ history has of necessity to engage with ‘this all-knowing public’. For, as that contemporary Hindi film song has it: ‘yeh jo public hai, sub jaanti hai’. The public, especially when it comes to ‘the Musalman’, has been knowing (sic), as we say on the sub-continent. It has been, at least since the late-nineteenth century, an ‘all (north)-India’ public. For it is with the coming of non-literary texts, c. 1840s, subsidized initially by the Directorates of Public Instruction, in Northern and Central India, and the growth of a stiff, modern Hindi that remembrances of the Musalman, which earlier perhaps were locale specific become pan-Indian and naturally majoritarian. To write in Hindi in late-19th-early 20th century was in this specifically communitarian sense to write a history of the Musalmans of North India, c. 1000-1880s-1920s.

3 See for instance, *Ritiratnakar, Jisko Shriman Bharatkhand, Vartaragan, Samuday Viravants Nayak Sir William Muir sahib Lt. Governor, Government Paschimottar Deshadhikari ki Agyanusar, taha cha Shriman Vidyagunanidhan Shikshaparakarannayak, Gunijan Vishramdayak Campeson sahib bahadur ki shiksha se Prayag, Panch Krosh madhyagat Lehra grambasi Pandit Ram Prasad Tiwari ne nimit karke ukt shriman ke samnukh nivedan kiya* (Ilahabad, Government Chapakhana, 1872). It would repay analyzing the full titles of these Hindi ‘pedagogical texts’, dedicated to the colonial patrons. Meant in this case as a high caste women improvement tract, these were
From now on the veracity of individual statements about ‘the Musalmans’ (it would be worthwhile exploring when the term ‘Turk’ as a designatory fades away\textsuperscript{4}) derive not necessarily from their individual truth content, but from a prior knowledge that readers are invited to bring to the issue at hand by the operation of a generalized principle: this could be the oppression of the Muslims in the past, of their otherness though time into the present. Hardly any room is left by now for a Muslim specificity that does not conform to a prior generality; remembrance, which is tied necessarily to area-specific particular events, becomes a part of a printed-Hindu community past. The Musalmans of, say Allahabad or Delhi give way to the Musalmans in Allahabad or Delhi.\textsuperscript{5}

It is precisely such concerns that animate Partha Chatterjee’s plea for historians to work towards ‘an analytic of the popular’. Chatterjee captures the disquiet among a new generation of post-Babri masjid historians thus: ‘Nevertheless, in spite of these attempts within the University to defend the autonomy of the

\textsuperscript{4}I have the impression that the designatory ‘Turuk’ continues in north-Indian folklore for a much longer time (well into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century) than in Hindi printed texts. It would be interesting to explore the usages of self-designatory among the ‘Musalmans’ in Urdu texts in the late-18\textsuperscript{th} to early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

\textsuperscript{5}This contrast is posed, largely to think through the impact of printed Hindi texts, where the literary sphere encompassed very largely the ‘historical’. This is in contrast to, say the writings in Marathi in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century which set out very purposively to be ‘historical’. The distinction between the Hindi literary and the Marathi historical sphere is illustrated nicely by the fact that while Banaras in the late nineteenth century lead the search for Sanskrit/Hindi (literary) manuscripts, the search organized from Pune in western India was for different sorts of historical records on the 18\textsuperscript{th} century, regional Maratha polity. On Marathi historiography, see the important (Tufts University) Ph.D thesis by Prachi Deshpande, now revised as ‘Historical Memory, Modernity and Identity in India, c. 1700-1960’ (Columbia University Press, New York/Permanent Black, New Delhi: forthcoming). There would surely have been more than local memories of area-specific events to do with ‘the Turks’. And that is because lore about the past travels across time and space over cultural, linguistic and other networks. Similar Sufi \textit{tazkrias} and \textit{malfuzat} would have also ‘leaked’ through the \textit{jamatkhana}s and such north Indian \textit{gaskas} as Rudauli, Sandila, Bilgram and Jais. On this latter, see the section ‘Linguistic Indigenization’, in Simon Digby, ‘Before Timur Came: Provincialization of the Delhi Sultanate Through the Fourteenth Century’, \textit{Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient} (47:3), 2004, esp. pp. 330-351.
discipline on the old basis – while outside, in the domain of politics, the campaign of the Hindu right waxed and waned through the decade of the 1990s – one important stream of awareness seemed to emerge among a new generation of historians…. What was perhaps required was a redefinition of the discipline – not, as before, by excluding popular practices of memory from its list of approved practices, but rather by incorporating within itself an appropriate analytic of the popular.’ Chatterjee characterizes the new writings, gathered together in the volume History and the Present, as motivated by a desire ‘to find a way out of the self-constructed cage of scientific history that has made the historian so fearful of the popular, virtually immobilizing his or her in its presence’.

Since the mid-1980s, majoritarian politics has institutionalized itself by doing away with the qualifiers to the enumerative truism ‘India has a majority of Hindus’. Now it goes something like this: India has a majority of Hindus . . . and the reconfigured Hindus have to be the subject of all subsequent sentences that follow from this originary sentence. Thus: India has a majority of Hindus who have to reconfigure the nation; and who have been misled into forgetting this basic fact; and who have been denied their prior due in the nation state; and who have been at the receiving end of History for an entire millennium, from the beginning of Turkish invasions and conquest, c. A.D. 1000–1200, to the present. In a word, the replacement of a qualifying ‘but’ by an insistent ‘and’ changes a descriptive truism into a majoritarian battering ram. It is obvious that such a move has enormous consequences for our past, present, and future.

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A common response when faced with such a ‘maazi ka hal’ (lit. the present of the Past, as well as the state of the Past), is to re-emphasize India’s vaunted syncretism, plucking at the strains of the demotic poetry of a 14th century Kabir, or the structured *khayals* of our classical Hindustani vocalists, whose musical habitations soared well above foundational divides.

I wish to offer a slightly different proposition in this essay. My plea is that we in India have to rake the past anew, if you will, so as to save the nation from the blight of our very own *Bhartiyabahulyavadis*, i.e. both resident and non-resident majoritarians. I wish to argue further, that faced with the majoritarian challenge in the present, and the plea, both historical and commonsensical, for a ‘New Hindu History’, what we need is not simply an emphasis on India’s composite culture. *Of course we need that.* But we also need something beyond the reiterations of sturdy certitudes. We need non-sectarian histories of sectarian strife, conflict and conquest of the past.

To give a not so obvious example, we need to appreciate the contribution to the development of Hindvi (language) by the great Amir Khusro, the Delhi-based 13-14th century sufi, intellectual, musician, demotic and Persian poet. But we also need to pay attention to the language of excess in which Khusro characterises the 14th century conquest of the southern Hindu kingdoms by the Delhi Sultan. And that is because faced with the foregrounding of conquest and conflict by the New Hindu History, we as historians have to produce alternative histories of conflict and conquest. We can’t for ever take recourse to an essentialist notion of Indian syncretism.

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7 I take this idea from Gyanendra Pandey. See his ‘The New Hindu History’, *South Asia*, xvii (Special Issue: After Ayodhya), 1994, pp. 97-112. See also ch. 4: ‘Monumental History, in *Routine Violence*, where Pandey has replaced it with ‘a new alternative history of India’, p. 70 ff. For the purposes of my argument I find the term ‘New Hindu History’ more useful, for it allows us to trace its genealogy (with breaks) to earlier
Coming to the late-nineteenth century North India, I suggest that popular remembrances of the Musalmans have to be studied, their locale identified, and the question of the interaction between the oral and the written, memory and history, the local and the pan-Indian explicitly posed and studied.

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There is enough evidence to suggest that the categories Hindus and Muslims have been deployed strategically for quite some time, howsoever social scientists may underline the fluidity of boundaries, in face-to-face small communities, living back to back with their differences in villages, *qasbas* and *mohallas*. By this I don’t wish to suggest that ‘Hindus’ and ‘Muslims’ were, and have been, exclusivist identities that have marked, shaped and bound each and every aspect of a person’s quotidian being. There is a growing body of literature which shows how notions of place, (*mohalla, qasba, ilaqa, jawar*), hierarchies of caste, status and purity, gradations of occupation, calling and work, affiliation to sects, devotion to powerful dead beings, partaking of a common speech, sharing of a literate and popular culture – all these went into the making of real-life individuals, families and groups with a multi-layered sense of self.  

Diametrically opposite to this is the case of communal ‘riots’ where the blurring of boundaries of the

‘Hindu’ constructions of History in Bengal and northern India more generally during the colonial period, c. 1870 onwards.

8 See now the collection of essays brought together in David Gilamartin and Bruce Lawrence eds., *Beyond Turk or Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia* (University of Florida Press/India Research Press, New Delhi, 2002). For an ethnographically nuanced transcription of a teenager’s memory of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in a small Muslim princely state in Rajasthan in mid-1940s, see Dr. Mubarak Ali, *Dar-dar ki Thokren* (Fiction House, Lahore, 5th edn. 2005), ch. 3: ‘Tonk’, pp. 12-40.
everyday are violently denied to individuals, who are killed, raped, burnt as representatives of a marked community.

Between these two extremes, the fluidities of boundaries in the everyday, and the horrific carving out of the bodies of the victims of riots, most recently in Guajarat, there is the historicist position that suggests that over a large stretch of the Gangetic plains (and in parts of central India), the forging of the link of language-community-nation in the heyday of Victorian colonialism led to a hardening of a religious-based community identities. Expressed in the newly-developing modern vernaculars, the angst of living in a colonial, ‘Oppressive Present’ lead to the carving of particularistic linguistic and cultural spaces where a uniformly ‘Hindu’ memory of Muslim conquest, oppression, despoilation, lasciviousness, forcible conversion were inscribed in literary and historical Hindi prose, with often a thin line distinguishing the two. 9 ‘Jīn jāvanan tuv dharam nari dhan tinhon linhaun’: ‘You Muslim-foreigners! You have robbed us [Hindus] of [our] dharma, women and wealth’, wrote the North Indian Hindi poet Bhartendu Harishchandra in 1888, echoing the stereotypical recollection of Muslim conquest of 11-12th century and its effect on a Hindu India. 10 Implied in this memorable couplet by one of the founders of modern Hindi, is the conflation of the foreigner-Turk conquerors of north India with the entire population of Muslims in India. The “uncriticized” gap between [Hindu] samskara [way of being] and nationalist ideology’ may have enabled many a ‘Hindi nationalist’ like Manan Dwivedi or the national poet Maithali Sharan Gupta, ‘to subscribe later to a secular, broad-minded ideology while retaining a sense of identity and history based on exclusive and unquestioned notion of Hindu subjecthood’. 11

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10 Cited in Chandra, op. cit., p. 123.
The politics of the imagination of “Hindu India” has depended crucially on a particular reading of the oppression of the disunited denizens of India by Muslim conquerors and rulers from the eleventh century until the establishment of British rule in the mid-eighteenth century.

Believing in four Vedas, six Shastras, eighteen Puranas and thirty-three crore devtas, Hindus to begin with, were differentiated according to bhav-bhesh-bhasha (language, beliefs and customs), and then the Mahabharata [Armageddon] caused further havoc. The one or two germs of valor that remained were finished off by the ahimsa [non-violence] of Lord Buddha. . . . Our ferociousness simply disappeared, our sense of pride deserted us; and as for anger, all sorts of sins were laid at its door. The result: we became devtas, mahatmas, or for that matter nice fellows (bhalmanus), but our spunk, we lost that. No fire, no spark, simply cold ash, that’s what we became: “Nihshankam deepte lokaih pashya bhasmchye padam.”

And on the other side in the desert of Arabia a soul appeared who was brave as his word, and in whose religion killing, slaughtering, fighting were the principal elements …

Thus wrote Mannan Prasad Dwivedi, Bhojpuri poet, Hindi novelist, and writer of nationalist prose and satire in an impressive two-part History of Muslim Rule [in India], commissioned by the Banaras-based Society for the Propagation of Hindi in 1920. There are clear continuities here with what Partha Chatterjee has called the “new nationalist history of India” written in Bengali in the late nineteenth century. These

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vernacular histories transmitted the stereotypical figure of “the Muslim,” endowed with a “national character”: fanatical, bigoted, warlike, dissolute, cruel.13

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One obvious, sensible and scholarly response to this persistent view has been to recapitulate the trends of tolerance, mutual respect and crossings in our long past and tortuous present. The most powerful (and very nearly the first) such response came from Professor Mohammad Habib, of Aligarh Muslim University, who in a series of essays between 1931 and 1952 sought to counter the communalization of India’s medieval history from a broadly Marxist perspective.14 Habib’s ire was directed particularly against the partisan-political scholarship of British administrator-“orientalists” who had consistently projected the “Muslim India” of c. 1000–1700 as a period of oppression and fanaticism from which colonial rule had at last liberated (Hindu) India.

Habib countered by arguing that the “real motives of the plundering expeditions” of the beginning of the eleventh century, associated with the name of the notorious despoiler of northern India, Mahmud of Ghazni, “was greed for treasure and gold. The iconoclastic pretensions were meant only for the applause of the gallery.” The Muslims of India were not so much the progeny of Turkish conquerors, he wrote, as local converts from the artisanal classes, socially and spatially at the margins of both Hindu society and early medieval towns. More important for Habib, “Such limited success as Islam achieved in India [as a proselytizing force] was not due to its kings and politicians but to its saints.”15

15 Habib, op. cit., pp. 21, 116, and 22–23 respectively.
Ibid., pp. 21, 116, and 22–23 respectively.
With a new faith everything depends upon the method of its presentation; and if Islam in this land had worn no other aspect except the conquering hordes of Ghazni, it would not have been accepted even by a minority of people. But Islam had nobler and better representatives, who far from the atmosphere of court and camps lived the humble life of humble people according to the Sunnat of the Prophet to whom “his poverty was his pride.” And Hinduism in its cosmopolitan outlook enrolled the Muslim mystics among its rishis, and neighborly feelings soon developed a common calendar of saints. So it was in the thirteenth century and so it remains today.  

For Habib, one of the founders of a “scientific history” of medieval India, syncretism was an engrained characteristic of the land marked by a shared cultural space. “The Indo-Muslim mystics, without perhaps consciously knowing it, followed the footsteps of their great Hindu predecessors.” Habib’s efforts were to blunt the “Sword of Islam” motif in the construction of the Indian past in both the colonial and the immediately postcolonial present. To trace Indian history as a sort of religious genealogy of India’s present-day Muslims, he argued, was to do both the nation and its largest minority a grievous historical wrong.

In an impassioned piece written in April 1993, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri masjid, Amartya Sen argued for this position as follows:

The heritage of contemporary India combines Islamic influences with Hindu and other traditions. . . . The point is not simply that so many major contributions to Indian culture have come from Islamic writers, musicians, and painters, but also that their works are thoroughly integrated with those of the Hindus. Indeed, even Hindu religious beliefs and practices have been substantially influenced by contacts with Islamic ideas and values. The impact of Islamic Sufi thought, for

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16 Ibid., p. 23
17 Ibid., p. 22
example, is readily recognized in parts of contemporary Hindu literature. Even films on Hindu themes frequently rely on Muslim writers and actors.\textsuperscript{18}

II

In most writings syncretism is posited as an innate characteristic of the people inhabiting the Gangetic heartland and peninsular India. A part of the “age-old moral and spiritual traditions of our people,” it delineates an essential Indian characteristic, one marked by emotive floral, faunal, and cultural signifiers. Syncretism in such an understanding is not an historical process, a product of coming to terms with events: political conquest and the otherworldly challenge posed to the indigenous jogis by what must have seemed like arriviste sufis. Syncretism springs, fully formed as it were, from the same “sacred land where the black gazelles graze, the munja grass grows and the paan [betel] leaf is eaten, and where the material and the spiritual are organically intermixed.” I take these evocative markers of India’s sacred topology from Habib’s powerful address to the Indian History Congress in the immediate aftermath of Independence and Partition in December 1947.\textsuperscript{19}

But we know that the medieval Sufis, though gentle in their persona, especially in archetypal opposition to the “holy warrior,” had to carve out forcefully their spiritual domain against the already existent authority of Hindu jogis. Hagiographies constantly harp on contests between the Sufi and the jogi for spiritual supremacy, contests in which the jogi is invariably worsted: he either converts, along with his disciples, or retires, leaving the Sufi in triumphant possession of a prior holy and tranquil spot (often by a lake). One of India’s most venerable Sufis, Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer, is said to have


established his *khanqah* (hospice) only after successfully overcoming ogres and warriors attached to a preexisting site commanded by a *jogi* and his entourage.²⁰

Sometimes all that remains of the prepossessing *jogi* is a wisp of a name, carrying the toponymic stigma of a “historic” defeat for all to utter. Many place names in the Gangetic heartland enshrine the memory of such holy victories and defeats, though I am far from arguing that every time a local mentions, say, the name Maunathbhanjan, he or she necessarily recollects the destruction (*bhanjan*) of the lord and master (*nath*) of Mau, a thriving manufacturing town near Banaras since the seventeenth century. In other cases the worsted spiritual master is transformed into an ogre by the sheer act of transcription from one language to another. While the Sanskrit *dev* stands for a god, or the title of a revered person, when written in Persian without this gloss the word *deo* stands for a ghost, demon, or monster. Spiritually and linguistically mastered, the holy-harmful figure often submits before the majestic Sufi, who grants him the last wish of his subservience being recorded for posterity in terms of a trace, either in a place name or as a visible marker of a suitably monstrous sort. At the Bahraich shrine of Salar Musaidd Ghazi in north-eastern Uttar Pradesh, the earrings of the subdued *deo* Nirmal are the size of grindstones.

These are some of the ways in which eventful encounters between the holy men of Islam and of the Hindus get enshrined in the life histories of popular Sufi sites. And of course these shrines attract both Hindus and Muslims as devotees. Let me clarify. My point is not to deny the composite following of India’s justly famous Sufi saints. Muzaffar Alam has recently shown with great acuity how many such descriptions are subsequent representations, probably guided by the political necessity to overcompensate either a founding-head’s politically incorrect dealings with an earlier Sultan, or to elevate him into a full-fledged Indian prophet (*Nabi-yi-Hind*), as the dominant Chishtiya silsilah faced

threats in the 17th century from ‘new Central Asian sheikhs’ (from the erstwhile homelands of the Mughals) and their Indian disciples.\textsuperscript{21} All I wish to do is to create a space for encounter, clash, and conquest as necessary elements of the conflictual prehistory of such cultic sites as that of Muinuddin Chishti or Ajmer and Nizamuddin Auliya, medieval and modern Delhi’s greatest Sufi saint. Wrathful, hypostatical, miraculous events and encounters, I am suggesting, not a simple, longstanding Indian spirit of accommodation, go into the making of the accounts of India’s vaunted syncretism. Or, to put it sharply: accommodation is predicated, necessarily in such stories, on a prior clash of two opposing wills. The hermetically cloistered figures of rosary-fondling Sufis (saints) and saber-rattling ghazis, (warriors) even when yoked to the cause of good pluralistic politics, produce bad history. Not History with a capital H, but the representation and recollection of their exploits, outside a proper, verifiable, contemporary medieval archives which is the only account that historians can give of the life-history of the legendary Muinuddin Chishti of Ajmer. And I say so for two reasons: One, because irrespective of their conjunctural specificities, such accounts become a part of textual and popular life-stories of prominent Sufis, forming the template for recollecting the exploits of subsequent, lesser, (but no less important), local figures. And also because standard tropes, such as the dumb idol breaking its silence under the power of a Sufi Shaikh to recite the Islamic creed, as found in medieval Persian texts, contribute to the valorization of the shahida (credo), and even quotidian Indian Muslim signs (like kalimi, or index finger which is raised analogically during prayer in testimony of the singularity of Allah, or even the ablutionary water-pot badhna) in a whole range of popular accounts of warriors and Sufis in the east-UP countryside.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{21} See the detailed consideration of the build up of the image of Khwaja Muin al-Din Chishti ‘as pioneering Islamizer’ of the sub-continent (c. 1200) from the second half of the 14th century, in Muzaffar Alam, \textit{The Languages of Political Islam, c. 1200-1800} (Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004), pp. 154-7, 164.

The notion of syncretism has come in for criticism recently from several scholars working with very different materials. Thus Tony Stewart in his analysis of the janus-faced popular Bengali deity Satya Pir, criticizes syncreticism for cutting the ground from under its feet, by seldom dealing directly with its object, and second, implying that an artificial product, it is unlikely to endure, while being committed simultaneously to an under-anlaysed persistence of this same syncreticism. Aditya Behal charaterizes the Awadh-based Hindvai Sufi poets of 14-16th century as ‘fully part of the Indian cultural landscape, indigenized yet competing with other groups to articulate their distinct theology’. Most recently Muzaffar Alam has analysed with great insight the north Indian Sufis’ output and attitudes in the context of its complex relationship to state and society between 13th to 18th century, which was political, theological, cultural, as it was competitive, adversarial and contributory. Such a multi-layered relationship, with its own chronology and politics, was one that was moulded firmly by the development of Indo-Islamic concepts such as whadat-al wujud (Unity of Being), tending towards ‘the process of religious synthesis and cultural amalgam’. The same 17th century Sufi writer while appreciating certain portions of the Gita that he found ‘close to some Quranic verses and hadises as read by proponents of wahdat-al-wujud’, could write another text which ‘reads like a polemic against Hindu beliefs and traditions’.\(^{23}\)

Muzaffar Alam locates the several works of Sheikh Abdu Rahman Chishti, including the biographies of Sufis of various orders in a voluminous tazkira titled Mirat al-Asrar, squarely in the context of the need of an important Sufi to elevate the Chishtiyas and its founder in India (Khwaja Muinuddin) to counter the 17th century naqshbandia influence

\(^{23}\) Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam*, p. 97.
at the Mughal court. Alam also makes a significant observation about Abdur Rahman’s biographies of two popular Gangetic saints of Makanpur (near Kanpur) and Bahraich.

[Abdur Rahman Chishti]… also wrote – or rather invented – the biographies of two popular legendary figures, namely Sayyid Salar Masud Ghazi, as a nephew of Mahmud Ghaznavi (r. 998-1030) and a commander of his army in Hindustan; and Shaikh Badi al-Din Madar, a Jew converted to Islam in the fifteenth century. All this was in order to integrate and associate the legends that had developed around these figures with the life and work of Khwaja Muin al-Din’.

There is no doubt that the life of Salar Masud is very largely a creation of this learned Sufi’s febrile intellect. If I have small disagreement with Alam, it is that here the historically non-existent connection between Salar Masud and the historical Sultan Mahmud is ascribed a bit exclusively to this important 17th century Awadh Sufi. There is some evidence that this connection, operating in the slippery and porous realm of the popular, was already in existence, at least in the time of Akbar (early 16th century), if not much earlier in the time of Ibn Battuta’s visit to the Bahraich shrine in 1341. The ‘integration and association of legends’ with the life and works of the Khwaja Muinuddin Chishti brings with it the difficult problem of building ‘an analytic of the popular’ in this particular case, without which the full significance of the achievement of Abdur Rahman can not be fully gauged. And this is the problem of explicating the relationship between memory-history-legend (of Salar Masud) and the Khwaja of Ajmer in this case. How do we analyse a text like the *Mirat-i-Masudi* (The Life of Salar Masud, c. 1610s) after the event, in this case the extant popular memorialisation of its eponymous hero? That remains a question a tricky question of the relationship between memory and a particular ‘take’ on history through a non-existent figure located in an appropriate historical time, for while in the 17th century *Mirat-i-Masudi* and in extant and present-day folklore, Salar Masud is the nephew of Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni (c. 990-1030), the Sultan had no nephew called Salar Masud!
Let us leave our hero here, and try and make some tentative suggestions by moving to sturdier contemporary accounts of medieval conquest. I am again in unfamiliar waters, but let me draw your attention to Amir Khusro, Nizamuddin’s celebrated disciple, scholar, mystic, philosopher, soldier, politician, musician, credited with the development of both sitar and the tabla, and arguably the greatest of the Indo-Persian poets who composed verses in Arabic, Hindi and Persian. Khusro’s riddles, puns, marriage songs are sung very widely even today. In Nuh-i-Sipar his ode to north India, Khusro the ‘Hindustani Turk’ celebrates everything Hindustani – from its flora and fauna to its cities, its people, its food and drink: he would much rather enjoy the raw sugar of Hindustan than the refined sweets of Iran, be a parrot in Delhi’s basti Nizamuddin than a nightingale in Shiraz.  

‘Har qaum rast rahi dini wa qibla gahi (each community has a way, religion, and sacred place to worship): Khusro’s message is best summed up in this celebrated catholic phrase.  

But he also wrote a prose account in Persian of the Delhi Sultan Alauddin Khilji’s conquest of the southern kingdoms in late 13th century to compete with the official Fateh-i-namah, or chronicle of Victory composed by the official court historian. I am not concerned here with the motivations behind the Delhi Sultan Alauddin’s thrust into Warrangal and Maabar, but with the language of excess in which Khusro represents the violence of Alauddin’s conquest of the Deccan. A part of this sprang from Khusro’s linguistic conceits, his attempt as a modern translator puts it, to perform verbal gymnastics with Persian prose.  

Most sections of Khusro’s account were given a verse heading to tell the reader what similies and metaphors the author had ingeniously sprayed the text with. In the English translation completed by a young Mohammad Habib in 1921, entire sections are strung together with such allusions as ‘allusions to hills and passes’, ‘allusions to sword’, allusions to saddle and briddle’, ‘allusions to the betel leaf’. Stereotypical contrasts between the ‘rice made Hindus’ and ‘the iron bodies of the Muslims’ abound.  

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24 Ibid., p. 165.  
26 Alam, The Languages of Political Islam, p. 120.  
Unable to withstand the invaders, Rai Laddar Deo collects heaps of his buried treasure, constructs a golden image of himself ‘and in acknowledgment of having become tribute payer, placed a golden chain round its neck’. He then sends this enslaved golden image of himself with an ambassador to the commander of the attacking force. Among the many treasures proferred by the demon Rai Laddar were ‘the mad elephants of Mabaar, not the vegetarian elephants of Bengal’.

When the messengers of the Rai came before the red canopy… they rubbed their yellow faces on the earth till the ground itself acquired their colour; next they drew out their tongues in eloquent Hindi more sharp than the Hindi sword, and delivered the message of the Rai’.  

The play on the word Hindi by one of the forerunners of Hindvi language is all there is to this scene of submission sketched by Amir Khusro. The bows of Persia, lances of Tartary and Hindi or Indian swords were the famous weapons in medieval Persian literature, but the ‘eloquent Hindi more sharp than the Hindi sword’ was not the demotic speech of north India of which Khusro was a master but a proto-vernacular of the peninsula.

As a final example I wish to refer to the section describing the erection of wodeen fortification preparatory to besieging the fort of Warrangal in present day Andhra Pradesh. The allusion Khusro informs his readers is to carpentry:

The victorious army drew into ranks like the teeth of a saw and the heart of the Hindus was cut into two. Every soldier was ordered to erect a Kath-garh (wooden defence) behind his tent. Immediately all hatchets became busy and every soldier was transformed into Ishaq, the wood-cutter. Trees that had never been molested by the stones of those who wished to eat its fruits, were now felled with iron axes in spite of their groans; and Hindus, who worship trees, were unable to come to

See also Wahid Mirza tr., *Amir Khusrau: Khazain-ul-Futuh* (National Committee for 700th Anniversary of Amir Khusrau, National Book Foundation, Lahore, 1975). I have used Mohammad Habib’s translation.
the rescue of their gods in their need. Every accursed tree in that land of infidelity
was cut down to its roots. Clever carpenters sharpened their instruments on the
tree-trunks and soon cut them into proper shape with their axes. Finally, a wooden
fence was built round the army. It was so strong, that if fire had rained from the
sky, the wooden fort would have been as safe from fire as Noah's ark was from
water. (Emphasis in tr.) 29

I need not comment further on this paragraph to bring out the stereotypical tropes of
Hindu/vs. Musalman that it contains. Nor do I wish to find historical accuracy of the
slaughter of Banik Deo and his thousand swift horsemen who made a 'night attack' on
this fortified 'Muslim army' 'when the Hindu-faced evening had [already] made a night-
attack on the sun and sleep had closed the portals of the eyes and besieged the fort of the
pupil'. 30 I am not an expert in this period, and I have a limited proposition to offer. To
continue to celebrate Amir Khusro's contribution to Indian popular culture, while
ignoring the tropes of excess and of stereotype that his arcane Persian abounds in is to be
wedded to a victor/victim's account of Allaudin's Deccan independent of both language
and of representation. It is also to abolish the distance between a contemporary
'Muslim's' then and a late-nineteenth or early 21st century Hindu/Muslim/Indian now.

If Allauddin's Deccan conquests are available to us through Khusro's extravagant
linguistic conceits, what sort of a language of defeat went into the making of a regional or
pan-Indian stereotype about the Musalman — as conqueror and 'intimate enemy'? One
such reverse amplification can be discerned in the invocation sarhe-chauhatar (seventy-
four and a half) that I am informed is still commonly inscribed by writers of confidential
letters in Bengal: a non-addressee daring to open the letter would incur the sin equivalent
to the killing of that number of Rajputs, the combined weight of whose sacred thread at
the siege of Chittaur in the 16th century amounted to 74 and a half maunds. 31 The
colonial official-ethnographer, William Crooke also reported the use of the charm 74 on

28 Ibid., p. 215.
29 Ibid., pp. 207-08.
30 Ibid., p. 208 and ff.
letters written by Hindus in late-nineteenth-century U.P.: ‘of which one not very probable explanation’, he wrote, is that they represent the weight in maunds of the gold ornaments taken from the Rajput dead at the famous siege of Chithor’.  

III

I wish to now transit to a somewhat schematic discussion of the relationship between history, memory and the fabrication of a community past in some literary writings from late-nineteenth-century north India, something I alluded to at the beginning of this paper. I shall be drawing heavily on the work of Sudhir Chandra whose writings have helped me formulate some of my own ideas.

Sudhir Chandra makes the important point that these early writers of modern Hindi prose and verse, located largely in eastern Uttar Pradesh, and Banaras in particular—men like Bhartendu Harishchandra, Balkrishna Bhatt, Radhacharan Goswami, Pratap Narayan Misra—were not Hindu exclusivists; rather they were fully aware of the ‘urgent need to bring about Hindu-Muslim unity’ as a part of an ‘organized national effort to deal with political subjection’ (p. 119). Yet the paradox, one could say the paradox constitutive of the formation of Hindi as a modern language, was that these very authors ‘could be perfectly venomous against Muslims, cutting at the root of their efforts’ (p. 119).

A demarcation was worked out in their writings between the two communities by the attribution of diametrically opposite traits to each and every individual follower of the two religions. Goswami harangued the Musalmans of Hindustan thus in his powerful Hindi prose (1885)

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31 Communication from Gautam Bhadra.
You were baptized with blood, and we with milk. The essence of your religion is discord, and that of ours peace. We do not, therefore, provoke anyone. But when you nettle us needlessly, our policy, too, is to meet evil with evil... Finally, we implore the Musalmans once again to give up their Nadirshahi temperament. Such tyranny and obduracy would not last long. The government has understood your character inside out.

In such constructions there was a remarkable mixture of the persistence of memory of ‘the Musalman’ though historic time—the time of ‘Muslim conquest and rule’ into the present—and the certified facts of history. This set two processes of remembrance of the Musalman and its inscription at work in the hands of these pioneering Hindi writers in the late nineteenth century. On the one hand, an authentic experience of ‘Muslim rule’ of the Hindus could be located simultaneously in an unhistoricised past, as it could be buttressed by a singular, Hindu memory of defeat and subjection. And on the other, the hard historical fact of Muslim conquest could enable these Hindi writers to populate this singular Hindu past with particular historical statements which had no other verifiable anchorage except the fact of their location and placement in the time of Hindu-India’s ‘Medieval-Muslim past’.

For Sudhir Chandra, this view of a ‘general-decline of the country... (from the beginning of Muslim rule)... fulfilled certain collective needs, this belief was not dependent (for these writers) on historical evidence.’ ‘It possessed sufficient vitality,’ writes Chandra, ‘to defy the facts that undermined it’ (p. 116). Within this ‘communally-oriented construction of the past,’ specific social evils such as the practice of sati, purdah and child marriage, all ‘emerged as a consequence of Muslim rule.... (T)he practice of sati, in keeping with the ascription of nearly every social evil to Muslim rule was explained as a consequence of the lecherous nature of Muslim rule’ (p. 129). Lodged in memory where ‘repression and make belief’ sustained it as something axiomatic, this belief in the relationship between Muslim rule and Hindu decline was ‘projected even in situations where blaming Muslims strained the limits of plausibility’. Such, for example,
was the case of the ascription of ‘something so nebulous as the loss of good taste’ by the Marathi writer Vishnu Kumar Chiplunkar in 1874 to Muslim rule! (pp. 130 -2)

Sudhir Chandra has cautioned us against hearing in excess of what was heard by the contemporaries of Harishchandra or Goswami, or indeed written by these Hindi writers (p. 136). In *The Oppressive Present* of these late-nineteenth century Hindi writers, Chandra has located the proximate contexts of such ‘violent outbursts’ in the immediacy of a public issues, be it a communal riot or the widespread feeling that Hunter’s Education Commission (of the 1880s) was favoring Urdu at the expense of Hindi. He also makes the interesting point that ‘traditionally, religious antagonisms and religious polemics were articulated in a rabidly offensive language’ : ribald and near pornographic ridicule of the ideas of Buddhists, Jains, Charvaks and Kapaliks, as in the popular 11th century Sanskrit play *Prabodhachandrodaya*, was a popular model very much available to Hindi litterateurs such as Harishchandra, who in fact authored one of the five nineteenth century translations of this text under the evocative title, Pakhand Vidambana.

One or two questions may be posed to Chandra’s perceptive contextualisation of the essentializing prose of nineteenth century Hindi writers, if we are to broaden our analytical net so as to capture the features and processes that underscored remembrances of the Musalmans. Important as the question of virulence of speech and violence of language is, I think Chandra’s excessive focus on this aspect of his texts tends to deflect attention away from the issue of typecasting that this language represents, and which can be, and is indeed, present in several other writings without the characteristic virulence picked out by Chandra for extended comment. Similarly, while the zealous advocacy of Hindi against Urdu was no doubt occasioned by the question of the second official language, the slippage between Hindi/Hindu and Urdu/Musalman ensured the articulation of a gamut of essentializing characteristics of the Musalmans vs the Hindus which were meant to appeal to common sense, precisely because these harked back to the quotidian and ordinarily lived differences through history that marked and demarcated the Musalmans from the Hindus.
To return to the point of our digression: The one question that the issue of the
virulence of these writings can not solve for us, unless we pose it explicitly, is the
relationship of such writings to prior pre-print remembrances, both elite and popular, of
the Musalmans. In his substantive book, Chandra has modified his earlier suggestion that
Bhartendu and others in the 1870s ‘gave expression to what could have been the
prevailing pattern of popular Hindu remembrance of Muslim rule.’33 This idea seems to
have been replaced partly by the suggestion that ‘exaggeration and fantasy were
characteristic features of popular Indian mode of perception and articulation.’ The search
for a context for the virulence of nineteenth century Hindi writings has led Chandra into
two logically distinct possibilities. Either these litterateurs were merely grasping and
transcribing what was popularly already in the air, or they were following a traditional
mode of adversarial writing marked by its characteristic excess. Both these analytical
moves have the paradoxical effect of denying creative agency to these Hindi authors, who
were certainly responsible for laying the foundations of modern Hindi/prose as we know
it—and perhaps siring concomitantly an authoritative popular Hindu remembrance of the
Musalmans!

My quest then is for an history of the remembrances of the Musalman. I realize
that this is a question easier posed than answered, but that does not lessen its importance
in my view for the history and politics of contemporary India. Clearly, the tension
between popular remembrance of the Musalman and its authorial inscription is a theme
which needs further exploration. I should like to argue that unless it can be established
that these Hindi litterateurs relied heavily on ballads, folktales, adages, proverbs, etc., it
seems a bit difficult to assume that the 1870s witnessed a simple inscription of popular
memory into literary texts. It is equally possible to suggest that ‘popular Hindu

33 Sudhir Chandra, ‘Communal Consciousness in Late 19th Century Hindi Literature,’ in
Mushirul Hasan ed., Communal and Pan-Islamic Trends in Colonial India (Delhi 1981),
p.173.
remembrance’ was in fact being fabricated by these writers in the late-nineteenth century. The combination of journalism and literature, the conscious cultivation of a standard Hindi, the desire to catch up with the established Urdu press—all these developments created the pre-conditions for the widespread appreciation of a common past on the part of the literati.

We know very little about popular remembrance of ‘Muslim rule’ and of the Musalman. One could hypothesize that these would have been particularistic as well as generalized, i.e., referred to discrete social groups in particular localities as well as to Hindus in general. What were the ways in which particular community’s dealings with the Musalmans was recast as a datum from a common Hindu past? The representations of Rajput-Mughal matrimonial alliances in Rajasthani folklore and court histories and their recasting in north-Indian literature (from late-nineteenth century onwards) could be one such exercise. Paratap Narayan Mishra upbraided the Hindus for these marriages as follows:

‘Jahan rajkanya ke dola Turkan ke qhar janya
    tahan dusari kaun bat hai j ehman log laj anya
    bhala in hinj aran te kuch hona ah.’

To quote Sudhir Chandra’s translation:

Where the princesses in their palanquins are carried to the houses of the Turks,
What else can happen that can make these people blush?
Can these eunuchs be good for anything? (p. 123 and end note 24)

These ‘eunuchs,’ as Chandra points out, are of course the authors own contemporaries, ‘who are being asked to avenge past humiliations, recover courage, and become warriors of a proud Hindu identity’ (p. 123). The historical reference clearly is to
the Rajput-Mughal matrimonial alliances which are considered a blot on the virility of all of manly Hindu society. Here is a case of a particular ‘fact’ of history becoming an important datum of the construction of a common Hindu past, from Rajputana to Raj shahi. And this is achieved without having to contest and contextualise the concerned Rajput houses’ view of themselves as wife givers to the Mughal court.\(^3^4\) From now on certain localised ‘facts’ of India’s medieval history can induce only one pan-Hindu feeling of shame and impotent rage; the history of such a remembrance (in Rajasthani manly and feminine lore and in royal chronicles) is cut short and pasted elsewhere, that is outside Rajputana, so as to contribute to a larger picture of what Hindu India felt under ‘Muslim Rule.’ We need to know more about such constructions and representations of a common past.

There is a case then for arguing that it were the Goswamis and the Harishchandras who were for the first time extolling the virtues of British rule and condemning their Muslim contemporaries along with the erstwhile Musalman Kings in a language and idiom easily comprehensible to the vast majority of the Hindi-knowing intelligentsia in the mufassil.\(^3^5\) The kaithi-using mahajan, the landlord who may have had his functionaries keep the state-accounts in shikasta-Urdu but had Ramcharitmanas for his religious text, the schoolmaster, the Patwari and the Qanungo would have provided the readership of journals like Hindi Pradip and Bhartendu, in which Goswami and Harishchandra were standardizing both language and history.\(^3^6\)

\(^3^4\) For perceptive discussions of Muslim kings as Rajput wife-takers during the Sultanate and Mughal period, see *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 13:3 (1976), pp. 219-50, and *Studies in History*, 18:2 (2002), pp. 274--96

\(^3^5\) For an argument that the Sanskrists did not provide an effective critique of Muslim rule during the mediaeval period, see Devraj Chanana, ‘The Sanskrists and Indian Society,’ *Enquiry* (Monsoon, 1965), pp.49-67. For the contexts in which the terms Tajika, Turushka, Hammira, Mleccha etc. were used in Mahakavya, Charits and land grants during 11th-14th century, see now Vrajdulal Chattopadhyay, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims* (Delhi, 1998).

\(^3^6\) For evidence on the standardization of language, i.e. the refecton of *Braj bhasha* poetry, and the rejection of the prevalent Kaithi script in favor of devnagari, see Christopher R. King, ‘Forging a New Linguistic Identity: the Hindi Movement in Banaras, 1860-1914,’ in Sandria Freitag ed., *Culture and Power in Banaras: Community, Community,*
By raising the issue of the fabrication of a common past in Hindi literary texts I do not wish to suggest that the Musalman was cast as a radically different type in the adages and folktales of northern India. ‘Til-gur bhojan, Turk mitai; age meeth, pache karvai’—‘eating gur-and- linseed (laddus sweets) is like a Musalman’s friendship: sweet first and bitter afterwards.’

In very many instances the Musalmans figured as defilers of various sorts. My argument is that these forms of popular remembrance have to be studied, their locale identified, and the question of the interaction between the oral and written, memory and history, explicitly posed. I take as my example the stories about the origin of the popular song form kajli/kajri. In his 1883 essay on Hindi language Bhartendu Harishchandra wrote as follows about the origin of this ‘destroyed’ song form:

"Kajli poetry is indeed very strange. Before giving an illustration of this genre, we shall say something about the origin of this destroyed song-form (nashvastu). In Kantit country there once was a Gaharwar Kshatriya king named Dadu Rai. He ruled over Mara, Bijaipur, etc. Ruins of his broken down fort can still be seen at the nala near the Vindhyachal Devi temple. He had made his garh in the middle of four mairag and he would not allow Musalmans to touch Gangaji in his raj. The rains failed in his kingdom and he performed many a religious deed; and then it rained. On his death and his Rani Nagmati committing sati, the women of Kantit sang their glory (kirti) in ragas and dhuns of their own composition. That’s how it came to be called kajli. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, there was a forest of the raja and it was called kajli. Second, the third day (tritiya) on which kajli is sung is called kajli-teej in the Puranas."
The rustics composed this chand during that time to the glory of the King — ‘Kahan gaye Dhandhooraiyya bin jag soon; Turkan Gangjhutara bin Arjun’...

Women normally compose this destroyed kajli on their own, but there are kajli poets even among men. Sanprat, a punkha-walla, has composed many kajlis, but the best are composition of a Brahmin named Veni Ram.’

This notice which forms a part of one of Bhartendu’s essay on Hindi language is intriguing. We learn that Dada Raiya ‘would not allow Musalmans to touch Gangaji,’ but the Musalman-as-defilers motif captured here, and in the phrase ‘Turkan Gang jhutara’ somehow gets lost in the welter of other facts about this Kshatriya king.

This motif is central to Ram Gharib Chaube’s description of the Customs and Ceremonies of the Hindus of eastern U.P., C. 1890:

*Kajli*, as everyone knows is a kind of song sung best and particularly in the District of Mirzapur. The name of the festival derives from the name of the song which is sung in every Hindu household in the eastern districts of NWP near Mirzapur.

Having given the provenance and popularity of *Kajli* teej (lunar third of the month of *Sravan*), and indicated that the origin of the song was in dispute ‘among the learned natives,’ Chaube provides the following story, as told by the ‘Mirzapur people’:

Once upon a time there was a King in the Mirzapur District named Dadu Rai. He was so strict a Hindu that he never allowed a Musalman even to touch the Ganges. On his death the Musalmans touched the Ganges and troubled the Hindus of the Raj in various ways. *It seems that the Musalmans particularly outraged his harem* (emphasis added). Those who could manage fled to a dense forest in the vicinity of his capital with all the female attendants, whose number

was very great. They sang the trouble and indignities that befell them at the hands of the Musalmans in a gloomy strain. The same songs were afterwards named *Kajli*, from their gloomy/doleful nature and the name of the forest in which they were sung. The following couplet is common among the educated natives of the Mirzapur District.

*Barwai Chand*

*Kanhan gaye Dadu Raiva jeh bin sab jag soon;*

*Turkan gang jhutara bin Arjun*

Tr. ‘Where is gone Dadu Ray to? Without whom the world is gloomily silent. The Turks have sacriled the Ganges without Arjun (Dadu has been compared to Arjun, the famous archer of antiquity in respect of might”).’

After this awkward but adequate translation, Chaube provided further details on the *kajli* sung in eastern U.P. While women ‘everywhere in (east) NWP sing *Kajli* at night on Nag Panchami... and (on) *Kajli Tij*, it was in Mirzapur, near the ruins of Dadu Rai’s fort, that a major *kajli* event took place every year. The location was the shrine of Ashtbhuj a Devi near Vindhayachal and the *Kajirahwa pokhra* (the *Kajli* pond), ‘where the entire gentry, common people, officials and dancing girls repair’ on two Tuesdays in *Sravan*, ‘solely devoted to singing and hearing *kajli*.‘

Both these texts, one a part of a larger statement on the Hindi language by Harishchandra and the other a near contemporary account of the culture of the Hindus of eastern Uttar Pradesh by one of its most accomplished ‘native ethnographers,’ refer to an identical popular remembrance of a timeless rapacity of Hindustan's medieval Muslim conquerors. However, it is not this remembrance but the context of its annual articulation in the highly semioticized, sensuous monsoon month of *Savan*—a well- established, feminine-erotic, semi-classical musical genre associated with such master practitioners as
The theme of Musalmans as defilers of the Ganges, and as lustful creatures who heaped indignities on Hindu women, as noted earlier, is central to the late-19th century Mirzapur story about \textit{kajli}. What is remarkable is that we city-folk have no inscribed recollection of the connection between Muslim lasciviousness and the pleasures of this sensuous musical form. The reason for the disappearance of the Muslim-context of \textit{kajli} seems to be the obvious fact that subsequent to the writings of Harishchandra and Ram Gharib Chaube in the 1880s, this connection was not written up as a datum of the popular Hindu remembrance of the Musalman. In fact the most detailed notice on \textit{kajli} published in 1913 by a prominent Hindi man of letters and aesthete of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Badri Narayan Sharma ‘Premghan,’ concentrates on highlighting the low caste feminine nature of this folk form, so as to protest against its defilement at the hands of commercialized bawdiness of city-based male singing troupe.

\textit{Kajli} is that which is composed by village women, filled with their unique feelings, current and propagated through time by them, in their very own language and tone, and which is not to be heard outside the rustic \textit{dhundhuniya} play (i.e. band of women bending and encircling and singing to the snapping of fingers).

Nowhere in ‘Premghan’s’ detailed expose on the origins ‘and characteristics of \textit{kajli} is there any reference to Dandu Rai and the prohibition on the Musalmans touching the Holy Ganges; Premghan’s entire effort is to establish, \textit{kajli} as an authentic rustic women’s folk form, as opposed to a whole range of male folk creations. Premghan repeatedly stresses that what the singing of \textit{Holi} is to men, \textit{kajli} is to the women of eastern U.P. Though concerned largely with \textit{prem} and \textit{shringar}, (love and

\begin{flushright}
39 ‘Customs and Ceremonies of the Natives of Eastern NWP’ MS.
40 \textit{Kajli Kutuhal, arthath kajli ka tyohaar, uske mele aur kajli ke geeton ka tatva, bhed, vibhed, utpatti aur tatsambandhi itihas aadi ka varnan}, Upadhyay Badri Narayan Sharma Premghan virachit (Meerjapur, vikrami samvat 1970, c. 1913)
41 \textit{Ibid.}, p.39.
\end{flushright}
‘ornamentalism’) kajlis were women’s ‘very own comment on the present, on noteworthy events of the immediate past or even the history of the last one hundred years or so.’ An index of the sexual banter shared by low caste women in their duhundhuniya play, kajli for Premghan very largely excluded the women belonging to the higher castes:

I shall give twenty rupees to the thanedarwa, and five rupees to the jamadarwa; These two breasts I shall offer (my lover) sipahiya; And to the (lowly but higher than the sipahi) dafadarwa I shall give my thumb (i.e. nothing), Oh my darling sanwaliya.42

Interestingly, the Musalmans if they figure at all in the above account, it is as Musalmanis: Muslim females who, ventures Premghan, might have agreed to come out and sing and play kajli with the Hindunis on the condition that they break the widespread interdiction against uttering the name of their husbands. Quoting the lines: ‘Khilawe moke Hinduni, main khel na ‘aanon Hinduni!’: I don’t know how to play; it is the Hinduni who is making me play, Premghan proffers the information that low-caste Hindu women end their kajli play by singing these lines and by naming their husbands to each other. This leads him to conjecture that in this way ‘by making the Hindunis break a very strict interdiction of their dharma that the Musalmanis perhaps agreed to break their own dharmic niyam and begin participating in their (common) festive kajli play’.43

The image of both Musalman and low-caste Hindu women breaking their respective dharmic (religious!) injunctions to tell each other (tales) about their husbands, maintains the difference between Hindus and Muslim women only to underscore its breach in the kajli play of the sensuous rainy season; this is a far cry from the Ganges-women defilement motif by the male Musalmans that had a possibility of becoming a part of our current commonsense, but in fact failed to do so.

42 Ibid., p.40.
The ‘Ganges-polluted’ motif appears nevertheless to have been a highly charged one, for it also figures as a ‘well-known episode’ in the saga of Ghazi Miyan, the legendary and hugely popular Muslim warrior saint of the Gangetic corridor, especially eastern U.P. A late-nineteenth-century version has the following counter-account of this ‘event’:

King Dadu’s castle was at Kantit, overhanging the Ganges, across the Mirzapur border. His tyranny and bigotry were such that he forbade all believers to bathe in the sacred river. To effect this purpose, he ordered every believer to be ferried over with his hands and feet pinioned. The Warrior Saint was strolling about the river bank, and quietly began to wash his feet and rinse his mouth in the water. ‘Mi! Mi’ cried the watchman, ‘is this dog spitting on the breast of Mother Ganges?’

They hurried him off into the castle before King Danu. ‘Away with him,’ cried the tyrant’ cut his hands and feet, that he may never again pollute the hallowed river.’ The Warrior Saint breathed the Opening Prayer. At the first words, his fetters were unloosed. At the second, every charger fell dead in the stables. At the third, the host was destroyed. At the fourth the castle tumbled thundering in ruins. King Danu fled in terror to Bijaypur, where his line still continues ...”

Women are absent from this narrative an ingenious reversal of the women-capturing theme is played out in another Ghazi Mian story, but on that later. In the above episode, King Danu’s edict maintaining the purity of the Ganges is shown to be cruel and unjust Ghazi Miyan is arrested while engaged merely in the ablutionary ritual preparatory to prayers. It is the injustice of Dadu Raiya (here called the Demon King) towards the ‘believers’ which brings about his downfall.

In the story about King Danu, the highly-charged purity-population encounter gets reduced to a just, spiritual contest between Ghazi Miyan and yet another cruel, unjust
(deceitful in some other episodes) ‘unbeliever’ Raja. This mythic contest, predicated on a clash of differing popular remembrances, takes place in terms of the accepted stereotypes of the Musalman. I say ‘accepted stereotypes,’ because a popular ballad about the victory of Islam would necessarily have to invert the existing stereotypes about ‘the believers’ it can afford to ignore these only at the risk of becoming a sectarian saga.

It is the tension between such local battles of stereotypes (usually conducted in Awadhi, Bhojpuri or Braj) and the generation of a common view of Hindu past (increasingly so in an emerging standard, Khari Boli) that requires further analysis. This may be one way of approaching the imbrication of Muslims-Memories-Histories at perhaps its most productive phase. What happens in the ta’lif (compilation with additions) and not (strict) tarjuma (translation) of Abdur Rahman’s life of Salar Masud into Urdu in late nineteenth century is another story altogether.

IV

The first lesson in the Hindi language primers for a good forty years has been an aggressively nationalist poem in tongue-Sanskritic Hindi which has to be memorised by standard VII-VIII students. The one for standard VII is entitled, ‘Chahta hoon desh ki dharti tujhe kuch aur bhi doon’: I wish my nation I could give you something more (than my mind, body, life, money etc. it goes in that vein. A stanza that sticks in my mind as I recall my 12 year old son struggling over it goes as follows:

‘Man samarpit, tan samarpit; neer ka trin-trin samarpit
Chahta hon desh ki dharti tujhe kuch aur bhi doon’

‘I surrender my mind, my body, each and every twig-and-straw from my nest I surrender to you the country of my birth.’

44 Panchon Pir. p.100.
I disagreed when I tried to bring home the meaning of the word ‘trin-trin’ by telling my son that it was high Sanskritic way of referring to the common ‘tinka’: a blade of grass, a straw. I disagree more as I write amidst a continual cussedness about nationalism, which leaves little room to distinguish between the left and the right view of it; where culture, politics, and a majoritarian view of ‘our common past’ make any critical historical or ‘minority’ (even a non-practicing Muslim perspective: some category this!) fall foul of the nation, and perhaps the law as well! Arguments about Indian culture pivot around a hyphenated religion- and the- nation. Gyanendra Pandey has put it sharply: ‘Today in India, as in many other parts of the world, the religious is the national. At least that is a commonly propagated and broadly accepted view’. 45

Coming back to the metaphor of the nest canabalised nationally, it is my firm view that the nation can never be made habitable by ruining the many dwellings where the peoples of India have nestled historically -- with and without conflict.

45 Pandey, Routine Violence, p. 90 (emphasis in original).