

I have been asked to speak on one Indian experience of hate and violence, specifically, of Hindus and Muslims reflecting the perceptions which various groups had of each other in India, over long centuries, and where otherness has to be understood in all its manifestations. But more briefly, where communities have co-existed for over a millennium in various parts of the world and where today they are in conflict, such as Hindus and Muslims, ' ' supposedly from history, intervene in contemporary relations. These are so deeply ingrained as to be almost genetic. Only a sharply self-conscious discernment can keep one from being imprisoned by stereotypes. The consciousness of a particular kind of history becomes instrumental in both the is exploited to legitimise the actions of the present. Where confrontations derive from a particular reading of history, it becomes

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past, is justified. In the Indian case, the reading of the civilisational dialogue between Hindus and Muslims as largely acrimonious and confrontational, was drawn from the partial and internalisation of such thistory villi not wait for this deconstruction. The more immediate encouragement to confrontations has therefore also to be examined. Why should communities belonging to both religions who have acted and interacted together amicably over many centuries, become recently aggressive towards each other, suggesting a long-suppressed nurturing of hatred ? The world has seen many ostensibly religious conflicts, conflicts which seem to have their genesis in religious differences : the Catholics and the Protestants, or the Christians and the Jews culminating in the holocaust ; the genocide of American Indians ; the Crusades of medieval times, where the hostility between Christian and Muslim seems not to have died down even to this day ; and the destructive campaigns sweeping through Africa and Asia in the name of Islam against the Infidel. Religions that knew no conversion such as Hindu sects in India and those in China influenced by Confucius, or else religions which placed less emphasis on conversion such as Buddhism, have in the past, had fewer associations with massive violence in the name of religion. Violence and intolerance tended to be more segmented and

discrimination took other forms. Nevertheless today, there is no holding back even among these religions. In situations of conflict, religion has not been nor is, the only factor. Other concerns, be they political or economic, are sometimes more central. Religion is used as the public legitimation of the conflict. So too has it been with Hindus and Muslims in India. The major articulation of this conflict was the partition of India into two states in 1947; Pnklstanand India. This, far from solving the problem has become a Jeouhce of sequential

Some

contention : '- Hindus argue that all Muslims should migrate to Pakistan and accuse those who have remained in India of being more loyal to Pakistan, thus collapsing a religious and political identity ; Muslims in India although a hundred and gmuimulWMLhmoK?Qma.

twenty million, are prone to feel thatLh-UIUIUEUEFthie they will permanently remain citizens of a subordinate kind and be discriminated against. This raises the bigger question of religion and the creation of nation-states, where, whatever the reason may have been for the creation of nations based on a religious identity, the exploitation of religious sentiments for political purposes looms large, whether it be Pakistan or Israel. Religion mediates between the state and the community. But nationalism incorporates more than just religious aspirations or a religious identity, and where pre-eminence is given, to religious identity, there the . 'role of nationalism becomes cramped, if not warped.

The use of religion towards political ends, by no means new in history, today requires a discussion of religious

even those religions such as Hinduism to accomodate a
fundamentalist position, inspite of the fact that traditionally
it was extraneous to such religions. Fundamentalism, which draws
on religious loyalties, reiterates the notian of a single,
true
belief, excludes non-believers, end sghggdinate clvll society to
the laws of religion, eannotube'e;hlegii:wewa& merely as the ulsh
of a soclety to focus on a rel" ? L '
fundamentalisms, be they of a Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Zionist
or Christian variety, are, in our times, built on the reality of
rush to condemn the
fundamentalist postures within a religious traditiun,
in over life-size forms.

This might also help to
create what I would like to call a "
self-conscious self " t a
self, not confined to ego, but incorporating the awareness of ago
with that of " the other " ; of not only constantly asking the "
why " of actions but also being conscious of the self as the
actor in such actions ; and of seeking symbolic mirrors in which
the actions of the self are reflected. There can be no self
without " the other " and once the significance of this becomes
visible, then " the self-conscious self " may begin to understand
that the other is a part of the self.
Romila Thapar