

Religion in the News: May 2003

by Mister Thorne

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The month of May started out well enough: people of different faiths helping one another. But cooperation was soon overshadowed by strife. It was a month of Muslim against Hindu, Hindu against Muslim, Muslim against Christian, Hindu against Christian, Christian against Muslim, and Hindu against Buddhist against Hindu. Members of one religion stomped on the religious sensitivities of another. Arsonists burned places of worship. Congress agreed with the president: religious discrimination is OK. The Vatican warned against allowing a nation of Muslims into the EU, and the EU told the Vatican to buzz off with its concept of Christian culture. Given all the fuss, more and more Canadians said, “the heck with all this hocus-pocus; let’s be Jedis.”

The Hindus of South Jordan

During the first weekend in May, a new Hindu temple was opened in South Jordan, Utah not far from Salt Lake City. The [Sri Ganesha Temple](#), funded in part by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, is now one of two Hindu temples in Utah, a place where the vast majority of people belong to the LDS church.

Several Hindu gods showed up for the dedication of the temple. It was obvious that the wind god (Vayu) and the rain god (Varuna) were in attendance. Even the sun god (Surya) showed up for a spell.

The patron god of the temple is Ganesha, the elephant-headed Lord of Categories who brings good luck and prosperity to worshippers. Ganesha is embodied in a 600-pound block of black granite carved in his image.

“There will be many gods here,” noted one of the temple’s members. “A Buddhist asked if he could bring a statue of the Buddha to the temple. Of course we said yes. After all, the Buddha was a Hindu first.”

The Hindus of South Jordan – primarily well educated immigrants from India – used to worship in a two-story home. They wanted to build a temple to “implement our traditions and customs so that our children will preserve our Hindu heritage,” according to one member. “This is for the next generation. They should have something to represent their culture,” said another. Someone else remarked that, “In two generations our children will be assimilated. The temple provides nourishment for our culture; it allows the children to touch and experience their heritage.” The temple is designed to last for 1,000 years.

Construction of the Sri Ganesha temple was funded by the Hindus of South Jordan and by donations. The LDS church donated \$25,000. The modest temple, constructed of cinder blocks and costing a half-million dollars to build, bears little resemblance to the elaborate temples in India.

Another Hindu temple is being build in Bartlette, Illinois near Chicago, and this one promises to be far grander than the one in South Jordan. Constructed of the finest Turkish limestone and white, incandescent marble, the temple complex will encompass 170,000 square feet. Some 3,000 masons in India are shaping the finest marble from Italy for the temple. The cost of the temple – expected to be about \$30 million – is being borne by the Swaminarayan sect, which has built some 450 temples in 45 countries. The sect’s temple in London, England is the largest Hindu temple outside of India.

Also last month, the first Hindu temple in Iowa held its open house. As more and more Indians move to the U.S., the number of Hindu temples will continue to rise.

Dalit Woman on the Rise

Uttar Pradesh is to India as California is to the United States: the most populous state in the country. It is the place where the Buddha set in motion the “Wheel of the Law” over 2,500 years ago. On 3 May, history was made when Mayawati Kumari became chief minister of Uttar Pradesh. What’s so significant about that is not that Mayawati is a woman. Heck, a woman has already served as prime minister of the entire country. What’s so significant is that Mayawati is a Dalit, a member of the lowest class in India’s caste system. Dalits are expected to sweep floors and haul garbage, not administer a state.

Despite her rise, or because of it, Mayawati is in some hot water. Her problem has to do with fund-raising activities. Her political enemies say she denounced tributes to the gods and demanded bribes for herself. As evidence, they produced a video in which Mayawati told politicians in her party, “You people go about spending tons of money on religious rituals that are prescribed by upper-caste Hindus only to exploit you. The rich dharma offered by you before stone idols is gobbled up by dogs.” Speaking about her birthday, the video shows her telling the politicians, “I would like to advise you to give me cash instead of silver, gold or diamond jewelry.” Essentially she’s been charged with saying something like, “bribe me instead of the gods.”

Azam Khan, a political rival, said, “Mayawati’s reference to the Hindu gods and goddesses as dogs could incite a civil war in the country.” Referring to the video, Azam said, “You can see for yourself how this chief minister was openly demanding bribes in the form of birthday gifts for herself.”

Mayawati rose to prominence by leveraging the bad feelings that lower-caste Hindus and Muslims feel towards those in the upper castes. Defending herself against charges that she had criticized her own religion, she said, “I have not criticized the Hindu religion, but some of its ills perpetuated by a section of the priest class who tend to abuse religion for their personal gains.”

Mayawati claimed the video was a fraud. A court ordered the video to be examined, and on 17 May, the report from the lab that examined the video concluded that it had been ‘doctored.’

Shall We Build a Temple, a Mosque, or both?

Far from the South Jordan or Bartlette or Madrid is Ayodhya, an ancient city in Uttar Pradesh. From 1528 right up to 1992, it was home to the Babri mosque. The mosque was destroyed on 6 December 1992 by a mob of excited Hindus (egged on by political leaders) armed with sledgehammers and crowbars. During riots after the mosque was destroyed, thousands of Muslims were killed by rampaging Hindus and hundreds of thousands were forced from their homes.

Many Hindus believe that the Babri mosque was built on the site of a Hindu temple that was destroyed by Muslim invaders. They believe it was not just any temple, but one marking the birthplace of Lord Rama, one of the most important deities in Hinduism. Six months before the mosque was destroyed, an archaeological dig nearby unearthed 14 pillars engraved with the names of Hindu gods, as well as a trove of Hindu sculptures, and this gave credence to the legend that the mosque was built on the site of a Hindu temple destroyed by Muslims.

Some have accused the nationalist BJP party (the Indian People’s party, of which Mayawati is a member), of instigating the destruction of the mosque. The party came to power by leveraging the animosity between the majority Hindus and minority Muslims. Party politicians had campaigned to rebuild the temple to Lord Rama where the Babri mosque had long stood.

Archaeologists have been digging at the site since March to determine whether an ancient temple had been there. Muslims and Hindus are fighting in court over ownership of the site, and the findings of the archaeologists may weigh heavily in the legal dispute.

On 15 May, a government lawyer testified in the case. He said there was no question that the site was the birthplace of Lord Rama. The only question was whether there had been a temple there before the mosque was built. Muslims immediately accused the government of taking sides in the case, rather than being impartial, and a Muslim lawyer disputed the claim of the government lawyer: "There is no historical proof of a character like Rama. So the government cannot give any statement on myth."

There were reports that, on 28 May, the leader of the BJP said that if a new temple were built on the site, then a mosque could be built nearby. This was seen as an attempt to woo Muslim voters to the BJP. The rival VHP party (the World Hindu Council party) denounced the BJP proposal the very next day. "It is absurd! Having a temple and a mosque standing alongside will only breed more enmity instead of bringing about a lasting understanding between Hindus and Muslims," said the leader of the VHP party. "If they want to build a mosque, they can do it outside Ayodhya. No force in the world can get a temple and a mosque built alongside in Ayodhya."

Muslim v. Hindu

It was reported that, on 9 May, a group of Muslims attacked and killed a group of Hindu fisherman sitting near a temple. The attack was said to have occurred in the coastal city of Calicut, in the state of Kerala, beside the Arabian Sea.

A long-time resident, a Hindu, noted that the attack occurred on a Friday evening, the traditional time for such unprovoked attacks as Muslims get all worked up in the mosques. He also noted that the fishermen were sitting outside a temple, another sign that the attack was motivated by religion. Lamenting what he sees as a worsening state of religious affairs, the resident noted, "I have observed over the years the changes in Islam here in Kerala. When I was a child, the Muslims I knew were relatively non-observant; the men sported no beards or skullcaps, the women wore saris and they merely drew the pallu demurely over their heads. Today, in Malabar [the coastal area] there are large numbers of bearded men with skullcaps and women in all-enveloping black burqas."

The man continued: "What is likely to happen? Not much. Frightened Hindus will move some place safer, and one more piece of real estate will become *dar-ul Islam*, land of Muslims. Hindus in Kerala have declined in numbers, and this is what happens to non-Muslims when the Muslim population reaches a critical mass: decimation. When Semitic religions hold sway, they brutalize minorities."

Speculating that the Muslim attackers may have been from Pakistan, he added, "India needs to put down its home-grown terrorists with force, and it needs to help Pakistanis feel some pain through substantial covert action. If Indian counter-terrorism blows up a few important Pakistanis, or engineers riots against the imperial Punjabis, their taste for adventurism will diminish. Otherwise, these poor Hindus would have died in vain, butchered in front of their place of worship."

Hindu v. Buddhist

In northwest India is the ancient city of Gaya. Fourteen hundred years ago, something significant happened just outside the city. Siddhartha Gautama sat under a fig tree and vowed that he would not move until he solved the riddle of human suffering. To thwart his effort, the devil appeared. He produced winds, and floods, and earthquakes to disrupt the Buddha's meditation. That didn't work. Then he had his daughters – Desire, Pleasure, and Passion – dance before the Buddha to tempt him away from his task. That didn't work. The devil gave up, and – on the 49th day of his effort – the Buddha got it: he solved the riddle of suffering and he knew what man had to do to overcome it. Such is the legend.

On 16 May, some young Buddhist men were selling books in Gaya that contained insulting references to several Hindu gods. Some young Hindu men – members of Bajrang Dal, a youth group devoted to protecting Hindus against the likes of Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims – happened upon the Buddhists, beat them up, and burned their books.

Both Sides are to Blame

Early in 2002, a train carrying Hindu pilgrims back from the city of Ayodhya, believed to be the birthplace of Lord Rama, was stopped in the town of Godhra (in Gujarat state) by a mob of Muslims. The Muslims reportedly set fire to one of the train's cars, and 58 Hindus were burned to death. In response, Hindus went on a rampage against Muslims in Gujarat, and over 1,000 people were killed.

Muslims charged that the violence was instigated by leaders of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal. There was widespread criticism that the state government did nothing to stop the violence. Lending credence to the criticism, Gujarat's chief minister described the violence as a "natural reaction" to the attack on the train in Godhra.

A commission was formed to investigate what happened. On 20 May, a member of the commission said both sides (Muslim and Hindu) were at fault. He said there was no evidence against any VHP or Bajrang Dal leaders. "Yes, there have been instances where people have said the Bajrang Dal and VHP workers at the local level instigated people to riot. But the complaints are primarily of a very general nature. There is no real evidence that has been brought to name individual Bajrang Dal or VHP leaders," Justice Nanavati was quoted as saying. "On the evidence that we have recorded so far, it would not be fair to say that only Muslims were targeted. Initially though Hindus may have been the perpetrators of violence because they were angry, later members of both communities were engaged in the violence," he said.

Hindu v. Christian

Earlier this year, the Freedom of Religion Bill was made law in Gujarat state. The law is ostensibly intended to prevent "forced" religious conversions. According to the All India Christian Council ([AICC](#)), an organization that seeks to bring the Word of God to the misguided Hindus, the law is really intended to persecute Christian missionaries.

Before the anti-conversion law was enacted, state police conducted a survey of Christians in Gujarat. They sent a questionnaire to missionaries that asked for details on Christians in each town and village: what were their names, their ages, and so on. The questionnaire also asked, "What are the reasons behind the conversions in your district?"

On 26 May, the AICC issued a statement expressing fear for Christians in Gujarat state. "We are scared that what the government did to Muslims last year, it will do to us," said Samson Christian, the AICC joint secretary. "Their intolerance towards people of any community other than Hindus is very frightening and such illegal surveys compound our fears."

In the city of Ahmadabad, Catholic Bishop Thomas Mcwan expressed his concerns for what is happening. After meeting with the chief minister of Gujarat, Bishop Mcwan said, "The chief minister assured me that the Religious Freedom Bill is not against us and that I need not be concerned." Despite the chief minister's assurances, Bishop Mcwan sees trouble. "Religious fundamentalism is growing in India," he said. "From the large cities it is spreading out to villages. Since the country was divided in 1947, into India with a Hindu majority and Pakistan with a Muslim majority, there has always been concern for the future of religious minorities."

Bishop Mcwan said he would fight the new law, which appears to violate the Indian Constitution. “This is contrary to Article 25 of the Constitution which lays down the fundamental right of every person to profess and propagate freely his or her own religion . . . we will appeal to the Supreme Court against its unconstitutionality,” he said. “This is a practice which goes against Christianity and against Jesus Christ. Every citizen must be free in conscience to change his or her religion.”

Is he concerned about the potential for violence against Christians? “We have the spiritual support of the universal Church. We are not afraid of threats. God sends us to bear witness to the Gospel and we will carry on our mission despite persecution,” said the bishop.

Hindu v. Muslim

Far from Gujarat is Carbondale, Illinois, home of Southern Illinois University and the Carbondale Islamic Centre. On the morning of 12 May, someone driving by the Centre noticed something unusual. There was black writing spray painted on the pale, yellow building. Police were called, they examined the graffiti, and it appeared to be the work of Hindus. “Free Kashmir” read one message. Another message said, “Long live Shri Rama.”

Muslim v. Christian

On 8 May, in the city of Basra, Iraq, two Christian shop owners were shot and killed by Muslims. Why? The two Christians sold liquor. Islamic militants had warned them repeatedly to stop selling liquor – a treat forbidden by Islam – or they would be killed. The two Christians refused, and the militants made good their threat.

Witnesses said the two were killed just minutes apart. In both cases, two Muslim men entered the shop, shot the shop owner in the head, and then left by taxi. Michael Faraaj, another Christian shop owner who sells liquor, said Islamic militants had visited him on several occasions and warned him against selling liquor. They said they would bomb his store if he did not stop. “The last time they came, they were threatening me again, but it was very serious. I had no choice but to close. All my life is in that shop,” he said.

In Baghdad, Chaldean Christians are feeling the heat. Just across the street from the Church of Mary the Virgin, Muslims have converted a former Baath party office into a mosque. They’ve mounted loudspeakers outside the building, and they blast their prayers so loudly that Monsignor Ishlemon Warduni can no longer lead his congregation in prayer.

Banners now appear in both Baghdad and Basra warning women to cover themselves, and Christian women report being harassed by Muslims for failing to cover their heads. Shereen Musa, a 22-year-old Christian woman, said she was walking through a market in Basra one day and Muslim men began to taunt her for not having her hair covered. Some members of the ‘religion of peace’ began throwing vegetables at her. “Everyone was laughing at me, and I was crying,” she said. “When I had to walk back through the same place, someone saw a cross on my neck and said, ‘Oh, you’re a Christian. You’ll suffer a terrible fate.’”

Stepping on Religious Sensitivities

On 12 May, Christians in Denmark stormed a store of the Coop chain of stores and destroyed a batch of “flip-flops of shame.” The chain was selling flip-flops (rubber sandals) with images purported to be those of Jesus and the Virgin Mary on the in-soles. The Christians took the use of the images as an insult. A Catholic parish filed suit against the chain for blasphemy. “We Catholics pray to Jesus and Mary and now they want us to walk all over them. That’s blasphemy and a serious and indecent violation of the religious sentiments of believers,” said a representative of the parish.

A Coop spokesman said the chain would continue selling the flip-flops. “Our intention was never to offend people’s beliefs, but we cannot accept to just fold because of the protests of a minority, who in addition commit acts of vandalism against our products and trouble our other customers,” he said.

Another flap over flip-flops involves the image of Lord Ganesha that appears on the in-soles of flip-flops sold by American Eagles Outfitters. This is particularly offensive to Hindus, who consider stepping on religious symbols a strong insult. (Like Muslims, Hindus remove their shoes before they enter a temple.)

A group called American Hindus Against Defamation ([AHAD](#)) demanded that American Eagles stop selling the flip-flops; they also demanded an apology. The head of the group, Dr. Ajay Shah, said, “To put images of Gods and Goddesses, which are revered and worshipped by a billion strong Hindu community is not just a mark of ignorance but seemingly a deliberate attempt to denigrate Hindu dharma and Hindus around the world.”

American Eagles promptly responded to the demand. In a letter to the group, Neil Bulman, V.P. and General Counsel for American Eagles, wrote, “On behalf of American Eagle Outfitters, please accept this letter as our formal apology for our use of the image resembling Lord Ganesha on this product. Again, this letter confirms that we will remove these flip-flop shoes from our stores in order to maintain the good will and our customer relations with the Hindu community.”

AHAD is still trying to get American Eagles to remove the image of Lord Ganesha that appears on tote bags it sells.

Jews v. Gentiles

On 8 May, the San Francisco Chronicle reported how the Editor-in-Chief of the student newspaper of a college in Santa Rosa, California got a lesson in religious sensitivities. She learned how those sensitivities can quickly react to unflattering opinions. The editor decided to run an op-ed written by a student and titled, “Is anti-Semitism Ever the Result of Jewish Behavior?” What a reaction! The editor received four death threats.

Arsonists v. Theists

On 6 May, a cinder block was thrown through a window of a Jewish educational center in Encino in California’s San Fernando Valley. The next day, someone started a fire by throwing a Molotov cocktail into the Valley Beth Shalom Temple just a few blocks away. It was the fourth fire at a religious site in the area in just over a week. The other sites attacked by what authorities believe is a single arsonist include a Presbyterian church, an Iranian Jewish temple, and a Bahai community center.

On 7 May, 52-year-old Donna Savage was sent to a mental hospital after serving 17 months in jail. Her crime? She set fire to a church in Maine four times in autumn of 2001. Why? Because she believed the pastor of the church was trying to damn her. A psychologist who testified at Savage’s sentencing hearing said, “In order to protect herself, she believed she had the right to take certain steps.”

U.S. Congress Votes to Allow Religious Discrimination!

On 8 May, the House of Representatives passed legislation (reauthorizing the Workforce Investment Act) that would allow religious groups that receive federal funds to practice religious discrimination. That's right! According to Representative John Shadegg (Republican of Arizona), religious groups "have a right to hire people who share their values."

In December, President Bush signed an executive order that would allow Christian groups to obtain contracts with the federal government even if they refused to hire Jews (or Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists).

Veil v. Vail

In 1990, in the case of *Employment Division v. Smith*, the Supreme Court made mince meat of the Free Exercise clause of the First Amendment, the one that says Congress may make no law restricting the free exercise of religion. The 1990 case had to do with religious use of peyote by members of the Native American Church. The Supreme Court ruled that, while it would be a violation of the Free Exercise clause for a state to prohibit the use of peyote solely because of its use in religious ceremonies, the law in question was designed to prevent anyone from using peyote for any reason, so it was OK. Since then, the Supreme Court has ruled over and over again that if the government wants to limit the free exercise of religion, it can (just so long as it's one of those minority religions).

In response, the Congress passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) in 1993. The act was unanimously approved in the House, and was just three votes shy of unanimous approval by the Senate.

According to the RFRA, government cannot pass or enforce laws restricting religious liberty unless it can show a "compelling state interest." Also, it must use the "least restrictive means" to satisfy that compelling interest. When President Clinton signed the act into law, he said, "The power to reverse by legislation a decision of the United States Supreme Court is a power that is rightly, hesitantly, and infrequently exercised by the United States Congress. But this is an issue in which that extraordinary measure was clearly called for. As the Vice President said, this act reverses the *Employment Division v. Smith* and reestablishes a standard that better protects all Americans of all faiths in the exercise of their religion in a way that I am convinced is far more consistent with the intent of the Founders of this Nation than the Supreme Court decision."

Fine. But in 1997, in the case of *City of Boerne v. Flores*, the Supreme Court ruled the RFRA unconstitutional. The government was free to pass laws that restricted the free exercise of religion, despite the Constitution's prohibition against it doing any such thing. Since then, several states have passed their own versions of RFRA. One such state is Florida.

Last June, we reported on the situation of Sulthaana Freeman, a convert to Islam who claims that her religion requires her to keep her face veiled (see [Religion in the News: June 2002](#)). The state of Florida says that Ms. Freeman must expose her face for a photograph if she wants a driver's license. Ms. Freeman's lawyer says the Florida version of RFRA (the [Free Exercise of Religion Statute](#)) means Florida cannot deny her a driver's license just because she refuses to violate her religious beliefs.

Ms. Freeman sued the state, and on 27 May, she, her husband, and her lawyer showed up in court as the case got underway. Surprisingly, on the first day of the trial, Ms. Freeman's face was prominently displayed. Turns out the attorney for the state – Jason Vail – had an enlarged photo of Ms. Freeman's face: a mugshot that was taken in 1999 when she was arrested for felony child abuse.

On 30 May, Governor Bush weighed in: “driving is a privilege,” he said. “It is not a constitutional right.” Public sentiment was pretty much the same as it was last year: if Ms. Freeman doesn’t want to show her face, fine. But then she doesn’t get a driver’s license.

EU to Vatican: Buzz Off

The Convention on the Future of Europe had been working on a European Constitution, and the Vatican wants the preamble to include a reference to Europe’s Christian heritage. On 28 May, the Convention produced a draft of the preamble to the Constitution that doesn’t quite suit the Vatican. The preamble does mention, “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe . . . nourished first by the civilizations of Greece and Rome” and “later by philosophical currents of the Enlightenment.” But that’s not good enough.

In an interview on Vatican Radio, Cardinal Roberto Tucci said the Convention obviously did not understand the Vatican’s proposal for a reference to the continent’s Christian heritage in the preamble. “It was not a question of adherence to Christianity, but of recognizing the historical fact of the enormous influence that Christian culture has had on European culture,” the cardinal said. “The most unifying factor of Europe, which has been Christian culture, is missing.”

Christian culture?

Josep Miro i Ardevol, president of the Convention of Christians for Europe, said, “It borders on the ridiculous that the preamble should make nominal reference to the Hellenistic and Roman component and jump directly to the ‘philosophers of the Enlightenment,’ omitting the Christian reference without which the Enlightenment is incomprehensible.”

In addition, Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran, the Vatican’s foreign secretary, said the EU should limit itself geographically (i.e., Turkey should not be admitted). Another prominent Catholic cleric, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, agreed. He said that admitting Turkey, which he described as a deeply Muslim country with a fast-growing population, would be problematic.

Cardinal Ruini, head of the Conference of Italian Bishops, saw a silver lining in the dark cloud of admitting a predominately Muslim state into the EU. He said admitting Turkey to the EU would improve the lot of the few Christians in Turkey.

More Canadians Say ‘The Heck with it’

On 13 May, [Statistics Canada](#) released its 2001 census on religions in Canada. Like the latest census released in the UK (see [Religion in the News: February 2003](#)), the Canadian census shows strong growth in the number of those who claim Jedi as their religion. Some 20,000 Canadians say they are Jedis, and half of them live in British Columbia. Also showing very strong growth are those who profess no religion. They went from less than 1% of the population 30 years ago to over 15% now. In British Columbia, they amounted to 35% of the population.

Like the U.S., Canadians remain predominantly Christian: now 72% of the population, down from 80% 10 years ago. And, like the U.S., minority religions showed strong growth: the number of Muslims grew by almost 130% in 10 years; in that same period, the number of Buddhists grew by over 80%; the number of Hindus grew by almost 90%, as did the number of Sikhs.

Commentary

When Muslim Turks invaded Hindustan (now India) in the 11th century, they followed their usual practice. They offered the conquered these options: convert to Islam, become a slave, or die. They didn't pretend that Islam was a religion of peace.

They destroyed Hindu temples and erected mosques in their place. The first mosque in India (built in 1198) was built on the site of a Hindu temple demolished by Muslims. To this day, an inscription on its walls says it was built using materials from 27 "idolatrous" temples. Quite a sight for the Hindus.

Muslim rulers came and went. In 1525, Baber, a descendant of Genghis Khan, invaded Hindustan and overthrew the Sultan of Dehli. Baber's son was unable to maintain rule after Baber died, but a grandson – Akbar – set things straight. He established the Mogul Empire, which included most of what is now India.

Unlike previous Muslim rulers, Akbar tolerated other religions. He was curious about them. He had come to doubt the authenticity of the Koran, and he wound up cobbling a new religion out of bits of Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism. He allowed his Hindu subjects to practice their religion, except that he outlawed certain practices, like throwing widows onto the funeral pyres of their dead husbands.

Time passed. Hinduism survived. Christians arrived and they began fighting each other (Dutch v. French v. English) for control of India. The English won, and by the 1850s, they had complete control.

To the Hindus, it was a good change of masters: Muslims replaced by Christians, sultans and emperors replaced by governors and viceroys. To the Muslims, it was utter defeat. They couldn't accept the sort of secular education the English imposed. They refused to learn English. Outnumbered three to one by Hindus, the very idea of elective government and independence that the Hindus were espousing was troubling. When the Hindus formed the Indian National Congress in 1885, it seemed as if the Muslims might fall under the mercy of those whom their ancestors had so gloriously conquered 700 years earlier.

Then Mohandas Gandhi hit the scene. Under his influence, Muslims and Hindus joined forces in the quest for independence. The union began to unravel as Hindus called for the "reconversion" of Hindus from Islam. By 1940, Muslims were calling for a partition of India into two nations: one dominated by Hindus, the other dominated by Muslims.

In 1947, after England granted independence, all hell broke loose. In just a few months, some 12 million people fled their ancestral homes as Hindus and Muslims clashed. The feud continues to this day. Muslims abuse the Hindu minority in Pakistan; Hindus abuse the Muslim minority in India. Politicians encourage strife, and the two countries continue to fight over who rules Kashmir.

And we live with the prospect of the world's first nuclear-powered religious war.

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