

## INTRODUCTION

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“Islam,” without referring it to the facets of a system of which it is part, does not exist.

—ABDUL HAMID EL-ZEIN,  
“*Beyond Ideology and Theology*”

Having faced acute suspicion from the Jamaat in Aligarh, I was thrilled when Shaheed, an eminent leader of its student wing (the Student Islamic Organization of India, SIO), agreed to a meeting. It was January 2002, and the debate on the February elections for the Uttar Pradesh (UP) Assembly had started. Hearsay had it that to defeat the “communal, fascist” Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Jamaat would canvass for the victory of candidates committed to secularism and democracy. And this precisely was the thorniest debate in the Jamaat circle: Was the Jamaat not departing from its earlier position according to which secularism and democracy were *haram*, forbidden? While talking to Shaheed about this issue, he told me that the Jamaat had “fundamentally changed” and that its acceptance of secularism and democracy was the glaring sign of that change. A week later I met him by chance near a *pān* shop at the busy crossing of Dodhpur. We began talking about the Jamaat, and he reiterated his earlier view. When two of his friends joined our conversation, however, Shaheed, to my surprise reversed his view and said the Jamaat had not changed.

I encountered several such episodes. For example, to my question as to whether the Jamaat had changed considerably, a Jamaat member told me, while doing ablution inside the central mosque of Aligarh *shahr*, that he would go one step further to say it had “completely [*bilkul*] changed.” After the prayer, he offered to share with me his rich experience as a Jamaat member since 1961, and we made an appointment to meet. At that meeting, two other Jamaat members were also present. When I brought up the issue of change, he, like Shaheed, also made a turn-around. I learned later that the other two members of the Jamaat were still unfriendly to its embracing democracy and secularism. In Rampur, a national leader of the Jamaat told me that he would accept the “massive” change privately but he would not say the same from a “public platform” (*ijlās*). While the members of the Jamaat themselves acknowledged the “massive” change, many of its Muslim critics—liberal, leftist, as well as ulema (religious experts) of other sects—told me that the Jamaat had not changed, and, if it had, the change was only tactical (see Qadri 1965; and Taban 1994).

## 2 • Introduction

Back in Amsterdam I came across a debate that resonated with my field experience. In 1999 the *Middle East Quarterly* carried a debate on the question “Is Islam a Threat?” The participants included Martin Kramer, John Esposito, Daniel Pipes, and Graham Fuller. Based on the writings of Olivier Roy and Abdulkarim Soroush, Kramer indicated a shift in Islamism. Pipes dismissed such a shift, arguing that Islamists continued to be ideologically unwavering. When Esposito stressed the mutation of Islamism, he admitted a minor shift but described it as merely tactical, not real (also see, Sivan 2003).

This book explores the theme of transformation or moderation of the Indian Islamists. Calling the “persistence of Islamism” thesis into question, I show the ideological transformation of the Jamaat and SIO, and the conflicts and ambiguities that accompanied the transformation. Far from being tactical, the transformation of Islamism, I maintain, is deeply ideological. In these pages I show how the trajectory of the Jamaat demonstrates a substantive mutation in the discourse of Islamism. Simply put, I demonstrate how its radical goal changed from establishing Allah’s Kingdom to embracing and defending Indian secular democracy. I also explore the issue of the radicalization of the Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), a young, breakaway group of the Jamaat founded in 1976. SIMI’s radicalization unfolded with the intensification of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, from the 1980s on. The twin calls for jihad and caliphate formed the core of SIMI’s radicalized agenda.

In accounting for the transformation of Indian Islamists, this book addresses a series of interlocking ideas. What led to the moderation of the Jamaat? Did the secular, democratic nature of the Indian polity and the disavowal of its ideology by the Muslim public shape the Jamaat’s moderation? If so, did it act up on the Jamaat only externally? Or did the Jamaat also undergo democratization and secularization from within? If we assume, however, that secular democracy catalyzed the moderation of the Jamaat, how can we comprehend the radicalization of SIMI? Does this suggest, then, an affinity between the altered form of secular democracy during the 1980s and the concomitant radicalization of SIMI? More important, is there a link between SIMI’s radicalization and the democratization of the Muslim community? In other words, was SIMI’s radicalization a mere staging of the pristine doctrine of jihad, or was it the beginning of the fragmentation of “traditional” Islam? Comparatively, does India’s secular democracy—in contrast to the mostly undemocratic regimes in the Middle East—offer a fresh framework to understand the moderation and radicalization of the Islamist phenomena? Can the study of Islamism in a Muslim-minority context such as India shed light on the trajectory of Islamists (and Muslims) living as a minority in the secular, democratic countries of the West and Africa?

To address these issues, I start with the question with which I began my research, and then unpack the concepts of Islamism, moderation, and radicalization. Next I lay out my argument and also outline an alternative genealogy of secularism. Finally, I describe the theoretical framework of this study and I then end with a synoptic account of the chapters.

### RESEARCH QUESTION

In the course of my research on the Jamaat, I was intrigued by its distinct ideology. Founded by Syed Abul Ala Maududi (1903–1979), in 1941, before the Partition of India, the Constitution of the Jamaat proclaimed as its goal the establishment of *hukumat-e-ilāhiya*, an Islamic state or Allah's Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Maududi argued that the very declaration of faith—the recitation of *kalima*, *lā ilāha illallāhu muhammadur rasūlullāh* (there is no God except Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger)—obligated Muslims to establish Allah's Kingdom. Because there was no Islamic state in British India and its Constitution was “infidelic [*kāfirāna*]” (in Tahir undated: 18), he considered it *dar al-kufr*, the land of disbelief. For Muslims to “even breathe,” let alone live, “under such an [infidelic] state was not legitimate [*jā'iz*] unless they strove to transform it into *dar al-Islam* [land of Islam]” (*ibid.*:18; also see Rahmani 1955). The mission of the Jamaat, as Maududi (2003a) defined it, was to transform India into *dar al-Islam*. Secular democracy, according to Maududi, was *haram* because it replaced *divine* sovereignty with *human* sovereignty. In his reading of the *kalima*, its profession also obligated Muslims to boycott what he called “*jāhiliyat*,” “*bātil*,” and “*tāghutī nizām*”—an anti-Islamic political system. The Constitution of the Jamaat made it compulsory for its members to boycott the following:

- Assemblies that legislate secular as opposed to sharia laws
- An army that kills “in the path of non-God [*qitāl fi ghair sabīl Allāh*]”
- Judiciary based on secular laws, either as plaintiff or defendant, and also banks based on interest
- Teaching or studying in colleges or universities, including Muslim ones, that serve *jāhiliyat* and whose goal is not the pursuit of an Islamic state; Maududi called them “slaughterhouse[s]”
- Government services and jobs in all institutions that are part of the anti-godly system
- Social ties with those who are *fāsiqīn* (transgressors) and neglectful of God (in Maududi 1942:178–82).

With India's Independence and the creation of the separate Muslim state of Pakistan in 1947, the Jamaat was divided into Jamaate-Islami

## 4 • Introduction

Hind (India) and Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan. Maududi himself chose to migrate to Pakistan. Following the Partition, Indian Muslims became a minority, territorially dispersed. It is worth exploring whether the Jamaat still believed in its pre-Partition goal of Allah's Kingdom. Did it continue to boycott the elections to the Assembly, the Indian judiciary, government services, and so on? Did it persist in severing ties with Muslims of different sects or ideologies, which in the past it had characterized as *jāhiliyat*? Did it continue to ban its members from studying or teaching in the "slaughterhouses"? Or did it reconcile itself to secularism and democracy which it had condemned as *haram* and antithetical to Muslims' very belief in *kalima* (monotheism)? In short, did the Jamaat's ideology change? And if so, how?

To answer this question I decided to study a Jamaat school and the SIO, both in Aligarh, a town southeast of Delhi with a sizable Muslim population and known internationally for being the seat of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). As my research progressed I realized that SIO could hardly be disentangled from SIMI. I also learned that half the SIO members on the AMU campus were from Jāmi'atul Falāḥ, a Jamaat madrasa in Azamgarh district in UP. This discovery took me to Falāḥ. Similarly, while studying the Jamaat school in the *shahr*, I traveled to Rampur where the first model school of the Jamaat was established (see chapter 1).

### *Conceptual Terrain*

In light of the research question, let us turn to the concepts of Islamism, moderation, and radicalization. An array of concepts is used to refer to Islamic movements, especially their radical variants: "Islamic Resurgence," "Islamic Revivalism," "Islamic Extremism," "Militant Islam," "Political Islam," and "Religious Nationalists." These terms are often ill-defined and used interchangeably. Islamic fundamentalism is the term most used. In fact, without "Islamic," it is a paradigmatic concept in the volumes edited by Marty and Appleby (1991–1995). They use it so loosely, however, that every religious articulation comes under its purview. They include movements as diverse as the Tablighī Jamaat and the Jamaat-e-Islami in South Asia (Ahmad 1991). Compared to the above terms, "Islamism" is well demarcated. "The Islamist movement," writes Roy (1994:39), "thus conceives of itself explicitly as a sociopolitical movement, founded on an Islam defined as much in terms of a political ideology as in terms of a religion." Roy's definition has two elements: as a movement its prime aim is to establish an Islamic state; and it derives its legitimacy from the Qur'an and the Prophet. The second element echoes Schmitt's idea of political theology that Meier (2002:86) expresses as "a political theory . . .

for which, according to the self-understanding of the political theologian, divine revelation is the supreme authority and the ultimate ground.”

Sayyid (1997) finds Roy’s definition narrow, as it excludes, *inter alia*, “neo-fundamentalists” who want to establish a state from the bottom up, that is, by Islamizing the society first. I think Roy’s definition is inadequate in other ways as well. To Touraine (1981:81), social movement is “the combination of a principle of identity, a principle of opposition and a principle of totality.” Setting aside the centrality he places on the class character of movements (*ibid.*:77–79) and hence the idea of historicity, we can retain Touraine’s principles of identity and opposition, the interrelationship between them, and the goal of actors as four constitutive elements of a movement. From this perspective, Roy’s definition does not fully foreground the identity of Islamism. Nor does it identify the adversaries of Islamism. It also falls short of explaining the relationship between Islamism and its adversaries.<sup>2</sup> It is my contention that Islamism, in addition to the properties Roy ascribes to it, expresses itself in two other remarkably interrelated ideas: the notion of purity and the constant maintaining of boundary between itself and its “other.” Islamism conceives of itself as “pure” Islam. This, in turn, is based on a novel reading of Islam as a perennial conflict between Islam and *jāhiliyat*, the “other” of Islam. This leads Islamism to disown much of Muslim history. In its discourse, throughout history, most Muslims, including the ulema, appear as impure. When extended outside Muslims and Islam, Islamism’s notion of history depicts the West and modernity as new incarnations of *jāhiliyat*; hence its denunciation of secularism, democracy, and communism. It is clear how notions of purity and boundary maintenance go together.

Central to the self-conceptualization of Islamism is also the idea that Islam is an organic system, and the state its nerve center. Likewise, *jāhiliyat* is an organic whole; participation in any of its domains is tantamount to heresy. Thus Islam, as a system, according to Islamism, must dislodge the *jāhiliyat* political system. Its strategy to dislodge it is threefold: first, if possible, remove it by force; second, establish hegemony in civil society and then take hold of the state; and, third, withdraw from and boycott the *jāhiliyat* system. The Jamaat’s plan to pursue its goal combined the second and third strategy (Maududi 1942:177). It follows that, as the claimant of pure Islam, Islamism regards practices within Islam other than its own as *fitna*, (sedition) or *jāhiliyat*. Non-Islamic religions or concepts such as secularism or democracy it regards as the opposite of Islam. Islamism is hostile to pluralism (Bayat 1996:45).

This outline of Islamism is obviously heuristic, derived from the specifics of the *Indian* Jamaat. One might ask, for example, if it applies to Islamist movements in Pakistan and in the Middle East. As for Pakistan, the

## 6 • Introduction

boundary between Islam and *jāhiliyat* that Maududi drew before Partition was revised after the creation of Pakistan. Until 1949 he regarded the Pakistani state as a sign of *jāhiliyat*, because it based itself on popular, as opposed to divine, sovereignty. In 1948 the western Punjab government mandated its employees to pledge an oath to the state. Maududi forbade his party members to do so until the state became Islamic. In March 1949 Pakistan's Constituent Assembly passed the Objectives Resolution acknowledging the sovereignty of God. Only then did Maududi (2003a) no longer regard contesting elections or joining the Pakistani army as *haram* (Nasr 1994:121–24, 246, n. 40; Niazi 1973:106–13). Maududi made many changes in his position by grounding them in this so-called Islamic character of the Pakistani state. Since the state and the Constitution of India were secular, Maududi kept to his old position about India. As for the Middle East, from the 1960s on many streams of the Muslim Brotherhood followed the path initially taken by the Jamaat. These included Takfir-wa-Hijra and Jihad in Egypt; the Phalanges of Muhammad and Al-mujahidūn in Syria; and Soldiers of the Lord in Lebanon. These groups derived their sustenance from Syed Qutb (Sivan 1990; also see Kepel 2003), who was influenced by Maududi (Shepard 2003). Many positions of the Hizb al Tahrir of Britain (Taji-Farouki 1996) resonate with those of the Indian Jamaat in its early phase. Let us return to the delineation of concepts.

Unlike Islamism,<sup>3</sup> the terms “radicalization” and “moderation” are not limited to the study of Muslim societies; they enjoy wider currency across the social science fields, including in the media. Their meanings remain imprecise, however. In the post-9/11 world, as Islam has become an object of “security,” these terms have also become “securitized.” From this perspective, the difference between moderates and radicals is *tactical*, not ideological. Moderates seek to achieve their goal by accepting the regime within which they work, whereas the radicals wish to achieve their goal by challenging it. Moderates and radicals thus imply a distinction between those with whom the West can “do business” and those with whom it cannot (International Crisis Group 2005:2) I wish to escape this securitization trap, as it reduces the complex phenomenon of Islamism to the binary distinction between those who are “friendly” and those who are “threatening.” I use the terms “moderation” and “radicalization” as each pertains to the content and forms of Islamist ideology in relation to the larger political field in which Islamists participate. I see moderation and radicalization as dynamic, interconnected processes, not as a set of fixed, isolated attributes. They represent two main templates of the Islamist spectrum. More to the point, I disagree with the dualism between tactics and ideology. To me, this dualism is simply false. Tactics spring from and entail a reevaluation of ideology.

I use the term “moderation” to mean the shifting position of a radical movement from a fairly “closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives.” This definition by Schwedler (2006:4) is useful, but we need to ask: Why does a movement change from a rigid to a more open perspective? It does so, I believe, because it begins to doubt and revise the premises that defined its earlier radical worldview. For example, some key premises of the Jamaat’s Islamism were that Islam is a complete system; the West and modernity are *jāhiliyat*; the Jamaat alone is the bearer of pure Islam; and the boundary between Islam and its “other,” *jāhiliyat*, is unbridgeable. In the course of its transformation, as this book will show, the Jamaat reexamined its premises. Conceptually, moderation thus signals the transformation of Islamism from an organic system into a process of interpretations, which means that Islamism mutates from an already accomplished system to an evolving process of interactions with its former adversaries. In so doing, the boundaries on which Islamism bases itself become blurred. Moderation, in short, is a discourse marked by the blurring, even dissolution, of Islamism’s boundaries, the embracing of its “other,” the decentering of the Islamic state from its agenda, and the casting of doubt over its own premises while generating ambiguity and conflict among its practitioners.

Radicalization, in contrast, sharpens the boundary between Islam and its “other,” and recenters the Islamic state on its agenda. Conceptually it tends to become rigid and hostile to alternative perspectives, both from within and without (cf. *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* 2003:259). In part, this happens precisely because of the moderating voices of those on what I have called the Islamist spectrum. The motor of radicalization, as well as of moderation, however, is the larger field of politics in which Islamists are one among several actors, and by no means the dominant ones. Here a clarification is in order. Although, historically, the term “radical” connotes a progressive slant, I use it in a neutral sense. Also, I do not use the term “radicalization” to mean acts of violence, even though it has come to signify just that. In my reading, the Jamaat, at the moment of its formation and subsequently, was radical in that it articulated the boundary between Islam and *jāhiliyat*. It maintained this boundary by, for example, boycotting the institutions of *jāhiliyat* such as elections to the secular assembly, government jobs, other Muslim organizations, and so on, clearly a radical approach. The Jamaat’s radicalism, however, was *isolationist*. Instead of engaging with the Indian political system and the Muslim society, the Jamaat, in its early phase, mostly withdrew from them. The radicalism of SIMI, in contrast, was *involved*, in that it engaged with the political system in important ways from the late 1980s on.

## THE ARGUMENT

As noted at the outset, a significant transformation has occurred in the ideology of Indian Islamism. I wish to push this transformation to the center of the debate. My main argument about moderation and radicalization of Indian Islamism consists of three interlocking propositions. First, I argue that Islamism is not a static, fossilized entity, immutably locked into a dead end. Instead, it has changed, and the moderation of the Jamaat is a telling illustration of this transformation. Whereas in the past the Jamaat called secularism and democracy *haram*, it now fights to safeguard these principles. Western-style Muslim colleges were previously considered to be “slaughterhouse[s],” but now the Jamaat seeks their minority status. Having its schools affiliated with the government earlier had been seen as an approval of *tāghūt* (idolatry), but now it has no qualms about getting that affiliation. Similarly, whereas earlier it had disregarded other religions, now it accepts them. Previously it had refused to collaborate even with Muslim groups like the Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind (see below), but now it forges alliances with its former “other”—secular, atheist, even Hindu pontiffs who blow a conch at its meetings. The pursuit of an Islamic state has also ceased to be central on the Jamaat’s agenda.

Second, I contend that secular democracy played a key role in the moderation of the Jamaat.<sup>4</sup> This factor markedly distinguished Indian Islamists from their counterparts in the Middle East, where neither non-authoritarian secularism nor democracy has a strong tradition. It was manifest in the Muslim public’s disavowal of the Jamaat’s ideology, which also played itself out in the realm of secular democratic politics. Critical to this disavowal is what I call an “ideological dissonance” between the Jamaat’s agenda and the political subjectivity of the Muslim public. In contrast to the Jamaat, the majority of Muslims, including ulema, did not regard secular democracy as alien to Islam. In fact, they fought for it. For the non-Jamaat Muslims, Islam did not obligate establishing an Islamic state. To make its ideology credible, the Jamaat first had to convince Muslims that a secular democratic state assailed Islamic monotheism. Because the Muslim public disavowed the Jamaat’s Islamist version of Islam, the Jamaat had to moderate its position, and in this, the Jamaat leadership played a significant role.

Secular democracy did not only act upon the Jamaat externally but did so internally as well. Indeed, the Jamaat’s functioning took on a robust democratic mode. Maududi, as the Jamaat’s president (*amīr*) had been the sole decision maker. The task of the consultative body (*shura*) whose members he himself nominated, had been to advise the *amīr*. With the democratization of the Jamaat, *shura* members began to be elected, and the *amīr* had to accept decisions taken by the *shura* in a majority vote.

So crucial had democratic decision making become that even the Islamic creed, the *kalima*, from which, according to Maududi, the ban on voting in the elections of a secular state had been derived, was put to a vote—a practice intractable in history. The Jamaat also underwent secularization. In Maududi’s view, Islam necessitated an Islamic state, but in postcolonial India the Jamaat recast its theology to say that an Islamic state was not basic to Islam. Thus it moved away from its position of fusing religion and the state. This differentiation was most glaring when, in 1961, the Jamaat sent a questionnaire to ulema asking if sharia allowed participation in elections. In seeking validation from ulema, the Jamaat differentiated the religious from the nonreligious domain, for it did not regard itself as (sufficiently) religious. When the SIO leadership asked one of its activists if he prayed and why he watched films, the activist was displeased, as he regarded these acts as individual choices. The SIO, he believed, should be concerned with sociopolitical issues and not private religious matters. He also held that the Islamic state had originally been secular and that the West had borrowed secularism from Islam.

Third, I contend that the dramatically changed nature of secular democracy from the 1980s on is what *primarily* led to the radicalization of SIMI. In the 1990s SIMI called for jihad and caliphate, which I contend was a response to the rise of Hindu nationalism that was targeting Muslims. The Ayodhya campaign was not just about a temple but was also a challenge to the secular ethos of the Indian Constitution and the Muslim identity. As Hindutva’s assault on secularism grew fiercer—culminating in the destruction of the Babri mosque in 1992, and accompanied by massive violence against Muslims—so did SIMI’s call for jihad. By stressing the connection between SIMI’s radicalization and the Indian state, I intend to show that the failure of the latter to protect the lives, property, and dignity of its Muslim citizens led SIMI to call for jihad against the Hindutva activists engaged in anti-Muslim riots. It was in the wake of the Babri mosque’s demolition and the ensuing large-scale riots across the country that SIMI described secularism as a “fraud” and declared India as *dar al-Islam*. SIMI’s call for caliphate was also a response to Hindutva’s project of inaugurating a Hindu state.<sup>5</sup>

SIMI’s radicalization, I argue, is also related to its activists’ yearnings for democratic rights in contrast to the wishes of the older generation of Islamists. A key repertoire of protest employed by SIMI was to stage a strike against the administration of the Falāḥ, a Jamaat madrasa. Historically, strikes are rare in most madrasas, as the dominant discourse there is that of duty and obedience to ulema. SIMI’s discourse, in contrast, is that of rights. Coming from what I call the “Islamist class” and possessing a specific type of cultural capital and disposition, the young SIMI activists assert for rights, not duties. Their intellectual dispositions enable them to

## 10 • Introduction

question Islamic authorities. SIMI's call for jihad and its rejection by all revered Islamic institutions thus gestures demonopolization of religious authority. The discourse of jihad, rather than being a simple replay of Islamic authority, is instead its fragmentation. Like the Jamaat, SIMI also underwent democratization.

These complex processes of moderation and radicalization were shot through with conflicts and contestations over what defines "true" Islam, and here I stress their import. These fierce contestations demonstrate that Islam is not an object "out there" but is continually fashioned and reconfigured in the changing sociopolitical universe that Islamists and Muslims inhabit.

### *India, Islam, Islamism*

No major anthropological or sociological work has been published on Muslim movements in India. A key reason for this neglect is that Westerners identify India with Hindus; is this not an orientalist hubris according to which religion-culture and geography-area converge (Appadurai 1986; Gupta and Ferguson 1992)? Muslims have thus become inconsequential.<sup>6</sup> When Barbara Metcalf (1995:955) told an American professor that she wanted to specialize in Indian Muslims, he spluttered: "Muslims! Why they are no more than 5 percent of the population and they simply do not matter." The reason, as Metcalf observes, was not statistical (that, too, is incorrect). Indian Muslims fall outside the pale of the origin of Islam, the Middle East, the so-called Islamic heartland. Further, given the portrayal of Islam as monolithic, it is assumed that Indian Muslims must also be like those in the "heartland," a shadow of the "universal Muslim" character (Pandey 1993:267). At the hands of Dumont and McKim Marriott, the anthropological-orientalist discourse shared by Hindu nationalism inscribed Muslims either as a foreign other or as an entity subsumed under Hindu culture (Van der Veer 1993, 1994).<sup>7</sup>

That most works on Islamism deal with Muslim-majority countries of the Islamic "heartland," seems itself a good reason to study an Islamist movement in India. A more plausible reason, however, is that India arguably has some distinctiveness that elude the societies of the Islamic "heartland." Historically the latter have largely been undemocratic and nonsecular. Can conclusions drawn from studies of the "heartland" hold up in a secular democracy like India, where Muslims have had a different, complex trajectory? Simply put, I believe that Indian Muslims, in contrast to the view of the distinguished professor noted above, do matter. And they matter, not just because Indian Muslims are the second largest Muslim population in the world, as is novel nowadays to mention in parenthesis. Their salience, I suggest, goes far beyond reducing them to an object of demographic data.

An important debate on Islam in the “heartland” is about Islam’s compatibility with modernity. It is often asked: Is Islam compatible with secularism and democracy? There are two major poles in this debate. Fukuyama (1992), Kepel (1994), Bernard Lewis (1988, 1993, 1996, 2002, 2003), Lawrence (1995), Gellner (1994), and Huntington argue, albeit differently, that Islam is incompatible with secularism and democracy.<sup>8</sup> In Gellner’s view, Islam presents a “dramatic . . . exception” to the patterns of secularization because “a church/state dualism never emerged in it [Islam].” “It [Islam] *was*,” he argues, “the state from the very start” (Gellner 1992:5, 9; also see Gellner 1981: chap. 1). Differentiating between three versions of Islam—namely, religion, civilization, and politics—Lewis states that the last one is surely hostile to democracy (1996:54). The first two, in his view, are also not compatible, for “in Islam . . . there is from the beginning interpenetration of . . . religion and the state” (*ibid.*:61; also see Lewis 2002). In Huntington’s opinion, “The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam” (1996:70, 217).

Bayat (2007), Esposito and Voll (1996), Esposito (2000), Filal-Ansary (1996), El Fadl (2004), and Tamimi (2000) represent the other pole of the debate. They see the possibility of democracy and secularism in Islam. Casanova (2001) predicts that Muslim countries could become democratic in the future, as churches and many Catholic groups became the motor of democracy. Some who don’t fit these poles raise a different question. Mahmood (2004), for instance, asks: Should Muslims even want to become better liberal democrats? Should they not instead, she proposes, take “their own resources of the Islamic tradition” to imagine a future different from the one offered by liberal democracy? This proposal, in my view, springs from an assumed authenticity of Islamic tradition as radically different from Western democracy.

Whether or not Islam is compatible with secularism and democracy is not a pertinent question to most Indian Muslims. Secular democracy has been integral to their political life for more than half a century. Founded in 1919 as the largest Muslim organization of ulema in postcolonial India, the Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind, among others, fought for secular democracy, and the language of its struggle was Islamic (see chapter 2). To the Indian Islamists represented chiefly by the tiny Jamaat—in 1947 it had 999 members (see Appendix 1)—however, secularism and democracy assailed Islamic monotheism.

In the following pages I will make an excursus to outline the conceptions of the secular state formulated and placed in the Constitution after India’s independence by the leaders of the Indian National Congress (formed in 1885; hereafter Congress) such as the first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) and Abulkalam Azad (1888–1958). I take the reader along to this excursus because to unravel the dynamics

## 12 • Introduction

of an Islamist party like the Jamaat it is useful to study the ideology, practices, and structure of the state in relation to which a given movement functions (Goldstone 2003; McAdam 1982). More important, because the secular democratic state is central to my argument, we should consider the contours of the political system in which the Jamaat had to play out its politics in postcolonial India. Given the centrality of the state in its ideology, it is crucial to examine how the Jamaat interacted with the secular, democratic state. The state assumes added significance because, for most Muslims in postcolonial India, the ideology of the secular, democratic state became the master framework for almost all mobilizations they undertook, whether it was the issue of Urdu, Aligarh Muslim University, the Babri mosque, the Muslim Personal Law, communal riots, their marginalized presence in government services, and so on. In critical dialogue with recent writings, mainly those of Asad, Casanova, Madan, Mufti, and Nandy, I attempt to present an alternative genealogy of secularism—preliminary, partial, and brief as it is. I broadly agree with Asad's insightful critique of secularism. His genealogy, however, brackets out the perspectives of the religious minorities and dissenters—actors with whom my account is concerned.

### *Another Genealogy of Secularism*

An avalanche of critiques of secularism began in the 1980s. The earliest critiques came from the anthropologist T. N. Madan and the social theorist Ashis Nandy. For Madan, secularism was “an alien cultural ideology,” “a gift of Christianity to mankind,” and hence “a vacuous word, a phantom concept” (1987:753–54). For Nandy, it was a “borrowed” concept, an “import” from the West, and hence inauthentic to the “indigenous personality” (1985:16, 18; 2002:64). Both argued that the separation of religion from politics was foreign to Indian culture. To bring the Indian state back to the ethos of Indian culture, Madan proposed that it ought to “reflect the character of the society” (1987:749), but he did not spell out what he meant by the society’s character—a society, that was religiously diverse. Nor did he state who indeed would define such a character, for what aims and for whom?<sup>9</sup>

This critique of secularism desires to recover the “indigenous tradition” in the name of what Mufti (2000) calls “aura of authenticity.” It reifies the diverse trajectories and meanings of secularism within the West (Bader 2007; van der Veer 2001) to posit it against an assumed Indian “indigenous personality.” Also contestable is Madan’s and Nandy’s assumption of a ruthless process of secularization by the state. Do they mean, for example, the passage of the Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s? If so, one may agree with Mehta (2004) that it was less an example of secularism and

more an attempt to fashion a “territorially unified body of Hindu law” whereby the state acted as the custodian of Hindus. My point is that I do not see such a ruthless secularization. In the three *mofassil* Bihar government schools I attended in the 1980s, much of the schools’ culture was already Hindu and callous to the sensibilities of Muslim students there. In the dining hall of my high school’s hostel, Muslim students (only a few) were segregated from Hindu students. Thus, instead of ruthless secularization by the state, what one witnesses is the process of grotesque othering of Muslims presided over by the state. During the genocide against Muslims in 2002, *Newsweek* (April 22, 2002) reported “the chilling message” inscribed on the wall in Gujarat: “This is the Kingdom of lord Ram. No Muslim can stay here. India is for the Hindus.”

Furthermore, Madan and Nandy, and also their critics, seldom ask what Muslims thought about secularism. Did they view it as “a vacuous word, a phantom concept”? For example, the Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind called secularism a “golden principle” (Siddiqi n.d.:2), a “pious objective” and resolved to keep the “candle of secularism alight” (Miftahi 1995:69–70). I suggest that this perspective has been elided, because the context of secularism has not been adequately thought through (but see Bajpai 2002; Jha 2002; Sarkar 2001; Bhargava 1998; and Rudolph and Rudolph 2000). The prime concern of secularism was the “Muslim question” by which I mean the whole issue of religious minority<sup>10</sup>—its culture, language, religion, visibility in public life, and its place in the religiously heterogeneous polity in colonial and future free India.<sup>11</sup> In the political arena, the Muslim question was present since the birth of the Congress. As early as 1886 the Congress used the term “secular” to rally Indians of all faiths for “general interests” (in Mitra 1991:766). The Muslim question, expressed in the idiom of minorities’ rights (Austin 1999), was central to the Motilal Nehru Report of 1928, the Congress ministries in 1937, Interim Government formation, and the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946. Without going into its complex history, let me stress that the Muslim elites had imagined that Pakistan’s creation would resolve the Muslim question for good. It did not. Millions of Muslims refused to go to Pakistan, and thus the Muslim question remained a vital issue for free India. Secularism was adopted, amid opposition from its rivals, to address this question. At the heart of the crisis of secularism (Needham and Rajan 2007), therefore, is “the terrorized and terrorizing figures of [the] minority” (Mufti 2007:2).

In speaking of the Muslim question, I am aware of the particularity of India. But I reject the uniqueness of this particularity. Indicated earlier by Tyabji (1971:7), Mufti’s (2007) remarkable work is perhaps the first to comparatively situate the minority question—Muslims in India and Jews in the West—in relation to the nation-state in the nineteenth century.

## 14 • Introduction

“The crisis of [Indian] Muslim identity,” he writes, “can’t be understood in isolation from the history of the so-called Jewish question in modern Europe” (*ibid.*:2). So, what would a genealogy of secularism look like from the perspectives of minorities? This genealogy, I submit, invites us to see secularism as a mechanism of power sharing by and nondiscrimination against religious minorities; and also to maintain and produce their distinctive religious-cultural identity. Such a genealogy clearly goes beyond the dichotomized categories of East versus West. My goal is not to overlook the difference between them. I simply question the uniqueness of each and, in so doing, clear the ground for appreciating the connected forms of this issue in East as well as in the West.

Like Madan and Nandy, Asad’s *Formations of the Secular* (chapters 1& 2) treats secularism as a comprehensive philosophy. He sees an organic link between secularism as a political doctrine and the secular as an ontology and epistemology, and he traces the genealogy of the secular through its “shadows.” He also goes into the etymology and meanings of the secular, sacer, myth, profane, and so on. “The genealogy of secularism,” he argues, “has to be traced through the concept of the secular—in part to the Renaissance doctrine of humanism, in part to the Enlightenment concept of nature, and in part to Hegel’s philosophy of history” (2003:192). I recognize the value of this approach, but it is too discourse-oriented to unpack tangible histories and workings of secularism in practice. It is also partly a secularist account; it presumes thoughts of Enlightenment philosophers determining people’s actions.<sup>12</sup> The average actors are conspicuously absent from their accounts. I submit that one of the key actors is the religious minorities—Jews and other minorities in the West and Muslims in India—for whom secularism was, however, not an all-encompassing philosophy. Most Indian Muslims viewed it as a political arrangement guaranteeing them the right to be equal citizens and lead their lives—collectively, not just individually, and publicly, not just privately—in accordance with their own religious traditions. If words acquire their meaning in constellation with other words, in India, as is evident, *inter alia*, from the debates in the Constituent Assembly, secularism is tied to phrases such as minority rights, anti-colonial *united* nationalism, the language and culture of Muslims, their Personal Law, and so on (Bajpai 2002; Madni 2002).<sup>13</sup> In this sense, Muslims’ view of secularism echoes one of the three elements of secularization expressed by Casanova (1994:11–39): the differentiation of religion from the state. This principle was important to ward off discrimination against Muslims and to resist the imposition of majoritarian religion and culture on minorities. Mahajan (2003) thus rightly argues that nondiscrimination and citizenship rights are the core of secularism. Is this stance of Indian Muslims toward secularism unique?

In the United States, the call to disengage religion from the state arose because in establishing “dictatorship of the holy” (Archer 2001:276) the Puritans as the dominant sect, persecuted and sought to impose its own version of Christianity on the minority denominations. Those demanding this disengagement were minority sects—Baptists, Methodists, and dissenters in Massachusetts. In Virginia it was non-Anglican minorities that disavowed the imposition of an Anglican Christianity (Gill 2008:chap. 3). This also holds true for the Catholic minority in the nineteenth century, when “Enlightenment liberals and the dominant Protestants came together to oppose Catholic influence . . . to impose their own generalized Protestant establishment on all of society” (Monsma and Soper 1997:44). The minorities resisted the entanglement of religion and the state not because religion was unimportant to them; rather, they regarded it as too important. The position of Jewish and Catholic minorities in Holland tells a similar story. In 1868 *Nieuw Israelietisch Weekblad*, a Jewish weekly, carried a front-page article arguing, “As a rule, they [Catholics] shared common interests with us to be promoted and defended, and therefore they are favorably disposed towards us” (in Ramakers 1996:33). What were the common interests between Jews and Catholics? Both were minorities facing legalized discrimination for centuries in a missionary Republic run by a Protestant majority. It was in such a context that Herman Schaepman (1844–1903), a Catholic activist, demanded that the state act secular by recognizing Catholic educational institutions. The party Schaepman desired, Carlson-Thies summarizes, “would promote freedom of religion, independence of the churches from the state, and equal rights for all citizens and all religious bodies” (in Monsma and Soper 1997:60). In France, whereas Jews and Huguenots stood for *laïcité*, its opponents belonged to the Catholic majority (Roy 2007:19). The resistance by minorities against the imposition of the hegemonic religion, and hence the demand that the state became secular, I argue, should figure in the genealogy of secularism.

What is also unconvincing in Asad’s genealogy is the foreignness of modernity or secularism. Like Madan and Nandy, he, too, sees it as an “importation” (2003:215). He views modernity as a project that people in power want to attain by institutionalizing democracy, civil equality, secularism and so on, in the non-Western world (*ibid.*:13). An important question here is why certain ideas and practices are classified as “importation,” whereas others are not? Put differently, why do many in the Middle East consider democracy and secularism as “importation,” whereas most Indians no longer regard democracy and secularism as “foreign” or “Western”? Leaving aside the struggle for democracy by the subalternated in the South that Asad fails to address, I sense a dash of authenticity in his premise. In discussing reforms, he disavows the intent of

## 16 • Introduction

Egyptian activists to reformulate the existing legal system (sharia) as “an aspiration for a Westernized future rather than a reformed continuity of the recent past” (*ibid.*:215, 198). Is “continuity” something self-evident, however? Or is it a representational trope and an ideological claim in a given discourse? My discomfort with “continuity” as well as “importation” comes from the ways in which Asad juxtaposes modernity and Islam. This argument, like Madan’s and Nandy’s, assumes, to cite Van der Veer (forthcoming:19), that “an already finished modular modernity has been shipped from Europe to the rest of the world.” However, if we view modernity as a series of interactions between the West and non-West, then both the aspiration for a “Westernized future” and “continuity of the . . . past” are representational tropes emerging precisely as a result of interactions between the West and Islam. From this perspective, Van der Veer (*ibid.*:19) rightly questions the efficacy of arguments in which “defenders of secularism are branded as ‘modern-westernized’ and defenders of religion as ‘traditional-nativist.’” If Hegel is central to the secular, Islamist ideologues like Maududi, *pace* Asad, are equally beholden to Hegel. As I demonstrate in chapter 2, Maududi’s reading of Islamic history indelibly bears the marks of Hegel.

Persuasive and relevant to my argument, however, is Asad’s revealing chapter on Muslims in Europe (2003:chap. 5). Like the chapter on the Rushdie affair in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993, chap. 7), it is a dazzling critique of the idea of Europe. Here Asad questions liberalism’s monochromatism to carve out a space for a multiplicity of worldviews. While making a case for Muslims’ status as equal citizens, he argues for their recognition as bearers of their religious distinctiveness, not just privately but also publicly (2003:180). Clearly this is not the case in Europe. Is it, however, because or in violation of secularism?<sup>14</sup> From Indian Muslims’ understanding of secularism, it is a violation of secularism. This view may assail the French self-perception of being secular. But self-perception in itself is not sufficient. Equally important is how minorities see the state. It is instructive to note that although the colonial Indian state regarded itself as secular, Indians viewed it as “fundamentally Christian” (Van der Veer 2001:24). The silencing of Muslim voices in the *hijab* controversy under the flag of “universal” indeed masks the provincialism of French liberalism (Brown 2006:173). The French secularism needs to be secularized; it has turned into, to cite Balibar (2007), “another religion.” Liberalism takes pride in the fact that, unlike religion, it is open to self-examination. In France (and Europe), the reverse seems to be true. While many Muslim intellectuals have revised their postulates, it is liberals who refuse to examine *laïcité*. The French case presents a classic illustration of the state’s monism—in law and language alike. In granting equality of rights to Jews, the French National Assembly demanded that they erase

every trace of their identity and become assimilated into the mainstream, which seldom was acknowledged as suffused with Christianity. Most important from the perspective of minorities in Europe is the Jews' refusal to assimilate and assert their distinctiveness. While pledging allegiance to the Republic, in 1792, the rabbi Isaac Berr asserted: "Each of us will naturally follow the religion of his father. Thus, we can be loyally attached to the Jewish religion and be at the same time good French citizens" (in Kates 1989:213). Let us now turn to India.

After Independence, when the framework for the future state was being debated, Hindu nationalists sought to cast it along majoritarian lines. The creation of Pakistan gave them more legitimacy to push for this project—Hindu raj. The Congress stalwarts—Sardar Patel, for example—barely concealed their verve for such a project. G. B. Pant, another Congress stalwart, warned Muslims that if they did not support the Congress then the "establishment of a purely Hindu raj was inevitable" (in Brennan 1996:130). It was against this rabid majoritarianism that Nehru called for a secular state. In September 1947 he made it clear that as long as he was "at the helm of affairs, India [would] not become a Hindu state" (in Brennan 1996:128). The obverse of secular was thus not religion *per se*, as Asad,<sup>15</sup> Madan, and Nandy contend, but rather was majoritarianism couched as nationalism and its practice to exclude Muslims. In Mufti's (2000a) reading, Edward Said's secularism stemmed from a similar concern. For Said, the opposite of secularism was not religion but majoritarianism. In the context of the Arab world, Said viewed secularism as an idiom to think about the predicament of its minorities. Mufti situates this Saidian meaning of secularism in relation to Christians in the Arab world. It was probably in this context that, in the Constituent Assembly, Brajeshwar Prasad urged for the inclusion of secularism in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution, arguing that it would boost the morale of minorities (Jha 2002).

Also crucial here was the climate in which the Constituent Assembly (1946 to 1948) debated the future state. It was an atmosphere rife with grotesque religious violence. Delhi itself, where the Constituent Assembly met, witnessed the convulsion of mass violence. In one estimate, half a million people—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—were killed. In response to violence against Hindus by the Muslims of west Punjab, especially the massive influx of humiliated Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan, Indian Muslims came under attack in many places—Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Delhi. They stepped into free India in the midst of discrimination. The Evacuee Property Law was one such agency. Thousands of Muslims who went to Pakistan simply to visit their relatives were denied citizenship on their return to India. Their properties and businesses were confiscated. The Evacuee Law empowered authorities to take over the property of

anyone whom they suspected of intending to migrate to Pakistan. In fact, many Congress leaders, including G. B. Pant and Mohanlal Sukhadia, chief ministers of UP and Rajasthan respectively, forced Muslims to leave for Pakistan (Copland 1998; Zakaria 1995; Zamindar 2007; also see Friedmann 1976). Worse, Muslims became suspect. Regarded as fifth columnists, they were required to prove their loyalty to the Indian nation-state. At the high noon of the British Empire, Hunter (1871) had raised the issue of Muslims' loyalty to the state. Now the postcolonial state did the same. Muslims' "disloyalty" became the ground for their exclusion and expulsion by the authorities. When Gandhi asked the government to treat the Muslims with justice, the Hindu nationalists ignored him. A Hindi paper reported that it would be a "political blunder of high order" were every Muslim granted the same privileges as a Hindu (in Pandey 1999:615). Even "Nationalist Muslims"—so called because as Congress activists they had opposed Pakistan—became suspect.<sup>16</sup> As Sardar Patel put it: "There is only one *genuinely* nationalist Muslim in India—Jawaharlal [Nehru]" (in Balasubramanian 1980:100; emphasis added). Note that, to Patel, a Muslim can never be loyal.

In such a climate Nehru made secularism a state ideology. On this point the opposition between "indigenous" Gandhi and "Westernized" Nehru, as Nandy suggests, is false (Tambiah 1998:420–24). Nehru used secularism to ensure equal rights to all, especially Muslims and other minorities, and to include them in the democratic processes. To Amartya Sen (1998:479), secularism was an ideology of "symmetric treatment of different religious communities in politics and in the affairs of the state." The Constitution embodied this spirit of secularism, as it did away with discriminations based on ascriptive identities, including religion, and granted equal rights to all citizens. In this sense the Constitution was a book of classic liberalism; it was not, however, a book of diversity—or culture-blind liberalism, what Parekh calls "assimilationist liberalism" (1998:205; 2000). The Constitution made provisions to ensure the cultural, linguistic rights and identity of Muslims; they were free to profess, practice, and propagate their religion (Article 25). Likewise, they had the freedom to manage their "religious affairs" (Article 26). To protect the "interest of minorities," the Constitution granted citizens the right to conserve their "distinct language, script or culture" (Article 29) and "establish and administer educational institutions of their choice" (Article 30). All these articles pertain to Part III, titled "Fundamental Rights" of the Constitution.

It should be clear that, unlike the monistic French *laïcité* (Bowen 2007), the Indian Constitution did not regard the headscarf as a violation of secularism. Sikhs had the liberty to carry a sword (*kirpān*) and many tribal communities and minorities—both Christians and Muslims—had the

right to retain their personal laws. Muslims had their own law: the Muslim Personal Law (MPL). Given this blend of individual and community rights, Parekh (1995:41) calls the state that the Constitution envisioned “both an association of individuals and a community of communities.” Recognizably this blend is not bereft of tension. Madan (1993) sees conflict between Article 25 to 30 and Article 44 requiring all citizens to have a Uniform Civil Code. He cites the 1986 Muslim Women Bill that overruled the Supreme Court’s judgment in the Shah Bano case, which upheld the right of a divorcee to receive maintenance from her ex-husband, as a “contradiction.” To him, this is the *locus classicus* of the crisis of secularism. Nehru saw it differently. Although he saw the need for reform in the MPL, he argued that the initiative came from within. He stressed for fashioning the conditions for such reform (Balasubramanian 1980). In my view, as an issue of gender equality, at stake is not what Madan calls *contradiction* but rather *condition*. The question is: has the postcolonial state created such a condition; or, Why do Muslims oppose reforming the MPL?<sup>17</sup>

### *The Language of Muslim Politics*

It may seem, from the above discussion, that the choice for secularism was an act of generosity on the part of the majority (Friedman 1976; Tambiah 1998). This appears credible, given the tiny presence of Muslims in the Constituent Assembly. However, it would be a mistake to endorse the generosity thesis. Abulkalam Azad and Maulana Hifzur Rahman (d. 1962)—both from the Congress-Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind alliance—played key roles in shaping the Constitution. Furthermore, as noted, secularism and democracy did not emerge suddenly; their roots lay in the shared Independence struggle that began in the nineteenth century (Austin 1999). Most important, secular democracy was equally pivotal to Muslim politics.<sup>18</sup> With several other organizations,<sup>19</sup> the Jamiatul Ulema-e-Hind (hereafter, Jamiatul Ulema) was the bearer of this Muslim politics, which in post-colonial India became nearly hegemonic. As a party of ulema, it also enjoyed religious legitimacy from Muslims (Adrawi 1988).

The leaders of the Jamiatul Ulema came from Darul Uloom Deoband, a madrasa founded in 1867. Qasim Nanotwi, the madrasa founder, issued a *fatiwa* (signed by three hundred ulema) urging Muslims to join the Congress (Al-jam'iyyat 1995:59; Engineer 2006). The role of ulema, however, remained marginal until the Khilafat campaign began in 1919 and they founded the Jamiatul Ulema. This phase of the anticolonial struggle also witnessed the onset of mass politics led by Gandhi, when a distinct language of Muslim politics began to evolve. Employing Islam, the Jamiatul Ulema argued that Hindus and Muslims formed a united nation, *muttaheda qau-miyat*, based on territory rather than faith. Though religiously different,

Hindus and Muslims, it was thought, should jointly fight against colonial rule for Independence. In 1927, citing Prophet Muhammad's example, the Jamiatul Ulema argued that if the Prophet could make a truce with the Jews against a common enemy at Medina, Muslims and Hindus could likewise come together as one nation against the British. In the tract *Muslims and the United Nationhood* (1938), Husain Ahmad Madni, the Deoband principal, reiterated that Islam and the Qur'an indeed entailed that Muslims support the Congress. He saw no contradiction in being a Muslim and a nationalist at once. He argued that the Qur'an never used the word *qaum* (nation) religiously. Instead it referred to a population with ties based on territory, occupation, or language (Madni 2002).<sup>20</sup>

Abulkalam Azad, a luminary of the Congress, and later the education minister of free India, held a similar view. In 1921 he wrote, "Thus if I say that the Muslims of India can't perform their duty unless they are united with the Hindus, it is in accordance with the tradition of the Prophet who himself wanted to make a nation of Muslims and non-Muslims to meet the challenge of the people of Mecca" (in Huq 1970:118). As president of the Congress, in 1940, he reasserted this position. Given its significance to my point, I quote his speech at length.

I am a Muslim and proudly conscious of the fact that I have inherited Islam's glorious traditions. . . . As a Muslim I have a special identity within the field of religion and culture and I can't tolerate any undue interference with it. . . . I am equally proud of the fact that I am an Indian, an essential part of the indivisible unity of Indian nationhood, a vital factor in its total makeup, without which this noble edifice will remain incomplete.

It was India's historic destiny that its soil should become the destiny of many different caravans of races, cultures and religions. . . . The last of these caravans was that of the followers of Islam. . . . This was the meeting point of two different currents of culture. . . . We had brought our treasures with us to this land which was rich with its own great cultural heritage. We handed over our wealth to her and she unlocked for us the door of her own riches. We presented her with something that she needed urgently, the most precious gift in Islam's treasury, its message of democracy . . . equality and brotherhood.

Eleven hundred years of common history have enriched India with our common . . . achievements. Our language, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs all bear the stamp of this common life.

Our shared life of a thousand years has forged a common nationality. . . . Whether we like it or not, we have now become an Indian nation, united and indivisible. (in Noorani 2003:32–33)<sup>21</sup>

The conceptualization of a “united and indivisible” nation clearly entailed a differentiation between religion and the state. According to Madni, Islamness (*Islāmiyat*) belonged to the domain of religion where Islam was supreme; in worldly affairs, Indianness (*hindustāniyat*) reigned high. For military, economic, and political pursuits Islam permitted Muslims to make common cause with Hindus. Such a separation between religion and the state, he noted, was already in practice and Islam legitimized it. “Islam is a flexible religion,” was Madni’s motto. Dismissing the view that democracy was European, he called upon Muslims to embrace it. Islam, Madni held, had laid the foundation of democracy (2002:36–46). The separation between Islam and state meant stressing that Muslims qua Muslims could flourish under a secular state. It was not a smooth task given the nineteenth-century jihad by ulema to found an Islamic state after Delhi’s takeover by the British.<sup>22</sup> In the viewpoint of the Jamiatul Ulema, the aim of the jihad movement was to expel the British, and ulema did not care if Hindus or Muslims formed the state (Friedmann 1976).

Although the Jamiatul Ulema worked with the Congress, it did not merge itself with the Congress but retained its autonomy vis-à-vis Muslim issues (Faruqi 1963). Some important issues were the preservation of civil sharia laws, for example, the freedom to practice Islam, advancement of Urdu, nondiscrimination against Muslims in various services, and so on. Given Muslims’ minority status, the Jamiatul Ulema urged the Congress not to adopt any majoritarian policy (*Al-jam'iyyat* 1995:91; Rahman 1995). Dismissing assimilation, Madni, in the tract cited above, made it clear that Muslims desired guarantee not just of their individual belief but of their “culture.” He further argued that for Muslims religion was not a “private” affair (2002:41–42). The 1931 Fundamental Rights resolution of the Congress addressed these concerns. According to S. Gopal (1996), Nehru’s biographer, this resolution formed the core of secularism in the Constitution. After Independence, secular democracy became the idiom of Muslim politics. The Congress made Hindi in Devanagiri script as the official language. Arguing that Urdu was not the language of Muslims alone, in 1949 the Jamiatul Ulema lamented that this decision was a betrayal of secularism. Hifzur Rahman observed: “In my opinion, it is the worst event in the history of the . . . Congress. Despite the claim of secular state and one nation, the mother tongue of millions of people of the Indian Union . . . is being trampled upon with hatred and contempt” (in Freidmann 1976:207).

In 1941 Maududi had founded the Jamaat precisely to contest the secular, democratic language of Muslim politics. To make itself prevail, the Jamaat had to convince both Muslims and non-Muslims of its ideology. Winning Muslims to its cause was indeed far more crucial, as they constituted the primary constituency of the Jamaat. Given that India was

a democracy, the Jamaat enjoyed freedom to persuade citizens in favor of it. Notwithstanding its limited resources, the Jamaat strove to enlarge its influence, but it did not meet with success. As I argue in this book, the disavowal of the Jamaat's ideology by the Muslim public impelled it to the path of moderation. The Jamaat argued that secular democracy negated Muslims' belief in *kalima*, and, based on this reasoning, they should boycott elections. Common Muslims and organizations like the Jamiatul Ulema, on the contrary, believed that Islam sanctioned secular democracy. Disregarding the Jamaat's call, Muslims actively participated in elections in the 1950s, triggering a debate within the Jamaat. As a result, in 1967, the Jamaat agreed, in principle, to participate in elections, but the debate continued through the 1970s and 1980s. Because of mounting pressure from the Muslim public, as well as from its own members, the Jamaat, in 1985, eventually decided to participate in democratic politics.

Precisely at a time when the Jamaat had undergone moderation, Hindu nationalism ascended on the horizon. During the 1980s and thereafter Hindutva grew stronger to become India's rulers. The virulence of Hindu nationalism was accompanied by massive anti-Muslim violence throughout India. Its aim was to fashion a unitary Hindu identity by erasing the plural identities that Nehru envisioned. In short, it sought to erode secularism. It was this erosion of secular democracy that led to the radicalization of SIMI. The project of a Hindu state had occupied the center stage of politics. I do not mean to imply that Hindu nationalism did not exist in the Nehruvian era or before. It did. But it remained on the margin. My contention that the erosion of secular democracy led to SIMI's radicalization, however, does not only mean that from the 1980s the state increasingly became anti-pluralistic and discriminated against Muslims. Drawing on the works of Iris Young (2000) and Lijphart (1996), my argument also calls for our attention to the failure of democracy, as evident in the abysmally low presence of Muslims in important arenas of public life: education, economy, police, civil services, and so on. In the midst and because of such marginalization of Muslims, SIMI's radicalism unfurled.

The radicalization of SIMI was also symbolic of a complex dynamics of democratization within Muslim society. Until the 1960s democracy worked along the lines of "command politics" (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987). The elites commanded the "masses" to act in a certain way. Anthropologically, this was facilitated by a patron-client relationship. The Congress cultivated ties with the Jamiatul Ulema. Hifzur Rahman was a Congress Member of Parliament from Independence till his death in 1962. After his death, the Congress elected Syed Asad Madni, son of Husain Ahmad Madni, to Parliament, which he served for eighteen long years (*Al-jam'iyyat* 1995:455). The shift from command to demand politics, or what Hansen (1999) calls the "plebeianization" of democracy, occurred

with the rise of new social strata from below. SIMI activists belonged to one such stratum, which I call the “Islamist class,” that democratization had unleashed. Unlike the students of most madrasas, SIMI activists had a distinct cultural capital and disposition that enabled them to question rather than obey the authorities of elders. It was these democratic urges for rights that empowered SIMI activists to stage a strike in Falāh. SIMI’s call for jihad thus reflects the demonopolization and democratization of Islam. Historically institutions such as Deoband, Nadwa in Lucknow, Jāmi‘ā Salafiya in Varansi (for Ahl-e-hadīth), and Jāmi‘ā Ashrafya in Azamgarh (for Barēlvīs) were centers defining Islam for their respective followers. None endorsed SIMI’s jihad. Yet SIMI claimed that its call for jihad was Islamic. Indeed, it accused ulema of being ignorant of “true” Islam. The claim for true Islam did not emanate from a painstaking study of Islam. SIMI members were quite young, as their Constitution required that they retire on reaching the age of thirty. Under the flag of “true” Islam, SIMI indeed subverted the authority of ulema who had spent their entire lives studying Islam. SIMI’s contestation of Islamic authorities testifies to Devji’s (2005) telling observation that the discourse of jihad is the fragmentation of such authorities and the democratization of Islam.

## THE FRAMEWORK

An attempt such as this to understand the dynamics of moderation and radicalization of Indian Islamism calls for a nuanced, critical framework. Many premises that animate the readings of Islamist politics in general, and Indian Muslims in particular, need to be rethought. The scholarship on Indian Muslim politics in the past two decades or so has mostly dealt with, for example, the “Muslim vote bank,” conversion, the Shah Bano case, communal riots, and the Babri mosque. Scarcely anthropological, it takes the whole Muslim community as subject of inquiry. An in-depth, longitudinal, ethnographic study of Muslim collective actions is rare. Located at the intersection of three traditions—political anthropology, Islamic studies, and social movement studies—this book seeks to go beyond the predominant themes of Muslim politics. My aim, in so doing, is to present an ethnography of the changing ideological contours of the Jamaat and SIMI. In this section I outline the broader framework that informs the description of my material and my argument.

### *Beyond “East” and “West”*

Eickelman and Piscatori, in their important book *Muslim Politics* (1996), urge for a nuanced, non-alarmist approach to Islamic politics, pointing

to the multiplicity of contexts in which Islamic politics plays itself out. Sensitive to theology, however, these authors caution against its canonization. They argue that theology, its meaning seldom stable, is only one among many factors shaping Muslim politics. Criticizing the texts-centered approach, Van der Veer (1988; 1994) argues for a historicized, anthropological framework to study the South Asian religious formations. In this respect, Eickelman's (1982) critique of the dichotomies of "Little" and "Great" traditions is compelling and persuasive, as is Asad's (1986) call to view Islam as a discursive tradition. This book tries to build on this stream of literature on religious politics and, I hope, take it a step further. I accord primacy to the political dynamics, especially the contours and role of the secular-democratic state, as key to comprehending the changing discourse of Islamism. The shifts in the Jamaat and SIMI have as much to do with the larger political terrain they inhabit as they do with the internal dynamics. Thus seen, the Islamic tradition is far from "indigenous" and its very ambition for "coherence" (*ibid.*:17) reflects and produces disjunctions within it.

Despite Said's critique of Orientalism, it continues to be dominant. According to Said (1995), the unbridgeable difference between the Orient and the West and the textualization of the Orient are important elements of Orientalism. A recent example of the latter is David Cook's *Understanding Jihad*, where he makes an inevitable link between the Qur'an and jihad. In his judgment, Islam is a religion "rooted in . . . domination and violence" (2005:166). In the first chapter of his book, titled "Quran and Conquest," he argues that the doctrine of jihad galvanized its readers to conquer one territory after another. He presents a timeline of jihad, which begins with Muhammad and ends with 9/11. This approach, in many ways, also informs writings on Indian Islam. Laced with citations from Bernard Lewis, Grunbaum, Montgomery Watt, and others, Krishna (1972) argues how the doctrinaire character of Islam poses a crisis for Indian Muslims to live in a democratic polity. In the same vein, Francis Robinson avers that Muslim separatism sprang from the faith of Islam itself (1979; also see Majumdar 1960; and Qureshi 1962). The analysis of Hindu-Muslim animosity by Gaborieau (1985), a French anthropologist, proceeds along a similar path. Dismissing the views that locate the root of religious rivalry in the recent past, he argues that it should be traced back to the writings of the eleventh-century traveler Al-beruni. Madan's (1997; 1998) writings also carry these assumptions. In his survey of one thousand years of Islam in "an alien socio-cultural environment" (south Asia), he traces the root of fundamentalism, *inter alia*, to Islam's doctrine of fusing religion and politics (1997:108).

This book calls into question such an approach to Islamic politics. To take the issue of state, a doctrine-driven explanation is flawed. The con-

tention by Madan, Gellner, and others that the state is intrinsic to Islam helps us understand neither state nor Islam. The nature of the premodern state was different from what it came to acquire in modernity. It was not theology that caused the state to become central to Islam; it was the unusual expansion of the early-twentieth-century state in almost every domain of life that made Islamists like Maududi see the state as central to theology.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, I argue that it is not the seamless culture or sacred text of Islam that fosters radicalism; on the contrary, it is the dynamics of politics that sets the discourse of jihad in motion. In stressing the contingent nature of radicalism by severing its almost naturalized link with Islam as “religion” or “culture,” my aim is not to bid adieu to culture. Instead, I seek to unsettle the notion of what James Ferguson, in a different context, describes as “a unitary, univocal, cultural system that unequivocally determines *the meaning of every signification*” (1999:228). Words such as jihad derive their meanings not simply because they belong to authoritative texts; they gain salience, even new meanings, in the wider sociopolitical landscape which the mobilizers of these words inhabit. SIMI’s call for jihad did not stem from its members’ reading the Qur’an but from Hindutva’s violent, anti-minority mobilization and the state’s failure to ensure the lives and dignity of its Muslim citizens. Clearly, what I critique is the dominant understanding of culture that squarely equates Muslim culture(s) with a unitary theology.

Along with the theological-textual approach, the notion of an eternal difference between the “traditional” Orient and the “modern” West is equally powerful. Commenting on Weber, Said writes that his sociology based on the essential difference between Eastern and Western cultures led him to the “very territory originally charted and claimed by the Orientalists” (1995:259). In Weber’s sociology of religion, Islam appears as a series of innate lacks (Turner 1984, 1984a, 2002a). Yet the Weberian-Orientalist framework dominates the study of Islam and Islamic movements (Burke 1988). Even Foucault, whose insights Said harnessed to criticize Orientalism, displayed many of its facets in his welcoming writings on the Iranian Revolution (Foucault 1999). He saw the Revolution as an authentic expression of the spiritual Orient untouched by the West (Stauth 1991; Almond 2004). Advancing this mode of argumentation, Bruce Lawrence says that Islamism is not only “anti-modernist” but also “anti-intellectual” (1995:17; 1987:31; also see Sivan 1990). From an anti-foundationalist approach, Sayyid (1997) states that the success of Islamism lies precisely in its anti-modernism. He takes Sami Zubaida to task for suggesting that Khomeini’s Islamism is not outside modernity. In this suggestion he detects that Western hegemony disavows the voice outside of the West by appropriating it. According to Davutoglu (1994), Islamic *weltanschauung* and *selbstverständnis* are polar opposites

of Western ideas, and the difference between them is irreconcilable. Tibi (1995) similarly contends that Islamism is “semi-modern.”

Social movement studies also reproduced this East-West divide. It is important to ask why studies on Islamism have only recently embraced a social movement approach (Tilly 2004; Wiktorowicz 2004) or, following Kurzman (2004:293ff.), why there is a “chasm” between the two? Kurzman explains this in a “core democratic bias” of social movement theories, which neglected movements outside of the West (also see McAdam et al. 1996; Smith 1996). The exclusion of Muslim societies, in my view, stems from a larger premise. A social movement, says Tarrow, is “an invention of modern age and an accompaniment to the rise of the modern state” (1998:2). Tilly adds that electoral politics and civil associations are its preconditions (2002; 1984). Because most Muslim societies, the assumption goes, apparently have not experienced modernity, lack modern states, and barely have electoral politics, they can only have a premodern-style rebellion but not a social movement, as the latter is a gift of modernity (Ahmad 2005).<sup>24</sup> After all, the absence of civil society and democracy were pet tropes of Orientalism (Turner 1984).

Several works have questioned the divide between East and West, Islam and modernity. Van der Veer’s *Imperial Encounters* shows the ways in which the British political formations shaped Indian nationalist thought.<sup>25</sup> Euben (1999) questions the uniqueness of Islamism by situating the discourse of Egypt’s Syed Qutb within the precinct of political theory and showing how it resonates with the critiques of modernity within the West by communitarians, postmodernists and Christian fundamentalists. From this framework, the quest for and assertion of tradition is an ideological move that significantly changes past discursive practices. The assumption that Islamism is a sovereign, anti-Western terrain is hard to sustain if we carefully read the writings of Islamists themselves. Maududi criticized ulema for their apathy to the West. Why did they not send, he asked, a delegation of Muslims to the West to learn its knowledge? He lamented that Muslims could not produce thinkers like Hegel, Comte, Adam Smith, and Voltaire. Delicately twisting Marx’s dictum, Maududi declared that Sufism was opium. He did not cling to tradition but rather launched assault on it and in so doing also invented it (see chapter 2).

### *Plan of the Book*

Many monographs only sketchily mention fieldwork sites and the field-worker’s interface with interlocutors. Pushing the process of fieldwork to the border is unsatisfactory, in my view. In chapter 1 I show how America’s bombing of Afghanistan and the banning of SIMI after 9/11 made me suspect in the Jamaat community. Thus I question the anthropological

premise of “native” versus “outsider,” “one’s own culture” versus “the other culture.” I demonstrate that the source of otherness lies *primarily* in a political rather than a cultural matrix. I also describe how my research evolved from a single- to a multi-sited ethnography. I end with an overview of the Jamaat’s evolution in Aligarh.

In chapter 2 I offer the historical-ethnographic context of the Jamaat’s formation and ideology. I focus on Maududi’s life to show how he evolved into an Islamist and came to support the Muslim League’s demand for Pakistan. But, unlike the League, he wanted a sharia state for which he founded the Jamaat. I then tease out Maududi’s political theology to depict its resonance with European ideologies. Finally, I delineate what the Jamaat’s ideology entailed in practice and describe how the Jamaat boycotted the key institutions of the state, including Muslim institutions like AMU. I give an account of its educational practices, including its decision not to affiliate its schools with the government. I end by discussing Maududi’s plan of action for the Jamaat members who remained in India.

The chapters in part 2 show the ideological transformation of the Jamaat, and the conflict and ambiguity it has generated. Chapter 3 deals with the educational project of the Jamaat and the ways that it functions in a school in Aligarh. I demonstrate how the Jamaat has departed from its earlier position and adjusted to the changing context, both local and national, focusing on the school’s affiliation with the government, the changing criteria of appointing teachers, and conflict in the school’s management body. Because of the Jamaat’s mutation, there is a conflict over what indeed was the school’s original aim. I also discuss how the desires of students and their parents—different as they were from those of the Jamaat—forced the Jamaat to change its ideology.

Chapter 4 describes the functioning of the SIO at AMU. Here I show that it followed the Jamaat’s line of moderation. I focus on SIO’s responses to the Babri mosque, the minority status of AMU, and moral indecency on the campus. The SIO, believing in secularism, appealed to the government and political parties to be truly secular so as to restore the mosque to Muslims and retain AMU’s minority status. Regarding moral indecency, the SIO persuaded students, for example, not to dance rather than forcibly stopping them. Here I also describe SIO’s depiction of the Prophet Muhammad as a symbol of love and compassion. In the final section, I present the contesting worldviews of two SIO activists to argue that, far from cohesion, ambiguity and conflict best defines the everyday practices of activists.

Moving from AMU to the Jāmi‘atul Falāḥ in Azamgarh, chapter 5 shows the raging conflict *within* Islamism. The conflict, implicated in a complex matrix heightened by an aggressive Hindutva, manifests itself in two models of Islam represented by SIO and SIMI. This contention,

## 28 • Introduction

I argue, reflects a process of democratization, and I illustrate how principles of democracy, representation, and critical debate inform the conflict between SIMI and SIO. Central to democratization is the language of rights voiced by the young Islamists coming from what I call the “Islamist class.” The young Islamist activists are radical not only against Hindutva but also against the older Islamists whom they see as denying to them their rights.

The two chapters in part 3 trace the radicalization of SIMI and the moderation of the Jamaat in postcolonial India. By zooming in on the 1992 student union elections of AMU, chapter 6 examines the whys and hows of SIMI’s radicalization. Next I move away from the AMU campus to illustrate its radicalism in response to national politics. I show that SIMI’s radicalization unfolded parallel to Hindutva’s anti-Muslim campaign to install a Hindu state. I conclude by discussing the theological justifications it offered for its radical turn. I show how SIMI’s depiction of Muhammad as a commander resonated with Hindutva’s portrayal of Ram as a combative god.

Chapter 7 charts the transformation of the Jamaat since Partition until today. I show how the Jamaat, which once held that true Muslims must establish Allah’s Kingdom and regarded any other form of government as an idol, came to defend secular democracy. In postcolonial India the Jamaat redefined its ideology, which was also remarkably different from that of SIMI. In conclusion, I draw out my argument, and discuss the political condition, especially the role of the secular, democratic state. I show how the changing forms of secular democracy crucially acted upon the moderation of the Jamaat, on the one hand, and the radicalization of SIMI, on the other. Understanding the interactions between the Jamaat as a movement and the practices of the secular state entails a new way of thinking through the complex interrelationships between Islamism, minority identity, and the secular-democratic state.