

The themes of communalism and the inter-community relationship carry extraordinary importance in the life of the modern South Asia. This has been reflected in the academic output though Bihar, the eastern province of India, which remained under the administrative appendage of the Bengal till 1912, has remained a relatively less explored region. The two adjacent provinces, viz., the Bengal, and the United Provinces (besides the Punjab) have attracted greater attention from historians. Vinita Damodaran (1992), and various well-researched essays of Papiya Ghosh (1953-2006), posthumously compiled in a volume (2008), attempted to fill this gap.

Hitendra Patel has moved ahead of all these to explore the origin of communalism and nationalism in colonial Bihar during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The factual as well as interpretative contents of this book are impressive. In fact, factual narratives proceed in such a way that the interpretative aspect keeps opening up in an effortless way. It traces the origins of majoritarian communal nationalism, more particularly with reference to the Hindi intelligentsia, and underlines "the process by which the Hindi intelligentsia became social leaders" (p 2). It delves into a large volume and wide range of hitherto untapped Hindi sources. Patel outlines his objectives very clearly: "We need to go into the processes of the development of these two ideologies at two levels—the popular and the literary... It is in the development of these modern languages and in the writings of the vernacular intelligentsia that we can study the process of the development of nationalism [and communalism] at the popular level" (p 11), as the vernacular regional [Hindi] intelligentsia, who were "dharmik (religious) intelligentsia" who "had actively supported and popularised nationalism" (pp 12-13), with considerable influence on the Congress also. In this analysis he draws upon a recent work of Jenny White on 'vernacular politics' informed by religious ideologies in Turkey (2002).

Patel's chapter on the Hindi (Nagri) movement in the 19th century enriches the historiography on Hindi-Urdu conflict. He writes how the protagonists of Hindi-Nagri received "crucial support from the Government" at least from the 1860s in Bihar, and the colonial state did its best to 'ethnicise' the language (with two scripts) along the communal lines of Hindu-Muslim divide. Having collected significant archival evidences, Patel elaborates that the Hindi movement "turned into a hostile anti-Urdu campaign. As a result, an environment was created in which Urdu was being identified with Muslims" (p 55). Muslim 'preponderance' in public employment was one of the prime considerations behind replacing Urdu with Hindi in Bihar [e.g., Dalton, the Commissioner of Chhotanagpur was particularly concerned about the fact that the Muslims constituted 58.3 per cent of the police forces in Chhotanagpur (p 69)]. In Bihar, "Hindi became an issue largely

Hinduisation of the national tradition

Communalism and the Intelligentsia in Bihar, 1870-1930: Shaping Caste, Community and Nationhood

By Hitendra Patel

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because of government initiatives. The first serious effort to introduce Hindi in the Nagri script was made in 1862 by Dalton, the Commissioner of Chhotanagpur, who opposed an outright substitution of Urdu with Hindi" (p 69). Patel further reveals, "Hindi supporters and writers always remained courteous while approaching the government but exhorted readers extensively to write about Urdu in derogatory terms" (p 80). In this chapter, Patel also makes use of the Hindi works of Shivpujan

Hindu-Muslim relations during the popular phases of nationalism. In doing so, he reproduces relevant, explanatory, and corroborative texts in Hindi while providing its gist in English. One problem though is Patel's interpretation of the conceptual category of *Jatiyata*, as "national consciousness" (p 96). This certainly is contentious and required some qualification.

In Chapter Five, Patel turns to the question of "how the intelligentsia was addressing the questions of

Patel turns to the question of "how the intelligentsia was addressing the questions of community, nation, and caste" and examines the contest and cooperation between the more orthodox Sanatan Hindu, the reformist/revivalist Arya Samaj, and the Congress. He provides micro details pertaining to the proliferation of communal organisations like the Hindu Sabhas and Dharm Sabhas even in mofussil areas, due to which "by 1923, communal tensions had become common in many parts of Bihar"

Sahay (1963) and of Dharendra Nath Singh (1986) – the latter has documented the Kharagvilas Press and the newspaper *Bihar Bandhu*, the two most important agencies of the Hindi-Nagri movement in Bihar. This chapter derives interpretational and theoretical inputs from Vasudha Dalmia (1997), Christopher King (1994), and Francesca Orsini (2002), but produces empirical details with cogent and lucid analysis pertaining to the issue in Bihar, as the three influential works on the subject had almost completely overlooked Bihar, so much so that "crucial information (like the help Bhartendu Harishchandra got from the Bihari people and institutions, without which he would not have gone bankrupt and his books would not have reached the public as effectively as they did; or that larger financiers of both the Congress and the Sanatan Sabhas came from Bihar) have strangely been ignored by the scholars" (p 160).

The subsequent chapter focuses on the creation of communal stereotypes of Muslims by the Hindi press, and also briefly makes content analysis of the school text-books which were produced along those communally divisive and polarising lines, which went a long way in determining the

community, nation, and caste" (p 157). It examines the contest and cooperation between the more orthodox Sanatan Hindu, the reformist/revivalist Arya Samaj, and the Congress. Deriving from Dalmia's "nationalisation of Hindu tradition", Patel underlines the "Hinduisation of the national tradition" (p 159). These myriads of communalising organisations were patronised by the leading landlords, like the Maharaja of Darbhanga (p 164). This chapter provides micro details pertaining to the proliferation of communal organisations like the Hindu Sabhas and Dharm Sabhas even in mofussil areas, due to which "by 1923, communal tensions had become common in many parts of Bihar". Then Patel declares, "The 'Shudhi movement' could not make much headway but it worsened Hindu-Muslim relations." (p 174). This is a bit difficult to accept as Papiya Ghosh (2008: 104) has argued that the Shudhi movement was fairly strong in Bihar in the 1920s, and one of the most important leaders to have pitched the Shudhi campaign in Bihar was Jagat Narayan Lal, belonging to both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress.

Patel complains that caste

associations have not been analysed ideologically, and argues that during his period of study (1870-1930) "the intelligentsia could dwell effortlessly in the three domains of religious, national, and caste spaces" (p 158). There were hundreds of caste magazines in Hindi-Nagri promoting and rigidifying caste consciousness (p 5). Yet rather than elaborating upon the issue, he dismisses this significant issue in only a few words (pp 177-79), and even those few words have been derived substantially from one particular work of KK Verma (1979). It may be added that two well-researched volumes in Hindi have already been published on the political mobilisation of the backward castes and Dalits of Bihar, by Prasanna Kumar Chaudhry and Shrikant: *Bihar Mein Samajik Parivartan ke Kuchh Aayaam, 1912-90*, (Vaani, Delhi, 2001); and *Swarg Par Dhawa: Bihar Mein Dalit Andolan, 1912-2000*, (Vaani, Delhi, 2005). As the subtitle of the book under review claims to speak on the issue of caste, it is disappointing that so little has been said on the issue.

Citing some comments from an Urdu periodical, *Al Punch* of Patna, Patel concludes that there was a strong distrust of the Bihar Muslims against the Congress (pp 179-80). Patel however does not contrast and contest this with the works of Md. Muzaffar Imam (1987), Kamta Chaubey (1990) and the three volumes on the freedom movement of Bihar by KK Datta (1958), which have produced ample evidence to show that the top leadership of the early Congress in Bihar came mainly from the Muslim elites. G. McDonald's unpublished PhD work (1978) on the polity of Bihar, 1908-37, used by Patel for other kinds of references, also corroborates it. Imam (1987) and Chaubey (1990) dealt with the role of the Bihar Muslims in the freedom movement, testifying proportionately large participation of the Muslim elites, along with their Kayastha counterparts in the national movement at least till the 1920s. McDonald's conclusion however does assert:

The Congress was in no way supportive of 'Hindu' view of nationalism, but nonetheless, Hindu nationalism exerted a pressure on the Congress-led nationalist ideology. On two major issues which served as rallying points for the intelligentsia—the Hindi-Urdu controversy and Cow protection—many leaders of the Congress in Bihar held views similar to those of the Hindu nationals. (p 228)

A somewhat similar conclusion has been drawn about the Congress' Right wing inclinations by Damodaran (1992) for Bihar, by Gould (2005) for UP, and by Joya Chatterji (1995) for Bengal.

The lack of citation of sources at some places in the book creates confusion. On p 43, for example, it has been mentioned that in April 1878, Bihar's first Arya Samaj was established at Danapore which became the nucleus of the Arya Samaj movement; here a votary of the movement has also been mentioned, but his name appears in two ways: Janakdhari Lal, and Janakdhari Prasad. It confounds those who know

that there was another Congress man from Muzaffarpur bearing the name, Janakdhari Prasad, who has also published his Hindi autobiography, *Kuch Apni Kuchh Desh Ki* (1970).

In his overall remarkably meticulous exploration of untapped archival evidences, significant Hindi sources, and marshalling of these with cogent and gripping analysis, the chapters of the book proceed in a logically structured way. This work is an encouragement to explore this theme with the help of Urdu sources which may add to our knowledge and understanding about the attitude of

the Urdu intelligentsia (or essentially Muslim elites) towards evolving notions of various shades/strands of nationalism, in different regions and localities. ■

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