"Indian" geopolitics: Unity in diversity or diversity of unity?

"Jean Gottmann once remarked that 'the geographer must keep the past in mind if he wants to understand the *whys* behind the present problems and the present landscapes.' In agreement with such insight, this paper argues that Indian geopolitics is best understood in its historical and discursive context of theorizing and practices."

Sanjay Chaturvedi

The author, a Leverhulme Fellow of the University of Cambridge, England, is the Chairman of the Department of Political Science and the Co-ordinator of the Centre for the Study of Geopolitics, Panjab University, Chandigarh. His research interest is the theory and practices of geopolitics, with special reference to polar regions, the Indian Ocean and South Asia. He is the author of Polar Regions: A Political Geography (*Wiley, 1996) and co-editor of the forthcoming* Rethinking Boundaries: Geopolitics, Identities and Sustainability *(Delhi, Manohar). He has contributed articles to several refereed journals including* Third World Quarterly, Journal of Social and Economic Geography, *and* Environment and Planning D: Society and Space. *More recently, he has been a Fellow at Columbia University Institute for Scholars, Reid Hall, and Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, Paris, under the International Programme of Advanced Studies (IPAS), researching on the role of "excessive" geopolitics in the partition of British India. Dr Chaturvedi serves on the international editorial board of* Geopolitics, *a journal published by Frank Cass, London.*

Introduction

If geopolitics can be critically conceptualized as a "way of seeing" whereby groups and individuals, political elites, and the institutions and intellectuals of statecraft, attempt to spatialize politics by implanting maps of meaning, relevance and order onto the highly complex and dynamic political universe they inhabit, observe, try to understand, and sometimes even desire to dominate, then, undoubtedly there is a long lineage of geopolitical thought, theorizing and practices on the subcontinent. Contingent as well as context-bound, geopolitics can also be considered "intimately bound up with the nation-state and its capacity to produce, regulate and survey political space."[1]

Jean Gottmann once remarked that "the geographer must keep the past in mind if he wants to understand the 'whys' behind the present problems and the present landscapes."[2] In agreement with such insight, this paper argues that Indian geopolitics is best understood in its historical and discursive context of theorizing and practices. The paper begins with a brief overview of geopolitical impulses and characteristics of ancient and medieval India from a geo-historical perspective. This is followed by a critical examination of various facets of the geopolitics of the Raj, with special reference to the manner in which "India" was imagined, constructed and represented by the British. The analysis then shifts to a discussion of some of the major institutional and ideological legacies of British rule, especially those inherited by the dominant geopolitical discourse and practices of the post-colonial state in India. The key enquiry relates to the dominant geopolitical idioms, myths and representational practices used by the post-colonial, "not-yet-nation" state to inscribe something called India and endow that entity with a content, history, meaning, trajectory and *unity.* Whereas the concluding parts of the essay critically examine the nature and implications of an increasingly influential geopolitics of "Hindutva" or "Hindu nationalism" and attempt to deconstruct the geopolitical reasoning deployed by the Hindu nationalists to carve out a homogenous and monolithic "Hindu" identity from a remarkably diverse and eclectic cultural tradition on the subcontinent. The question raised above is now recast in accordance with the tone and tenor of Hindu nationalist discourse: what are the key geopolitical idioms, myths and representational practices employed by the Hindu nationalists to inscribe something called India and endow that entity with a Hindu content, a Hindu history, a Hindu meaning, a Hindu trajectory and a Hindu *unity?*

The analytical approach adopted in this paper is inspired, on the one hand, by the fast expanding and impacting literature on what has come to be known as "Critical Geopolitics,"[3] which is centered on the Foucauldian premise that power, knowledge and geopolitics are bound together in an intricate and intimate manner.[4] In this perspective, Geography is understood to be a matter of social construction, and the manner in which the lands and the seas, the mountains and the rivers, assume relevance for politics depends essentially on how geography is perceived and constructed from time to time. But on the other hand, this paper draws upon an astute observation made by Jean Gottmann in one of his books on the geography of Europe. Gottmann wanted to explore the extent to which the distinctive features of Europe belong to the pattern of culture rather than to natural environment. While he agreed with the view that social environment puts its imprint on people's ways of living and acting, particularly on their under-

standing of the physical milieu, he also believed that "the stable, permanent features of the physical environment are the raw material out of which men model the finished product, the work of art that appears to the stranger as a 'local landscape'."[5]

Critical geopolitical writers also aim at exploring the manner in which geopolitical reasoning is integrated into a political discourse to sustain, augment and justify social and political practices of dominance in national as well as international politics.[6] A discourse, in a general sense, is a meaning-producing work. It demarcates the limits within which a set of ideas and practices is held to be "natural"; that is, it determines what questions are considered relevant or even intelligible.[7] Discourses, therefore, are practices of significance, providing a set of rules or perspectives for the acquisition and organization of knowledge, with its own dominant metaphors that facilitate further knowledge and insights, but simultaneously limit it. The dominant discourse not only provides the interpretative context within which "facts" are assigned significance but also determines which facts are to be interpreted; and thereby help to sustain and legitimate certain perspectives and interpretations. As far as the colonial discourse is concerned, as pointed out by Sara Mills, "it does not simply refer to a body of texts with similar subject matter, but rather refers to a set of practices and rules which produced those texts and the methodological organization of the thinking underlying these texts."[8] Such colonial, or for that matter, post-colonial discourse(s), often framed and flagged in negative terms of the "Other" could be usefully deconstructed to acquire some insight into how the struggle over representation has far-reaching effects. How are places and peoples (natural-human-cultural geographies) forced, for example, to be categorized, and to categorize themselves, within the Geographies of imperial/national knowledge systems? Yet it is seldom that the former are totally subsumed or mastered or dominated by the latter. Nor for that matter is the interplay, or rather tension, between representation(s) of unity and resistance of diversity ever resolved.

The geopolitical impulses and flows of ancient and medieval India: An overview

The historicity of the state in India is much older than the actual state itself. Though the Republic of India was "born" only in 1950, the *Arthashastra,* written at least three centuries before the birth of Christ, suggests a much older state tradition.[9] Even the idea of building up one empire on the Indian subcontinent is more than 2,500 years old and according to some scholars appears to some to be "the product of India's physical and political geography."[10] Owing to geographical and racial diversities, ancient India is said to have found itself divided into a large number of warring states and races. Hence the need for a political unification of the subcontinent under one empire within its geographical limits being felt and pursued from time to time. This is seen in the birth of certain geopolitical concepts like the concept of *Chakravartin;* a ruler the wheels of whose chariot roll everywhere without obstruction. As Inden puts it:

> The agent that remade all of India, the "entire earth," as an imperial formation was the king of kings who, together with his court, succeeded in the eyes of those who constituted the polities of an imperial formation, in exercising his supremacy over other would-be claimants. He was the king called a Chakravartin, a "universal monarch" or "lord of the entire earth" ... The idea of the Chakravartin, of a universal monarch, and with it the idea that "sovereignty" or, rather, overlordship over the earth, was a whole to be embodied in one polity (and not a particular to be instantiated in independent sovereign nation-states) appeared before the time of the Mauryas ... it becomes evident that the notion of universal kingship was embedded in the day-to-day practices of the Indian polities.[11]

After the 6th century BC, with the rise of the kingdom of *Magadha* (which included approximately 80,000 villages), the Indian geopolitical situation entered a new phase of development. *Magadha* under king Bimbisara started the process of empire building, reaching its peak under the king emperor Chandra Gupta Maurya. It was during this period that the most comprehensive treatise of statecraft of classical times in India appeared. Kautilya, also known as Chanakya and Vishnugupta, wrote the *Arthashastra.* During the period when the *Arthashastra* would possibly have been written, i.e. between the 4th century BC and AD 150, there were only two empires, the Nanda and the Mauryan. In fact Chandragupta Maurya was the first conqueror to join together the Indus Valley and the Gangetic plain in one vast empire. The political map of the subcontinent showed not more than six large kingdoms in the Gangetic plain, various republics in the predominantly hilly areas in the west and the north and a number of smaller kingdoms whose relative independence might have varied with the power of the large neighbor.

Most of what Kautilya is concerned with in the *Arthashastra* is not the reality that prevailed during his times, but a *future* reality, which *ought* to be realized or, alternatively, prevented (fig. 1).

As pointed out by L.N. Rangarajan, "He [Kautilya] does not deal with a particular state in a historical time, but with the state as a concept."[12] A hypothetical Kautliyan country was a compact unit ruled by a king, or, in some cases, an oligarchy of chiefs. It is interesting to note the importance that Kautilya gives to his imaginary state. He envisages a number of natural features – mountains, valleys, plains, deserts, jungles, lakes and rivers – though all these may not be found in reality in every country. The *frontier* regions were either mountainous or jungles inhabited by tribes which were not completely under the control of the king. The frontier was protected by forts, especially on trade routes to other countries. References to ships and trade by sea show that some countries had a sea coast. The well laid-out and fortified main city, situated in the central part of the country, was also located near a perennial water source. The *janapadas* or countryside consisted of villages with clearly marked boundaries and roads of different widths, depending on the nature of traffic, connecting not only the towns and villages but also the country with its neighbors.

Since, in the Kautilyan view, the king encapsulates all the constituents of a state, he expounded the theory in terms of the king – any king. In other words, what Kautilya calls the "interest of the king" would nowadays be termed "national interest." In the geopolitical imagination of Kautilya and his construction of a Kautilyan State, the king is designated as *vijigishu* – the king who wants to win or the "would-be conqueror." A neighboring king is then designated as "the enemy," and other kings nearby as allies, a Middle King or a Neutral King. Two things need to be emphasized here:

- First, the terminology employed by Kautilya defines only a set of relationships and therefore the conqueror need not necessarily be a "good king" and, correspondingly, the enemy a "bad king." The advice given to the conqueror can equally be applied by the enemy.
- Second, the *Arthashastra* is concerned with the security and foreign policy needs of a small state, in an environment with numerous other small states. Consequently, the scope for enlargement of this small state was limited to the Indian subcontinent. To Kautilya, "the area extending from the Himalayas to the north to the sea in the south and a thousand yojanas wide

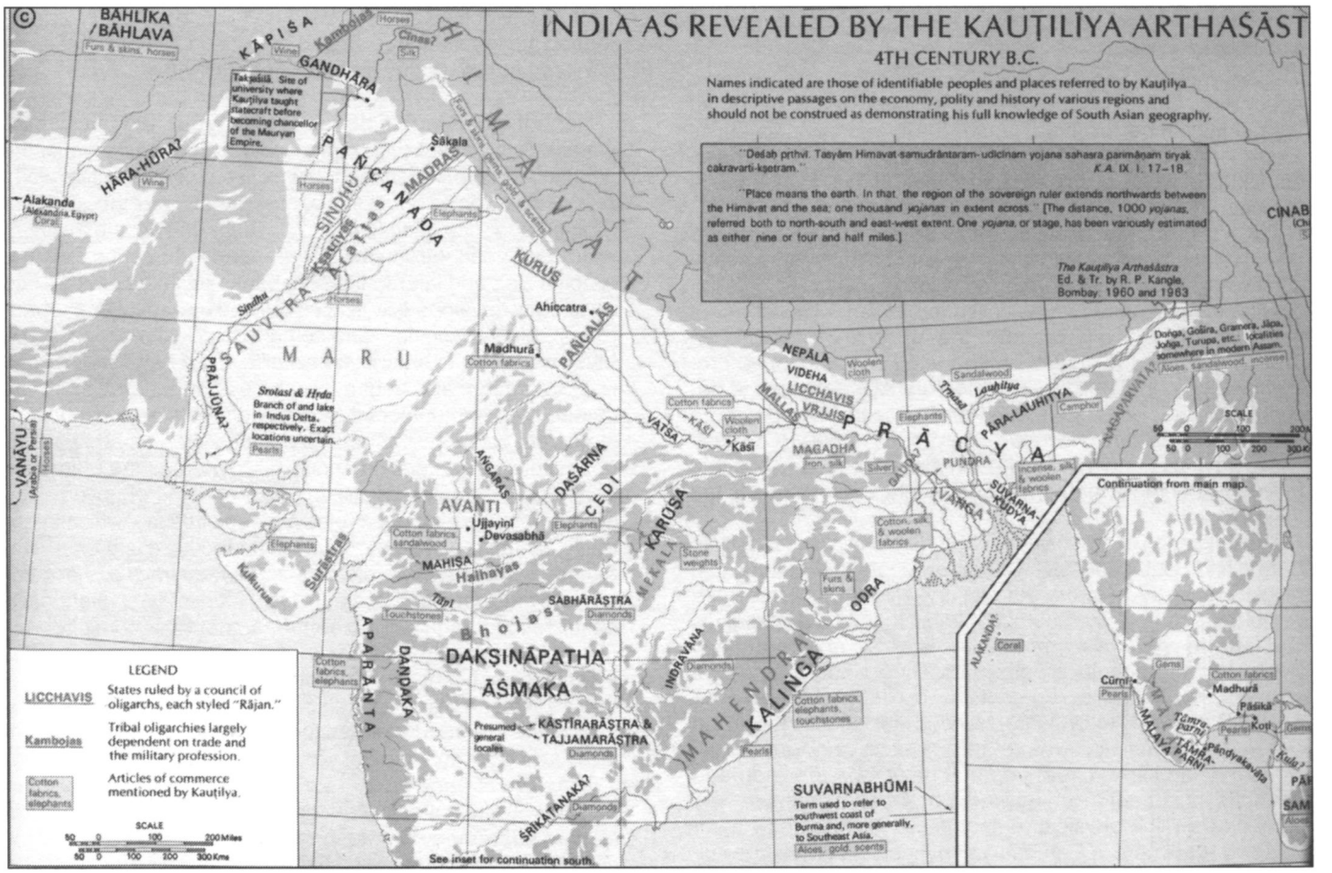

Fig. 1: India as revealed by the Kautilya Arthashastra. *(Source:* Joseph E. Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 16).

> from east to west is the area of operation of the King Emperor."[13]

In other words, whatever notion of *Lebensraum* is to be found in the *Arthashastra,* territories beyond the subcontinent are not included, probably for the reason that the conqueror is expected to establish in the conquered territories a social order based on the Arya's *dharma* (duty, right and justice), *varna* (four principal classes described in Manu's code; the more modern word being caste) and *ashram* (four stages in the life of a Brahman:

- student of the Veda;
- householder;
- anchorite; and,
- abandoner of all worldly concerns)

systems.

And Kautilya perhaps thought that the establishment of such a social order outside the limits of India was neither practical nor desirable. Moreover, plenty of land was available for settlement, indicating a fairly low density of population and many uninhabited tracts.

According to yet another argument the reason why there were no compulsions for territorial expansion was that "her (India's) large size of subcontinental proportion, her diversified natural resource base, her favourable location with reference to oceans and landmasses made the country in a great measure self sufficient."[14] Whereas, according to K.M. Panikkar,

> In terms of pressure on space India's geographical problem is different from that of European countries. *She has no necessity to expand, from the point of view of security or defense. Her size, her location in reference to oceans and landmasses make a policy of territorial expansion outside her boundaries unnatural.* Kautilya defined Chakravarti Patha or the empire state as extending 2,000 yojanas from the Himalayas across the peninsula of India, and the idea of extending the territories beyond the natural frontiers of India was never a factor with the most powerful rulers of India. It may be assumed therefore that the question of space never worried Indian political thinkers. *Himachala Sétu Paryantam* – from the Himalayas to Rameswaram – was their conception of India. Every ruler with imperial pretensions tried to extend his authority over the whole area ...
>
> *But outside the natural frontiers of the Indian sub-continent, they never tried to build up effective rule.* Chandragupta Maurya no doubt extended his empire to the Hindukush as a result of this treaty with Seleucus ... but we do not know whether it involved only a sphere of influence with autonomy for local rulers or was directly administered from Pataliputra. In any case, it seems to have been given up after Asoka. No other Indian king seems to have held territory outside the Indian sub-continent, though many monarchs of Central Asian origin from Kanishka to Shah Jehan held the Hindukush valley with their capitals in India. *That this was an unnatural geographical agglomeration was again and again demonstrated when after a generation or two the extra Indian territories had to be given up in favour of India. So, one of the main preoccupations of European geopolitics, that is the*

desire for space, has not the same significance in India.[15] (emphasis supplied).

This is why perhaps the main preoccupations of European geopolitics, including matters such as *lebensraum,* have had little significance for India. Also, there is no equivalent of Mackinder's "Heartland" thesis, with its power-political understandings of location, size and resources, in Indian geopolitical thinking.

The analysis so far might convey the impression that the traditional geopolitical impulses on the subcontinent were exclusively land-centric. According to K.M. Panikkar, who in the opinion of this author can be called the Indian "philosopher of sea power" (a term often used for the American Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan), the control of the Indian seas belonged predominantly to India till the 13th century AD, a period he describes as the "Hindu period in Indian Ocean." According to him the earliest Indian literature, the Vedas (1,500 BC) speak of sea voyages, and "next to the Himalayas, what has affected Indian history more than any other geographical factors is the Indian Ocean."[16]

The long span of 1,500 years of Hindu colonialism, mostly in Burma and Southeast Asia, was largely economic, cultural and religious in nature. In the 9th century, Hindu kingdoms were established throughout Southeast Asia. In the coastal regions of Sumatra and Java, the smaller islands, and the Malay Peninsula, the populace earned its living by trade and was strongly influenced by contacts with Hindu culture. The Shailendra dynasty (c. 760-860) blended indigenous Indonesian culture with Sanskrit literature and Brahmin and Saivite versions of Hinduism. Great imperial palaces and Hindu and Buddhist monumental tombs were constructed by these very early rulers. The physical remnants can be seen at Angkor Wat and elsewhere in Cambodia and Indonesia, while the cultural remnants permeate these societies. According to one viewpoint, these overseas Hindu kingdoms should not be seen as extensions or projections of an all India-based power; "it may well be that Indian society was so well adapted to overseas colonialism that little or no force was needed."[17]

According to a keen observer of Indian geopolitics what we do find on the subcontinent is a historic core region, which,

> ... lies at the centre of the gigantic Indo-Gangetic plain, which extends across the north of the subcontinent. The watershed region between them includes the Punjab (meaning "five rivers") and the upper course of Ganga and Jamuna. Together these make up the *Madhya-desa*, the middle land around which the first Indian state (Bharat) was formed. The Ganga-Jamuna region has remained the major centre of power since the earliest times. It was here that the principal core regions of the Indian states have been located and where the salient characteristics of Indian (Hindu) culture became evident. The mountains which ring the subcontinent to the north together with the Deccan plateau to the south have been a part of the dominant state during the period of its maximum territorial extent, although the far north and the far south, the latter including the island of Srilanka, have only rarely been incorporated into it. The major axis of communication, the "Grand Trunk Road," extends from northwest to southeast following the line of the river system, and the major centres of political power have almost always been located on or near to it.[18]

While it is difficult to challenge the dominant position of the Gangetic Valley, which makes it the core of India from every point of view, it has been argued equally forcefully that "the unity of the Deccan tableland (geographically a plateau commencing with the Ajanta Range, where the ancient undisturbed rock begins to extend over the Centre of the Peninsula right up to the Nilghiris) is as much an obvious geographic fact, as the unity of the Gangetic Valley ... The Deccan has always formed the great middle rampart of India and the Gangetic valley was not able at any time to establish over it a secure footing."[19]

Not until the Mughal period (1526-1858), did the "Indian state radically intensify its direct impingement on the life of the common people. Even then, it was like a matted lattice work, or a canopy, open on all sides, suspended over the affairs of rural or inner-city quotidian life."[20] In the Indian subcontinent Islam had been introduced – in the early 8th century via the Arabian Sea and later to the Malabar coast in the south – into an already developed civilization defined by agriculture, urbanization, higher religions, and complex political regimes. "The Muslim conquests brought a new elite and a new level of political integration, and began the process of generating a new culture blending universal Muslim concepts and symbols of statecraft, cosmopolitan artistic pursuits such as architecture and painting, and regional motifs."[21] Whereas the Mauryans had replaced traditional military-tribal patterns of governance with a system based upon rules and regulations – which eventually collapsed due to excessive decentralization – the Mughals, under Akbar, reintroduced bureaucracies to accommodate ambitious and powerful local leaders who might have either revolted against the central authority or conspired together to depose that authority. It needs to be noted that for most of the subcontinent's history the typical pattern had been that even when there were no pan-Indian empires, there were long spells of orderly, organized governance at the regional level lasting for hundreds of years.

The reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707) not only witnessed the reversal of Akbar's policy of conciliation of Hindus in favor of Muslim supremacy, but also profound changes were introduced in the structure of Mughal nobility. He was the first ruler since Akbar to expand the frontiers of his empire. He absorbed East Bengal, pacified the Northwest Frontier, took direct control of Rajasthan, and expanded the Mughal empire in the Deccan. In the wake of invasions, especially of the Deccan, there was not only a sudden rise in the number of Hindu lords into the imperial elite, but also an increase in competition for scarce *jagirs*, factionalism, and the exploitation of peasants. After the death of Aurangzeb, the efficacy of Mughal rule was seriously undermined by struggles of succession, internal rebellions and foreign invasions. In the early 18th century, several regions of the Mughal empire became independent under the rule of local *mansabdars,* who had now become *nawabs.* For example, Hyderabad under Nizam became independent in 1723. In other parts of India, regimes based on Hindu lordships and popular uprising came to power. Hindu-governed principalities regained control of Rajasthan. In Punjab, religious and ethnic groups such as the Sikhs and the Jats established local regimes. By the middle of the 18th century, the Marathas controlled most of South India, and had replaced the Mughals as the dominant power in Gujarat. The Marathas after having consolidated their grip on central and Western India, formed five independent and expanding states, but were defeated at the battle of Panipat (1761) by the Afghan invader, Ahmad Shah Durrani. The way was also opened for the emergence of the British as the paramount power in India.

Once the colonial power began introducing a series of changes into the kaleidoscopic pattern of "autonomous spaces" of Indian society, or into what Sudipta Kaviraj describes as "a circle of circles, but each circle relatively unenumerated and incapable of acting as a collective group,"[22] the hitherto unbounded geopolitical impulses of Indian civilization would be subjected to spatialization by the intellectuals and institutions of colonial statecraft.

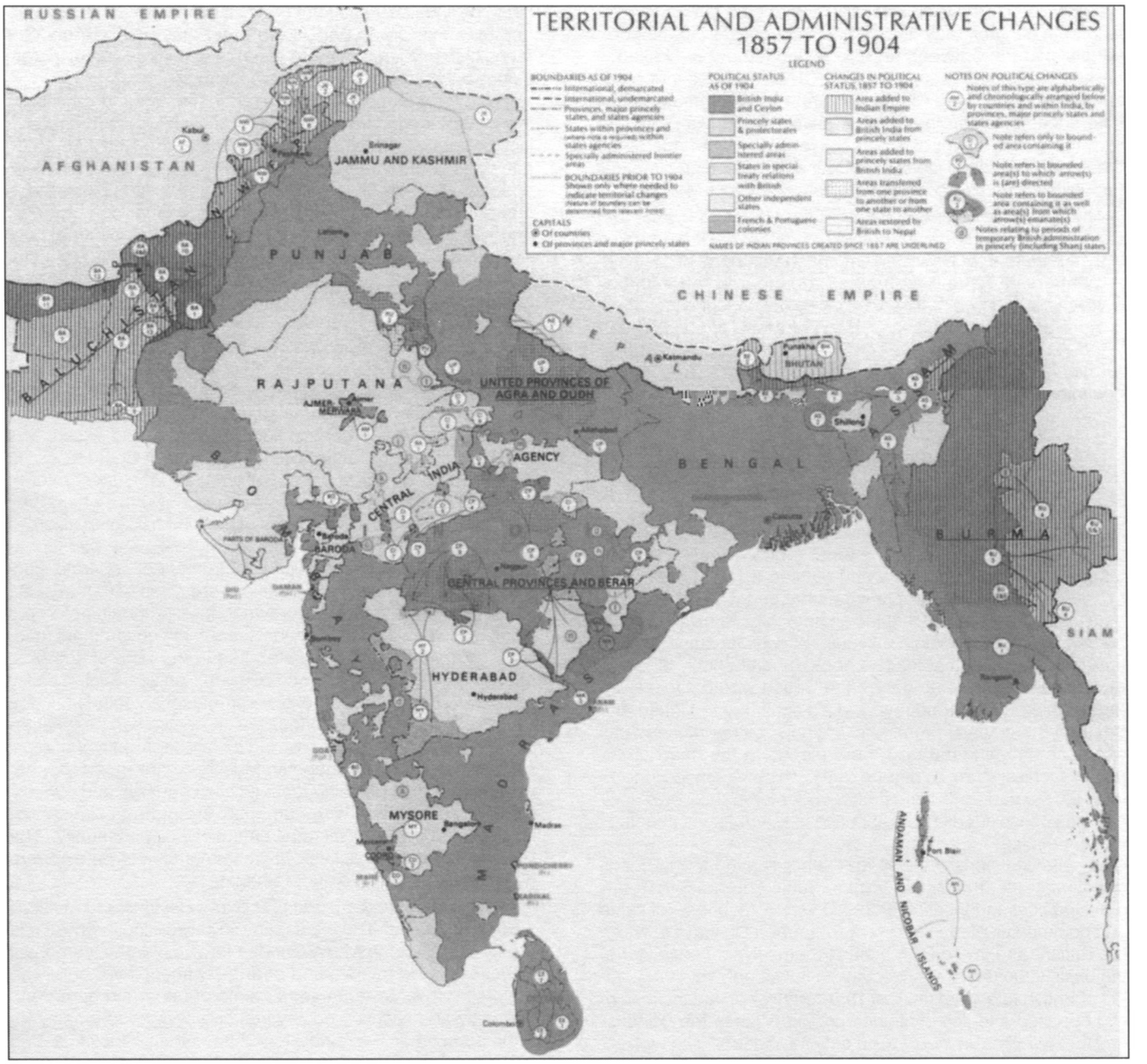

Fig. 2: Territorial and administrative changes, 1857-1904. *(Source:* Joseph E. Schwartzberg, *A Historical Atlas of South Asia,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1978, p. 65).

Constructing "India" in the geopolitical imagination of the Raj

From 1757 to 1857, the English East India Company serially annexed, or else extended its indirect rule over, each of the Indian states (fig. 2).

Capitalizing fully its political, commercial and military prowess, the English company annexed into its direct rule some 2.5 million sq.km or one million sq.miles – over 60 percent of the territory of the subcontinent containing over three-quarters of its people.[23] In the wake of the brutal suppression of a widespread military and civil revolt which had spread through much of northern India in 1857 and 1858, the British, who had started their rule as "outsiders," became "insiders" by vesting in their monarch the sovereignty through the Government of India Act of 2 August 1858.

However, the British knew that their efforts at social engineering were woefully inadequate in legitimizing British rule in India. Territorial annexation of India had to be supplemented by the annexation of "Indian" in imperial knowledge systems.[24] The mega-diversity of the subcontinent had to be reduced to the status of "familiar" and "intelligible," and established at the same time as "inferior," in the British vision of India. As Cohen puts it, "the period of 1860-1870 saw a rapid expansion of what might be thought of as the definition and expropriation of Indian civilization."[25] This process eventually led to the creation of an array of polarities that shaped much of the geopolitical ideology of the *Raj.*

Once the British started constructing "their India" during the later 19th century, they always had to negotiate the geopolitical disjuncture: between an acknowledgement of similarity, and an insistence upon difference. The task was inherently cumbersome. In order to demonstrate a set of fundamental differences between India and England, the British, together with the construction of a distinctive history that sustained them, also employed ideas of gender and race. In the imperial geopolitical imaginations of the British, points out Metcalf,

> There existed a "changeless" India inhabiting a past that endured in the present; an India of racial "decline" marked by the triumph of Dravidianism and the anarchy of the eighteenth century; and an India of a gendered "effeminacy" which made its women and men alike dependent on a benevolent British "masculinity." Each of these descriptions of India's difference had its own theoretical, even "scientific" rationale; each too was rent with deep contradictions both within itself, and in relation to the others. Above all, race and gender provided explanations of very different sorts for India's plight. The theory of racial decline announced a process of irreversible physical deterioration brought about by the mixing of blood, while the degeneracy defined by effeminacy was one of characters and morals.[26]

As an integral part of the larger Enlightenment project, which through observation, study, counting and classification attempted to understand the world outside Europe, the British set out to "order" the people who inhabited their new Indian dominion. It was crucial that India came to be known in such a manner that would sustain a system of colonial authority, and through categories that made it "look" fundamentally different. In other words, the categories the British would avoid were those which might announce India's similarity to Britain and threaten the colonial order. Accordingly, categories such as caste, community and tribe were placed at the heart of the Indian social system. Whereas class, which Victorian Englishmen considered as the most divisive factor in their own society, was conspicuous by its absence in the British accounts of Indian peoples.

Despite its inconsistencies and subordination to the needs of colonial rule, the British ethnographic enterprise had far-reaching consequences. For, these very categories – of caste and community, of race and sect – informed the ways in which the British, and in time the Indians themselves, conceived of the basic structure of their society.[27] It was only with the coming of British rule, from the late 18th century on, that the idea of two opposed and self-contained communities of the "Hindus" and the "Muslims" in India took a definite shape.[28] The two religious communities were defined, demarcated and demonized in terms of certain basic differences. In short, the British, by highlighting the centrality of religious community, along with that of caste, marked out India's distinctive status as fundamentally different land and peoples. What the British "construction of communalism" had willfully glossed over was the fact that the term "Hindu" was traditionally used not in any sense of a homogenous-monolothic religious belief but mainly as a signifier of location and country. The term has Persian-Arabic origin and derives from the river Indus or "Sindhu" (the cradle of the Indus Valley Civilization that flourished from around 3000 BC), and the name of that river is also the source of the word India itself. "The Persians and the Greeks saw India as the land around and beyond the Indus, and the Hindus were the native people of that land. Muslims from India were at one stage called 'Hindvi Muslims,' in Persian as well as Arabic, and there are plenty of references in early British documents to 'Hindoo Muslims' and 'Hindu Christians' to distinguish them respectively from Muslims and Christians from outside India."[29] Even when the term "Hindu" was used as a marker to distinguish those adhering to a non-Islamic faith, the perception each group had of the other was not in terms of a monolithic religion, but more in terms of distinct and disparate castes and sects along a social continuum.[30]

However, categories necessitate definition and definitions are in turn needed to impose order. This is where the geopolitics of census, which was introduced by the British in 1872, became integral to the British imperial mapping of India, with special reference to construction of mutually exclusive religious communities in terms of their particular demographic and geographical features. This is how the communal consciousness was forcefully injected into otherwise "fuzzy" communities. As Bhagat has ably shown it is hard to find evidence in support of a sustained communal hatred operating at the popular level prior to colonial rule. The partition of Bengal based on religion in 1905 was the most glaring example of how the British deployed a geopolitical discourse relating to the size of religious communities and their distribution to widen the rift between religious communities, especially between Hindus and Muslims. A new province of East Bengal and Assam was created with a predominance of Muslims in East Bengal in 1905. Speaking in Dacca in February 1904, Curzon offered the East Bengal Muslims "the prospect of unity which they have not enjoyed since the days of the old Musalman viceroys and kings."[31] The new communal consciousness was further perpetuated through the political instrument of separate electorates wherein religious minorities were given separate seats in the legislative bodies according to their proportion of population in the provinces. Even the seats in the government medical college Lahore were distributed in the ratio of 40:40:20 amongst Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in Punjab. Such a policy resulted in further sharpening of communal antagonism in the country, fixed Hindus and Muslims in hostile camps, exacerbated Hindu-Muslim divisions and fostered the spirit of political exclusiveness. Consequently, Muslims were made to "see" the advantage of pressing for special safeguards and concessions in accordance with numerical strength, social status, local influence and social requirement of their community. The following quotation explains why communal riots were so rare down to the 1880s. To quote Bhagat,

> In India social and cultural practices of Hindus and Muslims are inseparable. There are many so called Hindus whose religion has a strong Muhammadan flavour. Notable amongst these are the followers of strange "panchpiriya" cult, who worship five Mohammadan saints of uncertain name and identity and sacrifice poultry in their honour and employ for the purpose as their priest a Muhammadan "dafali fakir." In Gujarat there are several similar communities such as "matia kunbis" who call in brahmans for their chief ceremonies, but are followers of the Pirana saint Imam Shah and his successors, and bury their dead as do the Muhammadans, the "Sheikhadas," who at their wedding employ both a Hindu and a Muhammadan priest, and the "Momnas" who practice circumcision, bury their dead and read Gujarati Koran, but in other respects follow Hindu customs and ceremonial. The boundary line between Hindus on the one hand and Sikhs and Jains on the other is even more indeterminate. Even the census commissioner had reiterated "religions of India as we have already seen are by no means mutually exclusive." However, the practical difficulty in classifying the Indian population in terms of religious categories was solved by the census officials in their own way. The reconstruction of homogeneous and mutually exclusive communities was the main clutch through which divide and rule was possible. This was necessary for the sustenance of colonialism in India.[32]

Yet another dimension of the geopolitical "ordering" of India

under the Raj was the manner in which the "British Authority" came to be constructed, represented and exercised after 1858. Cohn[33] has examined at length the Imperial Assemblage of 1877 and the Imperial Darbars of 1903 and 1911, all organized at Delhi – which is the "political ritual centre" of India – in order to deconstruct the British authority and its representations in India. The so-called *Durbars* – meetings with large number of Indian princes, notables and Indians and British officials – at which honors and rewards were presented to Indians who had demonstrated *loyalty* to their foreign rulers during what the British had condemned as the "Mutiny" (1857-1858), conveyed that subordination to the colonial authority alone established privileges and ensured wealth and status.

One major geopolitical myth created by the "Imperial Assemblage" was that India was diversity, "ancient country of many nations," lacking in coherent communality except that given by British rule under the integrating system of the imperial crown. The enduring ideology that had sustained the Raj for so long was elaborated by Churchill, when he told the House of Commons in the debates on the 1935 Act, that there was "no real practical unity in India apart from British rule." Hence "liberty for India only means liberty for one set of Indians to exploit another." The British may have been only "the latest of many conquerors." but they alone had "made the well-being of the Indian masses their supreme satisfaction." As they had taken upon themselves this "mission in the East," the British could not simply "abdicate" it, and so "withdraw our guardianship from this teeming myriad population of Indian toilers."[34]

The British, however, were rather naïve in believing that through their archive for South Asia's geography (which comprised various images, maps, sketches, censuses, and textual descriptions), they could record and replicate the complexity of the Indian landscape. Moreover, Indians were not the passive and docile objects of the potent British vision which the British ontologically assumed them to be. They could and did resist in various ways the British conquest of the subcontinent and the reconstruction of the imperial space. There was, for example, resistance put up by villagers in various parts of the subcontinent against the surveys conducted from the hilltops; on account of the belief that the sacred geography of their native land was being violated. A detailed account of various instances of resistance to Imperial mapping, many of which are held in the East India Company's records, is yet to be written. Moreover, there were some areas of knowledge (such as the naming of rivers) that could not be reconciled with the ordered and structured space of the imperial geographical archive.

Apparently, a point that the British had missed altogether perhaps was that mapping the land of India has not been simply the domain of the cartographers of empires. One finds that in a range of Hindu traditions, map-making has been the domain of both cosmologists and mythmakers, and the imagined landscape they have created – a landscape shaped by the duplication and repetition of its features – is far more culturally powerful than that displayed on Bartholomew's map of India. One good example of duplication and replication is Ganga, considered as the most sacred river by the Hindus. Ganga as a whole is duplicated throughout India with seven major "Gangas" and numberless other rivers called Ganga. Furthermore, in this landscape networks of pilgrimage places have generated a powerful sense of land and location, not as a nation-state in the modern usage of the term, but as a shared, living landscape, with all its cultural and regional complexity. To quote Eck,

> The past 1,000 years of India's history have also included the flowering of an extensive Indo-Muslim culture with its own mental composition of the land, and with its own imagined landscape – a land enlivened with the heritage of kings and kingdoms, palaces and gardens, heroes and saints … there are many places where what we have come to call "Muslim," Hindu, Sikh or Christian traditions through the retrojective labeling of history have a lived-history and lived-reality of their own in which devotion has not subscribed to the boundaries of what we call the "religions" ... local examples of the confluence and layering of religious traditions around sacred sites abound.[35]

The imperial geopolitical imaginations/representations of the place(s) and people(s) on the subcontinent, despite their power-political potency and highly appealing reductionism could not entirely subsume the kaleidoscopic mega-diversity.

The post-colonial "nation-state" in India and the myth of geopolitical unity

The British were paid a handsome tribute in the early 1930s by Mahatma Gandhi when he conceded that the "Indian nation was a creation of the empire-builders. Independent India inherited the colonial nation."[36] As pointed out earlier in the paper, the colonial state was based on bureaucratic institutions and political values, which were not reflected in the historical experience of India. The amorphous structure of Indian civilization had shown the capacity to accommodate a multiplicity of social and linguistic identities, sometimes in a cluster of regional polities, and on other occasions in a somewhat fragile pan-Indian polity. Whereas, one of the major legacies of British rule in post-colonial India happens to be a uniquely colonial construct of the centralized state with an administrative bureaucracy and a standing army in particular, and the attendant ideological trappings of "ordered unity," "indivisible sovereignty" and the like. The westernized political elite of independent India, deeply influenced by the emergence of the liberal state in Europe in the late 18th century, did not seek to dismantle the colonial state. Instead this elite "attempted to conjure into existence a discourse which would democratize the colonial state. Indeed according to them, the democratic empowerment of a transformed colonial system was the most appropriate means of building a nation-state based on 'social and moral concern' for the citizens of a creative and independent polity."[37]

Extreme political instability in the wake of a bloody partition[38] was yet another fact that compelled the Indian state to place immediate emphasis on the state's coercive apparatuses, and to ensure, against the rhetoric of the national movement, that crucial parts of the apparatus of the colonial state did not crumble. The skirmish with Pakistan over Kashmir, the use of military force to integrate several recalcitrant princely states like Hyderabad into the Indian Union, the threat of communist insurgency in Telangana, all required a major recourse to the structures of army and bureaucracy that the colonial administration had left behind. As Kaviraj points out,

> ... the new state immediately entered a life of contradictions. The national state was an inheritor of two distinct, and in some ways, incompatible legacies. *It inherited the colonial state's systems of internal command and control, its administrative ethos, its laws and rules, and its three predominant characteristics to the popular mind: its marginality, its exteriority, and its persistent repressiveness against the lower strata of the people, who, at least in constitutional formality, were made the repository of sovereignty.* At the same time, it was successor to a triumphant national movement whose principal objective was to contest the culture of that state. Some of the ambiguities which had provided strength to the national movement, because it made it possible to draw on support from opposing social groups, now came to be the

issues of contention. *The historical circumstances of partition, dissidence, insurgency and war, made it inevitable that the apparatuses left behind by the colonial state would not be dismantled, but actually reinforced.*[39] (emphasis given)

Much in the British ideology of "difference" also survived and flourished in an independent India. Within the country, it left its mark above all in the conception of India as a society informed by a passionate commitment to community, and of the public arena as a site where communities contested for power. No doubt, after independence separate electorates were abolished and caste outlawed; and the 1950 constitution enshrined the values of secular democracy. Yet, behind the liberal rhetoric of the Nehru era, the structures crafted by the Raj, and affirmed during the course of the nationalist struggle, remained compelling. By far the most powerful were those of religious identity – as Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. As time went on, and the central government itself, together with the leaders of religiously based organizations, began openly to manipulate these communal loyalties for partisan advantage, such ties became ever more deeply embedded in Indian society.[40] We shall return to this theme later in the essay.

Once the political elite of post-colonial India began constructing its India as a "nation-state," it too was also compelled to negotiate the geopolitical disjuncture between an acknowledgement of difference (diversity) and an insistence upon similarity (unity). As pointed out earlier in the paper, the colonial state had faced more or less a similar dilemma while negotiating the disjuncture between an acknowledgement of similarity and an insistence upon difference between the "British" and the "Indians." The Indian state, however, chose to tackle the problem by constructing the "consciousness" of India as a single geopolitical entity, characterized by an organic unity.[41]

As already observed, the concept of the Indian subcontinent as an integrated unit has been implicitly invoked in many contexts over the millennia. "The idea has not only influenced the conception of the natural boundaries over which an emperor (such as Chandragupta Maurya, or Ashoka, or Akbar) would seek to establish command, but has also shaped the nature and domain of various economic, cultural and social movements."[42] Even if, as pointed out by Debabrata Sen,[43] the lineage of geopolitical thought has been inextricably bound up with the development of the sense of one Hindu civilization, it appears to be the modern Indian nationalism which produced unity of country in a way which had not always by any means been a part of India's historical experience. There has also been a deliberate and systematic attempt in the so-called "nationalist interpretations" of Indian history to focus on unity, rather than differences and discord within India.[44] To a large extent this was a reaction to the colonial thesis that India was diversity and it had no coherent communality except that given by British rule under the integrating system of the imperial crown. The nationalist counter-argument was that despite the diversity, there was an essential unity – and that this unity was not accidental, but some reflection of the unifying tendency in Indian culture and civilization as the ultimate foundation of nationalism. And then, as Sumit Sarkar puts it, "it becomes difficult – even for a Nehru, writing his *Discovery of India* – to resist the further slide toward assuming that that unity, after all, has been primarily Hindu (and upper-caste, often north Indian Hindu at that). The slide was made easier by the undeniable fact that the bulk of the leading cadres of the nationalists and leftist movements have come from Hindu upper-caste backgrounds."[45]

According to Austin[46] India's founding fathers were also forced by various pragmatic considerations to adopt the view that of all the characteristics of a "nation," unity is the most essential: no unity, no nation. Traumatized by the partition of India into two sovereign states, on the one hand, they faced the daunting task of integrating over 500 princely states, which had been outside the circle of British administration. No less compelling in their view was the need to secure their new nation's frontiers as the successors to those of the British empire in the subcontinent. And they were faced with the task of designing a constitutional-administrative system to make an effective nation from India's diverse identities. Compulsions such as these drove them to establish a strong central government, a tight "federal" system capable of becoming "unitary" in national "emergencies." Much of this they had inherited in the 1935 Government of India Act. "The flavour was Mughal as well: Delhi had become habituated to viewing the rest of the country through imperial North Indian eyes – despite the notable figures who had come (and continue to come) to Delhi from elsewhere in India."[47]

Along with the myth of a civilizational unity one also finds in the Indian geopolitical thinking what Barun De calls the "myth of permanence" in the South Asian empires. According to De,

> the Ashoka Empire was obviously the Indian government's beau ideal for the Indian state form. Adopting the symbols of the *Asoka Chakra* or the Asokan Lion capital, the Nehruvian Indian State harked back to the Asokan ideas of *satyameva jayate* and *dhammavijaya* as examples of syncretism and non-aligned diplomacy. Yet, historical data tells us that the Mauryan empire hardly lasted more than a hundred years and the Mughal Empire, as a politically stable entity, is supposed even by its greatest contemporary scholars to have lasted not more than a hundred and fifty years – from Akbar to Aurangzeb. Obscured by the Leviathian imperial tradition which, in the Asokan, Gupta, Mughal and British cases, rose from or collapsed into smaller principalities or state structures, there are at least two thousand years of political history of small principalities.[48]

"Cartographic anxieties" of post-colonial and post-partition India

In today's India one finds two principal geopolitical imaginations competing over the "core essence" of India's national unity and national identity: the "secular nationalist" – combining territory and culture; and the "Hindu nationalist" – combining religion and territory.[49] It is significant that for both the geopolitical imaginations, the defining principle of national identity is *territory*. The geo-body of India, according to the secular imagination, emphasized for 2,500 years since the times of the *Mahabharata,* stretches from the Himalayas in the north to *Kanya Kumari* (Cape Comrin) in the south, and from the Arabian Sea in the west to the Bay of Bengal in the east. The Indian subcontinent is not only the birthplace of several religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism), but has also received, accommodated and absorbed "outsiders" (Parsis, Jews, and "Syrian" Christians) over a long period of time. What make Indian civilization unique, therefore, are the virtues of syncretism, pluralism and tolerance reflected in the cultural expression: *Sarva Dharma Sambhava* (equal respect for all religions).

The most noteworthy example of India's national identity is Jawaharlal Nehru's book entitled *The Discovery of India* (1946). In Nehru's construction of India, syncretism, pluralism and tolerance are the signature themes. For Nehru, "some kind of a dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization." He "discovers" India's unity as lying in culture and not religion – hence no notion of a "holyland" in his mental map of the country. For him the heroes of India's history – Ashoka, Kabir, Guru Nanak, Amir Khusro, Akbar and Gandhi – subscribe to a variety of Indian faiths and it is Aurangzeb, the intolerant Moghul, who "puts the clock back."

India's geography was sacred to Nehru not literally but metaphorically.[50]

Nehru's secular nationalist construction of India stands in sharp contrast to the religious notion of India as originally the land of Hindus, and it is the only land which the Hindus can call their own.[51] According to V.D. Savarkar, the ideological father of Hindu nationalism, "A Hindu is he who feels attached to the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu [from river Indus to the seas] as the land of his forefathers – as his Fatherland; who inherits the blood of the great race whose first and discernible source could be traced from the Himalayan altitudes of the Vedic *Saptasindhus* and which enabling all that was assimilated has grown into and come to be known as the Hindu people."[52] What is said to unite India's physical landscape is the "sacred geography" of Hindu holy places (Benaras, Triputi, Rameswaram, Puri, Haridwar, Badrinath, Kedarnath, and now Ayodhya) and the holy rivers (Cauveri, Ganga, Yamuna, and the confluence of the last two in Prayag).

It is important to note that the boundaries of India as suggested by the secular-nationalist are coterminous with the "sacred geography" of the Hindu nationalist whose hallowed pilgrimage sites mark off essentially the same boundaries of the country, although the Hindu nationalist would go much further into mythic history than two and a half millennia to assert "historic rights" on these sites. As Varshney (1993, p. 238) remarks:

> Since the territorial principle is drawn from a belief in ancient heritage, encapsulated in the notion of "sacred geography," and it also figures in both imaginations [secularist and nationalist] it has acquired political hegemony over time. It is the only thing common between the two competing nationalist imaginations. Therefore, just as America's most passionate political moment concerns freedom and equality, India's most explosive moments concern its "sacred geography," the 1947 partition being the most obvious example. Whenever the threat of another break-up, another "partition" looms large, the moment unleashes remarkable passions in politics. Politics based on this imagination is quite different from what was seen when Malaysia and Singapore split from each other, or when the Czech or Slovak republics separated. Territory not being such an inalienable part of their national identity, these territorial divorces were not desecrations. In India, they become desecrations of the sacred geography.[53]

The anxiety surrounding questions of national unity, often expressed in terms of "territorial integrity" is shared by both the secular-nationalists and the Hindu-nationalists. According to Sankaran Krishna[54] such "cartographic anxiety" permeates a society that perceives itself as suspended forever in the space between the "former colony" and "not-yet-nation." Such a state of perpetual suspension can be observed not only in the discursive production of India as a bounded sovereign entity but also in everyday politics. According to Krishna, the degree of anxiety revealed by the state over matters of cartographic representation, the obsession with notions of security and purity, the disciplinary practices that define *Indian* and *non-Indian*, *patriot* and *traitor, insider* and *outsider, mainstream* and *marginal,* and the *physical* and *epistemic* violence that produces the border illustrate that the real continues to succumb to the imaginary.[55]

The ongoing tension between the mega diversity of the subcontinent and the disciplinary, homogenizing practices of statecraft is also illustrated by the fact that Nehru, despite his firm belief in the timeless existence of a spiritual and civilizational entity called India, is forced to begin his modern reconstruction of India's past in *Discovery of India* (1946) with a graphic description of the country's "natural" frontiers. And in Nehru's *Autobiography*[56] also, one finds occasional references to the need for safeguarding the physical boundaries of the nation; tracing the country's downfall to porous frontiers and, more importantly, to unfortunate timing by which a disunited and fragmented India succumbed to the cresting and united civilization of the British. According to Nehru what was broken up at the time of partition was something very vital and that was the body of India.[57] As Dijkink points out, what Nehru was actually seeking to overcome in his historical perspective spanning 2,500 years or more, was 200 years of British rule. "His idea of unity was nonetheless conditioned by the era he wanted to wipe out."[58]

Early on, the actual foreign policy of an independent India was shaped by Nehru himself and his chief foreign policy adviser, Krishna Menon.[59] Their distinctive world-view had emerged out of the long struggle with the British and out of the wider process of decolonization then taking place. A fairly illustrative account of Nehru's geopolitical vision can be found in his book *The Discovery of India* (1946) especially in the chapter entitled "Realism and Geopolitics, World Conquest or World Association: The U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R." What appears as most striking in Nehru's geopolitical thinking is the curious mix of "idealism" and "realism," "internal" and "external" on which he relies to construct his vision of the post-war world and India's role in it. Nehru is critically dismissive of the geopolitical theories of Mackinder and Spykman, which, according to him, are the pseudo-scientific justifications for the "power quest," "power politics" and "world domination." To quote Nehru,

> Geopolitics has now become the anchor of the realist and its jargon of "heartland" and "rimland" is supposed to throw light on the mystery of national growth and decay. Originating in England (or was it Scotland?), it became the guiding light of the nazis, fed their dreams and ambitions of world domination, and led them to disaster ... And now even the United States of America are told by Professor Spykman, in his last testament, that they are in danger of encirclement, that they should ally themselves with a "rimland" nation, that in any event they should not prevent the "heartland" (which means now the USSR) from uniting with the rimland.[60]

Behind Nehru's world-view and underlying his reflections on the desirability and feasibility of a just and peaceful post-war world order, one finds a much larger and deeper geopolitical concern with India's internal-domestic situation, and with the need for a foreign policy that would safeguard a "dream of unity" that according to Nehru had occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. He is thoroughly convinced about the unity of India – within its British Imperial borders. To quote Nehru, "thus, we arrive at the inevitable and ineluctable conclusion that, whether Pakistan comes or not, a number of important and basic functions of the state must be exercised on an all-India basis if India has to survive as a free state and progress. The alternative is stagnation, decay and disintegration, leading to the loss of political and economic freedom, both for India as a whole and its various separated parts."[61] Views about a future division of India are subjected to the same criticism that Nehru levels at traditional realist power politics: the small-nation state is a phenomenon of the past, and territorial division of India would soon reveal how dependent both new units are on each other and would immediately raise the need for a federal association. Besides, any acceptable territorial division would leave the Muslims with a territory that was both smaller and economically less viable. The prospect for the Indian subcontinent was, according to Nehru, either "union plus independence or disunion plus dependence."[62] The tragic events of the separation of India and Pakistan, as Dijkink points out, "suggest that Nehru was actually engaged in 'constructing' rather than 'discovering' India."[63]

In the geopolitical calculations of Krishna Menon, "external affairs" were "only a projection of internal or national policy in the field of International Relations."[64] And to a large extent, this was reflected in India's policy of non-alignment. The Indian foreign policy elite, according to Jean Houbert,[65] opted for non-aligned India also because it enhanced the ability of the Indian state in "containing" communism in its domestic politics. Given that the Communist movement in India was neither homogenous nor united in one well-organized party, any challenge on its left could be tackled by the Congress without the Soviet Union intervening. Moreover, non-alignment provided India with the means to save on military spending and put the priority on social and economic development, "thus winning the allegiances of the electorate and cutting the grass from under the feet of the communists."[66] External as well as internal security considerations too were likely to be better served by non-alignment than by joining the Western military alliances. But there was more than security and ideology to India's support for non-alignment; it "would also enhance the power of India ... by harnessing the moral dimension of international politics non-alignment provides India with more power in its weakness than alignment would do ... thus the ideology of peace was bound together with India's security interests and power considerations in the non-aligned policy."[67]

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, independent India's first Home Minister, hailed by many as the Bismarck of India, is yet another example of how "national unity" and "national identity" of post-colonial India dominated the perceptions and priorities of its political elite. In the words of K.P.S. Menon, the former Foreign Secretary of India, "when the British left India the unity of even divided India was in danger. Some 560 Princely States had been left in the air. It was open to them to adhere to India, to accede to Pakistan, or to remain independent ... It almost looked as if India was going to be balkanized. But this danger was averted by the firm handling of the Princes by a man of iron, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel."[68] To Sardar Patel, as Krishna points out, "Hyderabad seemed to have mattered much more than Kashmir. Situated as it was in India's belly, he naturally asked: 'How can the belly breathe if it is cut off from the main body?' That would have sounded the death-knell of Patel's dream of One India; and the cancer of disunity and divisiveness would have spread to totally balkanize the country."[69]

Even a casual observer of the Indian geopolitical scene cannot fail to notice an increasing obsession with the threats – real and/or imaginary – emanating from across the border to the "unity and integrity" of India; the "alien" infiltration with a shadowy "foreign hand" is out to destabilize and destroy the body as well as the soul of the nation. The Indian state has inherited its discourse as well as practices on borders or borderlands from the imperial powers, becoming totally oblivious in the process that the geo-histories of the borders of so-called "South Asia" were actually written by those who were "creating" or "constructing" them in the first place for their own power-political gains. Consequently, the maps that were drawn by the imperial power are both too static and too simple to capture the diversity and the dynamism of the South Asian borderlands. As Paula Banerjee points out,

> The last two decades in the twentieth century have witnessed the formulation of policies to make South Asian borders more rigid. Yet a glance at the history of the region will show that the concept of demarcated borders, both inter and intrastate, was not considered viable. It still remains to be seen whether it is wrong to contend that South Asian frontiers cannot be dissected into rigid boundaries, but can at best be organized as borderlands. The concept of strategic frontiers is mainly an imperial and western one. When the British carved up South Asia, they did it largely on paper; the ruling classes in the States thus created then ossified those borders due to power considerations. This goes against the social, cultural and economic traditions of the region.[70]

The remarkable influence of Curzon's legacy on the Indian state can be well gauged from the fact that it is still unable to get out of the mind set that it has inherited, so much so that even today it continues to deny its own citizens access to maps of the border region, even outdated ones.

The persistent concern of the Indian state, often bordering on obsession, with the "territorial integrity" of its geopolitical realm, is well reflected through the manner in which the Indian state relates itself to its immediate neighbors on the subcontinent, especially Pakistan. Be it the secular-nationalist imagination or the Hindu-nationalist imagination, the geographical size of India and the ideal of its unity are often cited as key differences between India and Pakistan, with the latter being described as a fabrication of geo-political necessity split into two parts separated by a thousand miles. Integral to the geopolitics of place-making on the subcontinent, having acquired hegemonic categorical forms in the imperial mapping of "India" as two opposed and self-contained communities of Hindus and Muslims, authenticated by the "un-clean partition," the otherness in the case of India and Pakistan persists in its various avatars.[71] Pakistan is portrayed by the hawks in India as an inherently hostile, monolithic, identity-crisis ridden society populated and run by fanatics, who would like to "crush" India's unity, and who would not mind risking yet another war (even nuclear war) over Jammu and Kashmir to complete the "unfinished task of partition." Today, just about every other act of subversion in India is blamed on the elusive but omnipresent Pakistani ISI.[72]

This major bone of contention between India and Pakistan, the northernmost state of the Indian Union, namely Jammu and Kashmir, is a good example of how peoples and places with distinctive histories, cultures and ethno-linguistic identities can be reduced to the status of mere "issues" in the geopolitical imaginations of the intellectuals and institutions of statecraft. At the heart of the dominant Indian discourse on Kashmir lies the polemical two-nation theory. While India is said to have somehow reconciled itself to the theory as an "inevitability,"[73] Pakistan is accused of having adopted a rigid position that "the partition of the subcontinent will remain incomplete till all Muslim-majority areas of India either become part of it or are independent Muslim political entities."[74] India's commitment to principles of plurality, synthesis and co-existence – transcending the factors of ethnicity, language, religion and sub-regional identities – is contrasted sharply to Pakistan's devotion to the religious homogeneity of Islam as the sole basis for national and territorial identity. Attempts continue to be made by certain ruling regimes in both Pakistan and India from time to time to re-claim and re-write their respective "national" pasts to suit their present political ideologies.[75] Pakistani contention that Kashmir was a part of Muslim kingdoms over the last 1,200 years and more, is strongly challenged by Indian historians on the ground that history neither commences nor ends abruptly. If Kashmir was a part of Muslim kingdoms and empires, then it was also a Hindu and Buddhist polity at some stage. India remains adamant in its stand that if the political and territorial affiliations were to be based on religious and historical arguments, the political map not only of the Indian subcontinent but of the whole world would have to undergo a radical transformation.

However, once the sanctity of national borders is held to be synonymous with the very existence/survival of the state of the Indian "union" by various political groups right across the ideological spectrum, the perceived indispensability of "secure" or "inviolable" borders for national unity, national development, and a coherent-cogent national identity itself, diverts attention from the violence that continues to define and defend the bor-

der.[76] A classic example of how a "production of border" can lead to a senseless costly "war" over frozen wastes is that of conflict between India and Pakistan over the Siachen Glacier. According to a recent study,

> The ongoing conflict in Siachen has become embedded in the Indian public consciousness as a symbol of national will and determination to succeed against all odds. Siachen has acquired a sanctity of its own, which is part folklore, part military legend, part mythology, and a substantial measure of national pride ... the beginning of the conflict had much to do with geography, geopolitics and strategic perceptions. Not all strategic assumptions that were brought to bear in the 1980s were entirely right. They were perceived to be correct then, but time and events have shown them to be flawed.[77]

The Siachen conflict is a good example of how a state-centric geopolitical reasoning, while fully drawing upon the emotive symbolism of heroism, sacrifice, and honor, diverts critical gaze away from the social-ecological impact of this unending warfare on the places and peoples of Jammu and Kashmir. Whereas the fact that even though the glacier is miles from the nearest Pakistani military positions in the Karakorams, the local headquarters is often reported by official and popular media as being in the Siachen area, reveals the (geo)politics of cleverly crafted as well as grafted locations.

The rise of "Hindutva" geopolitics: Re-mapping India

Today, in many parts of India, especially the northern and central states, a new Hindu identity is under construction.[78] This process is undoubtedly assisted to a considerable extent by the fact that this identity is also the basis of political mobilization by the party in power in New Delhi, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP is the only cadre-based party in India in the real sense of the term. Unlike the Communist parties and the Congress, having their front organizations with distinctive identities, the BJP is a political arm of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS, National Voluntary Corps), meant to implement its program. The RSS, also known as Sangh Parivar (family), has emerged since its inception in 1925 as *the* organization articulating Hindu revivalism, especially among the youth, devoted to the establishment of a "vibrant Hindu nation" with the ethos of the alleged Golden Vedic Age at its core.[79] According to Tanika Sarkar, "reification and mystification of the country have been fundamentally necessary for the [geo]political project of Hindutva nationalism. The premise of this project is an authoritarian, militaristic and overcentralized polity. The image of threatening neighbors outside and treacherous Muslims within – both of whom are united by a common Muslim identity – is intended to keep the nation an aggressive and unsatisfied whole."[80]

A geopolitical discourse, according to Ó Tuathail and Agnew, signifies much more than the identification of specific geographical influences upon a particular foreign policy situation; "to identify and name a place is to trigger a series of narratives, subjects and understandings."[81] For example, to designate an area as "Hindu"or "Islamic" amounts not only to a naming ritual, but also to enframing it in terms of its "sacred geography," "authentic politics" and the type of foreign policy that its "nature" demands. Geopolitical discourses are rendered meaningful and "legitimate" largely through practical geopolitical reasoning, which relies more on common-sense narratives and distinctions than on formal geopolitical models. One good example of what has been said above is the section entitled "Hindutva: The Great National Ideology" on the official website of the BJP. The opening stanzas read in part as follows:

> In the long history of the world, the Hindu awakening will go down as one of the most monumental events ... Never before has Bharat, the ancient word for the motherland of the Hindus, India, been confronted with such an impulse for change. This movement, Hindutva is changing the very foundations of Bharat and Hindu society the world over ... During the era of Islamic invasions, what Will Durant called the bloodiest period in the history of mankind, many Hindus gallantly resisted, knowing full well that defeat would mean a choice of economic discrimination, via the *jaziya* tax on non-Muslims, forced conversion, or death ... In modern times, Hindu *Jagriti* [awakening] gained momentum when Muslims played the greatest abuse of Hindu tolerance; the demand for a separate state and the partition of India, a nation that had a common history and culture for countless millennia. Thus the Muslims voted for a separate state and the Hindus were forced to sub-divide their own land.[82]

According to Savarkar, as mentioned earlier in the paper, "A Hindu means a person who regards his land ... from the Indus to the Seas as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland."[83] In order to qualify as a "Hindu" a person or a group must meet three criteria: *territorial* (land between the Indus and the Seas), *genealogical* ("fatherland") and *religious* ("holyland"). Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists can be part of this definition, for they were born in India and meet all three criteria. Whereas Christians, Jews, Parsis (already assimilated) and Muslims meet only two. India is not their "holyland."

It has been ably argued by Satish Deshpande that globalization and Hindutva are impacting on each other in contradictory as well as complimentary ways, "making it difficult to hold on to any unidimensional conception of their reciprocal involvement. One important aspect of this mutual impact is the globalization of Hindutva itself, the globalization of its congregations and constituencies. The emergence of what might be called 'non-resident Hindutva' (especially in the USA and the UK) provides an obvious instance where the 'portability' as well as the 'changelessness' of its essence are simultaneously highlighted. Today, when the world is witness to more and more such ongoing negotiations (involving both collusion and collisions) between the local and the globalised faces of ethnicity, the net impact is too complex to predict."[84]

Conclusions

This essay has shown that in numerous ways the complex, multi-layered nature of Indian geopolitics can be attributed to the ceaseless interplay between the natural and imagined geographies on the subcontinent. Once encountered with the mega diversity on the subcontinent, the "Geopolitics of Raj" addressed itself largely to the task of *constructing* differences between the "British" and the "Indians" on the one hand, among the "Indians" on the other, and the *disciplining* of those differences through the transformation of "fuzzy" communities into homogenous-monolithic categories. Whereas the major geopolitical concerns of the post-Colonial State ("Nation-State"!) in India seem to revolve around

- the uncontested *inheritance* of certain colonial legacies, especially the British ideology of "communal" difference in India;
- the subtle but at times harsh denial and disciplining of religious, socio-economic and linguistic diversity by invoking the myth of "geopolitical unity"; and,
- the growing tendency on the part of the Indian state to deal "authoritatively," both at home and abroad, with mounting cartographic anxieties over preserving the "territorial integrity" of the country, a concern shared by both the so-called secular nationalists and the Hindu nationalists.

Against the backdrop of perennial tension between the disciplinary practices of the geopolitical discourse(s) of "unity in diversity" and the resisting impulses of the geo-cultural "diversity of unity" on the subcontinent, the secular-nationalist and the Hindu-nationalist, neither represent nor exhaust the entire range and variety of geopolitical imaginations to be found across the length and breadth of India. The contest among various such imaginations and representations of "India" and "Indians" for spatial hegemony will continue to rearrange the geo-social map of the subcontinent.

References

1. K. Dodds and J. Sidaway, "Locating critical geopolitics," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* vol. 12 (1994), pp. 515-524.
2. J. Gottmann, *A Geography of Europe* (London, Harper, 1954), p. 2.
3. G. Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (London, Routledge, 1996); J. Agnew and S. Corbridge, *Mastering Space: Hegemony, Territory and International Political Economy* (London, Routledge, 1995); Dodds and Sidaway, *op. cit.*
4. G. Ó Tuathail, "Thinking critically about geopolitics," in G. Ó Tuathail, S. Dalby and P. Routledge (eds.), *The Geopolitics Reader* (London, Routledge, 1998).
5. J. Gottmann, *op. cit.,* pp. 3-4.
6. S. Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War* (London, Pinter, 1990); S. Dalby, "Critical geopolitics: discourse, difference and dissent," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 9 (1991), pp. 261-283.
7. T. Barnes and T. Duncan (eds.), *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (London, Routledge, 1992), p. 8.
8. S. Mills, *Discourse* (London, Routledge, 1997), p. 107.
9. See S.N. Eisenstadt and H. Hartman, "Historical experience, cultural traditions, state formation and political dynamics in India and Europe," in M. Doornbos and S. Kaviraj (eds.), *Dynamics of State Formation: India and Europe Compared* (New Delhi, Sage, 1997); H. Kulke, "Introduction: the study of the state in pre-modern India," in H. Kulke (ed.), *The State in India 1000-1700* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995); S.K. Mitra, "Between transaction and transcendence: The state and the institutionalization of power in India," in S.K. Mitra (ed.), *The Post-Colonial State in Asia: Dialectics of Politics and Culture* (New York, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990).
10. A. Sen, "Secularism and its discontents," in R. Bhargava (ed.), *Secularism and its Critics* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 250.
11. R. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 229-230.
12. L.N. Rangrajan, *Kautilya, The Arthshastra* (New Delhi, Penguin, 1992).
13. *Ibid.,* p. 543.
14. R.D. Dikshit, "The nature of revolutionary nationalism in India: a historical and geographical perspective," in C.P. Singh (ed.), *New Perspectives in Geography* (Allahabad, Indian University Press, 1981), p. 199.
15. K.M. Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History* (Bombay, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955), pp. 19-20.
16. *Ibid.,* p. 56.
17. S. Cohen, *India Emerging Power* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 11.
18. G. Parker, *Geopolitics: Past, Present and Future* (London, Pinter, 1998), p. 89.
19. K.M. Panikkar, *op. cit.,* pp. 26-27.
20. B. De, "Moving beyond boundaries: contradictions between people and territory," in T.K. Bose and R. Manchanda (eds.), *States, Citizens and Outsiders: The Uprooted Peoples of South Asia* (Kathmandu, South Asia Forum for Human Rights, 1997), p. 18.
21. I.M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 356.
22. S. Kaviraj, "On state, society and discourse in India," in J. Manor (ed.), *Rethinking Third World Politics* (London and New York, Longman, 1991), p. 77.
23. M.H. Fisher, *The Politics of the British Annexation of India 1757-1857* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993).
24. B.S. Cohen, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997).
25. B.S. Cohen, "Representing authority in Victorian India," in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996), p .182.
26. T.R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 110-111.
27. *Ibid,* p. 114.
28. G. Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 23-65.
29. A. Sen, *op. cit.,* p. 471.
30. R. Thaper, *From Lineage to State: Social Formations in the Mid-First Millennium B.C. in the Ganga Valley* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996).
31. R.B. Bhagat, "Census and the construction of communalism in India," *Economic and Political Weekly,* vol. 36, no. 46-47 (24 November, 2001).
32. *Ibid.*
33. B.S. Cohen, "Representing authority in Victorian India," in Hobsbawm and Ranger (eds.), *op. cit.*
34. Metcalf, *op. cit.,* p. 231.
35. D.L. Eck, "The imagined landscape: Patterns in the construction of Hindu sacred geography," *Contributions to Indian Sociology,* vol. 32, no. 2 (1998), p. 167.
36. B. Sen Gupta, "India in the twenty-first century," *International Affairs*, vol. 73, no. 2 (1997), p. 299.
37. R. Kumar, "State formation in India: retrospect and prospect," in Doornbos and Kaviraj (eds.), *op. cit.,* p. 404.
38. See A.B. Hansen, *Partition and Genocide: Manifestation of Violence in Punjab, 1937-1947* (New Delhi, India Research Press, 2002).
39. S. Kaviraj, "The modern state in India," in Doornbos and Kaviraj (eds.), *op. cit.,* p. 223.
40. See J. Alam, "Composite culture and communal consciousness: The Ittehadul Muslimeen in Hyderabad," in V. Dalmia and H.V. Stietencron (eds.), *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (New Delhi, Sage, 1995); A. Jalal, "Exploding communalism: the politics of Muslim identity in South Asia," in S. Bose and A. Jalal (eds.), *Nationalism, Democracy and Development: State and Politics in India* (Calcutta, Oxford University Press, 1997).
41. G. Parker, "Geopolitical perspectives on India and Indian foreign policy," in *The Ford Foundation Lectures in International Relations Studies* (Department of Political Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, 1988).
42. A. Sen, "On interpreting India's past," in Bose and Jalal (eds.), *op. cit.,* p. 20.
43. D. Sen, *Basic Principles of Geopolitics and History* (Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1975), p. 251.
44. A. Sen, *op. cit.*
45. S. Sarkar, "Indian nationalism and the politics of Hindutva," in D. Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 275.
46. G. Austin, *The Indian Constitution's Seamless Web* (New Delhi, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1994), Research Paper no. 14, p. 17.
47. *Ibid.*
48. B. De, *op. cit.,* pp. 16-17
49. A. Varshney, "Contesting meanings: India's national identity, Hindu nationalism, and the politics of anxiety," *Daedalus*, vol. 122, no. 3 (1993), pp. 227-261.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 236.
51. D.D. Pattanaik, *Hindu Nationalism in India: Conceptual Foundation* (New Delhi, Deep & Deep Publications, 1998), pp. 43-50.
52. V.D. Savarkar, *Hindutva,* 5th ed. (Bombay, Savarkar Prakashan, 1969), p.100.
53. Varshney, *op. cit.*
54. S. Krishna, " Cartographic anxiety: Mapping the body politic in India," *Alternatives*, vol. 19 (1994), p. 508.
55. *Ibid.*
56. J. Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London, John Lane, 1936).
57. J. Nehru, *Independence and After: A Collection of Speeches 1946-*

1949 (Delhi, Government of India, 1956), p. 247.
58. G. Dijkink, *National Identity & Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride & Pain* (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 129.
59. M. Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (London, Oxford University Press, 1968).
60. J. Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Calcutta, Signet Press, 1946), p. 539.
61. *Ibid.,* p. 533.
62. *Ibid.*
63. Dijkink, *op. cit.,* p.121.
64. M. Brecher, *op. cit.,* p. 4.
65. J. Houbert, "India between land and sea," *Current Research on Peace and Violence*, vol. 12, no. 4 (1989), pp. 201-211.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*
68. Cited in S. Krishna, *op. cit.,* p. 433.
69. *Ibid,* p. 398.
70. P. Banerjee, "Frontiers and borders: Spaces of sharing and spaces of conflict" in Ranabir Samaddar (ed.), *Space, Territory and the State* (Hyderabad, Orient Longman, 2002), p. 41.
71. S. Chaturvedi, "Process of othering in the case of India and Pakistan," *Journal of Economic and Social Geography,* vol. 93, no. 2 (2002), pp. 149-159.
72. K.P.S. Gill, "Give internal security the top priority," *The Pioneer* (New Delhi),13 June (1998), p. 8.
73. J.N. Dixit, *Anatomy of a Flawed Inheritance: India-Pakistan Relations 1971-1994* (Delhi, Ajanta Publications, 1995), p.199.
74. *Ibid.*
75. N.C. Behara, "Perpetuating the divide: political abuses of history in South Asia," *Indian Journal of Secularism,* vol. 1, no. 4 (1998), pp. 53-71.
76. S. Krishna, *op. cit.* p. 511.
77. V.R. Raghavan, *Siachen: Conflict Without End* (New Delhi, Viking Penguin India, 2002), p. 210.
78. S. Chaturvedi, "Representing post-colonial India: Inclusive/exclusive geopolitical imaginations," in K. Dodds and D. Atkinson, *Geopolitical Traditions: A Century of Geopolitical Thought* (London, Routledge, 2000), pp. 222-226.
79. B. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993).
80. T. Sarkar, "Imagining Hindurastra: the Hindu and the Muslim in Bankim Chandra's writings," in D. Ludden (ed.), *op. cit.,* p. 279.
81. G. O Tuathail and J. Agnew (1992), "Geopolitics and foreign policy: practical geopolitical reasoning in American foreign policy," *Political Geography*, vol. 11 (1992), p. 195.
82. http://www.bjp.org/philo.htm
83. Cited in A. Varshney *op. cit.,* p. 231.
84. S. Deshpande, "Hegemonic spatial strategies: The nation-space and Hindu communalism in twentieth century India," in P. Chatterjee and P. Jaganathan (eds.), *Community, Gender and Violence* (New Delhi, Permanent Black), p. 211.