RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM IN INDIA AND JAPAN

A Report of a Senior Study

by

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Abstract

This article examines the political phenomenon of religious nationalism as it exists in India and Japan. The author discusses the origins and doctrines of religious nationalism in India and Japan, as well as discussing major organizations connected with each movement. Finally, the author explores notable similarities and differences between the two movements.
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INTRODUCTION

The acerbic Anglo-Irish playwright Oscar Wilde once observed, “The truth is rarely pure, and never simple.” While this apt observation can easily apply to a number of situations and fields of study, it readily applies to the complex political and historical idea of nationalism. This political ideology, in its most basic form, emphasizes national identity and unity. Religious nationalism is a form of nationalism which sees religious unity as an indispensable part of national identity. For some people reared on the idea of “separation of church and state,” the mere suggestion of a linkage between these two notions may produce considerable discomfort. When church and state are intertwined, however, lines of division between religion and politics often blur.

This study will begin with an introduction to basic, overarching political concepts key to understanding the issues involved in the study of religious nationalism in India and Japan. Since some readers may be unfamiliar with the political, historical, and religious terms and ideas involved in understanding this issue, brief overviews of relevant aspects of each nation’s history, politics, and religions will follow. The introduction to this study will introduce readers to some basic information about each nation and key terms and ideas relevant to the topic at hand.
Chapter I of this study will introduce readers to the nations of India and Japan, along with political, religious, and historical concepts and terms relevant to the discussion.

Chapter II of this study will present case studies of religious nationalism as it appears in India and Japan respectively. First, an in-depth examination of relevant incidents in Indian history will trace the ideological origins and political importance of Hindu nationalism. Next, an in-depth examination of relevant incidents in Japanese history will trace the ideological origins and political importance of Shinto nationalism.

Chapter III of this study will compare and contrast characteristics of religious nationalism in India and in Japan. Finally, a synthesis of the two cases will be followed by concluding remarks.
CHAPTER I

RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM: BASIC TERMS AND IDEAS

A number of basic (and a few advanced) political terms and ideas are involved in this study of religious nationalism in India and Japan, respectively. According to the Blackwell Dictionary of Political Science, nationalism refers to a complex set of political ideologies that emphasize loyalty to and identification with a particular nation-state above all others (Bealey 219). The so-called “left-right spectrum” of political ideologies is an idea that proves particularly useful in understanding the ideological alignments of various political parties and movements. In its political context, the term “left-right political spectrum” can refer to a range of positions on any one of a number of issues (“Left”). Another term useful to understanding the issue of religious nationalism, particularly in the Japanese context, is “classical liberalism.” The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences defines liberalism as “at once a political philosophy, an allied political movement, and a way of thinking about the foundations and practices of government” that values “the individual [and] individual rights.” In other words,
liberalism is a political concept concerned with the individual ("Liberalism"). Certain historical terms and ideas are also useful in understanding the arguments put forth in this study of religious nationalism. One historical idea that figures prominently in the case study on India in particular is postcolonialism, also known as postcolonial studies or postcolonial theory. According to Professor Deepika Bahri, Director of Asian Studies at Emory University, postcolonial studies is “the study of interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period” (Bahri). In other words, Bahri defines postcolonial studies as a discipline concerned with the relationships between colonizers and the colonized. An idea which comes up in the discussion of the nature of the Japanese emperor is the “mandate of heaven.” This idea from Chinese philosophy holds that Heaven gives an earthly ruler permission to govern the people (Turnbull “Way” 19, 20). The “mandate of heaven” bears some similarity to the pre-modern western concept of the “divine right of kings,” with the notable exception of the former’s provision against unjust rule. Specifically, part of the Mandate of Heaven idea is that Heaven can revoke a ruler’s right to rule (and demonstrate divine displeasure through natural disasters) if that ruler has governed unfairly. As the noted early Confucian thinker Mencius explained, “The mandate of heaven is not immutable” (Reid 99). Although the Japanese enthusiastically adopted many Chinese/Confucian ideas during the Tang Dynasty, the “Mandate of Heaven” idea never quite caught on among the staunchly monarchist Japanese elite. Ironically, this idea found its way into the political philosophy of Tokugawa Ieyasu, a historical leader readers will meet later on in the case study of Japan (Turnbull “Ways” 157-158).

India: An Introduction
A thorough introduction to India is essential to understanding the ideas and terms that will follow. The Republic of India, located in South Asia, encompasses roughly 3,287,263 square kilometers in area, stretching from the Himalayas in the north to the Indian Ocean in the South and from the dense jungles of Assam in the east to the arid plains of the Punjab in the West. With a population of about 1.2 billion people, India boasts the distinctions of being the world’s largest democracy as well as being home to one of the world’s oldest civilizations and the world’s oldest religion. Almost dizzying in its diversity, India boasts a plethora of religions and castes. India is also notable for its staggering linguistic diversity, exemplified by its sixteen official languages and 1,652 spoken languages and dialects.

A brief overview of Indian history and culture is crucial to understanding Hindu nationalism in context. From 1522 until 1858, the Muslim Mughal emperors ruled much of the Indian subcontinent. For much of its history, religious syncretism typified India’s religious landscape. For instance, some Hindus made pilgrimages to Sufi Muslim shrines and some Muslims took part in Hindu celebrations (Togawa).

A number of important ideas and terms pervade the discourse regarding India and Hindu nationalism. Chief among these ideas is the premise of Hindutva, literally meaning “‘Hindu-ness,’” which the early Hindu nationalist V. D. Savarkar introduced (Metcalf 228-9). This term refers to the three conditions Hindu nationalists view as integral to Indian identity. Another key idea in Hindu nationalist thought is the idea of a Hindu Rashtra or India as a Hindu nation. The term sangh parivar refers to the family of Hindu nationalist organizations which includes the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the
Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and the Bharatiya Janata Party, which are the movement’s main activist, social, and political branches, respectively (Chatterjee, Ipsita 626).

Understanding Hindu nationalism also entails an understanding of key terms and ideas related to Indian history and society. One of the most important ideas is that of caste. The British Raj, or rule, of India from the mid-eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, was to be a key factor in the formation of Hindu nationalism. The Mughal Empire, which lasted from approximately 1526 until 1858, controlled much of the Indian subcontinent and surrounding areas. The British Raj, which lasted from about the mid-eighteenth century until 1947, laid the foundations for the emergence of Hindu nationalism in the subcontinent. Nicholas B. Dirks, in his 1992 article “Castes of Mind,” argues that the British East India Company began to acquire power over much of the subcontinent, its officers began to try make sense of India’s cultural and social framework. Wanting to govern India by its own laws, the British sought out ancient Sanskrit documents such as the Laws of Manu. Unable to read Sanskrit, British scholars relied upon members of the priestly Brahmin caste for translations. The Brahmin translators tended to emphasize their own role as the most “pure” caste in Indian society (Dirks 62).

An understanding of the origins of Hindu nationalism entails the comprehension of the historical context in which this political ideology was born. The Mughal Empire, which lasted from approximately 1526 until 1858, controlled much of the Indian subcontinent and surrounding areas. The British Raj, which lasted from about the mid-eighteenth century until 1947, laid the foundations for the emergence of Hindu nationalism in the subcontinent. As the British East India Company acquired power over
more and more of the subcontinent, according to Nicholas B. Dirks, the Franz Boas Professor of History and Anthropology at Columbia University, officers of the British East India Company began to try to make sense of India’s cultural and social framework. Wanting to govern India by its own laws, the British sought out ancient Sanskrit documents such as the Laws of Manu. Unable to read Sanskrit, British scholars relied upon members of the priestly Brahmin caste for translations of the ancient texts (Dirk 62).

During the Utilitarian and Victorian periods of the British Raj, the British continued their presence in the Indian subcontinent, including what are now the states of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Burma (or Myanmar).

Communalist violence and mass exoduses marked the partition of India in 1947. Great Britain had opted to divide colonial India into three separate nations based on the majority religion of each area of the subcontinent. The Hindu majority areas retained the name of India; the Muslim majority areas in the Punjab and Bengal now became Pakistan; and the Buddhist majority-area in the east became Burma. Once the division occurred, numerous Hindus found themselves living in the Muslim-majority nation of Pakistan. On the other side of the Indo-Pakistani border, many Muslims found themselves in a similar situation; India’s Hindu majority greatly outnumbered Indian Muslims.

Japan: Key Terms and Ideas

As with India, a thorough introduction to Japan is essential to comprehending the arguments that follow. Japan, located to the east of China, Korea, and Russia, covers about 377.9 thousand square kilometers in area. With a population of about 127.4
million people living in an area slightly smaller than California, Japan is one of the world's most densely populated nations on earth. Nicknamed the "Land of the Rising Sun," this island nation's geographic isolation from mainland Asia allowed it to develop a distinctive culture.

Understanding certain terms and ideas from Japanese history helps one comprehend the events and circumstances underlying the emergence of religious nationalism in Japan. From the late twelfth century until the mid-nineteenth century C. E., dynastic lines of military rulers known as shoguns ruled Japan. In ancient times, the office of sei-i-tai-shogun, roughly meaning "barbarian-quelling generalissimo," was strictly a temporary position awarded in times of emergency. Later, this position became both permanent and hereditary, taken by a succession of powerful clans within the military class. Japan's warrior class, the samurai, or "those who serve," began its existence as a class of attendants upon the nobility and later rose to wrest supreme political power from their erstwhile masters (Dunn 14). In later centuries, samurai warlords known as daimyo fought and conquered one another in hopes of ruling the land.

In the twelfth, fourteenth, and seventeenth centuries, a succession of powerful warrior clans, the Minamoto and Hojo, the Ashikaga, and the Tokugawa, respectively, controlled Japan for varying lengths of time. The Tokugawa shogunate, founded by the daimyo Tokugawa Ieyasu, would last over two-and-a-half centuries, much longer than either the Minamoto-Hojo or Ashikaga shogunates that preceded it.

An understanding of certain portions of Japanese history and culture is crucial to understanding the arguments that follow. The Jomon Period, which, according to legend, saw the founding of the Japanese state by Emperor Jimmu, traditionally marks the
foundation of the Japanese imperial line, possibly the oldest in the world. The Heian period, which lasted from about 794 until 1185 C.E., marked the beginning of Japan’s pre-modern history. The Kamakura period, which lasted from 1185 until 1333 C.E., saw the establishment of the first permanent shogunate and the subordination of the court nobility by the warrior class; this pattern would persist for all but three of the next 680 years of Japanese history. The Ashikaga or Muromachi period, which lasted from about 1336 until 1573 C.E., witnessed some of the most turbulent years in Japanese history as feudal warlords known as daimyo battled one another in hopes of ruling Japan as its next shogun. The Azuchi-Momoyama period, which lasted from about 1568 until about 1603, at which time the rags-to-riches daimyo Toyotomi Hideyoshi served as regent to the now-powerless Ashikaga shoguns, marked a time of over-the-top aesthetics and a brief interlude of stability. The Tokugawa or Edo period, which spanned the years between 1603 and 1868, marked Japan’s longest premodern period of peace and national unity.

Within Japanese culture, the most relevant factors for our purposes are the influence of neo-Confucianism on Japanese thought and the ideal of absolute loyalty which developed among the samurai or warrior class from the seventeenth century onwards. In the seventeenth century, neo-Confucianism informed much of Japanese thought. Shinto, it should be noted, had no moral dimension of its own, so neo-Confucianism provided one. Among the Confucian virtues most deeply ingrained in the Japanese psyche was loyalty. The emperor’s divine right to rule informed Japanese neo-Confucian ideas; unlike the Chinese philosophical idea of a mutable “Mandate of Heaven,” the Japanese notion of imperial legitimacy left no room for mutability. In
short, the emperor’s political legitimacy depended on his lineage rather than on the quality of his rule (Turnbull “Ways” 13-27).

Comprehending both Shinto and Shinto nationalism involves understanding several key ideas and terms, many of which prove challenging to define, even for some leading scholars of religion or of Japan. A typical definition of Shinto, which translates as “‘the way of the gods,’” tends to run something like the following: Shinto is Japan’s native religion, based on animistic principles and concerned with the worship of spirits called kami. In other words, Shinto is a belief system endemic to Japan and concerned with the idea that spirits pervade the natural world. Knowledgeable critics will point out that this definition fails to evoke the sheer complexity of Shinto. Even the idea of Shinto as a religion in the Western sense of the term poses serious problems. Dr. Stephen Turnbull, military and religious historian and professor of Japanese Religion at the University of Leeds, explains how, to the typical foreign observer, Shinto appears to be “a long-established, crucial element of Japanese culture, providing [the nation] with a distinctive religious system found nowhere else on earth” (“Way of the Gods” 13). What Dr. Turnbull means by this statement is that, for outsiders, Shinto seems integral to the Japanese ethos. However, as Dr. Turnbull goes on to explain in his 2006 book The Samurai and the Sacred, Shinto’s ostensible simplicity belies its complex relationship to Japanese history and culture. For instance, even the idea of a “way of the gods” as distinct from other “ways” is relatively new compared with the ancient practices themselves, although scholars still debate about when this distinction might have taken hold (Turnbull “Way of the Gods” 14, 15). Shrine Shinto and State Shinto are two major forms of Shinto relevant to the topic of religious nationalism. Both Shrine Shinto and
State Shinto exhibit nuances that further complicate their roles in Shinto nationalism. To some scholars, State Shinto and Shrine Shinto are separate entities; to other academics, the two terms are synonymous (Shimazono, “State Shinto and the Religious Structure” 1081). One of Shinto’s most basic foundational concepts is that of kami. Renowned Japanese studies expert and WWII prisoner-of-war Fosco Maraini, in his 1959 book, Meeting with Japan, quotes what may be the most iconic definition of this crucial term. This term, often equated with “God” or “god(s)” in English, can also mean “someone or something worthy of veneration” (Maraini 145). In the context of religious nationalism, the Shinto nationalist idea of the Japanese emperor as kami is linked with the idea of a symbol as a focus for nationalistic thought. Prof. Keiko Yamagishi, professor of administrative law at Chukyo University, in her 2008 article “Freedom of Religion, Religious Political Participation, and Separation of Religion and State,” argues that State Shinto was religious in nature (940). The true nature of State Shinto notwithstanding, State Shinto itself formed one of the cornerstones of Shinto nationalist ideology.

One must understand certain historical and political terms and ideas to understand the role of Shinto nationalism in the formation of the modern Japanese nation-state. For two-and-a-half centuries, a series of dynastic military dictators, known as shoguns, ruled Japan. Ostensibly, the emperors ruled Japan; in practice, the shoguns and the shogunal government, or shogunate, governed the nation. As the nineteenth century wore on, several Western powers, including Great Britain, France, and the United States, began to call upon Japan to reopen herself to trade with them. Owing to the shogunate’s sakoku, or “closed country” policy, since 1638, the only Westerners permitted to trade with Japan had been merchants from the Dutch East India Company. In 1868, dissatisfied members
of Japan’s warrior class overthrew the Tokugawa shogunate in favor of returning the nation to direct imperial rule in a series of events known as the Meiji Restoration. The epoch that followed, which historians call the Meiji period, marked the reign of Japan’s first truly independent monarch since the end of the twelfth century C.E. The Japanese term kokugaku, or “national studies,” which refers to the scholarly discipline and philosophy concerned with an effort to purge Japanese culture of all foreign influences, is another important historical term essential to understanding the ideological foundations of Shinto nationalism. Kokugaku scholarship and ideas contributed to the foundations of what would later become Shinto nationalism. Still another key idea in understanding Shinto nationalism is the idea of kokutai, often translated as “national polity,” (Okuyama 123).

Kokutai, like the term kami, eludes simple definition. In his 1974 article “The Japanese ‘Kokutai’ (National Community) History and Myth,” Dr. Joseph M. Kitagawa, religious historian and late dean of the University of Chicago’s Divinity School, provides the following synonyms for kokutai: “national character, national essence, national substance, state structure, [and] national polity” (209). In other words, kokutai can refer to a variety of ideas in Japanese political thought. In the context of religious nationalism, kokutai tends to indicate one of the following: 1) the essential oneness of the emperor and the Japanese people or 2) the “Japanese [national] community,” as discussed above by Dr. Kitagawa (“Japanese ‘Kokutai’” 209). In short, kokutai embodies the idea of Japanese national unity.
A few more important concepts are invaluable in understanding Shinto nationalism. The idea of shinbutsu bunri, or the “separation of Shinto and Buddhism,” played a key role in the breakdown of religious syncretism in early modern Japan.

India: Key Terms and Ideas

A number of important ideas and terms pervade the discourse regarding India and Hindu nationalism. Chief among these ideas is the premise of “Hindutva,” literally “Hindu-ness.” Another key idea in Hindu nationalist thought is the idea of India as a Hindu Rashtra or Hindu nation.

Understanding Hindu nationalism also entails an understanding of key terms and ideas related to Indian history and society. One of the most important ideas is that of caste. Resistance to the British Raj, or rule, of India from the mid-eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, was to be a key factor in the formation of Hindu nationalism. Abstract concepts aside, certain physical places play key roles in the discussion of Hindu nationalism. The northern Indian city of Ayodhya, which Hindus regard as the birthplace of the god Rama, witnessed the destruction of the Babri Masjid, as mentioned earlier. This mosque, purportedly built over the ruins of a temple to Rama, was a politically charged target for the Hindu right. Communal violence in the western Indian state of Gujarat was intertwined with the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Certain organizations play key roles in the Hindu nationalist movement. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), or “National Volunteers’ Corp,” is a Hindu nationalist organization which “advocates a [political and cultural] agenda under the banner of [Hindutva]” (“Rashtriya”).
CHAPTER II

CASE STUDIES OF INDIA AND JAPAN

Case Study: India

The forerunners of Hindu nationalism played a small but crucial role in the struggle for India’s independence. Cow protection societies, which sought to preserve the welfare of Hinduism’s most revered creature, began emerging throughout colonial India during the late nineteenth century (Van der Veer 91).

The religio-political ideology of Hindu nationalism also played a crucial role in the events surrounding the partition of India in 1947. According to Barbara D. Metcalf and Thomas R. Metcalf, Hindu nationalists, along with Sikhs and Muslims, engaged in killing men and raping women of other faiths. For instance, a Hindu man might kill a Muslim man, rape his wife, and carry her off with him to India. After the partition began, Mahatma Gandhi embarked on his final “fast-onto-death” to urge the Indian government to relinquish certain funds to its new neighbor, Pakistan. In January 1948, a few months following Partition, a RSS member named Nathuram Ghodse assassinated Gandhi while the latter “[led] a prayer meeting in New Delhi” (Metcalf 227). This infamous incident
convincing the fledgling Indian government to ban all Hindu nationalist groups in a decision that would last until the mid-to-late 1970s (Metcalf).

In recent decades, Hindu nationalists have occupied an increasingly important role in Indian politics and history. Among the most salient Hindu nationalist organizations is the Bharatiya Janata Party, or the “Indian People’s Party,” indicated hereafter in the text by its initials, BJP. According to Barbara D. and Thomas R. Metcalf, the BJP first emerged around the mid-to-late 1980s following the decline of the once-powerful Indian National Congress Party. The BJP’s political clout increased throughout the 1990s and early 2000s as communal conflicts flared among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and adherents of other minority faiths (Metcalf 291). In 1992, members of the BJP and its fellow Hindu nationalist organizations converged on the Hindu holy city of Ayodhya and tore down the Babri Masjid piece-by-piece. In 2002, in a train station in the city of Godhra in the western state of Gujarat, Hindu pilgrims returning from Ayodhya perished in a fire that engulfed several passenger cars (Sambrani). Hindu nationalists blamed the unfortunate incident on the primarily Muslim residents of the slums just outside the city limits, fanning anti-Muslim sentiments that erupted into communal violence (Yagnik and Sheth). At the time of the Godhra riots, the BJP held a plurality in the Indian Parliament and governed the state of Gujarat; the state and national governments did little, if anything, to remain impartial. In some cases, according to Ipsita Chatterjee, Assistant Professor of Geography and the Environment at the University of Texas, Austin, BJP politicians, bureaucrats, and even members of the state police force ignored the attacks on Muslim slum-dwellers (627–8). As Chetan Bhatt, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology at the University of London’s
Goldsmiths College, points out, “The Gujarat government, far from seeking to contain Hindu ‘reprisals,’ tacitly connived at the ensuing violence” (Hindu Nationalism 299). In other words, many Gujarati officials were complicit in the communalist violence.

Case Study: Japan

Certain key ideas which underlay Shinto nationalism emerged during the Tokugawa period (named after the clan of the ruling shoguns), which lasted approximately from 1600 to 1868. The shogunate’s claim to sovereignty rested on the idea that the shogun ruled on the emperor’s behalf. In reality, the shogun governed Japan without the emperor’s involvement; indeed, the shogun kept the emperor and the imperial court under strict control (Dunn). This state of affairs, known only to Japan’s warrior class at the time, along with the ever-increasing restlessness of the warrior class during an unusually lengthy period of peace, spurred the growth of the pro-imperial movement, typified by a popular slogan of the later years of that period, “‘Revere the emperor, expel the [foreigners]’” (Charlton 156). Shinto nationalism has its roots in the ideas that propelled the Meiji Restoration. As early as the late eighteenth century, scholars of kokugaku, or “national studies,” such as Motoori Norinaga and Hirata Atsutane, argued that Shinto, as Japan’s only native religion, was the only appropriate faith for the nation. According to Japanese military historians Oscar Ratti and Adele Westbrook, in their collaborative treatise on Japan’s martial arts and military history, Secrets of the Samurai, Motoori claimed not only was the emperor of divine ancestry but he was also a divinity whose august presence blessed the land itself (449). Hirata’s argument went even further, claiming that all Japanese were divine and that, as such, the Japanese people had the right to conquer all other peoples of the world (Gordon). Nationalist scholars of later
times would use this idea to justify Japan’s expansion of its empire. Before the Tokugawa period, elements of Shinto mingled with Buddhism in a syncretic system which depended on the idea of honji sujaku, or the Buddha manifesting himself as the kami to save the Japanese people.

Other ideas in Shinto nationalist thought emerged during the Meiji Period. The idea of kokutai came to the forefront of Shinto nationalism around this time and played a key role in both the political and social changes of the era. Before the Meiji Restoration, a rigid class structure with inherited professions characterized Japanese society. In the introduction to his 1969 book Everyday Life in Traditional Japan, Charles J. Dunn explains how, within this hierarchy, the samurai ruled over the farmers, artisans, and merchants below them; each class lived by its own code of values and behavior corresponding to its societal role. For example, while bravery and loyalty unto death were considered the purview of the samurai, the pursuit of wealth was the purview of the merchant class. In short, members of each class had to act, think, and speak in accord with the values of that class (Dunn 11, 12). With the Meiji Restoration came significant changes in societal structure; in 1872, the Meiji government disbanded the feudal classes and instituted military conscription. According to a scholar of Japanese history, Dr. Stephen Turnbull:

The introduction of conscription challenged many values in Japanese society. Former samurai families greatly resented having to mix with lower classes. Farmers resented having the disruption that conscription caused to rural life when simple country boys…suddenly became soldiers. (“From Samurai” 164)
In need of a way to unify and galvanize the new Japanese military, the Meiji government used the idea of unswerving loyalty to the emperor as “something on which [the conscripted soldiers] could focus their loyalty to the point of death.” In other words, the Japanese government merged the Shinto idea of kokutai with the neo-Confucian virtue of absolute loyalty to create the same sort of fearlessness once demanded of the samurai (“From Samurai” 164). The development of State Shinto was another development central to the political ideology of Shinto nationalism. In 1868, the fledgling Meiji government restored the long-defunct Bureau of Kami Affairs, later replaced by the Shinto Ministry and finally the Department of Religion and Education (Kitagawa “Some Remarks” 240). According to Kitagawa, this series of government agencies oversaw Shinto shrines and their upkeep. Because some proponents of the Meiji Restoration considered Buddhism a foreign (read “inferior”) religion, a policy called shinbutsu bunri, or “separation of the Shinto gods and Buddhas,” came to the forefront of early Meiji religious policy. Under this principle, all traces of Shinto iconography and facilities were removed from Buddhist temples and all traces of Buddhist iconography and facilities were removed from Shinto shrines. No longer would Shinto deities be considered manifestations of various Buddhas or bodhisattvas and vice versa. Some early Shinto nationalists took the concept of shinbutsu bunri to its logical extreme, creating the unsanctioned haibutsu kishaku, or “exterminate Buddha,” movement (Kitagawa “Some Remarks” 240). Members of the haibutsu kishaku movement committed acts of religious violence, such as burning down Buddhist temples and forcibly defrocking Buddhist priests and monks (Sharf 3).
During the Taisho and early Showa periods, Shinto nationalism was to enjoy its heyday (Shoji). According to Dr. Michio Nakajima, professor of foreign languages at Kanagawa University, beginning in the Meiji period and continuing into the early Showa period, the Japanese government (and Japanese citizens living abroad) erected so-called ‘overseas shrines’ in conquered territories (Nakajima). In time, Japan’s political leadership preached the idea of a “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” wherein Asia would be united under Japanese imperial rule and ostensibly free from the bonds of colonialism (Wright 256).

After Japan surrendered to the United States in 1945, the Allied occupation soon drew up a new Japanese Constitution, and with it, the Shinto Directive. According to Dr. Keiko Yamagishi, professor of administrative law at Chukyo University, the postwar Japanese Constitution made three guarantees regarding the separation of church and state. First, the postwar constitution ensured that the government could not privilege religious organizations. Second, religious organizations could no longer wield political power. Third, the government agreed not to set aside public funds or property for the use of private religious organizations. Finally, the government could not involve itself in “‘religious education or any other religious activity.’” In short, the Japanese government had to distance itself from religious matters (919). Dr. Yamagishi also notes the “Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, issued the Shinto Directive…shortly after Japan’s surrender.” In other words, the Allies wasted no time in implementing preventive measures against any future misuse of Shinto for political ends. In particular, the Shinto Directive forbade the spreading of “‘militaristic and ultra-nationalistic ideology’ in anything connected with Shinto [and] abolished all
public educational institutions engaged in the study of Shinto or in training the priesthood…’’ In short, the Shinto Directive dismantled some of State Shinto’s most powerful and direct mechanisms of political influence (919, 928). Surprisingly, certain trappings of Shinto nationalism have survived the Shinto Directive and continue to occupy prominent roles in Japanese political life.

The connection between modern Shinto and Japanese nationalism lingers on at the controversial Yasukuni shrine in Tokyo. As Dr. Stephen Turnbull, Professor of Japanese Religion at Leeds University, explains:

Yasukuni shrine does not enshrine ancient kami, nor members of the imperial family, nor even exalted figures from Japanese history, but, in the main, individual commoners who died in the wars [from the Meiji Restoration until the close of World War II]. (‘‘From Samurai to Spirit,’’ 188)

What Dr. Turnbull is saying here is that the shrine immortalizes the dead of Japan’s modern wars. What makes this site so controversial is “the inclusion among its millions of enshrined spirits of certain Class A war criminals who were executed after the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, such as the wartime Prime Minister Hideki Tōjō” (‘‘From Samurai’’ 188, 190). In short, the Yasukuni shrine owes its controversial status to the war criminals listed among the venerated dead. Since 1978, several Japanese prime ministers have made highly publicized visits to Yasukuni, sparking reactions of outrage from states that formed parts of Japan’s erstwhile empire, such as China and the Koreas (‘‘From Samurai’’ 188, 190). On occasion, even the American news media publishes articles denouncing the practice, most recently when the Liberal Democratic Party leader Shinzō
Abe visited the embattled shrine in October of 2012 (Fackler). Some Japanese politicians not only visit Yasukuni shrine but also make ritual offerings or donations to the shrine, acts which fit neatly into the Shinto idea of worship (Yamagishi). In short, the Yasukuni shrine continues to play a significant, albeit disruptive role both in Japanese domestic politics and Japan’s international relations. Japan’s traditional right wing political parties are also integral to the continued existence of Shinto nationalist ideas in contemporary Japan.

To this day, the ideas of Shinto nationalism continue to resonate with Japan’s traditional right-wing political parties. The Liberal Democratic Party of Japan is an example of the influence of Shinto nationalism in Japanese politics. In his 2001 article, “Holy Lands and Their Political Consequences,” the late Prof. Adrian Hastings, former Catholic priest and later Professor of Theology at Leeds University, in discussing the near-universality of politically charged holy lands, describes how, “in 2000, a Japanese prime minister, Yoshiro Mori, could declare…‘Japan is a country of the gods with the emperor at its center.’” What Prof. Hastings is saying here is that even in recent times, certain Shinto nationalist ideas have continued to turn up in the rhetoric of Japan’s traditional right wing (Hastings 45).
CHAPTER III

SIMILARITIES AND DISTINCTIONS

Hindu nationalism and Shinto nationalism share certain notable traits. First, both political ideologies emerged during the formative years of their respective modern nation-states. Second, each of these political ideologies emerged after each state’s people came across and became acquainted with modern Western notions of religion and of the state. A third similarity between the two emerges when one considers the role of religious syncretism in each of the two states before their modern interactions with the West.

Hindu nationalism and Shinto nationalism differ from one another in a number of respects. The two political ideologies differ in the degree to which each has accommodated members of other religious communities. On the one hand, after making unsuccessful attempts to expel or exterminate Japan’s nonnative religions, Shinto nationalists eventually settled on a strategy of inclusiveness intended to allow all Japanese to participate in State Shinto ceremonies and festivals. Hindu nationalists
exclude the members of Abrahamic religions (i.e., Muslims, Christians, and Jews) from their conception of Indian citizenship owing to their “foreignness,” despite the presence of those religions in the subcontinent for between one and two millennia. Another distinction between the two ideologies appears in the way the native states of each ideology interacted with Western nation-states. In India’s case, interaction with the West came as the latter’s colonial domination of the former. In Japan’s case, the first modern interaction with the West came with the latter’s forcible “reopening” of the former to free trade with the West in 1852 by the U.S. Navy.

Another significant similarity between religious nationalism in India and Japan lies in the Western conception of religion and the Western idea of nationalism. Prior to contact with the West, Indian and Japanese ideas about religion differed significantly from the Western idea of religion. According to Dr. Brian Pennington’s book *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*, the Western conception of religion emerged from a Christian perspective, particularly a Protestant perspective (176). What Pennington is saying here is that Protestant Christian ideas about religion formed the basis for the Western understanding of religion. In a similar vein, the modern idea of nationalism came to India and Japan via Western thinkers.

Still another similarity between Hindu nationalists and Shinto nationalists has to do with the recent relations between political parties affiliated with these religious nationalisms and traditionally disenfranchised minorities, namely the “untouchables” or Dalits (from the Sanskrit word for “oppressed”) of India and the Burakumin (literally “hamlet people”) of Japan. In recent decades, the Bharatiya Janata Party has been
courting Dalit voters aggressively to win elections (Maclean 488). According to Badri Narayan, the BJP has pursued a strategy of turning Dalits against their Muslim neighbors by invoking the god Rama as a protector and benefactor of the disadvantaged classes (30). However, the BJP’s recent outreach to Dalits has earned it the scorn of some of the party’s core supporters, mostly members of the upper castes (Maclean ). According to La Trobe University professor Kama Kellie Maclean’s 1999 article, “Embracing the Untouchables: The BJP and Scheduled Caste Votes,” Hindu nationalist groups such as the BJP have been courting Dalit support in recent years, especially as Dalits seek to convert to Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and other religions. Less information is available about Shinto nationalists and their attitudes towards the Burakumin, although an article by the New York Times on the current state of the Burakumin in Japan mentions at least one LDP politician of Burakumin descent (Onishi).

Religious nationalist groups appear to ignore or deny the presence of certain minorities in their respective states. Shinto nationalists, for instance, appear to ignore the Ainu (although the Japanese government did so until about 2008), and, like the Japanese government, ignore the presence of ethnic Koreans, Chinese, and Okinawans, among others.

One of the major differences between the Hindu and Shinto varieties of religious nationalism concerns what minority groups each movement tends to sidestep. Shinto nationalists at least appear to ignore the presence of the Ainu, Korean, Chinese, Okinawans, and other ethnic minorities, claiming that Japan is ethnically and culturally homogenous. On the other hand, Hindu nationalists appear to ignore certain religious
minorities, namely Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists, owing to the long-held belief that adherents of these faiths are Hindu by virtue of belonging to religions native to India.

One of the primary differences between the Hindu and Shinto varieties of religious nationalism lies in the historical contexts of their respective homelands. One particularly telling difference has to do with which side of the colonial relationship each state was on. Whereas India was a British colony, Japan was an independent colonizer. In a way, these states of affairs may have influenced the development of nationalism in each state.

Another difference between India and Japan lies in the India experienced several invasions over its lengthy history and both originated and absorbed a number of religious traditions. In contrast, Japan was only invaded two or three times in its history, and had limited contact with only a handful of religious traditions until relatively recently. These circumstances influenced perceptions of who fell into one side or the other of the boundary between insiders and outsiders. For example, Hindu nationalists draw a line between adherents of non-Indian religions and adherents of Indian religions. In a somewhat similar vein, Shinto nationalists draw a line between people born in Japan and those people born outside of Japan, even if the latter are of Japanese descent. Another difference between Hindu and Shinto nationalism emanates from the attitudes Hindu nationalists and Shinto nationalists hold towards Dalits and Burakumin, respectively. Upon close examination, the ties linking India’s Bharatiya Janata Party and Japan’s Liberal Democratic Party to religious nationalism are not as difficult to prove as some might expect. The BJP in recent years has continued to promote Hindutva (and still maintains a “Hindutva” section on its English-language website) as the best political path
for India. Furthermore, the party does not appear to have toned down much of its virulent “India-for-Hindus-alone” rhetoric, particularly the unabashed anti-Muslim rhetoric. The BJP has even gone so far as to claim that Hindus, not Muslims, are and have always been the champions of India’s minorities (“Hindutva”). The LDP’s current ties with Shinto nationalism are slightly more challenging to pinpoint, but not impossible to find.

According to an article by New York Times Tokyo Bureau Chief Martin Fackler, the LDP’s new leader, Shinzō Abe, visited Yasukuni Shrine around mid-October shortly after taking power. The fact that most leaders of the Liberal Democratic Party, not to mention a few prominent members of the rival Democratic Party of Japan, have visited the embattled shrine despite repeated protests from nations formerly under Japanese control seems to convey the idea that Yasukuni is both a memorial to the war dead and the place where their spirits are now enshrined. This politically potent move comes across as especially risky at a time when Japan is involved in simultaneous territorial disputes with China, South Korea, and Russia over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands, and the Northern Provinces/Kurile Islands, respectively.

Another possible, though far from certain link between the LDP and Shinto nationalism concerns some of the amendments the party has proposed for Japan’s current constitution. Listed under Chapter I of the LDP’s draft constitution are two proposals of great interest to Shinto nationalists, and to Japanese nationalists at large, namely, making the Emperor both a national symbol and head of state and confirming “Kimigayo” or, “His Majesty’s Reign,” as the national anthem and the Hinomaru or “Circle of the Sun,” as the national flag (“LDP”). “Kimigayo,” in particular, has lingering associations with Shinto nationalism. The lyrics, loosely translated, run something like this:
Thousands of years of happy reign be thine,
Rule on, my lord, until what are pebbles now
By ages united to mighty rocks shall grow
Whose venerable sides the moss doth line (Karan 298).

“Kimigayo” and the Hinomaru flag, both used during the Japanese Empire, still have associations with Japanese nationalism. “Kimigayo,” in particular, has lingering associations with Shinto nationalism. As Pradyumna P. Karan and Dick Gilbreath point out in their book Japan In the 21st Century: Environment, Economy, and Society, these associations remain so strong that a number of Japanese oppose the use of “Kimigayo,” particularly educators. Karan and Gilbreath go on to explain, “Teachers...have strongly opposed the anthem, contending that it evokes the 1930s and early 1940s, when Japanese troops conquered much of China and Southeast Asia.” Karan and Gilbreath are saying that the controversy surrounding “Kimigayo” has much to do with its associations with the final years of the erstwhile Japanese Empire (298-9). Moreover, Karan and Gilbreath note that the anthem “appears to grant almost holy status to the emperor for the first time since the defeat of Imperial Japan in 1945.” Here, Karan and Gilbreath are saying the song is replete with overtones of Shinto nationalism (298-9). Although many Japanese have no issue with the anthem or with the flag, internal and external opposition to these controversial emblems centers on their usage in Imperial Japanese attempts at wholesale cultural assimilation.

The other relevant portion of the LDP’s proposed draft constitution concerns making the Emperor head of state again, along with His Majesty’s current position as a national symbol. This proposal, another throwback to Imperial Japan, has some major
Japanese political parties in an uproar, such as the New Komeitō Party, one of the LDP’s most unlikely allies. Restoring the emperor to such a position lies mere steps away from the Shinto nationalist goal of restoring the emperor’s status as a god, which would provide Japanese nationalists with a rationale for attempting to reconquer its former colonies and, perhaps, lands which it never colonized.

Synthesis

What can all of this information tell the reader about the political nature of religious nationalism? For one thing, religious nationalism continues to affect national politics significantly in both India and Japan many years (and in Japan’s case, a couple of centuries) after the movements first began to take shape. Additionally, the history of each nation significantly influenced the development of its particular variety of religious nationalism. Next, each of these movements envisions the future of its nation vis-à-vis the dominant culture and that culture’s preferred religion. Each movement regards its practices as synonymous with the “national culture.” Finally, each religious nationalist movement maintains uneasy relations with groups marginalized by the dominant religious traditions in society. In sum, these forms of religious nationalism seek to define nationality along strictly religious lines and tend to disparage cultural exchange with other countries as a sullying of national honor.
GLOSSARY

INDIA

Adivasi: India’s indigenous peoples, also called “tribals”

Bharatiya Janata Party: the major Hindu nationalist political party

Dalits: India’s “Untouchables”--Sanskrit for ‘the oppressed’

Hindu Rashtra: Hindu nation

Hindutva: Hindu nationalist doctrine defining the Indian nation as culturally, racially, and religiously Hindu in nature.

Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh: Volunteer organization

Sangh parivar: the family of Hindu nationalist organizations

Vishwa Hindu Parishad: International organization connecting members of the Hindu diaspora with Hindu nationalists in India

JAPAN

Burakumin: Japan’s “untouchables”

Haibutsu kishaku: ‘Abandon Buddha and destroy Shakyamuni [a term for the historical Buddha]’--an often violent movement to banish Buddhism from Japan

Kami: God(s) or spirits in Shinto

Kokugaku: ‘National studies,’ a philosophical movement seeking to purge Japanese culture of foreign influences

Kokutai: the essential oneness of the Emperor and the Japanese people; the Japanese national community
Shinbutsu bunri: ‘Separation of the [Shinto] gods and Buddhas’ -- a movement to define boundaries between Shinto and Buddhism
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