The defeat of Indian forces by the Chinese in 1962 ushered in a phase after which India tended to be cowed by the growing economic and political might of China.

has been upheld by the Supreme Court of India as one of the fundamental features of the Indian Constitution, which cannot be amended. However, secularism is coming under pressure in India both on account of its inner contradictions and certain historical developments. Although the government in India claims to be secular in nature, it is also a fact that many state governments in India administer Hindu temples. For instance, the five southern states of India—Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana—administer more than 90,000 temples, and their funds are syphoned off into the state treasury. This apparent anomaly of a secular state administering Hindu temples has surprisingly been overlooked for a long time. It has been explained away by making a distinction between religious and secular activity of a temple, where the government is supposed to be constitutionally capable of taking over the secular functions of these temples. This arrangement is unique to India and has become the cause of considerable heartache within the Hindu community.

Summary of the Discrimination Faced by Hindu Places of Worship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Hindu</th>
<th>Muslim</th>
<th>Christian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Places of worship are under state control</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government administers finances</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government can control takeover and dispose temple assets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government can divert funds for other purposes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priests, devotees, practitioners have a say in temple management</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational institutions run by place of worship are autonomous</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational institution can decide and discriminate in hiring of staff and student admissions</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Based on a chart in the article Part 1: The Way Hindu Temples were Systematically Looted by Congress Government is Reprehensible on the TFIPOST website at https://tinyurl.com/yyx338bh.
The Hindu community retains a memory of perceived Muslim oppression during the period of Muslim rule over India and of perceived Christian oppression at the hands of the European powers.

especially because the government has not shown the same enthusiasm in taking over mosques and churches. The Muslims and Christians enjoy the protection of minority rights, which is deemed to come in the way of the acquisition of their assets. What is surprising is that even those states that are run by the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), such as Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka, also have shown little interest in changing this state of affairs, presumably because they benefit financially from such an arrangement, although the BJP garners votes in the election by projecting itself as the guardian of Hindu rights. This feature of the Indian Constitution was probably introduced to prevent the temples from indulging in discrimination against the former untouchables and other corrupt practices, and so was well-intentioned, but was identified as early as 1963 by Donald Eugene Smith in his well-known work *India as a Secular State* as a potential threat to Indian secularism. This issue has now become relevant because several moves are afoot within the Hindu community to legally challenge this arrangement. The existing arrangement has created the impression that a secular looting of the Hindu temples is going on unchecked, and more than one party has claimed that if any government is going to do this, then it should proclaim India as a Hindu state!

The Hindu community retains a memory of perceived Muslim oppression during the period of Muslim rule over India and of perceived Christian oppression at the hands of the European powers. It had hoped that, after Independence, it would be free from such oppression, but unfortunately such governmental control over Hindu temples, some of which generate annual revenue in US millions of dollars, is now being increasingly perceived as secular oppression of the Hindus in line with earlier oppressions associated with Muslim and Christian rule.

This perception is aggravated by the fact that the minorities in India, such as the Muslims and the Christians, have a privileged position compared to the Hindus, who constitute the majority, although majorities and minorities were never defined as such in the Constitution. This too may have been well-intentioned, under the influence of the noble idea that the minority may be granted more rights than the majority in order to make it feel secure. But this has had the unfortunate consequence that some groups within the Hindu community have begun to claim they are not Hindus, but followers of a “minority” religion in order to avail of such privileges or to protect themselves from governmental interference. This happened in the case of the Ramakrishna Mission in Bengal, where the Communist government there made it so difficult for the mission to function that it was driven to claim in 1980 that it is a minority religion, although it is a quintessentially modern Hindu organization.

The point, then, is that these forms of asymmetrical secularism are generating responses that might pose a serious threat to Indian secularism in the twenty-first century.

3. The Transformation of Hinduism

The third thing to know about India is that Hinduism has been undergoing a transformation over the past few decades, whose consequences will have possible ramifications throughout the twenty-first century. These changes are partly the result of the perception of “secular” oppression and partly the result of changes within Hinduism that have led to the rise of political Hinduism, otherwise also described as Hindu nationalism, whose main ideologue was V. D. Savarkar (1883–1966), identified with the concept of Hindutva or militant Hinduism. The most provocative version of his message finds expression in the slogan “Hinduise politics and militarise Hinduism.” The first half of the slogan has proved more effective than the second, and the electoral ascendency of the BJP on the Indian political scene reflects this. Apart from perceptions of secular oppression, two other factors have put increasing pressure on Hinduism to move away from its traditionally apolitical nature: experiences of Jehadi terror and Christian proselytization.

4. The Changing Concept of Indian Nationhood

4. The Changing Concept of Indian Nationhood

The fourth thing to know about India is that the traditional concept of Indian nationhood is under challenge as a result of the developments just described. It seems obvious that a concept of a Hindu nation, as espoused by the Hindu Right, is at odds with the concept of a secular India (although some Hindu thinkers have argued that Hindu pluralism may serve as a possible substitute for secularism). Thus, one needs to watch the interplay of the concepts of Indian secularism and Hindu nationalism for the rest of the century. At stake is the very understanding of Indian nationhood. When India became independent and was partitioned in 1947, it faced a fundamental choice: will its polity be based on the religion of the majority, as in Pakistan, or will it be nonsectarian in nature? The leaders at the helm at the time in India resisted the temptation of the former option and chose to found Indian polity on the basis of territorial nationalism rather than on the basis of ideological or religious nationalism. The concept of a Hindu nation is central to Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, and therefore poses a challenge, if not a threat, to secular nationalism. The rise of the Hindutva movement within India is therefore something to watch for in view of the implications it has in this respect, as already noted in my spring 2020 (volume 25, number 1) EAA article, “On the Difference Between Hinduism and Hindutva.”

5. Ethical Issues

The fifth thing to know about India in the twenty-first century has to do with the ethical implications of what we have been discussing so far. All the points discussed have to do with the exercise of power—China, secularism, Hindutva, and the concept of Indian nationhood. A major ethical issue India will be facing in the twenty-first century has to do with the way that it negotiates the tension between piety and power. The importance of this distinction should be clear from the fact that orthodoxy is a reaction of a religious tradition to the perceived loss of piety in the public square, while fundamentalism is its reaction to the loss of power in the public square.
Religious life in India within Hinduism has largely been an exercise in piety rather than power. Islam and to a lesser extent Christianity are more politically determined religions compared to Hinduism. If the trends identified in the previous points hold, and India as a nation and Hinduism as a religion become more interested in seeking power rather than piety, then the entire religious landscape in India will tend to become more power-oriented than piety-oriented. This is again something to watch.

Another ethical issue to watch has to do with the righting of historical wrongs. Modern discourse has studiously avoided including the righting of historical wrongs as part of human rights discourse. Modern human rights discourse knows only biography, not history, but the previously colonized parts of the world are only now fully awakening to the extent of the deprivations and depredations suffered under foreign rule over these countries, and the demand for reparations are now being raised, though often only in muted tones, in parts of the Third World. This issue is gaining some visibility in India. An economist, Utsa Patnaik, has calculated that the amount of wealth removed from India under British rule perhaps exceeds US $45 trillion dollars, which is several times the current GDP of Britain. Similarly, demands for restoration of temples destroyed during Muslim rule over India resulted in the demolition of the Babri Masjid (mosque) in 1992. That mosque in Ayodhya was supposed to have been built on the site of the birth of Ram, a Hindu divinity. The issue of building a temple again at the site of the mosque went to the Supreme Court, which basically upheld the right of the Hindus to do so, and the foundation stone for the new temple was laid earlier in the year by the Prime Minister of India himself.

Curiously, India’s affirmative action program for the former untouchables and lower castes is perhaps the most comprehensive affirmative action program in the world. These measures were obviously instituted to right historical wrongs which the members of these castes were subjected, but somehow the concept of historical justice has not been associated with them in Indian intellectual discourse. These measures are viewed as constituting social or economic justice. The preamble to the Indian Constitution also refers to justice of various kinds, such as economic and social, but does not use the word “historical” in this context. It could be argued historical justice in practice if not in theory is already a constitutional value, and in this respect praxis may be said to be ahead of theory. The very concept of justice could well take a historical turn in the twenty-first century in India.

**6. Indology**

The next thing to look for are new developments in academia, especially in what is now called Indology. The academic study of Indian history and culture has, over the past 300 years, been largely a Western enterprise. Even the chronology of ancient India as it currently stands was reconstructed by Western scholars. In this sense, a self-understanding by the modern Indian of his or her own history and culture has been uniquely mediated by the scholarship rooted in another, namely Western, culture, especially as Indian scholarship has basically accepted the lead provided by Western scholarship in these matters. The impression has been gaining ground among Indians for the past few decades that this could well have resulted in distortions, sometimes very serious, and that the time has now come to rectify them. To provide an example, most Western writings describe the conical object associated with the worship of Shiva, referred to in India as the Shiva Linga, as a phallic representation, and yet hardly any worshipper of Shiva considers it as such. For Shiva worshippers, it may have many meanings, as symbols often do, but in his mind it is hardly ever associated with a fertility cult. It is as if an Indian were to see the Christian Eucharist as a form of cannibalism.

Currently, some foundational assumptions of Western Indology are under serious contestation in India. Two examples must suffice. Western reconstruction of Indian history is based on the assumption that a people who called themselves Aryans either invaded or migrated into India in the middle of the second millennium BCE, but this assumption is fast losing credibility among large sections of Indians. The further assumption—that the Aryans belong to a different race that entered India from the outside, resulting in a racial conflict between them and the indigenous people, and that the caste system arose as a result of this conflict, somewhat like
The BJP was accused of being an upper-caste organization, but today, it is being led by Shri Narendra Modi, who hails from a caste just above the former untouchables in the traditional caste hierarchy.