The writings of Talal Asad, among others, have recently demonstrated how modernity restricted the meaning of religion to matters of private belief, its domain to the other worldly and the esoteric, and its legitimate place the world of rituals rather than realms of the public and the political. Broadly defined, modernity in this sense refers to new models of organizing social, political, and economic relations, which, we are told, draw their inspiration from the ideas of the Enlightenment and material circumstances following from the triumph of industrial capitalism. While there is no doubt that modernity does in many ways define the world we live in, one wonders if we must assume such a one-way traffic between religion and modernity? Must we, in our representations of the world, empower modernity with such a totalizing force? Can we not, and given the evidence to the contrary that we see around us, should we not perhaps, consider the possibility of a more dialogic process—where religiosity is undoubtedly transformed by modernity, but also in some way, helps to shape and define the contours of the modern world? It is to explore such a possibility that this paper examines the emergence of what I term ‘republicized’ Hindu religiosity in colonial north India. Focusing
on the city of Lucknow, I demonstrate how a modernity shaped by Indian middle-class activists sought to transform multiple strands of beliefs and practices into a more or less monolithic ‘Hinduism’, and purge it of its divisive and hierarchical aspects so as to suit their own public sphere projects.

A close examination of these efforts however, also reveals that this recasting of religion created powerful discursive templates which were then deployed in many different ways, for a variety of different political agenda. Not only did a transformed Hindu religiosity allow for the imagination of ‘Hindu pride’, often better known in its modern incarnation of Hindu nationalism, but such templates also served the project of a liberal ‘secular’ nationalism. Exploring in some detail the nature of the modern political world fashioned by middle-class activists in India, therefore, raises some interesting possibilities of reinterpreting the relationship of religion and modernity. Not only does the modernity fashioned by this middle class bring religion back into the realms of the political, but this re-publicized religiosity becomes a central and constitutive feature of a political modernity. Such a modernity, this scenario suggests, allows for and perhaps makes necessary, the simultaneous avowal of secular and the religious, thereby smudging the boundaries between two terms so often read as binary opposites.

Why did religion become so important for middle-class nationalists in colonial India? Partha Chatterjee has offered us one of the best-known recent explanations. Chatterjee argues that the middle class intelligentsia of colonial India from the late nineteenth century onwards constructed an ‘inner domain of cultural identity’, from which to ready the nation for contestation with colonialism. He locates the concern with religion in the failure of middle-class projects in the ‘outer’ domain of politics. Middle-class intellectuals sought to claim complete sovereignty over their ‘inner domain’ which they defined primarily in ‘spiritual’ terms. In other words, the concern with religion is born out of a failure, a lack. It is failures in the realm of ‘true’ public sphere politics, which in colonial India was governed by the ‘rule of colonial difference’, that animate middle-class concerns with religion. Although Chatterjee is very aware of how middle-class activists then deploy religion to attempt their own counter-hegemonic project, religion in this work, as in many others, necessarily functions as an alternative to the realm of modernity, rather than a part of it. In the larger picture, Chatterjee’s focus on middle-class religiosity helps...
explain why ‘our modernity’, the modernity of the colonized, had to be different from western modernity.4

Yet, there is a serious danger here of reifying ‘religion’ as possessing a timeless and unchanging essence. In accepting Chatterjee’s thesis in toto, we open up the possibility of simply reinforcing the notion that the domain of the religious, by definition it seems, excludes negotiations over political power conducted in the public sphere. This is also one of the dangers posed by some recent postcolonial readings of Indian history, where ‘religion’ figures as a resource for academic critiques of modernity. Scholars, such as Chatterjee himself, have found in the presence of religion in politics a ‘position’ from which to critique the universalist claims of western modernity.5 This is a valuable critique, both to show the limits of modern history, and to push all historians towards understandings of the past that do not simply universalize a particular ideal-typical modernity, so often attributed to the history of Europe.6 However, one wonders if the best way to demonstrate the limits, or indeed the partiality, of a Eurocentric modernity’s self-image is to reaffirm ‘religion’ as something outside of, and an alternative to, the modern? At a time when religious chauvinism is on the rise, there is for one, a danger of unwittingly valorizing this very different (and extremely modern) vision of religiosity.7 Moreover, deploying religion in this fashion also appears to reaffirm the notion of religion as the essence of the non-modern, bringing us surprisingly close to colonial readings of the non-West. Religion, after all, was the basis on which Orientalist scholarship ‘othered’ India, to establish both the incapacity of Indians to rule themselves, and to reaffirm the rationality and the capacity of the West to rule over others.8 This paper seeks to offer an alternative, by first examining the ways in which the concern with religion of the middle class brought religion firmly into the realms of public sphere politics, and then analysing the larger implications of this ‘republicized religiosity’.

RE-PUBLICIZING RELIGIOSITY
A study of Lucknow’s middle class does bear out Chatterjee’s thesis to some extent. The tropes of what Sudhir Chandra termed an ‘oppressive present’, appear as important components of the middle-class imagination of the late nineteenth century.9 Images of desolation and powerlessness abound in many of the writings of westernized middle-class men of nineteenth-century Lucknow. [...] [P C] Mookherji was concerned with the lack of achievement, the inability of the educated
Indians, to actually do anything to assert their presence in the city. As Mookherji said: ‘With all that vast bookish knowledge, the so-called educated native is helpless to the last degree. [...] They talk and speechify well—but cannot show any matter’. The realization of the limits of their own participation in liberal politics initiated by colonial rule was, as Chatterjee suggests, evidently one factor prompting the despairing vision of the colonial middle class.

Though full of despair, and evidently dissatisfied with the amount of influence they were able to exercise over society, the auto-critique of the late nineteenth-century middle-class activists hardly nihilistic. Contemporaries from differing ideological persuasions agreed that ‘religion’ in some way constituted an answer to their problems. The England-educated barrister, social reformer, and future President of the Indian National Congress, Bishan Narain Dar attributed the absence of ‘genius’ in modern India to the lack of moral fibre in young men of his time, which in turn he attributed to their lack of religion. ‘Morality,’ he said, ‘has been so closely connected with religion, since history began, that whenever religious sanction has grown weak, serious moral injuries have occurred to mankind.’ A present thought of as oppressive, corrupt, and alienating was blamed on the fact that society had gone astray from its religious ideals. Not only that, but the lack of religion was seen as one of the causes for their lack of freedom and strength. Partha Chatterjee’s thesis it seems, stands vindicated with this evidence. The religiosity of the nineteenth-century middle class in Lucknow, as in the Bengali case Chatterjee studies, appears to closely reflect a concern with overcoming their perceptions of inadequacy and disempowerment, which, in turn, were seen by them as a direct product of the colonial experience.

Yet there are significantly different possibilities of reading this history. The controversy surrounding cow protection in the 1890s provides one context in where the concern of middle-class activists with religion was very evident. [...] Gyanendra Pandey, in his study of this movement has pointed to the multiple meanings which participants brought to their actions. Especially, he points to the cohesion as well as the contradictions present in the invocation of a ‘Hindu’ identity in the mobilization efforts of the leaders and participants in the movement.

Bishan Narain Dar, in his capacity as a lawyer, was called upon to defend some Hindus convicted of rioting in Azamgarh. He visited the area and independently published a report which blamed the
‘meddlesomeness’ of colonial authorities for the trouble between Hindus and Muslims. His agenda was fairly explicit:
I have no particular liking for the [Gaurakshini] Sabha myself as I think that such institutions whether they be Hindu or Mohammedan, do more harm than good in the long run, yet I do not see the wisdom and even the justice in interfering with other people’s religious persuasion.

While turning a blind eye to the ‘interference’ which Hindu Sabhas had practised, Dar highlighted the actions of British officials in Azamgarh as evidence of interference of Government in the religious practices of Hindus. The prosecution of Hindu rioters was, by him, represented as ‘religious persecution, pure and simple’. Expressing grief at the partisan attitude of the colonial Government towards Hindus, Dar depicted the whole affair as one in a series of happenings where: ‘Hindu religion is insulted and Hindu practices are treated with unconcealed scorn.’

One could, with Chatterjee, argue that the roots of this imagination lay in the middle-class perception of their oppression at the hands of the colonial state, especially if we add to Chatterjee’s thesis the gendered dimension of a perceived emasculation though the workings of a ‘colonial masculinity’. It was to overcome this perception of oppression, to seek new sources of self-respect, that middle-class activists like Dar sought to selectively celebrate aspects of what they perceived as evidence of ‘Hindu manliness’ in Azamgarh. In his report, for instance, Dar complained that Hindus, ‘have for years and years been treated like the proverbial dog whom any stick is good enough to beat with’. What he celebrated through this report, was the possibility that Hindu peasants’ actions had opened up for the imagining of a strong and virile community in contrast to a disempowered and oppressed one. It was the desire to celebrate a strong, virile, ‘native’ self, which led Dar to adopt a position valorizing the collective violence against Muslims enacted in Azamgarh. Despite distancing himself from the actions of the rioters, Dar demonstrated pride in the actions of the Hindu sabha activists of Azamgarh, simply because their actions proved to him, ‘that the Hindus are not quite such a meek, unmanly, and contemptible race as they have been imagined’.

[…] This was hardly a ‘retreat’ into any domain, uncolonized or otherwise. On the contrary, Dar used the report to criticize colonial official actions and bring the question of religion very much into the domain of public contestation with the state and its administration. Of equal significance is how […] Dar explicitly made his criticism as a
self-appointed representative of the ‘Hindu community’. His report, however, completely appropriated the complex web of events and ideas which had contributed to the disturbances in Azamgarh to the agenda of middle-class politics. The multiple meanings of ‘Hindu-ness’ present in Azamgarh were submerged in Dar’s report. The report also made it evident that Dar’s concerns were not really with Azamgarh or even the cow-protection movement. Despite acting as their lawyer, Dar described the cow-protection movement as, ‘humane, though somewhat impractical’.21 Moreover, in his report he was quite willing to acknowledge what he termed the ‘good deal of latent barbarism’ of the participants. The interventions of men such as Dar produced a new, and specifically middle-class discourse of Hindu religiosity. No doubt serving to overcome perceptions of middle-class inadequacy, the striking point about this modern Hindu religiosity was that, on the one hand, it distanced itself from the ‘latent barbarism’ of the religious practices of illiterate peasants of Azamgarh, yet on the other hand, used the opportunity to celebrate ‘Hindu valour’ and defend ‘Hindu rights’ in the domain of public sphere politics.

There is little doubt that middle-class men did indeed find in religion a resource for overcoming their perceptions of disempowerment. [...] But seeing ‘religion’—at least the religiosity of the middle class in their political projects—as only constituting an ‘inner’ or ‘uncolonized’ domain seriously limits our understanding both of the nature of middle-class agenda and of the category of religion. For one, treating ‘religion’ as a synchronic entity ignores the ways in which religiosity itself was recast in very new terms through middle-class interventions in colonial India. Second, exclusively looking at religion as a way of contesting colonial hegemony glosses over the ways in which religion, like other middle-class interventions, was actively concerned with the empowerment of this social group over others. Together, these two lacunae obscure important historical connections between religion and power as they were being created anew through the politics of nationalism in India.

A number of studies of pre-colonial South Asia testify to the fact that religious institutions were very much a part of processes through which power and authority was constituted. The centrality of religion in political processes also made it a powerful locus for the creation of collective identities well before the advent of colonialism.22 This was certainly the case in Lucknow, where Shia Islam played a significant role in the way politics and power were configured in the Nawabi courts.23
Colonial rule entailed the severing of many of these connections, and contributed in important ways to transformation of religious identities in India. Whether through Orientalist reinterpretations of texts, or new administrative and legal categories and practices, colonialism created the circumstances for very different perceptions and possibilities of imagining ‘religious communities’. However, central to this process is also the often-overlooked role of middle-class activists who resisted the attempts of the state to push religion into the realms of the personal, by successfully ‘re-publicizing’ religion through harnessing it to their interventions in the colonial public sphere. Such interventions not only created new understandings of religion, but also decisively shaped the nature of modern politics in India.

THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF A PUBLICIZED RELIGIOSITY

References to Hindu religious practices or beliefs in Dar’s report were either condescending or derogatory, even though he was representing the Hindus of his province and offered a spirited defence of their rights. Dar lived at a time when debates between Hindu reformers and revivalists were particularly keen. In fact, Dar was himself at the centre of a controversy about religious practices, when his decision to go to England to study law led to... his own temporary ostracism from the community. Despite that, however, and the fact that he left behind copious amounts of writing, much of it stressing the importance of ‘religion’, we are left with no clue as to Dar’s own position on matters of devotional practice; whether for instance, he advocated a ‘return’ to varnashram dharma (in which the fourfold caste hierarchy would be central), or some reformed variant of Hinduism. In fact, Dar, like many of his middle-class contemporaries, was articulating a new sort of religiosity, forged out of concerns of middle-class activists as they sought to create a larger place for their own endeavors in the public sphere.

Traditional conceptions of religion, prevailing religious practices, and beliefs could not easily serve projects which were part of the agenda of the emerging middle class. Existing ‘Hindu’ religiosity—with multiple traditions, metaphysical speculations, and most obviously, social practices governed by hierarchical principles—was particularly unsuitable as the basis of an ideology to mobilize a public, and create a ‘community’ which could be represented by the middle class. Middle-class constructions of Hindu religiosity therefore stressed
its active, this-worldly orientation, as well as its non-divisive aspects. Through such reinterpretations, activists sought to create a religiosity which could most effectively be deployed in the public sphere. This republicized Hindu religiosity emphasized community rather than hierarchy, unity rather than divisions and difference, activism rather than ‘mere’ contemplation, and the exercise of reason over ‘blind faith’. Much like other aspects of their public sphere politics in colonial India however, this vision of a singular Hindu community too, was riven with contradictions. Attempts to mobilize this community often made these contradictions very visible, especially as the vision of an undivided Hindu community came into conflict with hierarchical beliefs and practices equally important for the middle class to maintain their social hegemony.

Involved in efforts at redefining religion, were not only lay public sphere activists, but also religious specialists, or those who had taken ascetic vows. Swami Vivekanand was probably the most famous of such ‘patriotic sanyasis’. In Lucknow it was Swami Rama Tirtha, and later his disciple Narain Swami, who caught the imagination of the middle class. After an MA in mathematics, Rama Tirtha was a professor of Mathematics at the Mission College in Lahore by 1896. Swami Rama Tirtha’s religiosity was quite the opposite of any sort of ‘otherworldly’ speculation. ‘Vedanta locked in cupboards will just not do, he wrote, thus breaking from the path of Upanishadic philosophical abstraction, and firmly establishing his Hindu religiosity in the public sphere. Rama Tirtha’s Vedanta had no place for rituals either. Rather than traditional animal sacrifices (yagna), he urged disciples to use the ingredients normally used in such sacrifices to feed the poor. In the contemporary world, Rama Tirtha argued, ‘sacrifice (yagna) requires, not innocent animals, but rather to consign to the flames of love, all our feelings of groupism, that is, caste and religious differences (jati-bhed) and envy, which alone can bring us heaven on earth.’ Real religion—politicians and poets, activists and ascetics alike seemed to agree—did not lie in philosophical abstractions, or blind devotion, or ritual practices. Rather, real religion was intimately tied up with the world, with the concerns and problems of people. Such an anthropocentric view of religion, tied to ideas of humanity and national uplift, was a defining quality of the middle-class religiosity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

These newly-created standards of a ‘real’ Hinduism were also deployed by middle-class activists to try and control or change existing
traditions and practices. The *sadhu* (wandering ascetics) of India were a favourite target, particularly for their ‘indolence’. Undoubtedly, the fractious and fiercely independent nature of many ascetic sects, added to the desire to ‘reform’ the sadhus. Rama Tirtha, despite his own ascetic vows, was highly critical of Indian sadhus, comparing them to ‘unhealthy scum’ on a lake. [...] His disciple, Narain Swami, attempted to discipline these wandering ascetics and set up a ‘Sadhu Mahavidyalaya’ (University for Sadhus) at Hardwar so that ‘illiterate sadhus’ could be given what was considered an appropriate Sanskrit education. [...] Equally important was the disciplining and reformulation of everyday religious practices, and here women were a particular target of reforming zeal, as they were not only perceived as inherently more religious, but also for their ability to produce and shape future, appropriately religious, subjects. Sannulal Gupta’s didactic manual aimed at middle-class women, *Strisubodhini*, sought to educate and improve women in this crucial aspect of their behaviour, in addition to offering other advice. Gupta warns women against ‘superstition’, and against ‘charlatans’ who adopt a religious guise. Most religious specialists, but particularly wandering ascetics claiming powers of divine possession or sorcery (though also venal Brahmin priests) are shown up to be frauds in Gupta’s manual. [...] Ultimately, a woman’s true religion, Gupta suggests, consists in following *stridharma* (literally a woman’s religion/duties, effectively a religion of domesticity) and for that she has no need of either religious specialists or indeed to participate in fairs, festivals, or other public rituals.

Like contemporaneous movements among the Sikhs, and those led by middle-class Muslims, many of the innovations coming from middle-class Hindus at this time consisted of drawing boundaries between religions. At the level of religious practice, for instance, it was common for Hindus, and particularly women, to seek boons and blessings at the shrines of Muslim *pirs* or renown holy men. This form of popular worship which often cut across caste, class, sectarian, and religious boundaries, was unacceptable to middle-class reformers, who, undoubtedly influenced by a modern colonial epistemology, found such practices ‘irreligious’. Reformers like Gupta took it upon themselves to wipe out syncretic religious practices among Hindus. *Strisubodhini*, accordingly, contains a major diatribe against worshiping at Muslim *pirs’* tombs, where the book seeks to invoke fear (such worship may make women barren), as well as castigating
such worship for demonstrating a disrespect for one’s ‘own religion’ because the shrines of Muslim pirs glorified individuals who were responsible for killing many Hindu men.\(^{37}\)

Although many of the changes initiated by reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were couched in terms of ‘rediscoveries’ of eternal truths about Hindu dharma, there is little doubt that such innovations were recasting if not reinventing religious traditions.\(^{38}\) This new Hindu religiosity not only allowed greater facility in constructing bounded religious communities to represent, but also the opportunity of greater social control through the power or authority to define what did or did not constitute appropriate religious practice. This period also saw the emergence of a new middle-class notions of religiosity, where ‘religion’ was separated from ‘superstition’, became more ‘rational’, and more amenable to the sensibilities of the middle class educated men, and of course to their public sphere projects as well. [...] The attempt to fashion, address, and mobilize a singular ‘imagined Hindu community’ in the nineteenth century was a unique attempt, and one which reflected the concerns of the middle class, and also the new possibilities that were open to them in the colonial public sphere.\(^{39}\)

However, as much as the writings of middle-class men reveal the tremendous confidence they undoubtedly had in their ability to transform social practices and beliefs at will, their projects remained necessarily partial and incomplete. At one level they were resisted by conservatives among their own ranks. A man like Shivanath Sharma, a prominent Hindi journalist and humourist of Lucknow, used his journal Anand to savagely lampoon the dress, eating habits, and even newer ways of relieving oneself, the Anglicized ‘babu’ unthinkingly copied from his masters.\(^{40}\) At another, more quotidian level, middle-class efforts at transforming religious practices were resisted simply by being ignored! Arya Samaj sources inform us that the Lucknow branch of the Samaj was particularly strict in its enforcement of rules of conduct. [...]\(^{41}\) Yet, at the level of actual practice, these rules were evidently ignored. A report from the Lucknow newspaper, the Advocate of 1904 reveals that ‘for some years’ the president of the Lucknow Arya Samaj had been a gentleman by the name of Umrao Bahadur, who was born of a Hindu father and Muslim mother, and who had himself married a Muslim woman.\(^{42}\) When even the president of a branch of the Arya Samaj which prided itself on orthodoxy so evidently transgressed boundaries the organization was seeking to reinforce,
then we can only conclude that there was considerable gap between ideas and practice. Efforts of men seeking to create a monolithic, singular Hindu community were bound to remain unconsummated.

But a more serious limitation of the project of a public Hinduism, perhaps even more so than resistance at the level of praxis, was the fact that contradictions constitutive of the new modernity sought to be forged by middle-class activists worked to undermine their own efforts to construct this new entity. Nothing shows up these contradictions better than the vexed issue of caste. Caste was the foremost among the vast variety of social, cultural, and devotional practices that needed to be tamed and disciplined to produce the new Hindu religiosity. With the principle of hierarchy at its centre, caste ideology as well as practices such as untouchability, interdictions on commensality, and restrictions on interaction between different castes were the biggest obstacles to the realization of the sort of unity desired by public sphere activists in colonial Lucknow. Rama Tirtha made the criticism of caste one of the central motifs of his writing.44 [...] A true Hindu he said, ‘must not observe any discrimination against anybody. For him there is no differentiation between the rich and the poor, high and low, and a Brahmin and Shudra.”45 [...] The modernity of Rama Tirtha’s interpretation is most evident in his critique of the Manu Smriti. This fourth century canonical text, which most explicitly and unabashedly sets out caste and gender hierarchies and prescribes draconian punishments for transgressions, was taken to task by him because, ‘instead of serving the people’, the Manu Smriti acted as ‘a despotic tyrant’.46

Despite theoretical rejection of caste by reformers, for many middle-class men upper-caste status was an important marker of their social respectability and their distance from lower classes and castes. Sannulal Gupta’s book shows him to be a great supporter of the Arya Samaj, whose formal ideology also rejected notions of hereditary caste privilege or disability.47 Yet [...]. [t]he most convincing reason he can offer to dissuade women from worshiping ‘un-Hindu’ pirs is to point to the low caste origins of these saints. ‘Isn’t it a matter of shame,’ Gupta asks, ‘that even though we are high-born (uchha kul), we worship a base-born person?’48 Worshipping these saints, Gupta points out, is to worship chamars (an ‘untouchable’ caste) and even worse, bhangis (scavengers, even lower on the caste scale). ‘Ram! Ram’ writes this Arya Samaj supporter, ‘have we Aryas become so irreligious and backward that we should fold our hands to and worship Bhangis, Chamars, Koilis,
Clearly, neither the ‘religion’ nor the ‘progress’ that Gupta or his kind were seeking to construct in colonial India, included any association with the lower castes. Rama Tirtha’s fond hopes were evidently at odds with the sentiments and practices of many of the people he addressed. The new religiosity of the middle-class imagination revealed contradictions almost at the moment of its creation.

By the 1920s, caste issues were very much at the forefront of political debate in nationalist circles. This was also the time when an assertive Hindu nationalism, building on the templates of a new religiosity, was seeking to play a larger role in political affairs by championing the rights of a Hindu political community. To successfully represent the ‘rights’ of Hindus and create a stronger, more assertive, Hindu self in colonial north India, it was crucial to the project of Hindu publicists in the 1920s to reiterate, at least rhetorically, the notion of a single ‘Hindu community’. For instance, there were many highly charged, emotional, articles in support of allowing ‘untouchables’ entry to Hindu temples in the prominent Hindi journal of Lucknow, *Madhuri*. One of these compared the untouchables’ situation with children prevented from embracing their father. Yet, [...][t]his became one arena where the limits of the modern Hindu religiosity stood revealed most clearly. Immediately after an impassioned plea on behalf of allowing untouchables temple entry, *Madhuri*, [...] warned against taking such reformism too far. While it was important to recognize certain ‘Hindu birthrights,’ *Madhuri* argued, showing untouchables ‘more compassion than was necessary’ would only divide Hindu [...] On an earlier occasion, *Madhuri*’s upper-caste editors had also criticized the attempts to force Hindu Sabha members to eat a meal cooked by untouchables. Their objections were expressed through a rhetorical question, asking if ‘the natural and bodily impurity which made such *jatis* [castes] untouchable in the first place, [had] disappeared all of a sudden?’ [...] However much the editors may have liked to believe otherwise, fault-lines based on caste and class not only limited the Hindu Sabha members, but the very imagination of a modern publicized Hindu religiosity.

It is important not to dismiss such contradictions in middle class Hindu nationalism as evidence of a simple political duplicity, or to suggest that this avowal of a single Hindu community was ‘using’ religion as a guise for more ‘real’ material or political interests. That would be tantamount to arguing that Bishan Narain Dar went
to Azamgarh with the real agenda of undermining the religious sensibilities of the peasants there, even while claiming to represent the Hindu community; or that the editors of Madhuri were simply upper-caste bigots who put on a facade of liberality while writing some articles in the journal, but allowed their ‘true’ feelings to surface in some pieces. There is really no historical justification for such conspiracy theories. In fact, such dismissals have lurking at their root, the notion that ‘real’ religion needs to be concerned with the otherworldly, with individual worship, rather than political power. What middle-class interventions actually did was simply re-politicize religion in the contexts of the colonial public sphere. Of course, like all religiosities perhaps, the product of their efforts too reflected their own interests and the power configurations emerging in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in colonial north India. This context included tensions and contradictions which were constitutive of the middle class. The coexistence of the old and the new, the hierarchical and the emancipatory, and the religious and the secular, are therefore better seen as examples of inevitably fractured modernities characteristic of middle-class politics. A closer look at other deployments of this republicized Hindu religiosity might make this more evident.

DEPLOYING RELIGIOSITY

[...] Tamed Hindu religiosity, liberated from specific contexts and practices, could and was deployed in different ways, as part of many political projects, and in many sorts of discourses. The varieties of explicitly nationalist projects were the most obvious of these. Having consigned caste and other inconvenient features of lived Hinduism to the realms of ‘false religion, and emphasized the pristine purity of Advaita Vedanticism, Rama Tirtha and the more famous Vivekanand deployed the new religiosity to impress upon foreign and native audiences the glories of ‘Hinduism’. It was equally necessary for caste and other parochial aspects to be defined as historical accretions upon a true Hindu essence, before India’s first President and philosopher, S. Radhakrishnan, could claim that, ‘Vedanta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance.’ A range of hierarchical precepts reinforcing caste and gender distinctions, and a significant history of sectarian conflicts within and between groups of rival Hindu religious specialists and ascetics needed to be marginalized, suppressed, or subsumed by this new notion of Hindu
religiosity before Gandhi could define ‘non-violence’ as one of the essential virtues of Hinduism. On the other hand, political activists like Bishan Narain Dar were not so concerned with the history and philosophy of Hinduism. But even for him to be able to appropriate subaltern religiosity in the name of representing the rights of a ‘Hindu community’ against the ‘meddling’ of the colonial state, it was necessary to have the idea of a Hindu community free of divisions, whose rights were to be defended by the middle-class activists like himself.

Abiding faith in liberal values, and commitment to the politics of nation-building may have led Dar to emphasize, even in his celebration of Hindu might, shared aspects of the history and culture of Hindus and Muslims. In other contexts however, the cultural politics of Hindu assertiveness could, and was, used to construct a much less plural vision of the nation, underscoring Hindu superiority while compelling Muslims to recognize their status as the vanquished. This aggressive Hindu nationalism also drew upon the templates of middle class modernized Hinduism, celebrating a ‘real’ Hinduism, not divided by caste, class, language, or region, as the ideological basis for a Hindu community it sought to represent. A rhetoric of community and solidarity, rather than hierarchy, as the characteristic of a modern Hinduism is equally necessary in order for the middle-class proponents of Hindutva today when they tear down mosques or carry out systematic pogroms of Muslims or Christians in the name of ‘restoring Hindu pride’.

But this is, by now, well known. What is more surprising however, is that the discursive templates that allowed for the discourse of Hindu nationalism to emerge, also underpin large parts of the most liberal and ‘secular’ discourse of Indian nationalism. Jawaharlal Nehru is almost universally regarded as a quintessential modernist. His rationalism, belief in the progressive impact of western science and technology, and heavy industry, has often led unfavourable comparisons with Mahatma Gandhi, the ‘indigenous’ critic of modern industrial society. [...]. Nehru’s own disdain for ‘superstitious practices and dogmatic beliefs’ and his outward rejection of religion because its ‘method of approach to life’s problems… was… not that of science’, do, on the surface, appear to reinforce the image of Nehru the modern secularist. What is quite surprising therefore, is to note the extent to which Nehru’s narrative also draws heavily upon a republicized Hindu religiosity as he recounts his Discovery of India.
One reason that Nehru could not unequivocally celebrate the Indian past was because that past contained much that was evidently unsuitable for a progressive, modern, nation-state. Yet, that past needed to be appropriated, made available for the history of the modern nation. How then were hierarchical and non-modern institutions and ideas so much a part of that history to be accounted for? How was Nehru to square his dislike for non-scientific superstition and dogma of religion with the necessity of celebrating, taking pride in a past which so evidently consisted of much that was religious? Nehru’s resolution was very much in the discursive pattern established by men like Rama Tirtha or Vivekanand. Expressing his admiration for the vitality of the Vedas, the spirit of enquiry and philosophical insights of the Upanishads, Nehru celebrated the ‘rational spirit of enquiry, so evident in ancient times, which,’ he added, ‘might well have led to the further growth of science’ but then notes a historical and intellectual decline when such a spirit of enquiry is replaced by orthodox, orthoprax religion, and ‘irrationalism and a blind idolatry of the past’. It is then that Indian life, In Nehru’s view, becomes ‘a sluggish stream, living in the past.’ It is this degeneration of an authentic tradition that leads to the sort of superstition and dogma Nehru associates with religion, which ‘petrifies’ a system of reasonable division of labour and a mechanism of group solidarity into the oppressive caste system.

In common with much of nationalist writing, Nehru exhibited what has variously been described as the ‘aporia’ or the ‘Janus-faced’ character of nationalism, asserting simultaneously the ‘objective modernity’ and the ‘subjective antiquity’ of the Indian nation. The tension between the two is never quite resolved. [...] The only way that Nehru could appropriate history to the Indian nation was to fall back on notions almost identical to those of a ‘real Hinduism’ which were deployed by the middle-class activists of the nineteenth century. What India needed therefore was not to reject the ‘vital and life-giving’ past, but break with ‘[...]the dust and dirt of the ages that have covered her up and hidden her inner beauty and significance, the excrescences and abortions that have petrified her spirit, set it in rigid frames, and stunted her growth’. A tamed, disciplined, religious heritage, unencumbered by the ‘dust and dirt of the ages,’ was the essence of Nehru’s ‘wisdom of the ancients.’ Such a heritage, liberated from lived practices as well as a host of hierarchical and non-modern notions, could be polished, selectively appropriated, to serve as a glorious and un tarnished resource available to the emerging Indian nation.
Ironically therefore, it is the discursive template of republicized religiosity that allows Nehru the arch-secularist to detach religious ideas from their contexts, from religion itself as he understands the term. It is only a new way of thinking about religiosity which allows Nehru to celebrate the ‘wisdom of the ancients,’ and their spirit of enquiry, while condemning the rest as the ‘dust and dirt,’ as ‘excrecences and abortions.’ It is this religiosity which allows the secularist to first construct and then condemn only one part of a tradition as ‘religion’.

CONCLUSION
Nationalist modernity in India evidently did not relegate religion to the realms of the private or personal belief. On the contrary, actions of middle-class men in colonial India brought the discourse of religiosity firmly into the domain of public politics: far from a being a ‘consciousness other than a consciousness of reality’, a republicized religion became constitutive of the realities of nationalist politics in India. Liberated from specific devotional beliefs, social and cultural practices, and detached from the world-views from which they emerged, republicized religiosity was easily deployed for a variety of modern projects in which the middle class played a central role. Of course such interventions also transformed religion. The republicized Hindu religiosity of the middle class was considerably different from the myriad customs, beliefs, and practices which had previously characterized ‘Hinduism’. Undoubtedly a modern phenomenon, this middle-class vision of Hindu religiosity however, cannot be dismissed either as non-religion or even less so reduced to a duplicitous drive to acquire political power. Looking at this phenomenon in the context of a longer history, in fact, we could well see this as yet another instance where transformations in religious ideas both reflected as well as contributed to struggles over political power. Moreover, the very visible presence of religion in the modern arena of nationalist politics also allows us to question the ideal-typical model of modernity itself. […]

Rather than understand the Lucknow middle class’ religiosity as a lack or failure, where they strive for and ultimately fail to achieve the secular-modern ideal, we can look at them as active producers and the products of a sacralized modernity which in turn produced a modernized religiosity in colonial India. This was a modernity shaped by their own concerns and contexts, and their rhetoric and politics
were in turn shaped by it. Religion, or rather self-definitions based on religious categories, became a critical part of the modern self created by the colonial middle class. The modernity which middle classes constructed in colonial India, therefore, used the new and the old, looked ahead as well as back. The modern in this case was built on the traditional and coexisted with it, belying near dichotomies between the modern and the traditional, the religious and the secular. It is this fractured modernity,64 built upon but never erasing existing traditions, which allows for the simultaneous articulation of the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular which are so characteristic of modern politics, not only in India but across much of the colonial and post-colonial world.

NOTES

12. Pandey, *Construction of Communalism*
15. Ibid., Appendix, 9.
16. Ibid., Appendix, 10.
19. Ibid., p. 28.
20. This is also how it was primarily read by the administration. Dar’s report was widely cited and criticized within the administration for its anti-Government tone. For one such interpretation, see the official report on Dar written at the time he was elected President of the 1911 session of the Indian National Congress. Government of India. Home Political, January 1912, B 121-123. (National Archives of India)
28. Pt Brijnath Sharga, Life of Swami Ram Tirtha (Lucknow: Rama Tirtha


34. Ibid., p. 25.


39. After the death of Rama Tirtha for instance, his disciple Narain Swami decided that the most fitting memorial for his spiritual mentor was the establishing of the ‘Rama Tirtha Publication League’, which later became the ‘Swami Rama Tirtha Pratishthan’, and undertook the task of publishing and disseminating the message of his Guru to the largest possible audience. Swami Rama Tirtha Pratishthan, *Swami Narayana: Some Reminiscences with a Brief Life Sketch* (Lucknow: Rama Tirtha Pratishthan,1975), 26.


44. Singh, *Swami Rama*, p. 221; Rama Tirtha, p. 42.


49. Ibid, p. 647, emphasis added.
60. Ibid., p. 47.
61. Ibid., pp. 284–95.
64. For an elaboration of this argument, please see Joshi, *Fractured Modernity*. 