**[Unwelcome returns](https://www.dawn.com/news/1832367/unwelcome-returns)**

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WITH the prescience that philosophers share with out-of-office politicians, a hundred years ago, a leading Indian scholar analysed the combustible demography of India. In 1923, Dr Radhakrishnan wrote in his two-volume survey of Indian Philosophy: “India even today is mainly Hindu.” Describing the Epic Period, which spanned roughly 600 BC to 200 AD, he wrote: “The fortunes of the Hindus [however] became more and more linked with those of the non-Hindus.” Amongst these, he included Buddhists, Jains, Saivites and Vaishnavites — the sons of India’s soil. Muslims, of course, had yet to come.

It is a lengthy tome to read, and even more difficult to digest. I chewed on it as a student in the 1960s, but gave up before reaching the end of the second volume. I returned to it recently to seek answers to the Hindu-Muslim experiments at religious coexistence since the arrival of Muslims in the subcontinent, and especially since PM Narendra Modi’s determination to expel them.

India’s traditional hospitality is proverbial, but it does not extend to religious strangers. Over the centuries, Buddhists have quit India for gentler climes. Today, Budd­h­ism has over 520 million followers, of whom only 8m are left in India (Lord Buddha’s birthplace) to follow in his footsteps.

Almost contemporary to Buddhism is Jainism, also founded in India and perfected by the 24th tirthankara, Lord Mahavira (circa 600 BC). Equally pacifist and non-confrontational, unlike Buddhism, Jainism has survived in India. There are between 4m to 5m still living there. A growing number are to be found today in Canada, Europe, and the US, where the practice of pious self-abnegation would appear to be at odds with crass materialism.

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In PM Modi’s eyes, the problem in India is not a majority of Hindus, but a fertile surfeit of 200m Muslims (now 15 per cent of its population). Modi’s predicament is not a question of putting a genie back into the bottle. His conundrum is how to remove the green genie from the saffron bottle.

Under PM Nehru, Muslims in India rarely felt that they had to choose between their country and their religion. Under his daughter, PM Indira Gandhi, a test of sorts for Indian Muslims came in 1971, when, after her victory in East Pakistan, she is said to have commented: “A thousand years of subjugation have been avenged.”

Incidentally, all of the rulers of the Mug­hal dynasty (whom PM Modi regards with anathema) — except for its founder Babar and his son Humayun — from Akbar to Ba­­hadur Shah Zafar, were born in India. They saw themselves as Indians by birth. Today, they are tarnished as Muslim foreigners.

During the recent elections in Bangladesh, which brought Sheikh Hasina Wajed back to power, India did not figure as a material issue. Neither in Pakistan, where Nawaz Sharif’s earlier bonhomie with PM Modi did not affect the return of his PML-N to power.

In India, though, PM Modi’s recent spe­eches during his election campaign could have been dismissed as hustings hype, were it not for their implications for Muslims within India, and for Pakistan and, by extension, other neighbouring countries.

On home ground in Gujarat, Mr Modi ad­­dressed four different rallies where he ac­­c­u­sed the Congress party as harbouring a “da­­ngerous mentality”, its manifesto being in the “language of the Muslim League”. In 2017, he had accused form­­er PM Manmo­han Singh of “holding a secret mee­­ting with Pak­istani diplom­a­­ts to conspire agai­nst him”.

Now his theme is that Pakistan’s political leaders “are praying for a Congress victory. Pakistan is now eager to make the prince of the Congress the prime minister of India”. To an audience in Junagadh, he add­ed: “If Sar­d­­ar Patel was not pre­­sent [in 1948], Junagadh would have gone to Pak­is­tan. The Con­g­­­ress will create a dangerous situation for the country if it comes to power. They may give away the Kutch desert claiming no one lives there.”

On June 4, everyone in the subcontinent will know who will rule India for the next five years. Mr Modi knows it will be him. The Sharifs in Pakistan hope so too. They should anticipate, however, that Mr Modi as an emboldened three-time prime minister may taunt Pakistan by testing the fragile frontier between occupied Kashmir (India’s new ‘union state’) and Pakistan’s foundling counterpart Azad Jammu & Kashmir.

He may also decide to withdraw from the Indus Waters Treaty, which covers the rivers flowing from the upper riparian, to leave Pakistan frothing at the mouth, knowing that an enfeebled World Bank would prefer not to arbitrate.

Over the next five years, PM Modi could pressurise Indian Muslims to crowd Pakistan’s eastern borders in Punjab and Sindh as refugees. It happened in 1971, when up to 10m refugees from East Pakistan crossed into India. PM Modi may be tempted to return the compliment.

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