

were mostly members of the Serbian Orthodox Church) killing Muslims in Bosnia called it “ethnic cleansing,” not “religious cleansing.” Muslims and Jews lived together fairly peacefully in British-controlled Palestine until the 1920s, when Zionists, who believed that Jews needed their own homeland so that they could defend themselves from lethal anti-Semitism around the world, particularly in Germany and other parts of Europe, began immigrating in great numbers. Threatened by the flood of Jews, Palestinian Arabs rioted and demanded the British halt the migration (Sela 1994). Note that most of the founders of Israel were more or less irreligious, as are most Israelis today. As mentioned earlier, these secular people define Jewishness in ethnic rather than religious terms. One has the right to become an Israeli citizen if one’s mother is Jewish, not if one believes in the sacredness of the Torah and that Jews are God’s chosen people: ethnicity, not religion. Jews are not fighting Muslims because they believe theirs is the one true faith.

All this is not to say that there are no wars or internal mass killings that are not at least somewhat religious in basis. After the fall of the Egyptian dictator Hosni Mubarak, some Egyptian Muslims began attacking the churches of Christian Copts, who are about 10 percent of the population, calling Christians “blasphemers” for disagreeing with Islam. In recent years even inside the United States we have seen religious violence: for example, the killing of doctors who perform abortions by fundamentalist Christian vigilantes who claim to be acting on religious grounds. In the nineteenth century, Mormons were violently driven out of upstate New York and later Nauvoo, Illinois, and elsewhere because of their different religious ideas.

An Example of Religious Conflict in India

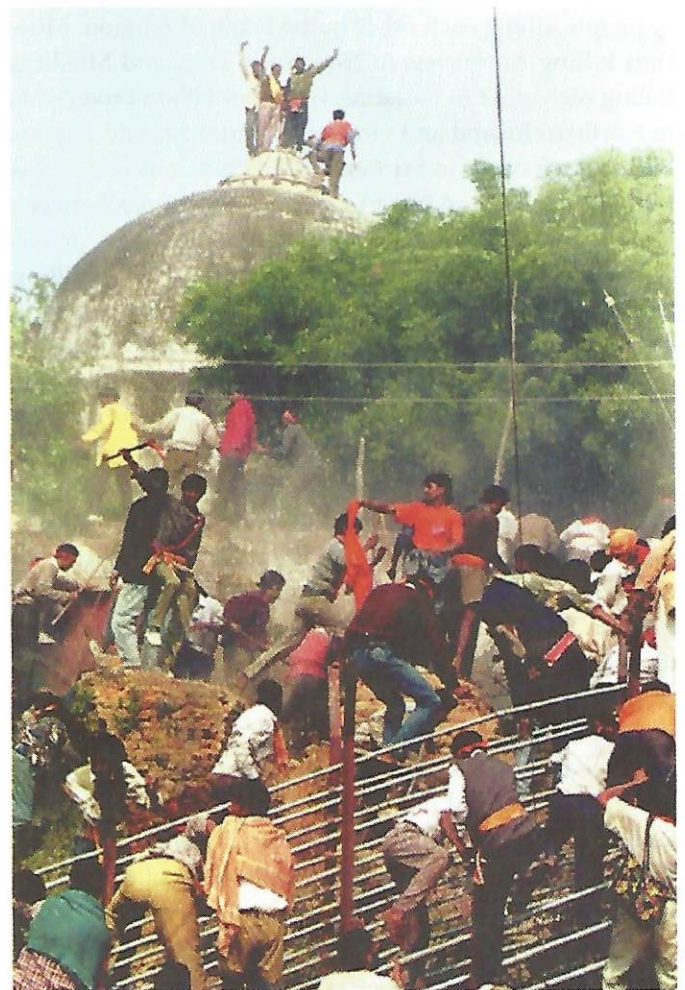
14.4.2 Discuss the long-standing religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India.

One of the most compelling examples of what seems to be religious violence is the long-term conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India. The partition of India into India and Pakistan (which at first included what would become Bangladesh) took place in 1947, shortly after Britain decided to end its colonial control over the subcontinent. The partition was hasty and unplanned. More than 7 million Muslims moved to Pakistan, and an approximately equal number of Hindus, Sikhs, and others moved from the territory that became Pakistan to India. From being approximately 25 percent Muslim before partition, the new India contained less than 13 percent. The new Pakistan had hardly any Hindus at all. It is estimated that between half a million and a million people died in the process as Hindus and Muslims fought over land or just over resentments in both communities.

After partition, communal conflict between Hindus and Muslims was common in India, although almost

always local. Anything that might go wrong could begin a cycle of hostility. Muslims had conquered most of India in the sixteenth century and ruled until the eighteenth century, a fact not lost on the majority Hindus. To this day, some of them continue to write vicious screeds on the horrors of Muslim occupation, particularly in the blogosphere. For many Hindus the partition meant that India was now specifically a Hindu country, perhaps with more reason than the idea that America is a Christian country. This idea sparked the growth of a political philosophy of “Hindutva,” which asserts that India should be for Hindus, and eventually led to the election of an avowedly Hindutva party to a majority in the parliament.

In the early 1990s, Hindutva politicians and a number of Hindu holy men focused on a mosque in Ayodhya that they claimed had been built on top of an important Hindu temple (what cynics have called one of the mythical birthplaces of the mythical god Rama). They demanded that the mosque be razed and the Hindu temple rebuilt. The government was opposed, envisioning the turmoil that would ensue and the hundreds of other sites that might become controversial. In December 1992, an estimated 200,000 Hindus descended on the mosque and, despite



Hindu militants in India storm the disputed mosque at Ayodhya, preparing to demolish it and clear the site for a Hindu temple.