Modern Asian Studies **39,** 4 (2005) pp. 897–927. © 2005 Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/S0026749X05001897 Printed in the United Kingdom

Urban Riots and Cricket in South Asia: A Postscript to 'Leveling Crowds'

STANLEY J. TAMBIAH

Harvard University

My book *Leveling Crowds*[1] was published in 1996, and around the same time and in succeeding years there was a spate of books on much the same topic, but primarily focused on India. This essay discusses the implications of some of these studies for my chief submissions, and also responds to the comments of some reviews of my book. It is hoped that this postscript will amplify and enrich our investigation of the dynamics of ethnonationalist conflicts in South Asia.

Violence as a Mode of Conducting Ethnonationalist Politics

Let me begin by considering some of the conspicuous features of violence enacted during civilian riots. Clausewitz famously said that 'war is the continuation of policy by other means.' Adapting that aphorism for my own purpose, I would say that civilian riots are a mode of conducting politics by other means.

Contemporary ethnic violence, primarily an urban phenomenon, is purposive in nature. Riots have direction, show evidence of premeditation and planning in the sense that once they are triggered they victimize and even kill targeted persons and at the same time target temples, schools, shops and businesses, and homes of the victimized group. In riots staged in recent decades, there is evidence of 'riot captains' carrying with them the addresses and names of victims, and carrying with them gasoline and kerosene and crude weapons for arson and demolition. Examples are the Colombo riots of 1983, the Delhi riots of 1984, and the Bombay riots of 1992–93. Although the killing of human beings is foregrounded in media accounts, it is equally

[1] Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds. Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996).

0026–749X/05/$7.50+$0.10

significant for understanding the rationale of riots that there is much destruction of property by arson, and secondarily looting of property. As Carlyle said with illuminating brevity 'a short argument: fire.' As I see it, the attacks in South Asia primarily on adult males and on the property of the victimized group are a two pronged leveling strategy, namely, reducing the manpower and the alleged economic advantages possessed by the minority attacked.

A second feature of riots is that a wide spectrum of the population is involved among the attackers, not just criminal elements and the lumpenproletariat, as popular prejudice will have it, but more extensively regular workers, artisans and members of the lower middle class (the 'lower orders' as the European literature has it), and behind them providing direction and securing the collusion of authorities, operate the politicians, typically of the middle range, and certain members of the middle and professional classes.

A third feature is that there is widespread reporting of the collusion of the police in the riots, their conduct ranging from non-action to collusion and direct participation. The Bombay riots of 1992–93 are a ghastly instance of selective police firing on the embattled Muslims in the slums and dense colonies. (Similar accusations of police non-action and collusion surfaced in last year's (2002) Hindu–Muslim riots in Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat.) These features I have described are also amply confirmed by Horowitz and Hansen, and Jaffrelot.[2]

Now we come to a certain formulation the significance of which we have to carefully assess and incorporate. Paul Brass in his arresting and richly documented book *Theft of an Idol* (1997)[3] postulates the notion of 'institutionalized riot systems', especially in relation to his study of Hindu–Muslim clashes in the city of Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh. The city has a population which is roughly 80 percent Hindu and 20 percent Muslim, and in the twentieth century, it has experienced a number of riots, three large ones in the thirties, and a severe one in 1992 in the wake of the Ayodhya incident. By institutionalized riot systems Brass means that there are in the city organized networks of activists in the service of political parties who stage riots

[2] Donald L. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence. Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2001); Christoph Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (Viking Penguin Jadea, 1996).

[3] Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997).

aimed at ethnic or religious minorities. He states that there is a 'network of persons who maintain communal racial and other ethnic relations in a state of tension, of readiness for riots.' He describes them as 'fire tenders' who keep ethnic relations on the boil, and he asserts that in Kanpur 'communal riots are . . . undertaken mostly by such specialists.'

Although I too have stated that in the instances I have studied there is evidence of patron–client entourages and networks used by businessmen in trade wars and in actions against trade unions, and by politicians to win elections, Brass's concept of 'institutionalized riot systems' appears to be a strong formulation that is particularly applicable to cities in India where there are long-standing co-resident or contiguous groups of Hindus and Muslims, and where over time intermittent collisions and exchanges of violence have occurred between both sides in an agonistic fashion. But it is clear that in Kanpur the Muslim minority suffered the greater losses, and the violence against them was asymmetrical. Sudhir Kakar's *The Colours of Violence* (1996)[4] is primarily devoted to interpreting the riots of 1990 that took place in the old city of Hyderabad, a former capital of a Muslim-ruled state and now a part of the State of Andhra Pradesh. The riots in question occurred after Advani's arrest during his spectacular rath yatra (pilgrimage procession) from Somnath to Ayodhya. The city has some 60 percent (plus) Hindus and 35–39 percent Muslims, and according to Varshney's count over the decades it has experienced riots, especially in the period 1978–1995, when they occurred each year, sometimes with two or three episodes during the same year.[5]

Kakar's accounts are couched in psychoanalytic conceptual jargon that is different from Brass's Foucauldian perspective of non-concordant, competing narratives and discourses functioning as vehicles through which local power struggles are played out. However, Kakar gives informative profiles of the pehlwans, the 'warriors', 'strong men', 'thugs', and trained 'killers' who were at work in the city of Hyderabad on both Muslim and Hindu sides. Their hallmark was their training as 'wrestlers' and 'body builders' in fraternal akharas (gymnasiums). These are the cells in which these enforcers and riot specialists are trained, socialized, even professionalized. In every day life their main activity and source of income is euphemistically called

[4] Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (Delhi: Viking, 1989).

[5] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life. Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale University Press. New Haven and London. Chapter 7, 2002).

"land business," that is, collecting rent or evicting recalcitrant tenants on behalf of landlords, settling house and land disputes, and cornering real estate for businessmen. Their means of operation are the threat or actual use of force. It would seem that Hyderabad can be said to have 'institutionalized riot systems' in Brass's sense.

Information on the large-scale destructive riots that took place in Bombay in December 1992 and January 1993 reveals that organizations and networks of youth at the service of Bal Thackeray, and his Shiv Sena (Shivaji's Army), taking its name from the seventeenth-century Maratha warrior king, committed systematic arson and physical violence during the riots. We are treated to an even more colorfully thick description of the organization and operation of the Shiv Sena by Gerard Heuzé and T. B. Hansen.[6] According to Heuzé the Shiv Sena had some 40,000 hard core activists and 200,000 sympathizers loosely organized in some 200 urban branches (shakas) and 100 sub-branches.

Aside from these shakas that were organized for political action, there were networks of friends' clubs (mitra mandals), some 5000 of them in Bombay, the majority of which were associated with the Shiv Sena (though some were affiliated with the Congress Party and the Dalit Party). Heuzé glosses the mitra mandals as fraternal brotherhoods, whose youthful members are drawn from the so-called 'popular classes', and which, among other social activities, organize public festivals. One would imagine them to be havens for the multitudes of unemployed and underemployed youths, many of them rural migrants.

The socialization of these youth as warriors, and the inculcation in them of a virile martial kshatrya identity seems to be a critical feature to grasp in understanding their subjective attraction and commitments to Shiv Sena's program. Hansen speaks of Shiv Sena's focus on the 'recuperation of masculinity', the overcoming of a perceived 'effeminization' of Hindu men at the hands of the British and Mughal rulers, and on the expunging of the Muslim other.[7]

[6] Gerard Heuzé, 'Cultural Populism: The Aspect of the Shiv Sena', *Bombay: Metaphor of Modern India*, ed. S. Patel and A Thorner, pp. 213–47. Bombay: Oxford University Press. Thomas Blom Hansen, 'Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu Nationalism Violence and the Exorcism of the Muslim Other', *Critique of Anthropology* 16, No. 2, 1996, pp. 138–72.

[7] Hansen, 'Recuperating Masculinity', *op. cit*. (Princeton. Princeton University Press 2001).

The reverse of the Shiv Sena's processional exhibition of masculinity is the likening of followers not showing enough belligerence to women wearing bangles. In January 1993 at the height of the agonistic maha aartis staged by the Shiv Sena on the grounds of 'justified self-defense' against Muslim initiated violence, Thackeray was reported as saying 'If our people should not retaliate then they should wear bangles'.[8]

Hansen in the course of discussing the role of 'the most inflated rumors' of Muslim gangs 'roaming the streets of Bombay at night to avenge their dead and to rape Hindu women', goes on to report in the next paragraph as a known matter of fact the following which punctures the Kakar-Mehta wishful notion of the unlikelihood of rape of women: 'As in other riots, rape was a regular feature of the atrocities committed both by mobs and smaller groups. As in earlier riots, women were seen distributing bangles to men who did not participate in the riots. Reports also circulated of Hindu women actively assisting in the gang rape of Muslim women, as well as in arson and looting'.[9]

For those who are interested in this issue, I would recommend Anand Patwardhan's film, *Father, Son and Holy War*, which conveys how Hindu majoritarian violence against minorities like Muslims, may reflect male insecurity, which may be intensified during the very celebration of macho manhood in the context of religio-political strife. Male aggression is fueled by tales of marauding Muslim invaders who raped Hindu women, destroyed temples and forced religious conversions.

The film also juxtaposes the Hindu upper caste 'purifying' fire rituals (including sati)[10] with the fires that ravaged Bombay after the demolition of the Ayodhya mosque. These Indian performatives add to my treatment in *Leveling Crowds* of the symbolism of destruction by fire in many riot situations.

Now on the basis of considering riots that took place in Colombo in 1983, Delhi in 1984, Bombay 1992–93, and Ahmedabad in March of 2002, and other instances, one can question the sufficiency and general applicability of the reports of Brass and Kakar as complete characterizations of what happened. The membership, orientations and activities of the core groups and networks of riot specialists to

[8] Hansen, *Wages of Violence*, p. 122. Hansen cites as his source *Lokprabha,* 10 January 1993.

[9] Hansen, *ibid*., p. 123. Hansen reports as his sources: 'The evidence of women's increasing involvement in the riots was collected by Gopal Guru, Pune University, and scholars at the Women's University in February and March 1993'.

[10] The immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands practiced by certain *rajput* castes in Northwest India.

whom they attribute the major agency, do not explain how in these massive urban riots, hundreds of 'ordinary' citizens, who were not regular members of them, were mobilized for short-lived spells of violent action. The information concerning Bombay gives us insights into what are missing in Brass and Kakar, namely the communicational devices and processes that enabled the short-term widespread recruitment and participation of large numbers of male youth and young adults.

There are serious limitations to espousing and generalizing Kakar's celebrated ethnographic snippet. Kakar reports a violent strong man in Hyderabad as saying that riots, involving a mutual slaughter of Hindus and Muslims, are 'like one-day cricket matches where the killings are the runs. You have to score at least one more run than the opposing team'. It is a serious mistake to apply the analogy of repetitive agonistic cricket matches between India and Pakistan as an iconic model of the Hindu–Muslim riots.[11] For instance, C. J. Fuller, of the London School of Economics, has naively opined that the 'exchanges' of violence between Hindus and Muslims 'may involve the emergence of a moral economy . . . in which men on both sides, and may be women too, agree that leveling, or more precisely marginal superiority, should be pursued in the likeness of one-day cricket matches.' He suggests that the perpetrators of violence 'reconstituted ethnic killing as akin to the ordinary past time of cricket'.[12] No doubt Hindu activists of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena varieties will salute this white washing. Kakar's own ethnography, as for example, in Chapter 4, labeled 'The Night of Long Knives' contradicts the misplaced rhetoric of his singular colorful informant that antagonists observe a taboo on killing women and children, or raping women during riots.

[11] The following is the profile of Kakar's informant Majid Khan (provided earlier in Chapter 3) whose inventive analogy is credited with so much insight by Kakar, and two other reviewers in search of a 'moral economy' model of ethnic riots. Majid Khan is introduced as a *pehlwan* ('wrestler', 'strong man'). 'Among the Hindus, he is notorious, as a killer, while many Muslims approvingly acknowledge his role in the organization of the community's violence during the riots' (*Colours*. p. 59). He has a striking record of community's confrontation with the police. 'He is no more a soldier', but is increasingly busy in the political arena, is suspected of being 'a general' who is one of the chief organizers of Muslim violence during a riot (*Colours*. p. 60).

[12] C. J. Fuller in his review of Stanley J. Tambiah's *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia*, in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 32, Part 1, Feb. 1998, pp. 253–6.

Fuller also cites Veena Das's essay 'Our work to cry; your work to listen' which focused on Sikh victims of the Delhi riots of 1984, to make the point that 'the perpetrators of violence and its male victims may be the same people, or that the latter are men who failed to act violently to save their own families'.[13]

The first half of the above sentence means that male Sikhs may be both aggressors (against whom?) and victims, an assertion that largely is untrue if one studies the Delhi riot incidents.[14] The second half of the sentence does not fit with the former—it only asserts the fact that most of the Sikh males felt unable to retaliate, which again confirms the asymmetry of the violence. And in my view, Fuller's recounting of 'a particularly gruesome incident in which [Das] saw drunken Sikhs, whose kin had been butchered, re-enacting the slaughter with themselves in the role of perpetrators' seems to me a clear example of victimized Sikhs, having later become drunk, engaging in black humor, which underlines their unequal power relations vis-à-vis the Hindus, not their identification with them. Finally, my observation that in a number of settlements of the urban poor aggressors and victims 'frequently are not strangers to each other' makes it all the more disturbing that during ethnonationalist riots neighbors who have been mobilized have been known to turn on their acquaintances, while a minority of others have been known to give them shelter. I recommend that Fuller meditate on this observation by Georg Simmel: 'The degeneration of a difference in convictions into hatred and fight occurs only when there were essential similarities between the parties. The "respect for the enemy" is usually absent where the hostility has arisen on the basis of previous solidarity. And where enough similarities continue to make confusions and blurred outlines possible, points of difference need an emphasis not justified by the issue but only by that danger of confusion'.[15]

Kakar's snippet likening the mutual slaughter of Hindus and Muslims in Hyderabad to one-day cricket matches, was also eagerly picked up by Pratap Mehta who highlights a passage in Kakar that asserts that unlike in Bosnia, there were reasons in Hyderabad for 'the relative absence of rape in a Hindu–Muslim riot, including . . . the strong disapproval of rape as an instrument of religious violence in

[13] Fuller, *ibid*.

[14] See my discussion of the 1984 Delhi riots in Chapter of *Leveling Crowds*. Also my essay '*Obliterating the "Other" in Former Yugoslavia*', *Paiduma* 44, 1998, pp. 78–95.

[15] G. Simmel, *Conflict*, Ch. 1 (Glencoe: Free Press, 1995).

both communities . . . after a riot the Hindus and Muslims still have to live together . . . Rape makes such intervention impossible and turns Hindu–Muslim animosity into implacable hatred.' (*Colors of Violence*, p. 86).[16] Mehta in fact kindly gave me a draft of this review to read before publication and I referred him to Kakar's own ethnography elsewhere in his book, for example the gory account entitled 'The Night of Long Knives' (pp. 98–9). Muslim men, according to his informant Lalita, a Hindu woman, who were not outsiders ('but our Mussulmans here') and who knew which houses belonged to Hindus, attacked Pardiwada, a low caste enclave of about fifty houses surrounded by Muslim settlements. Lalita recounts how a woman's mother's brother was killed that evening as was her sister-in-law, who had run out in panic to fetch her four-year-old son. Both mother and son were chopped down by sword blows. Another woman neighbor had four children who are not normal in the head. The attackers 'killed her with a sword' splitting her head in two. Still another woman, who would not divulge where her husband was, had her arms and legs cut off. Such incidents of killing of women and children, even if men were the primary targets, make one wonder about Kakar's thesis of the norms of coexistence exemplified by the non-rape and immunity of women. Mehta having re-examined Kakar's ethnography concedes this in a footnote: 'there are curious passages on pages 136 and 137 that suggest that moral attitudes towards those who rape during riots are an issue among his informants. Kakar does not remark on these. Why would this be an issue if rape were entirely absent?'[17] The attack on Pardiwada on one night left twenty-four dead. A Hindu temple was torched. A sizable number of residents were displaced for good. Pardiwada which had a population of about a hundred and fifty families before this riot 'had now dwindled to fifty'.[18]

Now, I infer from Kakar's treatment of riots in Hyderabad, that Hindus and Mulsims live in various localities, in different demographic mixes—some in which the Muslims number more than Hindus, and others in which the distribution is reversed. And the endemic violence might indeed take the shape of Muslims and Hindus periodically staging attacks against each other—the Muslims being the majority in one arena, the Hindus in another—and causing serious damage to

[16] Kakar, *Colours*, p. 86.

[17] Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Ethnicity, Nationalism and Violence in South Asia. Review Article.' *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 3, Fall 1998.

[18] Kakar, *Colours*, p. 87.

persons, property, and also thereby spatial displacement of people. Someone may characterize this chronic condition in macro-terms as a state of mutual exchanges of violence, but the 'gentlemen's' game of cricket is decidedly what it is not. Varshney in another context comparing the cities of Lucknow and Hyderabad (which I shall deal with presently) refers to Hyderabad as one of the eight most riot prone cities in India, with riots regularly exploding among a deeply polarized population of Hindus and Muslims.[19]

Ashutosh Vashney's recent book *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*[20] is ostensibly devoted to explain variance between three pairs of cities in India (and within these cities over time) with regard to the occurrence of ethnic violence between Hindus and Muslims. He focuses on the presence or absence of 'civic interconnections' between Hindus and Muslims as the key explanatory variable. I shall in the next section comment on his discussion of Hindu–Muslim relations in the cities of Hyderabad and Lucknow.

Varshney also cannot resist invoking in a section entitled Riots and Cricket (1978–93)[21] Sudhir Kakar's description of the role of wrestlers (pehlwans), both Hindus and Muslims, in their urban neighborhoods. What is astonishing is that Kakar's quoting the statement of a single wrestler-strong man, which I have reported and discussed earlier, is now transformed by Varshney into a general ethic and model of violence voiced by several wrestlers, Muslims and Hindus: 'Killing in riots, they said, was like a one-day cricket game: one stopped as soon as one had made more runs than the adversary.'[22] In fact, this fascination with cricket among a large numbers of Britishers, citizens of the British Commonwealth and members of former British colonies, both players and multitudes of 'spectators', both in the past and present, might provoke a wit to say that cricket is the glue that holds this colonial and post-colonial diversity together. That killing 'warriors' and 'riot captains' should find in the 'gentleman's' game of

[19] Kakar too mentions in his introductory background, that riots had been an annual feature since 1978, which incidentally was 'triggered by the rape of a Muslim woman and the murder her husband in a police station'. After 1984 there was according to him, a lull, until December 1990 which is the central episode in his book. Varshney's estimate of frequency is very likely correct.

[20] Ashutosh Varshney. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life, Hindus and Muslims in India*. This book is influenced by Robert D. Putnam's notions of 'civic community' and 'social capital' as enunciated in his *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 206–9.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 209.

cricket an analogy for their violence is macabre enough. What do we make of some credulous social scientists taking it seriously?

The Rhetoric of Pehlwans

In the face of some scholars' espousing the cricket analogy to characterize Hindu–Muslim riots, it is necessary at the cost of some redundancy to go back and scrutinize Kakar's own text where the analogy made its first appearance. In chapter 3 of his text, *The Colours of Violence*, Kakar gives sketches of four *pehlwans* who are wrestlers/warriors in the eyes of their own communities, but 'goondas,' rowdies, in the eyes of the police. The names of the *pehlwans* are Majid Khan, Akbar, and Nissar who are Muslims, and Mangal Singh who is a Hindu of the Lodha caste who produce and distribute illicit liquor.

Of these four Majid Khan is the sole source of the cricket analogy. Kakar describes him as 'an influential local leader' of a certain section of Hyderabad city, 'who lives and flourishes in the shaded space formed by the interaction of crime and politics.' During the Hindu–Muslim riots in 1990, he suffered a sword blow to his head, and became in his own words 'the hero of Hyderabad.'[23] To Kakar he described himself as a 'peace maker' and intent on 'curbing young "killers,"' who wanted to show off their killing prowess. His self-representation to Kakar is that he has never experienced a blood lust even during the worst phase of religious violence, which does not mean he is a believer in non violence. He has, reports Kakar, a 'healthy' attitude toward the mutual slaughter, an outlook he states as follows: 'Riots are like one-day cricket matches where the killings are the runs. You have to score at least one more than the opposing team. The whole honor of your nation (*quam*) depends on not scoring less than the opponent.'[24]

[23] Kakar, *Colours*, pp. 56–7.

[24] *Ibid*. 'The other part of Majid Khan's role,' says Kakar, 'is liaising with police and the administration on behalf of the community and in organizing and distributing relief supplies on behalf of his party, the Majlis.' (p. 57)

A theme that Kakar touches on, but does not dwell on, is that Majid Khan's expressed attitudes are context and situation sensitive. His eloquence, when he a Muslim conversing with Kakar, represents violence as human suffering and as a shared experience of Muslims and Hindus alike. Kakar suggests that his talk may be colored by the fact that 'he is talking to me, a Hindu. Talk of suffering brings the two of us closer in mutual sympathy.' But Majid Khan in a separate previous conversation with Kakar's female Muslim research assistant, Sabha Hussain, (who arranged Kakar's meeting with Khan), a conversation with a fellow Muslim, he

I now report what the other *pehlwans* do and say. Akbar, whom Kakar dubs as the 'violent poet,' is a 'true *pehlwan*' who has been trained as a wrestler since the age of ten and 'comes from a family where for the last four generations the men have all been wrestlers. Among the Hindus, he is a notorious killer, while many Muslims approvingly acknowledge his role in the community's violence during the riots.'[25] He is a prosperous man whose chief source of income is 'land business' (which includes settling landlord–tenant disputes); he owns a hotel and three wrestling gymnasiums (*taleemkhanas*); he has three wives; and he has at his service a following of toughs and assistants. He is credited by the police with a long list of crimes, including assaulting a special police party for which he was sentenced for a couple of years. He is suspected of being 'one of the chief organizers of Muslim violence during a riot.'[26]

The cricket analogy of near symmetrical exchange of violence disappears altogether in Akbar's claim of Muslim martial superiority. He tells Kakar: 'The impression is false that in every riot more Muslims than Hindus are killed. I can say with complete confidence that at least in Hyderabad this is not true. Here the Muslims are very strong and completely united. More Hindus than Muslims are killed in every riot.'[27] Asserting that many Muslims marry more than once and therefore have large families with many children, and remarking that low caste Hindus are converting to Christianity and Islam, he concluded that 'in time there won't be many Hindus left.'[28]

We next come to Kakar's sketch of Nissar, a twenty-eight year old young 'tiger' and 'soldier,' who reveres Akbar and other famous Muslim pehlwans. Married with four children, he makes his living by selling vegetables; he stopped his training as a wrestler for economic reasons. Though not a *pehlwan* yet, he is known as a *dada* (elder brother) and considers himself 'a soldier in the service of the Muslim

maintained that 'Muslims never initiated any attacks, they only defended themselves. They are discriminated in every field and the police oppression is making the whole community mutinous. There is nothing like a riot to unite the community.' (Kakar, *ibid*., p. 57)

[25] Kakar, *ibid*., p. 59. For a more detailed account of Akbar's reputation and activities as a 'tiger's tiger,' see pp. 59–61.

[26] *Ibid*., p. 61.

[27] *Ibid*., p. 64.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 64. Akbar perhaps unwittingly affirms the propaganda of Hindu nationalists that Muslims of India have a higher birthrate than Hindus and are thereby swelling their numbers in comparison with the Hindus.

nation,' and serves it 'through *chaku-bazi*, wielding of the knife.'[29] His boastful rhetoric doubles the arithmetic of Majid Khan: 'We always make sure that if Hindus kill two of our people, we should kill four of theirs . . . I don't take a weapon with me when we go out to kill Hindus during a riot. I only have a wooden stave (*lathi*) . . . I make sure that the first person I confront on the other side is the one with a sword. I disarm him with my *lathi* and then kill him with his own sword.'[30]

Mangal Singh is the sole Hindu *pehlwan* profiled by Kakar, but he is a 'well-known Hindu *pehlwan*,' in many ways 'the Hindu counterpart of Akbar.' He belongs to the Lodha community whose prosperity apparently stems from illicit liquor distillation and distribution. 'The reputation of the Lodhas is of a mercurial and violent people who are always in the forefront of a riot from the Hindu side.'[31] Kakar reports that an old Hyderabad resident 'who has studied the community closely' told him that 'They will kill as many people in two hours as the rest will in a week.'[32]

Mangal Singh has two wives, conducts a profitable land business, has the obligatory chamchas as his retinue, and owns a large gymnasium (*vyamshala*) which 'trains more than a hundred boys and young men.' He is 'very active during communal disturbances,' and true to form, 'He is an embellisher of facts, some of which may get changed to fit in with what he believes to be true at a certain time.'[33]

I conclude this section by raising these questions. Kakar in Chapter 3 of his book presents the four *pehlwans* as zealous partisans and antagonists in the Hindu–Muslim confrontations in Hyderabad city. Their profiles are for the most part their self-representations, and it is clear that they make boastful claims about their prowess as warriors on behalf of their communities. The status of such rhetoric as a basis for assessing the overall occurrence and direction of violence is left unexamined.

Majid Khan's testimony that likens the Hindu–Muslim collisions to one day cricket matches (near symmetrical exchange of violence) is

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 71–2.
[31] *Ibid.*, p. 72.
[32] We are by now familiar with this kind of inflation as a figure of speech applied to the 'killers.'
[33] *Ibid.*, p. 78. Kakar mentions in passing that he has close connections with political parties such as the BJP and MLA, and contact with the RSS. On the whole, unlike Paul Brass's analysis, Kakar's book has very little documentation of the integral nexus between riot specialists and politicians.

quite different from the narratives given by Akbar and Nissar (and intimated by Mangal Singh), especially Akbar's and Nissar's claims of the larger killings inflicted by their side. Given the totally different claims made by three of the four warriors profiled in the same chapter, how is it that scholars like Fuller and Varshney (and others) pick Majid Khan's benign analogy and ignore the voices of Akbar, Nissar and Mangal Singh? Did they actually read Chapter 3 in its entirety, or were they repeating from hearsay a snippet that gets *typified* and *normalized* in its passage from scholar to scholar?

Kakar and Alter on the Cult of the Body and its Relation to Violence

There is a striking conjunction as well as a profound disjunction between Kakar's and Alter's representations of the Hindu and Muslim wrestlers as trained in their respective gymnasiums.

Kakar in fact refers to and borrows from Alter the latter's description of the wrestlers, trained in both Hindu and Muslim gymnasiums, as primarily concerned with the development of the body, fed by food such as milk, ghee, crushed almonds or chick peas, and focused on the conservation of semen as sexual energy.

Alter emphasizes that the wrestler develops his body to achieve self control primarily for moral and ethical purposes. He asserts that wrestling involves a physical regimen 'focused on the moral principles' of continence, internal and external cleanliness, simplicity and contemplation of god.[34] While Alter refers to the pahalwan as engaged in wrestling contests, he nowhere in his texts published in the early nineties (based on research conducted probably in the 1980s) mentions the wrestlers as using their bodily prowess for violent action or for engaging in the organization and conduct of riots and other forms of physical coercion.[35]

Kakar writing primarily (but not solely) about the Muslim wrestlers associated with the gymnasiums located in the city of Hyderabad,

[34] Joseph S. Alter, *The Wrestler's Body: Identity and Ideology in North India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), p. 83.

[35] Alter does compare the non-political vocation of wrestlers with the political commitments and militant nationalist activism of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He does however state that some of the wrestlers he encountered were members of the RSS or participated in their parades.

while overlapping with Alter regarding the wrestlers' concern with body building and semen control, deviates from Alter in characterizing the wrestlers he studied as deploying their bodily prowess for violent action, especially in the organizing and conduct of riots and other forms of coercion. Their disjunction apparently does not strike or is ignored by Kakar whose profiles of pehlwan as warriors and killers in the service of ethnic violence in Hindu–Muslim confrontations is disconnected from Alter's thesis that wrestling as a regimen is focused on the moral principles of 'continence, honesty, internal and external cleanliness, simplicity and contemplation of God.'[36]

'Retributive Justice': The Majoritarian Myth of Symmetrical Exchange of Violence

I would suggest that the concept of 'retributive justice', as enunciated by Thomas Hansen, to characterize the justification proffered by members of the majoritarian Shiv Sena (and advocates of Hindu nationalism) for the overwhelmingly asymmetrical violence committed against Muslims during the course of the Bombay riots of December 1992 and the early months of 1993,[37] is a version of the misplaced cricket analogy espoused by Kakar, Fuller, Mehta, and Varshney. In my view, whether it is consciously or unconsciously advanced, it constitutes a Hindu nationalist majoritarian apologetics. Hansen remarks, for example, that the answers given by V. Deshmuk, a former high ranking officer of the Special Branch of Bombay's Police Department, 'revealed that he subscribed to the widespread notion of communal violence as simple retributive justice, where a killing on each side cancels each other out and makes the two sides even. The grave failure of the Security Branch to monitor Shiv Sena could, in this view, be counterbalanced by its equally serious leniency toward Muslim communal organizations . . . '.[38]

In fact, the Bombay advocates of retributive justice and symmetrical equalizing exchange of violence reversed the direction of violence, and laid the blame for initiating violence upon the Muslims. 'The

[36] Alter, *ibid*., p. 83. Also see J. S. Alter, 'The Sanyasi and the Indian Wrestler: The Anatomy of a Relationship,' in *American Ethnologist* 16 no. 2, 1992, pp. 317–36.

[37] Hansen, *Wages of Violence*. See especially Chapter 5. My own chapter 9 in *Leveling Crowds* is in line with Hansen's detailed and authoritative portrayal of the riots.

[38] Hansen, *ibid*., pp. 138–9.

perception that Muslim aggression justified police brutality and later Hindu retaliation informed the testimony . . . of Shreekant Bapat who was Bombay's police commissioner during the riots.' This explanation was repeated by other officers.

It seems that the stoppages, delays and pressures experienced by the Srikrishna Commission took their toll and led it to conclude its report in language somewhat at variance from its own unambiguous indictments of the Bombay Police Force and the organized violence of the Shiv Sena. The temporal vicissitudes endured is as follows. A few weeks after the January riots of 1993, the government of Maharashtra set up a Commission of Inquiry headed by Justice Krishna of the High Court, and it began its work in Maharashtra in June 1993. When the Hindu nationalist coalition came to power in Maharashtra in March 1995 some twelve of the more than twenty cases pending against the Shiv Sena leader Thackeray for inciting violence were either withdrawn or removed from public prosecution for alleged 'security' reasons. The process of obstructing the commission's work was underway. And as the evidence mounted concerning Shiv Sena's prominent involvement in the two spells of violence and 'the many links between the party and the police force, the government decided in January 1996 to dissolve the Srikrishna Commission'.[39] But in May 1996 under pressure from the BJP national government in Delhi, the Srikrishna commission was revived, but now with an expanded mandate to include the 1993 bombings in Bombay attributed to Dawood Ibrahim, the expatriate and his Muslim 'gang' alleged to be affiliated with criminal networks in Bombay. This expansion of the mandate that now included the alleged culpability of Muslims, 'enjoyed considerable support in the public debates that followed' and this indicated that 'the dominant, official interpretation of the riots as irrational excesses committed in extraordinary situations spontaneously and with equal participation, by faceless Hindus and Muslims had gained widespread currency. The government's decision authorized the formula of a "balanced and equally apportioned guilt", namely, that every murder a Hindu committed was ethically neutralized by a corresponding atrocity committed by a Muslim. This notion of retributive justice, exploited by Shiv Sena's counsel and the Sena-led government in order to exonerate the party . . . was slowly imposed on the commission'.[40]

[39] *Ibid*., p. 141.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 142.

Some Queries

Let me return to Brass, and pinpoint a limitation in his representation of collective violence. While Brass's insights regarding the complicity of local democratic politics in fomenting collective violence is truly revelatory, his instrumentalist perspective, which informed his earlier writings, is carried over into his latest work as well, in so far as he assigns to the manipulations of 'duplicitous politicians an overwhelmingly powerful, self constituting role'.[41] Brass's Foucauldian perspective focuses on the competing narratives by local actors on what happened in riots which constitute a struggle over the meaning attributed to the conflict, which in turn is related to the battle over resources, public policies, and, sometimes, state policy.

I submit that in order better to understand civilian participation on a large scale—not as one massive monolithic crowd, but as many volatile and mobile crowds—one has to expand and extend our horizons by taking into account such features as the numbers and social composition of those involved, their rituals of provocation, and stereotyped procedures of deliberate disrespect, violation of sacred places, the temporal phases and duration of violence, the multiple sites and spatial locations of violence, and the patterning of destructive activities. One should also attempt to sense intersubjective heightened emotions that fuel the surges of destructive violence.[42]

One commentator, Rogers Brubaker, has generously remarked that 'The most sustained contribution in this genre is Tambiah's richly textured, multilayered account. While distancing himself from a simplistic instrumentalist interpretation of ethnic riots . . . [he] devotes considerable attention to the routinization and ritualization of violence, to the "organized" anticipated programmes and recurring features of seemingly spontaneous, chaotic and orgiastic actions.' Brubaker affirms the position I had taken in *Leveling Crowds* that 'an ethnic riot typically involves at one level deliberate manipulation and organization by a small number of instigators but also, at other

[41] Norbert Peabody, Collective Violence in our time. Review article, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2000, pp. 169–78.

[42] On rituals of provocation and violation of sacred spaces see also: M. Gaborieau, From Al-Beruni to Jinnah, *Anthropology Today* 1985; 1, 3, 1985. Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence. The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Ireland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 29–30. Christopher Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to the 1990s*. Viking, Penquin, India, 1996, Chapters 11, 12.

levels, turbulent currents of crowd behavior governed by powerful emotions and compelling collective representations requiring social psychological and cultural modes of analyses'.[43]

I conclude this section by raising two important queries in the study of collective political violence.

The first is this: under what circumstances do incidents of ethnic/ethnonationalist collective violence, especially as they have occurred in urban locations, become institutionalized as periodic, cyclical exchanges between two long-standing antagonists. When and how does such a sustained condition of bilateral violence develop into a state of continuous civil war. Northern Ireland, especially Belfast with the standoff between the IRA and the Unionists, between Catholics and Protestants, is a spectacular example.[44] [In these situations of bilateral exchanges both sides have numbers displaced from their places of habitation as long term refugees.] What confrontations in South and Southeast Asia have approximated or approximate or share affinities with this phenomenon.[45]

A counter question is to what extent are certain prominent outbursts of such collective violence occasional, even unprecedented, and most importantly asymmetrical in the sense that a dominant, even hegemonic majority, both as regards monopoly of physical force and demographic strength, victimize a minority which does not possess the manpower and the ability to return the violence on equal or near equal terms.[46] Such asymmetrical occurrences may occur periodically without a slide into civil war.[47] It is these one-sided asymmetrical

[43] Rogers Brubaker and Laitin, Ethnic and Nationalist Violence, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1998, 24, pp. 446–7.

[44] See for example: Feldman. *Formations of Violence: The Narratives of the Body and Political Terror in Ireland*; Begona Aretxaga: *Shattering Silence: Women, Nationalism and Political Subjectivity in Northern Ireland* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987).

[45] To what extent is Kashmir a similar instance. Unlike a single focal city of Belfast, the Kashmir conflict between Hindus and Muslims is distributed between two separate areas of concentration with incursions into urban locations. The Muslim–Hindu urban violence in Hyderabad City (Kakar) and Kanpur (Brass) seems to show evidence of systematic bilateral violence in spatially separate locations in which who is in the majority and who in the minority changes according to local demographic concentrations.

[46] Examples of this kind are the Sinhala–Muslim riots of 1915, and the Anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in Delhi following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi (see my *Leveling Crowds*, Chpts. 3 and 5.)

[47] The Sinhalese majoritarian attacks against the Sri Lankan Tamils, especially in Colombo, in 1956, 1958, 1977, 1981, 1983, who were principally located in the North

occurrences that typically pose aggressors on the one side and victims and displaced people on the other side, many of whom may not return to their original houses and reestablish their livelihoods.

The frequently asymmetrical nature of ethnic riots is impressively substantiated by Donald Horowitz. I cannot review and do justice in this essay to his encyclopedic study *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*,[48] which reports his findings of a study of 150 riots that occurred in about 50 countries mainly located in Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet Union. I merely want to mention here that this study, conducted independently of my *Leveling Crowds*, and published after it, makes unambiguous assertions which confirm my own views, which Fuller and Mehta have queried. Horowitz highlights the marked asymmetry of a majority's lethal attacks on the targeted minority victimized; he highlights the attackers' sense of just cause and collective entitlement to attack a minority characterized as posing a danger to the welfare of the majority; the explicit or tacit support of 'the civil authorities, the police, and the armed forces' which has the effect of 'overcoming the fear and moral inhibitions felt by potential rioters'; 'rumors of aggression by the target group [which] serve generally to underscore the gravity of the situation and to justify the riot as self defense.'[49] 'While the violence proceeds, there is a strong, although not exclusive, concentration on male victims of a particular ethnic identity . . . Rapes certainly occur in ethnic riots, sometimes a great many rapes, but the killing and mutilation of men is much more common than is the murder or rape of women.'[50] Horowitz firmly affirms what I had

(and Northeast), outside of Colombo and the Western Province, were asymmetrical. It was, however, at this point that the Tamil insurgents located in the North and (Northeast) outside of Colombo and the Western Province organized their armed resistance and attacks against the Sinhalese armed forces and Sinhalese settlements, including the bombings in Colombo. The Civil War in Sri Lanka thus differs from the civil war in Belfast. The recurrent attacks in Indonesia against the Chinese communities, especially in Jakarta, Medan and other urban locations may illustrate the asymmetrical condition.

[48] Horowitz. *The Deadly Ethnic Riot*. Some of the famous instances he cites are the anti-Ibo riots in Nigeria; the anti-Chinese riots in Malaysia in 1969; the anti-Bengali riots in 1980 in Tripura, India; the anti-Uzbek riots in Khyghistan in 1990; and the anti-Madurese riots in West Kalimantan 'in Indonesia in 1997 and 1998. Horowitz states that an ethnic riot as a 'single event', is 'an intense, sudden, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group'. Riots as such are larger wider occurrences, precipitating or triggering events, and waves of recurring riots may occur over a variable period of time.

[49] *Ibid*., p. 367.

[50] *Ibid*., p. 73.

sensed: 'An utter absence of remorse pervades the typical post-riot atmosphere. To be sure in some countries, most notably India, small but vocal groups of intellectuals and professionals speak up, investigate the violence, demand punishment, deplore the likelihood of further violence. But, across countries and centuries, what stands out is the general absence of such sentiments or actions taken on the basis of them.'[51] Horowitz makes this remark, which confirms my own view, that the conduct of democratic electoral politics in certain countries in Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Eastern Europe, has given rise to acute forms of political violence mainly in the form of riots.

Causality, Interpretation, and Explanation

Certain issues regarding explanation and 'causality' have been raised by Professor Pratap Mehta regarding the manner in which in *Leveling Crowds* I have dealt with 'the topography of urban civilian riots in South Asia.'[52] Mehta remarks that 'Tambiah wisely resists the temptation of monocausal explanations. A variety of factors—urbanization, the competition over real estate and other scarce resources, patterns of migration, the imperatives of electoral politics, the need for collective identities, wider patterns of acceptance of violence in society—converge to produce riots. Tambiah's analysis insightfully studies the relationship between local riot mechanisms and larger social and political transformations. This relationship is best exemplified by the processes of "focalization" and "transvaluation", the two modes in which violent incidents are converted into social texts. The former refers to the "process of progressive denudation of local incidents and disputes of their particulars of context and their aggregation". The latter refers to a "parallel process of assimilating particulars to a larger, collective, more enduring and therefore less context-bound, cause or interest" (*Leveling Crowds*, p. 192).[53]

But Mehta complains that my treatment of these complex features, which by accumulation constitute the particular riots I consider, does

[51] *Ibid*., p. 367.

[52] Pratap Bhanu Mehta. Ethnicity, Nationalism and Violence in South Asia. Review Article, *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 71, no. 3, Fall 1998.

[53] Mehta further adds that I adduce factors such as 'economic changes, unemployment, electoral politics, labor protests in the form of *hartals*' as involved in ethnic violence.

not weight these features and prioritize them—which he concedes is 'a difficult task'.

My reply is that my case study method of narrating certain riots, retrospectively labeled by the actors, media, and social scientists, as the Bombay riots of 1991–1992, the Delhi riots of 1984, and so on, involves locating these occurrences in the context of certain places and time, tracing antecedent features, and the way in which multiple factors dialectically and recursively interweave to produce an outcome.[54] I shall return shortly to the explanatory possibilities contained in my multi dimensional approach as discussed by Brubaker.

A second query and critique proffered by Mehta is actually a repeat of the comparative issue and the search for monocausality proposed by political scientist Ashutosh Varshney. Among a set of Indian cities which share similar features (or, as more hyperbolically alleged by Mehta, which manifest 'almost all the factors' listed by me 'as causing riots are present across South Asia during the last three decades'), why are only some cities prone to riots and others not.

In fact one study by Varshney and Wilkinson claims that twenty-four towns in India accounted for as many as 62 percent of the total deaths in (Hindu–Muslim) communal riots between 1960 and 1993, and these towns represent only a fifth of India's urban population and a mere 6 percent of India's total population.[55] The variation between Indian towns is indeed a relevant issue.

Varshney's ambitious search for a monocausal explanation is presented as follows: '...If we compare why the same incidents, rumors, skirmishes—Muslim boys eloping with Hindu girls, music before the mosques, deaths of cows in suspicious circumstances, the defeat of Hindu or Muslim wrestlers in a wrestling bout—lead to rioting in "riot prone" cities, whereas they don't in peaceful cities and towns in India, we understand that causation can be established. My own research in communally peaceful and violent cities of India shows that in conditions of deep civic engagement between Hindus and Muslims at the local level, the prior trust and communication

[54] My approach, which sociologist Brubaker views as a 'multicausal' approach, proceeds in an entirely different direction from the Varshney-Mehta search for a monocausal explanation of the presence and absence of Hindu–Muslim conflicts in Indian cities. Varshney sees his search for causality as a rejection of Brass's post-modern Foucauldian interpretive approach which focuses on the rival attribution and interpretation of causes by contending actors.

[55] Ashutosh Varshney and Steven I. Wilkinson, *Hindu Muslim Riots 1960–93*. Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, Project No. 12, 1996.

can't easily be broken by local thugs and politicians, including those who would benefit from communal violence . . . The nature of civic life, thus, emerges as a causal factor in such comparative analyses . . . Thus communal violence, if systematically compared with communal peace, allows us to get into the undoubtedly difficult issue of causation.'[56]

In the event, one major example of Varshney's monocausal offering consists of a comparison of Hindu–Muslim relations between two cities Hyderabad and Lucknow. The hypothesis simply put is that absence of 'civic engagement' results in conflict between Hindus and Muslims, whereas presence of civic engagement leads to absence of conflict.[57]

Varshney's ambition of monocausal demonstration turns out to be too imprecise even for a two-city comparison. It does not and cannot address the fact that the two cities of Lucknow and Hyderabad are so vastly different on many fronts that the concept 'social engagement' or its absence cannot contain them or sum them up. Muslims comprise 28 to 30 percent of Lucknow's population, and 35–37 percent of Hyderabad's. In earlier pre-British times Muslim Shia Princes and Nawabs ruled Lucknow, while the Nizams ruled Hyderabad. But now consider these stark differences between the cities. Lucknow's current economy is characterized by a old-craft-style putting-out system centered on 'embroidered textiles'. It is not a factory system. Hindu traders and entrepreneurs own and run the enterprises, but the workforce of craftsmen consists of Muslims whose women work as embroiderers at home. This craft industry has been run on the basis of trust and not legal contracts, and it has been tariff protected since Independence. Lucknow's economy is viewed by Varshney as an 'integrating' one.

Hyderabad, by contrast, is industrially much more advanced than Lucknow: it has several large industries in the organized sector. The majority of the Muslim population, however, are located in the economy's informal sector composed of small and very small businesses. No trader–customer linkages exist between Hindus and Muslims.

[56] Ashutosh Varshney. Review of Paul Brass (ed.). *Riots and Pogroms* (New York: New York University Press. 1996), *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, No. 1, Feb. 1999, pp. 131–3.

[57] Varshney's comparison is given in his Post Modernism, Civic Engagement and Ethnic Conflict, *Comparative Politics* (January 1997, pp. 1–19, and in detail in his *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*. In this latter work, Varshney gives two other paired comparisons between Aligarh and Calicut, and Ahmedabad and Surat which I shall comment on at a later time.

The city is bifurcated between the old city and the new, with the population of the former in particular being polarized between Hindus and Muslims, and very riot prone, while the more affluent latter is not. Riots have taken place between 1978 and 1995, regularly each year, sometimes two or three a year. Politically there is a polarization between the strongly pro-Muslim party, the Majlis-e-Itteh'ad (MIM) and the parties of the Hindus, which are dominated by the Hindu nationalists. Notably the MIM and the Hindu nationalists have thus split the city.

By comparison let us see how in Varshney's account the political segments line up in Lucknow. Hindus and Muslims living in neighborhoods, including Hindu nationalists, work together in peace committees, which is evidence of 'prior existence of civic engagements' and collaborations. It is claimed that in Lucknow, although Muslim parties exist, an overwhelming majority of Muslims do not vote for them, nor is there bloc voting by them. This profile of Hindu–Muslim collaboration is further strengthened by the fact that the only major Hindu–Muslim riot of the twentieth century took place in 1924. Remarks Varshney: 'Lucknow had no riots during the two biggest nation-wide "shocks" in the 20th century: India's partition in 1947, and the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992 in Ayodhya, a town only 70 miles away from Lucknow'.

Lucknow's combination of rare features in a major city, and its record since 1924 of no Hindu–Muslim riots, is, however, riven by another fault line of frequent violence, which is acknowledged but not given enough weight in Varshney's profile of civil society collaboration.

Historically there has been an acrimonious Muslim sectarian split between the Shias and the Sunnis, which goes back to the time of the rule of Shia princes and nobles. Varshney mentions that the Shia princes (1737–1856) actually struck alliances with the Hindus in opposition to the Sunnis, and this cleavage preceded the rise of the Indian national movement in Lucknow. Lucknow's Shia–Sunni violent collisions at the annual Muharram festival is well known as occurring into our present times.

Hyderabad by contrast is not exercised by a Shia–Sunni sectarian split. The story there is the different one of the Nizam's exercise of his authoritarian powers in the last decade of his rule (1937–1948) to block the formation of mass-level organizations that might have brought Hindus and Muslims together. From this complex and many-stranded profile of the two cities, one might advance the proposition that in Lucknow the primacy of the internal segmentation

and split between Shias and Sunnis plays and important role in the coalitional politics between segments of Muslims and Hindus, whereas in Hyderabad, for reasons already stated, a monolithic divide between Muslims and Hindus engenders conflict between them. The point of these profiles of the two cities is that an imprecise and overloaded notion of civic engagement is insufficient to serve as a clear-cut monocausal variable.

Varshney's analysis has a serious gap in that he fails to inquire how and to what extent the violence-prone sectarian cleavage between Lucknow's Shias and Sunnis directly relates to the economic relationships between the Muslim embroidery workers and the Hindu entrepreneurs and traders, who run the putting-out system. Are Shias and Sunnis both working for the same or different entrepreneurs, and is there a competition between Shia and Sunni craft families as clients of Hindu patrons? If there is, then does it not directly affect, feed and exacerbate the Shia–Sunni sectarian cleavage, which therefore cannot be cordoned off from the economic and political dynamics of Lucknow?

Such considerations may open the door to an alternative to Varshney's benign 'civic engagement' explanation of the virtual absence of Hindu–Muslim violence in Lucknow. This alternative hypothesis is as follows: The economic dominance exercised by Lucknow's entrepreneurs and traders, who also dominate Lucknow's politics as BJP politicians, over the working-class Muslim embroiderer families may pretty much suppress any likelihood of Lucknow's Muslims combining to wage violence against the Hindus. In sum there are two possible inferences: The so-called 'sectarian religious' divide cannot be disengaged from economic entanglements, class dynamics, and political power. And dominance—suppression may comprise an alternative hypothesis to that phrased as integrative civic engagement between Hindus and Muslims in Lucknow.

There are certain other problems relating to Varshney's comparative method of counting individual towns and cities as separate units, that are coded as riot-prone, or not riot-prone as if they were independent and bounded. This method misses out another feature of major instances of ethnonationalist violence such as, for instance, that which happened immediately following the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya, when a chain of riots occurred almost simultaneously or in close sequence in many of the cities of North India, culminating in the massive horrendous violence in Bombay in December 1991 and January 1992. (The riots originating in Colombo

in 1983, which I have described in detail elsewhere, also had a similar chain reaction and timing in other locations.)[58]

My misgivings about Varshney's method of seeking 'monocausal' explanations of the difference between towns that are prone to or immune from riots, stem also from my view that violent ethnonationalist occurrences involve the interweaving and dynamic interplay of multiple features and processes, some of which may be distinctive to particular locations, and others which may be discernible in many of them.

My narrations aspire to give dialectically interconnected accounts of retrospectively named larger social-political-formations. The sociologist Rogers Brubaker, who on the whole approves of my studies of ethnonationalist conflict and collective violence 'in which cultural, economic, political, and psychological considerations are deftly interwoven', proposes this programmatic notion of 'causal heterogeneity', which I leave to other methodologically sophisticated social scientists to explore in the future. Brubaker advocates a disaggregation of causes as follows:

> The paradigmatic instances of ethnic and nationalist violence are large events, extended in space and time. Moreover, they are composite and causally heterogeneous, consisting not of an assemblage of causally identical unit instances of ethnic violence but of a number of different types of actions, processes, occurrences, and events. For example, it is evident from the case literature that in Sri Lanka 'ethnic violence' consists of episodic riots on the one hand and more continuous low-level terrorism (and state violence in response to the terrorism) on the other, all occurring against the background of the 'cultural violence' perpetrated by a series of ethnocratic Sinhalese governments. Not only do the riots, terrorism, and state violence involve sharply opposed mechanisms and dynamics (in terms of degree and mode of organization, mode of recruitment and involvement of participants, affective tone, symbolic significance, contagiousness, degree and modality of purposeful rationality, and so on), but within each category there is also a great deal of causal heterogeneity. Thus an ethnic riot typically involves at one level deliberate manipulation and organization by a small number of instigators but also, at other levels, turbulent currents of crowd behavior governed by powerful emotions and compelling collective representations requiring social psychological and cultural modes of analysis.
>
> There is no reason to believe that these heterogeneous components of large-scale ethnic violence can be understood or explained through a single theoretical lens. Rather than aspire to construct a theory of ethnic

[58] These processes are considered in my *Leveling Crowds* (1996), and *Sri Lanka, Ethnic Fratricide and the Dismantling of Democracy* (1986).

and nationalist violence—a theory that would be vitiated by its lack of a meaningful explanandum—we should seek to identify, analyze, and explain the heterogeneous processes and mechanisms involved in generating the varied instances of what we all too casually lump together—given our prevailing ethnicizing interpretive frames—as 'ethnic violence'. This can be accomplished only through a research strategy firmly committed to disaggregation in both data collection and theory building.[59]

There is another feature of the kind of quantitative figures provided by Varshney which I find interesting and worth investigating further. Concentrating primarily on Hindu–Muslim violence, which he has characterized as India's most dangerous divide, he has identified 28 cities as riot-prone in the years 1950–95. What is particularly interesting to me is that he nominates eight cities as the most riot-prone (judged according to a measure of a minimum of fifty deaths in ten riots over five-year periods). They are in order of violence magnitude Bombay (Maharashtra), Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh), Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) Baroda (Gujarat), Delhi (Union Territory) and Calcutta (West Bengal). Among States the most riot-prone have been Gujarat and Maharashtra in Western India, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (North India). These eight cities in India are sites of a significantly disproportionate share of Hindu–Muslim violence: a little over half of all urban riots.

While a research project focused on variance, e.g. why some cities are riot-prone, and others not, may be a legitimate one, I find it compelling to propose as well another inquiry, namely why in South Asia the largest cities have been the principal sites of violence of an ethnonationalist kind (one might include in this list Colombo in Sri Lanka, Jakarta and Medan in Indonesia).

A systematic study awaits implementation, but I would like to highlight these features. The largest cities in South Asia are simultaneously the ones involved in modern industrial, manufacturing, and commercial expansion, and they are therefore also the most powerful magnets attracting massive numbers of rural migrants who swell the dense populations already in place. The most recent census reports should enable us to establish the differential migration rates to towns and cities. A significant number of these migrants are literate or

[59] Brubaker; Ethnic and Nationalist Violence, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1998, 24, pp. 446–7. Brubaker remarks that others like R. Williams, J. Snyder, Don Horowitz have advocated the disaggregation of the different strands.

semi-literate youths who however do not find adequate employment and are looking for patrons and are ready to be mobilized for political action, and to join social movements.

These large-scale cities are the seats of the major universities, technical and junior colleges, and secondary schools, and they possess modern communicational media and facilities, numerous public places and squares, and most relevantly, the transportation networks (including bus and railway stations) which facilitate political and religious leaders to mobilize followers for mass action and to launch demonstrations. These same cities most likely have the largest mixes of different religious, linguistic and regional groups, some of them recently arrived and jostling with other groups for living space and economic and occupational niches. Such competitive pressures threaten the local embedded middle classes who are attracted to bhumiputra populist propaganda. We also have to include in this potent mix the consideration that these very large cities are the sites of the steepest differences between the rich and the poor, between corporate business interests and factory owners on the one side and wage labor on the other, itself made divisive on issues of unionization. Add to this attempts by corporate industry and banks, hungry for space, to displace poor people in old neighborhoods surrounding cotton mills, now defunct, and to remove people from squatter settlements, whose dwellers previously converted unlivable swamps into habitations. It is no mystery why the city's police force, drawn overwhelmingly from the ranks of a population swayed by populist communalism, stands by or even collaborates in the violence.

I had begun in a modest way some years ago a study of Bombay, which manifests these characteristics, to try and answer the puzzle as to how this city, celebrated as India's most cosmopolitan and modern city, became the site of the worst Hindu–Muslim violence, since the time of partition. Thomas Hansen's timely recently published book, *Wages of Violence; Naming and Identity in Post Colonial Bombay*[60] provides an excellent deep study. It has been since British colonial times, a primary industrial center. I suggest that Ahmedabad in Gujarat is another prime candidate, famous for its cotton mills, and recently in the months of February and March of last year (2002), it was the site of murderous riots, following the Godhra railway incident. Ahmedabad, like Bombay, has a history of previous violence, a virulent example of

[60] Princeton University Press, 2001.

which was the 1969 riots when six thousand dwellings and one hundred factories and ware houses were looted or destroyed, and three Hindu temples, thirty-seven Mosques, fifty tombs of Muslim saints and six cemeteries were destroyed.[61]

Is Hindu–Muslim Cleavage the Paradigmatic Case?

India no doubt is the most populous and territorially largest country, and the dominant presence in South Asia. But of course it is not the only country in the region. The question therefore arises for scholars of South Asia as to how we are to weigh and compare the multiple ethno-nationalist conflicts and political violence in the region.

For many of the scholars writing on political conflict in India, the Hindu–Muslim divide has been the major point of reference and preoccupation. The 'subaltern' school of historians seem to highlight the divide in two divergent ways. For example, Gyanendra Pandey in his book *The Constitution of Communalism in Colonial North India* powerfully argued that the British employed the Hindu–Muslim 'communal' divide as the master narrative to explain all riots and public disturbances in which Hindus, and Muslims (and others) were involved, and moreover to characterize quite a few incidents in which no trace of 'communalism' can be found in the historical record.[62]

Commenting on the characterization of political developments in India before and after independence, Pandey has remarked that the nationalist discourse has tended to celebrate the Independence struggle, and to reduce the Hindu–Muslim strife to being a minor phenomenon in the main anti-colonial struggle for Independence from British rule. The Partition was 'for the majority of people living in what are now the divided territories of northern India, Pakistan and

[61] Marc Gaborieau, *From Al-Beruni to Jinnah, Indian Ritual and Ideology of the Hindu–Muslim Confrontation in South Asia* cites these figures from v. Graff, *Les émeutes communalists de 1969 à Ahmedabad* (Purusartha, Paris, EHESS, 1977), Vol. 3, pp. 179–214.

Varshney in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life* deals with Ahmedabad in recent decades including the BJP's coming to power in 1995, but his book was completed before the murderous anti-Muslim pogrom and rioting that ravaged in that city after the Bodhra incident, during the watch of the BJP.

[62] Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Bangladesh, *the* event of the twentieth century, and difference-inspired strife between Hindus and Muslims persists in India today.'[63]

The Hindu–Muslim divide has been most definitely since 1947 a continuous cleavage that has been kept on the boil on account of the Kashmir dispute. It is well known that the contemporary ideologues of Hindu nationalism have viewed the approximately 120 million Muslims residing in India as the enemy within, and the Muslims living in Pakistan as the enemy without, and that they orchestrated the demolition of the Babri mosque in December 1992 in affirmation of an alleged cultural unity and identity.

At another level and context, that of academic commentary, some of the prominent recent texts that focus on Hindu Nationalism, for example, works authored by Jaffrelot, Hansen, Van der Veer, Lisa McKean[64]—entail discussion of the Hindu–Muslim divide. Or if others focus on political violence and riots, they also foreground Hindu–Muslim clashes as the primary episodes to consider—e.g. Sudhir Kakar's *The Colors of Violence* deals exclusively with Hindu–Muslim antagonism in Hyderabad city, and so do large parts of Paul Brass's *Theft of an Idol*, especially the violence that occurred in Kanpur city in 1990.

Much of Asghar Ali Engineer's writings also concentrate on Hindu–Muslim confrontations.[65] The most recent in this genre is Ashutosh Varshney's attempt to provide a causal analysis of the variance in Hindu–Muslim riots in three pairs of cities.[66]

Scholars concerned with ethnic/ethnonationalist conflicts in South Asia as a region have yet adequately to deal with some comparative issues both temporal and spatial. First, with regard to Hindu–Muslim antagonism how far back in time have they occurred? Marc Gaborieau has asserted that that there is a long literary legacy ranging from Al-Beruni in the 11th century to Jinnah in the twentieth expressing sentiments of opposition and difference between Hindus

[63] See Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, pp. 23, 313–22 for a summary of Pandey's submissions.

[64] Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India*; Thomas Blom Hansen; *The Saffron Wave: Hindu Nationalism and Democracy in Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

[65] For example Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India* (New Delhi: Sangam, 1991).

[66] Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*. The cities are Aligarh and Calicut, Hyderabad and Lucknow, and Ahmedabad and Surat.

and Muslims.[67] Others have referred to a long 'cultural memory' and remembrance, how continuous and consistent it is not clear, of clashes between Hindus and Muslims. Such characterizations seem to have an affinity with the 'primordialist' thesis. The term 'primordial' is defined in the dictionary as 'existing from the beginning,' 'first formed,' and more loosely used in social science literature to denote long established pre-modern ties of 'kinship', 'tribalism' and 'racial identity'. Sudhir Kakar in *Colors of Violence* seems to view the Hindu–Muslim enmity as primordial in this sense.

There are certain historical viewpoints which see occurrences of Hindu–Muslim 'communalism' in pre-British times as predating the 'communal divide' coined or exploited by the British.[68] Coming to later times, aside from the violence engendered by the Partition and the memories and traumas that ensued, it is significant that, as Varshney has indicated, there are a number of Indian cities which during the period 1950–1995 (and of course thereafter) have experienced intermittent riot episodes between Hindus and Muslims.

Such long term frequency of conflicts in India between Hindus and Muslims is not matched in any other part of South Asia between any two ethnic groups. However, an historian may rightly point out that contextual and motivating issues and circumstances of Hindu–Muslim conflicts in India may have been different in individual occurrences, and therefore cannot be lumped together.

In answer to the question as to the degree to which the Hindu–Muslim cleavage and conflict should be taken as the paradigmatic long durée case for understanding other ethnic conflicts in the South Asian region I would submit the following counter examples.

The Hindu–Sikh political violence that came to a boil in North India in the 1980s was a new eruption. In *Leveling Crowds*[69] I have cited Harjot Oberoi as demonstrating that the militant Tat Khalsa in its latest form was one among other Sikh traditions, such as the Sanatan, which in the past had associational and ritual links with Hinduism. Bhindranwale's fundamentalist militancy aimed against Hindu hegemony as he saw it and his advocacy of Khalistan came to a head only in recent times. In any event, the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in Delhi (and elsewhere) after

[67] Marc Gaborieau, From Al-Beruni to Jinnah.

[68] C. A. Bayly, The Pre-History of 'Communalism'? Religions in Conflict in India, 1700–1860, *Modern Asian Studies* 19, No. 2, 1985, pp. 177–203.

[69] Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*; Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in Sikh Tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994).

the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi were singular, and on the Sikh side organized violence by radical secret fraternities had subsided by the mid-1990s.[70]

Let me briefly allude to a few other ethnonationalist conflicts whose origins are recent. In Pakistan the Muhajir–Sindhi conflicts and the Pathan–Bihari clashes in which Muslims were pitted against one another were engendered by issues relating to migration, demographic proportions, control of urban space and electoral competition etc. These violent clashes peaked in the 1980s. Again, Bal Thackeray's mobilization of the Shiv Sena on behalf of the advancement of the interests of the Maharashtrian sons of the soil was launched originally in the 1960s against South Indian migrants' entry into clerical occupations. And later his Shiv Sena joined the Hindu nationalist cause and, as we have seen earlier, was vigorously and violently involved in the Bombay riots of 1992 and 1993[71] which were targeted against Muslims, who first came in numbers from the Deccan and North India in the late nineteenth century, to Bombay to work in the cotton mills as weavers and spinners in central Bombay, and lived there in both ethnically mixed and separate neighborhoods. This residential pattern changed as a result of the 1992–93 riots when Muslims fled to and became concentrated in their own majority areas like Nagpada.[72]

However, there is a sense in which in the mobilization of Shiv Sena, Thackeray was tapping into the military traditions in the Deccan, principally the mythologized glory of Shivaji (1627–1680) who founded the Maratha Kingdom, and staged raids against the Mughal Empire. This legacy of the Maratha past 'serves today as an important mythical reservoir for virtually all political forces seeking justification in the region's history'.[73] Thackeray fused this Maratha militant regional nationalism with the wider Hindutva RSS-BJP style nationalism at the time of the Ayodhya campaign and the subsequent politics of the Maharashtra State. The question it whether the Bombay-style Maratha chauvinism is some kind of deeply entrenched animosity focused on Muslims, past and present, or whether it is a generalized xenophobic resentment against all immigrant outsiders who are perceived as threatening Maratha interests and identity:

[70] See for example Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Chapter 5, 'Sword of Sikhism', pp. 84–92.

[71] Relevant discussions are, among others, Jaffrelot (*op.cit.*), Hansen (*op.cit.*).

[72] See Hansen 2001 *op.cit.*, Chapter 6, pp. 160ff.

[73] Hansen *op.cit.* p. 25. He gives a summary of various 20th century works on Maratha history.

as exemplified by campaigns at different times in the later part of the twentieth century, against South Indians, against Muslims, and against Gujaratis.

Let me now turn to Sri Lanka, and comment on whether the alleged entrenched Hindu–Muslim cleavage in India and the periodic political violence that it has generated, bears resemblance to recent Sinhalese–Tamil conflicts in Sri Lanka. I have in my writings on Sri Lanka[74] submitted that while there is a long tradition of chronicles composed by literati-monks which may be read as asserting a Sinhala Buddhist identity and hegemony over the island, and in tandem anti-Tamil sentiments, there is also the countervailing evidence in Sinhalese history of streams of migration into the island of a variety of South Indian peoples who together with their religious and cultural practices were beneficiaries of tolerant assimilation and incorporation. The recognition of these processes of Sinhalization and Buddhicization of these peoples should serve as an antidote to the strident Buddhist nationalism of recent decades propagated by certain right-wing elements, who initiated a series of anti-Tamil riots, which in turn produced a violent Tamil resistance and counter assaults.

In any case, as many other commentators have also made the judgment that the post-1983 occurrences of Sinhala–Tamil riots[75] 'as indeed the earlier 1915 Sinhala–Muslim riots' have had their genesis in late nineteenth-century British colonial times, and subsequently more relevantly in the dynamics of post-independence nation state making in a plural society dominated and driven by majoritarian democratic electoral politics, which subordinate and marginalize minority concerns and voices. It is hoped that the current peace negotiations between the Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim groups will produce a peace settlement according to a federal arrangement.

[74] Stanley Tambiah, *Buddhism Betrayed? Religion, Politics and Violence in Sri Lanka* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), especially Chapter 13, in which I discuss 'Sinhalese Identity and the Legacy of the Past', and cite a number of sources, and the submissions by an array of scholars on historical memories and processes.

[75] See Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds*, Chapter 3, 'The 1915 Sinhala Buddhist–Muslim Riots in Ceylon', pp. 36–81.