Report by Ravinder Kaur and Staffan Lindberg from the workshop:

Religious Mobilisation and Organised Violence in Contemporary South Asia

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Platform

Excerpts from the invitation:

"Religious violence, also called communal violence, is often described as a ritual or a 'pact of violence between social groups' that keeps the community boundaries in place. At times the ritual turns from symbolism into organised pogrom. This is sometimes explained, for example, by the police agencies as handiwork of 'local criminal elements', or as effects of deep religious passions and sentiments. These explanations not only provide convenient excuses, but also imply that religious violence be accepted as an inevitable feature of the South Asian social fabric. Any meaningful legal enquiry into the development of religious violence, therefore, is made redundant because violence with religious overtones is considered outside the universe of criminal offences. This raises questions about the role of state and the institutions of law enforcement and policing. Do they hibernate at such critical times or do they actively engage themselves in violence? In Gujarat, state's withdrawal, or its active complicity at times, has been clearly demonstrated where the state's Chief Minister followed the internecine violence with a '*Gaurav Yatra',* the celebratory 'journey of pride' through Gujarat. …

How can we understand the face of violence characterised by a lack of remorse combined with brash display of communal power? This question opens the domain of religious mobilisation through sustained, long-term programmes organised by the nationalist groups with religious overtones and undeclared political ambitions. … The significance of these riots lies not just in the brutality and the number of people killed but also in the systematic destruction of residential and commercial properties that belonged to Muslims. The continuation of economic-social exchanges between the communities in post-riots situation is now rendered impossible with the destruction of homes and sources of livelihood. Similarly Islamic organisations, especially the ones stemming from the *Wahabis*, seem to be engaged in militant activities, suicide attacks etc, that are collectively dubbed as Islamic terror networks'. With these transnational networks, said to be rooted in South-Central Asia, the issue ceases to be of mere national or even bilateral significance between India and Pakistan.

The third and last theme is that of symbolism, scale and nature of violence. The attacks on Hindu temples in Gujarat and Jammu in 2002 and the destruction of *Babri Masjid* (mosque) in *Ayodhya* a decade ago augured a new kind of highly charged symbolic politics. The violence is no longer represented as mindless act of fringe elements of society but as well thought out strategies with years of mobilisation behind it using to full effect the emotional power of TV media and a strongly communalised vernacular press. The banning of electronic media from Gujarat in March 2002, for instance, stands in stark contrast to the highly charged news coverage in India of the attacks on temples, or incidents in Kashmir.

This two day workshop attempts to cover the issues and questions opened by the recent events in South Asia through comparative or specific studies of religious violence, organisations and their national/transnational linkages both at empirical and conceptual levels. The range of suggested themes are:

- the mythology of religious violence that limits the scope of enquiry to poor urban fringe sections of the society;
- organisations and processes of religious mobilisation that have produced an intolerant and unapologetic constituency of the middle classes;
- scale and nature of the new violence (e.g. Gujarat) that significantly departs from the better known forms of religious violence;
- the role of state and other institutions of law and governance such as courts, police etc. that are not only seen as having withdrawn but also as facilitators of violence."

Paper presentations

1. The Body as Symbol in the Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence
by Paul Brass, Professor Emeritus, Washington, USA (brass@u.washington.edu)

Excerpts from the paper:

"Partition of the Hindu Body
I want to return now to my opening remarks concerning the uses of history to perpetuate communal animosities in India and to justify Hindu retaliation against Muslims. I believe that there are considerable differences between Hindu and Muslim approaches to the past, not just in their understanding of past periods, events, and rulers, but in their degree of absorption in the past. Whatever the differences between Hindu and Muslim approaches to their past, it is evident that Hindus are far more absorbed in theirs than are Muslims. They live their imagined past in the present and perceive every imagined wrong, especially those imagined to have been done by Muslim conquerors, as if it happened only yesterday, not five hundred years before by people

differently defined and aligned in relation to each other. They blame Muslims for the loss of their past and of the monumental evidence of their former greatness in north India, which they believe was destroyed by Muslim generals and rulers.

These conflicting historical consciousnesses and identifications culminated in a terrifyingly precise moment in modern Indian history, that is, the Partition, which stands for most educated Hindus—and in northern India, most Hindus in general—as a historical scar that not only divided the subcontinent but defied the truth they had fought for as their rightful heritage: the unity of India. Muslims, for their part, fought for another truth invented out of their past in India, namely, that they constituted a separate civilization distinct from that of the Hindus, that they had always been separate, and would have to remain so in the future. Leaving aside the question of the causes of Partition, on which much ink has been spilt, it stands as the first catastrophe in modern South Asia of the historical consciousness. Partition certainly arose out of political struggles, but one of those struggles was over the past, combined with a fear of a future in which two cultures perceived as historically distinct would not be able to live together in peace. Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in Aligarh, laid the Muslim foundation for separatism that Jinnah turned into a political weapon. And in Aligarh itself stands the very institution that Hindus deem to have constructed the ideology and the leadership that produced this moment of violence and chaos, the Aligarh Muslim University. Further, the militant Hindus claim to believe that the AMU and all the distinctive institutions of the Muslims in India, even their very religious beliefs, threaten Hindu India, India that is Hindu, with further partition, violence, and chaos.

For these Hindus, living in an imagined past, the path to the glorious future—that rightfully belongs to India because of the greatness of its ancient civilizations before the arrival of the Muslims and the British—is blocked. It is blocked, on the one hand, by the remnants of that more recent past of Muslim conquerors, empires, monuments, and mosques built upon the ruins, real and imagined, of Hindu monuments and temples. That past has to be rectified before Hindus can be released from its bonds to achieve the future greatness that belongs to them. A major step in this direction was the destruction of the mosque at Ayodhya, which, to countless Hindus, signified the beginnings of their release from "slavery." For some, the destruction of at least two more mosques—those in Mathura and Varanasi—and perhaps many others may be necessary before the past can be finally rectified and Hindus achieve full freedom at last.

On the other hand, all militant Hindus and many who are not associated with the organizations of militant Hinduism also suffer from an obsessive concentration on that moment when Independence was achieved and sullied by Partition. They suffer from the presence in the very present of the evidences of Partition and the imagined dangers of future partitions. In Aligarh, the AMU stands for that presence. Elsewhere, in every major city and town in north India, there are further symbols of that presence wherever there are large concentrations of Muslim populations. These Muslim concentrations are called "mini-Pakistans." These "mini-Pakistans" in turn are seen as the centers of riot production designed to intimidate Hindus and generate more and more partitions, more and more violence on the Hindu body."

Discussion by Staffan Lindberg:

Summary:

The paper is a solid empirically grounded exposition of a strong thesis: Hindu-Muslim antagonism and violence in North and Central India is grounded in a political and ideological discourse with a significant historical mythology, which have developed over a long period of time.

The antagonism involves the following elements: It is a communal discourse with a long-term view of the history of current Indian society. Hindus regard Muslims as conquerors who destroyed a great Hindu civilisation. By opting for partition and a separate Muslim state, they feel Muslims have vivisected Indian society, ripped a living part away from the Indian body. There are living memorials of Muslim conquest, subjugation and destruction: mosques, Muslims enclaves (called “mini-Pakistans”), and Muslim institutions (such as Aligarh Muslim University). Therefore, Hindus have the right of revenge and to destroy Muslims. The destruction aims at human beings (bodies) and is seen as necessary in order to restore India to its former greatness. The empirical ‘body’ count shows that the violence is instigated by Hindus, the killing of Muslims is done in great numbers, and the police is often involved in these acts.

Brass notes three types of violence: 1) Murder of Hindus to stir up feelings, mutilation of bodies, 2) Mob violence, which results in the killing of both Muslims and Hindus (Hindus are normally stronger and more Muslims are killed in these fights); and 3) Police violence, which is directed against Muslims, resulting in ever more Muslims deaths.

Comment:

The paper describes a terrible reality. At first I had difficulty reading, shying away from what the words stood for. But, it is a meticulous work and very convincing as well.

Questions to discuss:

1. Was it this scenario that Jinnah and others feared most? I remember reading statements to this effect.

2. Sometimes in the text one gets the feeling that this Hindu discourse is embraced by all Hindus. How widespread is it actually? Sangh Parivar, other militant Hindu groups? There is, of course, also a time dimension to this.

3. In what way can one say that this symbolic violence directed at the ‘human body’ is unique to the Hindutva discourse? Is it not also present in a number of other ethnic clashes, like that instigated by Ku-Klux-Kan or that inflicted by various groups in the break up conflicts of former Yugoslavia?

4. Why are the police forces acting in such one-sided manner even under Congress governments?

5. How is one to interpret those episodes where Muslims take the initiative, like in the Gujarat carnage starting 27 February last year?

6. What is actually the role of religion in these? We see terrorist violence from Catholic rebels in Ireland trying to get rid of 350 years of British colonialism. We don't see such violence in Scania, where I come from, despite the fact that we were conquered from Denmark by Sweden at the same time as Cromwell's armies struck Ireland? Is it religious belonging and the fact that we were all Lutherans of the same type that makes the difference? Or is there another explanation that combines economic relations, political and cultural development and the changing role of religion?

7. What is the wider context and dynamics of the rise to dominance of this Hindu discourse and political actions? Class wars taking religious formats? Struggle for control over the state using religion under the banner of nationalism?

8. There is obviously a dynamic in the strength and consequences of this close to 'genocide' Hindu discourse and mode of action, so that after a peak following partition, there was low intensity and low incidence of violence during the high time of the Nehru Congress modernisation project, only for it to return in the period 1980 – 1990s and still, as we know. So what are the counter-forces? Modernism?

Added later in correspondence:

Paul Brass' answers to these questions:

1. No, they fomented it.

2. Increasingly widely spread among Hindu upper castes and classes.

3. Yes.

4. They are "infected" with anti-Muslim animosities themselves, and act that way when there are no explicit orders to the contrary.

5. Muslims do sometimes take the initiative in a variety of different situations, e.g., a) when they are incited and feel offended by an act or action by Hindus or the government or a novel by Salman Rushdie or b) when a local quarrel between a Hindu and a Muslim expands into a fracas and people rush to defend the Muslim side; or c) when Muslim criminals themselves precipitate a riot, sometimes even at the behest of Hindu politicians, who use them for the purpose and who then gain an opportunity to loot, sure that they will not be arrested or, if arrested, will be freed.

6. It is not religion, but the deliberate creation of a politico-religious consciousness.

7. I don't see class war involved in riot production. I do agree with your second idea, namely, that it is involved with a "struggle for control over the state ..." This struggle intensified with the decline of the Congress and of secular politics, which predominated during the Congress heyday when the primary opposition parties also pursued secular policies and strategies.

8. The counter-forces depend on the political context: changing fortunes of parties, effectiveness of communal mobilization strategies in particular contexts, political advantage to be gained from controlling violence against Muslims, combined with the political will to do so.

Once again, many thanks for your careful summary of my paper, your gentle comments, and your interesting questions.

2. Between Ethnicity and Communalism

by Dipankar Gupta, Professor, JNU, Delhi (dipankargupta@hotmail.com)

Excerpts from the paper:

Introduction: “Why the Nation-State?

Ethnicity requires a little terminological clarification. Though this term is of American provenance and was popularly in use in the United States from the early 1960s, it has become part of the academic lexicon only in the last twenty years or so. It refers most generally to identities that are ascriptive in nature, but that does not help very much. As there are already other concepts of this order, most notably traditionalism, ascription and communalism, why introduce yet another without any proven analytical advantage?

Ethnicity has a close cognate in the term communalism, particularly in the way the latter is used in the Indian context. Communalism is about identities, which again are ascriptive in nature and has, in addition, a particularly pejorative connotation. Communalism is backward looking in contrast to forward looking secularism. Not everywhere is communalism understood in this fashion. For example, in America, communalism is a good word. It calls out to community fellow feeling and to a rather cherishable attribute of good will and neighbourliness.

In India today the terms ethnicity and communalism are often used interchangeably. Sometimes ethnic identities are also meant to signify a quiescent adherence to the diacritics of one’s identities, whether caste or religious. This would imply that communalism is the activist expression of such sentiments especially when they are contrapuntally positioned against a hated, or negativised, “other”. Nevertheless, here again we do not have a consensus. On many occasions communal movements are also called ethnic movements, and the terms slip back and forth in easy synonymy.

There is still a need to distinguish between these two terms because ascriptive movements in India, and, I daresay, elsewhere as well, are not of the same kind. In particular, not all ascriptive movements thematise the nation-state. Most often they angularly position themselves against the other, but do not see their enemy as an outsider to the nation-state, but rather as a community that has got more than it deserves from the existing state of affairs in the country. Hence it is the government that is thematised in this connection.

This is why it is important to separate out ascriptive movements into communal and ethnic ones depending on how they relate to the nation-state. This is important as the dynamics and logics of the two are quite distinct. As ethnic movements thematise the nation-state, they easily become concerns of the country as a whole regardless of where exactly the flashpoint may be currently positioned. Ethnic movements are also so many determinations to symbolically flag march national unity in the face of external threats. Thus when the term ethnic cleansing is used it is meant to signify that impurities have entered the body politic of the nation-state and they have to be extirpated forthwith. Room for compromise is limited and negotiations, if any, are aimed at arriving at the most effective way of curtailing the influence of these extra territorial communities. Ethnic movements are a dogmatic assertion of national unity at the expense of those others who are within the nation-state but are considered to be outsiders. Thus ethnic movements turn insiders into outsiders. In the final analysis, an ethnic movement may well be seen as an indicator of nervousness regarding the durability of the nation-state and its territorial possessions.

Communalism has other concerns, but none of them are nearly as grand as the ambitions of ethnic movements. The "other" in communal movements are legitimate members of the nation-state, but are seen as too greedy, demanding and grasping. In addition, if such communities have all these unsavoury characteristics then it is largely because the government has given them a larger slice of the cake than what they are entitled to. Thus linguistic and caste mobilisations are communal in character. Even the dispute over Cauvery waters can be considered as a species of communalism- especially in the way in which politicians from Karnataka and Tamilnadu are colouring this dispute. While people elsewhere may follow the Cauvery dispute with interest, it is not with passion. Cauvery is a highly regional affair that does not concern other provinces in India. Even when political differences arise between Scheduled Castes and the rest, rarely does the entire country get agitated by it. The relationship between Scheduled Castes and Caste Hindus is not the same everywhere. If one factors in the interventions of the Backward Castes into this then the equations between castes become highly variable across the many regions of India.

This is certainly not the case with the way in which the country responded to Punjab, to Kashmir and now even to Gujarat. Even in those areas where there were a very small number of Sikhs, anti-Sikh sentiments were quite apparently manifest. Bokaro Steel City is not known for its many Sikhs, and yet the devastation that this community faced there in the post Indira Gandhi assassination massacres were no less gruesome than what happened in Delhi where the killings began. Kashmiri Hindus can and do get a sympathetic hearing in Mumbai, and the Godhra incident, where Muslims killed a compartment load of Hindus returning from Ayodhyaya, aroused angry passions all over the country.

…

Conclusion: Ethnic and Communal Movements: Between Status and Class

We can now pick up the theme of ethnicity versus communal movements again with the help of some of the empirical material provided in the preceding pages. As we mentioned in the early sections of this paper, ethnicity thematises the state (and with it sovereignty and territory), but communalism targets the government. Now we can go further and assert that in ethnic movements the state loses its tridic node, or at least every attempt is made, by at least one of the protagonists, to undermine the state's occupation of this locus. This is the ultimate success of an ethnic movement. But not all ethnic movements manage to come this far. When they are thwarted in their ambitions to attain this climax it is because they do not have enough adherents on their side. For example, when the Punjabi Suba was agitating for a unilingual Punjab, many Hindu opponents tried to give this demand an ethnic dimension saying that it was a thinly disguised attempt at another partition. Fortunately, this interpretation did not take wing and a unilingual Punjab came into being in 1965. The state held its triadic post.

In a communal movement the sovereignty of the state is never in doubt, which is why the government of the day is importuned to act as an official arbiter and redress the grievances brought to its notice by interested parties. The complaints usually are that members of the communal "other" are either grossly misutilising resources, or are undermining the good faith on the basis of which administration is run, or that there are some new laws that must be put into effect so that social imbalances do not occur, and so on. For example, caste conflict are usually about how a certain section of the population is taking undue advantage of legal and statutory provisions. Or, conversely, how certain vested interests are not allowing underprivileged castes in asserting what is legally theirs. Linguistic movements of the 1960s demanded that better laws be in place so that the spirit of the constitution and that of federalism could be realised in practice. The Cauvery water dispute between Karnataka and Tamilnadu is balanced on the Supreme Court's verdict, though both sides are doing their best to influence the Court's decision.

Now we can add another aspect that differentiates communal movements from ethnic movements, at least in the context of contemporary India. I admit that this may not hold in other circumstances, but that is because every nation-state has come into being following its own unique path. Ethnic movements in India are not driven by economic considerations. When Hindu mobs attacked poor Muslims in Gujarat, it was not as if they wanted their jobs. When the RSS and other right wing Hindu organisations hit out at Muslims and urged that they all go to Pakistan it is not with the intention of taking over their land, or their property. True, there may be certain manipulators in the ranks who see some petty economic interests being served, but one cannot in any way justify ethnic movements by calling out to economic factors.

The Shiv Sena's attack on South Indians was indeed determined by economic reasons and by the peculiar demographic and social profile of Mumbai. Imagine Mumbai in 1966. Here in the capital of Maharashtra, native Marathi speaking people constituted only 43% of the population. The best jobs and the best localities belonged to the non-Marathi speaking people. The lower middle class educated Maharashtrian faced a rather stiff competition from migrants from South India as the latter were better qualified for white collar and frayed white collar jobs. It is in this context that Bal Thackeray advised his followers to learn English and typing in a hurry.

When Shiv Sena dropped the South Indians as their main enemies and turned full time ethnic, the transition cannot be understood in pure economic terms. It did not have an economic agenda as such on the basis of which their partisans could be motivated to attack Muslims. Members of the real estate mafia in Mumbai saw some advantages in clearing slums so that they could then capture the areas for mega profits, but as for the ordinary mass of Shiv Sainiks and their many supporters are concerned, money was not the consideration. In ethnic movements it is not so much class as status that is relevant. Hindutva asserts the status of being the real Indians. For this status to be truly compelling it cannot be soiled by economic considerations.

As ethnicity is a quest for affirming status there are only absolute winners and losers. Unlike a movement spurred by economic grievances where there are chances of a compromise, status seeking ethnic movements are absolutist in their scope. This is probably why ethnic movements invite so much violence without any remorse. The ethnic "other" is after all an alien, someone who does not belong to the nation-state. In caste movements in India, it is not as if poorer castes are told to leave the country, or denied their claims to being Indian. Dominant and prosperous castes must negotiate a future with them even as they are engaged in political struggle. Further, when Dalit castes fight for respectability, a large part of it is fuelled by their economic deprivation, both in the village as in towns. Land rights and jobs frequently accompany Dalit mobilisations, though there are instances of Dalits striking out for pure status as well, particularly in the many Buddhist conversion movements. What however keeps Dalit uprisings from becoming ethnic is that so far Buddhism is not seen as a threat to the nation-state by Hindu activists. The matter would have been quite different if Dalits chose to convert themselves to Islam. Even so, as Buddhists they have often earned the ire of Bal Thackeray because of their irreverence to Hindu sacerdotal texts. That it is Islam that arouses the greatest ire in ethnic mobilisations is because of the presence of Pakistan and the tragedy of the Partition.

Though there are elements of status imbedded in many communal assertions, there are often clear economic reasons why language movements get the kind of partisanship that they do, or why people can be activated to fight for the formation of Jharkhand, or why the Cauvery waters can arouse so much passion in Tamilnadu and Karnataka. Ethnic movements, in contrast, deny any economic motive and perhaps suffer it only in the margins. For conspiracy theorists, it is these margins that are pushed into the centre, but in actual fact, it is not economic gain that propels howling mobs against their ethnic "other".

Can we say in conclusion that ethnicity finds it greatest ally in the tendency for human beings to cast cultural differences in natural terms (Levi-Strauss)? Is this not what status affirming ethnicitst are really doing? Are we then to be perpetual victims of our basic anthropological failing? If, in the future, nation-states and the memories they stoke become irrelevant, will some other kind of bigotry take over? Perhaps reflecting on this would help us overcome the severity of the consequences of our anthropological failing? Or, would it?"

3. On the Study of Religious Mobilization and Organized Violence in South Asia: An Essentialist view

by Stig Toft Madsen, Associate Professor, IU/RUC (stm@ruc.dk)

Excerpts from the paper:

"Introduction: Religion Spells Danger
For a start I would like to declare myself a primordialist and an essentialist as regards religion. I know this is a risky proposition. There are few essentialists around these days, and who would like to be called a primordialist? In truth, I am not sure that I am *really* an essentialist. Perhaps, I am in the process of becoming an essentialist - if it is, indeed, possible to "become" an essentialist.

In casu, this means that I will be searching for the intrinsic or fundamental nature of religion in order to look at religious violence from that perspective. Religious conflict looms large in the study of South Asia. While observers recoil at the brutality of religious violence in South Asia, most refrain from faulting religion as such. Religion - not least in South Asia - is beautiful and enriching. It is the crown of human culture. Since culture is what sets us apart from other animals and makes us human, to talk of religion as the cause of violence is a challenge to our identity as humans.

Like religion, nature is also often very beautiful and enriching, but we have learnt that nature is, in fact, "red in tooth and claw". To say that religion, likewise, is red in tooth and claw – or in tongue and mind and deed – does not seem right, but it may be equally true. There is a theodicy problem here: If God is good, why riots? The answer, I will argue is that religion itself can cause evil. It is not that religion is *in* danger. Religion *is* danger and God can be evil.

I take the opportunity to address the issue posed by the organizers of this seminar with reference to the works of some of our distinguished guests. In particular, I will enter the so-called Brass-Robinson debate. Many people agree that this debate encapsulates the main issues relating to religious mobilization and conflict in South Asia. Over the years, I have benefited greatly from reading the works of Paul Brass, and I entirely agree with Pamela Price's billing Paul Brass as "one of the most eminent political scientist of India in the world today" (posting on Nofsa-net@sum.uio.no, 31 January 2003). I am most familiar with some of the earlier works of Brass, which I read in my more impressionable years. Hence, my reading of Brass today may well be unfair as regards his more recent works. I apologize if that is the case.

I will start the paper by a general discussion of religion, which bears no direct relation to the Brass-Robinson debate. I do this to argue that what is at stake in the production of religious violence cannot "in the first instance" be taken to be a matter of who did what in particular events. I do not deny that Rajiv Gandhi, probably, should have called in the army right after his mother was assassinated instead of saying that the earth trembles when a big tree falls, or that Atal Behari Vajpayee could have limited or contained the carnage in Ahmedabad by deputing KPS Gill to Gujarat immediately after the murder and arson in Godhra, or that Modi could have put the lid on the riots in Ahmedabad by an early concerted repressive move of the civil and armed forces at his disposal. But I still do not feel at ease when Harsh Mander states at *Hard Talk* that "no violence can continue more than a few hours if the state is not involved". Repression is a powerful tool to stop riots, but the question is also to avoid riots and other forms of violence in the first place. From my *kaccha* essentialist standpoint, I want to argue that what is at stake is the inbuilt propensity of religion to generate violence. I will argue this point via a rather detailed incursion into neo-Darwinist readings of the phenomena of religion, and, more broadly, of culture.

…

Section 3: Conclusions

This "*pratiloma*-paper" has been purposefully written against the grain of received wisdom. I have tried to throw light over a well-established field of social inquiry by introducing various Darwinian interpretations, something that is quite unusual. Further, I have tried to rescue a primodialist or essentialist view on religious conflict. Horowitz in his analysis of violent riots takes a positive look at the primordialist position, but this is a road not often taken (Horowitz 2001:51). It is now time to review some of the consequences of my choice and to look ahead.

My general conclusion is that I am right to maintain that religion is not in danger. Religion *is* danger, even a clear and ever-present danger. The danger resides not only in the brinkmanship associated with boundary maintenance. It goes deeper, and it is an essential part of religion. I have tried to chase this aspect of religion to it roots by referring to the idea of religion as a meme machine or, alternatively, as a group-level adaptation, which cannot be presumed to be functional for anyone else but the believers. I have not, on the other hand, denied that religious violence can be a tool in the hands of elites, and that religion, therefore, can be adaptive for this elite, whether the elite be religious people, democratically elected politicians, or some other collectivity of individuals. I accept that this may be so in many cases, but - with Robinson and others - I have cautioned against the view that the elite alone makes or breaks the peace. There is more to religious violence than elite conflicts. I may not have substantiated that this is so in most cases, but at least I hope to have made the argument that this must be considered a possibility. My case-study from Karnataka aims to flesh out the degree to which even non-virulent economic development can pave the way for religious conflict. It is difficult to imagine pathways of economic development, which do not bring groups into conflict in ethnically divided societies. The very success of some groups increases the risk of confrontation once such groups plough back part of their profits into religious institutions in their villages and towns of provenance.

The notion of vicarious participation complicates the primordial-instrumentalist dichotomy. It introduces an element of "make-believe", which may cloud both the primordialist and the instrumentalist world.

Vicarious participation makes it a challenge to determine what people really mean. Arun Shourie has written on Islamic terrorism:

> "*Believe what the ideologues and organisations of the terrorists say*. The one thing for which ideologues and organisations can be credited is that they are absolutely explicit about their aim and objectives. The fault - the fatal fault - of liberal societies is that, to this day, they continue to shut their eyes to what these organisations proclaim to be their aim: domination, conquest, conversion of the 'land of war' into the 'land of peace', that is, the land which is at peace because it is under their heel…" (Shourie 2002: 21).

I think it is generally wise to follow Shourie's advice - also when reading Shourie's own writings! Culture has a core, but as Dipankar Gupta has pointed out, radical rhetoric may be hyperbole. It remains to be worked out how vicarious participation enables both entry to and exit from the worlds of religious extremist, and how it may contribute to both escalation and de-escalation of conflict.

In conclusion, I would like to elaborate on the primordialist-instrumentalist dichotomy. The two scholars with whom the dichotomy is associated were never really far apart, and perhaps they are closer today now that Robinson apparently has spent the period from 1997 to 2000 in Seattle. Hence, I would like to stretch the dichotomy beyond the their respective positions. On the one extreme one may posit the existence of humans as selfless vessels of religious memes. On the opposite pole one may posit the existence of humans as egotistical frauds, who use religion as a tool for their own selfish ends. In between there is a variety of positions: Close to the selfless vessels one may posit the existence of humans as group-conscious primordialists acting on behalf of their religion in a manner that optimises the collective life chances of the group. Further towards the instrumentalist pole, one may posit the existence of humans as motivated by real or perceived group-grievances. Further still towards the instrumentalist pole, one may posit the existence of humans as individuals or sub-groups motivated by greed, rather than by group grievance or by primordial dispositions. In all these positions, one would further have to allow for degrees of vicarious participation.

One final point: The primary aim of this paper has not been to devise or recommend political ways of preventing or solving religious conflicts. I am sure that other participants in this seminar will focus on the art of the possible. But I would like to float a suggestion, which derives from the Darwinian perspective attempted. If religion – apart from its adaptive virtues – has over the centuries manifested a range of maladapative and destructive vices, it may be presumed that humans in the course of history have evolved a series of responses to deal with these negative consequences of religion. In other words, if there is, indeed, a Darwinian cultural machine of which religion is an integrative part, there may also be a "third machine" (or a second-order cultural machine) that has evolved precisely to deal with the problems cause by religion or, more broadly, by culture. This third machine could be the political (or juridical) machine which, to quote Moynihan again, saves culture from itself. The biological Darwin machine has been with us from the time our species came into existence. That did not prevent humans from creating and perfecting a cultural machine, which in many respects negates or runs counter to our biological machine. Likewise, we may evolve a third machine that runs counter to or puts the leash on, our cultural machine. Maybe this seminar is an exercise in visualizing a supra-cultural machine. According to Steve Fuller, Thomas Henry Huxley (known as “Darwin’s bulldog”) in a series of lectures elaborated on the idea that “the point of being human is to be against evolution”. Similarly, the point of being in the social science field may be to put the brake on cultural evolution. One cunning solution is to reduce religion to its non-functional cultural “spandrels”. Brass’ position is more radical and direct: He targets the predators. But the arches still stand.”

Discussion by Jan Breman:
Instrumentalism versus Essentialism

Madsen declares himself to be an essentialist as regards religion. Or, at least, he thinks that he is becoming one. Not yet a full believer but on the verge of conversion. In other words, he takes a *kaccha* position. But what does it mean? He goes in search for the intrinsic or fundamental nature of religion in order to look at religious violence from that perspective. His criticism addresses commentators who express their anguish and horror on the recent wave of violence that has been going on in India but shy away from faulting religion as such for the atrocities. Madsen claims that religion in itself is danger and that God can be evil. He elaborates on this point of view by entering the Brass-Robinson debate but he starts with an incursion on the idea that there is a built-in propensity of religion to generate violence. I would like to hear what Paul Brass himself has to say on the note that his disagreement with Robinson may have to do with their different exposure to Indian culture, the view from the *qasbah* versus the view from the *ganj*. Conceding that the way one is exposed of course matters, I myself can’t see why exposure to the *qasbah* would make for an essentialist view while more familiarity with the *ganj* milieu would lead to a bias in favour of an instrumentalist view of religion.

Madsen has found his inspiration from neo-Darwinist readings on the phenomenon of religion. He then contextualises the Brass-Robinson debate from that perspective. Then the argument changes and gets a more empirical flavour by turning the focus to South Kanara portrayed as having been until recently an island of peace in a sea of violence on the South Asian subcontinent. The story of Udipi is told, however, that even here, in this paradise of developmentalism, religion speaks danger. Finally, Madsen briefly discusses how to get rid of violence. By doing away with religion? Then the question becomes how do societies contain religion.

Madsen is firm in rejecting the notion of cultural relativism. And he refers to statements made by Huntington to back up this opinion. With approval he quotes the author of The Clash of Civilisations: politics can change a culture, read religion, and save it from itself. His major inspiration for his argumentation is a recent book by Wilson.

To confront the two opinions singled out he first clarifies the instrumentalist view taken by Brass who wrote: the study of ethnicity and nationality is in large part the study of politically induced cultural change. I am glad that Martinussen who is the founding father of the Centre in Roskilde, which has brought us together is coming on stage here. In his seminal publication

Society, State and Market, he observed that Brass and in Scandinavia also Blom Hansen see ethnicity and nationality as phenomena which are socially and ideologically constructed and perhaps even politically manipulated by elites fighting for control over resources and privileges. Dipankar Gupta, also present here, has lined up with the instrumentalists. He argues: that position takes us away from looking at perpetrators of heinous crimes as merely bearers of culture.

In contrast to these positions Madsen feels more inclined to side with Morrison in defending an primordialist or essentialist point of view on the role of religion, summarised by Brass as saying that attachments that form the core of ethnicity are biological and genetic in nature.

Confronted with this dichotomy Robinson has qualified his primordialist position. Politicians do indeed make choices but they are more constrained by personal histories and cultural forces than Brass seems to be aware of. And then he goes on to make that point that Muslims can in effect be presumed to be culturally predisposed to either seek Islamic suzerainty on others or to defend their right to maintain a clear separate identity as a matter of principle. It is the essence of Islam to seek a political roof over the *ummah*. Thus, in the context of South Asia, Pakistan was inevitable. And: Muslims were meant to be disloyal to the independent state of India.

Relevant here is the point made by Robinson that religions are made for their adherents, not for others. Bu this is where social scientists have their own analysis to offer, which is that religious doctrines and practices are indeed contextualised and should be understood in a comparative perspective. (Pillarization in the Netherlands the ultramontane loyalty of Roman Catholics in late nineteenth century, fighting for the pope). The dynamics of religious tenets is a dimension which Madsen seems to have understated. A view of religion which is all too static.

The position of Brass, Madsen continues, is under-determinist. No matter how deeply religious traditions may be embedded in cultures, there is always room for political manoeuvre. The instrumentality of religion is articulated in this point of view and believers are not accepted as vessels or conduits of their culture. Madsen challenges the idea that the masses are manipulated by a political elite, which distorts the market for economic and social development to satisfy their own interests. His more specific criticism is that in the first place. Brass has exaggerated the gulf between elite and masses. Both sometimes cooperate because they share the same culture or the same interest.

In the second place, any theory, instrumentalist or primordialist has to take into account when and where violence breaks out or not. He approvingly refers to Varshney according to whom religious violence is mainly an urban phenomenon and also in that setting includes only a fraction ñ 6% - of the total population. I thoroughly disagree with Varshney's analysis and I hope to be able to explain why in my own presentation tomorrow. But I of course agree with Madsen that explaining where and when violence will or has occurred is necessary. I want to add however that this question is more critical of the primordialist than of the instrumentalist viewpoint.

Underlying the arguments made by Brass is, according to Madsen, the assumption of an undifferentiated elite. Backing up his opinion that this is a much too simple observation he describes the social dynamics in South Kanara. I have no qualms with what he has to say in this connection. But if Brass has been too static in his views on the elite, let's accept that for a moment for the sake of argument, then doesn't this criticism also apply to the way Madsen has constructed religion as essentially being unable to respond on what is going on in the social fabric?

Madsen discusses the cultural impact of social and economic success: increasing religiosity of the BJP flavour. Can the inroads made by Hindutva in the South Kanara landscape only be attributed to that the successful entrepreneurs have gone back to their roots by claiming a new identity, that of the BJP. And even then, it is not so dissimilar from successful Christian or Muslim migrants eager to sponsor the building of their churches and mosques as Madsen himself comments. I fail to see, however, what the essentialist merit is about this outcome of economic success.

By way of conclusion, Madsen tells us that the aim of his paper has not been to devise or commend political ways of preventing or solving religious conflicts. But the suggestions he makes flow from a Darwinian perspective and that is to deal with the problems caused by religion, or broader still, by culture. How? By the construction of a supra-cultural machine which saves culture from itself. But indeed, if culture is the driving and evil force, which are the social dynamics building up to that supra-cultural machine. For me this solution comes close to a tautology. But also here I would invite Paul Brass to follow up on what he recently wrote on the Gujarat Pogrom of 2002 in Items and Issues, a bulletin published by the American Social Science Research Council. In that article he shows himself critical of social scientists for confusing what is the core problem by drawing attention to the difficulties of governance in societies where interethnic and inter-communal animosities are rampant. Not governance is the critical factor, he argues, but the Hindutva agenda. Let's call a spade a spade. Now if we substitute the word governance for religion, isn't it basically also what he has to say on the essentialist view in an avatar which is either pure or *kachha*?

4. Sovereigns beyond the State: on legality and public authority in India

by Thomas Blom Hansen, Reader, Edinburgh, UK (t.hansen@ed.ac.uk)

Excerpts from the paper:

Introduction:

"India's extensive legal system is probably the most widely appreciated legacy of colonial rule. 'Legal consciousness', the awareness of rights and the use of litigation have for decades been integral parts of everyday life of millions of people across India. Yet, events over the past decade suggest that the awe of the law in India, and it's corollary, the sovereignty of the state, are in sharp decline. Successive governments seem unable and unwilling to curb or prevent recurrent clashes between religious communities and attacks on minority communities in the country; the police force is widely regarded as brutal and incompetent; a large number of crimes and murders are never reported or never investigated; the courts are overburdened and ineffective with conviction rates below ten percent; political parties, movements and criminal rackets routinely subvert the law, commit crimes with impunity and evade justice, etc.

Most educated Indians view this state of affairs as a result of corrupt politicians interfering in bureaucratic and legal processes, and the country's poor, uneducated and gullible electorate. But the image of a civilised and law abiding middleclass beleaguered by illiterate and corrupt forces obeying other and more arcane forms of authority are belied by even the most cursory scrutiny of the status of legality in contemporary India.

As Paul Brass points out in his study of communal violence and social order in North India, the state and its armed wing, the police, is not seen as constituting a public resource enforcing impartial justice. The police force is the prize over which influential elite groups, criminal organisations and political forces fight. The use of courts and litigation is but one among several means in the battle over authority and resources in the North Indian countryside where, "…the use of force and violence is, if not routine, at least not something unexpected or exceptional." (Brass 1997, 275)

The disregard of rules, the expectation of being able to avoid punishment, or 'fix things' by pulling a few strings, or by merely asserting one's importance, education and command of English *vis-à-vis* poorly educated policemen is at the heart of the Indian middle class world. While the open contempt of courts and legal process displayed by maverick politicians like Bal Thackeray in Mumbai (whom I will return to below) elicits moral condemnation, few educated Indians will rely solely on courts, trust due process or even the hallowed 'civic sense' in their everyday lives. In a small write up on the traffic chaos and garbage heaps around a new upmarket shopping mall in Mumbai, a security guard told a journalist: "Most of the people coming here are rich… they are used to get things their way and are not prepared to stick to the rules we try to enforce."

How do we understand this apparent paradox? On the one hand, a widespread endorsement of legality and a proliferation of legal arguments in India's public culture, and, on the other hand, an equally widespread endorsement of retribution and killings during communal riots (as was evident in Gujarat in 2002) and even more widespread practices of seeking informal justice and using private revenge and violence when settling private and family conflicts? Conventional arguments of the weakness and fragmentation of the state, or of the "incomplete modernisation of society", seem ineffective here. As Brass points out, India is not characterised by any Hobbesian state of lawlessness. Competing networks of power and authority seek to organise violence, retributions and entitlements. (Brass 1997, 275-279) This often happens through deploying the police, sometimes through the courts, and at other times through armed gangs of men from a community, or a political movement – and very often through the hired help of local strongmen. For all its conspicuous presence and repressive power, the Indian state obviously does not exercise any monopoly of legitimate violence. The central challenge is, in other words, to understand how *de facto* sovereign power – the right to kill, punish and discipline with impunity – historically has been configured and distributed in India. Not formally but in practice. This is a large and very complex question that calls for many detailed and ethnographically

anchored studies of the imbrication of legality, punishment and violence in everyday life. In the following I shall merely attempt to sketch a preliminary historical and conceptual framework that may enable us to understand how what I would call three competing *repertoires of authority* – organised around the *de facto* practices of sovereignty in the name of the law, the community and the local 'big man'. These registers are founded on violence, or the threat thereof, but also organise distinct, if morally ambivalent, registers of public and political agency.
…

Conclusion: The House of many Masters.
I have suggested that postcolonial India has produced (at least) three intertwined, *de facto* legitimate but also incongruous repertoires of authority and sovereignty: legal sovereignty of the state, the (moral) sovereignty of the nation/community, and the multiple forms of informal sovereignty based on local 'big men' and everyday violence. Their efficacy flows from a fundamental ambiguity – an incessant oscillation between generosity/protection and excessive violence – or the threat thereof.
The material from the cities of western India suggests - as would material from other cities in India – that the right and the capacity to make decisions, to adjudicate, to govern and even to kill and punish, is distributed between a range of authorities and institutions, both local and supra local at the same time. The three repertoires of authority I have tried to outline operate in an intertwined and simultaneous way. Some acts of sovereign power are taken outside the state and the legal framework – as in the so-called underworld, others such as the police force operating within a legal framework – at least in theory. A political party and social movement like the Shiv Sena operates both within the framework of state institutions as well as outside, based in local and informal structures of authority and violence anchored in localities and communities. This inordinately dispersed structure of governance and sovereignty indicates the limits of state and legal sovereignty in India.

To control the government, the state and the powers of legislation is merely one, albeit important, dimension of the exercise of power in India. But it is also a form of power that is easily subverted, evaded and negotiated, and can be challenged without any consequences because its efficacy and implementation depends on the informal sovereigns depicted above. The fragmentation of both governance and sovereignty in contemporary India – the historical roots of which I tried to indicate - should be borne in mind when discussing both the dangers of rightwing authoritarianism and the possibilities of social reform and accountability through legislation. Given the anti-democratic impulses that many Hindu nationalists share with parts of the Indian elite and middle class, it is maybe a blessing in disguise that the Indian state in its present form offers little temptation and material for imposition of authoritarian control throughout society."

Discussion by Paul R. Brass

Thomas Hansen's paper provides a quite insightful, structural analysis of the current state of law and lawlessness and of legitimacy and illegitimacy, especially in the use of violence, deplored by most observers of the current Indian political scene. At the same time, Hansen argues, "India is not characterised by any Hobbesian state of lawlessness." Rather, in contrast to the European "ideal" of "indivisible territorial sovereignty" (p. 5) sanctified by Hobbes, there has existed in India in both the pre- and post-colonial periods, "segmented, overlapping and stratified forms of sovereignty," (p. 4). But, a new kind of sovereignty arose in the colonial period that has become a serious challenge to the sovereign legitimacy of the post-colonial secular state, namely, the claimed sovereignty of the Hindu community. The Hindu community is seen by militant Hindus as a sovereign body ever-ready for inflicting violence upon those who threaten it metaphorically or physically, that is, those who contest the sovereignty of the Hindu community in contemporary India and those, mainly the Muslims, who are demonized as physical dangers. In effect, to the everyday lawlessness of Indian public life has been added a massive assertion of the right of the Hindu community as a whole to act with lawless impunity against its huge Muslim minority and other groups in Indian society deemed to be a threat to Hindu sovereignty.

The fragmentation of legitimate authority creates opportunities for both locally prominent individuals ("big men"), mafiosi gangs, and political parties, such as the Shiv Sena in Bombay, to assert their own power, authority, legitimacy, and even sovereignty, including the right to exercise violence against the alleged enemies of the sovereign Hindu community. In effect, therefore, there are three contesting forms of sovereignty in contemporary India: that of the state, that of the Hindu "nation/community," and that of the local "big men" (p. 22), all claiming the right to the legitimate use of violence. Although Hansen clearly finds these multiple sources of authority and violence deeply troubling, he does not see the establishment of the European ideal of undivided authority as a desirable alternative, given the widespread existence of "anti-democratic" values in Indian society. The exercise of undivided authority would, on the contrary, open the possibility of the "imposition of authoritarian control throughout society" (p. 23). There would seem, therefore, to be no evident resolution of the conflict of sovereignties, and the violence and lawlessness associated with it, in contemporary India.

5. Religious Mobilisation and Organised Violence in Pakistan Today

by Ian Talbot, Professor, Coventry, UK (LSX140@coventry.ac.uk)

Excerpts from the paper

Introduction

"What explains the rising tide of religious violence in Pakistan during the past two decades? These have seen a mini insurgency by Maulana Sufi Mohammad's Tehrik Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammad in the Malakand Agency against the Pakistan state in November 1994 in support of its campaign to replace the civil law with the Islamic *shariat*; a dramatic increase in Sunni-Shia sectarian violence in which leading clerics, activists and professionals were assassinated in tit-for tat killings; large scale tribal sectarian warfare in such areas of the Frontier as the Shia dominated Upper Kurram Agency which in September 1996, resulted in 100 deaths and scores more injuries. In all, bomb blasts, assassinations and machine gun attacks on rival sectarian places of worship resulted in 581 deaths and over 1,600 injuries in the period 1990-7. In addition attacks on the Christian community increased during this period. Thirteen Christian churches were burnt down in Khanewal in southern Punjab in February 1997. Churches were attacked in the wake of General Pervez Musharraf's alignment with the US coalition against the al-Qaeda terrorists. An assault on 12 October 2001 at a church in Bahawalpur resulted in 18 deaths; another attack on 17th March 2002 on the Protestant International Church in the

Diplomatic Enclave Islamabad ended with 5 deaths including those of a US diplomat's wife and daughter; another attack on 5 August 2002 at Murree Christian Missionary School brought 6 deaths (4 of the deceased were Muslims); four days later there were a further 4 fatalities after an attack on the Chapel of Christian Hospital in Taxila. The heterodox Ahmadi community simultaneously faced individual acts of violence and persecution as a result of the blasphemy ordinance.

Numerous reasons both at scholarly and everyday levels are provided for the rising tide of religious mobilisation and violence in Pakistan. This paper will focus on three approaches, these may be termed state-centric, primordialist and instrumentalist explanations. The first at its simplest, lays these and other ills at the door of the abandonment of Jinnah's vision for Pakistan. A more sophisticated variant points out the deleterious effects of the abandonment of state religious neutrality in favour of state construction in terms of a Sunni majoritarian vision. Primordialist understandings see sharply defined and divergent ethnic and religious communities set naturally on a collision course. Intrinsic group differences create prejudice and trigger violence. Instrumentalist understandings present the view that leaders strategically manipulate communal and ethnic differences for the sake of power. Instrumentalism is linked with modernisation theory in that leaders are believed to especially exhibit this behaviour during periods of rapid socio-economic change that increases competition for the control of resources.
…

Conclusion

What light does the rising tide of religious violence in Pakistan during the past two decades shed on the major theoretical explanations regarding mobilisation and violence? Moreover what does it tell us more generally about the role of the state and violence in the contemporary subcontinent? Certainly the unfolding events reveal the inadequacy of monocausal explanations whether these are primordialist or modernisation theory driven. Explanations of sectarian violence in terms of a preordained primordial identity fail, for example to shed light on the timing of its upsurge. Why was Sunni-Shia conflict muted during the opening decades of Pakistan's existence? Similarly why has the Christian community only become a target for attack in recent years?

Instrumentalist understandings set within modernisation theory are in some respects more satisfactory. A newly socially mobilised Sunni middle class's competition for power with the feudal Shia elite was, we have seen the context for Jhang's emergence as a hotspot for sectarian violence. At the street level some participants were making 'rational choices' in following the extremist SSP as a means of overcoming their marginalisation from the traditional power structures. For others, however, it was a primordial religious duty inculcated in sectarian and *jihad*-centric madrasas to exterminate their 'unbeliever' rivals. Modernisation theory glosses over the power of this 'inward' dimension to mobilisation and struggle. There are thus elements of truth in both modernisation theory and primordialist accounts. Core religious identities and beliefs have played a crucial mobilising role, but within the context of the changes brought by modernisation.

Finally, it is important to appreciate the role of the state. The politicisation of sectarian religious identity would not have occurred without the abandonment of its religious neutrality. State sponsored Islamisation raised the question whose Islam and what Islam should be implemented. These questions were especially sensitive in the wake of the Iranian Revolution which had strengthened the self assertion of Pakistan's Shia community which made up some 15-20 per cent of the population. The conditions for violence were further encouraged by the state's support for the mushrooming of madrasas, many of which operated on extremely sectarian lines. Another crucial development was the 'backwash' effects of the Pakistan state's strategic alliance with the Taliban and *jihad* groups in pursuit of its Afghan and Kashmir policies.

Two other points concerning the state emerge from this study which apply more widely to communal violence in South Asia. First, as can be seen clearly in 1947, the collapse of state authority is a precondition for violence. During the 1990s, in the words of S.V.R. Nasr, 'state power exist(ed) only in pockets and regions and (was) absent in others. The limits to State power in the rural areas can translate into unmanageable sectarian conflict and criminal activity. Sunni-Shia mini civil war in parts of the tribal areas and the failure of the police to secure entry to the heavily armed militant Shia SM Punjab headquarters at Thokar Niaz Beg in October 1996 are evidence of this situation. Perhaps most damaging of all was the collapse of the Pakistan state in Karachi at the height of the ethnic conflict in the 1990s.

Second, and conversely, for large scale violence to take place in the subcontinent this must be abetted by the machinery of the state itself. There is a long history of this from the communalisation of the police and the Punjab Boundary Force in 1947 down through the 1984 Delhi riots, the 1993 Bombay Riots and most recently the 2002 Gujarat Riots. On a smaller and less dramatic, but nonetheless significant scale, sectarian violence in Pakistan during the 1990s would not have occurred to the extent to which it did, if the authorities had not turned a blind eye. More vigilant policemen and local officials risked assassination or transfer if they inconveniently confronted sectarian groups. They were able to carry out attacks with impunity because of the political protection they were afforded both by local politicians and the security apparatus which as we have seen had developed close ties with Sunni militants since the Zia era. At the Centre, both the Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif governments were driven more by short term than national interests in dealing with the issue of sectarianism. Indeed, Benazir Bhutto, even worked to undermine the National Reconciliation Council (Milli Yikjahati Council) which had been formed by the mainstream Islamic parties in March 1995 in an attempt to end sectarian conflict.[32] A moral universe has emerged in which the state is no longer neutral in its dealings with its citizens and in which it can abnegate its responsibility to provide for minority groups' protection. There are parallels here with the contemporary situation in India. In such circumstances, while there may be lulls in communal and sectarian violence, a strong likelihood persists of a future recrudescence of conflict."

6. Hindu–Muslim riots and the ‘thermostat effect’ of political violence

by Kathinka Frøystad, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Oslo (h.k.froystad@sai.uio.no)

Excerpts from the abstract and the paper

Anthropological studies of riots have made significant contributions to the understanding of why riots erupt and what violence does to its victims. This article shifts the emphasis to the on-again, off-again characteristic of riots. To do so it outlines three anthropological approaches to riots, assesses their potential to analyse such fluctuations and argues that the most useful approaches are those that allow us to separate between different riot roles or to extend the temporal unit of study beyond the riot.

…

Seen from a *bird's eye view*, the on-again, off-again feature appears as a ‘thermostat effect’, a metaphor that may help us to distinguish riots as a particular form of political violence. The *actor perspective* comprises approaches that, by focusing on one riot case or a limited number of such cases, distinguish more sharply between the various roles that people may have during a riot, or limit their study to one of these roles. The *everyday life perspective* grounds the understanding of riots in an examination of inter-religious relations in periods without riots, which for the purpose of this article are subsumed under the residual category ‘everyday life’. Each of the three perspectives may be useful for examining the process by which a riot breaks out. When addressing riot suppression and violence fluctuation, however, the paper argues that the bird's eye view is inadequate the way it has been developed so far. Only with help from the two latter perspectives can anthropologists be positioned to examine the on-again, off-again feature of riots. Shifting the focus back to the bird's eye view, the paper suggest that these processes appear as a ‘thermostat effect’, a metaphor that may help us to distinguish riots as a particular form of political violence.

…

Conclusion

My efforts to make sense of Hindu–Muslim relations have made me return to Kanpur several times since the riots in 1992. Each visit has made me surprised over the repairability and plasticity of Hindu–Muslim relations. In 1997 I found my pre-riot host Pramod and his nephews and friends wearing pathan suits – a male dress associated with Muslims – during Hindu rituals and weddings, something they wouldn't even dream of wearing a few years earlier. In 2001 Pramod's sister-in-law planned a pilgrimage to the grave (*dargah*) of the Muslim sufi Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti in Ajmer in gratitude for the recovery of her son after a serious illness, and Pramod himself had even approached the head of a madrasa for countering the tantric spells he held responsible for his economic problems. As for Jalal, he still lives on in Kakadeo though he has been on the verge of moving every time there has been interreligious tension. Despite these tokens of normalisation, there have been several Hindu–Muslim clashes in Kanpur since 1992. So far none have been of the same magnitude and discursive temperature as that year, but as my local friends acquaintances matter-of-factly assure me, it is bound to happen again some day.

In this article I have put such fluctuations at the centrestage and suggested some analytical approaches that may be useful for examining them. One is to focus on those who prevent and suppress riots, another to study the extent to which riots transform interreligious relations, emphasising continuity and temporary changes rather than permanent transformations. Part of my motivation for addressing the fluctuating level of violence that riots entail is that it has received little attention in studies of Hindu–Muslim violence. But most importantly I wanted to point to what I perceive as a slight misfit, or even split, between anthropological studies of riots and the anthropology of political violence in general. By emphasising the role of the state as a perpetrator of violence, societies in which violence is enduring are favoured as venues of study, something that reinforces the methodological marginalisation of riots in the theorisation of political violence. It is my hope that the trope of a 'thermostat effect' may help us delineate riots as a particular form of political violence, thereby bringing these fields of study closer together."

7. Communal Upheaval as the Resurgence of Social-Darwinism

by Jan Breman, Professor, Amsterdam, NL (breman@pscw.uva.nl)

Excerpts from the paper:

Introduction "Again

The recent pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat was not the first I have observed from close quarters. The wave of communal violence engulfing the state after the destruction of the Ayodhya temple coincided with a round of rural and urban research in which I was engaged during late 1992 and early 1993. I wrote on the shock and dismay in the village of my fieldwork when the news arrived of the urban carnage taking place in Mumbai, and on the state of disorder which still prevailed in Surat and Ahmedabad during my subsequent stays in these cities.

In Spring 2002, the religious cleansing operation has been more severe, larger in scale and longer lasting than on earlier occasions, mainly because the state apparatus – both the leading political party and government agencies – condoned or even facilitated the pogrom, rather than stopped it, while it was taking place in late February and early March. The breakdown of civic society has been discussed from various angles, such as the unique history of Gujarat with deep-seated lines of fission between religious majority and minority, a progressive state of flux in the caste balance caused by upward mobility and the concomitant assertion of the middle class, or finally the character of the region as a cultural frontier.

I myself am inclined to give a lot of weight to the well-entrenched nature of the Hindutva movement and its predecessors in this part of the country, strongly opposed to communal harmony and to the design of society as a melting pot of diverse and open-ended social segments. The mobilization of low and intermediate castes to participate in the activities of the Sangh Parivar organizations in the last two decades has broadened the base of Hindu fundamentalism as a social-political force. The price these previously denigrated segments have to pay for their acceptance within the Hindutva fold is their willingness to express antagonism to Muslims as members of the religious minority and, in brutal acts of confrontation, to do the dirty work of cleansing on behalf of their high-caste brothers and sisters. The dynamics of inclusion and exclusion are intricately interwoven.

…

Dividing the labouring poor

One should, however, be careful when implying that underprivileged segments in the underbelly of urban (or for that matter rural) society can easily be incited to engage in indiscriminate and sustained combat against each other. Indicative is the recent change in meaning of the term communal. The riots which broke out in the early 1980s were a reaction by the high and intermediate castes against the reservation policy introduced by the Congress government to favour their clientele from the lower social classes. The first anti-reservation agitation targeted the dalits, while the second round of the same backlash which erupted in 1985 included the OBC's (other backward castes) which stood to gain from the proposed expansion in the system of reservation. While the notion of communal until then tended to refer to frictions between top and bottom of the caste hierarchy, the social forces pushing the Hindutva agenda gave a different slant to the term by propagating the unity (although most certainly not on equal par) of Hindus high and low. In their guidelines for societal reconstruction, inferiority and subjugation were coined as the exclusive stigma of Muslims. It remains to be seen whether, as part of a long term strategy – if not dictated than at least inspired by the interests of classes higher up in society – the fragmented segments of the labouring poor can be trusted to go on waging war against each other. Particularly in the localities inhabited by *dalits* it is not only possible to detect remnants of a previous class-based solidarity but there is the realistic awareness that in a next round of violence they might again be on the receiving end of the discriminatory policies that have been practised by the powers that be from generation to generation. Of undiminished and even striking relevance here is the observation with which Gooptu ends her study of the urban poor in India at the beginning of the twentieth century:

> '….. in the case of the untouchable or the Muslim poor, their caste status and religious affiliation further reinforced their stigmatization and social exclusion by the urban upper and middle classes, who were predominantly higher-caste Hindu, and included orthodox commercial groups as employers of labour and as zealous promoters of Hindu revitalization movements. All sections of the poor in varying degrees found themselves culturally and socially distanced, at times even physically segregated as the middle classes retreated into the safe havens of new urban residential areas' (Gooptu 2001: 420).

We need historical reports not only for the sake of writing the chronicles of today's events, but also to get an idea of things to come. Accounts with a focus on *la longue durée* might give us a handle on the kind of future we are heading for, or drifting towards.

Discussion by Staffan Lindberg

Summary:

The paper is about the rise and fall of the textile industry in Ahmedabad, once known as the Manchester of India, and along with that the fate of industrial workers. Once with formal and secure employment, a strong and well organised trade union, and a rudimentary welfare-regime, workers now stand impoverished, having lost their jobs to become dependent on casual rather than regular jobs. They have been forced to bring their women and children into to work for wages, but even so they face poverty and a deteriorating social and physical infrastructure all around them. Lately, their habitat is also increasingly ghettoised by various social and political forces at play. Thus, this is a dramatic situation of relative deprivation within just a generation. And one with communal implications as well.

During the heydays of regular work and strong trade union politics, class took precedence of caste-ethnic-religious loyalties it seems. Incidents of communal mobilisations were defused at the level of the working class by concerted actions against them founded both on 'objective' bonds of loyalty and more 'subjective' political actions. Much of this stands shattered today, it seems. In the February-March 2002 outbreak of communal violence, Ahmedabad workers from lower castes participated in lootings and killings.

But it is Hindutva politics, which is the active agency according to Breman. Their politics is now different from the type of communalism involved in the anti-reservation agitations which took place in the 1980s and which pitted high/middle castes against low-middle/low and dalit castes against each other. It is a change of strategy towards an all-Hindu mobilisation.

The paper makes two reservations about the potential of this 'all-Hindu' mobilisation. Economically, Muslims and low caste Hindus are involved in a division of labour, which means a basic dependence and potential for concomitant 'organic solidarity'. Moreover, entrenched for ages, in discrimination and humiliation by the upper castes, engaged in class and caste war all over India, lower caste participation in an 'all-Hindu' front must be seen as contingent and fragile. They somehow know who is next in turn, and class-caste wars are raging in other regions if not as present in Gujarat.

Comments and questions:

This is a sketch of events and relationships. It is a theoretically informed and historically grounded empirical story. It is focused and very interesting and in line with thoughts I think we share for a long time about the relationship between social structure and dynamics on the one hand, and politics and ideology, on the other. I am also sure that these are basic perspectives that by now have surged in the discussions at this seminar.

My interpretation of the dynamics is the following:

1. There are two stable and long-term features underlying these processes, which I would like to emphasize:

- Indian Development strategy 1950 – 90 (Indian Model): a state led, rather autonomous development regime in alliance with local capital, combining agricultural development (green revolution) and import-substituting industrialisation. The development of a rudimentary welfare state, slow but gradual reduction of poverty in relative terms. Rise of an increasingly wealthy middle class and modern consumer economy. India surging into dominance in IT industrial development and entertainment & experience capitalism. Greater gaps, glaring inequalities and persistent poverty among the huge marginalized groups
- Emancipatory movement, class-caste struggles emerging all over India: slow but ongoing land reforms (tenancy reforms), reservation policies … increasing mobilisation and voice of regional middle and lower classes, regional parties, dalit och OBC movements and parties, etc

Is it not this mobilisation from below and its progress that also leads to the counter reactions on part of the higher and middle castes in the 80s? That is, the anti-reservation agitations, which then are linked to the ongoing low-key Hindutva movements and reinforces it.

2. When Hindutva politics gains momentum towards the end of 80s, the 'Muslim' returns as the important Other. The incorporation of middle, lower middle and lower castes becomes an important strategy in Hindutva politics. Given the slow but steady reduction of poverty in relative terms: For most people, it is not the relative deprivation of becoming 'down and out' but rather that from rising expectations that comes with emancipation and slow but steady increase in living standard. Cannot such 'rising expectations' have a similar 'relative deprivation' effect and form a resonance bottom for cultural political mobilisations as well as a more class-based type of mobilisation?

3. 'Social Darwinism' and Lumpen capitalism'? Beginning in the 80s, international neo-liberalism undermines the previous development strategy. Unable to raise domestic resources to sustain the Indian Model and with decreasing support from US-Western states and international institutions (World Bank, etc.) India begins going neo-liberal. It is a slow process in Industry, but even slower in agriculture. In this, as we know, the Sangh parivar is also extremely divided. Neo-liberalism is not, I think, a design by Hindutva politics, but it can use its effects for its own purposes.

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Other recent papers of interest to this theme:

Items, Social Science Research Council, Vol. 4, No. 1, Winter 2002-03:
http://www.ssrc.org/programs/publications_editors/publications/items/itemscontents.pdf

Web page: open Democracy:

http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-2-43-1056.jsp