



Islamophobia in India

A case study of Gujarat 2002

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Declaration Form

The work I have submitted is my own effort. I certify that all the material in the dissertation which is not my own work has been identified and acknowledged. No materials are included for which a degree has been previously conferred upon me.

Signed.....*Kandala Singh*.....

Date.....25-05-2009.....

In gratitude

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Abstract

Inter ethnic and inter religious conflict all over the world is enmeshed in identity discourses about 'the self' and 'the other'. This study attempts to understand the role of public discourse and its language of signs, symbols and narratives in shaping perceptions about 'the other' during situations of inter ethnic violence. It focuses on the communication dynamics within the Hindu community during a case of targeted anti Muslim violence in Gujarat, India 2002 to understand the role of dehumanization and prejudice in causing and legitimising such violence. It argues that identity discourses such as the Hindu Right discourse in India contributes to dehumanizing religious minorities, especially Muslims. The process of dehumanization works at multiple levels in society and contributes to human rights violations.

Keywords: ethnic conflict, Hindu-Muslim conflict, Islamophobia, dehumanization, discourse, Gujarat 2002, communalism, prejudice.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the case and the problem

On February 27, 2002, a train called the Sabarmati express travelling between Faizabad and Ahmadabad in Gujarat, Western India, was stopped and torched at a place called Godhra. An estimated 59 people died, most or all of whom were Hindus (Amnesty International, 2005). More than six years later, the facts of the incident are yet to be established clearly. However, the incident was widely projected as an attack by Muslims on the Hindu community, and the ‘retaliation’ was fierce. According to a report released by the Editors Guild of India:

“...the anticipated backlash took on the dimensions of a holocaust primarily aimed at the Muslim community...” (Editors Guild, 2002:1)

This and several other reports¹ establish that the violence in Gujarat 2002 was a case of *targeted anti Muslim violence, enacted with state complicity*.

The Indian state is a signatory to several human rights conventions and treaties. For instance, India ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 1979. The ICCPR guarantees that the right to life of all citizens shall be protected by law. The case of Gujarat was a flagrant violation of these human rights principles. Though

¹ See, for example, The International Initiative for Justice (2003) *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*

Available online at www.onlinevolunteers.org

Also : Human Rights Watch (2002) *“We Have No Orders to Save You” State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*

Stable URL at: <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/india/>

official estimates number the dead at around 800, unofficial estimates are way higher, starting from a minimum of 2000 killed and at least 2,500 missing (Editors Guild, 2002:1). Approximately a hundred thousand people were rendered homeless (Mathur, 2008: 11).

My interest in the issue was raised when I visited Gujarat in the summer of 2003 to work as a volunteer to engage in building cultural understanding between the religious communities post the violence. My position as a student activist and an outsider to both the region and the issue (in that I am neither Gujarati, Hindu nor Muslim) gave me the advantage of access to several people and opinions from both the Hindu and Muslim communities. However, there was one exceptional instance in which I was perceived as a member of the Muslim community, which I will bring up later in this study. During the course of my stay in Gujarat, what struck me most was not the horror of the violence (though that gave one plenty of food for thought), but its legitimisation. My interaction with several middle class Hindu youth and with activists working in Gujarat left me with a strong impression that the violence was deemed acceptable by sections of the Hindu community. This raised my research question: how is violence between communities that are culturally similar in many ways, enabled and legitimised?

During the course of my interaction with sections of the Hindu community in Gujarat, I heard repeated references to 'the other' (i.e. the Muslims) and their responsibility in starting the violence by torching the train at Godhra. This argument struck me as strange. Statistics showed that Muslims were clearly the victims of the violence, so how could one blame the Muslim community for the violence? The argument was that the Muslims had started it all by torching the train, and thus were to blame for the violence directed at them. This points to the possible role of *prejudice and stereotypes* in the violence. Thus, one way of trying to understand the social dynamics of the violence is to focus on the public discourse afloat during the violence within the Hindu community, and try and answer the question: how far does prejudice, arising out of public discourse, enable and legitimise interethnic violence?

Working with an idea that ‘dehumanization’ is a key ingredient in enabling human rights violations, my analysis will focus on the domain of culture to see how this dehumanization of the Muslims has come to be expressed. For that, I will look at both the historical background and the contemporary expressions in public discourse. In doing this, I will use an interpretative approach. That is to say, I will attempt to read the signs used in the language of the conflict to understand what role they play in causing and legitimizing extensive violence. The Hindu ‘retaliation’ in Gujarat to a perceived attack by the Muslims will be used as a case study to illustrate the role of such symbols in violent conflicts. *My focus here will be on the cultural expressions, the metaphors, symbols etc. that gained ascendancy in the Hindu Right discourse and how they express social boundaries.*

I see two main dimensions to the communication dynamics during the violence: first, the signs and symbols afloat amongst the Hindu community during the violence (what I call the Hindu-Hindu communication dynamics), and the way these signals were perceived by the Muslim community, in this case the victim (Hindu-Muslim communication dynamics). The main focus of this study is the first dimension: that is, the communication dynamics within the Hindu community. What messages did the leaders of the Hindu Right send to their audience i.e. the Hindu community in Gujarat? What signals and narratives constituted this discourse, and how were these signals perceived by the Hindu community? These are the questions that I will try and address in the course of my analysis. The focus on this Hindu-Hindu communication dynamic has been supplemented by occasionally touching upon the Hindu-Muslim communication dynamics by referring to voices from the Muslim community. The larger aim of the study is to understand the social dynamics of the violence.

1.2. Objectives of the research

The following are the objectives of the research:

- To identify the range of cultural expressions associated with the violence afloat in the Hindu Right public discourse.

- To analyse the role of these cultural expressions of the Hindu Right discourse in the enactment and legitimisation of the violence.

1.3. Importance of the study

Why explore the discourse and the cultural domain of the public sphere in order to understand the dynamics of interethnic violence? How can an analysis of cultural expressions contribute to understanding the intertwined and complex social, political and other dynamics that constitute interethnic violence?

One argument which stresses the importance of the link between violence and the domain of culture has been put forward by Shubh Mathur. Comparing cases of violence by democratically elected governments (such as the violence sponsored by the Hindu Right in India)² with violence sponsored by military dictatorships in countries like Argentina and Guatemala, she argues that an analysis of culture and its link with violence is especially significant in cases where it is sponsored by democratically elected institutions. This is because in a democratic setup, one needs to seek causal factors beyond the concentration of power or armed might in dictatorial governments. Violence in democratic contexts, she argues, is not executable without tacit public consent (Mathur, 2008: 13). Based on this, I hope to show how an understanding of culture, as expressed through the public sphere, can provide important clues to understand the tacit public consent to inter ethnic violence.

There are limitations to this kind of analysis in understanding mass violence and militancy, since public discourse is not the *only or ultimate* reason why such killings take place. Violence is inevitably complex and multi-faceted, and there can be no one causal explanation for mass killings. The starting point of this study is thus the acknowledgment of this complexity. The focus on social factors or phenomena such as the circulation of

² In 2002, the BJP (the political party of the Hindu Right) was in power both in Gujarat as well as at the centre (national level).

cultural metaphors has been chosen keeping in mind that an understanding of the multiple social dynamics involved in the violence is impossible to accomplish within the current space and time constraint. Thus, the cultural domain is only one of, but nevertheless an important, factor in understanding targeted mass violence.

This study is based on an idea that the dehumanization of a community plays an important role in enabling large-scale human rights violations. The concept of dehumanization is especially relevant for the field of human rights research, since the idea of human rights is based on the idea of equality for all individuals³. That is, it approaches all human beings as individuals in their own right, regardless of their national, religious or any other identity. Following from that, I would argue that the struggle to ensure justice for victims of human rights violations is a struggle to rehumanize them .i.e. enabling them to be viewed as individuals equal to all others. I hope that this study will contribute to this endeavour: it is by understanding the politics of dehumanization and mass violence that we can hope to counter it and contribute to ending human rights violations.

1.4. Some Important Terms

Some terms used in this thesis are specific to the case study and should be explained:

- **Communalism**

The term 'communalism' in the Indian subcontinent is specifically used to denote hatred between or towards another religious community (ies).

- **Islamophobia**

The term can be defined as "...an irrational fear or prejudice towards Islam and Muslims..." (www.islamophobia.org)

³ Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) states that: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."(UNDHR, 1948: Article 1). Available online at : <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

- **Hindutva**

Hindutva or Hinduness is an ideology propagated by the Hindu Right forces in India today. The notion of *Hinduness* is supposed to bridge the huge gaps of caste, class and other differences that exist amongst Hindus in India, building an idea of a Hindu nation (*rashtra*) in which all peoples defined as Hindu can participate (Mathur, 2008:43).

However, *Hindutva* is not an emancipatory ideology: on the contrary, it seeks to retain the power imbalance in Hindu community. In order to ‘unify’ Hindus, it propounds a model of social harmony that does not address, but *retains* the internal conflicts and hierarchies amongst Hindus. The authoritarian model of Hindu society provides “a moral and ethical basis for individual sacrifice and surrender to the leaders at the top” (Banerjee, 1991: 97). Since this ideology is the defining feature of the propaganda of the Hindu Right forces in India, the terms “*Hindutva* discourse” and “Hindu Right discourse” have been used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

1.5. Background

In order to understand the processes of boundary construction between communities, it is necessary to understand the historical processes behind it. In this section, I will outline the history of communalism and the historical context in which the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy emerged in India.

Perspectives on history

History is a contested domain, and there are differing historical perspectives on Hindu-Muslim relations in India. It is possible to identify two major historical perspectives. The first of these argues that Hindu-Muslim antagonism in India dates back to pre-modern times. It follows that Hindu Muslim riots in India today are part of an older problem that has been endemic in Indian society for a long period of time (Bayly, 1995). Thus, violence between religious communities is something that occurs spontaneously and naturally.

I find this view rather rigid and essentialist, and see it as part of the problem of communalism in India today since it explains away inter religious violence by using vague terms such as tradition and spontaneity instead of trying to understand its contemporary dynamics. Indeed, this is the view of history that Hindu fundamentalist organisations in India today prescribe to, a point that I will return to later in this study.

A view that tries to understand the complex dynamics of inter ethnic violence will provide a starting point for a solution to such violence. This is what the constructivist perspective seeks to do. The constructivist perspective views communalism in India as a modern construction, and sees communalism as a ‘mask’ used to promote political, economic and power interests. This is the school of thought that scholars like Paul Brass belong to (Brass, 2003: 25). This study also takes a constructionist approach. Taking this approach as a point of departure, I will now briefly outline the history of Hindu Muslim relations in India.

A brief overview of Hindu Muslim relations in India

The history of communalism in India is linked to colonialism and the political context it generated. One of the first branches of history writing to highlight the tensions between Hindus and Muslims was British colonial historiography. The dominant trend in this writing by the end of the 19th century was what Veena Das calls ‘the colonial riot narrative’, which presented most events, regardless of the issue concerned, as a case of religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims (Das, 1995; Pandey in Das, 1995:42-43). Thus, this perspective essentialized the relationships between people of differing religious persuasions to make the case that Hindu-Muslim interaction in India was dominated by feelings of religious hatred and conflict.

The nationalist movements that developed in pre independent India sought to glorify the Indian past to oppose colonial constructions of a backward country. However, the nationalist discourse absorbed many of the biases of the colonial discourse it opposed. Gyanendra Pandey, a historian who has written extensively on the history of communalism in India, shows that the history of nationalism in India is linked to the history of

communalism. The nationalist discourse, he argues, with its need to construct a core or a mainstream of the nation, drew sharp boundaries between communities. The following quote by him sheds light on the Indian case:

“... It was in the particular context of 1947 – building on more than a century of colonial governance premised on the division between Hindus and Muslims, and on an extended (and oft-retold) history of Muslim adventurers raiding the land, settling and setting up towns and kingdoms in which the question of religious and ethnic identities became important political issues – that the “we” of Indian nationalism came to be elaborated, and the Muslims came to be marked out as a minority ...”(Pandey,1999: 625).

Thus, the forces of colonialism, nationalism and communalism are inextricably intertwined in the history of India. All these discourses draw boundaries between Hindus and Muslims in India, albeit in different ways and in differing degrees. The British colonial policy of divide-and-rule and the development of Hindu and Muslim communal politics culminated in the partition of India on communal lines in 1947 into an Islamic Pakistan and a secular India.

In India today, Hindus constitute a religious majority of approximately 80% of the population, while Muslims constitute the largest minority of approximately 13% of the population (Census of India, 2001). The population of Muslims is dispersed all over the country, and has large concentrations in the states of Jammu and Kashmir and West Bengal, with lower concentrations in other areas. In riot-prone regions like Maharashtra and Gujarat, the Muslims constitute a minority of less than 20 per cent of the population. On an average, Muslims are of a lower income bracket than Hindus (Frøystad, 2009: 444). Other religious minorities in India include Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Parsees, Jews and others. While communal tensions are not limited to differences between Hindus and Muslims, the history of partition has ensured that Hindu-Muslim conflict is an enduring problem in India today.

Since 1947, communal riots between Hindus and Muslims and anti-Muslim pogroms have been endemic in India (Brass, 2003:6). One major landmark was the violence that occurred in various parts of the country following the demolition of the Babri Masjid (Mosque) in Ayodhya, India on 6th December 1992, and the riots that followed in Bombay. A decade later, in 2002, another landmark case of communal violence was witnessed in Gujarat, which is the case discussed in this thesis.

The state of Gujarat⁴:

Gujarat has witnessed several incidents of violence in post independent India (Pillai, 2006: 19). The presence of the Hindu Right in Gujarat dates back to the 1950s, and the movement gathered a great deal of strength by mobilising largely upper caste support in the 1960s. Major landmarks of communal violence include the riots in the city of Ahmedabad in 1969. Another case was the widespread violence all over Gujarat in 1993 that occurred in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. A report by an organisation called the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) states that in both cases, the damage and losses in the Muslim community were way higher than those amongst the Hindu community. Another instance of violence in 2000 witnessed the systematic destruction of Muslim property by members of Hindu Right organisations (PUDR, 2002: 64-66). The same pattern of systematic targeting of Muslim lives and property was also seen in 2002, which is the case discussed in this study. When the violence broke out, the political face of the Hindu Right, a political party called the BJP (Bhartiya Janata Party) was in power.

⁴ 'State' is an administrative division. Gujarat is one of the 28 states of the Republic of India, and is located in the Western part of the country. Refer to Appendix B (Map of India showing Gujarat).

The Hindu Right in India

There are a number of Hindu Right organizations in India today, which are collectively organized into a coalition called the *Sangh Parivar* (the Family of Associations). These include:

- The RSS (The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*). It describes itself as a cultural organization, with its main task being “character building” (Mathur, 2008:81-82). It operates through the disseminating mechanism of its branches or *shakhas*, which are spread all over India, and operate on a daily basis. Different *shakhas* operate for different age groups. Here, children and adults are taught to use weapons such as *lathis* (sticks, swords etc.), and they learn about nationalist Hindu heroes (Mathur, 2008: 88-100). These *shakhas* are perhaps the best example of the everyday life of Hindu nationalism.
- The BJP (the *Bharatiya Janata Party*), a political party. It was in power both in the state of Gujarat as well as at the national level during Gujarat 2002. It is still in power in Gujarat, though not at the national level.
- The ABVP (the *Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad*), the All India Students Council.
- The VHP or *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council), which works in the field of ‘religion and social work.’
- Apart from this, there are various organizations working with women, tribal people, lower castes, labourers and other social groups.

Thus, the mass base of the Hindu Right organizations in India is wide and varied. What unites these varied organisations into one coalition? Shubh Mathur has argued that the unifying factor in the ideology of the Hindu Right is not the exact nature of Hindu identity, but a hatred of religious minorities (Mathur, 2008: 53). Due to the peculiar history of the Indian subcontinent, Muslims feel the brunt of this hatred the most. How is this hatred of

Muslims created, propagated and reinforced by these organizations? How can one begin to understand this Islamophobic ideology? The next chapter outlines the methodological and analytical approaches chosen in this study.

Chapter 3 looks at the cultural content of the Hindu Right discourse in the public sphere in Gujarat. It presents the cultural signs and narratives associated with the violence in different categories and discusses them systematically. The analysis in Chapter 3 is micro analysis in that it is specific to the cultural signs presented. Based on this, Chapter 4 draws more general conclusions about the cultural aspect and the use of signs in the Hindu Right discourse (macro analysis). Conclusions regarding the impact of dehumanization on various aspects of society are provided in Chapter 5. This chapter also presents some conclusions on Islamophobia in India, and discusses possible parallels for analysis. Chapter 6 gives some recommendations for further research. Keeping the practical aspect of the study in mind, it also discusses the applicability of the human rights framework to countering processes of dehumanization in society, and suggests alternative strategies and approaches that might help in ensuring the more effective implementation of human rights.

Chapter 2

Methodology and Analytical Framework

2.1. Sources and Methodology

My initial research questions (articulated on page 2 and 3 in the Introduction) were formed during my visit to Gujarat in the summer of 2003. To answer these questions, I have turned to a variety of sources.

This study is based almost exclusively on secondary sources. The main sources of material on the case study used are human rights and other civil society reports published by various national and international bodies. In addition, some news coverage available online has been used. I have supplemented these secondary sources by using notes drawn from my experiences as an activist, as well as conversations I have had with several people from Gujarat to gauge their opinions about the violence.

Most of these sources are one sided in that they take a clear partisan position in condemning the violence and the state of Gujarat. Further, most of them are either written from, or lean towards a human rights perspective. Keeping this in mind, I have attempted to use these sources critically. At the same time, however, this study also takes a partisan position in that it leans towards a human rights perspective.

The available material has been used to identify a variety of cultural expressions associated with the violence afloat in the Hindu Right public discourse. Using a perspective of discourse analysis, these expressions have been categorised and analysed with the help of academic literature on Hindu Muslim conflict and literature drawn from the field of violence studies. A detailed review of this literature follows in the next section.

2.2. Analytical Framework

This section examines a few concepts that are central to the analysis in this study.

Violence

A number of important questions come to mind regarding the nature of mass violence. What, for instances, causes such violence? Can one factor, such as the lack of civic engagement between two communities, explain the outbreak of violence (Varshney, 2001:363)? Further, is the term ‘outbreak’ appropriate for understanding how this violence breaks out: that is, can it be understood as spontaneous, a sudden eruption? If yes, then are these eruptions aberrations, shocking occurrences that disrupt the peace of daily life? This is a view that stems from a long-standing argument in the field of genocide studies that views the Jewish Holocaust as a unique case (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004: 19-20). Viewed from this perspective, cases such as Gujarat can be classified as exceptional occurrences detached from daily life.

An understanding of mass violence as spontaneous stems from a long tradition in social psychology, first articulated by Gustave Le Bon that views ‘crowds’ as easily swayed by passion and hysteria.⁵ As Gupta argues, perspectives influenced by this idea view cases of mass violence as occurrences in which primordial passions are inflamed and ‘boil over’ (Gupta, 2007:34).

Ashutosh Varshney, in his study of causation in Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, stresses the nature of civic engagement between the two communities as an important factor in inter-community relations. He postulates that in cases where there is frequent civic engagement (such as professional associations, networking, community interaction) between Hindus and Muslims, conflict is not likely to occur. Consequently, he argues, the

⁵ See: Le Bon [1896] (2001) *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Kitchener: Batoche Books.
Available online at: <http://socserv.mcmaster.ca/econ/ugcm/3ll3/lebon/Crowds.pdf>

absence of civic engagement between Hindus and Muslims leads to situations in which conflict is more likely (Varshney, 2001). I see Varshney's explanation as supporting a view of violence as spontaneous. His argument seems to imply that the absence of civic engagement would lead to automatic outbreaks of spontaneous violence. Thus, the search for mono causal explanations feeds into a primordial view of violence.

On the other hand, one can look at acts of violence as a continuum, and therefore view violence in everyday life as linked to large scale instances of violence. Scholars such as Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004: 19-20), and Raka Ray (2007: 87) have argued that there *is* a link between everyday and large scale occurrences of violence. This is the link that this study attempts to explore further by trying to examine what role cultural signs play in normalizing and ritualizing violence and thus enabling the outbreak of a pogrom.

Scholars such as Tambiah and Brass, who have worked extensively on Hindu Muslim violence in India, have postulated that such cases of collective communal violence in India are to some degree *routinized and ritualized* (Tambiah, 1990:755; Brass, 2003:30). I quote Tambiah:

“...ethnic conflicts are occurrences that, up to a point, are staged, that by virtue of repetition acquire stereotypical features, and in which antecedent happenings become precedents for later orchestrations.” (Tambiah, 1990:755).

Thus, Tambiah takes an instrumentalist view of ethnic violence by arguing that ‘riots’ are in fact often planned and pre-meditated. Spontaneity is often used as an excuse to cover up the political crafting behind such violence. Taking this argument as a point of departure, this study is based on the assumption that mass violence is complex and multi faceted, and pre planned up to some degree. Given such a scenario, this project attempts to understand the role cultural signs play in the pre planned as well spontaneous aspects of such violence. That is to say, it examines how cultural signs structure and shape the actual events of the violence.

In doing this, this dissertation uses the analogy Brass has drawn between the production of communal violence in India and the production of stage dramas. He says that riots can be likened to stage productions which have distinct phases: the preparation stage, in which leaders (politicians and others) decide how to attack, followed by an activation/enactment stage in which the actual violence is carried out. The third and last stage is explanation/interpretation, which is the political debate that follows communal violence, in which the violence is interpreted and the responsibility for the violence is determined. Brass argues that this stage is characterised by a blurring of agency and what he calls ‘blame displacement’, which I will return to in a later chapter (Brass in Frøystad, 2009:445). This dissertation focuses on two of these stages – the enactment and the subsequent contextualisation of the violence – and tries to see how cultural signs and narratives shape both these stages of the violence.

Discourse

In order to locate cultural signs in the violence, one has to try and understand them in the context of the *discourse* which propagates them. This study therefore focuses on the Hindu Right discourse and tries to analyse it critically to understand its features, logic and operation in India. The point of departure here is Apter’s definition of political discourse and political discourse theory:

“Discourse in general is a way of organizing human experience. It establishes frames of meaning by the recounting and interpreting of events and situations. It constructs systems of order. Political discourse applies such frames to the exercise of power – including principles of hierarchy, representation and accountability...As a form of critique, [modern political discourse theory] tries to penetrate below the surface of the good stories that people tell themselves about politics...”(Apter, 2004: 11644).

This endeavour of questioning and understanding such ‘good stories’ and grand narratives is what this study hopes to contribute to. In the grand narratives of discourses that construct community identity (such as Hindu, Muslim, Arabic, Jewish etc.), *culture* is an important aspect. The emphasis on a common culture, shared traditions and social values unique to a community is important in the construction of community identity. In

traditional sociological theory, a community is often defined by two main aspects. The first is its common culture .i.e. the community is seen as the sphere of face-to-face relations and interaction where a common, shared worldview of the community is created (Das, 1995: 50). The focus here is on intra-community interaction, and how that shapes culture. The second aspect of constructing collective identity involves defining the self vis-à-vis ‘the other’, whereby a community defines itself and its culture in contrast to other communities (Cohen in Saugestad, 1982:134). Thus, the definition of the self as different from others is an important part of constructing one’s identity. This study thus looks at the cultural aspect of the Hindu Right discourse, and tries to penetrate its understanding of a common Hindu culture as unique and different from other cultures.

Apart from analysing these ‘good stories’, this study also tries to question the bad stories that such discourses tell about ‘the other.’ That is, it looks at the negative aspect of how discourses construct community identity. Veena Das has pointed out that often, there are violent and homogenizing tendencies involved in defining and drawing the *boundaries* of a collective (community) (Das, 1995: 10). The need of the community to define the imagined self as unique can lead to defining “the other” not just in contrast to, but in *opposition to the self*. Thus, culture not only defines common identity, but also *social boundaries*.

This link between culture and social boundaries has been explored by Sidsel Saugestad in her work on the symbols and metaphors that prescribe community identity and social boundaries (Catholic vs. Protestant) in Northern Ireland (Saugestad, 1982). Based on her work, this study takes a similar approach in that it looks at how boundaries that express social differences between groups are created and maintained. For the purpose of such an analysis, the conflicting identities of ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ can be viewed as *ethnic groups*. In Saugestad’s categorisation of the identities ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ in Northern Ireland as ethnic groups in conflict, she draws on Barth’s (1969) definition of *ethnic groups* as groups that define themselves as, and are also defined by others as unique and different from other social groups (Saugestad, 1982: 134). The expression of community identity in such cases is not based so much on an understanding of a shared

culture and common traditions, but on the boundaries that define the self vis-à-vis the other.

Das has pointed out that community discourse not only defines itself in opposition to ‘the other’, but often engages in violence against this “other” (another community) to maintain these constructed boundaries (Das, 1995:10, 15). Thus, discourse that shapes community identity may be based on a dehumanization of, and following from that, violence against, the other. Shubh Mathur’s study of the Hindu Right discourse in Rajasthan analyses the cultural domain of such violence and looks at how negative definitions of ‘the other’ can penetrate the everyday life and commonsense understanding of a community (Mathur, 2008). This dissertation draws upon her work to understand how inter ethnic violence can be *normalized*.

The impact of the negative, violent aspect of cultural discourse and identity construction should not be underestimated, for it implies that *words can kill* (Apter, 2004: 11644). What are these words? What is the content of such discourse? The next chapter examines the content of the Hindu Right discourse in the context of the violence in Gujarat in 2002.

Chapter 3

Cultural Signs and Narratives: Micro Analysis

“... Ancient wrongs, real and imagined, were sought to be collectively avenged by the savage violation of the rights of a living, demonised “enemy”. There has been an appalling emotional partitioning of minds into “we” and “they” among all too many across Gujarat and elsewhere in India...” (Editor’s Guild of India, 2002:22).

3.1. Introduction

The above quote illustrates how social boundaries between communities, when taken to an extreme, can result in violence. This chapter looks at the cultural content of the Hindu Right discourse in the public sphere in Gujarat to understand how it expresses these social boundaries vis-à-vis ‘the other’ .i.e. the Muslim community. It presents the cultural signs and symbols associated with the violence in different categories and discusses them one by one. The analysis presented in this chapter is micro analysis in that it is specific to the cultural signs presented here. A more general (macro) analysis follows in the next chapter.

Ordinary cultural signs that are part of everyday life often acquire an extraordinary meaning or significance during situations of conflict. Since the violence in Gujarat was carried out in the name of religion, several cultural signs that are part of daily life took on an added meaning as markers of religious identity. Further, these signs were those that were seen as *expressing differences* between the two communities. The following quote sheds light on this:

“...The features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant. The cultural contents of ethnic dichotomies would seem analytically to be of two orders: (i) overt signals or signs – the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, house-form, or general style of life, and (ii) basic value orientation: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged.” (Barth in Saugestad, 1982: 135-136).

This means that many of the symbols used by the Hindu Right discourse do not necessarily express religious hostility as such, but are seen by the actors involved as doing so. Further, as Barth says in the above quote, these signs have both overt (visible, tangible) aspects, as well as covert (invisible and intangible) aspects. The signs related to the violence in Gujarat have both these aspects. Keeping this in mind, let us now turn to a discussion of these signs. For the sake of clarity, these signs have been categorised and discussed under four separate headings: visual symbols, verbal discourse, written discourse and lastly, terminology and metaphors. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive and overlap to a great extent. Further, the categories and examples listed here do not cover the entire range of cultural signs, but represent a sample of such cultural signs. In this sample, I have tried to focus on those signs that I felt illustrate the actors' perceptions of their victims, as well as their views on the violence they were executing.

3.2. Visual Symbols

The visual symbols are all *tangible* ones, and are therefore seen as expressing cultural differences in an overt manner.

Religious structures:

Religious structures are one of the most obvious targets of attack in cases of communal violence. The demolition of a religious structure is a physical and symbolic way of degrading the other community's religion, offending its religious sentiments and establishing a symbolic victory over 'the other's' religion. The demolition of the Babri *Masjid* (Mosque) in Ayodhya in Dec 1992 is perhaps one of the best examples of this. The demolition of this 500 year old mosque sparked one of the most horrible cases of communal violence in the country.

The same pattern was seen in Gujarat: often, mosques were attacked before any other form of violence was carried out. It has been estimated that approximately 240 Muslim mosques, shrines, graveyards etc. were vandalised in various parts of Gujarat (Editors Guild, 2002: 6). Further, these holy sites were desecrated before being burnt or demolished

in several places. For instance, a report published by an NGO called the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR) notes that in *Sanjeli* (in District Dahod), where the mosque was broken and set on fire, abusive slogans against Muslims were found written on the walls (PUDR, 2002: 31). Saffron flags and images and idols of the Hindu god *Hanuman*⁶ were installed (Editors Guild, 2002: 6; PUDR, 2002:31). PUDR argues that the symbolic desecration carried out before the actual destruction of mosques is indicative of a “...systematic attempt to stamp out the cultural identity of Muslims...” (PUDR, 2002: 31).

Colour:

The colour *green* is known to be the colour of Islam in the Indian subcontinent⁷. However, the link between the colour and Islam is not automatic, and does not apply to every context. Green is also the colour of fertility, and also just another colour of the clothes people wear. During the violence in Gujarat, however, it acquired a special significance as an almost exclusive marker of the Islamic identity. I will illustrate this by recalling an instance from my personal experience in Gujarat in 2003, a year after the killings.

Walking down the road with a friend in Ahmedabad city, I suddenly realised that we were receiving a lot of hostile stares from people on the road. We wondered about it for a while, and then it slowly dawned on us that it was possibly because I had a green shirt on, along with a green stone pendant around my neck. Feeling increasingly scared, we decided to run for it after a while. A few of the people we met in Gujarat also said that they realised that they received hostile stares if they happened to be wearing green shirts.

The colour *saffron*, on the other hand, is portrayed by the Hindu Right as representative of the Hindu identity. In general, the colour saffron is so prominent in *Hindutva* campaigns

⁶ *Hanuman* is a Hindu god who features along with the god *Ram* in the epic *Ramayana*. *Ram* and *Hanuman* are prominent symbols of the *Hindutva* movement.

⁷ The flag of the Islamic state of Pakistan, for instance, has green in it since the colour is associated with Islam.

that Hindu Right nationalism is often called *saffron nationalism*. During the violence, several of the attackers wore saffron bands or scarves. For instance, eyewitnesses of the violence in a village called *Pandarwada*⁸ reported that a car filled with men who wore saffron *dupattas* (long scarves) drove around the village and supervised the murders (PUDR, 2002:8). Thus, in the context of the violence, the colours green and saffron were not merely expressions of religious identity and difference, but also of religious enmity and violence.

Other tangible signals:

The above examples indicate that the violence was not just physical, but also symbolic in that it sought to establish the supremacy of ‘Hindu’ cultural identity over the Muslim. Other incidents indicate this as well:

One of the instances of mass killing reported from the village of Delol (in the District Panchmahals) was the hacking and burning to death of ten people. The dead bodies were piled up and set on fire. This represented a symbolic act of conversion, since Hindus and Muslims follow different death rituals. While Muslims bury their dead, Hindus cremate the body. Two young boys, aged ten and twelve, were forced to go around the fire and shout ‘Jai Shree Ram’⁹ (‘Victory to Lord Ram’) before being shoved into the pyre (PUDR, 2002: 11).

In months following the violence, several Muslims stayed on in relief camps out of fear. In May 2002, the Peoples Union for Democratic Rights reported that:

“...Threats issued to many Muslims trying to go back to their villages hinge upon

⁸ *Pandarwada* is located in District *Panchmahals* and has around 500-600 Hindu families and approximately 70-80 Muslim families (PUDR, 2002: 7).

⁹ Ram is a Hindu god who features prominently in the Hindu Right discourse in India.

their stopping the use of cultural symbols, even caps and beards for men¹⁰ and salwar kameez¹¹ for women.”(PU DR, 2002:31).

Such overt threats regarding symbols that are considered markers of Muslim identity and the ritual acts of symbolic conversion during the violence indicate that there is a direct link between cultural symbols, religion and violence in the vision of the Hindu Right discourse in India.

3.3. Verbal Discourse

Slogans:

Slogans feature repeatedly in the memory of eyewitness and survivor testimonies. Some examples follow:

“Babar ke aulad”

The Editors’ Guild fact finding mission reports that Muslims were referred to as “Babar ke aulad” (Editors Guild, 2002: 4). Literally translated, this phrase reads as ‘children of Babar’.

Babar was a Mughal emperor who founded the Mughal empire in 1526 AD, which flourished in what are now large parts of the Indian subcontinent from the mid-16th to the mid-19th century AD. Since Islam came to India only in the middle ages,¹² a common argument of the Hindu Right discourse is that Islam is a ‘foreign’ religion that spread in

¹⁰ ‘Caps’ here refers to the white cap worn by Muslim men while praying. ‘The beard’ here represents another stereotype which says that all Muslim men have beards. In fact, the beard is not an exclusive indicator of religious identity in the Indian subcontinent. Several Hindu and Muslim men have beards, and several do not.

¹¹ The *salwar kameez* is a traditional garment worn by women in several parts of India. Again, the idea that only Muslims wear *salwar kameez* is a stereotype. The *salwar kameez* is worn by many non-Muslims (including Hindus) in several parts of India.

¹² The first period of Islamic rule started in the 13th c. with the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate, the rulers of which came from Central Asia.

India at the point of sword. The period when Islam came to India is commonly portrayed as a dark age that brought about the downfall of Hindu civilisation. Islamic kings are said to have plundered Hindu temples and destroyed them mercilessly (Puniyani, 2003: 83-87). The use of Babar's name in this phrase is thus a sample of this larger argument.

The phrase raises some interesting points. The reference to a historical figure so far back in time seems to illustrate that in the attackers' imagination, the violence they are carrying out is directly linked to history. Given the Hindu Right's version of history, which is clearly linear, the acts of violence executed are likely to be seen as retaliatory or revenge for the ancient wrongs carried out by Muslims on the Hindu civilisation. I will dwell further on this sense of history in the next chapter.

“We are willing to do anything for Hindustan/India”

The Editor-in-Chief of *Sandesh*, a Gujarati (vernacular) newspaper that was widely criticised for coverage favouring the Hindu Right during the carnage, told a fact finding mission that he felt that the reaction to the train burning in Godhra was justified.¹³ He is also quoted to have said: *“Hindustan ke naam per kuch bhi karenge”/ “We are willing to do anything for Hindustan/India”* (Editors Guild, 2002: 5).

This phrase is clearly a nationalist one. The violence against Muslims was thus carried out in the name of this nation: the presumption here is that this nation is a Hindu nation, either made up exclusively of or at least dominated by Hindus¹⁴. I will dwell further on this variant of nationalism in the next chapter.

¹³ The reaction' here refers to the mass killings in Gujarat.

¹⁴ The idea of Hindu *rashtra* or Hindu nation is an important cornerstone of the *Hindutva* ideology.

Rumours and Myths:

Recollections about rumours and myths abound in the accounts given by eyewitnesses of the violence. These existed in both the written and verbal forms, and some of the spread of misinformation was amazingly well organized.

In *Pandarwada* village for example, Faiz Mohammad Ahmadbhai (a Muslim eyewitness), mentioned a huge meeting in which villagers from 50-60 villages gathered just two weeks before the attacks started:

“Nearly 300 to 400 people from the nearby villages, men and women, had collected at the meeting. There were VHP¹⁵ leaders, *sadhus* [saints] and others. The entire meeting was broadcast on the loudspeakers....One leader said, ‘...The Muslim population is increasing. We must do something now. We have no arms. In Muslim houses arms are ready for use. We must prepare to fight them...’ The Muslims don’t believe in family planning so their population increases. Let our population also increase...” (Mohammad Ahmadbhai in PUDR, 2002: 27, emphasis added).

This account indicates a few important things: firstly, the fact that the meeting was organised in advance and was addressed by leaders of the VHP indicates that some of the propaganda that spread rumours and myths about Muslims before the violence was well organised. Paul Brass has spoken about two types of rumours in his analysis of the role of rumour in communal violence. He says that while gossip mongering in general may have no role in mobilizing people to act violently, there is also organised and specialized production of rumours designed with the specific purpose of mobilising violent crowds (Brass, 2003:361). Using this classification, the speech quoted above clearly falls into the latter category. That is to say, rumours that demonise Muslims in this way are *intentionally* spread.

¹⁵ The VHP: The *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* or the World Hindu Council. It is a sister organization of the BJP, the political party in power both in the state as well as the centre during the violence in 2002.

Secondly, the references to increasing Muslim population and possession of arms seem to imply that there is a Muslim conspiracy to dominate and/or kill Hindus. Such propaganda is likely to have aided in creating fear and hatred towards the Muslims amongst the Hindu community. Lastly, the speech has a clear tone of urgency to it in that it urges Hindus to act with immediate effect to defend themselves. Keeping in mind that at least 38 Muslims were killed in *Pandarwada* just two weeks after this meeting, the speech can be read as a directly inciting violence. Other rumours such as "...Hindu women being violated by Muslims..." are likely to have added anger and justified the violence that followed (PUDR, 2002: 28).

3.4. Written Discourse

Pamphlets and Handbills:

Pamphleteering played an important role in the violence, and there were several different pamphlets in circulation (PUCL-Vadodara and Shanti Abhiyan, 2002:150)¹⁶. A glance at some of the pamphlets in circulation indicates that rumours and myths were not just propagated verbally, but also in the written form.

The following extract is from a four-page long pamphlet that was circulated in the city of Ahmedabad. Circulated by the VHP, the pamphlet appealed for funds to provide security for Hindus. It says:

“... Your life is in danger, you can be murdered any time... We are collecting funds for securing the interests of the Hindus....there are thousands of more Godhra carnages being planned.” (Times of India, April 26, 2002 in Editor’s Guild, 2002: 14).

The language of the quote creates a clear dividing line between a Muslim community gearing up to attack and a Hindu community under threat. Creating an atmosphere of fear

¹⁶ PUCL-Vadodara and Shanti Abhiyan is an NGO based in Gujarat.

and tension, this quote places the responsibility for the uncertainty in the air on the Muslim community. In other words, it paints a picture of *Muslims as aggressors* inciting the violence.

Print Media:

Sections of the vernacular press in Gujarat, especially two newspapers: the *Sandesh* and the *Gujarat Samachar*, have been condemned for playing a provocative role in the violence¹⁷. The role of these two newspapers is especially significant since they have a large readership: *Gujarat Samachar* has approximately 8.10 lakh (810000) readers, while *Sandesh* has a readership of approximately 7.05 lakhs (705 000) (Editors Guild, 2002: 2-6).

Just a few days after the Godhra incident, an article in *Sandesh* carried the following title in block letters:

“THE GODHRA INCIDENT IS NOT COMMUNALISM, IT IS THE BLACK SHADOW OF TERRORISM” (Sandesh, 1 March 2002 in PUCL-Vadodara and Shanti-Abhiyan, 2002: 154).

This headline portrays the Muslims as terrorists. The Muslim-terrorist-aggressor equation reminds one of Islamophobic rhetoric in the West, especially post the attacks on September 11, 2002 in the United States of America.

Interestingly enough, *Sandesh*'s circulation increased by approximately 150,000 copies after the riots began, which was probably due to its pro-Hindu stance (Editors Guild, 2002: 6). The increase in the popularity of the newspaper indicates that the messages communicated by the newspaper were accepted by at least some parts of the Hindu community in Gujarat. On this basis, one can conclude that the anti Muslim discourse was effective to at least some extent.

¹⁷ The same report that condemns the role of *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* concludes that otherwise, the overall role of both the local and national media in the Gujarat carnage was neutral (Editor's Guild. 2002).

School Textbooks:

Post the violence in Gujarat, there was much talk in India about the communalisation of the education system in Gujarat. Analyses of the social science textbooks prescribed by the Gujarat State Board of School Textbooks were criticised for being substandard and biased (Editors Guild, 2002: 17).

For instance, Chapter 9 in the Social Studies textbook for Standard 9 is titled “*Problems of the Country and their Solutions*” and reads:

“..Apart from the Muslims, even the Christians, Parsees and other *foreigners* are also recognised as the minority communities. In most of the states the *Hindus are in a minority and Muslims, Christians and Sikhs are a majority in these respective states.*”(Social Studies textbook, Std. IX in Editors Guild, 2002: 17, emphases added).

The use of the term ‘foreigner’ to refer to minorities in the country invokes the idea that Hindus are somehow the genuine, authentic inhabitants of India. Apart from this bias, this paragraph is also factually incorrect and self contradictory: while on the one hand, it lists the Muslim, Sikh and Christian communities as minorities, it then claims that Hindus are a minority in most parts of India¹⁸. This factually incorrect statement seems to be deliberately designed to give the impression of a majority of Hindus who are left to the mercy of ‘foreigners’ in their homeland.

A report by an organisation called the Citizens’ Initiative points out that the Social Studies textbook for Standard 10 presents a rather uncritical view of fascism and Nazism, and glorifies Hitler. Hitler is praised for lending “dignity and prestige to the German government.”(Social Studies textbook, Std. X in Citizens’ Initiative, 2002:1). Such glorification implies that the textbooks promote a *militant nationalism*.

¹⁸ Hindus form a majority of approximately 80 per cent of the population in India.

3.5. Terminology and Metaphors

The previous two sections have examined samples of language used in the *Hindutva* violence in the verbal and the written form. This section looks at examples of more condensed usage of language, and focuses on specific terminology and phrases.

Names:

Names in India can sometimes, though not always, indicate religious identity. During the violence, disclosing one's name if one was a Muslim would have been foolhardy.

The following quote is by Sahir Raza, an eyewitness to the violence. Sahir was 14 years old when the violence broke out. Being the son of activists, he accompanied his parents to Gujarat, and shot the carnage on his camera. Though not a Muslim by persuasion, his name 'Sahir Raza' would spell 'Muslim' to the attackers. Recalling the precautions he had to take, he recalls:

“The very first instruction my mother gave me on the morning of 30th march 2002 was that my name was *Sahil Raja* for the next few weeks. To a 14 year old boy, this instruction didn't make much sense....however, with the approach into the city, the burnt houses, the empty streets and the smell of charred meat the fear flooded in... being forced to change my name to stay alive was one of the hardest and most humiliating things I have ever gone through.”(Sahir Raza, personal communication, 2009, emphasis added)

Sahir's experience is not atypical, and the theme of names as identification runs through several testimonies¹⁹. However, as in Sahir's case, not everyone with a so called 'Muslim name' in India is a Muslim. Thus, a lot of the violence 'missed its mark', so to speak, by threatening people who were non Muslims. This demonstrates the problems with reducing something as fluid and intangible as cultural or religious identity to a stereotyped checklist

¹⁹ A report on Gujarat by the Citizen's Initiative says that “The entitlement to a Muslim name has.... threatened the right to the Indian nationality.”(Citizen's Initiative, 2002:5).

such as name, colour, beard etc. This quote also gives us a hint about the victim's experiences and the *humiliation* associated with the act of having to hide or deny one's cultural identity to stay alive.

Metaphors:

'Slap': a metaphor for the killings

Sociologist Raka Ray has analysed an article on *Hindunet.org*²⁰ that surfaced online after the killings in Gujarat. This online article, written by a columnist who is a supporter of the *Hindutva* ideology describes the events following the Godhra incident:

“Somebody out there has been slapped twice. The first slap was the violent retaliation that spread in other parts of Gujarat. The second, more powerful slap was delivered through non-violent means: through the ballot²¹. Both ballot and bullet have had their say. If there were any anti-national forces out there that planned to destabilize India through sudden and sporadic attacks on civilians, they must be doing a serious rethink now...” (Jagtiani in Ray, 2007: 83).

Ray dwells on the metaphor of slap here, explaining that the violence following the Godhra incident in Gujarat is seen as a retaliatory slap (expressed in terms of physical violence) from ‘the Hindu nation’ towards the Muslims for the Godhra incident. The metaphor of slap is particularly significant here, Ray argues, because a slap differs from other forms of violence (say, a kick or a punch), since the purpose of the slap is not so much to harm physically as it is to *humiliate* (Ray, 2007: 88).

She goes on to argue that this metaphor has particular significance for *Hindutva* ideology, which plays on the image of the hyper masculine Muslim who has supposedly raped and

²⁰ www.hindunet.org is a pro-*Hindutva* website

²¹ This ‘second slap’ refers to the re election of Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2002. Modi was widely criticized for his role in inciting and justifying the violence, as well as for the inaction of the State government under him (see Appendix A). Modi was reelected Chief Minister in Dec. 2002, and again for a third term in Dec. 2007. The BJP government under Modi is thus still in power in Gujarat.

humiliated the body of the Hindu nation in the past (Ray, 2007: 95). That is, the Muslim is a foreigner who has insulted and degraded the body of 'Mother India'²². This imagined enemy must be retaliated to, be 'slapped back' by the Hindu nation. The violence against the Muslims is thus construed as a *retaliation*, a resistance against the centuries of 'foreign' domination. This slap is a demonstration of the *strength and power* of the 'Hindu nation' (Ray, 2007: 95).

In other words, the purpose of the slap is clearly to avenge and humiliate the 'other' and demonstrate one's own prowess. By demonstrating prowess, one establishes a *hierarchy* between the self and the other by asserting one's own superiority. Thus, the metaphor of slap seeks to establish *inequality* between the self and 'the other', a physical as well as moral superiority. This hierarchy has a gendered aspect to it: the Hindu male has to shed his 'weakness' and display strength and aggression in order to reclaim his mother land from the aggressive, foreign Muslim (Ray, 2007: 88, 95-96). The idea of being strong and establishing one's superiority over 'the other' is closely linked to the idea of proving one's masculinity.

Mini Pakistan: a metaphor for Muslim localities

The term 'mini Pakistan' has become a common term for Muslim localities in *Hindutva* parlance. The locality of Juhapura for instance, located on the southern outskirts of the city of Ahmedabad, is home to 400,000 Muslims, and is thus called 'Mini Pakistan'. The following testimony by Mohsin, a resident of Juhapura, demonstrates the tension between the two communities:

"You can see the "border" from our windows....there is a wall between our Juhapura and the Hindu Jivaraj area. The Bajrang Dal, with *talwars* [swords] and *kesri patties* [saffron bands] came from there and cut up Muslims here. The police too stood on that side of the border and tear gassed and fired shots into this side...." (Mohsin in the Rang Avadoot Camp, Juhapura, May 5th 2002 in Citizen's Initiative, 2002: 4).

²² 'Mother India' is a common metaphor for the nation in Hindi. The nation is referred to as the motherland.

The 'border' here is a physical expression of the ghettoization and division between the two communities. The fact that Juhapura is called 'Mini Pakistan' implies that 'the border' is a metaphor for the border between India and Pakistan. During the violence, the 'Hindu nation', with all the symbols appropriated in its name, such as saffron bands and swords by the *Hindutva* forces, crossed this border to attack the 'foreign' enemy. The metaphors of 'mini Pakistan' and 'border' invoke memories of the Partition of 1947 and the 'enemy' across the border. The use of swords indicates the militant nature of the hostility of *Hindutva* nationalism towards its enemies, the Muslims.

The sample of signs presented above in this chapter gives us an idea of the Hindu Right discourse and the prominence of cultural signs in such discourse. The case of the Hindu discourse illustrates common communication strategies used by discourses on community identity in general in expressing social boundaries and defining the self vis-à-vis 'the other.' The varied techniques of communication: visual, verbal and written help in penetrating various aspects of daily life and thus give such discourse an all encompassing nature. The power of such discourse also lies in its normality: the everyday character of the symbols and signs it draws on makes it an effective mechanism of communication to mobilise an audience and hence construct community identity. What is the nature of the community identity reflected in and shaped by such discourse? The next chapter pieces the fragments of cultural signs and narratives together to form a more holistic picture of the *Hindutva* discourse and the community identity it constructs, as well as the exact role such discourse may play in enabling and justifying mass violence.

Chapter 4

Discourse and Violence: Macro Analysis

4.1. Features of the Hindu Right Discourse

A key term in the analysis of this study is ‘discourse’, which is seen as a way of organizing human experience. A discourse constructs its own worldview and systems of order’ i.e. it defines right and wrong, demarcates social boundaries and establishes hierarchies (Apter, 2004: 11644). The previous chapter shows that the Hindu Right discourse is rich in cultural content. Both tangible and intangible aspects: that is, both concrete cultural symbols and narratives shape the worldview of this discourse and consequently, the actors it influences. The present chapter analyses how this discourse constructs Hindu community identity, which is expressed in terms of the idea of *a Hindu nation*. The idea of this Hindu nation finds concrete expression in the physical space of the current nation of India, which it claims as its rightful territory. The idea and this claim is justified by drawing on *narratives* of both the past and the present. ‘The past’ here refers to the strong sense of history that permeates the *Hindutva* discourse, while the present refers to the (continued) existence of an enemy that exists both within the borders of ‘the Hindu nation’ (India) and across the border (the Islamic nation state of Pakistan). A closer look at the notions of the past and the present help in understanding how they shape the ‘Hindu’ community identity in this discourse.

The past in the present

The discourse conceptualises a glorified past of a five thousand year-old ‘Hindu nation’. Thus, the nation-state is equated with religion, and India is seen as a land belonging exclusively to Hindus, in which the entry of Islam was an invasion (Puniyani, 2003: 33, 41). Linked to the idea of this invasive Islam is the idea of Hindu tolerance, which has historically led to the subjugation of the tolerant and peace loving Hindu at the hands of the aggressive Muslim. Thus, the discourse draws a sharp boundary between the tolerant

insider and the intolerant, aggressive outsider. It also draws on a powerful metaphor of gender to emphasise this boundary: that is, it distinguishes between the image of the aggressive, hyper masculine Muslim who has subjugated the weak and tolerant Hindu in the past (Mathur, 2008:69-73).

Ascribing characteristics to both communities entails a process of homogenisation of ethnic identity, which lays down strict definitions of the identities 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' as well as the differences between the two communities. Differences between the two communities are constructed through *systematic forgetting* and *selective repetition* (Das, 1995: 129). Points of difference between the two communities are highlighted repeatedly, while the shared bonds of cultural similarity such as language, food habits, and everyday interactions are systematically suppressed and silenced. The internal differences within the two religious communities are also ignored, thus painting a picture of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' as *homogenous identities* with fixed characteristics. The characteristics ascribed to both communities are so strong that they resemble caricatures. These stereotypes are deployed in constructing a linear and one sided view of history in which the 'tolerant, peace loving Hindu' has been historically victimised by the 'aggressive Muslim'.

The idea of the Hindus as a victimised community does not stop at the ancient past, but continues into more recent history and also pervades the present. Linking the idea of Muslim intolerance and aggression to the idea of Islamic separatism, the discourse places responsibility for the partition in 1947 on the Muslim community (Mathur, 2008: 74). The concrete physical presence of 'the enemy nation' .i.e. the Islamic state of Pakistan across the border, with whom India is not on good terms makes it easy to evoke memories of the Partition and float the idea of an internal enemy. The Muslims who stayed behind in India are portrayed as 'traitors' of the nation and agents or spies of Pakistan who continue to pose a threat to the nation (Gupta, 2007:32). In this manner, the notion of Hindus as a threatened and victimised community continues into the present. This *sense of continuity* in history is integral to the discourse. By establishing a sense of linear continuity between the past and present, it makes the case that the Hindus have *always, since eternity*, suffered at

the hands of the Muslims. It also gives the message that unless immediate *action* is taken, Hindus will continue to be victims in the future. At this point, discourse transcends the abstract domain of thoughts and words and has concrete consequences:

“Collective stories have political consequences when, as myths they purport to be history, as history they are reinterpreted as theories, and as theories they make up stories about events. Theories that become stories create *fictive truths*. Since in politics, truth-telling and story-telling are part of the same process, it becomes possible to interrogate the past in order to transform the future....such stories are *collectivized*, systematized, and formed into what have been called *master narratives*”(Apter, 2004: 11645-11646).

The concrete political consequences of the stories that constitute the master narrative of the *Hindutva* discourse include targeted violence against Muslims, such as in Gujarat. The ‘fictive truth’ of Hindus as victims is extremely significant in determining how the discourse contextualizes the violence that it encourages. The strong sense of victimization frames all violence by Hindus as a *retaliation*, a response to current or past injustices (Brass, 2003:12). All the violence is carried out in the *name of the community*, in this case, the Hindu community. In this way, every act of violence against “the other” community is transformed from a morally wrong act to an act of self-defence or a fight against injustice (Das, 1995: 130-132). Thus, even though the militant *Hindutva* discourse is rife with militant and aggressive terminology and narratives which directly and indirectly instigate violence against Muslims, it projects the *agency of its aggression* away from itself and on the victim, thereby indulging in what Brass calls “blame displacement.”(Brass, 2003: 15-16). This is one of the central paradoxes of this discourse. I will return to the link between the cultural content of the discourse and blame displacement later.

Constructing ‘the other’

Another, related paradox of this discourse is that though it claims to be a discourse about Hindu community identity, it is overwhelmingly concerned with ‘the other.’ Drawing on Barth’s idea of ethnic identity, Mathur has pointed out that the *Hindutva* discourse is more concerned with the boundary between the Hindu and the ‘other’ rather than the content that

the boundary encloses (i.e. on defining what it means to be Hindu in positive terms) (Mathur, 2008: 120). In other words, the unifying factor in the ideology of the Hindu Right is less the exact nature of Hindu identity, and more an attitude that appears as a hatred of religious minorities (Mathur, 2008:53). Amongst the religious minorities in India, the Muslims are the most convenient target of hatred because of the particular socio-historic context of the Indian subcontinent. The memories of partition and the existence of Pakistan makes Muslims the perfect enemies for the 'Hindu nation' of India (Gupta, 2005: 37). Thus, the discourse of Hindu nationalism is dependent on, and constructed primarily on the idea of the existence of this perfect enemy.

Leadership and Agency

I have used phrases such as 'constructed' and 'most convenient target' while referring to the *Hindutva* discourse in the above paragraph to underline the point that this hatred for Muslims is not inherent, but *created*. The construction of a discourse entails *agency*:

“... stories are *collectivized*, systematized, and formed into what have been called *master narratives*. For this purpose *agency* is required, a public figure able to play the special role of 'storyteller' whether in the form of philosopher-kings, cosmocratic figures, politicians, soothsayers, diviners, or others.”(Benjamin 1969 in Apter, 2004: 11646)

Further, the creation of a master narrative or ideology does not by itself create violence. As Denich argues, the transformation of idea into action involves communication between leaders and their audiences (the public) that invokes people to act in accordance with this collective ideology. In other words, the creation of a discourse that encourages violent action involves the *conscious construction and manipulation of symbols* by leaders (Denich, 1994:369; Geertz in Denich, 1994: 369). In the case of Gujarat, the leaders were a varied but organised group ranging from representatives of the state to members of Hindu Right organisations, who clearly had an important role to play in the violence. Judging from the flamboyant and rhetorical use of inflammatory signals by these leaders, one can infer that the use and manipulation of these symbols was intentional. In other words, the

repeated use of such signals demonstrates the *intentionality and agency* behind the anti Muslim discourse in Gujarat.

Thus, I am arguing that the use of signals (which includes narratives, words, actions as well as tangible symbols) as mobilising tools is a conscious act by leaders. These signals are thus integral to the discourse: they constitute a part of, and are crucial for several aspects of this discourse.

The functionality of cultural signs and narratives

Cultural signs and narratives are integral to several aspects of the functioning and acceptance of discourses on community identity. Symbols help in creating community identity by linking micro, everyday life to a larger and crystallized macro identity. For instance, the *Hindutva* discourse gives symbols that are a part of everyday life (such as mosques, beards, colour, flags, traditional garments) a new meaning by injecting them with nationalist or anti-nationalist zeal, which has helped in creating a sense of identity among the Hindus in India (Mathur, 2008: 84; Panikar, 1993: 26). In this manner, the innovative use of symbols has incorporated many people into the fold of the *Hindutva* agenda (Panikar, 1993: 26). Symbols thus serve as an important *mobilising tool* for political discourses by creating a sense of identity around which several people rally.

As argued above, the concept of identity that emerges is often narrow and extremely homogenised. The use of tangible symbols freezes collective identity which is fluid by nature to strict definitions. These strict definitions in turn become the basis for the ascription of differences and the boundary between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’. The negative image of the other i.e. the enemy, when taken to the extreme, can result in the dehumanization of the other, whereby this ‘other’ is defined as less than human.

A fear of the marginalized

The ‘less than human’ status of ‘the other’ implies that ‘the enemy other’ is always constructed as inferior to the self. At the same time, the enemy is an object of fear, and poses a threat to the self. For example, the Hindu militant discourse in Gujarat evokes a

great deal of fear of the victim .i.e. the Muslims. This *fear of the marginalized* is a hallmark of such discourse. Another interesting example of this is witch hunting. Several anthropological accounts mention that the victim is often feared in cases of witch hunting (Mathur, 2008:164). How can one explain this fear of the victim? One possible explanation is that the dominating group can fear the retaliation by the victims or the marginalized that they suppress. Thus those who are marginalized are viewed as dangerous for the established system of power (Lidenbaum in Mathur, 2008: 165). To counter this threat, one needs to indulge in aggression to keep the victims at bay. Fear and aggression may thus constitute two sides of the same coin.

The extreme manifestation of such aggression is seen in cases of violence such as those in Gujarat. Such cases of inter ethnic violence are often symbolic in that they do not target just the body of their victims, but the cultural values that the victim is seen to represent. Further, they seek to establish superiority of one's own cultural values over 'the other.' In other words:

...Violence is never just violence, it expresses cultural ideas of who is the enemy and how that presence is to be dealt with. Not only are the targets of chosen carefully, but the forms of violence follow a cultural logic (Sarkar in Mathur, 2008:185).

The fear and dehumanization of Muslims in India is expressed in a symbolic language. From narratives of history to the systematic destruction of cultural institutions such as mosques, the discourse surrounding the violence in Gujarat reflects fear, aggression and prejudice towards Muslims, and can thus be called Islamophobic.

The normalization of prejudice

The discourse draws on images that are part of everyday life. Further, it manages to penetrate the popular consciousness through public media such as school textbooks, electronic and print media and other means. The everyday nature of such discourse indicates that it normalizes violent nationalism and makes it acceptable as common sense (Kabir, 2002: 10). Violence and prejudice can be normalized by the manner in which it is expressed, articulated and interpreted repeatedly in daily life.

In other words, I am arguing that the discourse and its language of symbols, signs and narratives provides clues to the link between violence in daily life and large scale instances of ethnic violence. This link is the dehumanization of the subjects of the violence, which is expressed in the language of public discourse. However, this link is neither linear nor obvious. As Ray has argued, violence in daily life *is* linked to large scale outbreaks of violence, but in complex ways (Ray, 2007:87). Though it is clear that cultural signs and narratives constitute an important part of such discourse, how effective they are is hard to measure. The question then remains: to what extent does prejudice, arising out of an Islamophobic discourse (of symbols and signs that constitute the language of the conflict), have a bearing on the actual killings? Is it possible to identify the stages of the violence in which cultural signs and narratives have the most impact? The next section addresses these questions.

4.2. Discourse and Violence: the link

In order to analyse the exact role of symbols in the violence, one needs to understand the nature and various aspects of the violence itself. The starting point of this dissertation was that cases of targeted mass violence such as the incidents described in Gujarat are pre planned to some degree. Brass has further argued that there are three stages in which riots are produced: planning, enactment and interpretation (Brass, 2003). Using this framework, I would argue that cultural signs and narratives play differential roles in these different stages. As argued above, the extensive use of such signals by the leaders in Gujarat implies a degree of planning. I will now analyse the role of this cultural discourse in the enactment as well as the contextualisation of the violence.

Enactment

This is the stage in which the actual killings occur. The question that arises here is: to what extent can prejudice, which is created through an Islamophobic discourse replete with signs and narratives, be a causal factor in the actual killings? I would argue that one has to be careful about the weightage one gives to the prejudice created through the signs and narratives of the *Hindutva* and similar discourses in *enabling* violence. I will discuss this further in the following paragraphs.

I have argued so far that the public discourse in several parts of India, for instance Gujarat, is heavily communalised and Islamophobic because of a strong presence of the *Hindutva* narratives, signs and symbols. That any dehumanizing discourse is dangerous for a democratic society is an obvious statement. As Appadurai has argued, the influence of politicized discourse can influence people to reconceptualise their neighbours and acquaintances as part of a threatening enemy community. (Appadurai in Frøystad, 2009:451). In this way, prejudice can be a contributing factor to the violence.

However, I would argue that one should not exaggerate the role of prejudice in causing mass violence. Mass violence is complex and multi causal: thus, no one factor can explain the occurrence of mass violence (Tambiah, 2005: 920; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois, 2004). The exact extent to which the signs and symbols of the Hindu Right discourse manage to create prejudice in society, and the exact role of that prejudice in the violence, is hard to measure and beyond the scope of this paper. However, keeping the multi causal nature of the violence in mind, one can argue that prejudice could be one of, while not the sole cause of violence.

There is also another, related reason why signs and narratives cannot be assigned a determining role in causing mass violence. I have argued in Chapter 2 that instances of mass violence rarely start spontaneously, and should be seen as orchestrated political productions that use the argument of spontaneity as a cover up for the political crafting

behind such violence (Tambiah, 1990:755; Brass, 2003:30). Taking this into account, I would argue that assigning prejudice (arising from a discourse rich in signs and narratives) a central role in causing violence would assist in portraying pre planned violence as spontaneous. There is a tendency in India to view Hindu Muslim riots as spontaneous outpourings of anger which arise due to the pre existing prejudices and hostilities between the two communities. As Brass has pointed out, this explanation is incomplete because it does not take into account the pre planned nature and the intentionality behind the violence (Brass, 2003: 10-11). The existence of prejudice between communities is not sufficient to cause people to engage in acts of violence against the other. The conversion of prejudice to targeted and organised violent action against ‘the other’ requires other factors, such as leadership. Thus, an explanation of inter ethnic violence as a spontaneous outburst of anger arising due to pre existing hostilities between communities diverts attention away from the intentionality and agents of the violence, a point which I will discuss further in the next section.

On the basis of the above analysis, I conclude that in a causal analysis of violence, prejudice constitutes a necessary, but not a sufficient cause for the outbreak of inter ethnic violence.

Interpretation/Contextualisation

The manner in which violence is interpreted and explained is important, among other things, in determining *agency* i.e. assigning responsibility for the violence. In my view, identifying responsibility is a first step towards ensuring justice for the victims in a situation of violence. Thus, the interpretation of a case of inter ethnic violence has direct consequences for the manner in which human rights violations are understood and addressed. I will return to discussing the difference between the state’s understanding and a human rights perspective of inter ethnic violence in the concluding chapter (Chapter 5).

Tambiah has pointed out that the ‘staging’ of the violence often uses antecedent happenings as “precedents for later orchestrations” (Tambiah, 1990:755). In the case of

Gujarat, the targeted killings of Muslims were justified by the Hindu Right as a spontaneous reaction to the train burning in Godhra (Human Rights Watch, 2002: 4). Further, the *Hindutva* discourse surrounding the violence is replete with references to inherent and essential differences between the two communities, which are also meant to imply that the violence was a spontaneous outburst in which these underlying tensions and differences between the two communities came to the fore. This explanation diverts attention away from the agents of the violence .i.e. the Hindu Right forces in India. Thus, the discourse and its language of signs and symbols served a *functional purpose* for the agents of the violence and assisted in the process of displacing responsibility.

The question then is: on whose shoulders does the burden of the violence lie? Often, the blame shifts away from the perpetrators to the victims. The *Hindutva* Right discourse's almost obsessive focus on *demonizing the other* .i.e. the Muslim through its language of signs and narratives is a case in point. The Islamophobia conjured up by this discourse i.e. the negative and fearful characteristics it ascribes to the Muslim, puts the onus of the violence on to 'the Muslim'. Thus, in the contextualisation of the violence, cultural signs and narratives serve as important tools for diffusing blame away from the perpetrators and on to the victims.

Shubh Mathur has argued that in the Indian context, the tendency to diffuse or displace blame is not limited to the Hindu Right discourse alone. According to her, a large part of the secular public as well as academic discourse in India gives primacy to the role of prejudices and existing hostilities between Hindus and Muslims as explanations for the outbreaks of violence. In other words, current academic discourses seek to balance the guilt by putting equal blame on both sides, on perpetrators and victims (Mathur, 2008:13-16). She argues that this kind of academia is counter productive because it separates the action from its agents, and thus "creates the gap which allows the violence to happen in the first place" (Mathur, 2008: 173). Varshney's explanation for communal violence, which gives primacy to the absence of civic engagement as a determining factor and thus separates the violence from its agents, is an example of such arguments (Varshney, 2001).

In this way, some of the academic discourse in India unintentionally ends up assisting in blame displacement and reinforces the process of *dehumanizing the victim* started by the Islamophobic discourse of *Hindutva* in India. The acknowledgement of human tragedy is thus lost in the jumble of biased signs and narratives, and sometimes, the obscure language of academia. This kind of contextualisation is counter productive from a human rights perspective.

To sum up, there is a grand discourse on violence in India that views cases of communal violence as spontaneous, random occurrences that have roots in deep seated hatred felt by two communities for each other. All too often, Brass argues, pre planned violence and anti Muslim pogroms in India are termed *riots* by the press, the state and the general public (Brass, 2003: 10). The citing of incidents such as Godhra (in Gujarat 2002) as the main causes/focal points around which riots start spontaneously can be understood as a part of this larger contextualisation of such violence as spontaneous.

Scholars like Brass (Brass, 2003) and Mathur (Mathur, 2008) argue against this perspective and say that one must locate the agents or instruments behind the violence. In my view, it is extremely important to make an analytical distinction between spontaneous and pre planned acts of violence, even though it may be difficult to prove in specific cases. Communal violence inevitably has a cyclical nature, and the perpetrators in one instance may be victims in another. That is to say, there are different actors and leaders involved in different situations of violence: in the case of Gujarat, evidence points to the Hindu Right leaders, while other cases of violence might involve other groups of people. The point remains: if one is to redress human rights violations effectively, one has to bring the perpetrators of violence to book. For this, an instrumentalist view of violence is more productive than a primordial view. Such academic perspectives would also take into account the suffering of the victims, and give them a voice. This would help in the more effective implementation of human rights.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

5.1. Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation has been to try and understand inter ethnic conflict from a perspective of public discourse. Based on the analysis in the previous chapters, the study draws certain conclusions on the role of public discourse in the development of community identity, and the use of a language of signs, symbols and narratives in inter ethnic violence.

The Role of Discourse

My analysis of the *Hindutva* discourse shows that this discourse constructs a Hindu community identity primarily on a negative basis .i.e. in opposition to an enemy ‘other’ .i.e. the ‘Muslim’. This ‘other’ poses a threat to the self, and needs to be controlled by violence. Thus, violence against an enemy ‘other’ forms a basis for such discourse. Further, such violence is framed as vengeance and retaliation, which displaces blame away from the perpetrators of the violence. Often, this blame is transferred to the targets of such violence. For these reasons, I would argue that it is justified to label the *Hindutva* discourse Islamophobic.

The analysis of the discourse shows that its language of signs, symbols and narratives plays a role in dehumanizing the targets of such violence and creating prejudice against them in society. However, such prejudice plays more of a role in the process of interpreting and contextualisation of the violence than in its enactment. This study argues that mass violence is generally planned or implemented for political reasons, in order to secure positions of power. Prejudice or negative stereotypes about ‘the other’ play an important role in displacing responsibility for the violence from the perpetrators (in the case, the

leaders of the Hindu Right) to the victims (here, 'the Muslim'). In other words, the discourse not only encourages violence, it also justifies it.

From a human rights perspective, this dehumanization of the targets of human rights violations has several implications at multiple levels.

Community Identity

The process of dehumanization works at the level of community consciousness by shaping common, widely shared attitudes about community identity. In other words, it influences the informal sphere of everyday interaction and culture, where community identity is defined. It is here that we can see that the abstract image that discourses construct of 'the enemy other' have implications for individuals lives in reality. For instance, the image of the 'hyper masculine, cruel, aggressive Muslim' may influence people to equate individual members of the Muslim community with this image (Appadurai in Frøystad, 2009:451). Thus, the pervasive signs, symbols and narratives that construct a less-than-human other feed directly into violent acts that have consequences for the human rights of individual human beings. In this way, dehumanization plays a role, albeit limited, in enabling human rights violations. Further, as argued above, dehumanization of victims justifies mass violence as retaliation, and puts responsibility for the violence on their shoulders. This raises the question of determining *agency* in cases of human rights violations, which is extremely important in order to ensure justice for the victims. This brings us to another aspect of society that is influenced by and is part of the process of dehumanization .i.e. the state system.

The role of the State and the problem of state compliance

The relationship between the state and the victims of communal violence in India is a complex one, a detailed analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, I would like to raise a few points about how the state contributes to the process of legitimising violence.

The state represents the formal structure on which the system of human rights – their execution and protection – is based (Smith, 2007: 164-165). In spite of the fact that the Indian state is a signatory to several international human rights treaties²³, the state of Gujarat and India failed to protect the human rights of its citizens from being violated. These violations include, amongst others, violations of the most fundamental human right .i.e. the Right to Life (Smith, 2007:194), and of The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (Citizen’s Initiative, 2002). This glaring gap between the theory and practice of human rights deserves academic attention, for, as Norberto Bobbio has pointed out, the point of rights is “... not so much how to justify them, but how to protect them ...” (Bobbio, 1996:10).

According to the international human rights system, in case human rights are violated, it is the prerogative of the state to redress the human rights violations by acknowledging the victims’ loss and punishing the perpetrators of such violence. In the case of Gujarat, this means that victims have to ask for justice from the very state that is involved in violating their rights. Since agents of the state are often directly involved in communal violence in India, most often no steps are taken to prosecute them. The fact that the Chief Minister and several other leaders of the state of Gujarat were clearly involved in inciting the violence has not had any implications for their political career. This failure on the part of the state to punish the perpetrators and acknowledge the loss of the victims of the violence suppresses the voice of the victims, and contributes to their dehumanization.

Academic Discourse

This study has also addressed the role of academic discourse in the process of dehumanization. One of the arguments of this dissertation, drawn from Mathur, has been that some of the mainstream secular and public academia in India unintentionally ends up aiding the process of blame displacement by giving primacy to prejudice, and thus doesn’t

²³ India ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) in 1979. Article 6(1) of the ICCPR guarantees that the right to life of all citizens shall be protected by law.

allocate responsibility. The main problem with such paradigms is that they fail to take into account the perspective and the voice of the victim (Mathur, 2008:186-187).

On the basis of the above arguments, I conclude that there is a need for a more practical understanding of situations of inter ethnic violence, which I will return to in the last chapter.

5.2. Parallel Perspectives

The focus of this study has been on the construction of community identity through discourse *within a specific community*. This case study of the dynamics of communication about ‘the other’ within the Hindu community in Gujarat has clear parallels with other cases in India and elsewhere.

A significant aspect of Hindu-Muslim communal violence in India is the fact that the Muslims are a minority, which creates an inherent asymmetry between the two communities. Gupta has argued that the scope and nature of minority (Muslim) and majority (Hindu) inspired politics varies greatly in India, and that except for Kashmir, minority politics in India is of little consequence. He goes on to argue that:

“On the other hand, religion and politics combine frequently, and with telling impact, nationwide when it comes to expressing Hindu majoritarianism...” (Gupta, 2007: 32).

While Islamic fundamentalism certainly exists in India, it doesn’t penetrate public discourse and consciousness to the degree that Hindu fundamentalism does. The Islamophobic discourse surrounding the violence in Gujarat testifies this. Its rationalisation as ‘common sense’ by large sections of the Hindu community and the consequent acceptance of the violence indicates that violence from the top (the state) was accompanied by agency and consent from below (Kabir, 2002: 10; Mathur, 2008: 171). I would therefore argue that in the current context, Islamophobia is a serious problem that requires urgent attention in India today.

The phenomenon of Islamophobia and the divisive language of the *Hindutva* discourse has parallels in discourse on identity across the world. Thus, the analysis on the link between the stereotyping of community identity and inter ethnic violence is replicated in other identity discourses. The case of Catholic-Protestant conflict in Northern Ireland has been mentioned earlier. Denich has pointed out that the violent dismemberment of Yugoslavia in 1992 was accompanied by a discourse that manipulated symbols and revived history in order to construct and reinforce strict boundaries between the nationalist identities of Serbs and Croats. The construction of this discourse also required leadership. Denich argues that in 1991, both Serbian and Croatian leaders could have avoided creating oppositions between the two groups by using inclusive and egalitarian strategies for nationhood and the recognition of citizenship. Instead, the leaders of both camps chose to propagate exclusive ideas of nationalism, in which ethnicity was defined as the criteria for citizenship (Denich, 1994: 367-369). This conscious emphasis on differences and hostility between the two communities by leaders is similar to the extremes of Hindu-Muslim identity discourse. Another similarity is the focus on the past in order to justify violence in the present against 'the other.' The memory of the World War II massacre of Serbs by the Croatian state was revived and emphasised repeatedly by Serbian leaders to justify a separatist national identity and violence against the Croats in 1991. A strong sense of having been victimised in the past pervaded this revivalist Serbian discourse (Denich, 1994: 367,377). This notion of victimisation by referring to history finds a parallel in the Islamophobic discourse of the Hindu Right.

Further, Islamophobia is not limited to India alone, but exists across the world. Though the Indian situation has a specific Hindu-Muslim dimension that doesn't extend to other parts of the world, Islamophobia in India is nevertheless related to this larger phenomenon. As the report of the International Initiative for Justice points out in its conclusion:

"It would be a mistake to attempt to locate ... the Gujarat pogrom, at a purely local or even national level, because the local anti-Muslim discourse both feeds into and draws strength from the global anti-Muslim discourse. What follows then is an easy subliminal association of Muslim-Terrorist-Aggressor ... The idea of exacting collective punishment against an entire community for the actions of unrelated

individuals, or of attacking a much weaker and numerically smaller group in the name of “self-defence” has acquired new validity in the post-September 11 scenario.” (IIJ Report, 2003: Para 10.3)

The post 9/11 crackdown on Muslims in the USA is a classic example of subjugating individual human rights to the interests of the state. This is especially significant because the protection and implementation of human rights is dependent on individual nation states. In this regard, the subjugation of human rights in the name of state security indicates a serious flaw in this system. The Western images of radical Islam justify human rights violations against Muslims. That is to say, one of the similarities between Islamophobia in India and in the West is that state infringement of basic rights receives tacit popular consent. On this basis, I would argue that human rights violations targeting specific communities today result from sanction given by from both leaders (above) and from local actors (below). Thus, any checks on such human rights violations must necessarily involve both the state and the local community. What kind of checks and practical steps can be taken to ensure the more effective implementation of human rights? The next chapter will outline some recommendations in this regard.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

6.1. Practical Recommendations

The vision of the human rights discourse articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based on a universalistic stance towards human rights in that it believes in the idea of certain basic, inalienable rights for all humans that are applicable across barriers of culture. This dissertation has argued that dehumanizing discourses on identity (such as *Hindutva*) pose a major challenge to the implementation of this ideal. Three levels of society influenced by this dehumanizing process have been identified: the state, the level of community consciousness and academic discourse. In this chapter, I will suggest that in order to implement human rights more effectively in the Indian context, varied strategies should be adopted to address the problem at different levels.

At the level of the state system, the human rights discourse can be used effectively. A major weakness of human rights is that they are dependent on implementation on the state, which can abuse its power and violate the rights of the human beings that it is supposed to protect (Turner in Short, 2008:7). This kind of state complicity in communal violence was seen in Gujarat, followed by the subsequent apathy of the Indian government. However, the Indian state does not oppose human rights in principle since it wants to maintain a good face in international relations. As Messer argues, no state today would go on record opposing human rights (Messer, 1993: 223). Thus, human rights can be used by civil society and the international community to pressurise the Indian state to prosecute the agents behind human rights violations. This method of working is central to human rights activism, which is primarily concerned with mobilising support to pressurise abusers to stop human rights violations (Ignatieff, 2001: 9). In India, the work and research done by national and international human rights organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other civil society bodies using the language of human rights has

been instrumental in pointing out state complicity in the violence and pushing the Indian government to ensure justice and provide relief to the victims of the violence in Gujarat. In this way, the language of human rights can be used effectively to redress human rights violations at the level of the state system.

At the level of popular consciousness, one of the problems is that the language of human rights is culturally alien to the average person in India. In my view, this is a major handicap of the human rights discourse and is one of the reasons why its outreach and influence remains limited in the arena of culture. One of the arguments of this dissertation has been that the *Hindutva* discourse has managed to establish a prominent presence at the level of popular consciousness. It has managed to gain a strong foothold in popular culture and has become part and parcel of what is familiar, and that people identify with. To counter this, the implementation of human rights should also be done by using languages and methods of communication that people identify with. In other words, while the framework for change should be that of human rights, the strategies for implementation should be adapted to the specific context and take the local needs and situation into account (Wilson and Mitchell, 2003:13).

For an alternative discourse of secularism and tolerance to acquire the level of legitimacy and acceptability that a xenophobic discourse has acquired, it should draw lessons from the same. Since a presence in the public sphere and popular culture is the key to the success of *Hindutva*, the secular movement should try and “build a social consciousness through the terrain of culture” (Panikar, 1993: 31). The efforts of some NGOs in India are geared towards this end. For instance, some organisations have chosen to counter the power of symbols appropriated by the Hindu Right by promoting symbols of peace. A successful example is from Godhra (where the train burning took place in 2002), where a group of twenty NGOs organised a rally to distribute roses on the same day when the Hindu Right forces were distributing *trishuls* (weapons/traditional Indian tridents). An excerpt from a newspaper report read:

“Some said it with roses, others with *trishuls*. The medium definitely was the message on Sunday as Godhra lived another day of contrasts...Carrying placards which conveyed messages of peace, harmony and goodwill, the rallyists marched through the streets, drawing people out of their homes and shops...around 3,000 people took part in the rally...in the latter part of the day, the VHP²⁴ programme turned out to be a damp squib, with only about 250 of the expected 1000 initiates arriving for the *trishul* distribution.”(Express India, 29 March 2004, emphases added).

Such initiatives are appropriate since they counter xenophobic discourse by using the media of communication it uses, and try to penetrate the crucial arena of the public sphere. Further, as the participation of three thousand people in the above event indicates, such measures can successfully involve members of a community to work together. Action initiatives based on community participation are thus efficient means to build a secular consciousness, and lessen the threat of communal violence and human rights violations (Shankar and Gerstein, 2007: 8). Initiatives that employ community participation and use a language that the local populace can identify with may be more successful in checking the growth of communalism in the informal sphere of everyday life. Such approaches are most useful when they implement the universal principles of human rights with strategies that are specific to the demands of different cultural contexts (Freeman, 2002: 104).

6.2. Academic Recommendations

A third aspect of society influenced by the process of dehumanization is academic discourse. This dissertation has questioned the role of some of the academic discourse on mass violence that unintentionally aids a process of blame displacement by understanding cases of violence as spontaneous ‘riots’. To separate the action from its agents is counter productive for the redressing of human rights violations (Mathur, 2008).

From a human rights perspective, it would be more beneficial to establish academic paradigms that are more action oriented in that they locate agency behind the violence.

²⁴ Refer to Page 10.

This argument is part of a general debate on the politics of social research .i.e. on whether academics should play an engaged or objective role in the field. In the *Current Anthropology* debate on objectivity vs. militancy, Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995) advocates an engaged stance in her proposal of a ‘militant anthropology’, which goes beyond a mere record of human thinking and engages actively with issues of ethics and power. Her main argument is that when encountering cases of human rights violations and injustice, the researcher should shed his/her role as a passive bystander and take stands to try and redress them (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Roy D’ Andrade disagrees with her and critiques what he calls ‘the moral models in anthropology’ by arguing that they are too black-and white and mono causal. He points out that human misery is a complex social phenomenon, and it is not always possible to pinpoint blame and identify aggressors/oppressors (D’Andrade, 1995). Instead, he advocates an objective approach which would, according to him, avoid the pitfalls of mono causality, and may be able to present more varied perspectives on a given issue.

I share D’ Andrade’s concerns that research should avoid falling into the trap of mono causality and needs to take the complexity of a situation into account. However, I would argue that human rights research, in a certain way, is biased by definition since it prioritizes certain values such as the universal ideal of certain basic, inalienable rights for all humans. Thus, human rights research should reflect the concerns expressed in Nancy-Scheper Hughes’s idea of “militant anthropology”, which is more action-oriented, and promises more in terms of preventing and redressing human rights violations. Extending this idea and adapting it to other academic disciplines as well could be useful in constructing academic paradigms that help in addressing human rights violations. There is scope for the development of action oriented perspectives in various social science disciplines. At the very least, social science research should not be counter productive by contributing to the dehumanization of victims of such violations.

There is also scope for research on the link between Islamophobia in India and Islamophobia in the West. As this dissertation suggests, the two discourses feed into and

give strength to each other. The link between discourses at the local and the national level, between the national and the international level merits further research. This might help uncover the dynamics of how discourses of hatred work not just at the national, but at the global level.

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Appendix A

Recent Developments

The following article featured in the online version of newspaper *The Independent* on 2nd May 2009. It reports the recent decision of the Supreme Court of India to set up fast-track tribunals to deal with the pending court cases from the violence in Gujarat in 2002. Available online at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/tribunals-set-up-to-examine-slaughter-of-indian-muslims-1677666.html>

Tribunals set up to examine slaughter of Indian Muslims

Politician tipped to be next PM investigated for his role in 2002 sectarian riots

By Andrew Buncombe in Delhi

Saturday, 2 May 2009

SEBASTIAN D'SOUZA/ AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A Hindu mob brandishes swords at Muslims during street battles in Bapunagar, Ahmedabad in March 2002, when inter-faith violence left 2,000 dead



Seven years after hundreds of Muslims in Gujarat were murdered in some of India's most vicious religious violence since partition, the families of those who died are a step closer to justice after the

Supreme Court ordered the setting up of fast-track tribunals. Among the people to be investigated will be the state's controversial chief minister, Narendra Modi, a man tipped as a future prime minister of India.

The court order, which came in the middle of India's general election, instructs legal authorities in Gujarat to establish tribunals to examine 14 outstanding cases relating to the 2002 killings. "You can be assured of a quick and fair trial now and that was very urgently needed. It is great news for the riot victims who had been waiting for justice," said Mukul Sinha, a lawyer representing some of the victims. The so-called "Gujarat riots" that swept through parts of the western state in the spring of 2002 left as many as 2,000 people dead, the overwhelming majority of them Muslims. The trigger for the violence was a fire on a train carrying

Hindu pilgrims that killed around 60 people, which was alleged to have been started by a Muslim mob. Inquiries have suggested that the blaze on the Sabarmati Express was an accident. Either way, what followed was a sustained slaughter of Muslims.

Houses were set on fire, people were burned alive, others fled for their lives. While some officials claimed that the violence was a spontaneous reaction to the train fire, there is persuasive evidence – such as the easy access of the mob to land registry records – to suggest the violence was at least partly planned. There have been persistent accusations that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which was in charge of the state, and chief minister Mr Modi played a crucial role in the violence.

In Gujarat, the wounds of 2002 have never healed. While the BJP was subsequently twice re-elected to state office – largely on the back of a booming economy and of Mr Modi's profile as a man who would "protect" Hindus – thousands of Muslims remain in refugee camps on the fringes of Ahmedabad, unable (in some cases too afraid) to return to their villages. For many in India, the failure to properly address what happened remains a painful sore.

The Supreme Court has also ordered an inquiry into allegations that Mr Modi failed to stop – and may even have encouraged – the 2002 violence. Earlier, one of his ministers in the Gujarat state assembly, Maya Kodnani, gave herself up to the authorities after a special investigating team accused of her leading mobs. Both she and Mr Modi deny the allegations against them.

Among the individual cases that will be looked at by the newly ordered tribunals will be the burning of the Sabarmati Express, the killing of up to 95 people in the Naroda Patia neighbourhood of Ahmedabad and the murder of Ehsan Jafri, a senior Muslim politician from the Congress Party. A 2007 investigation by the Tehelka news magazine discovered that Mr Ehsan was murdered despite frantically calling Mr Modi's office for help.

"Five or six people held him, then someone struck him with a sword, chopped off his hand, then his legs, then everything else," the magazine quoted one of those accused as saying. "After cutting him to pieces they put him on the wood they'd piled and set it on fire ... burnt him alive."

Narendra Modi: Rise of the 'modern-day Nero'

Few Indian politicians can match Narendra Modi for confidence and swagger. None comes close for stirring controversy.

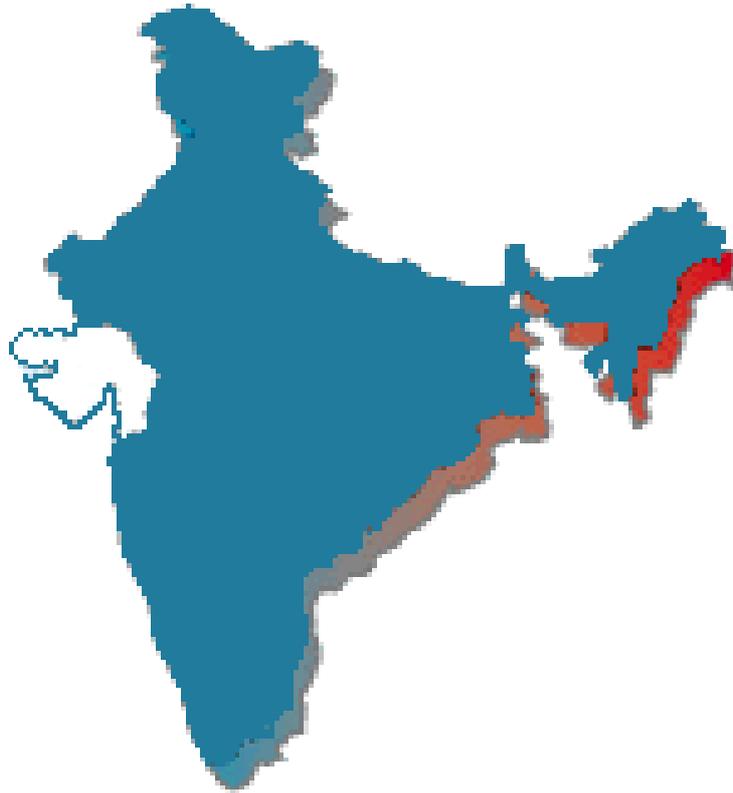
If, as expected, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) fail to secure power in this election, many expect that Mr Modi will seamlessly take control and push aside the party leader, LK Advani.

It would be a remarkable achievement for a man was once described by the Indian Supreme Court as a "modern-day Nero", and was refused a US visa on the grounds he had "violated religious freedom".

But Mr Modi, 59, has worked hard to project himself as a tough leader, ready for the national stage. He has promoted Gujarat as one of India's leading business locations and was able to lure industrial Ratan Tata to build his much vaunted Nano "people's car" in the state.

During the election campaign, Mr Modi has been a star performer, mocking the Congress party as an "old woman". Such is his popularity that plastic masks of the well-dressed politician are among the election's bestsellers. But Mr Modi, whose estranged, never-talked-about wife lives alone in a Gujarat village, is yet to deal with the religious riots of 2002. He has always denied involvement but accusations continue to dog him.

Appendix B



Map of India showing Gujarat

The white portion on the map shows the state of Gujarat.

The state of Gujarat has an area of 196,024 sq. km. and a population of 50.67 million. There are 25 districts, 170 blocks and 18539 villages.

Source: Government of Gujarat

Available online at: <http://www.gujaratindia.com/stateprofile/profile1.htm> [Accessed 1 May 2009]

Demography of Gujarat

Religion/Sex-wise Total Population in Gujarat				
-2001				
Religious communities	Residence	Person	Male	Female
All Religions	Total	50671017	26385577	24285440
Hindus	Total	45143074	23538770	21604304
Muslims	Total	4592854	2370832	2222022
Christians	Total	284092	142881	141211
Sikhs	Total	45587	24987	20600
Buddhists	Total	17829	9439	8390
Jains	Total	525305	266768	258537
Others	Total	28698	14452	14246
Religion not stated	Total	33578	17448	16130

Source: Census of India 2001.

Year: Period of fiscal year in India is April to March, e.g. year shown as 1990-91 relates to April 1990 to March 1991.