



Hindu-Muslim Communal Riots in India I (1947-1986)

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INTRODUCTION

[Short biographical notices and background information are provided through hyperlinks for the most important personalities and organizations mentioned in the text that follows. The reader might refer to them for further understanding.]

All along the years when the fight for an independent India was at its peak, a number of Congress personalities, led by an already well-known leader - a brilliant man who hailed from the historically famous United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh, UP) - Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, carried a dream: once India was freed from the British rule, a modern state would be built, a state that would see that its caste and communal ancestral traditions were forgotten. A secular state that would bring people together. A new Socialist order would be built. New Temples - i.e. heavy industries would appear which would bring the new India into modernity (Parry and Struempell 2008). Some of these dreams would take shape indeed. However, the tragedies of the Partition and the violence which swept Northern India from 1946 to 1948 came as a shock and destroyed many illusions (for a historical background, see "India from 1900 to 1947" by Claude Markovits [2007] and for further details on the Partition violence, see "Thematic Chronology of Mass Violence in Pakistan, 1947 2007" by Lionel Baixas [2008]).

The assassination of [Mahatma Gandhi](#) in January 1948 was a watershed moment for India. It put an end to the murdering frenzy and to mass violence. Law and order could be restored. A strong leadership saw to that. Among those leaders was the "Iron Man of India" that was the Union Home Minister, [Sardar Patel](#). He was the one who had gathered in time the 560 Indian princely states which had a special status (Menon 1961). In the larger country, he had made it very clear that no nonsense would be tolerated. What he had in mind were of course the various agitations of those days, mainly the Communist - led guerillas (Graff 1974), but also the linguistic or ethnic claims and, very clearly, the grievances of the religious minorities - whose behavior could threaten "Mother India". These last categories, however, were more than willing to demonstrate their loyalty. They were in a state of shock. After the dramatic exchanges of populations which had taken place during Partition, Hindu refugees had finally adjusted rather well. Muslims, however, had not. They were the guilty. They were those who had divided the Motherland (Robinson 1993). Those who had not left for Pakistan (which meant the majority of Muslims and most definitely the poorest among them) were left high and dry, even more so because their patrons, upon whom they depended, were no longer present (Azad 1959; Khaliquzzaman 1964). The only thing they could do was to concentrate on their day-to-day survival. Nearly four years proved necessary to reach a certain degree of peaceful coexistence between the communities concerned (Spear 1967; Philips and Wainwright 1970; M. Hasan 2004).

Who were these communities? And why this gulf between them? What is feeding the so-called "communalist cancer" in India, the word referring to the sense of insecurity, even hostility, which many communities feel at heart towards the "Other" (Pandey 1990), and which can lead them to take violent action in order to protect themselves, and further their own interests?

India is a giant country, a subcontinent which is extremely diverse, and where one finds people who, for millennia, have cohabited in a narrow proximity but have never merged. They belong either to local indigenous tribes (adivasis) or descend from various waves of invaders who have settled, over the

centuries, along the country's rivers, in the large valleys of the Indus and of the Ganges, or in the hills, cultivating, plundering, settling or building but remaining organized along different strata and statuses. It is around 1500 B. C. that these various populations met and interacted. On the one hand, there were the Dravidians, people earlier associated with the Harappa civilization in the Indus valley, who had seemingly pushed aside the adivasis. On the other hand, there were the Aryans, who had come through successive waves from the Caucasia regions (from 1500 B. C. to approximately 1000 B. C.). These Aryans were very different from the populations they met when they came, with specific practices and religious traditions, articulated around the Vedic poems. They brought along the premises of an organization, centered on the notion of sacrifice, monopolized by a sacerdotal caste, the Brahmin varna.

These Vedic times are still remembered throughout India with utmost reverence. They are at the roots, together with the Upanishads and the great popular epics (Ramayana, Mahabharata), of what is being called Hinduism today, an accomplished civilization which is both open and tolerant as far as faith is concerned, but extremely rigid regarding the rules of society (see *infra* the four - varna model). It is altogether a system, a sophisticated philosophy, and a faith translated into a myriad of local popular creeds and devotion to thousands of deities.

With time of course, transformations and reforms have occurred: the major ones, Buddhism and Jainism, were born in the 5th century B. C., in present Bihar. They have tried to get rid of the caste system, and they have put the accent on meditation and non - violence. Sikhism on the other hand, was born much later in Punjab (in the 15th century), with a first sant, Guru Nanak, who tried to elaborate a kind of syncretism between Hinduism and Islam, centered on a unique God. Guru Nanak had several successors, and it is the fifth guru who built the much revered Golden Temple in Amristar in 1604. The next gurus faced serious problems with the Mughal Empire, and organized the community around martial and fiery traditions (the Khalsa order). The lineage stopped at the tenth guru, and Sikhs now rely on a holy book, the Guru Granth.

All of these religious traditions, born on the sacred Indian soil, are considered as a part of the Hindu world. They represent now 85 percent of the total Indian population. But who are the other 15 percent? On the margins of this Hindu world, at times in fact completely imbricated, there are important minorities, born out of foreign religions, which have survived, in glory or in submission (see table 2 and 3).

The Parsis (Zoroastrians), who have their origin in Persia, have migrated when the Sassanid Empire fell under Arab conquests (8th to 10th century). They are a tiny elite group which is today on the way to a possible extinction (too many outside marriages). At the moment, they are the main industrialists in India and its most educated benefactors. Their community is mainly centered in Bombay.

Christians (2.4 percent of the whole population) have a long history, going back to the 1st century: Saint Thomas is said to have landed in South India, to eventually reach Madras, where he is supposedly buried. Historical evidence underlines the venue of merchants from the Middle-East and with them the first real efforts of evangelization, during the 4th century, thanks to the activities of the Oriental Churches and their missions. Contrary to later converts, these Syrian Christians benefited from a high status in society; today most of them are wealthy planters or businessmen, and they have a dominant role in Kerala politics. Quarrels are frequent as they are divided along many rival Oriental Churches.

A second wave of conversions to Christianity occurred in the 15th and 16th century with the arrival of Portuguese conquistadors (Vasco de Gama in 1498). The Roman Catholic clergy was well - organized, extremely active (notwithstanding the Inquisition attempts), and they were able to reach the lowest castes (Untouchables and tribal people). As for today, for instance, most Christian fishermen in South India are Latin Catholics.

The last wave of conversions started with Protestant missionaries from the 18th century onwards. Contrary to a general feeling in the West, the churches involved in missionary work were not British. Both the East India Company and the Church of England were very clear: nobody from their side should intervene in the Hindu private life and religious traditions. It explains why the job was done by non-British missions (Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Scotland), and why the various denominations look quite disconcerting to outsiders.

All in all, Christians today are not very numerous, and they are mainly concentrated in the South. Most of them are highly educated, running hospitals and educational establishments. It is to be noticed that Christian staff includes many literate and well-trained nuns, and that they accept jobs that high-caste Hindus would never fill.

Muslims are by far the largest religious community (see table 2 and 3) and, although they are always considered as a monolithic entity, they are in fact extremely diverse: a diversity which is not surprising if one looks at the geographical factors, past history and local traditions. In the South, for instance, Islam was introduced peacefully by sailors who settled on the Malabar and Coromandel coasts while often intermarrying with local women (Dupuis 1996; Gaborieau 2011). Then, as it was the case with Christianity, Islam soon appeared, to the lowest Hindu castes, as a way to escape their miserable fate. The process of conversions still goes on.

In the North, the atmosphere is different and often disquieting. Here Muslims are deeply resented as they are identified with those Turk and Mughal invaders who, along the centuries, descended from Central Asia and plundered India, before their chieftains built great empires, the Sultanate of Delhi, then the Mughal Empire, which fell only in 1857, under the enterprises of the British East India Company. As in the South, most Muslims are converts. They have a very low status, and it is only a small "crust" of Muslims (ashraf) who can proudly refer to their foreign origins. By and large, whatever the sects, schools and practices, most Muslims are Sunnis, except those whose princely rulers were Shias (Twelvers) or those in the West who are Ismaeli Shias, and involved in petty or large businesses. Last but not least, encompassing all these sects and schools, it should be remembered that there is an Islam "of the mosques" which is orthodox and somewhat militant, and an Islam "of the shrines" which is heterodox and extremely diversified (S. A. A. Rizvi 1978; Troll 1989): this Islam was brought by Sufi saints and preachers of various tariqa (mystical orders), whose tombs are still visited by lakhs of devotees (1 lakh = 100, 000). These tombs are definitely the place where Muslims and Hindus can meet and pray together.

In 1947, before Partition, Muslims represented one fourth of the total Indian population (94.5 million people or 24.3 per cent as per the 1941 Census of India). They fell to ten percent to now reach 13.4 percent. They are very unevenly distributed (see map 1). There are districts where they matter, especially when elections are in the offing, and other districts where they hardly exist. Table 1 lists their distribution and numbers by state (Census of India 2001). Tables 2 and 3 indicate distribution and growth figures for the main religions. It will be noticed that the Muslim population has grown more rapidly than the populations that adhere to other religions - a point which fuels one of the main arguments of the Sangh Parivar (Hindu nationalist family of organizations) to warn against Muslims.

Table 1 : Muslim Population by State Table 2 : Population by Religious Community, 1961 to 2001 (in thousands) Table 3. Decadal growth of religious communities, 1961 to 2001 Map 1. District - wide distribution of the Muslim population Map 2. Locations of Main Riots between Hindus and Muslims (1978 1993)

Source: GRAFF, Violette. 1993. «Le désarroi des musulmans indiens.» Hérodote. 71 (October December): 129.

What makes things difficult for a state which calls itself "secular" (the word "secularism" was introduced in 1976 in the 1950 Constitution) and which wants to observe a balance between religions can be summarized

as follows (Smith 1963; Madan 1993; Bhargava 1998):

1. Hinduism has "institutionalized" hierarchies and inequalities. There are thousands of castes and subcastes (jatis), together with their own status whose major criteria are blood purity, color, and traditional occupation. Endogamy is thus a strict rule. The origin of this organization is still subject to serious debate but, as we have seen earlier, it seems that the model is of Indo Aryan origin and the tripartition system as formulated by the comparatist Dumézil (1958). Four main varnas can actually be distinguished, themselves encompassing thousands of endogamous jatis, which are a living demonstration of the system and of its pervasiveness: the priests (Brahmins) and the warriors (Kshatriyas) are at the top of society, followed by those that include society's economic actors (Vaishyas). Situated beneath these high castes (labeled "twice-born"), we find the Shudras, the main part of the Indian population. Overlapping of these categories and disparities in economic possibilities explain that the administration (first British, then Indian) has classified them under different connotations (e.g. Backward Classes and Other Backward Classes. They are not, however, society's "lowest of the low": the "infamous" people who should not be approached because of their alleged "impurity" are the Untouchables, today called Dalits. Nevertheless, everybody needs their services, and as it is the case with the higher jatis, interaction is constant and expected. In administrative terms, they are classified as the Scheduled Castes (SC), while the adivasis (indigenous people) have been termed the Scheduled Tribes (ST) - both categories benefit from quotas recognized in the Constitution of India, the proud child of [Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar](#), himself a Dalit.

2. Muslims desperately seek to maintain their own identity, way of life, and culture, which are specific and strictly ordained by a monotheist religion, Islam, through the Quran, the Sunna and the Muslim personal law, the Sharia. There is Allah and his Prophet, and then, for the Shias, their veneration for Ali (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet) and his sons, Hassan and Hussein, whose martyrdom is celebrated with much passion during the ten days of Muharram. Of course, as said earlier about shrines, there are bridges between Muslims and their Hindu neighbors. There are practices which can bring people together, share values and, at times, pray together.

Nevertheless, looking at major, at times irreducible differences (behavior, reasoning, personal codes, food, language), one can understand how, before Independence, a number of politicians, who could not cope with the ways of the Congress Party, would put the emphasis on these differences and subscribed, instead, to what is known as the "Two-Nation theory" that was formulated by [Mohammed Ali Jinnah](#) in Lahore in 1940 (Brown 1963; Hardy 1972; Jalal 1985; M. Hasan 1993; Bernard 1994).

Partition of the subcontinent was to prove a disaster in many ways, especially for the large Muslim population who could not or would not migrate eastwards or westwards to a nascent Pakistan. These millions of people are still "paying the cost" of the vivisection of Mother India. The memories of the past are still overwhelming and many people, sincerely or not, in their heart of hearts, would look at the Millat (Muslim global community) as one monolithic estranged block. From the very beginning, and in spite of communal violence and the many massacres that occurred between 1946 and 1948, a free and proud India was to assert itself in a most impressive way (see "India from 1900 to 1947" by Claude Markovits [2007]).

By the beginning of the 1950s, various developments in domestic politics and external affairs had softened the so-called communal relations. First, Indo Pakistani relations eventually improved (the Nehru Liaquat Ali Khan pact). Second, the death of [Sardar Patel](#) and the departure of other leading figures noticeably altered the balance of power within the Congress, and also weakened the so-called Hindu inclinations in the Party, along with the "communalist" overtones which some people saw in them. Prime Minister Nehru was able, henceforth, to impose his views without encountering any real opposition from either inside or outside the Congress system. This signified that there were no longer valid grounds for Muslims to refuse, on a

political level, to back this composite organization, which, in general, had demonstrated benign neutrality; nor any reason for Muslims to align themselves with opposition parties whose promises could not be guaranteed. Generally, throughout this period, they were gradually reassured - if not entirely convinced - by Nehru's personal stance, by the presence around him of a number of "nationalist" Muslim leaders, not really popular but respected ([Maulana Azad](#) and Rafi Ahmed Kidwai), and also by the very firm position these leaders were taking with regard to the secularization of the state and concerning the issue of communal relations (for instance, the guarantee offered by the Article 25 of the 1950 Constitution: "...all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion...") (Morris - Jones 1957; Smith 1963; Madan 1993; Chatterji 1995; Nandy 1998; M. Hasan 2004). From the first general elections (1951-1952), right up until the third general elections, which were held immediately before the Sino Indian conflict broke out in 1962, all indications forecasted a Congress sweep of the Muslim-minority vote.

How is it that after this rather smooth period, religious tensions have surfaced in such a way that Hindu Muslim riots have become a distinct feature of intercommunal relationships in India?

The year 1961 is held as a turning point, when "old demons raised their ugly heads" again. A serious riot in Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) sounded the alarm. But there were other episodes which were not noticed as they should have. Aligarh and Meerut were later to be dubbed "riot-prone" cities (Brass 2006). And this turned out to be just the beginning&

An extensive literature on Indian Hindu Muslim riots exists, complete with a recurrent and heated debate regarding their origin (Engineer 1984b; Ghosh 1987; Saxena 1990; Schermerhorn 1971). Are they due to the well-known irritants (Gaborieau 2011), feverishly decoded by the "other" community at a time when tensions are simmering: the desecration of religious sites, indiscrete loud music, disrespect shown toward the Prophet, the overlapping schedules of religious festivals and celebrations (Id, Muharram, Durga Puja, Holi, and Ganapati among others), the slaughter of cows, intruding pigs, disrespect shown toward women ("eve-teasing"), and property disputes? Are they linked to and aggravated by economic rivalries, the occupation of costly graveyards lands, abusive Hindu moneylenders and deep inequalities in education and commercial networks (Imtiaz Ahmad, 1984; Engineer 1992b)? Are they linked to the political developments of the day, to local antagonisms, or to pre-electoral and electoral battles (Varshney, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004) organized in a Machiavellian manner - as described in Brass's observations about "institutionalized riot systems" (2003)? Are they linked to external pressures, ranging from Pakistani politics to cricket rivalries (Imtiaz Ahmad 1975; Wright 1978), or to international developments (Graff 1977)? It is difficult to analyze all of these possible explanations in this introduction. They will be referred to in the following chronology, which details each of these riots.

One thing should be clear: the data for the present paper has proved difficult to obtain. Nevertheless, it is obvious that in India, we don't face "mass violence" as strictly defined by this project. As Michael Mann wrote: India "sees recurrent violence, but most of it takes the less serious form of a riot cycle" (Mann 2005: 474). Low-intensity cyclic riots, a structural feature of Indian society, are therefore not always extensively covered in official reports and the media. Some of these incidents, however, have escalated, provoking mass murder (as in Gujarat in 1969, and again in 2002). But it always remains difficult to obtain reliable information:

1. Because India, the world's largest democracy, doesn't readily publicize these issues. As noted by Steven Wilkinson in a book on elections and violence, "...as with most ethnic conflicts, systematic information on where and when Hindu Muslim riots have taken place is hard to find.&State governments keep riot commission reports secret or delay their publication for years. The Central Government instructs the state

news media to provide no 'inflammatory' information on riots, which in practice often means no information at all"(2004).

2. It is nearly impossible to obtain the exact death toll of each riot as statistics are dependent on police records, which are themselves dependent on "the corruption of the local police; the perceived power of those who initiated the riot; whether policemen were injured or fired their weapons; and the level of financial compensation offered to riot victims by the state or central government" (Wilkinson 2004: 243-244). Almost always, the official death-count figures are much lower than the actual figures.

In this article, the reader will find only short references to Kashmir, a problem of a very different nature and rather unrelated to the issue of communal relations. The Kashmir question, debated since 1946, has been the source of three wars between India and Pakistan. As of today (in fact since 1987), it concerns also the will expressed by a number of Kashmiris to seek autonomy or even independence for their state (refer to the biography of [Sheikh Abdullah](#)). Regarding the Hindu-Muslim relationships as such, they have always been rather harmonious. The tragedy today concerns the Kashmiri Brahmins (pandits), the only Hindu caste existing in Kashmir, who had to vacate their properties when the present war started (Noorani 1964; Madan 1981; Puri 1981; Akbar 1991b; Hurtig 1993; Racine 2002; Noorani 2011).

We have not dealt either with the issue of terrorism throughout India, (whether originating with Muslim radical groups or Hindu extremist organizations). An examination of the topic would entail our having to treat additional issues which involve other repertoires of violence and patterns of explanation - ones often not pertinent to the actual state of communal relations within India.

CHAPTER 1

The decline of the Congress system, noises from the opposition, and the international environment show their mark on intercommunity relations (1961-1970)

In 1961-1962 (third general elections), the previously manifested optimism regarding India's future was fading. Nehru's last years were fraught with difficulties (war with China, rising tensions within the Congress, failure of the Third Five-Year Plan (1961-1966), and the re-emergence of communal violence). The short but memorable tenure of Lal Bahadur Shastri (from May 1964 to January 1966), and then the first years of [Indira Gandhi](#)'s government were marked by an unprecedented increase in agitation (linguistic and others), by a war with Pakistan, the threat of famine, and a grave economic recession. Added to this, for the Muslims, was their perception of a distressing evolutionary process which seemed to be threatening that which they held most dearly: the erosion of Urdu (Hindi was to be implemented as the official national language after 1965); the "suspension" of the special minority status of the Aligarh Muslim University (also occurring in 1965); certain actions taken by L. B. Shastri, who granted personal interviews to [Golwalkar](#), the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteers Association) leader; and above all, the constant suspicion which surrounded Muslim civilians and military personnel during the 1965 war with Pakistan, despite their remarkable loyalty. The election of a Muslim, [Dr. Zakir Hussain](#), the former vice-chancellor of Aligarh, as the president of India, did little to dissipate their growing anxiety. Such was the uneasiness that a number of Muslim personalities, from all shades of opinion, (for instance Dr Syed Mahmood [a Congressist from Bihar] or [Dr. A.J. Faridi](#) [a member of the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) from Lucknow]) attempted to respond by creating a pressure group, the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (MMM), whose action, unfortunately, would prove extremely disappointing (Quraishi 1971; Brass 1974).

The 1967 general elections marked a decisive turning-point in Indian political life. The Congress Party had, hitherto, been the only All-India organization which could form strong and coherent governments both at

the Centre and in the states (Kothari 1964). In 1967, it was short of a real majority, but nevertheless remained the largest party at the Centre. Still, it was defeated in a number of key states, where the winners had nothing in common except for their unmitigated anti - Congress stance. This situation would mean four difficult years for [Indira Gandhi](#) (who had taken over in 1966 after the sudden death of L. B. Shastri in Tashkent) before she had the reins of government firmly in hand. Her opponents were a strange mixture of "Old Guard" leaders (from the dissident Congress [O]), Liberals (Swatantra), Hindu nationalists (Jan Sangh), the BKD (Bharatiya Kranti Dal) led by peasant leader [Charan Singh](#) and several branches of Socialists. The Hindu tint among this opposition was strong, and the administration was wondering, uncertain. A new formation born from the Jan Sangh started operating, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council, Hindu nationalist organization). The communal atmosphere was definitely vitiated. It showed in the Ranchi riots in 1968. It showed even more in Ahmedabad in 1969 where national and international circumstances led to a dramatic pogrom (Graff 1977; G. Shah 1984). It was also the case with the Bombay Bhiwandi riots in 1970 (Engineer 1984c). During those years and later on, the Army had to be brought in on numerous occasions. It should be noted that contrary to the Western understanding and to what happens in Pakistan, the Indian military forces are absolutely apolitical and non - communal. And for Muslims, during a riot when police forces are extremely partial, an Army "flag march" is expected as the only savior.

1961; February 4 9: Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh)

Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 80% Hindus, 14% Muslims

Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh: K.N. Katju, Congress Party, January 1957 - March 1962

The first major-scale riot between Hindus and Muslims in post-Partition India erupted in the city of Jabalpur in the state of Madhya Pradesh. This riot was linked to the emergence of a small class of successful Muslim entrepreneurs who created a new economic rivalry between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The immediate cause of the violence, however, remains unknown. Two versions exist.

According to the Justice Shiv Dayal Shrivastava Commission of Inquiry report, the suicide of a young Hindu girl after her rape by two Muslims youths on February 3 triggered communal tensions. With the support of the ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, All India Students Forum, a Hindu nationalist student union), students conducted a peaceful procession on February 4 to condemn the rape. Trouble started when some of them stopped near the Anjuman Islamia School and forced Muslim students to join the procession. Stones were thrown and violence erupted. As the procession was mainly Hindu and the students of the school were predominantly Muslim, the incident acquired a communal feeling.

Other reports considered that the riot was sparked by the elopement of the daughter of a prominent Hindu businessman of the bidi industry (small cigarettes) with the son of his Muslim rival. The Hindu press described the elopement as a rape attempt. The Hindu Muslim rivalry in the bidi industry polarized the situation even more.

The army was called in on February 5 to control the situation. But when it left on February 7, Hindu activists attacked and looted Muslim properties (while carefully sparing Hindu houses). Fifty-five people died according to official reports, but unofficial accounts put the death toll at more than 200. Violence propagated to nearby villages causing six deaths in Sagar on February 8 and 9, and two deaths in Narsimhapur on February 8. The Urdu press reported many stories of police atrocities.

*** (Engineer 1992b); *** (Jaffrelot 1996 165 166); *** (Engineer 2003a); *** (National Integration Council 2007: 8)

1961, October 3: Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh) 57% Hindus, 41% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: C. B. Gupta, Congress Party, December 1960 October 1963

After the Jabalpur riots, which badly shook the Indian leadership and the Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, further violence flared up in Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh), just before the 1962 general elections. The city is famous for the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), whose students are predominantly Muslim and which has claimed minority status for years. During the student-union elections of October 1961, not a single Hindu student was elected. Muslims held a victory procession, provoking counter-demonstrations by activists from the BJS (Bharatiya Jan Sangh, Indian People's Alliance) and the ABVP. A clash subsequently broke out between Muslim and Hindu students in a university hostel. A rumor that a Hindu student had been killed on campus sparked off violence in the city on October 3. University employees were assaulted by students from the town's Hindu colleges. The riot claimed 14 lives, mostly Muslim.

***(Brass 2006: 71); ***(Brass 1965: 90 109); ***(Graff 1982: 65), ***(Jaffrelot 1996 167)

1961, October 5 8: Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) 61% Hindus, 36% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: C. B. Gupta, Congress Party, December 1960 October 1963

Troubles also erupted in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh), after one Hindu student, a native of the town, was severely beaten by Muslim boys during clashes at the Aligarh Muslim University. Back in his hometown and supported by his father, a police officer, he led a procession of 150 supporters who targeted an old Muslim college and some Muslim-owned shops. Prominent members of the administration were present in the crowd and the police did nothing to intervene. The following day, an even larger Hindu procession gathered, threatening to enter a Muslim locality. Muslim residents rushed out of their houses, armed with lathis (sticks) - ready to defend their community. Instead of dispersing both the crowds, the police charged into the Muslim crowd. As a consequence, rioting broke out in several parts of the city. Violence lasted several days, claiming between 13 and 17 lives.

***(Brass 2006: 66 78)

1964; March: Calcutta (West Bengal), Jamshedpur (Bihar), Rourkela (Orissa)

Calcutta 78% Hindus, 20% Muslims

Chief Minister of West Bengal: P. Chandra Sen, Congress Party, July 1962 March 1967

Jamshedpur 81% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: K. B. Sahay, Congress Party, October 1963 March 1967

Rourkela 84% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Orissa: Biren Mitra, Congress Party, October 1963 February 1965

Horrendous violence engulfed the cities of Calcutta (West Bengal), Jamshedpur (Bihar), and Rourkela (Orissa). These riots were part of a cross-national (affecting India, Pakistan and East Pakistan) chain of events: the theft of a relic hair of the Prophet Mohammed from the Hazratbal mosque in Srinagar (Kashmir) on December 27, 1963 provoked indignation in Pakistan and East-Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Protest marches

and violence against the Hindu minorities took place in the cities of Khulna and Jessore (East Pakistan) on January 2 and 3, 1964. This led to retaliation against Muslims in Calcutta and in West Bengal, which in turn kindled events in Dacca and Naryangunj (East Pakistan), where minority communities (of Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists) were heavily targeted (although, ultimately, the holy relic was returned on January 4). According to the 1965 Report of the Indian Commission of Jurists on Recurrent Exodus of Minorities from East Pakistan and Disturbances in India thousands of Hindu families left East Pakistan and sought refuge in India after January 5. The Indian government arranged for special trains to deliver them to the states of Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh where they were to be received. As these trains crossed through Indian towns, the narrative of the atrocities that Hindus had suffered in East Pakistan spread, triggering anti-Muslim riots. Jamshedpur (Bihar) and Rourkela (Orissa) were particularly affected.

In Calcutta, troubles started on January 10. The army was called in on January 11 and left on January 18. In the period leading up to January 19, the Jurists' Commission reported 104 dead, of whom 39 had been killed in shooting by police. Other estimates put the death toll at 400. On March 16, a day before the hartal (general strike) organized by the "Save Pakistan Minorities Committee" was to take place, a group of one-hundred Muslim textile workers was assaulted. Thirteen of them lost their lives.

In Jamshedpur, violence flared up on March 19. The army had to be called in on March 21. The official death toll amounted to 51 dead but the actual figure was much higher.

In Rourkela, rioting started on March 16 when inhabitants attempted to feed Hindu refugees travelling in a special train that had stopped in the town. Riots started when a Hindu refugee vomited after having eaten bread allegedly offered by a Muslim baker. A rumor spread that Muslims were attempting to poison Hindu refugees. Violence propagated from the train station to various slums in the town and to adjacent villages. Hindu mobs (mainly Punjabis, Bengalis, and Oriyas) joined local adivasis (tribes) in the killing of Muslims. The Muslim's economic upward-mobility from the 1960s onwards, along with competition for jobs in the steel industry, had indeed created resentment among Hindus and adivasis. Activists of the BJS and RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteers Association) are said to have stirred up hatred. The police proved inefficient and the protection they offered, insufficient. German engineers who had been working in the steel industry of Rourkela were powerless. Official reports put the death figure at 53 (the Jurists' Commission reported 70 deaths), but according to S. K. Gosh, who was then Orissa's Additional Inspector General of Police, the violence in Rourkela alone, which lasted for 15 days, claimed two thousand (mostly - Muslims) lives. Other reported figures, probably exaggerated, put the total at five thousand deaths.

In all, while official records estimate that the violence claimed 134 lives in the three towns - Calcutta, Rourkela, and Jamshedpur - the actual death toll actually came to several thousands. This tragic chain of events forced the home ministers of India and Pakistan to meet in Delhi on April 1964 to restore order.

***(Feldman 1969: 149); ***(Schermehon 1976: 5); ***(Saxena 1984: 53); ***(Ghosh 1987: 210 212); *** (Bernard 1994: 188 189); ***(Chatterji 1995: 18 21); ***(Parry and Struempell 2008); ***(Ul - Huda 2009)

1967; August 22 29: Ranchi (Bihar) 63% Hindus, 17% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: Mahamaya Pd Sinha, Jan Kranti Dal, March 1967 January 1968

Troubles erupted between Hindus and Muslims in the towns of Hatia and Ranchi (Bihar). Rioting had already occurred in the district in 1964, following anti-Hindu violence in East Pakistan. The Raghubar Dayal Commission of Inquiry established that communal tensions (regarding the organization of the Hindu

Ram Navami festival) had been rising since April 1964. The 1965 conflict with Pakistan had also reinforced suspicions about Indian Muslims. During the March 1967 general elections, the situation further degenerated because of the debate over the Urdu issue (the language commonly spoken by Muslims). A proposal to declare Urdu the second official language of Bihar weakened the ruling coalition and led to state-wide, anti-Urdu agitation on the part of the BJS, the RSS, and an organization called the Bihar Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. Trouble erupted in Ranchi on August 22 after the brick-battling of an anti-Urdu student procession near Muslim Azad High School. The school was attacked and one Hindu was killed in retaliation. The Raghubar Dayal Commission of Inquiry reported 184 deaths in Ranchi - among them 164 Muslims and 19 Hindus. Violence spread, leading to arson, looting, stabbings, and large-scale rioting in the city itself as well as in nearby industrial towns, particularly Hatia, where 26 persons died (25 Muslims and one Hindu).

*** (Raghubar Dayal Commission 1968); *** (Bose and Prasad 1973: 125); *** (Brass 1974: 219; 265); *** (Ghosh 1987: 139-143); *** (Chatterji 1995: 22-23); *** (National Integration Council 2007: 13)

1968; March: Karimganj (Assam) 47% Hindus, 52% Muslims

Chief Minister of Assam: B. P. Chaliha, Congress Party, December 1957 November 1970

Violence flared up in the district of Karimganj (Assam) after an argument erupted between Hindu and Muslim teenagers, merely over a cow. An existing local rivalry between Hindu and Muslim smugglers constituted the underlying cause of the riots. Other accounts noted that violence had broken out the very day that the CPI (Communist Party of India) organized a massive demonstration of tea workers - which included 1,500 Muslim laborers. That appeal to communal sentiments was designed to break the workers' unity. The violence claimed 41 Hindu lives and 41 Muslim lives according to some sources but only seven lives according to others.

*** (Z. Hasan 1984: 78); * (Rajeshwari 2004)

1969; September 18-24: Ahmedabad (Gujarat) Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 81% Hindus, 14% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: Hitendra K. Desai, Congress Party, October 1965 May 1971

Dramatic riots occurred in Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and in adjacent districts in September. Communal tensions had been rising since the Indo-Pak war of 1965, during which Gujarat's Chief Minister's plane was shot down. Anti-Pakistan feelings rapidly transformed into anti-Muslim resentment. Incidents multiplied from mid-1968 onwards. In June 1968, the Muslim organization Jamiat-Ulema-i-Hind organized a conference of Gujarati Muslims. This was followed by an RSS mass rally held the 27-29 December, and attended by the leader Guru [Golwalkar](#). In January, an All Gujarat RSS Camp was held in Ahmedabad and included two thousand volunteers. On March 10 1969, Muslim protests took place in the city in which several policemen were injured after a Hindu policeman allegedly insulted the Quran during an altercation with a Muslim rickshaw-driver. On August 21, Muslims demonstrated against the arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. On September 4, a Muslim policeman was alleged to have kicked the Hindu holy book of Ramayana while searching for a Hindu pandit (scholar of Hindu sacred texts) during a religious ceremony. Two days later, a Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti (HDRS, Committee to Defend Hindu Religion) was formed. On September 15, a victory procession was organized by the BJS to celebrate the punishment of the Muslim police officer. On September 14 and 16, the MP (Member of Parliament) and BJS leader, [Balraj Madhok](#), made a series of inflammatory speeches (the Modak lectures).

At the political level, the situation was no less confused. In the 1967 elections, for the first time since Independence, the Congress ceased to be the dominant party. In Gujarat, it had lost the Muslim electorate to the Swatantra Party and was severely weakened in the Assembly. At the national level, the confrontation between Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](#) and the Old Guard leadership of the Congress further destabilized the party (a scission was to occur in November 1969). Fearing a complete debacle, Congress Chief Minister Hitendra Desai could not afford to alienate Hindu opinion by clamping down excessively on the anti-Muslim violence that was to later erupt.

In this tense atmosphere, violence was sparked by the "Jagannath Temple incident" on September 18. Thousands of Muslims had gathered for a yearly pilgrimage to a shrine adjacent to the Jagannath Hindu temple, in the Old City. Clashes occurred with sadhus (ascetic Hindu men) for a minor reason. Thirteen of them were injured and the glass facade of the temple was damaged. Further troubles erupted in the city after a series of pamphlets and inflammatory speeches spread rumors about the incident. The local media played a despicable role in the events. On the night of September 18, large Hindu crowds looted and set fire to Muslim properties and religious places, with the police refusing to intervene. The situation worsened on September 19. A Muslim youth was burned to death for refusing to chant "Jai Jagannath!" ("Long live Jagannath"). Large numbers of women were raped, and even children were not spared the violence. One hundred Muslims were murdered in Amraiwadi. On the night of September 20, four trains were stopped and 17 Muslim passengers trying to leave the city were killed. On September 23, when the government imprudently lifted the curfew for a few hours, forty persons were murdered. Violence spread to nearby districts as well between September 20 and 30. In the nearby city of Baroda, around ten persons were killed, and six thousand families lost their properties; thus becoming refugees. The arrival of the army (belatedly) defused the situation, but incidents of stabbing continued intermittently for almost a month. The P. Jaganmohan Reddy Commission Report published evidence that most of the attacks had been carefully planned. Voters' lists were used to identify Muslim households. The Reddy Commission blamed the police and the Congress-led state administration for their incompetence and delay in imposing curfews. It also denounced the RSS and the BJS for their active involvement in the riots.

In all, according to that report, violence claimed 660 lives, including those of 430 Muslims and 24 Hindus. Other accounts consider that more than one thousand -or even two to three thousand- people lost their lives. The large majority of those killed were Muslim (about 80 percent).

The Ahmedabad tragedy had international repercussions: during the Islamic Conference held in Rabat (Morocco) on 24-27 of September of that year at which many Muslim countries were represented the Indian delegation sent by [Indira Gandhi](#)'s government was asked to quit the negotiation room, a serious humiliation.

***(G. Shah 1970); ***(Reddy 1971); ***(Graff 1977); ***(Schermerhon 1976: 17-18); ***(G. Shah 1984: 185-191); ***(Ghosh 1987: 154); ***(Saksena 1990: 177-178), ***(Chatterji 1995: 24-25)

1970; May 7-8: Bhiwandi (Maharashtra) 44% Hindus, 51% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Vasantao P. Naik, Congress Party, December 1963 February 1975

Dreadful communal disturbances occurred in the state of Maharashtra in the towns of Bhiwandi, Jalgaon, and Mahad during this period. Since 1969, the situation in the Muslim-majority town of Bhiwandi had been tense. In October, Hindu leaders received anonymous letters threatening imminent revenge for the 1969 Ahmedabad riots. Publication of these letters in the press and an ensuing series of provocative speeches by communal organizations contributed to the escalating hate campaign. Adding to the uneasiness, the religious festivals of Muharram (Shia) and Holi (Hindu) coincided in March 1970.

Communal disputes arose over the Shiv Jayanti procession celebrating the anniversary of the Maratha warrior king Shivaji (1630 1680). Shiv Jayanti was first celebrated on a large scale in 1964, when the Shiv Jayanti Utsav Samiti (Committee for the Festival of Shiv Jayanti) organized it; lending the celebration an exclusively Hindu character and excluding the Muslim community from the festivities (whereas, they had previously participated as musicians). In 1970, the RUM (Rashtriya Utsav Mandal, Hindu communal organization close to the BJS) launched a campaign for the Shiv Jayanti procession to pass through the Muslim area of Nizampura, in close proximity to an important mosque. Despite the protests of Muslim leaders, the local administration allowed the procession to follow the controversial route. On May 7, the procession travelled through the area, shouting anti-Muslim slogans. The RUM campaign had attracted 3,000 to 4,000 people from nearby villages; they came armed with lathis (sticks). Some Muslims hurled stones at those marching in the procession, triggering a riot. Exaggerated rumors concerning the Bhiwandi disturbances, in turn, sparked off communal tensions in the town of Jalgaon on May 8.

In all, according to the Justice D. P. Madon Commission of Inquiry Report, the violence resulted in 164 deaths, of whom 142 were Muslims and 20 were Hindus. In Bhiwandi alone and in the adjacent villages of Khoni and Nagaon, the report said that 78 persons died: 17 were Hindus and 50 were Muslims.

***(Madon 1970), ***(Chatterji 1995: 25 33)

CHAPTER 2

Indira versus the Janata (1970 1980)

This was a checkered period but, surprisingly, there were no serious communal incidents. These were happy years for [Indira Gandhi](#) who had managed to tame Banks and Princes (Hurtig 1988) and who, above all, had won an impressive victory over Pakistan in liberating its eastern wing, the nascent Bangladesh. This is when she was enthusiastically called "Durga", the warring Hindu Great Goddess.

Fresh difficulties appeared in 1974 with the first petrol crisis, and a protest movement which developed around an "old-timer", Jayaprakash Narayan (JP), with the active participation of the national opposition, namely the Congress (O), the BLD (Bharatiya Lok Dal) of [Charan Singh](#), the Swatantra, the Jan Sangh, and the Socialist parties. The JP Movement looked threatening. Indira cut it short. A state of Emergency was declared in June 1975 (L. I. Rudolph and S. H. Rudolph 1987; Bernard 1994).

It was at first a kind of relief for Muslims, who feared the Jan Sangh's influence within the JP Movement. However, especially in UP and Bihar, Emergency had its dark sides. There were excesses, which changed everybody's perceptions (Dayal and Bose 1977). In January 1977, mid-term elections were called by [Indira Gandhi](#), who was apparently unaware of the general discontent. It was a disaster for the Congress Party in Northern India. The opposition leaders, who had spent eighteen months in jail, were now free, vocal and victorious at the polls. They were thus in a position to form a government. A Janata Party was built in a hurry. It was the kind of a heterogeneous combination that we had found previously within the JP Movement and, with some fresh allies, these people were now at the head of the country. The new PM - a unanimous choice - was [Morarji Desai](#), an old rival of [Mrs. Gandhi](#). There were however major differences between the Janata and the JP Movement: religious leaders had met in jail. They now "understood" each other better (Graff 1980). Communal biases would be controlled.

This amicable mood did not last, however. In various cities, local Hindu activists could not accept the conciliatory efforts made at the Centre by their representatives, the two cabinet ministers, A. B. Vajpayee and [L. K. Advani](#). In 1978 - 79, communal violence erupted again.

1974; May 5: Delhi 81% Hindus, 12% Muslims

Chief Minister of Delhi: none, Delhi was, as of that date, a Union Territory, not a state

Troubles erupted in Delhi in the locality of Sadar Bazar where Hindus and Muslims live side by side. The incidents were triggered by a minor quarrel between two Muslim youths and a Hindu boy. As each of them subsequently called his friends, among whom there were petty criminals, the small dispute rapidly degenerated into a serious Hindu-Muslim confrontation. Arson, heavy brick-battling, and weapons firing took place. The police were targeted by rioters, and were unable to maintain control of the situation. The Muslim community suffered particularly. Eleven persons lost their lives in these riots, after which a curfew was imposed on the locality for 45 days.

***(Krishna 1985)

1977; October 22 23: Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) 68% Hindus, 31% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Ram Naresh Yadav, Janata Party, June 1977 February 1979

Troubles erupted in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh). The first clashes occurred on October 1 after an altercation between Hindu students and a Muslim weaver. On October 22, tensions arose again when a Hindu Durga Puja procession attempted to pass through a Muslim area. This had never happened previously and the Muslims wanted to avoid any precedent being set on that matter which would subsequently permit similar future processions. On October 23, the procession, with much fanfare, tried to enter the Muslim area. The Muslims resisted. Violence flared up. Both sides were armed for battle. Some reports established that the police took an active part in the looting and arson in Muslim localities. Stabbing incidents also took place. Paradoxically, there were not many casualties (around ten).

***(Akbar 1978: 47); ***(Khan and Mittal 1984: 308)

1978; March 29: Sambhal (Uttar Pradesh) 54% Hindus, 46% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Ram Naresh Yadav, Janata Party, June 1977 February 1979

Violence took place in Sambhal (Uttar Pradesh), a tehsil (sub - district) of Moradabad district in which 70 percent of the population is Muslim. A Holi procession led by a local Hindu Congressman and a beauty contest in which two Muslim girls had participated enraged Manzar Shafi, a Muslim League leader. Tensions increased following a gherao (protest demonstration), led by sweepers who had not been paid for three months. Aided by goondas (criminals) Manzar Shafi took this opportunity to call for a bandh (general strike). Violence flared up when a Hindu panwallah (betel seller) refused to follow the strike. Twenty-five persons were killed in these riots, among them 22 Hindu victims.

***(Sharma 1978: 59), ***(Ghosh 1987: 227 228)

1978; March 31 April 4: Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) 54% Hindus, 43% Muslims

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh: [Marri Chenna Reddy](#) , Congress Party, March 1978 October 1980

After three relatively peaceful decades, violence erupted in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) after a Muslim woman, Rameeza Bee, was allegedly raped and her husband, Ahmad Hussain, murdered by policemen on March 24. A Muslim crowd gathered around the police station to express its anger. On March 31, a rumor

circulated that Rameeza Bee had eventually been killed by the police. Although the rumor proved to be false, it was enough to spark off violence. Fifteen persons were killed, some of them after being shot by police. After these initial events in 1978, Hyderabad was to experience communal riots almost on a yearly basis, particularly during the Ganesh festival, the public celebration of which was encouraged by the then chief minister [Chenna Reddy](#) in order to serve his own political ends (see Chapter 4 in «Hindu Muslim Communal Riots in India II (1986 2011)» by Violette Graff and Juliette Galonnier [2012]).

***(Kumar 1978: 76); ***(Ghosh 1987: 120 121).

1978; October 5 and November 6: Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh) 57% Hindus, 41% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Ram Naresh Yadav, Janata Party, June 1977 February 1979

Serious riots took place on two occasions in the city of Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh). The annual report (1979) of the National Minorities' Commission established that troubles started after the stabbing of Bhure Lal - a wrestler in a Hindu akhara (traditional physical training center) and a notorious criminal - by Muslim criminals on October 3. Hindu wrestlers close to Bhure Lal organized a procession to protest his death: his body was paraded through the city while slogans such as "blood for blood" and "ten for one" were shouted. On October 5, a riot erupted in which 12 people died. A report by the PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties) (1978) emphasized that communal agitation in the city had been stirred up for months by RSS elements over the issue of Aligarh Muslim University's minority status. The report criticized local Hindu nationalist leader K. K. Navman for his involvement in the violence. The PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary, Uttar Pradesh Police Force) was also accused of complicity with Hindu rioters. In addition, the local administration had demonstrated little urgency in controlling the situation.

Large-scale rioting erupted again in the city one month later, on November 6. Fifteen to twenty persons were killed. Tensions had increased over the construction of a new cinema hall in the area of Manik Chowk. Muslim residents of that neighborhood opposed the project. On November 5, a speech by the BJS leader, [Balraj Madhok](#) further inflamed the situation and a quarrel between two Muslim youths triggered a new riot. The riots spread to localities which had been spared in October. The Muslims suffered heavily and retaliation against low-caste Hindus was also carried out.

***(PUCL, 1978); ***(Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee 1978); ***(Surjeet 1978); ***(National Minorities' Commission 1979); ***(Graff 1982: 67 71; 171); ***(Ghosh 1987: 214 215); ***(Brass 2003: 90 96)

1979; April 11: Jamshedpur (Bihar) 81% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: Karpoori Thakur, Janata Party, June 1977 - 21 April 1979

A riot rampaged in Jamshedpur (Bihar) and it is worth recalling the chain of events that led to the violence. After the troubles of 1964, Muslims had been relocated to specific areas, such as the Sabirnagar neighborhood. During the same period, Hindu nationalist organizations were actively leading campaigns to "Hinduize" the adivasis by introducing Hindu deities and rituals within their neighborhoods. In 1978, the RSS tried to hold a Ram Navami Hindu procession starting from the adivasi colony of Dimna Basti. It was then slated to pass through the Muslim section of Sabirnagar, but the district's administration refused to grant authorization at that time. In 1979, the RSS tried, once again, to organize the procession. The atmosphere in the city had been tense ever since the speech of the RSS chief, [Balasaheb Deoras](#); on April 1. The local RSS - affiliated Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) and leader of the BMS (Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, Indian Workers' Union, a Hindu trade - union), Dinanath Pandey, organized a propaganda

campaign in favor of allowing the procession to pass through Sabirnagar. On April 7, a pamphlet circulated asking people to gather on April 11 in order to hold the procession forcibly. Muslim leaders were persuaded by the district administration to accept the procession's itinerary. On the morning of April 11, a 15,000 - strong mob gathered. The procession stopped near a mosque in the Mango Area of the Muslim sector. Muslims were prepared for the violence. Stones were thrown and a riot erupted. The Jitendra Narain Commission held the RSS responsible for having created a climate conducive to communal violence. The leaflet distributed on April 7 was denounced as a challenge to the authorities, a threat to the Muslim minority, and an incitement to violence. Adivasis took an active part in attacking the economically well-off Muslims of Jamshedpur. One hundred and eight persons lost their lives in this riot according to the Jitendra Narain Commission of Inquiry, among whom 79 Muslims and 25 Hindus were identified. Other estimates put the death toll at 120, more than half of whom were Muslims. The Commission established that RSS elements and the local MLA, Dinanath Pandey, played a key role in engineering the riots.

(Akbar 1979); **(India Today 15/05/1979); **(Secular Democracy 05/1979); **(Secular Democracy 10/1981); *(Ghosh 1987: 134 136); ***(Narain 2006); ***(National Integration Council 2007); ***(UI - Huda 2009)

CHAPTER 3

Hindus feel besieged:

From Moradabad and Meenakshipuram to Ayodhya and the Shah Bano case (1980 1986)

In 1979, dramatic events shook the Muslim world: revolution in Iran at the hands of Imam Khomeini, the occupation of Afghanistan by the Soviet Army, while in Mecca a commando of fanatics wreaked havoc at the Muslim holy site. Would this fury reach India and its Muslims? What happened was more subtle but no less charged with danger. It underlines the role of rumors and the way they are able to affect the delicate balance that has been achieved between religious communities. In this case, rumors concerned the rather sudden increase of transactions with the Gulf region and the money sent back by Indian migrants working in the area. Colorful mosques sprung up and noisy calls to prayer appeared. Some small-scale Muslim entrepreneurs and even humble workers paraded their new wealth. In Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh), they would pay dearly for this. In August 1980, a dramatic clash with the police occurred at the idgah (ground for offering prayers) on the last day of Ramzan (Ramadan). The government did not display sufficient determination to curb the violence. The violence spread throughout Uttar Pradesh, first to Aligarh and Allahabad, and then to other cities (Delhi, and even Mhow).

Uneasiness permeated people again, in spite of [Indira Gandhi](#) 's spectacular comeback in December 1979 (Weiner 1983). Was it because of her son, Sanjay; his sudden death in June 1980 and the shock it meant for his mother? Was it because of the disintegration of the Janata Party, leading to a difficult recomposition of the political arena? The same old groups were surfacing, including the former Jan Sangh, now the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It should be noted that the latter had taken to Gandhian attitudes, but this was certainly not the case for the satellites of the Sangh Parivar (the RSS, VHP, and Bajrang Dal) which were obviously looking for fresh opportunities in which to display their Hindu commitments.

One such opportunity came in a spectacular way in 1981, with the heavily reported mass conversion to Islam of several hundreds of Harijans ("Untouchables", today called Dalits) in Tamil Nadu, at Meenakshipuram (Imtiaz Ahmad 1982; Sunday 07/09/1982; M. Khan 1991).

Another controversy followed when a rumor was spread about a Muslim "demographic coup". According

to that rumor, the president of the Jamaat-e-Islami, during an international gathering in Hyderabad, had made a strong appeal to the Millat, urging Muslim families to have more children. The response was an impressive Hindu rally, the Hindu Sammelan, held in Delhi in October 1981, at which a number of personalities, including the former ruler of Kashmir, called for a necessary rethinking of the Hindu society. The meeting left a deep impression and other steps followed. Should be mentioned the protracted efforts which were made in various places to bring back the Muslim "converts" to the Hindu fold, then the much publicized Ekatmata Yagna Yatra when, in November 1983, urns filled with Holy Ganga water crisscrossed India in motored caravans. Not to forget the controversy raised at the same time over the so-called beef-tallow issue (which looked very much like the 1857 events in which Hindu and Muslim sepoys fighting for the British East India company were supposedly issued animal-tallow-grease-smeared cartridges [which could have been either pork or beef tallow, thereby offending members of either or both religions]); nor, later on, the Ramjanmabhoomi procession organized to "liberate" and restore to its Hindu devotees the birthplace of Lord Ram in Uttar Pradesh, "occupied" by an old mosque built in the 16th century by Mughals, the Babri Masjid (Van der Veer, 1987).

Things came to a halt in 1984, when attentions were drawn to the Sikh crisis, and to a series of dramatic developments: the "Blue Star Operation" over the Golden Temple in Amritsar in June, the assassination of [Indira Gandhi](#) as a reprisal, on October 31, 1984, and the ghastly anti - Sikh pogrom which followed.

Indira's elder son, [Rajiv Gandhi](#) , who had been assisting his mother, was asked to succeed her. A few weeks later, he was triumphantly elected in the Lok Sabha elections which followed, a period during which Muslims were more or less forgotten, or even set apart. One thing mattered: the Hindu vote (Graff 1987).

[Rajiv Gandhi](#) was known for having an open mind, and his first years as a Prime Minister were promising. He was able to solve a number of pending issues such as the Punjab question. However, he did not know much about problems related to secularism and, as it seemed, with the best intentions, he ignored the caution observed in the old days by the late Pandit Nehru and his secular companions.

There were two major instances which were to mark the period, and had deep consequences:

1/ In what is known as the Shah Bano case (1985 1986), the Union government was led to act against the Supreme Court - it was all about a controversial alimony received by a repudiated old Muslim woman from Bhopal - and the government supported the most conservative Muslim circles, together with a bill passed in Parliament, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, which meant an open support to the Sharia (Mahmood 1986; Z. Hasan 1989).

2/ At the same time, in February 1986, under pressure from various Hindu lobbies in Uttar Pradesh and in Delhi (including from friends of the Prime Minister [Rajiv Gandhi](#)) and, as a compensation to the Hindu opinion, the gates of the Babri Masjid (which had been locked in 1949 after the mysterious introduction of a Hindu idol) were opened to the Hindu devotees. It was just the beginning of a dramatic series of violent events (Gopal 1991).

1980; August 13 14: Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh) Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 50% Hindus, 49% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: V.P. Singh, Congress Party, June 1980 July 1982

Moradabad (Uttar Pradesh), a then Muslim-majority town, experienced a gruesome riot on August 13, the day of the Muslim festival of Id-ul-Fitr. The rising prosperity of the Muslim population within the brassware industry (because of its exports to the Middle-East) had created deep resentment among Hindu

middlemen, particularly those who were refugees from East Pakistan. Tensions had also increased between Valmikis (a sub-caste of Dalits) and Muslims after the kidnapping of a young Dalit girl during a marriage ceremony by four Muslim youths on March 1980. On August 13, eighty thousand Muslims had gathered at the city's Idgah to offer prayers. A pig disrupted the ceremony, an incident in which the police refused to intervene, leading the Muslims to think that the police had deliberately sent the pig. Stones were thrown and the police reacted by firing indiscriminately, killing several people during their prayers. A riot followed in which 50 persons lost their lives, including young children. The same evening, a Muslim crowd attacked a police station, killing two policemen and setting fire to the building. On August 14, a rumor circulated that the Muslims had attacked an entire police platoon. The Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) retaliated by beating ten men to death. A curfew was imposed from August 13 to September 10. Muslims suffered from intimidation by the police and the PAC (which colluded with Hindu goondas). Due to local-police involvement in the violence, paramilitary forces had to be deployed. The local administration proved totally inefficient and irresponsible. The death tally from this riot is still debated, but the Government recognized and paid compensation for 400 deaths. A Muslim group put the death toll at 2,500 while other sources estimated that 1,500 to 2,000 persons had lost their lives in the violence. Further rioting broke out at the end of October, in which 14 persons died. After much hesitation, Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](#) eventually visited the town in October in order to appease the Muslim population. Following the Moradabad riot, violence between the PAC and Muslims also flared up in Allahabad, in August, claiming around ten lives.

(Akbar, 1980); *(Gandhi, 1980); *(Secular Democracy, 09/1980); *(India Today, 30/11/1980);
*** (Saberwal and M. Hasan, 1984: 209); ***(Engineer, 1984b: 39); ***(Ghosh, 1987: 221 224);
*** (Chatterji, 1995: 38 38)

1980, October 1981, May: Godhra (Gujarat) 51% Hindus, 46% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: Madhavsingh Solanki, Congress Party, June 1980 August 1985

A series of communal incidents which occurred over an almost one-year period took place in the city of Godhra (Gujarat). They resulted from a local rivalry between Sindhis (a deprived Hindu group from the Sindh region, which migrated to India after Partition) and Ghanchis (an Other Backward Classes [OBC] Muslim group). The first major incident occurred on 29 October 1980 when two street hawkers (one Sindhi and one Ghanchi Muslim) quarreled over the position of their handcarts. Sindhi and Ghanchi crowds rapidly gathered, each setting fire to shops and houses belonging to the other community. A family of five Sindhis was burned alive. On March 1981, further violence took place when the municipality allowed the Sindhi community to rebuild shops that had been destroyed, while the Muslims were formally denied permission to do the same. Attacks and counter-attacks took place until September. About ten lives were claimed.

*** (Engineer, 1984b: 246 261)

1981; April 30 May 5: Biharsharif (Bihar) 63% Hindus, 37% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: Jagannath Mishra, Congress (I), June 1980 August 1983

A serious riot took place in Biharsharif (Bihar), a town that had a forty-eight percent Muslim population at the time. Due to the relatively large presence of Muslims, there are several cemeteries in the town. In early 1981, tensions arose between Muslims and Yadavs (a rising Hindu lower caste) because of a dispute in which Yadavs had attempted to claim land for themselves that was situated in a Muslim cemetery. On January 21, the Muslims realized that the Yadavs had gone ahead with the construction of a Hindu temple

on the disputed site. Clashes erupted, but they were rapidly brought under control by the police. On August 30, a dispute between drunken Muslim and Hindu youths in the predominantly Muslim neighborhood of Gangandiwan sparked off a riot. Rumors spread that Muslims had "massacred" Gangandiwan's few Hindu families. On May 1, a mob armed with guns and bombs attacked Alinagar - an area which had been exempted from the curfew imposed in other areas. One man and 14 women and children were killed. In the town of Biharsharif alone, twenty persons lost their lives. But the most important events took place in nearby villages such as Gulni where 13 persons, mainly women and children were killed on May 2 by a crowd armed with bombs and rifles. Villagers, mainly Dalits and Yadavs (OBCs), joined the mob, attacking Muslims in a village that had lived in communal harmony for years. Violence in the rural areas continued unabated for three days without any intervention from the police. The Congress state administration reacted slowly; Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](#) had to come to the area on May 4. Calm was restored on May 5. Some reports pointed out that the RSS had taken advantage of the Yadav's anger over the land dispute to trigger a riot. A local CPI (Communist Party of India) MLA reported that during the riots, RSS activists visited rural areas with loudspeakers, spreading a false rumor that two hundred Yadavs had been killed by Muslims in Biharsharif. The police also proved themselves to be incompetent and partial to the Hindus.

The actual death toll remains unknown. Official accounts reported 52 deaths, but other estimates put the figure at from 80 to 150 200 deaths.

(Secular Democracy, 05/1981)*; ***(Sunday, 24/05/1981)*; *(Engineer, 1981)*; ****(Ghosh, 1987: 127 130)*; ****(Saksena, 1990: 167)*

1981; July 12 20: Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) 54% Hindus, 43% Muslims

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh: Tanguturi Anjaiah, Congress Party, October 1980 February 1982

Fresh riots erupted in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) and lasted for eight days. Forty people were killed and three hundred injured. The deaths were not attributed to mob violence but to isolated stabbings perpetrated by goondas in the small lanes of the city.

****(Saksena, 1990: 191)*

1982, February 15 18: Pune and Solapur (Maharashtra) PUNE 80% Hindus, 9% Muslims

SOLAPUR 76% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Babasaheb Bhosale, Congress Party, January 1982 February 1983

Communal incidents took place in two cities, Pune and Solapur (Maharashtra), as a result of an aggressive VHP-led campaign that sought to awaken Hindus to the dangers of Islam, after the mass conversions that had been carried out at Meenakshipuram. Frightened Muslims adopted a low profile. On February 16, the VHP organized a procession through Pune, with the support of the Congress administration. It crossed Muslim neighborhoods, damaging Muslim shops and properties along the way. In the working-class town of Solapur, a VHP procession stopped near a mosque and shouted anti-Muslim slogans such as "Jalado Jalado Pakistan" ("Burn, Burn Pakistan"). Muslims there (not as passive as their coreligionists in Pune) retaliated by burning Hindu shops. Prompt action on the part of the administration brought the situation under control and limited the casualties.

(Akbar, 1982)*; ***(Secular Democracy, 03/1982)*; *(Engineer, 1984b: 263 270)*

1982; September 29 October 2: Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 61% Hindus, 36% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Sripat Mishra, Congress Party, July 1982 August 1984

Following the incidents of 1961, tragic communal riots occurred, once again, in the city of Meerut (Uttar Pradesh).

The atmosphere had become tense since January 1982 when the RSS chief, [Balasaheb Deoras](#), visited the city. In September, Meerut felt the repercussions of the Ekatmata Yagna Yatra. On September 19 21, the VHP organized a meeting in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh). A training camp was also held in Haridwar (Uttarakhand) in July. VHP volunteers subsequently came to the city of Meerut.

Communal troubles started because of a small dispute - over a piece of municipal land in the crowded neighborhood of Shahghasa - between a Muslim advocate, who was said to have usurped the land, and the municipality. Hindu organizations added a communal dimension to the incident by claiming that a temple used to stand on the disputed parcel. The Muslim lawyer added further fuel to the disagreement by saying that it was in reality the site of a mazar (tomb of a Muslim saint). Several isolated killings occurred up until September 11. The district administration decided to seal off the site on September 14. The Hindu - dominated Traders and Bar Associations declared a hartal (strike) on September 18 to protest against that decision, and the seal was eventually removed on September 22 when the district administration bowed to outside pressure. The following day, members of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party) led a victory procession onto the disputed site. On September 28, the day of the Muslim festival Id, the Qazi (scholar of Islamic law) of the town incited Muslims to wear black badges in protest over the seal's removal. Provocative speeches by the Shahi Imam [Syed Abdullah Bukhari](#) of Delhi's Jama Masjid also inflamed passions. In this highly communalized atmosphere, the situation degenerated on September 30 into a communal riot that lasted until October 2. Scheduled Castes were particularly involved in the anti-Muslim violence. The special police force of the PAC also took an active part in the killing of Muslims. This was no longer a case of mere partiality toward Hindus but a police attack that directly targeted Muslims. In all, the PAC shot dead 42 persons on October 1 and 2. The worst event took place at the Feroze Building, in a poor Muslim area, where 13 persons (according to some sources and 29 according to others) were killed by PAC bullets. The district administration proved incompetent and partial to Hindu interests. At the state level, Congress Chief Minister Sripat Mishra, should have taken action by immediately removing the district police officers involved in the violence, but his administration proved ineffectual and slow to act.

***([Chishti, 1982](#)); **([India Today, 31/10/1982: 24 29](#)); **([Sunday, 03/04/1983: 21](#)); ***([Engineer, 1984b: 275 279](#)); ***([Engineer, 1987c](#)); ***([Ghosh, 1987: 216 220](#)); ***([Brass, 2004](#)); ***([Brass, 2006: 66; 91 94](#))

1982; October 22 30: Baroda (Gujarat) Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 85% Hindus, 11% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: Madhavsingh Solanki, Congress Party, June 1980 August 1985

Violence occurred in the communally sensitive city of Baroda (or Vadodara), Gujarat. Tensions began in September 1981 when nine persons lost their lives in a small-scale riot. From that point on, people lived in constant fear of communal troubles until October 1982 when large clashes eventually broke out. The underlying cause of the riots was the ever-present economic rivalry opposing Muslims and Kahars (a Hindu Scheduled Caste community) within the illicit liquor business. In addition, in 1982, the Hindu festival of

Dussehra and the Muslim festival of Muharram (celebrated by Shias) coincided, further antagonizing the two communities. The stabbing death of a youth in the Navapura quarter on October 22 triggered off riots. Hindu and Muslim processions marching in the same street clashed. The police had to open fire and a curfew was imposed. A fresh bout of violence occurred on October 27 when a tazia procession (brandishing miniature mausoleums to celebrate Muharram), passing through a Hindu locality, discovered the dead bodies of two Muslims. Profiting from the social disorder and relying upon their close links with some police officers, Hindu criminal elements from the liquor industry ransacked Muslim shops. The stabbing of a Hindu on October 29 also led to violent police operations in Muslim areas. Engrossed in factional fighting, the Congress state administration proved unable to cope with the situation. Chief Minister M. Solanki did not visit Baroda until November 6, when Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](#) requested him to do so. The violence claimed seven lives and left 55 injured. On December 13, a rumor that the city police commissioner (a man close to the BJP and RSS) had been removed by the state government, in response to pressures from Muslim leaders, sparked off student demonstrations, arson, and shop looting. Twelve persons died.

***(Engineer, 1982); ***(Ghosh, 1987: 171 174)

1983; February 18: Nellie (Assam) Religious composition of the population in the district (as per the 2001 census): 48% Hindus, 51% Muslims

Chief Minister of Assam: no Chief Minister between March 1982 and 27 February 1983

A massive attack against Muslims took place in Nellie (Assam) in the Nagaon district and in other parts of the state during the February 1983 assembly elections.

The remote and deprived state of Assam is highly diverse and composite, the result of a long history of migration from the neighboring region of West Bengal. During the colonial period, the British encouraged the settlement of Bengali Muslim peasants to cultivate the land. With Partition in 1947 and the creation of Bangladesh (in 1971) - a poor and heavily populated state-Muslim migration to Assam intensified. In a situation where Assamese, tribals, Bengali Hindus, and Bengali Muslims lived side by side, forming a complex mosaic, Bangladeshi Muslim migrants were rapidly designated the scapegoats of a population suffering from its remoteness, its underdevelopment, and its lack of integration into the Indian nation. Agitation against "foreigners" crystallized around the voting issue: in a democratic system, Assam's native citizens feared that they might become a minority in their own land.

Back in 1979, the discovery of electoral rolls (for a local election) that included numerous foreign names caused a scandal. The AASU (All Assam Students Union) and the AGSP (Asom Gana Sangram Parishad, Assam Popular Struggle Association) launched a movement to disenfranchise illegal Bangladeshi voters: the names of all post-1971 migrants were to be struck from the electoral lists. State-wide protests started. But the Congress-led state government, which had traditionally ruled with minorities' support up until that point, proved reluctant to revise the lists.

In 1983, assembly elections were held amid a student movement and opposition parties' call for a boycott. The central government in Delhi insisted that the elections be conducted. Large-scale violence erupted on all sides. Electoral violence combined with ethnic rivalry, communal tensions, land alienation (evictions carried out irrespective of prior property rights), and a settlement of old private scores. Five thousand persons lost their lives during these elections.

On February 18, in this context of a total breakdown of governance, a large number of Muslims were killed in Nellie and in nearby villages. The Bangladeshi Muslims had made it clear that they intended to

participate in the elections. This sounded like a provocation to other villagers, who resented the Muslim presence on their lands. On February 17, the Bangladeshis were prevented from voting. On February 18, they were attacked by a mob of Lalung, Mikir, and Bodo tribals; Assamese Hindus; and Nepalis. The attack resulted in atrocious bloodshed. The death figure of this attack remains unknown. Official accounts reported 1,383 deaths. Other reports put the death toll at from 3,300 to more than 4,000. The violence in Assam, however, cannot only be chalked up to communal antagonisms: ethnic, linguistic, and migration issues also came into play

(India Today, 15/03/1983). **(The Indian Express, 07,08,09/04/1983); *(Graff, 1983); ***(Engineer, 1984b: 296 304); ***(Baruah, 1986); ***(Saksena, 1990: 77); ***(Tehelka, 30/09/2006); ***(Racine, 2011: 311 314); ***(Engineer, 2009)

1983; September 7 9: Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) 54% Hindus, 43% Muslims

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh: N. T. Rama Rao, Telugu Desam Party (TDP), January 1983 August 1984

For a period of two days, the city of Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) was once again rocked by serious communal violence. The BJP and VHP were responsible for communal agitation in the city on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Ganesh Chaturthi. On September 7, a mentally handicapped Muslim leaving a mosque threw a stone at a Hindu temple. On September 8, a mosque on the premises of the Allwyn Metal Factory was desecrated by laborers from the trade union led by A. Narendra, a BJP MLA. Hindu idols were installed within the mosque and copies of the Quran were thrown into ablution tanks. The MIM (Majlis-e-Itthadul Muslimeen, Muslim party in Hyderabad), supported by other Muslim organizations (the Muslim League, the Tamir-e-Millat, the Jamaat-e-Islami, and the Amarat Millat Islamia) subsequently called for a bandh (general strike) on September 9. Although the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief minister, N. T. Rama Rao, did his best to dissuade them, the local Congress(I), eager to recover Muslim support, convinced the MIM leaders to maintain the bandh. The demonstration remained peaceful till MIM volunteers started coercing people to participate. A police officer fired, killing two young Muslims boys. After this event, isolated stabbing incidents began to take place in many sections of the city, but occurrences of mob violence were rare. Individual victims were killed in the narrow lanes of Hyderabad city. The city administration was reluctant to impose a curfew as this would have disturbed the Ganesh festival scheduled for September 10. As a result, the violence claimed 45 lives, according to official figures. Unofficial estimates put the actual death toll at 70 and the number of those injured at more than 200.

(India Today, 15/10/1983: 8); *(Radiance, 30/10 5/11/1983: 7); ***(Engineer, 1983); ***(Ghosh, 1987: 120)

1984; May 17 18: Bombay and Bhiwandi (Maharashtra) Bombay 67% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Bhiwandi 44% Hindus, 51% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Vasantao Patil, Congress Party, February 1983 June 1985

Riots raged in Bombay, Bhiwandi, Thane, Kalyan, and Bhayander (Maharashtra). Together, these riots are often referred to as the "Bombay Bhiwandi riots". They left a deep scar on India's collective memory.

The communal atmosphere had been tense in the region since April 1984, when, for his birthday, the leader of the Shiv Sena (Army of Shiv, Maharashtrian Hindu nationalist organization), Bal Thackeray, decided to form a united Hindu front, called the Hindu Maha Sangh, with several organizations. A meeting of the

Maha Sangh was held in Bombay on April 21, during which Thackeray delivered highly inflammatory speeches, referring to the Muslim community as a cancer, which needed to be excised. Vasant Dada Patil, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, paid no attention to the incident. Instead, he allowed the procession to proceed on the festival of Shiv Jayanti - for the first time since 1970 (the procession was banned at that time after having provoked communal riots). On May 13, the Urdu newspaper Akhbar-e-Alam distorted Bal Thackeray's speech, thus propagating a rumor that he had insulted the Prophet. Muslims organized demonstrations. In response, the Shiv Sena called for a bandh in different areas of Bombay on May 16. Muslims counter reacted on May 17 by hoisting green flags and removing Shiv Sena's saffron flags. Violence erupted in Bhiwandi and spread to Kalyan, Thane, and Bombay. People from outlying villages attacked the outskirts of Bhiwandi. Armed mobs with kerosene destroyed parts of the city. On May 19, twenty-seven persons, who had taken refuge at the farm of a rich Muslim businessman, were burned alive by a mob of about one thousand people. The police did not intervene. It was not a spontaneous eruption of crowd violence: the murders were perpetrated by well-armed Hindutva activists, hooligans, and goondas.

The total death toll according to some accounts amounted to 278. In addition, 1,115 people were injured, and property worth 7 crores (70,000,000 rupees in Western notation) and 65 lakhs (6,500,000 rupees in Western notation) was destroyed. An inquiry led by Asghar Ali Engineer reported 500 deaths in Bhiwandi (400 Muslims, 100 Hindus), 104 in Thane (all Muslims), and 6 in the industrial township of Bhayander. The great majority of those killed belonged to the poorest segments of the population.

(The Times of India, 3/06/1984); *(India Today, 15/06/1984); * (Engineer, 1984c: 29; 160 163); *** (Ghosh, 1987: 202 205); *** (Saksena, 1990: 184 187); *** (Engineer, 1992d)

1984; July and September: Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh) Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 54% Hindus, 43% Muslims

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh: N.T. Rama Rao, Telugu Desam Party, January 1983 August 1984

N. Bhaskara Rao, Congress (I), August 1984 16 September 1984

Communal troubles occurred once again in the city of Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh), which was becoming more and more sensitive (see chapter 4 in "Hindu Muslim Communal Riots in India II (1986 2011)" by Violette Graff and Juliette Galonnier [2012]). On July 22, stones were thrown at a Hindu procession of Kali worshippers in the Muslim - majority area of Moghalpura. One person died in the fracas that followed. On July 29, a group of young men attacked a police station and stabbed passers-by. Riots subsequently erupted in five other parts of the city. Fifteen persons lost their lives. Further rioting took place in September, particularly on September 9 when young men from a Ganesh procession passing through the old city attacked and set fire to Muslim shops. Stabbing incidents took place in retaliation bringing the number of dead to twenty.

(India Today, 31/08/1984); * (Ghosh, 1987: 123)

1984; October 31 November 4: Delhi 81% Hindus, 12% Muslims, 4% Sikhs

Chief Minister of Delhi: none, Delhi was then a Union Territory, not a state

Following the assassination of Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](#) by her Sikh bodyguards, anti - Sikh pogroms occurred in Delhi, claiming 2,733 lives. (For further details, see, «Case Study on the Anti - Sikh Pogrom of October 31 to November 4, 1984, in New Delhi» by Lionel Baixas [2009].) Although this could not be qualified as an episode of Hindu Muslim violence, this event left its mark on the Muslim community,

which feared being targeted in the same manner. During the short period leading up to the December 1984 elections, rabidly pro-Hindu pamphlets were distributed.

(***Graff, 1987: 441)

1985; March 18 25; April 15 29; 1986; July 9 14: Ahmedabad (Gujarat) 81% Hindus, 14% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: Madhavsingh Solanki, Congress Party, June 1980 August 1985, Amarsingh Chaudhury, Congress Party, August 1985 December 1989

A series of communal troubles erupted in the city of Ahmedabad (Gujarat), claiming more than 200 lives. The violence that engulfed Ahmedabad in February was not, at first, of a communal nature: it was linked, rather, to the anti-"reservation" protests of upper-caste Hindus against the implementation of quotas for the Backward Classes in the public and education sectors. On March 18, disturbances took on a communal cast when Muslim storekeepers refused to close their shops in response to a bandh call. In April, policemen retaliating for the death of a police head-constable helped rioters set fire to Muslim houses. On April 22, the police burned down the office of the newspaper Gujarat Samachar (which had been critical of their activities). Twenty Muslims were killed in shooting by police. The Indira Garib Nagar slum was attacked by an armed upper-caste Hindu mob with the police's complicity on April 22. The unofficial toll rose to one hundred dead.

After the difficult year of 1985, Hindu Muslim communal riots erupted again on 9 July 1986. The "Shah Bano controversy" had polarized the atmosphere along communal lines. Troubles began on July 9 when stones were allegedly thrown from Muslim houses onto a Rath Yatra (chariot procession). The parade participants were armed with lathis (sticks), trishuls (traditional trident), and kerosene; and were shouting anti-Muslim slogans. A riot erupted, claiming 59 lives.

*** (Engineer, 1985a); *** (Engineer, 1985b); *** (S. Patel, 1985); *** (Engineer, 1986); *** (Ghosh, 1987: 163 164; 265); *** (Saksena, 1990: 96); ** (Varshney and Wilkinson, 2004, database); * (Rajeshwari, 2004)

CONCLUSION

The Indian subcontinent acquired independence in 1947. However, the inability of the Indian National Congress (INC) and of the Muslim League to reach an agreement before the required deadline brought about a precipitous partition of the country, and with the ensuing massacres and exchange of populations, the event has had heavy long-term consequences. To their mutual detriment, both India and Pakistan continue to defy each other dangerously. For India, the secular model, advocated by Nehru and which was meant to ensure peaceful coexistence between religious communities, seemed to have worked. However, after some fifteen years, the situation deteriorated. Local economic rivalries, political games, and international tensions brought a new awareness of difficulties and discriminations. Violence erupted in many places and each successive prime minister had his or her own approach to events. In 1986, religion invaded the political field. Efforts were made by the government to "appease" both Hindus and Muslims, which brought about disaster. Various groups became vociferous. Hindus felt besieged. Minorities felt threatened. The next decade would be one of blood and tears.

[For a continuation of this chronological index, see «Hindu Muslim Communal Riots in India II (1986 2011)» by Violette Graff and Juliette Galonnier (2012)]

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Communalism Combat

Frontline

India Today

Link

Mainstream

Muslim India

Organiser

Outlook

Radiance Weekly

Secular Democracy

Seminar

Sunday

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All the corresponding files, documents and press cuttings are available at the SciencesPo library (Fonds Violette Graff - Allier).