



Hindu-Muslim Communal Riots in India II (1986-2011)

Violette Graff and Juliette Galonnier

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By Violette Graff, Research Fellow (rtd.), CERI, SciencesPo.

Written in collaboration with Juliette Galonnier, PhD Student, SciencesPo and Northwestern University (Chicago).

INTRODUCTION

We are in 1986, almost forty years after Independence and the traumatizing events of Partition: Hindu Muslim relations in India are fraught with many difficulties. The communal divide, as it is called, is still salient, and religious riots have become a distinctive feature of Indian social life. Starting in 1961, the country has witnessed a number of severe riots: dramatic events occurred in Calcutta, Rourkela, and Jamshedpur following the theft of a relic hair of the Prophet in Kashmir (1964). The country then witnessed a large pogrom against Muslims in Ahmedabad (1969); ghastly riots in Bhiwandi (1970) and Jamshedpur (1979); repeated incidents in Hyderabad; unbridled violence in Moradabad (1980) and Biharsharif (1981); huge massacres in Nellie (1983); and terrible riots in Bombay Bhiwandi (1984) (for a detailed account of this period, as well as a general introduction to India and its various communities, see «Hindu Muslim Communal Riots in India I (1947 1986)» by Violette Graff and Juliette Galonnier [2012].) Throughout that period, the Muslim minority had growing reasons to be highly disillusioned with the Indian secular ideal, while a growing proportion of the Hindu population tended to subscribe to an ethnicized, Hindu centric vision of the Indian nation.

In the mid-eighties, as the country was heading toward the ninth general elections, alarming signs were displayed, which didn't bode well for the future. While Muslims were up in arms defending their personal law (for example, in the «Shah Bano case»), the controversy over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was gaining strength and was becoming a national matter of concern—a bone of contention between the two communities in each and every Indian city.

CHAPTER 1

Towards the ninth general elections (1986 1989)

It was a fateful and bloody period. Tensions had been simmering but, with the perilous decisions taken in February 1986 (see «Hindu Muslim Communal Riots in India I (1947 1986)» [Graff and Galonnier 2012]), the «Shah Bano case,» and the unlocking of the Babri Masjid, clashes turned to bloody riots, an occurrence which became distressingly commonplace. This situation was largely the consequence of the BJP's new attitude (Bharatiya Janata Party, Indian People's Party) and its fresh strategy—a strategy much more offensive than its earlier more moderate stance. Moderation had not paid off in the 1984 general elections (the BJP had only two seated Member of Parliaments in the Lok Sabha). Why not then return to the former Jan Sangh's militancy regarding the «Hindu Nation» (Jaffrelot 1996: 358 403)? The VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad, World Hindu Council) proved to be the best tool possible for doing that and, as in 1983, yatras were the best method of attracting people. It was, in fact, a revival of an old Hindu tradition, organizing processions that crisscrossed large regions—occasionally the entire country—thus evoking deep emotions on the part of Hindu crowds and devotees.

Unfortunately, it so happened that, on the Muslim side, there was a new leadership, which was much less cautious than earlier generations. Among them, there was a flamboyant but rather irresponsible cleric, the

already well-known Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid in Old Delhi, [Syed Abdullah Bukhari](#). There was also, dominating several other politicians, a fierce MP from Bihar (Kishanganj) and a former diplomat, [Syed Shahabuddin](#). His references were impeccable but he was fiery by nature, and at times displayed an aggressiveness which would add fuel to a number of confrontations.

At the Centre, the [Rajiv Gandhi](#) government was embroiled in a serious crisis, the Bofors Armament scandal. Defense Minister, [V. P. Singh](#), known for his troublesome honesty, had resigned. Personalities on all sides from the opposition were coalescing around him. They gained strength, rebuilding something which looked like the old Janata Party.

General elections were slated for November 1989. These were years of questions, quarrels and ego clashes. A few sensible decisions were taken however, like the ban on Rushdie's Satanic Verses, although it was anathema to many intellectuals (René 1997; Graff 2008). But, by and large, the period was dominated by unfortunate gesticulations, unreasonable boycotts and rallies from the Muslim side; and by exacting pressures from the emergent «Ramjanmabhoomi movement» which was now fighting for building a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Giant yatras (processions) were organized so that the 500,000 villages of India would participate in the event: each of them was supposed to send or to carry a shilanya (sacred brick) to build the formidable Ram Temple, whose miniature model was exposed in front of the Babri Masjid. After many debates in the government, the processions were authorized, and it was in the city of Faizabad, close to Ayodhya, that [Rajiv Gandhi](#) opened the electoral campaign (for the ninth Lok Sabha) and promised a Ram Raj (kingdom of Ram). It was «too much, too late,» and he was no longer trusted. Many cities had seen severe rioting. In Bhagalpur (Bihar), events were shamefully handled by a biased administration; and it proved tragic.

1987; May 18 23: Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)

61% Hindus, 36% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: BirBahadurSingh, Congress Party, September 1985 June 1988

The city of Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) and the nearby areas of Moradnagar and Maliana were again the scene of ghastly violence. After twenty-five years, the memory of these horrors is still extremely vivid.

Meerut. On 14 February 1986, Muslims hoisted black flags in the city to protest against the opening of the lock that sealed the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh). They set fire to Hindu shops, leading to a small-scale riot. On 30 March 1987, large numbers of Meerut's Muslims participated in a rally held by the Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) in Delhi, where inflammatory speeches were delivered by the [Shahi Imam Syed Abdullah Bukhari](#). On April 14, a riot erupted during the Muslim festival of Shab-e-barat (the night of freedom), claiming ten lives. On May 16, the murder of a Hindu during a banal land dispute provided the spark for more extensive rioting. Violence flared up on May 18 in the Muslim-majority neighborhood of Hashimpura when a stand belonging to a Muslim was set on fire. Muslims attacked a Hindu shop in retaliation and stabbed its owner to death. The police and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) subsequently surrounded the area to arrest people. It was the Ramzan (Ramadan) period and Muslims were celebrating Iftar. Following appeals broadcast from the mosque's loudspeaker, they pelted stones at the police. The violent and indiscriminate arrests that followed enraged the Muslim community, which started attacking Hindus. In the factories of Pillokhdi, ten to twelve persons (Hindus and Muslims) were burned alive. On May 19, a curfew was imposed. Hindu activists, helped by the PAC, looted and burned parts of the city. Many Muslims from poor backgrounds were burned alive, particularly in the area of Shastri Nagar where 33 persons (or more than 100 according to the residents) were killed.

Moradnagar. On May 22, around a hundred Muslims who had been arrested in the Hashimpura locality were taken in trucks to the Ganga canal in the Moradnagar area. They were shot one by one by the PAC. Although the police denied the incident, many bodies were seen floating in the canal. It is alleged by some survivors that more than 100 persons were killed.

Maliana. While Meerut city was returning to normalcy, another massive killing occurred in the village of Maliana, six kilometres from Meerut, on May 23. The PAC arrived in Maliana (where some Muslims, initially taken prisoner in Hashimpura, were alleged to have taken refuge) and started shooting into Muslim homes. The Hindu residents of the village, particularly Dalits, took part in the looting and burning. Many Muslims were burned alive in their houses.

The death toll and the savagery of these events left their mark on post-Independence India. The Gian Prakash Commission of Inquiry report (quoted in Engineer 1988b) established that 117 people had been killed in Meerut. Engineer also reported 68 deaths in the nearby village of Maliana and 40 in the Moradnagar area, bringing the total death toll of the events to 225. But the actual figure might be much higher, probably around 400, including around 180 deaths in Maliana and around 100 in Moradnagar. Some media reports consider that the death toll might have reached well above the four-figure mark.

**(The Indian Express 27/05/1987); **(India Today 15/06/1987); **(Secular Democracy 07/1987);
(Secular Democracy 07/1987); * (Secular Democracy 12/1987); *** (Engineer 1987b); *** (Engineer 1988b)

1987; May 19 22: Delhi

81% Hindus, 12% Muslims

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

A series of rumors about events happening in Meerut triggered communal violence in Delhi. On May 19, a mob killed the imam of a mosque in the Hauz Khaz area. A curfew was imposed but relaxed again on May 22 so that Muslims could offer prayers on the last day of Ramzan. A new bout of violence took place after afternoon prayers when mobs from the Jama Masjid and the Fatehpuri Masjid went on rampage. The media reported eight deaths. Other reports put the death toll at 15, among whom 12 were killed in shooting by police. The border between Meerut and Delhi was subsequently sealed.

(The Illustrated Weekly 07/06/1987); **(Secular Democracy 07/1987); * (Engineer 1987a),
*** (Engineer 1987c: 65 108)

1988; May 17 20: Aurangabad (Maharashtra)

52% Hindus, 29% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Shankarrao Chavan, Congress Party, March 1986 June 1988

Troubles erupted in the city of Aurangabad (Maharashtra) and in nearby villages after Municipal Corporation elections were held. Shiv Sena's leader, Bal Thackeray, had held a rally in the town to ensure victory for his organization. But an alliance between the Congress (I), the Muslim League, and the Dalits enabled a Congress (I) candidate to win. Shiv Sena corporators (elected members of a municipal corporation in India) filed a petition with the high court to protest the outcome of the elections. On May 16, the day of the court hearing and a day before the Muslim festival of Id began, a large crowd gathered in

front of the courthouse. A Shiv Sena mob started looting and burning parts of the city. Muslim criminals also stabbed Hindus. In all, the riot claimed 26 lives according to newspaper reports. Violence spread to the villages of Paithan and Bidkin; seven persons died in stabbing incidents in Paithan, and one person was shot dead in Bidkin. Two persons were also killed on May 20 in the nearby town of Jalna when the Shiv Sena attempted to hoist its flag near a mosque.

(*The Times of India* 27/05/1988); **(*India Today* 15/06/1988); *(*Engineer* 1988a)

1988; October 8 11: Muzaffarnagar (Uttar Pradesh)

58% Hindus, 40% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Narain Dutt Tiwari, Congress Party, June 1988 December 1989

Communal riots took place in the town of Muzaffarnagar (Uttar Pradesh). On October 8, Hindu communal organizations held a bandh (general strike) to counter a rally that was scheduled by the BMAC (Babri Masjid Action Committee) for October 14. Some Muslim shopkeepers refused to close their shops and violence flared up. One Muslim was stabbed and shops belonging to Hindus were burned. On October 11, a peace committee, mainly composed of Muslims, organized a demonstration in the town. It met a Shiv Sena mob. The two crowds started fighting, and 35 people, mainly poor rickshaw-pullers, were killed according to official accounts. The highest figures reported totaled 60 dead from the Muslim community and 27 victims from the Hindu community, bringing the total death toll to 87.

***(*Engineer* 1989d)

1989; February 24: Bombay (Maharashtra)

67% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Sharad Pawar, Congress Party, June 1988 June 1991

On February 24, the first Friday after Ayatollah Khomeini issued a call to all Muslims declaring that the author Salman Rushdie should be killed for the publication of his book *The Satanic Verses*, a bandh was organized by some Muslim groups in Bombay. The book had already been banned by the Indian government in October 1988 (after intensive lobbying by Muslim organizations and also, it should be indicated, by secular lawyers), but Khomeini's fatwa revived the mobilization. A protest march was held. This demonstration was not isolated: a transnational wave of protest had stirred up Muslim communities worldwide, with events having been organized not only in Delhi, Calcutta, Benares, and Darjeeling but also in Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Japan, Turkey, and France-to name but a few. In Bombay, the participants were young people associated with Islamic organizations. Disturbances started in the greatly stigmatized Muslim locality of Mohammed Ali Road after the police intervened to disperse the procession. Official figures put the toll at eleven dead. ***(*A. Shah* 1989); ***(*Engineer* 1989c), ***(*Wright* 1990); ***(*René* 1997), ***(*Graff* 2008: 227)

1989; April 16 20: Hazaribagh (Bihar)

73% Hindus, 21% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: Satyendra Narain Sinha, Congress (I), March 1989 December 1989

Violence engulfed Hazaribagh (Bihar). Communal tensions arose regarding the route that the Hindu Ram Navami procession was to follow; it was prevented by police from passing near the Jama Masjid (mosque). The VHP led an angry demonstration in the town in order to obtain the right to follow the ancient procession route—a demand finally agreed to by the district administration. On April 16, while the procession was taking place, a bomb exploded, sparking off a riot that claimed 19 lives according to official sources (but around 100 by unofficial accounts).

***(Sunday 07 13/05/1989)*; ***(The Illustrated Weekly 21/05/1989)*

1989; September 14: Kota (Rajasthan)

79% Hindus, 16% Muslims

Chief Minister of Rajasthan: Shiv Charan Mathir, Congress Party, January 1988 December 1989

Riots took place in the city of Kota (Rajasthan). On September 14, a Hindu Anant Chaturdashi procession (held on the last day of the Ganesh festival; when Ganesh idols are immersed in lakes or rivers) marched in the town, shouting anti-Muslim slogans. Members of several akharas (traditional physical-training centers) and activists from Hindu communal organizations were present among the crowd. When the procession stopped near a mosque in the Ghantaghar area, Muslims rioted. Large-scale rioting ensued. Looting and burning by criminal elements took place. Muslim business groups were targeted, particularly the Bohras (a Shia sect). The media reported 16 deaths. Government reports counted 21 deaths but the Urdu newspaper; *Tulu-e-Subh*, established that, in all, 26 persons had lost their lives—22 Muslims and four Hindus.

(Frontline 30/09 13/10/1989)*; ***(Sunday 1 7/10/1989)*; *(Engineer 1989a)*; ****(Saksena 1990: 72)*

1989; September 28: Badaun (Uttar Pradesh)

56% Hindus, 43% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Narain Dutt Tiwari, Congress Party, June 1988 December 1989

Riots erupted in Badaun (Uttar Pradesh). Tensions rose over the issue of Urdu-slanted to become Uttar Pradesh's second official language. On September 27, the ABVP (Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, All India Students' Council) organized an anti-Urdu procession in the town. Riots occurred on September 28, the day the Urdu bill was introduced in the state's legislative assembly. Students from Islamia Inter College organized a pro-Urdu march and attacked a Hindu college. Arson and killings began, with armed men firing at passers-by from the town's rooftops. The riot claimed 27 lives according to some media reports. Other accounts assessed the total at more than 60 killed. Violence also spread to the countryside. During an attack on the Kasganj Kashipur train, 13 passengers were killed by a mob. Other sources put the death toll of this attack at 24.

(The Times of India 29/09/1989)*; ***(The Times of India 01/10/1989)*; ***(Frontline 14 27/10/1989: 108)*; ***(India Today 31/10/1989: 19)*; *(Saksena 1990: 2)*

1989; October 14: Indore (Madhya Pradesh)

81% Hindus, 13% Muslims

Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh: Motilal Vora, Congress Party, January 1989 December 1989

Communal troubles occurred in Indore (Madhya Pradesh), a predominantly Hindu city. The atmosphere in the city had become communalized ever since the «Shah Bano case» erupted. The «Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi issue» was another underlying factor that eventually helped trigger the riots. On September 30, a massive VHP rally was held. On October 4, a Ram Shila procession carrying consecrated bricks to build the projected Ram temple in Ayodhya, paraded through the city, creating resentment among Muslims. More than 25,000 people participated in the procession, among which BJP, RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteers' Organization) and VHP members could be found. Some Muslim leaders decided to counter this event by organizing an equally large procession in honor of the Prophet's birthday on October 13. With the 1990 state assembly elections fast approaching, the Congress government, which had already given permission for the Hindu Ram Shila to be held, could not take the risk of further alienating Muslim voters: permission was granted for the Prophet's birthday procession to take place. A riot ignited near the Ram Laxman Chowk area when crackers exploded at the end of the 30,000-strong Muslim procession, thereby panicking the crowd. Some armed marchers started rioting, which soon turned into a police Muslim confrontation. Opponents of the chief minister, including those within the Congress, took advantage of the riots to demonstrate the incompetence of his administration. Engineer estimated that 27 people died in these riots (20 Muslims and seven Hindus), most of them in shooting by police. Official sources put the death toll at 23, including 19 Muslims. Unofficial reports say that the actual figure might be between 35 and 50 deaths.

(*The Indian Express* 16/10/1989); **(*Frontline* 28/10 10/11/1989); *(*Engineer* 1989b)

1989; October 22 28: Bhagalpur (Bihar)

69% Hindus, 30% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: Satyendra Narain Sinha, Congress Party, March 1989 December 1989

One of the most remembered riots in India's post-Independence history occurred in Bhagalpur (Bihar) and in 250 adjacent villages. The Justice Ramanandan Prasad Commission of Inquiry submitted a well-researched report in March 1995.

The «Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi controversy» had created communal tensions throughout the state of Bihar. The state government had issued directives to district and police authorities advising great caution. In the town of Bhagalpur, tension was simmering. The proximity of the festivals of Bihula Puja (Hindu) and Muharram (Shia) and the unsolved murder of a Muslim rickshaw-driver during the Hindu Bihula procession on August 20 had already antagonized the two communities. In October, local Hindu groups asked permission to organize a Ram Shila (carrying sacred bricks) procession to Ayodhya that was slated to pass through the Muslim-majority area of Tatarpur. The district administration, ignoring both the sensitivities involved in such a demand and the directives of the state government, acquiesced and granted the procession's organizers permission to follow the proposed route.

Violence started on October 24 when the Ram Shila procession, shouting anti-Muslim slogans, was refused entry by the residents of Tatarpur. Bombs were allegedly thrown from a Muslim school and the police opened fire on the crowd, killing two persons. Around twenty Muslim students from Tatarpur-area colleges were killed in mob violence, which subsequently spread to the city. Muslim houses, shops, and religious places were looted and burned by goondas. Weavers' mohallas (neighborhoods) were razed to the ground. On October 26, eighteen persons were brutally murdered by a mob in the area of Jamuna Kothi. Trains were also attacked: passengers, whose names were identified as Muslim on the reservation charts, were killed. The police and their superintendent, K. S. Dvivedi, participated actively in the killing of Muslims. Their involvement was so extensive, that Bihar's Director General of Police had to call for Dvivedi's

immediate replacement. But during a visit for his electoral campaign, on October 26, Prime Minister [Rajiv Gandhi](#), after having listened to complaints from local policemen, declared that Superintendent Dvivedi would not be transferred, thereby legitimizing a continuation of violence. The Ramanandan Prasad Commission condemned, in the most severe terms, the partiality and active participation of the police forces-particularly that of the Bihar Military Police (BMP).

Tragic events also occurred in nearby villages. On October 26, the village of Timoni (125 households) was entirely destroyed. An evacuation of the villagers, which had been carried out earlier, on October 25, limited the casualties to eleven deaths. In Chanderi, a hundred Muslims were killed on 27-28 October by a Hindu mob. The Ramanandan Prasad Commission also reported that on October 27 a four-thousand-strong mob streaming in from adjacent villages attacked the village of Lugain for nine hours, with the active complicity of the assistant sub-inspector of the Jagdishpur police station. Two hundred persons were killed.

In all, according to official records, 396 people died in the violence. But it is likely that more than one thousand people lost their lives during these events; the police were reluctant to register all deaths. Engineer reported that 896 Muslims and 50 Hindus died, and that 106 persons were missing, bringing a plausible total death toll to 1,052. Fifty- to sixty thousand persons were also made refugees.

The conspicuous partiality of the district and police administrations; and the state government's delay in reacting were stressed by several commentators. Five days before the riots, the Congress-led state administration had received a letter from a local officer, requesting the removal of the superintendent of police, Dvivedi, and the district magistrate, Arun Jha, who had previously acted irresponsibly in their handling of communal tensions. The state government simply ignored the proposal. That proved to be a terrible mistake.

A belated trial took place in 2007: of the considerable number of persons originally charged, only twenty-four were eventually judged. Fourteen of them, including two police officers, were found guilty.

([India Today](#) 15/10/1989); **([The Statesman](#) 25/11/1989); *([Bharti](#) 1989); ***([Saksena](#) 1990: 170-172); ***([Engineer](#) 1990b); ***([A. K. Jha](#) 1991); ***([Engineer](#) 1995b), ***([Rizvi](#) 1997)

CHAPTER 2

From [V. P. Singh](#) to P. V. Narasimha Rao. Mandal versus Mandir. *Demolition of the Babri Masjid. Rage, riots, and pogroms.* (1989-1993)

In November 1989, the long-awaited general elections were held, together with a series of assembly elections, some of them in sensitive constituencies. At the Centre, the Congress Party had to pay dearly for its past errors. It had to make room for a triumphant coalition of sorts, around a «messiah», V.P. Singh, whose recently born National Front included a number of lobbies and regional parties, and had even the support of the BJP and of the Communist parties. However, tensions soon developed within the Front and externally: over the policy concerning peasants; over Kashmir; and over the «Babri Masjid issue.» To counter these developments, the prime minister held a trick up his sleeve. On August 7, he announced that he was to implement the pending and controversial recommendations of a conveniently forgotten commission, the Mandal report, advocating «affirmative action» and quotas in favor of the OBCs (Other Backward Classes). For the BJP, it was unacceptable, as it would ruin the «Hindu Nation», dividing it into thousands of warring sub-castes. A strong counter-fire was urgent. The only way for the BJP was to revive the Mandir (temple) issue as forcefully as possible ([Jaffrelet](#) 1996: 449-481).

One year earlier, the shilanyas (sacred brick processions) had made a deep impression and brought together crores of people (1 crore = ten million). Now it would be a giant Ram Rath Yatra (God's chariot procession), with the strong man of the BJP, [L. K. Advani](#), leading on a colorful truck with the Ram idol on its front, and again crores of devotees, from all shades and castes, offering flowers, and even, at times, their own blood.

The yatra left Somnath (Gujarat) and its famous temple on September 25, 1990. The procession was scheduled to reach Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) after some 10,000 kilometers of ecstatic crowds but, also, predictably, leaving a bloody trail in its wake (Engineer 1991c).

Obviously, this flamboyant procession was not sufficient for the Sangh Parivar: at the same time, another yatra marched, carrying torches and lights in various UP cities (the Ram Jyoti Yatra). It was met with the same enthusiasm and the same violence. As was the case in 1989-but this time more systematically-one city after another fell prey to rioters. Each of these riots, of course, had its own story, starting with rumors and being fed by various agents, Hindu networks, local rivalries, communal irritants, and political ambitions. Ultimately, it underlined the major role that is devolved in India to the administration, to the police (largely pro-Hindu), and to local DMs (district magistrate), whether they know their districts well or not (in the case of a recent transfer, for example). Each one displays either courage or passivity (Saksena 1990).

It should be noted that several CMs (chief ministers) had taken strong measures, with preventive arrests, as was the case in West Bengal, where the Left Front, with its CPM (Communist Party of India [Marxist]) chief minister, [Jyoti Basu](#), had a good opportunity to demonstrate its secular commitments (Zins 2001). In Bihar, the recently elected Janata leader, Laloo Prasad Yadav, showed his determination by putting an end to [L. K. Advani](#)'s yatra at the border between Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. In November 1990, in Uttar Pradesh (UP) itself, the CM Mulayam Singh Yadav (later called «Maulana Mulayam» by grateful Muslims-[maulana means Islamic scholar]) managed to save the Babri Masjid, at least temporarily, from two successive kar sevaks (Hindu volunteers) assaults. There were however a number of casualties (around twenty), and a fresh opportunity for the VHP to organize a new yatra, the Asthi Kalash Yatra-a procession carrying the ashes of «martyrs.» Passions were dramatically revived and, in spite of V.P. Singh's conciliatory efforts, the BJP withdrew its support from the Central government.

The Mandal Mandir affair had got the best of «messiah» [V. P. Singh](#) (P. S. Jha 1990). He had to make room for a Janata dissident, Chandra Shekar, who became the new prime minister, and whose government depended entirely upon the support of the Congress Party. It did not last.

To add to the uneasiness felt in Muslim circles who had lost the support of [V. P. Singh](#), the First Gulf War was clouding their sympathies: Saddam Hussein was extremely popular among them, but they hardly dared express their support for him (Wright 1982). At home, the sinister list of riots was becoming longer and longer, especially after the bloody Ram Navami (festival celebrating the birth of Ram) in March 1991. In April, with an incredible display of strength at the Boat Club in Delhi, the VHP launched a new «battle for Ram» and, with mid-term general elections in view, every leader, every group, every action committee ensured that its voice was heard. Just before the first round of elections could be held, violence swept Uttar Pradesh.

Then came [Rajiv Gandhi](#)'s tragic assassination on May 1991, at the hands of the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, activists from Sri Lanka). The nation was deeply shocked, and this helped the Congress party to win a thin majority at the polls in the tenth Lok Sabha elections.

The new Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, was a Brahmin from South India. Together with a first-rate economist, Dr. Manmohan Singh, he managed to completely change India's economic landscape.

Unfortunately, he would not demonstrate the same clear views and determination on the communal front, and this, at a time when the UP political scene was entirely new (Graff 1997): the BJP had won the Assembly elections; the secular Mulayam Singh Yadav had to leave the gaddi (throne) in Lucknow, and the new CM was a Hindutva man, [Kalyan Singh](#), who, it should be noted, did not belong to the upper castes but to the OBC (Other Backward Classes). It was an additional challenge.

The BJP had won in UP but also in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Himachal Pradesh. Violence diminished, then resumed in various places (Saharanpur, Varanasi, Meerut in UP, and even Badhrak in Orissa and Trivandrum in Kerala, among others). In UP itself, [Kalyan Singh](#) appeared cautious and obviously willing to negotiate. In September 1992, his government acquired 2.77 acres of land adjoining the Babri Masjid, supposedly for tourism activities, although the VHP held part of the ownership. Obviously, a new stage had been reached.

The land acquisition was challenged by the Supreme Court, and feverish talks followed (between various Action Committees, the National Integration Council, lawyers, and other concerned actors). However, the VHP-RSS were determined to proceed. A symbolic Kar Seva (religious gathering) was to be held on December 6. A confrontation was in the offing, as, in the last weeks of November, a massive mobilization of Hindu activists, police, and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) had taken place around Ayodhya. Tragedy struck the very same day. Within a few hours, the mosque was demolished right under the eyes of the Sangh Parivar leadership, razed to the ground, and Hindu idols were «returned to their due place» in a makeshift temple.

It is impossible here to give more details about these fateful days. The shock and rage of Muslims were amplified by «live» images shown repeatedly on the BBC channel. They shouted their anger when, at the same time, triumphant Hindus were chanting victory slogans. Violence erupted, even in Calcutta, and took a tragic turn in many places. Bhopal was bad, Surat awful, Bombay tragic, with horrifying murders, followed by systematic massacres. Events there unfolded in two sequences, a «classical» eruption in December 1992 and, afterwards, in January 1993, a real pogrom, with the well-organized perpetration of atrocities on the part of Hindu activists (Heuzé 1993). It could have lasted whatever the forms. It stopped suddenly, due in large degree to a signal being sent on March 12, 1993 by the Gulf Muslim mafias, in the form of several bomb blasts that were set off in major public places in Bombay. The message seemed clear enough to most, although it was never acknowledged as such.

In any case, the general madness was decreasing. The communal frenzy had reached such paroxysmal levels that it could not reasonably carry on. The violence diminished. President's rule had been imposed on the four BJP states. Opinion surveys showed that few people still supported the Ramjanmabhoomi movement. As for the Central Government, no matter what was said about its responsibilities, it was not that passive (Jaffrelot 1996: 464-478). Still, it would pay dearly for the whole drama in the 1996 general elections. Muslims would never forgive Narasimha Rao. He was dubbed a «traitor», as formulated in the Urdu press.

1990; April-October: Gujarat

89% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: Chimanbhai Patel, Congress Party, March 1990 February 1994

Violence took place in the communally-sensitive state of Gujarat. In Ahmedabad, several persons lost their lives in April and in October (between 30 and 40 victims). The spark for these riots was provided by the [L. K. Advani](#)-led Ram Rath Yatra, which started in the town of Somnath on September 25 and ignited

violence in several towns in Gujarat along the way.

In September, violence also engulfed the towns of Baroda, Anand, and Surat on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Ganapati (or Ganesh Chaturthi). In Baroda, riots erupted when the Ganapati procession, led by the BJP Health Minister of Gujarat, crossed a Muslim locality. The crowd went on the rampage looting Muslim shops. The BJP minister prevented any police intervention. Eight persons were killed. In Anand, on September 4, the same scenario was repeated and three lives were lost when a Ganesh procession shouted anti-Muslim slogans while passing through a Muslim area. On the same day, in Surat, one person was stabbed to death during the Ganapati festivities.

***([Engineer 1990a](#)); **([Varshney and Wilkinson 2004](#); [database](#)); *([Rajeshwari 2004](#))

1990, September 30: Colonelganj (Uttar Pradesh)

81% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

Serious riots broke out in the tehsil (sub-district) of Colonelganj (Uttar Pradesh) and in nearby villages in the Gonda district. The atmosphere had been tense in Colonelganj since the first week of September when a BJP leader, [Kalyan Singh](#), addressed a meeting about the Ram temple in Ayodhya attended by five thousand people.

A riot took place on September 30 after Muslims threw stones and petrol bombs at a Durga Puja procession that was shouting slogans in support of the Ram temple. After the stoning occurred, Hindu mobs attacked Muslim houses. Violence also spread to rural areas of the district. The official death toll amounted to 42, but unofficial sources reported around 100 deaths and other sources more than 300. The villages of Pandey Chaura (with 12 dead officially counted) and Kanje Mau (with six dead) were also particularly affected.

([Frontline 27/10 09/11/1990b](#)); **([Sunday 14 20/10/1990b](#)); **([India Today 31/10/1990](#)); *([Engineer, 1990a](#)); ***([Jaffrelot 1996: 419](#))

1990; October: Karnataka

84% Hindus, 12% Muslims

Chief Minister of Karnataka: Veerendra Patil, Congress Party, November 1989 10 October 1990, S. Bangarappa, Congress Party, 17 October 1990 November 1992

Riots took place in several parts of the state of Karnataka, inaugurating a cycle of communal violence in the south of India. The towns of Ramnagaram, Channapatna, Kolar, Davengere, and Tumkur witnessed communal violence that left 46 people dead according to the official count. Religious sensitivities had been exacerbated by the coincidence of the Hindu week of Dussehra with the birthday of Prophet Mohammed on October 3. Ram Jyoti processions (processions bearing the light of Ram) inflamed communal passions. In Channapatna, the «eve-teasing» (sexual harassment) of a Muslim girl by a Hindu boy triggered riots in which 17 people died (13 Muslims and 4 Hindus). In Kolar, the Ram Jyoti procession was held on October 2, followed by a Muslim procession for the Prophet's anniversary on October 3 during which decorative illuminations were destroyed. Muslim mobs burned several vehicles, leading to retaliations from Hindus, in which two persons were stabbed to death. In Davengere, communal violence occurred during the Ram Jyoti procession leading to one person dead-shot by the police and eight deaths in stabbing incidents.

**(Sunday 14 20/10/1990); **(Frontline 27/10 09/11/1990); **(India Today 31/10/1990)

1990; October: Rajasthan

89% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Rajasthan: B. S. Shekhawat, BJP, March 1990 December 1992

Troubles erupted in the state of Rajasthan. On October 3, in Udaipur, riots occurred when a Hindu Ram Jyoti procession (bearing the light of Ram) was stoned. A Hindu mob subsequently gathered to protest and demanded a ban on the Muslim Miladun Nabi (Prophet's birthday) procession. A local rivalry between Hindu Sindhis (who came after Partition) and economically well-off Bohra Muslims was the underlying cause of the violence. One person was killed. In Jaipur (Rajasthan), violence took place after the Ram Rath Yatra of [L. K. Advani](#) was halted in the town of Samastipur (Bihar) on October 23. [Advani](#) was arrested and subsequently imprisoned in Masanjore. This event ignited several towns in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Rajasthan. In Jaipur, the BJP called for a bandh (general strike) and large numbers of people started gathering in the streets. The (false) rumor that Hindu children were held captive in a mosque in the Muslim-dominated Ramganj area sparked off riots. Houses were burned. Audio cassettes inciting people to violence could be heard in different parts of the city. Well-armed Hindu and Muslim groups fought with each other. The violence claimed around fifty lives. The Justice M. L. Tibrewal Commission of Inquiry denounced the unpreparedness of the police in these riots.

***([Engineer 1990a](#)); ***([Mayaram 1993](#)); ***([National Integration Council 2007](#): 60)

1990; October 30 November 2: Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh)

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

On October 30, kar sevaks (Hindu religious volunteers) tried to assault the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh). The chief minister of the state, Mulayam Singh Yadav, gave firm orders that they should be prevented from doing so. The police opened fire. Twenty-six kar sevaks were killed. Immediately after, on October 30, to take revenge for the new «Hindu martyrs», outbreaks of anti-Muslim violence occurred in several places (Baroda, Ahmedabad, and Indore, Uttar Pradesh, and in Bihar on November 1 and 2), claiming dozens of lives. The Uttar Pradesh state government had to impose a curfew on more than thirty towns. The VHP then managed to capitalize on the event by organizing Asthi Kalash Yatras (processions carrying the ashes and bones of the «martyrs») throughout the country. These processions left another bloody trail of communal riots behind them.

***([Jaffrelot 1996](#): 422); **(India Today 15/12/1990)

1990; October 30 November 2: Bijnor (Uttar Pradesh)

56% Hindus, 42% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

A very serious riot broke out in Bijnor (Uttar Pradesh) due to the «Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi issue.» Curfew had to be imposed for ten days. Tensions had been rising since Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav's speech on October 9, in which he promised to protect Muslims, the Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes (SCs) from attacks by Hindu communal organizations. Shops were looted and set on fire

after his visit. The arrests, in Ayodhya, of kar sevaks-who were subsequently imprisoned in Bijnor-further communalized the atmosphere. On October 28, demonstrations were organized to protest against their imprisonment conditions. On October 30, when the BBC announced that the VHP had hoisted its flag on the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Hindu victory processions marched in Bijnor. They were apparently stoned by Muslims, leading to widespread rioting. Mosques were damaged. Armed gangs launched attacks on villages. The arrival of the PAC led to an increase in anti-Muslim violence. Forty persons died in the town of Bijnor itself and eight in the district according to official reports. Unofficial sources put the death toll at 200.

[\(Sunday 11 17/11/1990\)](#); *[\(Engineer 1991c\)](#); ***[\(R. Jeffery and P. Jeffery 1994\)](#)

1990; November 14: Delhi

81% Hindus, 12% Muslims

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

Delhi, which had remained relatively unaffected by communal troubles till then, witnessed riots on November 14, in the Sadar Bazar area (Old City). Violence started after a silent march was conducted by several unknown minority organizations, such as the All Indian Minority Front, the All India Muslim Unity Front, and the Sikh Muslim Dalit Panth-among others. In the seemingly peaceful procession, youths were armed with lathis and daggers. In the Sadar Bazar area, provocative speeches triggered clashes between the marchers and members of the majority community. The violence claimed around ten lives. The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, [Syed Abdullah Bukhari](#) condemned the attitude of the procession's participants and blamed the local administration for its inefficiency.

**[\(Sunday 1/12/1990\)](#); **[\(Frontline 21/12/1990\)](#)

1990; December 7 17: Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh)

54% Hindus, 43% Muslims

Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh: [Marry Chenna Reddy](#), Congress Party, December 1989 17 December 1990

A new bout of gruesome violence occurred in Hyderabad (Andhra Pradesh). The atmosphere in the city had been tense since October 1990. On October 9, the killing of a notorious criminal by the police led to clashes in different parts of the town, according to the Justice Heeraman Singh Commission of Inquiry. After [L. K. Advani](#)'s arrest in Bihar on October 23, the BJP and Muslim organizations distributed provocative pamphlets. Eleven people were killed in communal violence between October 29 and November 1 in Hyderabad and in the neighboring Ranga Reddy district. Reciprocal killings between Hindu and Muslim mafia gangs also occurred in the city.

Two versions of the December events exist. One purports that on December 7, the stabbing of a poor Hindu hawker triggered a riot in the area of Karwar. A mob of 150 people subsequently gathered in this area-50 persons were stabbed. Twenty of them died; the majority, Muslim. The second version says that communal violence erupted after the discovery of the bodies of a woman and her child in the Sabzimandi area. On December 8, the violence propagated to various parts of the city. Goondas (criminals) from the MIM (Majlis-e-Ittihadul Muslimeen, a Muslim political party) attacked Hindu seasonal migrant workers with swords and spears, killing around 40 people. In retaliation, many Muslims were killed by Hindus on

December 9. Women and children were particularly targeted in these riots. Many were burned alive or stoned to death. Official reports established that 134 people had been killed and another 300 injured in these riots. But the actual toll possibly amounts to 200 or 300 deaths.

Various elements indicate that communal violence was encouraged by several Congress dissidents in order to precipitate an overthrow of Chief Minister [Chenna Reddy](#) who, indeed, was forced to step down after the disturbances.

***([Engineer 1991b](#)); ***([Engineer 1991c](#)); ***([Kakar 1996: 47 51](#)); ***([National Integration Council 2007](#))

1990; December 7 10: Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh)

57% Hindus, 41% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

Large riots broke out again in the city of Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh). Communal tensions had been rising in the city since October 30, when kar sevaks were shot dead by the police in the city of Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), some 500 kilometers from Aligarh. Devotees carrying the ashes of the dead travelled throughout the state, including to Aligarh, thereby arousing tensions between the communities.

Riots erupted on December 7. Some versions say that Muslims attacked two Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) jawans (soldiers) after provocative speeches made in a mosque in the area of Upper Kot and that the PAC retaliated by killing Muslims. Other versions claim that a bomb exploded near a mosque in the area of Sarai Sultani. Muslims gathered to protest and stole a rifle from a PAC jawan. The PAC subsequently fired, killing three Muslims.

No matter which version is correct, what is clear is that large-scale rioting took place in the city and continued unabated for several days. On December 8, the Gomti Express train was attacked by a Hindu mob, resulting in the deaths of between 4 and 15 Muslim passengers. On the same day, 17 Muslims were burned to death in the locality of Jogiwara near the Sasni Gate police station. In all, over 50 people died on December 8. Violence intensified on December 10 after a false rumor (that 28 patients had been killed in the Jawaharlal Nehru Medical College Hospital of the Aligarh Muslim University) was printed in the Hindi vernacular press. Attacks on Muslims by Hindu mobs multiplied after this rumor was broadcast. According to the PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties) report, the PAC also killed a large number of Muslims.

The total number of deaths is uncertain. The media reported 75 deaths. Official accounts put the death toll at 92; two-thirds of whom were Muslims. Muslim organizations listed 100 deaths in the Muslim community alone. A report by the PUCL claimed the death toll to be 150 or 200. The Aligarh Muslim University student union claimed 500 dead, but this figure is probably overestimated.

([The Times of India 16/12/1990](#)); *([Engineer 1991c](#)); ***([Brass 2003: 116 125](#))

1990; December 10 15: Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

78% Hindus, 20% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

Communal violence erupted in Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) on December 10 when Muslim hawkers selling clothes were attacked and their merchandise burned. In retaliation, Muslims looted and set fire to Hindu shops. Hindus then destroyed Muslim shops and damaged a mosque. Six persons were killed in the violence. The PAC cut off telephone lines and water in a number of Muslim houses and made arbitrary arrests. On December 12, Muslims fought against the PAC in a confrontation that claimed four lives in shooting by the police and two other lives in stabbing incidents. By December 14, according to official sources, the toll amounted to 20 deaths.

***(Engineer 1991c)

1990; December 16: Agra (Uttar Pradesh)

82% Hindus, 15% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

Violence took place in Agra (Uttar Pradesh), the media reported 11 lives lost, but according to Engineer there had been 22 victims. The large majority of those killed were poor Muslims. At least eight were killed by the PAC who shot the victims dead inside their homes.

***(Engineer 1991c)

1990; December 15 23 and 1991; January 31 February 5: Khurja (Uttar Pradesh)

79% Hindus, 21% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

The city of Khurja (Uttar Pradesh) in the Bulandshahar district witnessed communal violence on two occasions due to the Ramjanmabhoomi campaign. In the first riot, which started on December 15, seventy-four people lost their lives (62 Muslims and 12 Hindus). Violence took place after a Muslim government employee was stabbed: although he was sent to Delhi for treatment, the Hindi newspaper Aaj published a false report that he was dead, leading to widespread rioting in the town. Most of the killings took place in the neighborhood of Sarai Sheikh Alam, where Banias and Brahmins (Hindu upper castes) targeted the few Muslim houses in the area. Further rioting took place on January 31 after a bomb exploded in a Muslim house. This second phase of violence lasted till February 5, claiming 22 lives (18 Muslims and four Hindus). It was characterized by the active involvement of the PAC. Rumors spread by the newspapers and inflammatory VHP-inspired pamphlets are said to have stirred up communal hatreds.

***(Chakravarti et al. 1992)

1991; March 24: Bhadrak (Orissa)

94% Hindus, 6% Muslims

Chief Minister of Orissa: Bijayananda Patnaik, Janata Dal, March 1990 March 1995

Riots occurred in the usually quiet state of Orissa (which had not experienced any communal riots since 1964). The town of Bhadrak witnessed communal violence on March 24, on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Ram Navami. The procession took place in a tense atmosphere due to the «Babri

Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi issue.» Surprisingly, the police allowed it to pass through a Muslim quarter. The usual scenario reoccurred, abusive slogans were shouted, and violence broke out. Muslims retaliated against the economically dominant Hindu Marwari community. The police were late to intervene. The BJP subsequently called for a state-wide bandh (general strike). Violence flared up in the town of Soro after an altercation between Hindus and Muslims. Respectively, 17 and 16 persons died in Bhadrak and Soro.

***(Engineer 1991a)

1991; March 27: Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

52% Hindus, 44% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

The usually peaceful city of Saharanpur (Uttar Pradesh) was the site of serious communal riots. As in Bhadrak, these rather unexpected riots took place during the Hindu festival of Ram Navami-which coincided that year with the Muslim month of Ramzan. On March 24, the Ram Navami procession was prevented from passing near a mosque where evening prayers were being said. Hindu communal organizations (the BJP, RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal the student wing of the VHP) insisted on completing the procession and began promulgating active propaganda. Tensions increased between Hindu and Muslim groups. Both sides were poised for a battle. On March 26, the local administration finally gave permission for the procession to complete its route. It was conducted ostentatiously, stopping near the Jama Masjid. Anti-Muslim slogans were shouted. Some of the marchers started to occupy the steps of the mosque. The police proved ineffectual. This provocative attitude triggered communal riots. The rumor that the mosque had been attacked led to violent retaliation by Muslim youths who targeted Hindu shops in several parts of the town. The violence claimed 12 lives officially and more than 40 according to media reports. Before the riots, the superintendent of police had been transferred, leaving the city without any competent officer in charge.

** (The Times of India 07/04/1991), *** (Engineer 1991a)

1991; May 19: Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

78% Hindus, 20% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

Riots took place in the industrial and violent city of Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh). Tensions had been steadily rising for more than one year with recurring altercations between Muslims and the PAC (police bullets were responsible for 6 deaths in April and another 20 in December 1990). In May, in the midst of the election campaign and in a context of communal polarization due to the «Babri Masjid/Ramjanmabhoomi controversy,» young BJP activists led an electoral procession through a Muslim locality. Muslim youths retaliated and rioting spread through the entire city. Twenty persons were killed.

*** (Engineer 1991a)

1991; May 20: Meerut (Uttar Pradesh)

61% Hindus, 36% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Janata Dal, December 1989 June 1991

On Election Day, riots also took place in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh). About to lose the Meerut city seat, the BJP organized aggressive campaigns to prevent Muslims from voting. Eighteen persons (16 Muslims and two Dalits) were brutally killed in broad daylight near the Nigar Cinema. The police remained impassive. In retaliation, Muslims burned Hindu shops and widespread rioting engulfed the city. Around 30 people died in the violence as per official records (more than 50 according to unofficial sources).

***(Engineer 1991a).

1991; November 8 and 13: Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh)

68% Hindus, 31% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: [Kalyan Singh](#), BJP, June 1991 December 1992

Two days of communal violence in Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) left between 15 and 50 people dead according to the media. On November 8, a Kali Puja procession was headed by one of the numerous Hindu clubs of the city, the Navsang Club. While passing through the Muslim area of Madanpura, the marchers shouted anti-Muslim slogans and set off firecrackers, launching a riot. Muslim members of the audience in the nearby cinema hall were harassed by the rioters. A curfew was imposed but subsequently lifted on November 13, leading to strong retaliation from the Muslims. Passers-by were stabbed in Madanpura. As a consequence, the PAC carried out violent search operations in the area in which one Muslim was killed.

**(Sunday 24/11/1991); *(The Week 01/12/1991)

1992; October 2 9: Sitamarhi (Bihar)

79% Hindus, 21% Muslims

Chief Minister of Bihar: Laloo Prasad Yadav, Janata Dal, March 1990 March 1995

Communal riots broke out in the district of Sitamarhi (Bihar), particularly in the town of Sitamarhi and in the village of Riga. Clashes started on October 2 when a Durga Puja procession shouting slogans such as «Jai Shri Ram» («Long live Ram») near a mosque was stopped by some Muslim youths. Brick-batting took place. On October 4, the Puja Samiti (Prayers' Committee) decided that the Durga idol was to be immersed in a by-pass pool after passing through a Muslim-dominated area. On October 8, the Durga procession commenced. Members from several akharas (traditional physical training centers) present in the procession shouted anti-Muslim slogans. Violence started between armed marchers and Muslim youths. The police fired, killing one Hindu and one Muslim. The media reported 50 deaths. Official sources put the death toll at 48, which included 41 Muslims, three Hindus, and four unidentified persons. But unofficially the actual death figure might amount to 65, of whom 58 were Muslims and seven, Hindus. Riots also took place in the village of Riga after a rumor spread that a ten-year-old Hindu girl had been brutally attacked and killed by Muslims in Sitamarhi.

(Sunday 25 31/10/1992); *(Engineer 1992a)

1992; December 6 12: Surat (Gujarat)

84% Hindus, 12% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: Chimanbhai Patel, Congress Party, March 1990 February 1994

The city of Surat (Gujarat) witnessed horrific communal violence. The riot started following a rally that had been organized by the BJP in support of the kar sevaks who were responsible for the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. One thousand persons participated in the procession, including VHP and RSS members. In retaliation, Muslim youths damaged shops in the old city. A small and marginal organization, the BMSS (Bharatiya Minority Suraksha Sangh) subsequently called for a Surat bandh on December 7. By December 8, riots had spread to the whole city. Fifty-seven persons were burned alive and entire slums were razed to the ground. In the area of Varachha Road, a four-thousand-strong armed mob attacked Muslim houses, leaving in their wake 27 people dead. In Ved Road, Muslim houses were marked by Hindu criminals and subsequently looted, leading to the death of 32 persons. In the suburbs of Surat, train passengers were attacked. Workers from the diamond industry and criminals were among the killers. These riots claimed 180 190 lives according to media reports. But for other sources, even a figure of 200 dead would be an underestimation. The majority of those killed were Muslims. The violence produced nineteen thousand new refugees. The usually peaceful city of Surat accounted for nearly two-thirds of the death toll in Gujarat, (Fifty-eight persons also died in Ahmedabad).

** (Sunday 20 26/12/1992); *** (Chandra 1993); * (K. Shah, S. Shah, and N. Shah 1993); *** (Sheth 1993); ** (Varshney and Wilkinson 2004, database)

1992; December 6 12: Bombay (Maharashtra)

Religious composition of the population (as per the 2001 census): 67% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Sudhakar Rao Naik, Congress Party, June 1991 March 1993

Following the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Bombay (Maharashtra) was the scene of serious Hindu Muslim violence. The December 1992 events constituted the first phase of a communal riot that was to be repeated on a larger scale in January 1993. The Justice B. N. Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry stated that there had been a build-up of communal fervor among Hindus and Muslims in the weeks preceding the demolition of the Babri Masjid. As the news of the demolition spread in the city on December 6, Muslims flowed out into the streets. Spontaneous communal incidents erupted in various parts of the city. Communal Hindu victory processions, such as the celebration rally held by the Shiv Sena in the slum of Dharavi, provoked the rage of Muslims. Transport buses and Hindu temples were damaged. Muslim criminals looted Hindu shops. Policemen were targeted by Muslim mobs: two constables were killed on December 7. The situation further degraded on December 7 and 8. In some places, the violence took the form of a police-versus-Muslim confrontation. According to media sources, ninety percent of the dead were killed by police firing. It is asserted that the police, incontestably, engaged in anti-Muslim behavior during these riots. In the area of Bainganwadi, near the mosque Nur-e-Ilahi, Shiv Sainiks (activists of the Shiv Sena) had come along with the police who subsequently shot many Muslims to death and set fire to the mosque. In the Dharavi slum, stoning between the two communities began on December 7. The police arrived on December 8, arrested many Muslims and opened fire in many areas of Dharavi: forty-two persons were killed in this slum, among them 40 who were victims of police shooting.

In all, the media reported 210 deaths in Bombay and 57 in other parts of Maharashtra. Engineer stated that according to police sources, 202 people died, among whom 137 were victims of shooting by police and the others of mob violence. The actual death toll, however, probably amounted to more than 400. The situation was brought under control on December 12, but according to the Justice Srikrishna Commission, stray incidents of violence continued to occur till January 5, when the second phase of the riot started.

(*The Pioneer* 18/12/1992); **(*Sunday* 20 26/12/1992); **(*Sunday* 24 30/01/1993); *(*Engineer* 1993b); ***(*Srikrishna* 1998); ***(*National Integration Council* 2007)

1992; December 6 13: Karnataka

84% Hindus, 12% Muslims

Chief Minister of Karnataka: M. Veerappa Moily, Congress Party, November 1992 December 1994

The state of Karnataka was the worst hit of the four southern states by the post-demolition (Babri Masjid) violence. Violence flared up in the districts and towns that had already experienced communal troubles in 1990 during the Ram Rath Yatra of [L. K. Advani](#). The media reported 73 deaths in the state. Muslim anger, in the days following the destruction of the Babri Masjid, led to a strong Hindu backlash. There were 19 deaths in Bangalore, most of them in police firing, after Muslim demonstrations incited the BJP to call for a bandh (strike). Nine deaths were reported in Gulbarga following the attack on a police station in a Muslim majority area. In Bidar, Hindu Muslim troubles claimed ten lives, half of them in police firing. In the twin cities of Hubli and Dharwad, stray stabbing incidents and attacks on individual houses claimed an additional seven lives.

**(*Sunday* 20 26/12/1992); **(*Frontline* 01/01/1993)

1992; December 6 11: Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh)

78% Hindus, 20% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: none, President's Rule from 6 December 1992 to 4 December 1993

The industrial and communally-sensitive city of Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) was also badly affected by the post-Babri Masjid violence. Muslim mobs upset by certain BBC broadcasts started looting Hindu shops and administrative offices on December 6. Four or five people were killed. Rioting spread to the city in subsequent days, with a peak of massive killings on December 9 and 10. Hindu mobs attacked Muslims with little interference from the police. Particularly notorious incidents occurred in the southern periphery of the city, where the riot spun out of control. According to official sources, 11 people died during four days of rioting in the town. Unofficial reports put the death toll much higher. According to Brass, «the destruction and killings in Kanpur were second only to that which occurred in Bombay,» although he provides no figures. Industrial units and shops were looted and set afire. Muslim houses, properties, and mosques were specifically and heavily targeted. A rapid deployment of troops helped curb the violence.

***(*Brass* 1997: 214 259); **(*Sunday* 20 26/12/1992)

1992; December 7 8: Assam

65% Hindus, 31% Muslims

Chief Minister of Assam: Hiteshwar Saikia, Congress Party, June 1991 April 1996

The state of Assam, already tense due to the Bengali-Assamese language issue and to agitation by the AAMSU (All Assam Minority Students Union), experienced communal violence in the wake of the Babri Masjid destruction. The districts of Nagaon (75 deaths by official counts) and Dhubri (12 deaths) were particularly affected. While official estimates put the death toll for the entire state at 87, the media

estimated that 100 to 300 people perished in the violence. Bengalis (Hindus and Muslims) comprised the largest group among the victims. Assamese (Hindus and Muslims) were generally spared. Troubles started on December 7 when Muslim households symbolically turned on their lights to protest against the demolition of the mosque. In the Nagaon district, posters demanding the reconstruction of the Babri Masjid were hung up. The town of Doboka (18 deaths on December 8) was particularly rocked by the violence after a provocative speech by a local Congress leader. Retaliation took place on December 9 in the town of Jamunamukh, claiming around 20 lives.

***(Sunday 27/12/1992 02/01/1993)*; ***(Frontline 01/01/1993)*; ***(Frontline 15/01/1993)*

1992; December 7 9: Rajasthan

89% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Rajasthan: B. S. Shekhawat, BJP, March 1990 15 December 1992

The state of Rajasthan also experienced communal violence in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition. The riots claimed 60 lives throughout the state with the capital, Jaipur, being particularly affected (28 dead). Most of the deaths were attributed to shooting by police.

***(Sunday 27/12/1992 02/01/1993)*; ***(Frontline 01/01/1993)*

1992; December 7 12: Calcutta (West Bengal)

78% Hindus, 20% Muslims

Chief Minister of West Bengal: [Jyoti Basu](#), CPI(M), June 1977 November 2000

Contrary to what had occurred in 1990, Calcutta (West Bengal) was seriously affected by the Ayodhya demolition, but the troubles there could not really be qualified as communal in nature. Deep emotions did exist, but the violence which developed was caused by the over-confidence of the Left-led government: the lifting of a curfew was carried out with precipitation (on December 9), and the criminals took over in an attempt to clear a site for their own building plans. The poor Muslim slum of Metiabruz was set afire. In the end, there were a number of casualties (35 deaths) amid a total failure on the part of the administration and political leaders who were completely absent during the events.

***(The Pioneer 17/12/1992)*; ***(Sunday 20 26/12/1992)*, ***(Frontline 01/01/1993)*

1992; December 7 15: Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh)

68% Hindus, 27% Muslims

Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh: Sunderlal Patwa, BJP, March 1990 15 December 1992

The demolition of the Babri Masjid also triggered large-scale riots in Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh), a city which had generally been spared by communal violence. The atmosphere had been increasingly tense for quite some time because of the influence of Hindu communal activists. On December 6, a victory procession led by the Bajrang Dal through the old city (Muslim populated) and BBC reports about the demolition further inflamed communal passions. Bands of angered Muslim youths targeted government buildings and Hindu residents in the old town. The spread of sensational rumors by the Hindi press and

agitation by Hindu nationalist activists led to widespread communal rioting. The main victims were poor Muslims who had already suffered during the 1984 gas catastrophe and middle-class Muslims from the BHEL industry (Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited). Four thousand families were rendered homeless by the violence. The police were accused of connivance with Hindu communal groups. The BJP state government demonstrated little effort in attempting to control the violence. The media reported more than 175 deaths. The Justice K. K. Dubey Commission of Inquiry established that 142 people died in these riots-thirty-four shot dead by the police.

(Frontline 15/01/1993)*; *(Jaffrelot 1996: 460 463)*; **(Rajeshwari 2004)*

1992; December 10: Delhi

81% Hindus, 12% Muslims

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

Violence also took place in Delhi, in the poor neighborhood of Seelampur, on the night of December 10. The immediate cause of the violence remains unknown. Muslims alleged that a rumor declaring that the Mustafa mosque had been razed to the ground triggered the violence, while Hindus claim that riots started after Muslims raped and killed an under-aged Hindu girl. Mobs started demonstrating. Large-scale arson took place. The police intervened. Between sixteen and twenty people died, most of them burned to death or hit by police bullets. A report by the PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties) held the police responsible for instigating violence, spreading rumors, and indiscriminant firing at the minority community. Muslims remained permanently terrified of the police forces after this incident.

***(The Times of India 13/12/1992)*; ***(Sunday 20 26/12/1992)*

1993; January 6 20: Bombay (Maharashtra)

67% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Sudhakar Rao Naik, Congress Party, June 1991 6 March 1993

The second phase of the Bombay riots commenced on January 6. While the first phase of rioting in December 1992 was the result of a spontaneous reaction by Muslim mobs who had been angered by the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Justice Srikrishna Commission of Inquiry established that the second phase of the riots resulted from the communal propaganda disseminated by Hindu nationalist organizations. Inflammatory articles, notably provocative editorials written by Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray in the newspapers Samna and Navaakal, inflamed communal passions. The Srikrishna Commission pointed out that preparations had been made after the December 1992 riots: surveys had been conducted by Shiv Sainiks to identify Muslim houses, shops, rickshaws, and taxis. Voters' lists with Muslim names had also been made available to the chiefs of Shiv Sena shakhas (branches).

Since the riots of December 1992, the atmosphere had remained tense in the city. As remarked in the Srikrishna Commission Report, attendance at Friday prayers in the mosques had increased. The Hindus were responding to this trend by organizing Maha Aartis (public displays of aggressive faith) which continued unabated from 26 December 1992 until February 1993.

The immediate cause for the riots has not been clearly established. Some versions say that four Hindu Mathadi workers were killed by Muslims in the area of Dongri on January 5, while other accounts state that

the violence started in the Bhendi Bazar, Null Bazar, and the Mohammad Ali Road area following the spreading of a rumor that a Muslim dargah (grave of a Muslim saint) had been desecrated by Hindus. Later, an entire Hindu family (including a handicapped girl) was burned to death in the Jogeshwari area on January 8; the event received considerable publicity from newspapers and was used by Hindu organizations to justify attacks on Muslims. Revenge incidents were instigated by Shiv Sena activists: arson, looting, killing, stabbings, rape, the destruction of religious places, and police firing occurred till January 20. The chief minister of Maharashtra, Sudhakarrao Nain, lost the control of the situation.

The gruesome and planned violence of this second phase cost 557 lives and left one thousand people injured. Police sources stated that 458 persons had been killed, among them 288 Muslims and 170 Hindus. One hundred and thirty-three deaths were caused by police firing (75 Muslims, 50 Hindus, and eight victims of unknown religious affiliation), 259 through mob violence (186 Muslims, 73 Hindus), and 66 in arson attacks (27 Muslims, 39 Hindus). But the actual death toll probably exceeded 600. In these riots, even the richest Muslims (usually spared) were targeted: they were killed or were forced to pay protection money.

In all, the two phases of rioting in Bombay-in December 1992 and January 1993-claimed 900 lives (575 Muslims, 275 Hindus, 45 unknown and 5 others): according to the Srikrishna Commission report. 356 died in police firing, 347 in stabbing incidents, 91 died in arson attacks, 80 through mob violence, and 22 in private shooting incidents. In other estimates, the violence was claimed to have taken more than 1,500 lives.

(Sunday 24 30/01/1993)*; *(Engineer 1993a)*; ****(Padgaonkar 1993)*; ****(Masselos 1994)*; ****(Engineer 1998b)*; ****(Srikrishna 1998)*

1993; March 12: Bombay (Maharashtra)

67% Hindus, 19% Muslims

Chief Minister of Maharashtra: Sharad Pawar, Congress Party, 6 March 1993 March 1995

In retaliation for the Bombay riots of December 1992 and January 1993, a series of bomb blasts occurred in different areas of Bombay: at the Stock Exchange Building in the Fort area; the Air India Building at Nariman Point; the Zaveri-, Katha-, and Century Bazars (the latter at Worli); the Sena Bhavan at Dadar; the Hotel Sea Rock at Bandra; the Hotel Centaur at Juhu; and the Hotel Centaur at Santacruz Airport; killing 257 persons and injuring 713 others according to the Srikrishna Commission. The authors of the blast were Muslims recruited by the Muslim mafia leader [Dawood Ibrahim](#), operating from Dubai.

****(Srikrishna 1998)*

CHAPTER 3

1994 2004: Congress is forced to bow to composite Fronts until a BJP-led coalition, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), gains undisputed power.

As we have seen earlier, people, in Northern India, were saturated with the violence they had experienced. The BJP itself was uncertain about its next steps. The demolished Babri Masjid was no longer a rallying point. Muslims themselves were in a state of shock and deep anger, but they remained realistic enough to understand that confrontation did not pay. Their leaders were now reduced to silence and introspection.

The following years were rather quiet. Sporadic incidents occurred, of course, but, except in Kanpur where the army had to be called in, these events were more or less trivial, or stopped in time by the police (Engineer 1994). Regional governments carried on. In UP, there was a kind of political «musical-chairs» game: «Maulana Mulayam» and his Samajwadi Party were back; after him a charismatic lady, Mayawati, an «untouchable» who was bringing her Dalit organization, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), to power for the first time ever (Jaffrelot 2003b: 387 42; A. Bose 2009); then followed the inescapable BJP which was still a force to reckon with in the region. In Western India, the same BJP was progressing rapidly: it enjoyed an undisputed victory in the Gujarat assembly elections (1995), and engaged in power-sharing with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra (1995), while, in the South, on carefully prepared ground (serious incidents in 1994 in Hubli and Bangalore), it became obvious that the state of Karnataka was the Sangh Parivar's next step (see Chapter 4 below).

As far as the Congress was concerned, it was definitely in trouble. At the Centre, the party's poor performance during the 1996 Lok Sabha ballot (earning 141 seats) was to compel it to bow to a composite Third Front where Left forces could have run the show, had the CPI(M) politburo allowed [Jyoti Basu](#) to become prime minister. It was Deve Gowda instead, a Janata Dal leader from Karnataka, to be followed one year later by his brilliant Foreign Minister, I. K. Gujral. It lasted only a few months. The Congress Party was playing a dangerous game of lending and withdrawing its support, while the BJP was waiting in the wings. In 1999, the electorate granted the Hindu party the support it needed to form a well-balanced government. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was a rather prestigious personality and the soft face of the Sangh Parivar. He was relatively popular with Muslims: as Foreign Minister in 1977, after the Emergency, he had facilitated relationships and family travels with Pakistan. In 1999, he had carefully organized his new venue to the gaddi [throne] (after two earlier attempts-one in 1996 and a more successful one in 1998 with the victory of Kargil over Pakistan in the Himalayas) and he had managed to set up a strong coalition of 15 different parties with a serious common program. In fact, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) would have left a «shining» image of itself and of the country (almost no serious rioting occurred during those years), if it had not remained a somewhat silent spectator to certain dramatic episodes which profoundly shook the entire country.

The first episode had to do with Christians. We cannot but mention this because Muslims, who were relieved by a kind of relaxed atmosphere, realized that the VHP had not changed its program, and that, in attacking Christian tribals and missionaries (in Orissa and in the Dangs Gujarat), Hindu activists were simply diversifying their targets.

The second shock was linked to the massacres which took place in Ahmedabad, in Godhra, and in their neighborhood (Gujarat) in February 2002. This was mass violence at its worst-a merciless anti-Muslim pogrom lasting several weeks. In spite of the information that came to light through various high-court and Supreme-Court judgments, the facts remain unclear regarding a train of Hindu pilgrims which had been set afire in the Godhra railway station (Jaffrelot 2003a, 2011). Who started what? It was said to have been a Muslim provocation. It could have just been an accidental unfortunate move. Whatever the truth might be, the answer was atrocious, and the responsibility of the BJP chief minister [Narendra Modi](#), and of his administration, has been demonstrated again and again. While it is true that A. B. Vajpayee, the BJP prime minister, did protest, he was not heard. What possible recourse could he have had against a popular leader from his own party who was now so well entrenched in the state? Gujarat is one of the most dynamic places in India. It attracts investments and various types of industry. In 2012, the thrice-elected [Narendra Modi](#) still reigns supreme.

2002; February 28 March 6: Gujarat

89% Hindus, 9% Muslims

Chief Minister of Gujarat: [Narendra Modi](#), BJP, October 2001

The state of Gujarat witnessed one of the worst cases of mass violence in Indian history. While government accounts reported around 850 deaths, it is likely that more than two thousand people, overwhelmingly Muslims, lost their lives in what has been called the «first state-led pogrom» in India. Every report on these events indicated that the riot was well-planned and sponsored by the BJP-led Gujarat administration and its chief minister, [Narendra Modi](#). The violence was preceded by concerted attempts to identify Muslim houses and shops in Ahmedabad and other of the state's cities and villages.

The violence was ignited on February 27 by an attack in Godhra (Gujarat) on a train carrying Hindu pilgrims and kar sevaks who were coming back from Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) where they had offered support for the campaign to construct a Ram temple in place of the destroyed Babri Masjid. It is alleged that they harassed Muslim passengers-forcing them to shout «Jai Shri Ram» («Long live Ram»)-and Muslim station vendors, refusing to pay them for refreshments. When the kar sevaks forced a Muslim woman into the train, a passenger pulled the chain, thereby stopping the train in the sensitive Muslim locality of Godhra. A mob of 500 2,000 people encircled the train and set fire to the wagons, killing 58 Hindus, including 25 women and 14 children. By evening, the corpses had been transported to Ahmedabad for a public ceremony. The VHP, with the support of the BJP administration, subsequently called for a February 28 state-wide bandh (strike) in Gujarat. The violence started on that day. Armed mobs of activists from the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the RSS and the BJP, some wearing uniforms (khaki shorts and saffron scarves), arrived by truck in Muslim areas, targeting Muslim households with militia-like precision. They used voters' lists from the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation to identify Muslim houses. The police refused to intervene, having received orders not to give assistance to the Muslim community. Policemen, in fact, participated in some attacks, actively colluding with Hindu criminals. One hundred and eighty-four people died throughout the state of Gujarat-shot by the police.

In Ahmedabad, 252 people died. The largest number of killings occurred in the Naroda Patia and Gulmarg Society areas. In Naroda Patia, 65 people were burned alive by a 5,000-strong mob after having been hacked and raped. In Gulmarg Society, the 250 persons who had sought refuge in the house of former Muslim MP (Member of Parliament) Ahsan Jafry were targeted by a crowd of 20,000. Seventy people were murdered, including Jafry who, in spite of countless calls to the administration, could not elicit any assistance. He was dismembered and burned alive.

The entire state of Gujarat was rocked by violence. Sixteen of its twenty-four districts were affected. The violence then spread to rural areas where, it is estimated, 1,200 villages were targeted. Adivasis participated in the attacks against Muslims on a scale never witnessed before. In the city of Baroda, on March 1, fourteen persons were burned alive at the Best Bakery, a Muslim establishment. Two hundred and forty-nine people died in Panchmahal district, 54 in Dahod district, 57 more in Mehsana district, 30 in Kheda district, 28 in Sabarkantha district, and many more in other districts.

Five hundred and twenty-seven mosques, madrasas, dargahs (shrines), and graveyards were destroyed. The violence left behind 100,000 refugees, including 10,000 Hindus. Sexual violence was used on an unprecedented scale (for India). Women were gang-raped and pregnant women were disemboweled. Christians were also targeted in the riots. Incidents of violence went on until the end of April 2002.

On September 24, in Gandhinagar (Gujarat), two men armed with AK-56s killed 28 persons in the Hindu temple of Akshardham to avenge the crimes committed against Muslims in the months of February and March.

Almost ten years after these incidents took place many of the instigators of one of India's most dramatic

episodes of mass violence are still not behind the bars. Although the faces of the guilty men are well-known (newspaper evidence is damning), justice has been repeatedly delayed. The grip of Hindutva forces over Gujarat's state machinery is a plausible explanation for the delay. In 2008, the Shah-Nanavati Commission, appointed by the state government of [Narendra Modi](#), submitted its report, which largely exonerated Gujarat's administration. The Commission's methods were challenged, however, by many Indian personalities and NGOs, as having been both partial and complacent. The Indian Supreme Court was therefore forced to set up its Special Investigation Team (SIT) to reinvestigate many of the cases, but its functioning remained heavily dependent on the cooperation of judicial and police officers belonging to Gujarat's state apparatus. A report was submitted in December 2010: the material gathered did not prove sufficient to justify legal action against the Modi administration.

So far, only a few riot cases have been tried by Indian justice, more or less successfully:

The Best Bakery case: In March 2003, a Gujarati court tried the case concerning the burning of the Best Bakery establishment in which 14 persons lost their lives (including 12 Muslims). The trial was cut short however, when one of the main witnesses, whose family members had been killed during the attack, eventually withdrew her testimony (probably under pressure and subject to intimidation). The 21 accused were acquitted. The case came to symbolize the complicity and partiality of the state's justice system. The investigation had indeed been carried out by the very same police force whose passivity during the attack was at issue. The case was eventually re-opened and reinvestigated in 2004. It was re-tried in 2006 by a Mumbai court: nine of the accused were convicted of murder, and were sentenced to life imprisonment.

The Godhra train-burning incident (with Hindus victims): after many controversies (the Shah-Nanavati commission claimed that the arson had been previously-planned by Muslim criminals, while a committee headed by a former Supreme Court judge, U. C. Banerjee, concluded that it was a mere accident) a special court, in February 2011, convicted 31 of the accused (11 death penalties, 20 life imprisonments) and acquitted 63 others (including the main suspects).

The Sardapura massacre: in November 2011, a special court in Gujarat sentenced 31 people to life imprisonment for the killing of 33 people in the village of Sardapura (Mehsana district) on 1 March 2002. The victims had been locked into a room and burned to death by a mob of assailants. Although forty-two of the accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence, this was the first time a trial held in Gujarat successfully convicted people for the 2002 events.

***(*Communalism Combat* 03 04/2002); ***(*Concerned Citizens Tribunal* 2002); ***(*Human Rights Watch* 2002); **(*Outlook* 18/03/2002); ***(*Engineer* 2003b); ***(*Jaffrelot* 2003a); ***(*Mann* 2005: 484); **(*Tehelka* 03/11/2007), ***(*Jaffrelot* 2011), **(*India Today* 10/11/2011)

CHAPTER 4

South India. Old issues. Fresh anxieties (1981 2011)

This chronology has hardly referred to South India. This does not imply that violence does not exist there, but it hardly concerns the relations between Hindus and Muslims. As mentioned earlier, the Muslim population does not suffer in the South from the deadly Middle-Ages images of ferocious horsemen galloping from Central Asia to plunder and raze great Hindu temples and cities. In the South, Islam arrived by way of pacific sailors and merchants, who stayed on inter-marrying, if only temporarily, with local women. They adjusted very well, learned the local languages, remained modest as far as their status was concerned, but also extremely faithful to Islam, strong believers as they were. Then, opportunities came, which helped them to acquire higher statuses and distinguished positions. A number of kingdoms were born

out of a declining Mughal Empire, and also through the rivalries and wars between the French and British East India Companies (Dupuis 1963). Tipu Sultan is still a great name in Mysore.

Came the day when the British Empire fell and another centre of power emerged in Delhi. This was Free India which, in 1947, had just been partitioned. It was of course not possible for the new government to tolerate independent princely states in the very heart of the country. In 1948, the Indian Army, through the «Hyderabad Police Action», removed the Nizam of Hyderabad, who, like the Maharaja of Kashmir, was still hesitant about whether to join India or Pakistan. Hyderabad is thus a very special case in South India. The «heir of the mythical Golconda,» then a wealthy city whose princes had direct links with the British crown, is today, as the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh, one of the most dynamic metropolises in India, but also a sensitive and riot-prone city. Hindus are in a large majority, many among them in the administration having been called along the years by the Nizam himself (as civil servants, they were extremely efficient). We have thus a very interesting and complex population, with several political parties in competition to win their favors at the polls: the Congress Party which has reigned without any serious opposition here for decades; the BJP which has always looked upon Hyderabad as the gateway to South India; various dissidents who are regular troublemakers; and then the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), an active, regional organization built by the film star, Rama Rao, known for his incarnations of various gods on the screen.

As in many places in India, processions are familiar and frequent events. In Hyderabad, the main festival, Ganapati (merging the idols of Lord Ganesh in the local lake) is celebrated with much passion and fanfare. For many years, Ganapati was conducted in a relatively peaceful manner until things began to sour in the Old City, the very place where politicians, at times, would play with fire. Here, in the heart of Hyderabad, is a real ghetto, where low-status Muslims lead miserable lives; they are either migrants from rural areas or Muslims «from the past», whose patrons left for Pakistan. In order to survive, they would accept any job, any transaction with their old connections of the Gulf and its new opportunities—they are even at times compelled to sell their daughters for short marriages with wealthy Arab businessmen. Land grabbing quarrels are frequent, and susceptibilities are running high. The local organization which is fighting to protect their interests is not the last one to react sharply: the Majlis-Ittihad-ul-Muslimin (MIM) is not a «fascist» party, as it is often said, but its fiery leader, the late [Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi](#), was not prepared to tolerate any kind of Hindu provocations (Wright 1963). The first serious confrontation took place in 1978 (the Rameeza Bee case), and the atmosphere never ceased to deteriorate thereafter, exacerbated by the huge dimensions that a blind Congress Chief Minister, [Chenna Reddy](#), gave to the Ganesh festival (Engineer 1991b). In 1983, there was an extremely violent and bloody sequence, although the emerging TDP showed there a real sense of responsibility. However, simmering tensions never stopped. Violence erupted again and again, the Ayodhya crisis adding fuel to old resentments ([Owaisi](#), by then a recognized MP, was a member of the Babri Masjid Action Committee [BMAC]). The story goes on, as there is always a rumor at hand to create agitation.

Regarding the deteriorating relationship between Hindus and Muslims reaching the South, the first alert occurred in 1981, with the agitation following the Meenakshipuram conversions of several hundred Dalits to Islam. Then, in 1985-1986, came the news about the «Shah Bano case» and the Babri Masjid controversy. Southern Muslims were not supposed to be interested or concerned. Still, on that fatal December 6, 1992, they were glued to the television just as much as their cousins in the North. Then anxiety mounted, if only because there were now, in the deep South, some new organizations, like the Hindu Munnani in Madras or certain Muslim militant groups in Kerala (e.g., the once dangerous Islamic Sevak Sangh of A. N. Madani), who were extremely noisy, assaulting and killing each other.

News coming from Bombay was not particularly comforting either: there were bomb blasts, new mafia networks, together with the increasing activities of Pakistani agents and the dynamism of those jihadis (Abou-Zahab and Roy 2004), who were now trying to set deep roots in India's southern regions. Anxiety

increased as well, because each bomb blast meant enquiries, police action, citizens being treated as suspects, and Muslim youngsters being sent to jail without trial. Fortunately, there were no violent reactions. People knew better.

In Kerala, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), still hated in the North, is an extremely positive factor. Rioting is rare in these regions and, when it does occur, it does so only for local reasons, as for example, with rivalries between fishermen (in Marad in 2002 2003). In fact, in those days, besides some places in Karnataka which have become rather sensitive like Bangalore (mentioned earlier) or Mangalore, the only riot which has been extremely serious and was repeated twice was in Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu) in 1997, and again in 1998. [L. K. Advani](#), the BJP leader who was visiting the city at the time, had a narrow escape.

1994; August 15: Hubli (Karnataka)

69% Hindus, 26% Muslims

Chief Minister of Karnataka: M. Veerappa Moily, Congress Party, November 1992 December 1994

Violence erupted on Independence Day in Hubli (Karnataka). The town had suffered from communal tensions for quite some time over the Idgah Maidan, a piece of open land held by the Anjuman-e-Islam (AEI), a Muslim organization. The Hubli municipality had leased out the area to the AEI in 1921 so that Muslims could have a place to hold prayers twice a year. Troubles cropped up in the 1960s when the AEI built a commercial complex on the land. In 1992, echoing the hoisting of the national flag by BJP President [Murli Manohar Joshi](#) in Srinagar (Kashmir), the Hubli's BJP unit attempted to hoist the national flag on the Idgah Maidan, thereby provoking the indignation of the AEI. BJP attempts were successfully countered by the state administration till 1994. On August 15, 1994, two BJP leaders, [Sikander Bakht](#) and [Uma Bharti](#), joined the flag-hoisting campaign in Hubli on the Idgah Maidan. They were arrested by police, angering a crowd of BJP activists. The police resisted and opened fire, killing six people. This riot remains a symbol of the communalization of the South of India.

([The Pioneer 01/02/1994](#)); **([The Times of India 15/08/1994](#)); **([Sunday, 28/08 03/09/1994](#)); **([Sunday 4 10/09/1994](#)); (*([Engineer 1995d](#)))

1994; October 6 8: Bangalore (Karnataka)

76% Hindus, 16% Muslims

Chief Minister of Karnataka: M. Veerappa Moily, Congress Party, November 1992 December 1994

Violence erupted in the city of Bangalore (Karnataka) after the broadcasting in Urdu of a Doordarshan (television) program on October 2, from 7:45 to 7:55 p.m., just after the Kannada newscast (Karnataka's dominant language). On October 3, a three-hundred-strong mob of pro-Kannada organizations gathered to protest in front of Bangalore's Doordarshan office. Over the following two days, many protest marches were held in the city and inflammatory speeches were delivered. On October 6, the linguistic agitation took a communal turn with the involvement of Hindu communal organizations-such as the ABVP-which damaged buses and official vehicles. On October 7, a Friday, a protest procession passed through a predominantly Muslim area shouting anti-Muslim slogans near a mosque where prayers were being said. Violence spread to the city. Sixty-three Muslim houses were destroyed. People died in the mob violence, shooting by police, and in stabbing incidents. The riot claimed 25 lives according to official sources, while unofficial estimates put the death toll at 40, and, on occasion, as high as 100. On October 8, the Urdu news

bulletin was suspended, but the violence continued, leading to the stabbing deaths of seven persons.

***(*Engineer* 1994); **(*Frontline* 04/11/1994)

1997; November 29 December 1; 1998; February 14: Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu)

84% Hindus, 8% Muslims

Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu: K. M. Karunanidhi, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), May 1996 May 2001

Communal violence flared up in the city of Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu). Tensions had increased between the Hindu and Muslim communities over the recent successes of Muslim businessmen in the town. The Hindu Munnani (an organization formed to defend the Hindu religion) leader, Rama Gopalan, had come to Coimbatore several times, asking Hindus to purchase only from Hindu shops. Moreover, relations between the police and the Muslim community had seriously deteriorated after the bombing of the RSS office in Madras in 1993: looking for members of the Al-Umma, an organization formed by S. A. Basha after the demolition of the Babri Masjid and which was suspected of being behind the blasts, the police raided Muslim localities, and they had arrested many Muslim youths in recent years. Several check posts were set up around the Muslim-dominated area of Kottaimedu, angering local residents. Muslim traders were also irritated by the daily collection by the police of a mamool (illegal levy) from each shop. Muslims had become organized through various organizations (Al-Umma; AIUTC All India Trade Union Congress , and TMMK - Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam), which were involved in a permanent conflict with the police.

In this tense atmosphere, violence erupted on November 29 after the murder of a police constable by three Muslim youths belonging to the Al-Umma. A section of the police, aligned with Hindutva circles, retaliated by setting fire to Muslim shops. They were joined by activists from the Hindu Munnani. Very well-armed and organized, they targeted, with clinical precision, Muslim properties. Violence occurred in different parts of the city, leading to the death of 18 Muslims (eight in police firing) and two Hindus.

On 14 February 1998, a series of bomb blasts occurred in Coimbatore in which around 50 persons were killed and 200 injured according to the Justice P.R. Gokulakrishnan Commission of Inquiry. Engineer reported 60 deaths. The attacks were perpetrated by Al-Umma members in retaliation for the killings of Muslims in shooting by police between November and December of 1997. Three human bombs were set to explode at a meeting delivered by the BJP leader [L. K. Advani](#) who had planned to visit the town. But [Advani](#)'s arrival was delayed and the perpetrators could not penetrate police lines. They left their bombs in other parts of the city. Various explosions took place until February 17. In the hours following the explosions, Hindu activists attacked Muslim shops and properties. The Government had to send in the army.

These events indicate the level of communalization that occurred in the South of India during this period.

(*Frontline* 26/12/1997); **(*Frontline* 07/03/1998); **(*Frontline* 23/10/1998); *(*Engineer* 1998a); **(*Frontline* 10 23/06/2000); ***(*National Integration Council* 2007)

CHAPTER 5

Victory of the Congress-led coalition

The first UPA (2004-2009) and the second (2009 onwards)

After the shock administered to the country by the Gujarat pogroms (an event so well planned and organized that the nature of that state itself was entirely modified), the violence refused to die down. The following year saw a lot of agitation in Northern and Western India. There were clashes, skirmishes, and minor «unprepared» riots issued out of silly quarrels, taking immediately communal colors, but petering out if the police were vigilant (as is currently the case in Bihar under the rule of the Janata Dal [U] chief minister Nitish Kumar). It could be serious otherwise, especially when any local personality wants trouble. This was the case, for instance, in Gorakhpur, a sensitive city in Uttar Pradesh, where the sitting BJP MP, Mahant Adityanath, is known for his militancy: on Holi 2003, things turned extremely violent, and Mayawati, the UP chief minister, had to intervene (Engineer 2004).

After the Ahmedabad pogroms, and in spite of later developments, the amicable A. B. Vajpayee had remained popular. The NDA was expecting an easy victory in the coming general elections (for the fourteenth Lok Sabha). That was not to be (Jayal 2004). In May 2004, the winner was a Congress-led coalition, patiently built by none less than the Italian-born widow of [Rajiv Gandhi](#), Sonia. This victory came as a terrible blow to the BJP and to its «satellites.» A «foreigner» at the head of the state? Hindu India felt betrayed.

Whatever the blow and the denigrating campaign which followed, the beginnings of the new coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), were brilliant: Sonia Gandhi stepped down, with much elegance, to make room for a prime minister who would not be controversial, a Sikh moreover, Dr. Manmohan Singh.

For the minorities, this was a strong signal. The new coalition, the UPA, was certainly extremely diverse but here, with the support also of the CPI and CPI (M), one could assume that most of them were committed to the notion and requirements of a secular state. Rightly or wrongly, people felt safer.

How is it then that, given the lessons of the past and the growing ambitions of the Sangh Parivar, Muslims who are able to absorb the heaviest blows and meet the weightiest challenges, cannot display the same good common sense, and master their reactions when it comes to petty or trivial offenses? Each community knows too well the age-old procedures of provocation (Gaborieau 1985), the traditional irritants, the religious symbols which are not to be touched, especially at the time of festivals which, unfortunately, frequently coincide. Why resort so easily to «brick-batting?»

Year after year, the list of the riots compiled with such courage by Asghar Ali Engineer and his CSSS (Centre for the Study of Society and Secularism, in Bombay) is revealing of the underlying violence which can surge any time if the administration in charge of law-and-order is not constantly on the alert. And there are, of course, places whose names are often cited in the news. Uttar Pradesh cities, for instance, have remained extremely sensitive: Agra, Aligarh, Azamgarh, Muzaffarnagar, and all of those localities where, for instance, a dangerous MP from Gorakhpur, Mahant Adityanath (see supra), has done his best, in recent years, to set up trouble. He has thus been involved in serious rioting in Bareilly, in Mau in 2005 (Ramzan and Dussehra coincided that year) and in Gorakhpur, in 2007, during Muharram. Outside UP, disquieting news would come regularly from Maharashtra where the ruling Congress-NCP government seems unable (or even reticent?) to control the Shiv Sena and the VHP. Cities in Madhya Pradesh (Dhar, Indore, Ujjain, etc.) are often in the news and, with increased frequency, Rajasthan, where, after a long BJP reign, the Sangh militants do not accept to see the Congress back, with Ashok Gehlot as the present chief minister. And in the South, it has been remarked how sensitive Karnataka has become, with many new Hindu groups proving really dangerous.

Thus, it would be a mistake to assume that, because of the absence of major riots over the last decade, and

because of the much-reduced number of casualties (the statistics of the Home Minister are quite optimistic), the underlying violence has really disappeared. There is much more than meets the eye, although it is also true that, on both sides, the concerned communities are able to display a surprising grasp of realities. This strange mixture of deep religious commitment, resentment, and self-control of the Millat (the Muslim community) appeared in full light in March 2006 when it came to demonstrating against the notorious Danish cartoons mocking the Prophet. There were lakhs (1 lakh = 100,000) of Muslims in the streets of Delhi, gathered in the first place to condole the death of Maulana Madani, rector of the famous Deoband Seminary, and also to demonstrate against the Civil Nuclear Deal (G. W. Bush was in town to sign the agreement). However, the spectacular mass-gathering of the Millat turned out to be a major demonstration against the «obscenities» and «blasphemies» of the West. The whole protest was nevertheless extremely disciplined and there were no incidents, in sharp contrast with the furious yells of an irresponsible UP minister, Haji Mohammed Yakoob, who, from a pulpit in Meerut, shouted out enormous offers of money (Rs. 51 crores, that is \$11.5 million) for the head of the cartoonist. It set up emotions, of course, and a riot erupted in Lucknow-of all cities, it was the least communal-prone in Uttar Pradesh. Other examples abound: cricket matches as in 2003 and the writings of Taslima Nasreen as in 2010 are still able to create hot tensions. A serious incident in South Delhi at Okhla (a controversial encounter with police at Batla House) led the students of Jamia Millia to demonstrate rather quietly, but it had nevertheless serious consequences in Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh) in September October 2008 (as was reported in the 1 15 October and 16 31 October 2008 issues of the Milli Gazette).

2005; October 13 14: Mau (Uttar Pradesh)

42% Hindus, 58% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Samajwadi Party, August 2003 May 2007

A serious riot took place in Mau or Maunath Bhanjan (Uttar Pradesh) on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Dussehra, which coincided with the Muslim month of Ramzan. In this town dominated by Muslim weavers, tensions arose when Hindus performing the Ramayana scene of Bharat Milap used a loudspeaker near a mosque while Ramzan prayers were being said. This violated a long-standing agreement between the two communities. Muslims protested and the Hindus agreed to stop. But on the following day, activists of the Hindu Yuva Vahini (HYV), a youth militia founded by the aggressive BJP MP of the nearby Gorakhpur constituency, Yogi Adityanath, came near the mosque and started using the loudspeaker again. Muslims riposted. HYV activists fired. Muslims attacked Hindu shops in retaliation, encouraged by the independent Muslim MLA Mukhtar Ansari, known for his criminal background. Muslims, particularly the weavers of Alinagar Colony, were then heavily targeted by Hindu groups. The police did not intervene. The Hindi local media played a dirty role by alleging that Mukhtar Ansari was the sole instigator of the riots. Official reports registered nine deaths. Newspapers reported 14 casualties.

** (Verma and Khan 2005); *** (Engineer 2006)

2006, March 3: Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh)

73% Hindus, 26% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Samajwadi Party, August 2003 May 2007

Lucknow (the capital of Uttar Pradesh), a peaceful city relatively unfamiliar with Hindu Muslim violence, but unfortunately known for Shia-Sunni clashes, witnessed communal troubles, following violent speeches delivered in Meerut by one of the UP ministers, Haji Yakoob, regarding the Danish Mohammed cartoons.

The Muslims from the localities of Aminabad, Kaiserganj, and Latoosh Road staged large demonstrations after Friday prayers. Violence started when they forced Hindu shopkeepers to close their shutters. Their procession was then stoned and a riot erupted, in which four persons were killed.

***(Engineer 2007)

2007; January 27 29: Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh)

78% Hindus, 21% Muslims

Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh: Mulayam Singh Yadav, Samajwadi Party, August 2003 May 2007

Troubles occurred in Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh). The Gorakhnath temple, located in a Muslim area in the city, is a centre of religious activity in eastern Uttar Pradesh and attracts thousands of Hindu pilgrims each year. The chief priest of the temple, Mahant Avidyanath, was a former political leader of the Hindu Mahasabha. His successor, Yogi Adityanath, has been a Member of Parliament (MP) for the Gorakhpur constituency since 1998. Although a member of the BJP, he adheres to a much more aggressive Hindutva agenda and often provokes the party's leadership. He founded the youth militia Hindu Yuva Vahini, known for its violent activities in the sub-region of Poorvanchal in eastern UP. In this communally-sensitive atmosphere, troubles erupted on January 27, on the occasion of the Shia festival of Muharram. The Muslim procession met with an inebriated Hindu marriage crowd. A riot erupted in which a Hindu was badly injured. Adityanath and his militia came to the site and retaliated by destroying a mazar (tomb of a Muslim saint). On January 29, violence resumed when Adityanath was arrested for provoking violence. His supporters wreaked havoc on the city. Around five persons died in the violence. The state government of Uttar Pradesh revoked the district magistrate and the superintendent of police for their failure to control the violence. It is to be noted that in 2003, troubles had already taken place when a Holi procession led by Adityanath passed near a mosque in a Muslim-dominated locality. The imam of the mosque was killed in the violence, along with two other people.

***(Engineer 2008), *(Tehelka 14/02/2007)

2008, July 3 4: Indore (Madhya Pradesh)

81% Hindus, 13% Muslims

Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh: Shivraj Singh Chauhan, BJP, November 2005

The city of Indore (Madhya Pradesh) was hit by communal violence, over the conflict concerning the Amarnath temple in Kashmir. On May 2008, the Jammu and Kashmir state government announced the transfer of one hundred acres of forest land to the Amarnath temple-one of the most famous shrines in Hinduism-to set up temporary facilities for Hindu pilgrims. This led to widespread protests in the Kashmir valley (the local population was worried about the ecological repercussions of the transfer, while Muslim separatists saw it as a cultural invasion). On July 1, the state government had to revoke the land-transfer decision. On July 3, the BJP and the VHP called for an All India bandh (strike) to protest against the revocation. The issue had repercussions far from Kashmir, in Indore.

Recent years had been particularly tense ones for the city because of a dispute over a piece of land, the Karbala ground, where the Shias celebrated Muharram and which Hindu activists began to claim for themselves on the grounds that an old Hanuman shrine used to stand there. Moreover, in March 2008, the sensational arrest of 13 SIMI activists (Students' Islamic Movement of India, banned by the Indian

government in 2001) in the town had further weakened the Muslim community, that was being increasingly targeted by the police.

In this tense atmosphere, the bandh of July 3 offered the perfect opportunity to launch a riot. Hindu activists and bandh supporters marched in Muslim localities and harassed passers-by. Many were badly beaten up. The police remained totally passive, as a result of which Muslims attacked the police station. The police retaliated, helped by bandh supporters armed with private guns. The violence lasted for two days. Eight lives were lost, of which, seven were Muslims. A curfew was imposed for five days. Since the BJP came to power at the state level in 2003, Madhya Pradesh has become a center of Hindutva propaganda, with new places nearby emerging as communal hot spots (Indore, Ujjain, and Dhar, where, in 2003, 2005, and 2006, riots erupted over the Kamaal Moula mosque, which allegedly stands on the site of the Hindu temple of Bhojshala).

***(Mehta and Tiwari 2008); ***(Engineer 2009)

CONCLUSION

By definition, a chronology like this one stops abruptly and leaves one guessing. What next? Has Ahmedabad taught a lesson? Are Meerut, Bhagalpur, Mumbai, things of the past or shall we discover that the perpetrators are at work preparing the ground for some fresh violence, some efficient «cleansing», so that they spread their influence, extend their positions, and go many steps further?

At the time of this writing (April 2012), India and its UPA Government are experiencing various difficulties which are of a very different nature: on the one hand, there is a serious non-violent but erratic movement, unofficially supported by the BJP, that actively denounces corruption in high places, on the other hand violent actions are carried in tribal regions, led by a powerful Maoist guerilla organization. Then, there is tension in Orissa where a dramatic anti-Christian pogrom happened in 2009. Regarding the Hindu Muslim relationship, and in addition to the usual conflicts, there is a very specific trauma because of the bomb blasts which, since 2005, have regularly struck the country in well-selected locations. This trauma is well concealed. It is nevertheless extremely serious. Who are the guilty? The Pakistani networks? The Indian Mujahideen? Some vengeful private Hindu groups?

Fortunately everything, on the so-called «communal front», is quiet. With so many challenges, especially the attack over Mumbai's most touristic sites (including the world-famous Taj Hotel) in 2008, people, whoever they were, kept calm, displaying a great sense of responsibility. They have demonstrated, and still demonstrate that it is possible. Next to violence, there is the law of the land, and there is hope. A last recent example should close this chronology on a somewhat optimistic note: the long-awaited verdict on Ayodhya was, at long last, pronounced on September 30, 2010. It looks iniquitous. Two-thirds of the contested ground around the Babri Masjid are to go to the two claiming Hindu groups. One-third is to go to the Muslim claimants. But worse: one of the judges commented that faith is enough to justify the present Hindu claim (Thapar 2010). Never mind, said the Muslim spokesmen. We shall appeal to the Supreme Court. And in every mohalla, people agreed gracefully. That is a great lesson when one remembers the bloody trail of the 1990s surrounding the «Babri Masjid issue.»

The future is open (Alam 2008). Politically. Economically. On the Muslim side, the now famous Sachar Report (2006) represents a major development. It seems to have opened many eyes. Millat leaders now realize that they should focus on the real difficulties of their people: poverty and marginalization. It is the only path to follow whatever the interference of politics and politicians, who are more than ever able to play dangerous games. The price of democracy is indeed extremely high.

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