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“ Hate and Hysteria ”
By Swapan Dasgupta

Hate and Hysteria

A Hindu political identity doesn't inevitably produce killers

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Communal violence generates strong reactions. This year's bloodbath in Gujarat was no exception and created a climate of both anger and hysteria. Apart from dubbing Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi a "mass murderer" who should stand trial in an international court for genocide, many secular activists concluded India had become a "fascist" state. Academics-mainly non-resident-joined the battle to point out that civil society in Gujarat had been so communalised over the past decade that democracy could no longer serve a healer. The implied Brechtian solution: abolish the Gujaratis and create new

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Some of this hysteria was understandable. The riots were horri- standard and the intensity of hate truly frightening. More to the erupted after a nine-year respite from sectarian violence. For a generation that didn't experience the decade of rioting culmina- Bombay riots of 1993, Gujarat 2002 was a novelty. The tempta consequently, was to view the post-Godhra carnage as both a and an expression of the new Hinduised politics.

**ETHNIC
CONFLICT
AND CIVIC
LIFE:
HINDUS AND
MUSLIMS IN
INDIA**

By Ashutosh
Varshney

Oxford

Price: Rs 495

Pages: 382

Ashutosh Varshney's study of Hindu-Muslim relationships shies these pamphleteering conclusions. Making an important distinc ethnic violence and ethnic conflict, he believes the "real issue i ethnic conflict is violent or waged in the institutionalised chann as non-violent mobilisation". According to him, there is nothing about communal violence flowing out of Hindu nationalist politi Muslim exclusivism. The outcome depends on the interplay be competitive politics and civil society.

With a rigour that has become the hallmark of political scientist and which is, unfortunately, not replicated in India-Varshney lo sets of broadly similar cities and asks why communal violence one but not the other. Aligarh, for example, has a record of riot Kozhikode, a city where the communal balance is roughly the same. He then Hyderabad and Lucknow and Ahmedabad and Surat to explore a similar dive

The answers are revealing. Communal conflict, Varshney concludes, tends to degenerate into violence when inter-community associational links are weak. In Kozhikode and Surat, for example, Hindus and Muslims are strongly connected by business and this engagement serves as a "bulwark of peace". This despite a strong Muslim League presence in Kozhikode and BJP dominance in Surat. No such professional or social connection is evident in Ahmedabad and Aligarh where Muslims are ghettoised.

However, while Varshney's analysis of what holds the peace is revealing, he does not dwell at any length on the organisation of communal violence. Considering the BJP's rise in Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Aligarh are relatively recent, an automatic link between Hindu nationalism and recurrent communal violence is difficult to establish. A Hindu political identity doesn't inevitably produce killers.

The transition from identity to violence, judging by Varshney's study, is brought about by hatred of the "other" born of social unfamiliarity. Unfortunate conclusion-a conscious de-ghettoisation of cities-may be too radical for squeamish stomachs.

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