6

States or Cities?

Studying Hindu-Muslim Riots[1]

Ashutosh Varshney

Is communal violence in India best studied at the state level or the city level? Or should an analytical framework be devised that incorporates both levels? If we find the latter path intellectually more meaningful, what is the best way to achieve such synthesis?

These questions are not simply academic. The gruesome communal violence that erupted in the state of Gujarat in 2002 brings them a poignant urgency. The violence continued for several months, but with the exception of a few relatively small episodes, it did not spill beyond Gujarat's borders.[2] Newspapers and television stations throughout India reported and discussed the events in Gujarat for much of the year, often presenting violence in its gory details. Yet the rest of the country, by and large, avoided retaliatory rioting. There were bombings in Mumbai more than a year later (in August 2003), and

2. There was minor rioting in Hyderabad (the capital of Andhra Pradesh) and some towns of Maharashtra as well.

they may well have been related to Gujarat's riots, but after all is said and done, the communal violence was mostly confined to a single state. Should we therefore conclude that the state level is the most important level of analysis for communal violence?

Before Gujarat hit the headlines in 2002, a North-South divide had marked perceptions of communalism and communal violence in India. It was generally believed that North Indian states were worse affected by communal violence. Hindu-Muslim relations in South India were widely considered peaceful, the major exception being Hyderabad, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh.[3] The contrast between communal tranquility in the state of Kerala and the riot-proneness of Uttar Pradesh (UP) was often drawn. Muslims constitute over 20 per cent of Kerala's population as against roughly 16 per cent in UP. Kerala thus has a higher percentage of Muslims than UP, but Hindu-Muslim relations in the two states have been polar opposites. This contradicts the widespread view that a higher proportion of minority population increases the propensity to communal violence because higher demographic proportions make minorities more assertive, or because higher percentages render minorities simply more visible. Either can increase a minority's susceptibility to resentment and reaction from the majority community.

This chapter examines the state-level conventional wisdom. It relies on my recent book, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*,[4] and especially on a data-set jointly created by Steven Wilkinson and me for the period 1950–95. The overall statistics for 1950–95, the so-called 'large-n' of Hindu-Muslim violence, allow us to answer two hitherto empirically unresolved questions: How is India's communal violence distributed across the nation? And at what level—state, town, village—should communal violence be studied?

My argument in this chapter is that while state-level comparisons in India make a lot of sense for a variety of questions, the attempt to compare Hindu-Muslim relations at the state-level is not wrong, but incomplete. The city is the most logical and significant level of analysis. However, an exclusive city-level focus also leaves an important part

3. For an analysis of why Hyderabad might be an exception, see Ashutosh Varshney, 'Postmodernism, Civic Engagement and Ethnic Conflict: A Passage to India', *Comparative Politics*, October 1997.

4. Published by Yale University Press (2002 and 2003) in the US, and by Oxford University Press in India (2002) and Pakistan (2003).

of the story uncovered and untold. Making both of these statements— the primacy of city-level mechanisms and the importance, if not primacy, of state-level factors—may appear paradoxical. This requires a brief explanation.

It turns out that even India's most violent states have many towns and cities that are peaceful, and statistically one can show that the riot-prone cities account for a disproportionate share of Hindu-Muslim violence in their respective states.[5] In Gujarat, for example, three towns—Ahmedabad, Baroda and Godhra—accounted for about 76 per cent of the total riot-related deaths in the state between 1950 and 1995. Over the same period, the city of Hyderabad experienced over 90 per cent of all riot-related deaths in Andhra Pradesh; four urban areas in Maharashtra—Bombay, Bhiwandi, Jalgaon and Thane— accounted for 85 per cent of all riot-related deaths in that state; and, six towns—Meerut, Aligarh, Kanpur, Moradabad, Varanasi and Allahabad—accounted for about 55 per cent of the total riot-related deaths in UP. In a state like UP, with over 50 districts and over a hundred towns, these figures, as in other states, show a high degree of riot-concentration. Violence, in short, was not concentrated in a particular state, but in various cities in different states. Often, cities separated by just 40 or 50 miles displayed dramatically different propensities to Hindu-Muslim violence: Aligarh and Bulandshahar in UP, Baroda and Surat in Gujarat, Hyderabad and Warangal in Andhra Pradesh.

Variation between cities located within a single state means that the search for causal factors cannot be confined to state-level politics alone. Any hypothesised state-level cause must have been subjected to locally varying factors for a state to contain both peaceful and violent cities. By definition, a state-level *constant* cannot explain intra-state *variation*. To attribute both Aligarh's endemic violence and Bulandshahar's rarely broken peace to factors associated with UP's state-level politics would violate standard methodological as well as routine analytical norms. So long as Aligarh and Bulandshahar continue to diverge so markedly, any explanatory framework must involve local-level dynamics and factors. We need an account of local mechanisms that produce such different outcomes.

Even so, the fact remains that often, though not always, these local mechanisms get activated by an extra-local trigger: the desecration of

5. In this chapter, the terms town and city will be used interchangeably.

a religious building; the burning of a train; an attack on a monument, institution, or building of great symbolic significance to a community; an apparently unjust electoral defeat of a political party or organization; police brutality against a community; even victories and defeats in sports. Some of these events, considered provocative in a particular city, may be traced to the national political arena, but others may well emerge within state-level politics. Still others could be entirely local in origin. The important point for our analysis is that if a given state's political parties mobilize their support groups communally (while in other states parties, for whatever reason, concentrate on issues that are cross-religious); if a state's police has a history of bias, actual or perceived, against a community (and police histories elsewhere differ); if the monuments attacked are of symbolic significance only to the public sphere of that state, instead of entering the entire national public sphere (for instance, the Guruvayur temple of Kerala versus the Ramjanmabhoomi of Ayodhya)—then the spark may come from state politics. How a locality responds to this extra-local spark—whether with violence or with the maintenance of peace—will depend on factors associated with the localities themselves.

Therefore, to understand and explain the relationship between the local- and state-level factors, I use the metaphor of 'sparks' and 'fires'. I conceptualize state politics as a spark, which may or may not lead to a fire—i.e., a riot—in a given locality. To the extent that a state has a history of communal animosities and violence and its politics are laden with communal symbols, the sparks confronting local mechanisms will be that much more flammable. Whether or not they actually result in violence will depend on the nature of local-level mechanisms, but different states may deliver sparks of different intensities, depending on their traditions of community relations, the strategies of their political parties, the behaviour of their police forces, and the presence or absence of buildings, monuments, and figures of communal significance.

The higher the intensity of the spark, the higher will be the possibility of a change to the prevailing distribution of peace and violence. The intensity of the state-level spark, once fanned by the state's political parties, police or bureaucracy, may be such that it overwhelms local structures that had allowed some towns, during earlier periods of violence elsewhere in the state, to remain peaceful. This would, then, lead to a greater dispersion of communal violence in a state than

has been historically observed. The latter, as we will see, appears to have happened in Gujarat in 2002.[6]

To demonstrate the primacy of local mechanisms, without belittling the importance of state-level factors, this chapter concentrates on a riot-prone city of UP (Aligarh), and a peaceful city of Kerala (Calicut).[7] My explanation for the variation between violence-prone and peaceful cities focuses on civil society, which tends to be locally textured and therefore locally varying. By 'civil society' I mean that space which: (a) exists somewhere between the family and the state, (b) makes interconnections between individuals or families possible, and (c) is independent of the state.[8] There is an integral link between the structure of civic life in a multi-religious society and the presence (or absence) of communal violence. Two links are critical.

First, there is remarkable difference between the inter-communal and intra-communal networks of civic engagement. Inter-communal networks are agents of peace: they build bridges and manage tensions. If communities are organized only on intra-communal lines and the interconnections with other communities are very weak (or do not exist), such a society is highly susceptible to communal violence, given a spark.

Second, intra- and inter-ethnic networks can each take two forms: organized and quotidian. This distinction is based on whether civic interaction is formal or not. I call the first *associational forms of*

6. This line of reasoning leads to an analytically intriguing (and politically dangerous) possibility. If repeated again and again, the state-level sparks could also enlarge the circle of violence on an *enduring* basis. In short, the larger dispersion would then be not simply a one-shot affair, but a long-lasting one. There is as yet insufficient evidence of such mechanisms in operation, but if they were proven conclusively to exist, our understanding of cause and effect in communal violence would need a serious reconsideration. Essentially, the proof of this kind of process would only come from the study of towns that were once communally peaceful but have routinely ceased to be so. Such a study has not yet been systematically conducted.

7. Communal peace has been disrupted twice recently—in 2002 and 2003—in the Beypore fishing area, just outside the city of Calicut. Beypore was identified by my research team as a peaceful but tense area, the continued peacefulness of which could not be taken for granted. For the recent disturbances, see Vinu Abraham, 'The Night of Long Knives', *The Week*, 18 May 2003, and 'Beypore Tense', *The Hindu*, 5 January 2002.

8. For a longer discussion of the various concepts of civil society, see Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, Chapter 2.

engagement; and the second, *everyday forms of engagement*. Associational forms of engagement include membership and participation in business associations, professional organizations, reading clubs, film clubs, sports clubs, NGOs, trade unions and cadre-based political parties. It should be noted that political parties in a multi-party democratic system could be part of both civil society and the state. Ruling parties would be part of the state, the opposition part of civil society. Everyday forms of engagement consist of the routine inter-actions of life, in which families from across the communal divide visit each other, eat together reasonably often, jointly participate in festivals, and allow their children to play together in the neighbour-hood. Both forms of engagement, if robust, can be foundations of peace; their absence or weakness facilitates communal violence. Of the two, however, the associational form is a stronger bulwark against violence, largely because organizational expressions of engagement can often resist efforts by politicians, or other political elements, to polarize people along communal lines. Vigorous organizational life, if it crosses communal lines, acts as a serious constraint on the divisive strategies of communal leaders and their organizations.

In the process of developing this argument, I will also perform another analytically necessary task. I will use the new data-set to show that some widely believed explanations for communal violence do not stand up to scrutiny. Two such arguments have been especially popular: those that focus on the proportion of a minority in a city or state, and those that concentrate on the peaceful role of tradition and the violent impact of 'modernity' on community relations. The latter, in many intellectual circles, has become conventional wisdom for explaining contemporary Hindu-Muslim violence. On the surface it appears plausible, but when analysed carefully it fails some key empirical tests.

The remainder of this chapter is organized as follows. Section II breaks down the 46-year time-series into the urban-rural, state-wise and city/town-wise distribution of violence. It also establishes the city/town as the appropriate unit of analysis for a study of communal violence. Section III focuses on the Gujarat violence of 2002, and argues that even this episode—in which violence was mainly confined to one state—does not detract from the primacy of local factors in accounting for the distribution of Hindu-Muslim rioting. Section IV assesses a range of popular explanations for communal violence and shows them to be underspecified and unsustainable. Sections V

through VIII concentrate on the comparison of Calicut and Aligarh, drawing out the civic factors that have led to a repeated peace in the former and frequent violence in the latter. Section IX summarizes the conclusions.

HINDU-MUSLIM VIOLENCE: WHAT ARE THE TRENDS?

National-level Trends

Has the all-India pattern of communal violence changed in the last four decades? It is often said that the 1950s were a decade of communal peace, and that since then the magnitude of communal violence has increased. The statistics, in fact, show no trend at all between the early 1950s and the mid-1970s; the ups and downs are basically a random walk (Figure 6.1). After the mid-to-late 1970s, however, we do see an unambiguously rising curve of violence, peaking in 1992, when the mosque in Ayodhya was destroyed. In 1994 and 1995, Hindu-Muslim violence dropped to very low levels. If we were to update the series to 2002, the low level starting in 1994 would almost certainly continue until 2001, rising to what could well be a new high in 2002, when the Gujarat violence broke out.

Figure 6.2 shows the rural-urban breakdown of deaths between 1950 and 1995. Hindu-Muslim violence is essentially an urban phenomenon. At less than four per cent in 46 years, the share of rural deaths in the overall number of deaths from communal rioting is very small. Under-reporting of incidents in rural areas may indeed have led to an underestimation of the rural share, but *the difference is simply too large to be entirely an artifact of reporting*. Even after allowing for some under-reporting, it is reasonable to conclude that urban India is the primary site of Hindu-Muslim violence.

State-level Trends

As already reported, North Indian states in general, and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh in particular, are generally believed to be the worst-affected by communal violence, and South Indian states, espe-cially Kerala, among the least communally violent. Figure 6.3 shows the ranking of states after controlling for the size of urban population. Uttar Pradesh is not the worst state, though Kerala is indeed among the most peaceful. The West Indian state of Gujarat, even before the
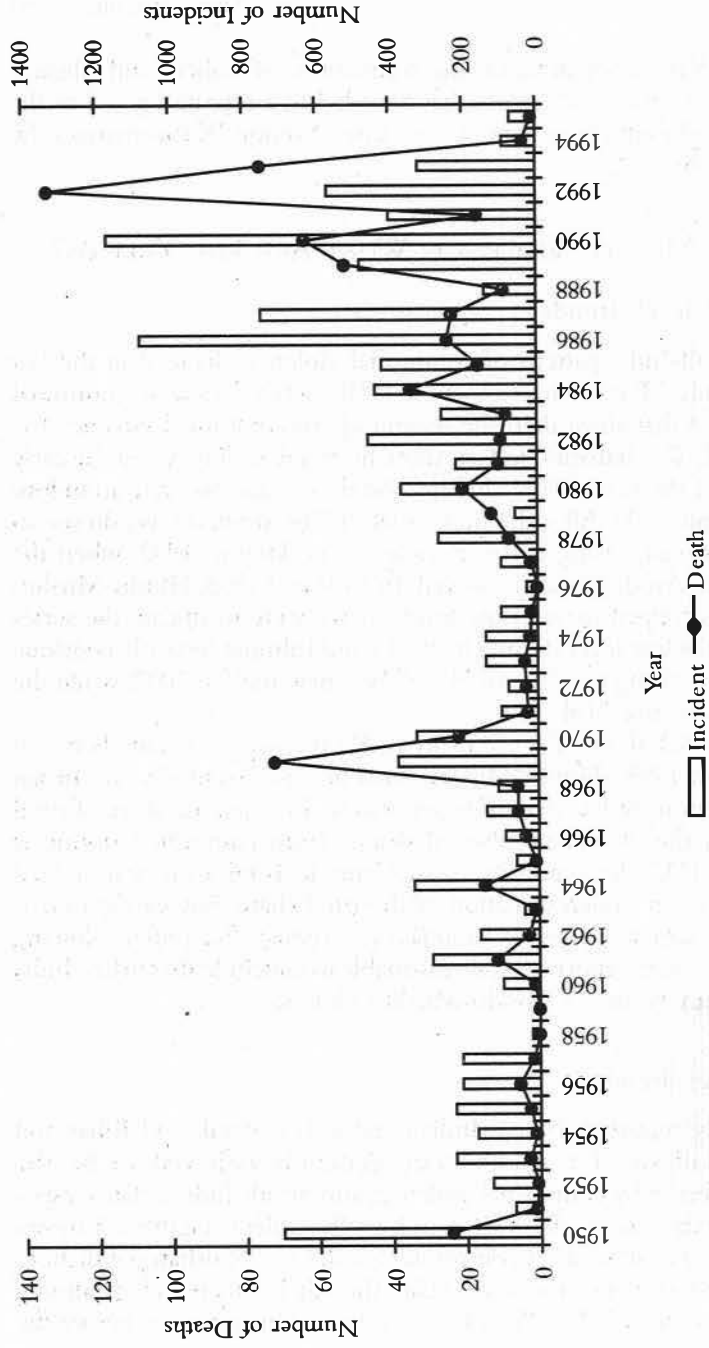
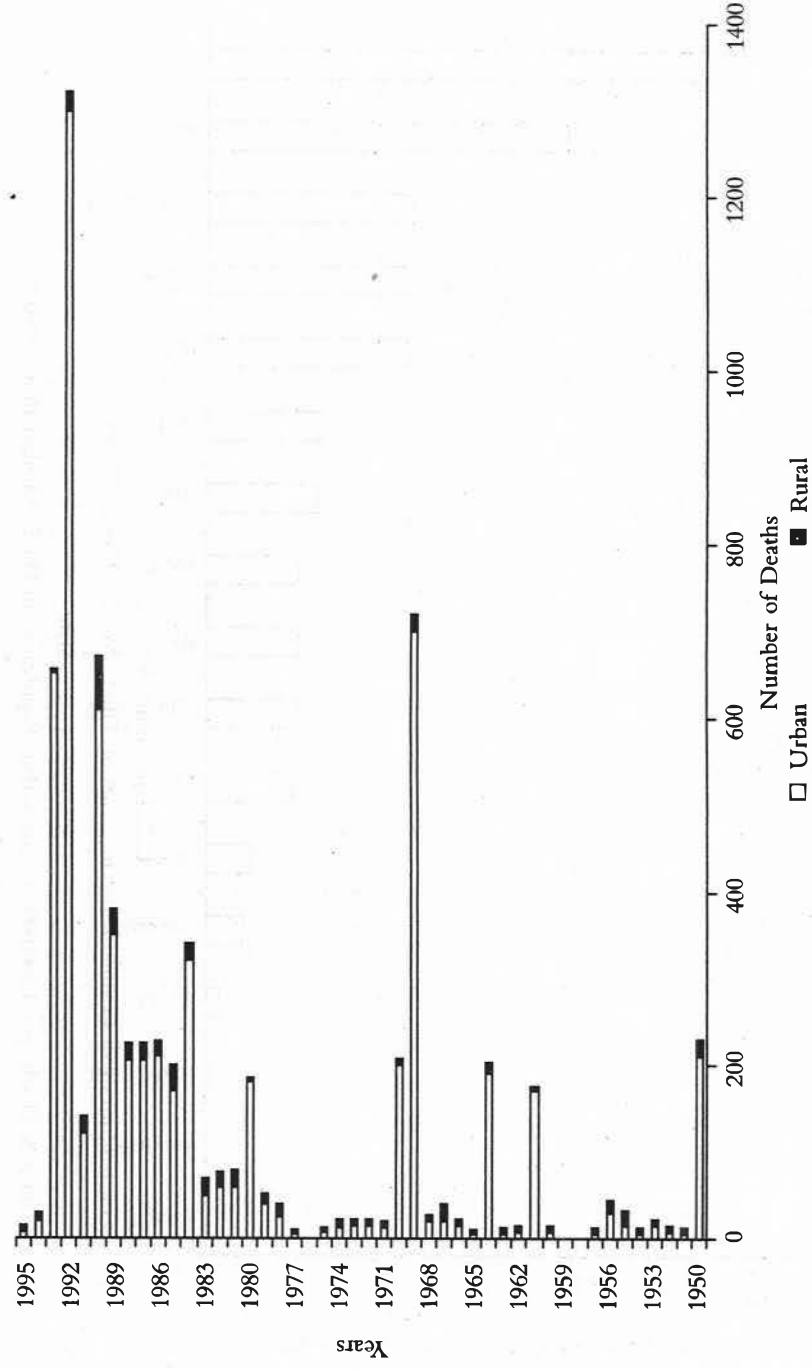FIGURE 6.1: Number of Deaths in, and Incidents of, Hindu-Muslim Riots, 1950–95

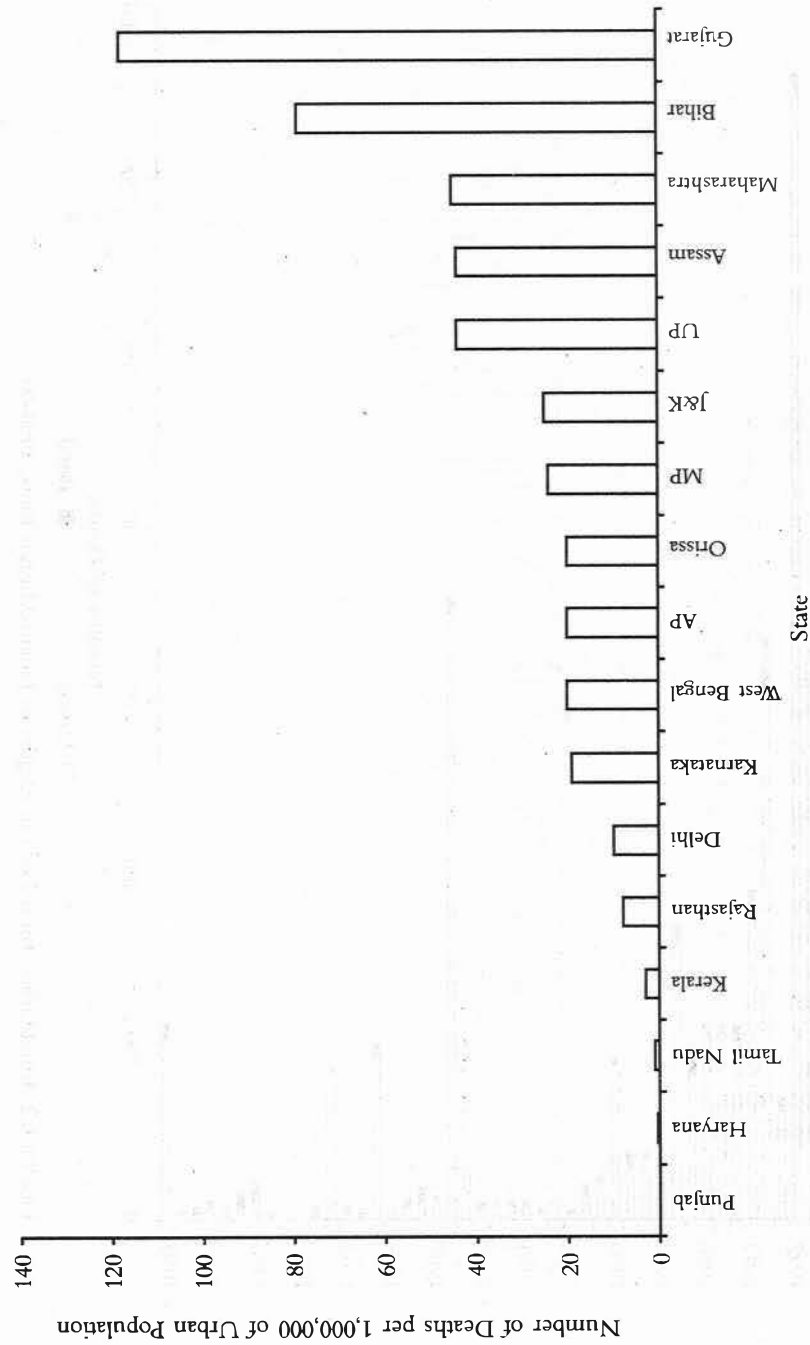FIGURE 6.2: Rural/Urban Breakdown of Deaths in Hindu-Muslim Riots, 1950–95

FIGURE 6.3: Deaths per 1,000,000 of State Urban Populations in Hindu-Muslim Riots, 1950–95

2002 riots, had the highest per capita rate of deaths in communal incidents, at around 117 per million of urban population. Bihar in the North (78 deaths per million) and Maharashtra in the West (45 deaths per million) also have higher per capita rates than Uttar Pradesh (43 deaths per million). Clearly, communalism is not primarily a North Indian problem; it has also been a serious issue for Western India for a long time. The pattern of rioting in UP for 1950–95 is presented separately in Figure 6.4.

Did the preexisting state-wise patterns continue or change during the Ayodhya agitation (1986–93)? While, with the partial exception of Bihar, the violence-prone states discussed above maintained their patterns, it is worth noting that even states where Hindu-Muslim peace normally prevailed were unable to escape the violence engendered by the Ayodhya agitation. This is demonstrated by trends in the otherwise communally peaceful states of Rajasthan and Kerala (Figures 6.5 and 6.6).

City-level Trends

By far the most revealing results are to be found at the town- or city-level. Table 6.1 shows towns with the worst records of communal violence between 1950 and 1995 in an increasing order of seriousness (Columns 2 to 5). How the orders of seriousness were derived requires some explanation.

The first question in deriving any such measure is: How does one define 'riot-proneness'? There are problems with using only deaths as a measure. Should a town like Bhagalpur which has had one serious riot in 46 years—but a riot in which scores were killed—be viewed as more 'riot-prone' than Delhi, which has had a large number of riots but very few deaths per riot? One would, obviously, have to combine both intensity *and* persistence. To develop such a composite measure for riot-proneness for the period 1950–95, four simple questions, making the benchmark progressively more stringent, were asked:

a. How many towns in India had at least three communal riots, in which a minimum of 15 deaths occurred, spread over at least two five-year periods? (Table 1, Column 2);

b. How many had at least four communal riots and a minimum of 20 deaths over at least three five-year periods? (Column 3);
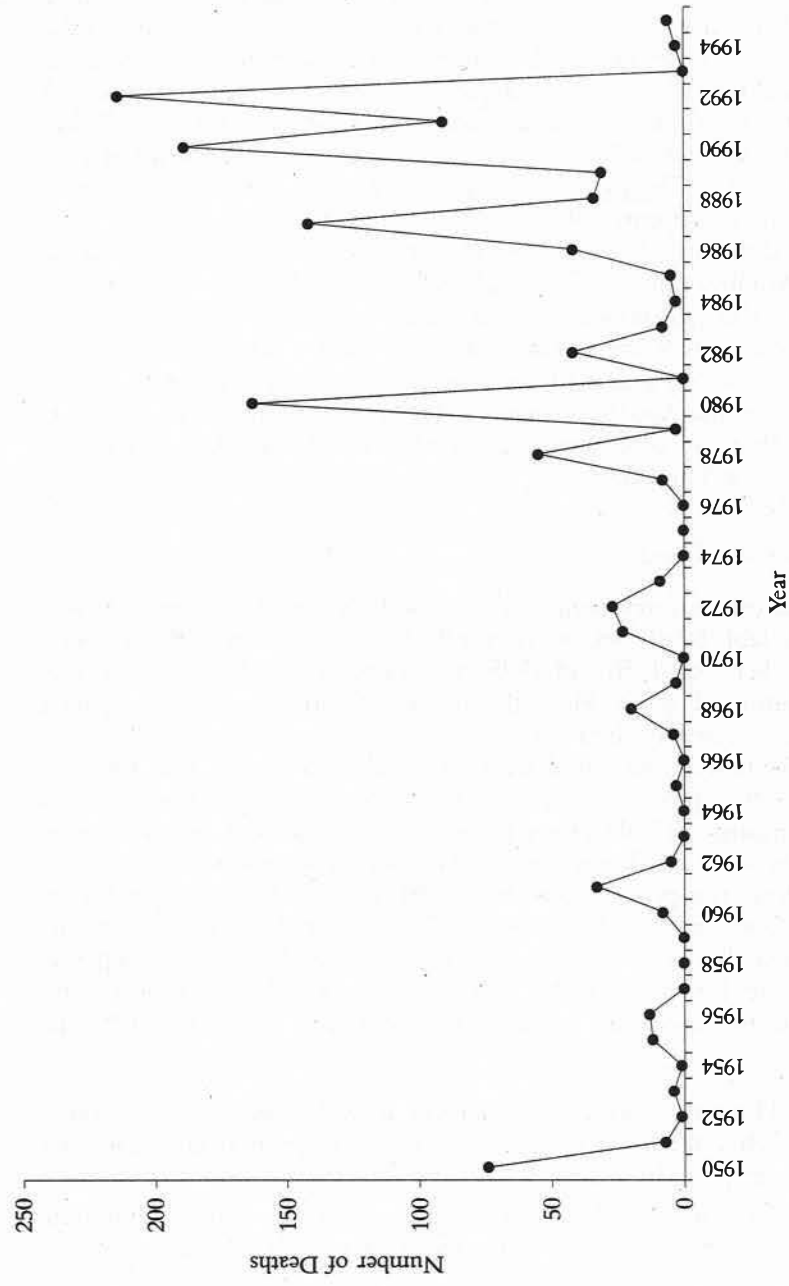
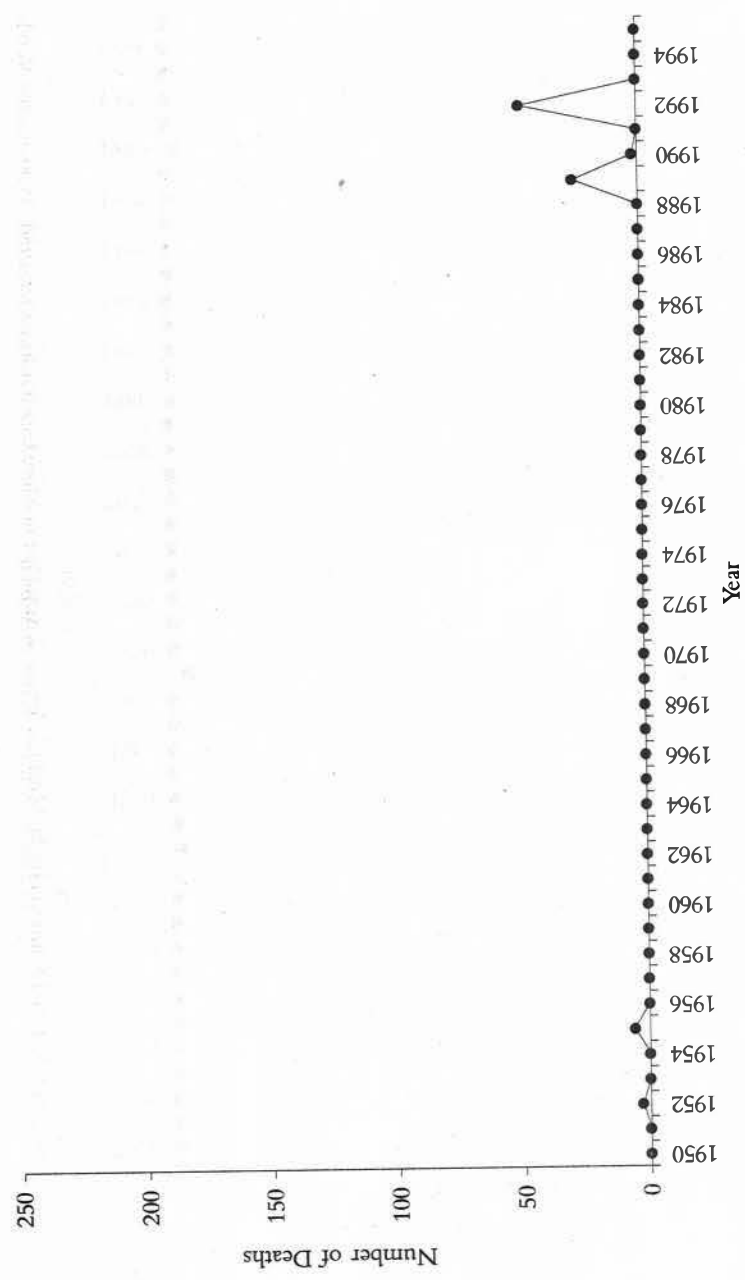FIGURE 6.4: Total Deaths in Hindu-Muslim Riots in Which One or More Deaths Occurred, 1950–95 (by year)—Uttar Pradesh

FIGURE 6.5: Total Deaths in Hindu-Muslim Riots in Which One or More Deaths Occurred, 1950–95 (by year)—Rajasthan
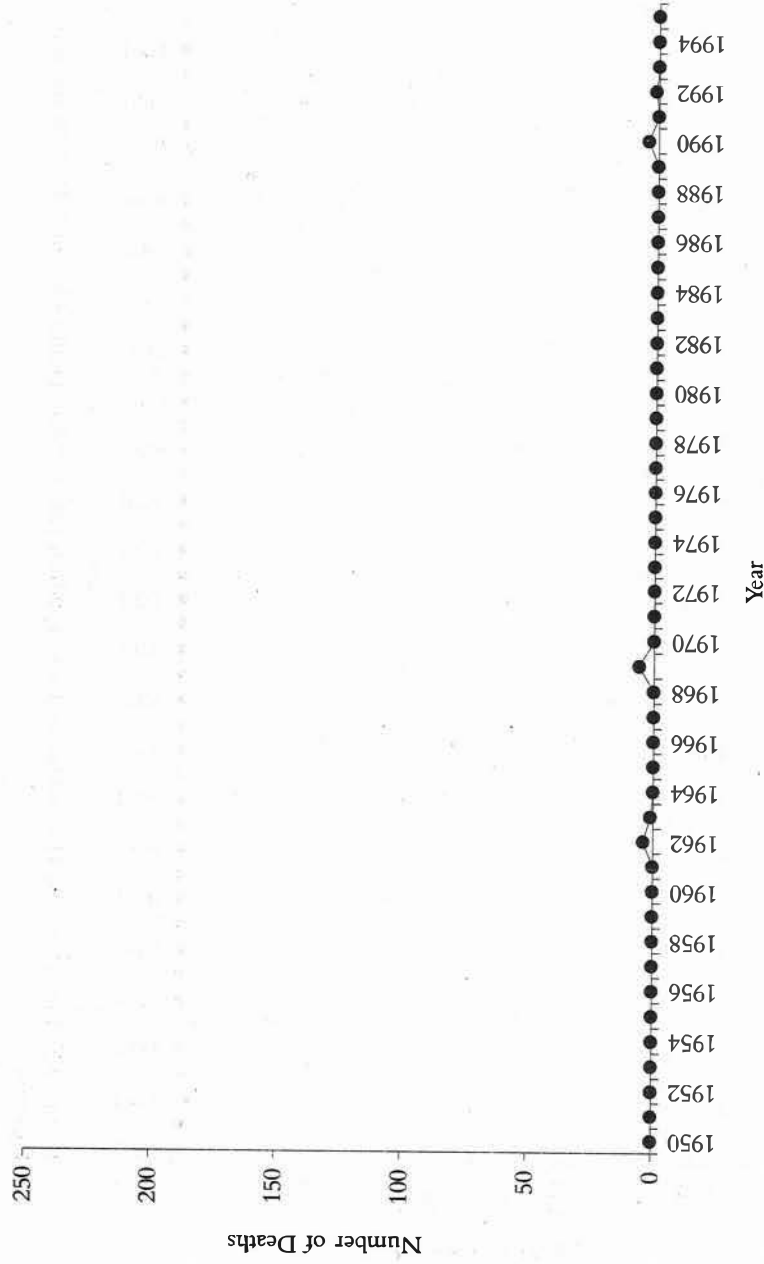
FIGURE 6.6: Total Deaths in Hindu–Muslim Riots in Which One or More Deaths Occurred, 1950–95 (by year)—Kerala

TABLE 6.1
India's 'Riot-Prone' Cities, 1950–95

RP1	RP2	RP3	RP4	Deaths 1950–95	% Literacy	% Muslim
Minimum of 15 deaths in 3 riots over 2 five-year periods	Minimum of 20 deaths in 4 riots over 3 five-year periods	Minimum of 25 deaths in 5 riots over 4 five year periods	Minimum of 50 deaths in 10 riots over 5 five-year periods			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Bombay	Bombay	Bombay	Bombay	˙1137	83	14
Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad	Ahmedabad	1119	79	15
Aligarh	Aligarh	Aligarh	Aligarh	160	60	35
Hyderabad	Hyderabad	Hyderabad	Hyderabad	312	71	34
Meerut	Meerut	Meerut	Meerut	265	61	34
Jamshedpur	Jamshedpur	Jamshedpur		198	81	12
Bhiwandi	Bhiwandi			194	63	53
Surat				194	76	15
Moradabad	Moradabad			149	57	48
Baroda	Baroda	Baroda	Baroda	109	82	11
Bhopal	Bhopal	Bhopal		108	72	28
Delhi	Delhi	Delhi	Delhi	93	77	8
Kanpur	Kanpur	Kanpur		81	72	20
Calcutta	Calcutta	Calcutta	Calcutta	63	78	14

Contd.

TABLE 6.1 (contd.)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15	Jabalpur				59	79	11
16	Bangalore	Bangalore	Bangalore		56	81	14
17	Jalgaon	Jalgaon	Jalgaon		49	79	16
18	Sitamarhi				47	NA	18
19	Indore	Indore	Indore		45	78	13
20	Varanasi	Varanasi	Varanasi		42	64	24
21	Allahabad	Allahabad	Allahabad		37	73	22
22	Nagpur	Nagpur	Nagpur		37	82	10
23	Jaipur	Jaipur			32	70	18
24	Aurangabad	Aurangabad	Aurangabad		30	77	31
25	Srinagar	Srinagar	Srinagar		30	NA	89
26	Ranchi				29	83	15
27	Malegaon	Malegaon			23	70	68
28	Godhra				18	76	40
Deaths in riot-prone cities	4706	4359	3887	3263			
All-India riot deaths 1950–95	7173	7173	7173	7173			
Riot-prone cities as a percentage of all India riot deaths	66	61	54	45.5			
Riot-prone cities as a percentage of all urban riot deaths	69	64	58	49			

c. How many had at least five riots and 25 deaths over four five-year periods? (Column 4); and

d. How many had at least ten riots and 50 deaths over five five-years periods? (Column 5).

These columns can be called RP1, RP2, RP3 and RP4 respectively, where R represents riots and P proneness.

If my reasoning above is right, *the RP4 category of towns/cities (Column 5) was truly riot-prone in the period 1950–95.* Of the four categories of riot-proneness constructed, RP4 combines intensity as well as persistence in a most analytically demanding way. In principle, RP3 (Column 4) could also be included in the category of riot-proneness but, as we will see later, that does not alter the primary conclusion.

The eight RP4 cities account for about 49 per cent of total riot-related deaths in urban India and about 46 per cent of all riot-related deaths in the entire country (including both urban and rural areas). However, RP4 cities hold only about 18 per cent of India's urban population, revealing how locally concentrated is Hindu–Muslim violence. If both urban and rural subtotals are combined, 'riot-proneness' can be seen to be confined to localities containing a mere 4.6 per cent of India's *total* population.

As reported earlier, the deaths in riot-prone cities also constitute a disproportionately large share of deaths in their respective states: the two RP4 cities of Gujarat—Ahmedabad and Baroda—account for about 75 per cent of the riot-related deaths in the state; the only RP4 city of Andhra Pradesh—Hyderabad—for over 90 per cent of that state's total; and metropolitan Bombay for 63 per cent of Maharashtra's total.

The unmistakable local concentration and the relationship between state-level and city-level statistics clearly establish city or town as the appropriate unit of analysis for studying the causes of communal violence. India's Hindu–Muslim violence is town- or city-specific. State (and national) politics provide the context within which the local mechanisms linked with violence get activated. The politics of some states may repeatedly provide 'sparks' to the local-level factors.

GUJARAT 2002

Have Gujarat's riots of 2002 undermined the city-state relationship summarized above? Does not the fact that the violence did not spread

to other states underscore the need to focus on the dynamics of state-level politics, rather than the micro-politics of the localities concerned, in order to understand the underlying causes of communal violence in India?

In one respect, the violence in Gujarat followed a highly predictable pattern. In the data-set analysed in the previous section, only three Gujarat towns—Ahmedabad, Baroda and Godhra—had appeared in the list of India's riot-prone towns,[9] accounting for as much as 76 per cent of all riot-related deaths in Gujarat during 1950–95. These three turned out to be the worst sites of violence in 2002. Consistent with its past pattern, Surat witnessed minimal violence in 2002, even though it is not very far from Baroda and Ahmedabad, both of which experienced shocking carnage. Of the four regions of Gujarat, South Gujarat and Saurashtra experienced very little rioting. Violence was heavily concentrated in Central and North Gujarat. Once the statistics are further disaggregated, even these latter regions are likely to show further concentrations of violence.

In another respect, however, the Gujarat violence of 2002 was remarkably different from previous patterns. This indicates that state-level factors can influence severely the intensity and spread of communal violence. Once the state government begins fanning sparks, allowing initial violence to go unchecked, the intensity of the extra-local trigger provoking rioting rises significantly. This kind of behaviour by governments is associated in the literature on ethnic violence with pogroms, not riots. *When riots become pogroms, the importance of state-level factors increases, compared to the role such factors plays in riots.*

How is a pogrom defined? Was the Gujarat violence of 2002 an example of a pogrom, or a series of pogroms, rather than an example of communal rioting?

According to the Brittanica dictionary, a pogrom is 'a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and

property of a religious, racial, or national minority'.[10] The key difference between riots and pogroms is that riots represent a violent clash between two civilian groups in which the government authorities are not demonstrably involved on either side, while in a pogrom the government either supports or condones the actions of the majority group.

Reports in almost all major Indian newspapers, with the exception of the vernacular press in Gujarat, show that once the spark was provided—the torching of a train containing cadres of Hindu militant organizations by a Muslim mob in Godhra on February 27[11]—the state government made no attempt to stop the killings, and even condoned them, at least in March, if not April.[12] That the state government officially approved or sponsored anti-Muslim violence is widely believed, but has not been conclusively proved. Future research may well provide a more definitive account of the government's role. What is unquestionable is that the state condoned revenge killings, which qualifies at least part of the Gujarat violence as a pogrom.

A great deal has already been written about what the state police or bureaucracy actually did.[13] But only India's courts will be able to establish whether the state government actually sponsored the violence. In the absence of such a determination, or unambiguous public statements by officials, the only route open to scholars is to infer the state's role from the conduct of its agencies during the riots, or from the statements of non-governmental organizations closely associated with the state government, but which the government never contradicted or questioned. In a formal resolution passed after the Gujarat violence began, the RSS, which remains the ideological and organizational centerpiece of the 'associational family' (or *sangh parivar*) to which the state's ruling party is affiliated, said: 'Let the minorities understand that their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority'.[14] Laws alone, the RSS implied, as it always has, cannot protect India's

9. See Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, pp. 104–5. No disaggregated statistics on the distribution of the Gujarat violence are yet available. I am currently engaged in putting together such data, but it will be some time before full, reliable results are known. What we can say for sure is that town-wise, Ahmedabad, Baroda and Godhra were the epicenter of the violence, and that region-wise, North and Central Gujarat saw the greatest concentrations of violence. It is statistically, of course, quite likely that even though three towns were the epicenter, the dispersion of violence was much greater than ever before in Gujarat.

10. *www.britannica.com*

11. This version of events in Godhra was widely believed by Gujarat's Hindus, though certain aspects were questioned in other quarters.

12. This is based on a close reading of the *Times of India*, the *Indian Express* and the *Hindustan Times*.

13. See especially Smita Narula, *We Have No Orders to Save You* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002).

14. 'Majority's Goodwill Vital: RSS', *The Times of India*, 26 March 2002.

minorities. This resolution, one should note, was not about the *political or economic welfare* of India's minorities, which as a pragmatic matter may arguably require working out some sort of equilibrium with the majority community. It was about the *physical safety* of the minorities. Many Muslims had already been killed in the roughly four weeks of violence preceding the RSS meeting. Yet no ministers of the Gujarat government, many of whom are members of the RSS, publicly criticized this resolution.

Consider another example. According to the chief of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), or World Hindu Council, Gujarat was 'the first positive response of the Hindus to Muslim fundamentalism in 1000 years'.[15] The reference here was to the arrival on the Indian subcontinent of Muslims from Central Asia and the Middle East, an event which, according to Hindu nationalist historiography, initiated a period of decline for Hindu civilization. Hindu decline is attributed to Muslim ascendancy, making violence against Muslims an historically justified act of vengeance—indeed, a pre-condition for civilizational renewal.

The Hindu right believes that its elected government did exactly what was required: namely, allowing violent Hindu retaliation against Muslims, including those who had nothing to do with the mob that originally torched the train at Godhra. Critics maintain that it is not the job of government, whatever its ideological persuasion, to allow public anger to express itself violently, *regardless of the provocation*. No elected government that has taken an oath to protect the lives of its citizens and to ensure due process of law can condone retribution. This is why the killings in Gujarat must be regarded as a pogrom. Should, ultimately, more detailed evidence emerge to support the claim that the state government actively sponsored the violence, this will make the judgment harsher. But even the existing evidence is sufficient to conclude that the Gujarat riots of 2002 constituted a pogrom.

State-level factors acquire a prominence in pogroms that cannot be assigned to them in riots. Local bureaucrats and police forces, after all, are under state government control in India. If the police and bureaucracy are directed to allow the killing of Muslims to continue, the outcome will inevitably differ from one in which state agencies attempt to halt the violence but are unable to succeed.

15. 'Parivar Wars', *Times of India*, 26 June 2002.

What, then, are the implications of Gujarat 2002 for my argument? If riots become pogroms, does the analogy of sparks and fires break down?

If anything, Gujarat 2002 illustrates two points. First, the intensity of sparks matters. Gujarat experienced a frighteningly large number of deaths, and a possibly larger spread of violence than ever before, touching in some cases villages' that had previously remained largely free from Hindu-Muslim riots. The second implication, however, is that even state-sponsored sparks of severely increased intensity do not inevitably lead to violence in all areas. These sparks can be extinguished where structures of local civic integration are sufficiently durable. The fact that Surat (and several other towns in South Gujarat and Saurashtra) did *not* explode in killings, even as Baroda and Ahmedabad *did*, supports the validity of the force-counterforce model implied in the analogy of sparks and fires. That the balance between force and counterforce can change over time does not detract from this central finding.

POPULAR BUT ONLY PARTLY RELEVANT: MODERNITY AND COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

The relationship between modernity and communalism or communal violence has long been debated in intellectual circles. Until the 1960s, modernization was viewed as an antidote to the problem of communalism. Since the late 1980s, however, anti-modernity theories have acquired striking popularity. India has had strong advocates on both sides. The customary view — that greater modernity would solve the problem of communalism—is often associated with Nehru and the Indian left. To the 'anti-secularists' or 'anti-modernists', however, modernity is a problem, not a solution.[16]

The Modernists

Modernization theory was an article of faith for most intellectuals in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1970s, it was clear that the expected erosion of ethnicity and religion was not taking place. Since then, the

16. Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance',*Alternatives*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1988), pp. 177–94; T. N. Madan, 'Secularism in Its Place', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, November 1987. Nandy's arguments have become especially popular in cultural studies, anthropology and history.

persistence of these identities, despite modernization, has been taken more or less for granted by scholars.[17]

Though few believe in the cruder versions of modernization theory today, a newer and more sophisticated form of the argument has emerged of late. It relies on 'human development' (as opposed to 'economic development'), especially higher literacy (as opposed to higher income alone), which is expected to generate greater tolerance and rationality and a lower reliance on biases and visceral interpretations of history. Sen, a prominent advocate of the human development school, holds up the Kerala-UP comparison as an example of how mass literacy can bring tolerance and rationality to the public sphere and political life.[18] Kerala, which at the *state* level of aggregation has suffered little communal rioting relative to other Indian states, had a literacy rate of 92 per cent in 1991, much above the national average of 52 per cent. By contrast, communal rioting is endemic in UP, whose literacy rate of 41 per cent in 1991was substantially below the national average.

If we take our comparison beyond UP and Kerala this argument breaks down. States with the lowest communal violence happen to be at opposite ends of the literacy spectrum. Kerala and Rajasthan are both among the least communally violent states. Kerala, as is widely known, is the most literate state in India.[19] However, Rajasthan, also communally peaceful, is among the least literate. At 38.81 per cent in 1991, its literacy rate was among the lowest in India. Moreover, in states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, high levels of communal violence coexist with high literacy rates. At 63.05 and 60.91 per cent respectively, the literacy rates of both these states were considerably above the national average in 1991.

Disaggregation at the town level also yields the same result. The RP3 or RP4 towns in the riot-prone list (Table 6.1) had literacy rates in 1991 ranging from 60 per cent (Aligarh) to 80 per cent and above (Bombay, Baroda). The national average for *urban* literacy was over 70 per cent in 1991.[20] Note also that rural India, with a considerably lower literacy rate than that of urban India, is not the primary site of communal violence.

In short, there is no systematic relationship between literacy and communal violence. For a variety of reasons, India ought to improve its literacy levels. But one should not expect that an increase in literacy will reduce communal conflict.

The Anti-Modernists

But do the data presented above support the arguments of anti-modernists? According to anti-modernists—or at least a subspecies that we might identify as anti-secularists—modernity in its various manifestations (rationality, urbanization, science and secularism) is the cause of higher communal violence, not the antidote. Three links are often proposed. First, modernity tends to flatten the radical diversity of traditional cultures. Many people resist homogenization, sticking instead to their particularistic roots—be they religion, language or culture. India is among the most diverse societies in the world. Attempts at homogenizing India are bound to lead to violence.

Second, modernity attacks the values of a religiously driven society like India, generating a reaction among the believers: hydroelectric dams, even in a modern age, cannot replace temples of worship.

Finally, and most importantly, modernity, according to anti-secularists, makes politicians immoral. Religion used to be a source of inner controls on human behaviour. For modern people nothing is sacred. In search of power and profit, a modern politician, if necessary, will use communal violence as a strategic tool. The agonizing immorality of inflicting deaths does not hold him back.

The anti-secularist view has become very popular. Its theoretical grandeur and popularity notwithstanding, it has never been put to a systematic empirical test. Nor have its proponents specified what might constitute an appropriate test for its validity, given that the

17. Among the first to deal with this possibility were Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Reinhard Bendix, 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, April 1967; and Rajni Kothari, 'Tradition and Modernity Revisited', *Government and Opposition*, Summer 1968. Building on this work, the most widely noted attack on the presumed power of modernity came from Samuel Huntington, 'The Change to Change: Modernization, Development and Politics', *Comparative Politics*, April 1971.

18. Amartya Sen, 'Threats to Secular India', *The New York Review of Books*, 8 April 1993. In later writings Sen has modified this view.

19. The statistics in this paragraph are from Ashis Bose, *Demographic Diversity of India: 1991 Census* (Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation, 1991), p. 62.

20. Based on Government of India, *India 1994* (Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1995), pp. 16–8.

modernity-versus-tradition view, strictly speaking, is an epochal view—it speaks of modern versus pre-modern eras. Testability requires shorter time-horizons.

The epochal sweep of the anti-secular argument may create problems of testing, but a proximate test is possible and it begins to show cracks in the anti-modernist argument. In his writings, Ashis Nandy, among the most influential and intellectually serious anti-modernists of our times, has consistently maintained that the *link between tradition and rural India* is considerably alive even today. Modernity has taken over urban, not rural, India. The countryside may eventually fall to the march of modernity, but it has thus far remained less afflicted by modernity: its traditional mechanisms for peacefully resolving religious disputes are, by and large, still alive. Nandy's argument against urban-industrial India is clear and forceful:

As India gets modernized, religious violence is increasing.... In the earlier centuries...inter-religious riots were rare and localized. ...(S)omewhere and somehow, *religious violence has something to do with the urban-industrial vision of life and with the political process the vision lets loose.*[21]

Does the urban-rural distribution of communal violence support anti-modernists? It is true that Hindu-Muslim violence primarily takes place in the cities, not in the villages. But, as shown above, it is also true that as much as 82 per cent of urban India is not prone to such violence. While an overall urban-rural distribution may suggest that modernity, proxied here by urbanization, may potentially be a cause, a greater disaggregation of violence—reflecting the intra-urban distribution—indicates that greater modernity cannot be the reason for higher communal violence.

Urban violence can be disaggregated in yet another way. It should be noted that all RP3 and RP4 4 towns are the so-called Class I cities of India—in other words, their populations are above 100,000. Even in the least violent (RP1) category, there are only two towns—Godhra and Sitamarhi—that were not Class I in the period 1950–95. Communal violence at its most intense and persistent seems to rock India's larger towns. Communalism may exist in Class II towns (50,000 to 100,000 people) and Class III towns (25,000–50,000), but tensions and small clashes tend not to lead to high levels of violence.

21. Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism...', p. 185 (emphasis added).

Can this observation support the anti-modernist claim? The largest cities, after all, are the furthest removed from traditional India, whereas smaller towns maintain, to a considerable extent, the intimacy of village India and its peaceful resolution of religious disputes.

Of the roughly 218 million urban people in India in 1991, 142.14 million (65.2 per cent) lived in Class-I cities. The population of the eight RP4 cities, all Class-I, was about 39.5 million, which was about 28 per cent of the total population in Class-I cities.[22] Thus, only 28 per cent of the overall population of Class-I cities lived in riot-prone areas. Even if we extend the definition of riot-proneness to RP3 cities, we find that the aggregate population living there was 37 per cent of the total Class-I population in 1991. In other words, 63 per cent of the most urban part of the country manages its life in a relatively peaceful manner, broken at worst by the occasional riot.

Thus, regardless of how we disaggregate the data on Hindu-Muslim violence since 1950, the anti-modernist arguments do not appear empirically sustainable. Their arguments are supported if we aggregate only the cases that look similar, not if we examine the variance that marks the universe of relevant cases. The anti-modernist argument is built upon excessive aggregation.

These tests are unlikely to satisfy the anti-secularists/modernists. Arguments about modernity, they may argue, are either not reducible to testing, or if tests are conducted, they should cover the pre-modern and modern *periods* of Indian history, not urban and rural India after 1950. By this logic, only the former can provide a conclusive test.

We only have impressionistic knowledge about communal violence in pre-modern India, whereas a great deal can be said about the modern period, especially the twentieth Century. The incomplete evidence that historians have produced shows considerable Hindu-Muslim rioting in the eighteenth Century,[23] though the levels of violence do not appear to be comparable to those reached in the twentieth Century.

Short of exhaustive data, is there a way of resolving the debate? Let us suppose for the sake of argument that the twentieth Century's levels of communal violence are indeed historically unprecedented. This assumption is very likely to be correct. But so long as we are

22. The numbers in these paragraphs are calculated from the 1991 census data.
23. See, for example, C. A. Bayly, 'The Pre-History of Communalism? Religious Conflict in India, 1700–1860', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2 (1985), pp. 177–203.

in a primarily conceptual realm, this assumption would not support the anti-modernist argument. For it may well be that the higher levels of communal conflict simply reflect the breakdown of pre-modern ascriptive hierarchies. The rise of equality and self-respect as a behavioural idea can be shown to have undermined caste hierarchies in much of India in the twentieth Century.[24] South India experienced such a breakdown in the first half of the twentieth Century; much of North India is experiencing it now. Is it that religious communities, like caste communities, in traditional India were placed in a hierarchical relationship of lesser and higher worth, of lesser and higher privileges, and such hierarchies were acceptable so long as notions of deference held cultural and ideological sway? If true, then the role of modernity is of a different kind, for it is not the intolerance of modernity or its penchant for cultural uniformity that causes communal conflict—or at least not these aspects of modernity *alone*—but rather modernity's attack on ascriptive hierarchies.[25] The former is the argument of anti-modernists, not the latter.

At any rate, if places that, *in spite of modernity*, do not have communal violence exist in large numbers, and such towns have found a way to live peacefully with inter-religious differences, *then the explanatory focus must shift from modernity to factors that make it possible for communities to live together and solve their problems in a peaceful way.*[26] These peacekeeping factors, rather than modernity *per se*, will then explain the spatial distribution of peace and violence.

COMPARING CITIES[27]

Following the reasoning above, my research project selected six cities—three from the list of eight riot-prone cities, and three classified

24. For what backward-caste movements represent, see Ashutosh Varshney 'Has India Become More Democratic?', *Journal of Asian Studies*, February 2000.

25. For a forceful argument on these lines, see Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

26. There is, in addition, the famous argument that some traditional associations—such as those based on caste or language groups—can provide many 'modern' goods (such as scholarships for college education), or perform highly modern roles (such as voter mobilization in party building in the context of electoral politics). Rudolph and Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition*.

27. This and the next three sections rely heavily on Varshney, 'Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond', *World Politics*, April 2001.

as peaceful—and arranged them in three pairs. Thus, each pair had a city where communal violence is endemic, and a city where it is rare or entirely absent. To ensure that we did not compare 'apples and oranges', roughly similar Hindu-Muslim percentages in the city populations constituted the *minimum* control in each pair. The first pair—Aligarh and Calicut—was based on population percentages only. The second pair—Hyderabad and Lucknow—added two controls to population percentages, one of previous Muslim rule and a second of reasonable cultural similarities. The third pair—Ahmedabad and Surat—was the most tightly controlled. The first two pairs came from the North and South. The third came from the same state of Gujarat, sharing history, language and culture, but not endemic communal violence. All of these cities, at this point, have a population of above 500,000, and the biggest, Hyderabad, is a metropolis of over 4.2 million people.

Why was similarity in demographic proportions chosen as the minimum control in each pair? The answer allows us critically to evaluate another popular thesis about the causes of Hindu-Muslim violence.

Both in India's popular political discourse and in theories about Muslim political behaviour, the size of the minority community is considered highly significant. Many politicians, especially those belonging to the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), who have often subscribed to the idea of 'Muslim disloyalty' to India, have argued that the demographic distribution of Muslims makes them critical to electoral outcomes. In 197, out of India's 545 parliamentary constituencies Muslims constitute more than 20 per cent of the electorate. In a first-past-the-post system, where 30 per cent of the vote is often enough to win a seat in multi-party contests, these percentages make Muslims electorally highly significant.[28] The higher the percentage of Muslims in a given constituency, argue BJP politicians, the greater the inclination of mainstream political parties to pander to their sectional/communal demands, and the lower the incentive, therefore, for Muslims to build bridges with Hindus. Thus, according to this argument, 'Muslim appeasement', based on the significance of numbers in a democracy, is the cause of communal conflicts in India.[29]

28. Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 196.

29. L. K. Advani, leader of the BJP, interviewed in *Sunday*, 22 July 1990.

That Muslim demography has political consequences is, however, not an argument confined to the Hindu nationalist BJP. Leading Muslim politicians also make a demographic claim, though they reverse the causation in the argument. The higher the number of Muslims in a city or town, they argue, the greater the political threat felt by the leaders of the Hindu community, who react with hostility to legitimate Muslim anxieties about politics and identity. An unjustified, even self-serving, opposition on the part of Hindu leaders, they argue, is the source of communal hostilities.[30] Both extremes of the political spectrum, therefore, rely heavily on demography for their explanations of communal violence.

These popular arguments are shared by social scientists as well, though their reasons are different. It has, for example, been argued that when a city/constituency has a Muslim majority or plurality, Muslims typically favor Muslims-only, confessional parties, not centrist, inter-communal parties.[31] Muslims support centrist parties when their share of the population/electorate is small in a given constituency. Smaller numbers make it rational to seek the security of a large, powerful, mainstream party.

To test the validity of these arguments, the project compared three pairs of cities where similarity in demographic proportions coexisted with variance in political outcomes—one peaceful and one violent.

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The pre-existing local networks of civic engagement between the Hindus and Muslims are the single most important proximate cause explaining the difference between peace and violence. Where such networks of engagement exist, tensions may flare up and small clashes may occur, but they get regulated and managed; where they are missing, such tensions and clashes can lead to endemic and ghastly violence. As already stated, these networks take two forms: *associational forms of engagement* and *everyday forms of engagement*. Both forms, if inter-communal, promote peace, but the capacity of the associational forms to withstand high-intensity sparks—such as India's partition in 1947, the televised demolition of the Ayodhya mosque by Hindu militants

30. Syed Shahabuddin, a prominent Muslim leader, has often made this argument in lectures, discussions and political speeches.
31. Rudolph and Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi*, p. 195.

in December 1992, the torching of a train in Godhra—is substantially higher.

What mechanisms link civic networks and communal conflict? And why is associational engagement a sturdier bulwark of peace than everyday engagement?

Two mechanisms connecting civil society and communal conflict can be easily identified. First, by promoting communication between members of different religious communities, civic networks often make neighbourhood-level peace possible. Routine engagement permits people to form temporary organizations in times of tension. These peace committees, consisting of members of both communities, policed neighbourhoods, scotched rumours, provided information to the local administration and facilitated communication between communities during crises. Neighbourhood peace committees were difficult to form in cities where everyday interaction did not cross religious lines, or Hindus and Muslims lived in highly segregated neighbourhoods. In such segregated towns, such committees could be imposed from above by the local administration, but they were often ineffectual. Sustained prior interaction or cordiality allowed appropriate, crisis-managing organizations to emerge from below.

The second mechanism reveals why associational forms of engagement are sturdier than everyday forms in dealing with ethnic tensions. If vibrant organizations serving the political, economic, cultural and social needs of the two communities exist, the support for communal peace not only tends to be strong, but can also be more solidly expressed. Inter-communal business organizations survive because they link the business interests of many Hindus and Muslims, not because neighbourhood warmth exists between Hindu and Muslim families.

Organized civic networks, when inter-communal, better withstand powerful sparks—partitions, civil wars, desecration of holy places—by constraining the strategic behaviour of local politicians. Leaders who polarize Hindus and Muslims for political gain can tear the fabric of everyday engagement through the organized might of criminal gangs. All violent cities in the research project displayed alliances between politicians and criminals. Organized gangs could easily disrupt neighbourhood peace, often causing migration from communally heterogeneous to communally homogenous neighbourhoods. People moved for the sake of physical safety. Without organized gangs, large-scale riots that produce and tens and hundreds of killings are most unlikely, and without the protection afforded by politicians, such

criminals cannot easily escape the law. Brass has rightly called this arrangement an institutionalized riot system.[32]

In peaceful cities—something Brass's focus on riots and violence alone could not detect—an institutionalized peace system exists. When organizations such as trade unions, associations of businessmen, traders, teachers, doctors and lawyers, and at least some cadre-based political parties are routinely integrated, countervailing forces are born. Associations that would lose from a communal split work for peace, making not only their members, but also the public at large, aware of the dangers of communal violence. Local administrations are far more effective in such circumstances. Civil society organizations, for all practical purposes, become the ears and arms of the local administration.

In riot-prone cities rumours and skirmishes, often strategically planted and spread, turn quickly into riots. In peaceful cities, the relationships of synergy between officials and communally integrated associations help to nip rumours (as well as small clashes and tensions) in the bud. Under such circumstances, politicians do not succeed in polarizing communities by provoking communal violence. After a time, they may not even attempt to do so. Not polarizing the people to engineer violence becomes the institutionalized common sense of the town. Figure 6.7 represents the argument diagrammatically. It is the 'spark' part of the model where state politics are most relevant.

This argument, it should be clarified, is probabilistic, not law-like. It indicates the odds; exceptions to the generalization could exist. Indeed, pending further empirical investigation, law-like generalizations on communal violence may not be possible at all. For example, a state bent upon communal pogroms, deploying the might of its police forces, can indeed succeed in stoking communal violence, notwithstanding the existence of communally integrated associations. Gujarat 2002 came rather close to this frightening scenario. To put the matter generally, some states, if unchecked by India's central government, may end up producing pogroms rather than riots. My argument, therefore, would be less applicable to *pogroms* than to *riots*, and even less applicable to *civil wars*.

Perhaps the best way to understand the relationship between civic life and political shocks is to use a meteorological analogy. If the civic

32. Paul Brass, *Theft of an Idol* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).
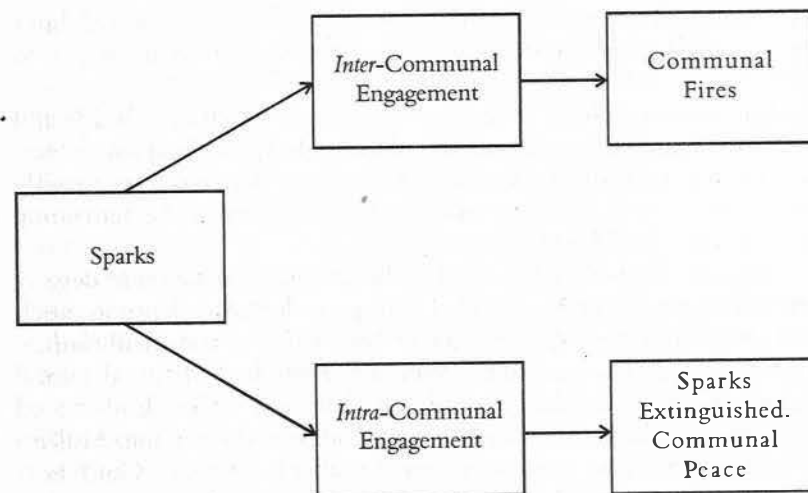

FIGURE 6.7: How Different Forms of Civic Engagement Affect Outcomes from Communal Provocation

edifice is inter-communal and associational, it stands a good chance of surviving ethnic earthquakes that rank quite high on the Richter scale (a partition, a desecration of an important holy place). If inter-communal and quotidian, structures of civic engagement can be brought down by earthquakes of smaller intensity (defeat of a communal political party in elections, police brutality in a particular city). And if engagement is only intra-communal, not inter-communal, small tremors (unconfirmed rumours, victories and defeats in sports) can unleash torrents of violence. A multireligious society with few interconnections across religious boundaries is very vulnerable to communal disorders and violence.

In the end, the intensity of the spark, not just the nature of civic relations, matters. Despite this chapter's emphasis on local factors, state politics remains important. The latter can deliver very severe jolts.

EVIDENCE THAT CIVIL SOCIETY MATTERS

Similar Provocations, Different Responses

The two-route process outlined above marked all three pairs in the project. In the peaceful town in each pair, civic links between the

Hindu and Muslim communities, combined with the *use* of such links by the local administration, prevented tensions from turning into riots.

Let me concentrate only on the first pair of cities, Aligarh and Calicut. Aligarh figures in the list of the eight most riot-prone cities; Calicut has not had a single riot in this century. Both cities are roughly 36 to 38 per cent Muslim, an overwhelming part of the remaining population being Hindu.[33]

Between 1989–92, when the Hindu nationalist agitation to destroy the Babri mosque in Ayodhya led to unprecedented violence in much of India, both cities experienced rumours, tensions and small clashes. But the final outcomes were very different. In Calicut, the local administration was able to maintain law and order. Unfounded rumours circulated in the city that pigs had been thrown into Muslim mosques. Similarly, there were rumours that the famous Guruvayur temple, a site of great veneration for Kerala's Hindus, was attacked by Muslims. Such rumours have led to riots in several Indian cities, and have frequently done so in Aligarh. In Calicut, the peace committees, and the press, helped the administration quash rumours. The storm of the Ayodhya agitation, the biggest since India's partition, and one which left hundreds dead in several cities, left Calicut unscathed.

The Ayodhya agitation plunged the city of Aligarh into horrendous violence. Unlike in Calicut, where newspapers neutralized rumours by investigating them and accurately reporting the facts, Aligarh's local newspapers printed blatant falsehoods to incite passions. Two of the largest-circulation Hindi newspapers wrote in lurid detail that Muslim nurses, doctors and staff of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) hospital had killed Hindu patients in cold blood.[34] Some Hindus were indeed killed outside the university campus,[35] but nobody was murdered in the AMU hospital.[36] But the rumours were

believed, and gangs of Hindu criminals went on a killing spree. Some of them stopped a train just outside the city, dragged Muslims out, and murdered them. The killings were under-reported by the local press. These newspapers were later reprimanded for unprofessional behaviour by the Press Council of India, a government-appointed watchdog. The damage had already been done. Gruesome violence rocked the city for several days, leading to over 70 deaths and many more injuries.

Aligarh's local mechanisms for coping with the exogenous shock of the Ayodhya agitation were remarkably fragile, as they had repeatedly shown themselves to be in the past. The criminals who engaged in killings were not brought to book. They were not only protected by politicians; they also had remarkable connections with the local media—Muslim criminals with the Urdu press, and Hindu thugs with the Hindi press. Effective peace committees could not be formed at the city-level in Aligarh, for it was difficult to get the Hindu nationalists and Muslim politicians together. Rumours would often be started, and played upon, by political organizations. Instead of investigating rumours professionally, the press printed them with utter recklessness.

Contrast this situation with Calicut. In Calicut, two points about the mechanisms for keeping the peace were common to all accounts furnished, in interviews with the author, by administrators who had served in Calicut between 1989 and 1992. These accounts were consistent with those provided by officials who had been posted in Calicut in the mid-1980s and had dealt with communal tensions. First, politicians of all parties in Calicut helped establish peace in the city, instead of polarizing communities, as they had in Aligarh. Second, city-level peace committees were critical to the management of tensions.[37] They provided information to the administration, became a forum for people from all groups to speak and express their anger, and provided links all the way down to the

33. Calicut also has a small Christian population.

34. *Aaj*, 10 December 1990; *Amar Ujala*, 11 December 1990.

35. 'For an Aligarh of Peace', Interview with District Magistrate A. K. Mishra, *Frontline*, 22 December 1990, pp. 22–3.

36. Interviews with: Aligarh Muslim University Vice-Chancellor M. Naseem Farooqui, Delhi, 15 July 1994; several AMU professors, August 1994; and local journalists, August 1994. For a thoughtful review of all such reports appearing in local Hindi newspapers, see Namita Singh, 'Sampradayitka ka khabar ban jana nahin, kahbron ka sampradayik ban jaana khatarnak hai', *Vartaman Sahitya*, September 1991.

37. Interviews in Trivandrum with: Amitabh Kant, District Collector, Calicut (1991–4), 20 July 1995; Shankar Reddy, Police Commissioner, Calicut (1991–4), 22 July 1995; Siby Matthews, Police Commissioner Calicut (1988–91), 21 July 1995; K. Jayakumar, Collector, Calicut, 21 July 1995; Rajeevan, Police Commissioner, Calicut (1986–8), 21 July 1995. Politicians of the Muslim League and BJP confirmed their participation in peace committees. The political leaders interviewed were: Dr Muneer, Muslim League MLA since 1991, 23 July 1995; K. Sreedharan Pillai, President, BJP District Committee, Calicut, 25 July 1995.

neighbourhood level, where smaller peace committees were also formed by citizens.

In Aligarh, on the other hand, those committees that have emerged on the basis of local initiative have tended to be intra-religious, not inter-religious. They are formed at the neighbourhood level to protect co-religionists from potential attacks by other communities. They do not—and are not designed to—facilitate communication with other communities. They serve instead to raise the perception of risk and harden the attitudes of those who participate in them. Members of these committees take turns policing their communities. The process forms a very different kind of consciousness than if the committees were inter-religious. Intra-religious committees are, by definition, not based on inter-religious trust, but on a lack of such trust. Moving within one's own community, hearing rumours that no one can verify or disprove, staying up in the middle of the night for weeks together, collecting firearms and other small weapons to ensure that retaliation is swift if attacks are made—these activities of intra-religious committees fuel, and are reflections of, a communal consciousness, not a consciousness that builds bridges.

The Variety of Civic Networks

Why did the two cities respond so differently? Why did politicians of all kinds cooperate in Calicut, but not in Aligarh? Most of all, why did even those politicians of Calicut, like the Hindu nationalists of the BJP, who would benefit from Hindu-Muslim polarization, not inflame communal passions, and instead aid peace-making efforts? The BJP leader of Calicut admits that Hindu-Muslim polarization would serve the BJP's political interests by consolidating the Hindu vote behind the BJP, in marked contrast to the current situation, where the vast majority of the Hindu vote is divided among non-communal parties. But he also voices his party's aversion to systematically initiating the polarization process. The party perceives a high political cost if it is seen to have undermined local peace.[38]

To understand why the BJP is unwilling to polarize Calicut on religious lines, one needs to survey the texture of civic life in Calicut. Hindu-Muslim civic integration is so deep in Calicut (and many

38. Interview, Sreedharan Pillai, President, BJP District Committee, Calicut, 25 July 1995.

would argue, in the state as a whole) that polarization is a highly risky strategy. If a party is shown as clearly linked with destroying the decades-long Hindu-Muslim peace, it stands a good chance of being penalized by the electorate. The reverse is true in Aligarh, where the weakness of cross-cutting links opens up space for communal politicians to wreak havoc.

Consider first the quotidian forms of citizen engagement in the two cities. Nearly 83 per cent of Hindus and Muslims in Calicut often eat together in social settings; only 54 per cent in Aligarh do.[39] About 90 per cent of Hindu and Muslim families in Calicut report that their children play together, compared to only 42 per cent in Aligarh. Close to 84 per cent of Hindus and Muslims in the Calicut survey visit each other regularly; in Aligarh, only 60 per cent do, and that too, infrequently.

Aligarh's Hindu-Muslim interactions are comparatively thin. Aligarh's statistics on all of these interactions would be much lower if we had concentrated only on the violent neighbourhoods. The few peaceful but integrated neighbourhoods show that politics has not destroyed civic interaction in all parts of the town. Some of the neighbourhoods manage to buck the town's prevailing trend of violence. It should be noted, however, that an overwhelming proportion of respondents over the age of sixty reported that their neighbourhoods were much more integrated in Aligarh in the 1930s and 1940s than they were in the 1990s.[40] Migration to communally homogenous localities began in the 1930s, as politicians started using thugs to spread violence. Neighbourhood-level intimacy was unable to withstand, let alone offset, the depredations of the emerging politician-criminal nexus.

What about the associational forms of engagement? Much like Tocqueville's America, Calicut is a place of 'joiners'. Associations of all kinds—business, labour, professional, social, theatre, film, sports, art, reading—abound. From the ubiquitous traders' associations and Lions and Rotary Clubs, found in almost all towns in India, to the otherwise rare reading clubs', head-loaders' and rickshaw-pullers' associations and even something like an art-lovers association—

39. Unless otherwise reported, the statistics here and below are from the survey conducted in Calicut and Aligarh. For the methodology, see Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, Appendix One.
40. Forty per cent of the sample in our survey was 60-plus in age, which allowed us to collect 'recalls' of the 1930s and 1940s.

citizens of Calicut excel at joining clubs and associations. Religiously based organizations exist, as they do in Aligarh; what is distinctive is the extent of inter-religious interaction in non-denominational organizations.

Consider the economic life of Calicut city. Merchandise trade is the heart of Calicut's economy. The city of 700,000 people in 1995 had an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 merchants and traders,[41] and about 100,000 people are partially or wholly dependent on trade. It is a rare trader who does not join a trade association. These associations—representing everyone from foodgrain merchants to bullion dealers—are, in turn, members of the Federation of Traders Associations (*Vyapari Vyavasayi Ekopana Samithi*).

In 1995 as many as eleven of the 26 trade associations that were registered with the Federation had Hindu, Muslim (and Christian) office-bearers: if the President of the Association was from one community, the General Secretary was from the other. These associations function as non-partisan bodies. As one rice dealer put it, 'We don't want to enter politics because our unity will be broken. We have debates in our association, so conflicts, if any, get resolved.' Moreover, such is the depth of engagement that many transactions are without any formal contracts. 'Our relationships with Muslim businessmen are entirely based on trust. Payments as large as Rs. 10 to 15 lakhs [$30,000–$35,000] are sometimes due. We send bills, but there are no promissory notes valid in the courts of law. ... There is no breach of trust.'[42]

Aligarh also has a Traders Association (*Vyapar Mandal*). In the late 1980s, it had about 6,000 members. In the 1970s it had even acquired a fair number of Muslim members, after some local Muslim families had acquired increased capital through remittances. The Association, however, developed a history of infighting on whether it should support, and work for, a political party. In the 1980s it was finally split into two bodies: a 'secular' organization, and a 'non-secular' one. The non-secular faction joined the BJP. Muslim traders headed towards the secular faction.[43]

Why cannot Aligarh develop an economic symbiosis between Hindus and Muslims? Unlike trade-based Calicut, Aligarh has a significant industrial sector. Aligarh is among the largest producers of locks in India. It is impossible to estimate the number of people working in Aligarh's lock industry. No surveys have been conducted.[44] We know, however, from ethnographic work that workers are both Muslim and Hindu, and so are the firm owners. We also know that an inter-communal form of civic engagement does not exist. Of late, rotating credit societies have emerged.[45] But these are intra-Muslim societies. They build trust within communities, not across them.

Even if the businessmen are not integrated, are the workers? Trade unions hardly exist in Aligarh. The local branches of national trade unions have decrepit offices, with no staff and little data. Trade unions, however, thrive in Calicut. The largest unions are linked to two major national trade union federations: CITU (Centre for Indian Trade Unions), which is affiliated with the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress), which is linked to the Congress Party.[46] Both of these unions are inter-communal. Calicut does have a Muslim political party, the Muslim League, which regularly wins general elections. It also sponsors a trade union, which is neither as large as the local units of CITU or INTUC, nor as vibrant. Muslim workers by and large vote for the Muslim League in assembly elections, but they tend typically to join INTUC or CITU for protection of their labour rights. The Marxist and atheistic character of CITU does not stop them from joining CITU's unions, if they think that CITU will fight more effectively for better rights and wages. In the process, they come into contact with Hindu

---

41. Calicut has no industry except tile production. Most units are small; there are nine factories and about 2500 workers in all.

42. Interview, V. Ramakrishna Erady, Wholesale Rice Dealer, Calicut, 25 July 1995.

43. Interview, Mohammed Sufiyan, ex-President, Vyapar Mandal, Aligarh, August 1995.

44. It is in the interests of industrial employers to underreport how much labor they employ: under Indian laws, the small, informal sector does not have to pay pension and other benefits to its workers. Official statistics are therefore unreliable. Foucault's concept of 'popular illegality', as one keen observer puts it, has caught the fascination of Aligarh's lock manufacturers. Elizabeth Mann, *Boundaries and Identities: Muslim, Work and Status in Aligarh* (New Delhi: Sage, 1992), p. 83.

45. Ibid., pp. 101–2.

46. Reasonably precise data on numbers of unionized members and their religious distribution is almost impossible to obtain. Estimates based on interviews are all that is available. The description below is based on interviews with labor leaders in Calicut, especially a long and detailed interview with M. Sadiri Koya, State Secretary, INTUC, 4 August 1993.

workers. Inter-communal links are formed, and the work force avoids a Hindu-Muslim split.

A final and highly distinctive aspect of associational life in Calicut concerns its social and educational activities. The city has had an array of popular theatre and science societies. While film clubs have been popular all over South India, societies devoted to taking theater and science to the masses are rather uncommon. Even more unusual are reading clubs. Kerala today has the highest literacy rate in India. 'Reading rooms', a unique Kerala institution, accompanied Kerala's remarkable rise in literacy, and helped to form deep social networks between the 1930s and 1950s. Young people from most communities would get together several times every week to read newspapers and cultural and political books. The fascinating story of the birth and role of reading clubs has recently been told by Menon:

Between 1901–31, the…growing numbers of schools and the rise in literacy found expressions in the numbers of reading rooms that were established both in the countryside and in the towns.… One of the novelties in the organization of reading rooms was the (communitarian) drinking of tea, as one person read the newspapers and the others listened.… Tea and coffee lubricated discussions on the veracity of the news and of political questions, and a new culture emerged around the reading rooms. It was premised upon sobriety and knowledge rather than drunken companionship transcending consciousness which characterised the toddy shops. The importance of tea and coffee lay in the fact that they were recently introduced beverages and did not fit into any taboos regarding what could be shared between castes. Tea shops and reading rooms all over Malabar provided common place for people to meet and to drink together regardless of caste (and community).… The reading rooms emerged as central to both formal attempts at organization by the left wing of the Congress as well as local initiatives.[47]

The cumulative outcome of the reading room movement is worth noting. In our Calicut sample, as many as 95 per cent of Hindus and Muslims reported reading newspapers—a statistic that is likely to be higher than in most cities of the world's richer countries. Calicut today, with a population of over 700,000, has 20 newspapers and magazines![48]

47. Dilip Menon, *Caste, Community and the Nation: Malabar 1900–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995), pp. 145–9.

48. The state of Kerala has 'a library or a reading room within walking distance of every citizen'. K. A. Isaac, 'Library Movement and Bibliographic Control in Kerala: An Overview', paper presented at the International Congress of Kerala Studies, Trivandrum, August 1994.

In contrast, while most Hindus in the Aligarh sample read newspapers, less than 30 per cent of Muslims did so. Information travels in the Muslim community largely through word of mouth. As links with the other community are almost non-existent, a few people can often spread nasty rumours, and make them stick.

In summary, the civic lives of the two cities are a world apart. So many Muslims and Hindus are interlocked in associational and neighbourhood relationships in Calicut that peace committees at times of tension are simply *an extension of pre-existing local networks of engagement*. A considerable reservoir of social trust is formed from the associational and everyday interactions between Muslims and Hindus. Routine familiarity facilitates communication between the two communities; rumours are quashed through better communication; and all of this helps the local administration keep peace. In Aligarh, ordinary Hindus and Muslims do not meet in a civic setting— economic, social, or educational—where mutual trust can be formed. Lacking the support of such networks, even competent and well-meaning police and civil administrators are helpless to halt an already unfolding riot.

The other pairs of cities studied as part of this research project witnessed similar processes. The difference was not an absence of religious tensions, provocative rumours, or small clashes. These were present in all of the case-study locations. The presence of the inter-communal networks of engagement was decisive; intra-communal networks did not contain, or stop, violence.

ENDOGENEITY AND THE UNDERLYING CAUSATION

Before we accept the argument about civic engagement, two more questions must be explored. First, how can one be sure that the causation was not the other way round? Did communal violence destroy the Hindu-Muslim civic networks in riot-prone towns, or did the presence of such networks prevent violence from occurring in those that were not prone to riots? Do we have a case of endogeneity here? Secondly, is the underlying causation different from proximate causation? Are there historical forces that explain the vitality or absence of civic networks? What emerges if we turn the independent variable of the short-run analysis—civic networks—into a dependent variable, to be explained historically?

Historical research conducted in the cities studied in this project demonstrates that civic networks—quotidian and associational—determined the outcome in the *short to medium* run, but in the *long* run inter-communal networks were politically constructed. Much of the associational pillar of India's civic structure was put in place in the 1920s during the movement against British rule. The 1920s was a transformative moment because mass politics emerged in India under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership. Politics before then were highly elitist. The Indian National Congress before Gandhi was largely a lawyers' club, which advanced constitutional arguments in the Queen's English.

Gandhi seized control of the movement in 1920 and quietly revolutionized it by arguing that the British were unlikely to give independence to India until the Indian masses were involved in the nationalist movement. The Gandhi-led nationalist movement was interested not only in political independence from the British, but also the social transformation of India. Gandhi argued that independence would be empty unless India's social evils were addressed, drawing attention especially to three primary objectives: Hindu-Muslim unity, abolition of untouchability, and *swadeshi* (buy Indian, wear Indian, think Indian). To these were added several other projects of social transformation: the upliftment of women and 'tribals', labour welfare, prohibition, and so on. In the process, a great variety of organizations came into being between the 1920s and the 1940s. The associational structure of India prior to Gandhi was minimal. The foundations of India's civic order were laid by the Gandhian shift in the nationalist movement.

The biggest organization, of course, was the Congress itself, which during the 1920s led the movement politically and developed cadres all over India. The pursuit of social transformation created a second set of organizations, the voluntary agencies. The Congress was primarily political; organizations that dealt with education, women's issues, the welfare of tribals and 'untouchables', and the movement promoting homespun cloth were concerned with social projects.

The civic order that emerged was not uniform across India. The movement had greater success in forging Hindu-Muslim unity in towns where a Hindu-Muslim cleavage had not already emerged in local politics. British India's towns had experienced local government elections since the 1880s. If local politics emphasized some other cleavages—for example, caste cleavages among Hindus, or Shia-Sunni

divisions among Muslims—then the Congress and Gandhian social workers found it easier to bring Hindus and Muslims together in local civic life. If, however, Hindu-Muslim differences were the dominant axis of local politics, the nationalist movement could not build integrated organizations with the same success. Once, however, such organizations were established, they acquired relative autonomy from competitive politics based on the mobilization of ethnic, linguistic, or religious identities.

In summary, the role of inter-communal civic networks has been crucial for peace. A space for them was created by forms of mass politics that emerged in the 1920s all over India.[49] Historical reasoning, therefore, requires that we draw a distinction between proximate and underlying causation. For problems of endogeneity, this reasoning suggests a two-fold conclusion as well. The truly exogenous element in a long-run, historical perspective was a transformative shift in national politics. In the short- to medium-run, however, the civic structures put in place by the nationalist movement have been a constraint on the behaviour of politicians, for they acquired a life and logic of their own.

CONCLUSIONS

I have made two arguments in this paper. The first argument is methodological. Whether comparisons in Indian politics should be made at the state, or some other, level depends on the nature of the problem at hand. I can think of many questions for which the best analytical results can be generated, and significant advances in knowledge and understanding made, if we use the state level of India's federal system as the unit of analysis and comparison. Communal riots and peace, however, only partly belong to this category. A focus on

---

49: This reasoning suggests an important difference between this research and the approach pursued in Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). In Putnam's formulation, the existence of social capital differentiates good governance from bad. The relationship between social capital and communal violence, however, yields a different formulation. If my argument is correct, civic networks determine the presence or absence of riots in the short to medium run, but are the products of deliberate acts of political construction over a much longer period. Putnam's study appears to emphasize the independent role of social capital both in the short and long run.

local-level mechanisms of peace and violence, supplemented by state-level factors, makes the greatest sense. Hindu-Muslim violence in India tends not to be spread evenly throughout the length and breadth of a given state. Even the most violent states have more towns and cities that are peaceful than are violent. Moreover, villages on the whole have very few Hindu-Muslim riots. Riots are heavily concentrated in some cities and towns, and the best insights are gained by focusing on the local-level mechanisms than on macro-level causes. The latter are not irrelevant. But the existing literature's overwhelming preoccupation with them has left an important puzzle unresolved: why do some towns and cities repeatedly have riots, whereas other do not? This question is unanswerable if we concentrate on state-level factors alone.

My second argument is substantive. Once we concentrate on the city-level mechanisms, we find that state politics can best be conceptualized as a 'spark', which activates the local mechanisms of peace and violence. Peaceful cities have institutionalized peace systems working through *inter*-communal civic engagement—especially in formal associations, but in everyday forms of engagement as well. Riot-prone cities have primarily *intra*-Hindu or *intra*-Muslim civic engagement, which undermines peace and transforms rumours and tensions into violence and riots. These networks thus perform very different roles, even when confronted with the same spark, trigger, shock or jolt. Differences in state politics, history, and administration often determine what these shocks and jolts will be, how often they will be supplied and, most importantly, with what intensity. An integrated civil society can take a lot of such shocks, but not in unlimited quantities. The intensity of the shock matters. So, therefore, does state politics.

7

In Varying States of Decay

Anti-Corruption Politics in Maharashtra and Rajasthan

Rob Jenkins[1]

This chapter examines India's two most influential anti-corruption movements—one based in the state of Rajasthan, the other in Maharashtra. Both groups have received an unusually large amount of attention from journalists, academics, government agencies, advocacy organizations and international development institutions. Throughout most of the 1990s, the two movements shared a remarkable number of traits, displaying similarities in terms of organizational form, operational method, approach to institutionalization, and political style. It is the existence of these similarities, as much as the successes that each movement has achieved, that has caused them to be bracketed together in public discussions about corruption and the means by which it can best be combated.