Case Studies: Example of Communal Violence in India

Partition, Bombay Riots, Gujarat,
Background: Islam in India

- By 1290, nearly all of India was under the loose domination of Muslim rulers.
- Two and a half centuries of internecine war among various Indo-Islamic Hindu states followed, after which the Mughals established an Empire in the early 16th century that stretched from the North-West Frontier Province to Bengal and down to the Deccan.
Islam in India

- The attempts of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb to extend his control to South India coupled with his brutal treatment of his subjects led to a crisis of empire.
- The Empire lasted until 1858, when it was finally eliminated by the British.
The liberation of India from the British regime in 1947 was the result of a long drawn struggle carried on by different sections of the Indian people irrespective of caste, creed or regional affiliations by forging a united front against the colonial rule.
Background

- This magnificent moment, however, was marred by the colossal tragedy of Partition.
- At the root of partition lay distinct antagonism between the two principal communities of the sub-continent, Hindus and Muslims.
Background

- From the point of view of Pakistan, their nation state was formed in opposition to a Hindu-majority India.
- The reason for the formation of Pakistan was that the Muslims, as a minority, would be forever at the mercy of the Hindu majority in a democratic polity.
Background

- This seemed a fate they could not abide and, therefore, Muslims needed a country of their own, specially as they came to view themselves as a nation different from the Hindus.
Background

- Thus, for Pakistan, the partition of India represented a division of the sub-continent between a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu India.
- This division was between those parts of India which were predominantly Muslim and those which were predominantly Hindu.
Why the Divide?

- There is a great difference between the Hindus and Muslims in tradition, in history and in their attitude towards life political, social and economic.
- The Muslims derive their inspiration from the Quran and Hadis, and the Hindus from the Vedas.
Why the Divide?

- The Muslims have got their traditions from the Prophet, the Caliph and Imams, while the Hindus have inherited them from the Ramayana and the Mahabhart and the Gita.
- The construction of fearful Hindu beliefs about Muslims and in opposition the emergence of Muslims ethno-religious idiom and practices, religiously justify social segregation and theories of Hindu Nationalism in India.
Two Sacred Texts
Why the Divide?

• The division of humans into mutually exclusive group identities of tribe, nation, caste, religion and class seems to serve two important psychological functions.
• The first is to increase the feeling of well being in the narcissistic realm by locating one’s own group at the centre of the universe, superior to others.
Why the Divide?

- The second is that it is also undeniable that sharing a common ego-ideal and giving one’s own group a super individual significance can inspire valued human attributes of loyalty and heroic self-sacrifice.

- For the psychoanalyst it is the second function of division into ethnic groups, namely the need to have other groups as contains for one’s disavowed aspects which is of greater significance.
What do you think of when you see this color?
What about this color?
Analysis

- What do your answers tell you about the effectiveness of communalism?
- At what age did you start thinking/having/knowing these thoughts?
Communalism and Class Division

- To make matters more complicated the communal divisions of Indian society in many respects overlapping the class divisions.
- Muslim community, having lost political power, was reduced to general state of impoverishment, whereas the Hindu retained their hold on trade and commerce.
Communalism and Class Division

• The Indian bourgeoisie was predominantly Hindus, and although there were millions of poor Hindus, the Muslim community remained economically backward.

• It was only too easy to transform an economic resentment into a communal issue.
Communal Violence - Reasons

- The issue of communal violence is a very grave in the history of any nation.
- Violence is a part of man’s social activity.
- Social scientists maintain that man as individual is seldom hostile.
- He neither commits murder nor go for war. Social man does both.

+ society =
Communal Violence

- It is only after men get together as the individual interests when they are organized into groups.
- Then group interests collide and conflict follows. Ancient Sages had praised the violence as manifestation of life force and specifically its creativity.
Game

1. Find people who have a similar taste in music as you.
   • Speak with them about the music. Ask them why they like it, they’re favorite songs, albums, etc.

2. Now, find people with a different taste in music than you.
   • Speak with them about the music. Ask them why they like it, they’re favorite songs, artists, etc.
• Which group was easier to speak with?
• Why do you think this is?
• How can you apply this to the idea of communalism?
• Does it teach you more about the practice?

What does this image suggest?
Questions

- What do you think is man’s inherent state?
- Do you think the moment people are in a social situation they will divide based on differences?
- Is it just as easy to talk and bond over similarities than differences?
- If you went back to the same group that had a different music taste than you, would you find other things you had in common? Could you still be friends?
- How does this relate to communalism?
Communal Violence

• The major focus of cultural approach of ethnic violence has been of the cultural construction of fear with the help of rhetorical processes, symbolic resources and representational forms and demonized, dehumanized or threatening, ethnically defined ‘other’ has been constructed.
Communal Violence

- “Culturalist” approach specifies the manner in which fears and threats are constructed through, narratives, myth, rituals, commemorations and other cultural representation.

- Once such ethnically focused fear is constructed, the ethnic violence no longer seems random or meaningless but all too horrifying.
Consequently, a cultural conflict is erupted because culture is considered to be the totality of the values, beliefs, traditions and heritage that confer an identity on each individual.

In its potential for explosive violence, culture could be compared to a nuclear reactor.
Continued

- Once communalism was discovered as an instrument to achieve power, it snow-balled by itself.
- The enfranchised Muslims and members of other sections were made to “vote communally, think communally, listen only to communal election speeches judge the delegates communally, look for constitutional and other reforms only in terms of more relative communal power and express their grievances communally.”
Continued

• The separate electorates became a political barrier in a society already beset by social and economic differences and prepared a fertile ground for rivalries and antagonism between the two communities.
Examples Of Communal Violence During Partition

- **Direct Action Day 1946 – 4,000 dead**
- This riot stands as the deadliest Muslim-Hindu riot in history.
- Direct Action Day, also known as the Great Calcutta Killing, happened on August 16, 1946, and ended with 4,000 people dead and almost 10,000 people homeless.
- The riot occurred in a place now known as Kolkata, a city in the province Bengal in British India, which at the time was known as Calcutta.

Following slides information from: [http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-deadliest-riots.php](http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-deadliest-riots.php)
Continued

- During the 1940s Constituent Assembly of India, the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League were at odds when the British government was opting for independence of the Indians.
- However, this plan did not satisfy everyone, mainly the Muslims who were long seeking an independent and separate Pakistan; however, this plan was shot down without thought.
The riot began on the 18th day of Ramadan, and was planned to be peaceful, but turned out to be anything but.
How it Started

- With plenty of unhappy Muslims because of the decision for Indian independence, Hindus living within Calcutta were attacked on a massive level.
- Muslims used clubs, knives, guns, and other weapons to kill any Hindu they saw, including young children and women.
- Some even say that women were beaten, raped, and buried alive.
The unhappy rioters would even stone offices and set various businesses on fire.

To get revenge, the Hindus then began to attack Muslim mosques as well as the Muslim slums.

The fighting not only caused death, but thousands of injuries as well as shortages within the city.

Those who survived were often left homeless and had to wander to look for food as well as some place of safety.
How it Ended

- The rioting seemed to end and die down on the 21st day of Ramadan, and at this time an estimated 4,000 people were dead, though some sources have said the death toll was around 7,000-10,000.

- The fighting was so bad that even police forces from both sides were unable to control it, let alone stop it completely.
Continued

- Many times, the police forces became those who picked up the dead bodies and put them alongside the road to avoid anymore trauma while the fighting continued.
- On August 22, the riots finally ended after British troops were sent in to calm the violence.
- During the riots, many people left their homes, but those who did not leave were subject to the violence. With over 100,000 injured, the riots didn’t end in Calcutta.
The End of Direct Action Day

- In fact, Direct Action Day sparked various other riots throughout India.
Another Example

- Personal Story: During partition of India in 1947, my family was living in Sheikhupura a district next to Lahore on the western side in West Punjab, now in Pakistan.
- My father was a Govt. contractor who owned the furniture shops in Sheikhupura and Lahore.
Continued

- We were four brothers living with our parents at the time of partition. My older brother aged 19 had come to visit us from Lahore who was a resident student at Dayal Singh College there.

- Our town (Sheikhupura) remained peaceful, when the communal riots had been occurring in various cities of west Punjab such as Rawalpindi, Multan, Amritsar, Lahore and Gujranwala since March, 1947.

- This continued up till August 17, 1947 when the Boundary Commission awarded the Sheikhupura district to Pakistan.
Continued

- The situation in this district began to worsen rapidly.
- All petrol duties to non-Muslims were stopped.
- Without valid ground, curfew was imposed on the 24th August, and the Biloach Military was brought in to parade the town after the 20th August.
• On the 25th August, Hindu and Sikh houses were burned in Gurdwara Bazar.

• A false alarm was raised of an attack on Muslim mohalla by Sikhs.

• All this was done to incite Muslims to fall upon Sikhs.

• On the same day about noon hours, a vigorous attack was made on Ramgarha, which had a sikh population Of about 1200. Sikhs were being chased.
The Muslim mob was followed by the military. When Sikhs gave a fight the Muslim mob retreated.

Then the military took the lead and took up positions against Hindu-Sikh areas.

Within few hours, the Hindu-Sikh population of this area had been killed, and the houses were in flames.
Muslim mobs then swelled and spread out to attack on the different parts of this town. Street after street was surrounded by Muslim mobs, military and police. The looting, burning and murdering continued.
Communalist Tragedy

- The Day India Burned – Part 1
- The Day India Burned – Part 2
Bombay Riots: Background

- From December 1992 to January 1993, the Bombay riots took prevalence in various cities.
- Both Muslims and Hindus were killed during the riots, which were said to be attended by 150,000 people, if not more.
- With so many people crowding together, it’s no wonder that deaths and injuries occurred. Various stories of the riots have been used in movies as well as in literature.

Following information from this source: [http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-deadliest-riots.php](http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-deadliest-riots.php)
How it Started

The riots were fueled by news of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, which was a mosque in Ayodhya, India by the Liberhan Commission.
Continued

• The demolition of this mosque sparked a lot of anger in the city, as many believed that the government would protect the mosque from being torn down.

• However, this didn’t happen, and as news spread of the demolition, more and more people gathered to express their emotions.
Riots Continued

- People flooded the streets, often attacking public property, including buses.
- As crowds and violence grew, the police force grew violent as well.
Continued

- Several shots were fired, which killed many and the Muslims and Hindus began to fight amongst themselves.
- After this, riots sparked in Dongri, in which Hindus revenged against the Muslims after Hindu workers were killed.
- The violence continued and the police force grew more restless, continuing to kill rioters. However, rioters continued their violence as well.
Some Analysis of the Riots

- The Violence Continues…
How it Ended

- Once the riots died down after the Hindus and Muslims came together to save the Islamapura mosque, the damage in various cities was already done; $3.6 million worth of damage.
Continued

- By the end of it all, 900 people were dead and about 2,000 were injured. However, soon after the Bombay riots ending, the Bombay bombings occurred that killed about 250 people.
Continued

- While riots are never a good memory, various movies have been made to depict the rioting that occurred, the most recent film being *Slumdog Millionaire*. Other movies have also used the riots are part of the plot.
Gujarat Violence: Background

- Communal riots between Hindus and Muslims erupted in Ahmedabad in 1969. At least 1000 people had died during this riot. At the time there was a dispute over the leadership of the Congress party between Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai. There were suggestions that violence was deliberately engineered to discredit the chief minister of Gujarat who was a supporter of Mr Desai.
Continued

• They were followed by riots in Uttar Pradesh with periodic violence erupting elsewhere.
• Hindu-Muslim riots broke out in Jamshedpur and Aligarh in 1979 and in Moradabad in 1980.
2002 Gujarat Violence

- The 2002 Gujarat violence was a series of incidents including the Godhra train burning and the subsequent communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in the Indian state of Gujarat.
- On 27 February 2002, the Sabarmati Express train was attacked at Godhra by a large Muslim mob as per a preplanned conspiracy.

Following slides source: http://www.globalmarathi.com/globalmarathi/20120228/5687216501233096334.htm
Events

- 58 Hindu pilgrims, mostly women and children returning from Ayodhya, were killed in the attack.
- This in turn prompted retaliatory attacks against Muslims and general communal riots on a large scale across the state, in which 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were ultimately killed and 223 more people were reported missing.
Damages

- 523 places of worship were damaged: 298 dargahs, 205 mosques, 17 temples, and 3 churches.
Damages

- Muslim-owned businesses suffered the bulk of the damage. 61,000 Muslims and 10,000 Hindus fled their homes. Preventive arrests of 17,947 Hindus and 3,616 Muslims were made. In total 27,901 Hindus and 7,651 Muslims were arrested. Nearly 10,000 rounds of bullets were fired in police shootings that killed 93 Muslims and 77 Hindus.
Consequences

• The nature of these events remains politically controversial in India. Some commentators have characterized the deaths of Muslims (but not the Hindus) as a genocide in which the state was complicit, while others have countered that the hundreds of Muslim and Hindu dead were all victims of riots or "violent disturbances".
Effect on Women

- An international fact finding committee formed of experts from US, UK, France, Germany and Sri Lanka reported, "sexual violence was being used as a strategy for terrorising women belonging to minority community in the state."[140]
- Taking a stand decried by the media and other rights groups, Nafisa Hussain, a member of the National Commission for Women accused organisations and the media of needlessly exaggerating the plight of women victims of the riots.
Continued

- This was strongly disputed as Gujarat did not have a State Commission for Women to act on the ground.
- The newspaper Tribune reported that "The National Commission for Women has reluctantly agreed to the complicity of Gujarat Government in the communal violence in the state."
- The tone of their most recent report was reported by the Tribune as "lenient".
Video

- Shots of Gujarat Violence
Conclusion: Questions

- How do you feel after learning/watching?
- Do you think that thinking/acting communally without violence is as wrong as with violence?
- Why do you think Gujarat/Mumbai/Bengal were places infamous for communal violence?
- Do you fear communal violence in the future?