

Finally, what is the truth? As far as I can see the truth is that there are two overarching histories of Hindu-Muslim relations—with many local variations—which have been used by varying political interests and ideologies and have been jostling for position for many centuries. In times of heightened conflict between the two communities, the Hindu nationalist history that supports the version of conflict between the two assumes pre-eminence and organizes cultural memory in one particular direction. In times of relative peace, the focus shifts back to the history emphasizing commonalities and shared pieces of the past. Many of the cultural memories which were appropriate during the conflict will retreat, fade, or take on new meaning, while others that incorporate the peaceful coexistence of Hindus and Muslims will resurface. And so it goes, on and on.

TWO

The Riot

My first personal experience of Hindu-Muslim violence was at the time of the partition of the country in 1947, when ferocious riots between the two communities engulfed many parts of the subcontinent, especially in the north. I was nine years old at the time and we lived in Rohtak, a small town some fifty miles west of Delhi, where my father was an additional district magistrate, "the ADM Sahib." As the killings and looting raged uncontrollable in the villages and towns of Punjab, more and more members of his extended family poured into Rohtak as refugees from the cities of Lahore, Lyallpur, and Sialkot, where they had lived for many generations and which now lay in the freshly created state of Pakistan. The rooms and verandas of our house became sprawling dormitories, with mats and durries spread close to each other on the floor as uncles, aunts, and cousins of varying degree of kinship lived and slept in what for a child was an excitingly intimate confusion. The kitchen, over which my mother had willingly abdicated all control, hummed the whole day with the purposeful activity of women, and there was not a time of day when a few bodies were not seen huddled in nooks and corners in various stages of sleep.

With the loss of their homes and places of work, with the snapping of long-standing friendships and other social ties, there was little for the refugees to do in our house except seek comfort from the sharing of each other's riot experiences. This they did in groups which continuously changed in their membership as they shifted from one room of the house to another. As a small boy, yet privileged as the son of a father who gave them food and shelter, I could sit in on any group of adults, though at its edge, without being shooed away and told to go and play with other children. I became aware of their bitterness about the leaders of a newly independent India, Nehru and especially Gandhi by whom they felt most betrayed. Gandhi was the pet ob-

ject of my grandmother's aversion, and many of my uncles and aunts shamelessly encouraged her as she held forth in her toothless, gummy voice, surprisingly similar to the Mahatma's own, on Gandhi's many affronts to Hindu sentiment and advanced salacious speculations on the reasons for his love of the "Mussulman."

It was also the first time I became aware of the Hindu hate of the Mussulman—the destroyer of temples, devourer of cow flesh, defiler of Hindu womanhood, rapers and killers all! Mussulmans were little better than animals, dirty and without self-control, who indulged all the demands of the senses, especially the violence of the body and pleasures of the flesh. Up to this time I had known Muslims as occasional colleagues of my father, some boys in school and, especially, as indulgent servants. In Sargodha, where my father was posted before he was transferred to Rohtak, I was particularly fond of Imtiaz, his Muslim orderly, who took me on forbidden bicycle rides to the bazaar. Once, seeing him get his forearm covered with an elaborate tattoo, I too had insisted on one—to the subsequent shocked disapproval of my parents. Then there was Fatima, a teenage girl who looked after me from the ages of four to seven, and who was almost on par with my mother as the object of my first desires and longings. Fatima was a patient and very often a willing participant in the games I invented for both of us. She was a valiant liar on my behalf whenever one of my undertakings ended disastrously. Half girl, half woman, Fatima delightfully forgot to be consistently one or the other when she was with me. Hitching up her *salwar*, she would scamper up a guava tree to pluck the best fruit from the top branches. Her maternal persona taking over once she was back on ground, she would clean the guavas for me and hold the salt in the open palm of her hand while I ate. Fatima was an indispensable assistant on our fishing expeditions to the small pond that lay in the grounds of the house. She helped me make the fishing rod from a twig, a piece of string, and a bent pin. She kneaded the dough we brought and made it into small pellets which were used as bait. In spite of my never catching any fish she did not destroy my illusion that there were indeed some lurking under the scummy green film that covered the pond.

It is not as if I were unaware that the Muslims were somehow different, although I do not recollect ever hearing the statement, "He [or she] is a Mussulman," as a marker of a person's identity in our home. I knew Imtiaz and Fatima could not enter the kitchen where Chet Ram, the Brahman cook, held sway, because they were Muslims. The Muslim parts of Sargodha were subtly different from the Hindu *mohallas* concentrated around the bazaar. In the early evening, the cooking smells wafted out into the alleys were more

pungent—the odor of mutton fried with onion, garlic, and ginger paste, with coriander and cumin, seemed embedded in the very walls of the houses. Old men with henna-dyed beards sat out on stringed cots, smoking their hookahs and murmuring their incessant gossip. The women, covered from head to toe in flowing white and black veils, glided silently through the alleys, followed by small children scurrying to keep up. There were also fewer stray dogs in the alleys, the ritually unclean animal being far less tolerated by the Muslim than by the indifferent Hindu.

As a little child, I had registered the differences but never felt the need to either evaluate or explain them to myself. It was only now, in Rohtak, that the family's "war stories" from the riot-torn towns of Pakistan began to retrospectively shape my early observations in the direction of prejudice. Two of these I recount below. For a time these stories threatened to become the core of my memory of "the Muslim" although, in the end, I like to believe, they did not overlay the child's love for Imtiaz and Fatima, did not replace it with fear, anger, and aversion. When I was carrying out this study in a Muslim locality in Hyderabad and engaging groups of Muslims in conversation, I became aware that within myself "the Muslim" was still somewhat of a stranger. The strangeness was not due to my ignorance of him but to my being singularly affected by someone I did not know. The ambivalence of fear and fascination from my past with which I regarded Muslims had not vanished; I was not indifferent to the subjects of my study. I became aware that my first impulse was to defend against the threat the Muslims posed to my boundaries by strengthening and fortifying them as a Hindu. Then, in a kind of reaction formation, my tendency was to move in the opposite direction by consistently placing a more positive, "humane" gloss on Muslim statements and actions than on Hindu ones. Ambivalence, however, also has a positive aspect. It prevents the crystallization of ideological convictions and an approach to the study with preconceived notions firmly in place. Convictions, as Nietzsche remarked, are more damaging to truth than lies.

The Story of a Cousin Told by His Elder Brother

Sohan Lal killed himself on the way to Rohtak. He threw himself in front of a train. I could not stop him. We had made all the arrangements for the escape from Lyallpur. A Muslim truck driver was ready to drive the three hundred miles to the border for six hundred rupees. Sohan Lal had been married for only five months. He had a very pretty wife.

On the day of our departure we went out to make the final arrangements

with the truck driver. The house was attacked in our absence. When we came back we hid on the roof of a Hindu neighbor's vacant house. We watched five husky Muslims in our courtyard. They had long butcher's knives stuck in their *lungis*. They were methodically looting the house. The corpse of our youngest brother—we were three—lay in the courtyard, the head completely severed from the trunk. One of the Muslims sat on a chair in front of the corpse, directing the looters. They were bringing out the packed trunks from inside the house and throwing them in front of him on the ground. The ground was cluttered with wedding *sarees* and colored silk blouses. I can still see the shining brass pots lying on their side reflecting the rays of the afternoon sun. We could not move. I was transfixed by the sight of the leader's hairy torso of which every inch was covered by a thick black fur. Then two of the Muslims went inside the house and brought out Sohan Lal's wife and the leader pulled her to him. She sat on the man's lap, naked to the waist, her petticoat ripped open, and the Muslim's hairy hand, like a giant black spider, covered her thigh. After laying her on the ground next to our brother's corpse, where drops of blood still oozed from the severed neck, they raped her in turn. I was holding Sohan Lal fast, my palm covering his mouth. If he had made the slightest sound the Muslims would have discovered us. But I do not think Sohan Lal would have done anything. His legs were buckling under him and I had to hold him up. After they finished, they ripped open her belly. Sohan Lal never said a word after it was all over and the Muslims had gone. In the days it took us to cross the border he remained mute. I tried my best to make him talk, to make him shed some of his grief in tears but his soul remained far away. He killed himself just before we reached Rohtak.

The Cousin from Lahore

We did try to retaliate, at least the younger Sangh [Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh] members like me. And of course the Sikhs. A police inspector told me of going to a Sikh village where there was a reported massacre of the Muslims. As the police entered the village they passed under a kind of welcoming arch which was a rope strung out between the poles. To this rope, attached with short pieces of string, were the circumcised penises of all the Muslim men who had lived in the village, hanging there as if they were small eels drying in the sun. In our own neighborhood there were three Muslim houses. Two of the families went away, leaving only Gul Mohammed behind. He was silversmith, a quiet graying man who kept to himself and did not really have any friend among his Hindu neighbors, although he had lived in the same

street for over fifteen years. We knew him and his family—a wife and three young children—cursorily, nodding to him as we passed by his shop located on the ground floor of his house. In his faded, embroidered skull cap, often working late into the night, his head bent down in concentration as he fashioned silver bracelets or ornamental anklets with delicate strokes of a hammer, he was a familiar figure to all of us. The young men from our street who went out during the riots to join Hindu mobs operating in other parts of the city, averted their eyes when they passed by his shop. They had left Gul Mohammed alone, not because of any particular affection for him but because of the established pattern among the rioters, both Hindu and Muslim. A mob always foraged wide from its home base, killing and plundering in other distant parts of the town, leaving people of the other community living in its own area unharmed. It is easier to kill men who are strangers, to obliterate faces which have not smiled on one in recognition. It is easier to burn houses which have never welcomed one as a guest. So we kept inside our houses when a Hindu mob from Anarkali came to our alley for Gul Mohammed. Later, I was told they broke open the door and one by one, Gul Mohammed's family was dragged out into the alley where they were trussed up with ropes and left lying on the ground. From the open windows of the house, string cots, low wooden stools, and sleeping mattresses were thrown out onto the ground where they were gathered into a pile. The doors and window shutters of the house were chopped into kindling and added to the heap which was set on fire. One by one, the children were picked up and thrown into the burning pyre. Gul Mohammed's wife was the last one to be burnt alive, having been first forced to watch her husband and children die in the agony of the flames. The shop was then broken into and methodically stripped of the silverware. Within an hour our alley was silent again, only a charred and still smoking heap left to mark the end of Gul Mohammed's family. Whenever possible, this is the way Hindu mobs preferred to kill Muslims—by burning them alive. A Muslim who is burnt and not buried after death is automatically consigned to hell fire.

Even as I retell the stories of my relatives from memory, I know I cannot trust that they adhere strictly to facts. I am, of course, aware of the small embellishments I have made for the purposes of making the narratives more aesthetically compelling. I wonder if in the original stories there were details from other accounts of riots, incorporated by the teller to increase the emotional impact of his or her own story. In their first versions, some of the more gruesome details were prefaced by "I am told," a qualification which disap-

peared in the retellings. My later, adult experience of riot accounts has taught me that the *talk* of atrocities which one was told about (and then even personally witnessed) is much more than their actual occurrence. The importance of the rhetorics of violence, as the British psychologist Peter Marsh has observed, is not necessarily that they illuminate actual action but that they substitute for it.¹

I am also unsure how much I can trust my own memory not to make additions from its store of images, picked up from narratives of riots, even as I tell the tale. The truth of these stories, then, lies in the archetypal material they contain rather than in the factual veracity of particular details. The riots brought to the surface (as they continue to do every time they occur in a fresh edition), both at the level of action and of imagination, certain primitive fantasies of bodily violence which are our heritage from infancy and childhood. Prominent among these fantasies are those relating to sexual mutilation—the cutting off of male genitals and the sadistic fury directed against female breasts which are hit repeatedly by iron rods, stabbed with knives, and lopped off by scythes and swords. At one level, the castration of males and the cutting off of female breasts incorporate the more or less conscious wish to wipe the hated enemy off the face of the earth by eliminating the means of its reproduction and the nurturing of its infants. At another, more unconscious level, in the deep regression and the breakdown of many normal defenses occasioned by the widespread violence and the fear of one's own imminent death, the castration of the enemy may be viewed as a counterphobic acting out of what psychoanalysis considers as one of the chief male anxieties: that is, it is a doing unto others—castration—what one fears may be done to one's self. The mutilation of the breast may be similarly derived from the upsurge of a pervasive infantile fantasy—the fantasy of violent revenge on a bad, withholding breast, a part of the mother whose absence gives rise to feelings of disintegration and murderous rage.

Sexual violence undoubtedly occurred during the partition, although far below the level enshrined in collective memory. On a more sociological level, the chief reason for the preponderance of specifically sexual violence in the partition riots in the north is that, as compared to many other parts of the country, the undivided Punjab was (and continues to be) a rather violent society. Its high murder rate is only one indication of a cultural endorsement of the use of physical force to attain socially approved ends such as the defense of one's land or of personal and family honor. There is now empirical evidence to suggest that the greater the legitimization of violence in some approved areas of life, the more is the likelihood that force will also be used in

other spheres where it may not be approved. In this so-called cultural spillover effect there is a strong association between the level of nonsexual violence and rape, rape being partly a spillover from cultural norms condoning violent behavior in other areas of life.² Given this violent tradition and its associated cultural norms, the riot situation further undermined, if did not completely sweep away, the already weak norms curbing male aggression. It is then quite understandable that sexual violence during the partition riots could reach levels of brutality which have been rarely approached in subsequent riots in other parts of the country.

It is only now that I can reflect more composedly, even tranquilly, to give a psychological gloss to the stories of the riots. At the time I heard them, their fearful images coursed unimpeded through my mind which reverberated wildly with their narrators' flushes of emotion. There was a frantic tone to the stories, an underlying hysteria I felt as a child but could only name as an adult. After all, my uncles, aunts, and cousins had not yet recovered from the trauma of what had befallen them. The partition horrors stalked their dreams. They were still not free of the fear of losing their lives, a fear that had clutched them for weeks. They had lost their homeland, where they had been born and lived, which constitutes such an important, albeit unconscious, facet of our identity. With the loss of their homes, their sense of personal identity was tottering—had become "diffused" in Eriksonian terms³—while they had yet to begin the process of adapting this fragmenting identity to a new homeland.

It is sobering to think of hundreds of thousands of children over many parts of the subcontinent, Hindu and Muslim, who have listened to stories from their parents and other family elders during the partition and other subsequent riots, on the fierceness of an implacable enemy. This is a primary channel through which historical enmity is transmitted from one generation to the next as the child, ignoring the surface interpretations and rationalizations, hears the note of helpless fury and impotence in the accounts of beloved adults and fantasizes scenarios of revenge against those who have humiliated family and kin.⁴ The fantasies, which can later turn from dimly conscious images to concrete actions during communal conflagrations, are not only a vindication of the parents and a repayment of the debt owed them but also a validation of the child-in-the-man's greater strength and success in overpowering those who had shamed his family in the distant past. Given the strong family and kinship ties all over the country, a Hindu's enmity toward the Muslim (and vice versa) is often experienced by the individual as a part of the loyalty due to or (in the case of a more conflictual parent-child relation-

ship) imposed by the parents. Later, as the child grows up, the parental message may be amplified by the input of one or more teachers. As Rajesh, one of the subjects of this study who we will encounter at some length later, remarked: "We had a history teacher in school. He was the type who loved his subject. He would keep the text book aside and teach us the lesson extempore—like stories. When he used to tell us about the inhuman atrocities committed by Muslim invaders on the Hindus, I remember I used to get so angry that I felt like walking out of the class and beating up a few Muslim boys."

Leaving aside the stories, I am uncertain whether even my direct childhood memories of the riots, with their vivid images which carry such an intense charge of *noesis*, the certainty of knowing, can be completely trusted to represent reality or are even wholly mine. For instance, I "remember" going with my father to the railway station one night. Was it Rohtak? Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan were camped on the station platform. Many had moaned in their sleep and a couple had woken up screaming (I now imagine) to escape from their persistent nightmares. We had walked through the sea of uneasy sleepers, their faces discolored by the dim violet glow of the neon tubes hanging high above the platform. Sitting silently among empty canisters and tattered bedrolls, shrinking at our approach, the children did not cry and rarely whimpered, their large dark eyes full of a bewildered hurt and (again I imagine) the memories of stabbed and hacked bodies lying in the streets of towns and villages which now belonged to Pakistan. One particular image has become permanently etched: a four-year-old boy with a running nose, the yellow-green mucous, a thin plaster of salted sweat on the upper lip, dense with buzzing flies which the child did not lift up his hand to drive away, afraid perhaps of giving offense to even the smallest of living creatures.

I never personally witnessed the kinds of violence described in the family stories during the few days of rioting in Rohtak. For we lived at the outskirts of the town, in Civil Lines, where the spacious bungalows of the *sahibs* of the Raj and a few elite non-officials were located. The Civil Lines families went rarely into town, preferring the company of each other. Our social life was focused on the Rohtak Club and was carried out in its high-ceilinged rooms with their covered padded chairs, the wooden dance floor, and books on big game hunting and mores of obscure Indian tribes lying unread on the shelves of teak bookcases. Sometimes in the evening, when children were not allowed in, I had watched my father and his friends sitting outside on the lawn from behind the cactus hedge surrounding the club. In their white drill trousers and their cotton bush shirts, they looked fresh and cool, radiating an

aura of peace and quiet authority which made me feel safe and quietly sleepy. A part of this effect was achieved through the sensory background of their setting—the settling dusk, the smell of freshly watered grass, the low murmurs of waiters gliding between the clubhouse and the widely spaced bridge tables bearing iced lemon and orange squashes. And as they sat there, the upright garden lamps transforming the lawn into a dull yellow island surrounded by the brilliant Indian darkness from which only moths and fireflies ventured in as intruders, the silence disturbed only by the occasional dream cry of a peacock, they had looked remote from the dust, the color, and the noise of the town they administered.

I remember well the night the riot started. From the terrace, where most of the family gathered on hearing a continuous, muffled roar break the stillness of the night, I counted at least twenty separate fires within the span of an hour as Muslim homes and shops were burnt on that first night. By midnight, the night had the shimmering glow of a slow-burning coal fire, the overcast sky beginning to have the ragged crimson edge of an uneven and an unnatural dawn. Although on the following days the sounds of the riot coming from the town were blended into a low-pitched buzzing, not unlike the one near a beehive, I sometimes imagined I could distinguish the distant shouts of the mobs roaming the bazaars from the panic-filled screams of their victims.

We had enough company that night. The roof terraces of our neighboring bungalows were crowded with whole families come up to watch the distant fires. Angry cries of babies awoken from sleep mingled with excited shouts of discovery as fresh fires were sighted. There were animated exchanges across the roofs as to the exact location of a new fire and the possible reactions of the Muslims. On the whole, the onlookers were in a gay mood; there was feeling of respite from the petty concerns of daily life, a kind of relaxation which comes from the release of long pent-up tensions. "This is a lesson the Muslims needed to be taught! We should have put them in their places long ago!" was the general consensus.

Although the night air began to be permeated by the acrid smell of smoke, the fires were far away and the possibility of any danger to our own homes and lives remote. At the most, the distant threat gave all of us a tingling sense of excitement which heightened the gaiety of what was fast turning into a festive occasion.

For the children, and perhaps for the adults too, that first night of the riot thus had a quality akin to the day of the kite-flying festival at the onset of spring, when people throng the roofs and the clear blue of the sky is profusely dotted with kites in all their bright colors; the town resounding to the

battle cries of children as the men compete against each other, trying to cut the string holding a rival kite aloft with their own. The duels taking place in the town that night did not use paper kites as weapons, and the battle cries we heard so faintly were no mere expression of childish exuberance but declarations of deadly intent. Yet, in the safety of our house and surrounded by the family, an uncanny impression of the riot as a macabre festival persisted throughout the hours I spent on the roof.

When the riots were brought under control after three days, I remember that my father gave in to my persistence and promised to take me into the town the next morning to see their aftermath. I remember waking up early that day and looking out at the speckled dawn as the sun struggled with the first clouds of the season. The monsoon was a few days away and, my elbows resting on the window sill of my parents' bedroom, I watched its forerunners, dark fluffy clouds racing across the sky as imperious heralds. The morning had been different from others, smelling not only of the sun's warmth but also of budding grass shoots and the dark, far away thunder. The walk through Rohtak's bazaars with my father was disappointing. I had expected to find images from the stories I had heard take concrete form. I expected to see smoldering heaps, amputated limbs, cut-off breasts—which I pictured as pale fleshy balls without a trace of blood. The reality was oddly disappointing. Except for an occasional house with charred doors, missing windows, and smoke scars on its front, the bazaars presented the unchanging vista of a provincial town awakening to another day. There were the men vigorously (and loudly) chewing on marigossa twigs to clean their teeth and clearing their throats with much hawking and spitting. Others murmured their prayers as they bathed under the cool streams of water from public hydrants. The women hissed encouragement over naked babies held up above the gutter. Older children squatted by themselves, with that faraway look which bespeaks of an inward absorption in the working of one's bowels, a trance occasionally broken as they bent down to contemplate their own dirt.

Almost twenty years later, in 1969, when I was again a witness to another Hindu-Muslim riot, this time in Ahmedabad in the western state of Gujarat, I was surprised to hear essentially the same rumors I had heard as a child in Rohtak. Thus we heard (and in Rohtak believed) that milk vendors had been bribed by the Muslims to poison the milk in the morning. Four children were said to be lying unconscious and two dogs had died after having drunk of the poisoned milk. Apparently, most of the servants in Civil Lines who went into the town frequently had personally seen the dogs in their death throes. Women had hurried to empty out the pails of milk; sticky patches of white

soon spread to plaster the cobbled stones of the streets. We heard that Muslims had broken into grocery shops in the night and mixed powdered glass with the salt. A police van with a loudspeaker was said to be driving around the town, warning people not to buy salt. Both in Rohtak and Ahmedabad there was talk of large stocks of weapons, acid, and other materials needed for manufacturing bombs, cached in the underground cellars of mosques; of prior Muslim preparations for a slaughter of the Hindus being forestalled by the riot. In Ahmedabad there was the additional rumor of armed Pakistani agents seen parachuting into the city at night. Its Rohtak counterpart was the imminent attack by thousands of armed Meo tribesmen making a detour to the town on their way to Pakistan.

The fact that rumors during a riot take such dramatic and fanciful turns is not surprising. In a study of the ratio of rumors to actual events such as killing, rape, beating, harassment, property violation, and inconvenience among the Asians expelled from Uganda by Idi Amin, the relationship was strikingly linear.⁵ That is, the more threatening and dramatic the experience, the more likely it was to be a wellspring of rumor. At the high point of a riot, the content of the rumors is at its most threatening and the speed at which they circulate at its highest. For it is at this particular time when three of the four conditions for the generation and transmission of rumors—personal anxiety, general uncertainty, and topical importance—are at their highest level. The fourth condition, credulity, is no longer in operation since, at high levels of anxiety, disbelief in rumor is suspended, that is, rumors will be believed regardless how farfetched.⁶

Rumors, of course, also serve some less conscious purposes. Deriving from and reinforcing the paranoid potential which lies buried in all of us, they were the conversational food which helped in the growth of a collective Hindu body. They sharpened our awareness of our own kind and many, who though they lived in the same bazaar were relative strangers earlier, became brothers overnight. They made misers discover a forgotten generosity as they offered to share food with those who had none; neighbors who had little use for each other now inquired daily about each other's well-being. There is little doubt that rumors are the fuel and riots the fire in which a heightened sense of community is also forged. If I remember the Rohtak riots so vividly, it is not only because I was an impressionable child but also because of the deep sense of communion I felt with my family and the wider, although vague, entity of "the Hindus." The riots generated emotions which expanded my boundaries. They gave rise to exhilarating feelings of closeness and belonging to something beyond myself which I desperately wanted to

keep. My memory of the Rohtak riots, I recognize, is not free from a shameful nostalgia for a shining flower which sprang from the mean soil of decaying corpses and ashes left behind by arsonists' fires.

In undermining our familiar controls over mental life, a riot is often experienced as a midwife for unfamiliar, disturbing fantasies and complex emotions, such as both disgust and overwhelming sexual attraction for a member of the enemy community. The overcharged atmosphere of violence breathed day in and day out by a person lifts the lid on the cauldron of instinctual drives as civilized sensibility threatens to collapse before the press of instinctuality in both its sexual and violent aspects. Accounts of sexual violence during a riot, for instance, not only evoke the publicly acceptable reaction of horror but may also release the more hidden emotion of a shameful excitement which bespeaks instinctual desire in its rawer form. Besides the expression of moral outrage, riot violence can be subjectively used for an unwanted but wished for vicarious satisfaction of sadistic impulses, for the fulfillment of one's urge to utterly subjugate another human being, to reduce his or her consciousness to a reactivity of the flesh alone.

In fiction, this complex flow of subjectivity during a riot has been brilliantly captured by the Hindi writer Krishan Baldev Vaid in his novel *Guzra Hua Zamana* ("A bygone era"). Biru, the teenaged hero of the novel, together with his parents, his sister Devi, and Kumari, the young wife of a neighbor, who Biru has always lusted after with the innocence and ancient knowledge of a boy on the verge of manhood, has been given shelter by a Muslim friend, Bakka, during the partition riots in a small town in Punjab. As the marauding Muslim mob, consisting of many men Biru knows well, including Bakka himself, roams the streets at night in an orgy of looting, killing, and rape, the Hindu family cowers in the small dark room and a terrified Biru's thoughts flow in a full, barely controllable stream.

Even if I survive it will be as a cripple. Before pushing us out, Bakka will first cut an ear off everyone. Devi and Kumari will also have a breast chopped off. Perhaps he will also break one of my legs. What if all the others are killed and I survive! I will commit suicide. I know how to. Somewhere here there must be a rope. What if I am killed and the others live? Mother will surely kill herself. Or she will become mad. She will go around asking, have you seen my Biru? My innocent, naive Biru? What will probably happen is that we will all die and only Kumari will be left alive. Bakka will take her as his wife. Or as his slave. He will change her name. Sakina or Hafiza. I like Muslim names. Also Muslim

women. When Bakka comes to kill me I will say, don't kill me I like Muslim names and Muslim women. He will be so surprised by my courage that his uplifted hand will remain suspended in air. I'll say, I am half a Muslim. When I hear the call for prayers from the mosque I shiver all over. He will think I am making fun of Islam but I am really telling the truth. . . .

The killer will agree that I am a Muslim at heart. But this will not stop him from striking. If I was in love with a Muslim girl would I have converted for her sake? I certainly would have become a Muslim if she had asked. Lovers have faith not religion. . . .

The accounting will start once it is morning. The counting of corpses. How many Hindus, how many Sikhs. There must be a few Muslims too. The intention of killing ten of us for every one of them. On the other side (the Muslims would say) so many of ours were killed, why so few of them here? There they took out processions of our naked women, why has that not happened here? Strip off the clothes of their women! Tear apart their bodies too. In front of their men. And then parade them in the bazaar! In front of their impotent men! At least they will learn to fear God! There, we hear, they cut off the breasts of our women, their hair too. We also will not let them get away intact. Chop one off everyone! Shave their heads! And then kick them in the arse! These are the ones who would not let us touch them. They would not eat from our hands. Now force them to eat everything. Stuff it into their mouths! And say, go to your Hindustan! Why are so few orphans here? Why is the sound of the weeping of widows so low? Why are the heaps of rubble so small? Do not rest till all these accounts are settled. Avenge blood with blood! For a hurled brick, retaliate with a stone! Take vengeance on the son for the deeds of the father! . . .

And this cycle will continue, for centuries. It is better if it remains dark. Because the darkness of the day will be unbearable. Because when morning comes no one will be ashamed. No one will embrace. No one will console.⁷

Territory and Passion

The partition violence is commonly agreed to have been the most momentous event in the shaping of Hindu-Muslim relations in independent India. It is not as commonly recognized that it may not have been the memories of

this violence which have been passed down through the generations—traumatic as the violence was in its scale and intensity—but the *division* of the country into two states of India and Pakistan which has had the stronger psychological impact on many Hindus. The partition of India sharpened, if not gave birth to, the distinction between the secularist and the nationalist Hindu. As often happens, even for the same set of memories, the lessons drawn were quite contradictory. The secularist looked confidently to the country's future polity once this regrettable business of dividing the country was over. One of the most respected political figures of the post-independence era, Jai Prakash Narain, argued that it had been like two brothers fighting for separation. Once the separation had taken place and the parental assets were divided, the brothers would live in amity and fraternal harmony.⁸ The secularist was convinced that the burning embers of the partition conflagration were permanently extinguished. Its memories were gone forever and perhaps existed only in the nightmares of an older generation which would soon disappear. "It can never happen again," was the common refrain in the first twenty years after independence. The gates to religious violence were securely locked and the riots which took place occasionally were regarded like the fall of small pebbles in the aftermath of the big landslide. Men of goodwill among both Hindus and Muslims echoed the poet Iqbal's famous line, "Religion does not teach mutual enmity." Others maintained that it was only because of the machinations of the British that the partition riots took the gruesome turn that they did.

Most of all, the secularist pinned hopes about the end of Hindu-Muslim conflict on economic development. The position taken by Nehru, which for many years produced a remarkable consensus within India's political class and the Westernized intelligentsia fascinated by Marxism, was that industrialization of the country and the spread of the "scientific temper" through modern education would undermine the religious outlook of the people and consolidate secular values. Implied in this "modernity project"—a catch-all term for political democracy, scientific rationality, and philosophical individualism—were the notions that the tasks of economic development would absorb all the energies of the people, and any conflicts which arose as a consequence of this enterprise would be taken care of by the democratic processes.

For the Hindu nationalist, politically weak till the remarkable ascent of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its Hindutva movement in the last few years, the partition, with Jinnah's Muslim League successfully insisting on a separate state for the Muslims, was the final proof that Hindus and Muslims

were really two different nations as Jinnah had claimed. There was a basic opposition between Islam and Indian nationalism, and, given the right circumstances, Indian Muslims will want yet another separate state for themselves. As we shall see later, "They [the Muslims] want to create another Pakistan" is an emotionally powerful appeal in contemporary Hindu nationalist discourse.

There was, of course, a third Hindu, probably in a large majority till at least a few years ago. This was the indifferent Hindu for whom the Hindu-Muslim problem and the national identity question were simply not salient. Such Hindus continued to live in their faith with a traditional indifference—often confused with tolerance—toward the Other sharing their space, whether the Other was the Mussulman or the Isai (Christian).

National identities, we are told by political scientists, can be based on several defining principles of collective belonging: territory (e.g., Switzerland), ethnicity (e.g., Japan), religion (e.g., Pakistan), and ideology (e.g., the United States).⁹ Although territory is invariably a part of the idea of the nation-state, it does not have to be the defining principle in all cases. For instance, the notions of ethnicity in Germany or religion in Iran evoke greater political passions than territory. In India, the political scientist Ashutosh Varshney suggests, for both the secularist and the Hindu nationalist the defining principle in the idea of national identity is territory; "national unity" and "territorial integrity" are thus highly charged phrases in the Indian political discourse.¹⁰ In the secular imagination, the territorial notion of India, emphasized for twenty-five hundred years since the times of the Mahabharata, is of a land stretching from the Himalayas in the north to Kanya Kumari (Cape Comorin) in the south, from the Arabian Sea in the west to the Bay of Bengal in the east. These boundaries are coterminous with the "sacred geography" of the Hindu nationalist whose hallowed pilgrimage sites mark off essentially the same boundaries of the country, although the Hindu nationalist would go back much further into mythic history than two and a half millennia to date the origin of these sites. Varshney remarks:

Since the territorial principle is drawn from a belief in ancient heritage, encapsulated in the notion of "sacred geography," and it also figures in both imaginations [secularist and nationalist], it has acquired political hegemony over time. It is the only thing common between the two competing nationalist imaginations. Therefore, just as America's most passionate political moments concern freedom and equality, India's most explosive moments concern its "sacred geography," the 1947 par-

tion being the most obvious example. Whenever the threat of another break-up, another "partition", looms large, the moment unleashes remarkable passions in politics. Politics based on this imagination is quite different from what was seen when Malaysia and Singapore split from each other, or when the Czech and Slovak republics separated. Territory not being such an inalienable part of their national identity, these territorial divorces were not desecrations. In India, they become desecrations of the sacred geography.¹¹

Later we shall look in some detail at the psychological processes involved in the arousal of political passions around the issue of territorial integrity which, the Hindu revivalist seeks to convince the indifferent Hindu, is under grave threat from all Indian Muslims and not only from those clamoring for secession in Kashmir.

Profile of a Riot

As I now look back at the partition riots, I am aware that perhaps there are very few people who reflect on the past with the professional historian's perspective. For most of us, as the sociologists Howard Schuman and J. Scott have remarked, it is only the intersection of personal and national history that provides the most vital and remembered connection to the times we have lived through.¹² If the partition is a significant source of collective memory it is not only because the origin of a nation is emotionally a particularly charged time. As Maurice Halbwachs has observed, not all emotionally provoking events are memorable, only those which require considerable psychological adaptation.¹³ The partition events were not only unique and provoked strong emotional reactions but also required profound changes in behavior and beliefs of those affected by them.

Yet the memory of the deep experiences of those days grows dim as I write, like a dream which loses its experiential charge even as it is recollected and retold. Recollections of all I have heard and read about other Hindu-Muslim riots come rushing in to make my unique event part of a category, with the dulling of individual detail and highlighting of similarities which mark the birth of a category.

As a category, communal riots in India differ from other kinds of riots—student riots, caste riots, language riots, agricultural and labor rioting—in that they are the most violent and most difficult to control. They are the most virulent because the particular conflict, generally a blend of religious, politi-

cal, and economic aims, becomes imbued with religious ultimacy. In other words, the issues at stake become life and death issues through an arsenal of ideational and ritual symbols. Moreover, as we saw in the last chapter, both Hindu and Muslim religious cultures have a long tradition in specifying "the enemy" and, as in other religious cultures, their violent champions have an acceptable, even admired rationale for the violence unleashed in "defense." Communal riots also differ from other riots in that they rarely remain confined to one location so that within a few days or (given the speed and reach of modern communications) hours, they can engulf many parts of the country.

Leaving aside the difficult and contested question of their ultimate cause, the eruption of a riot is always expected and yet takes everyone by surprise. By eruption I do not mean that a riot is spontaneous and involves no degree of planning or preparation, but only that it generally takes place after a considerable degree of tension between the two communities has been built up. To change the metaphor, the riot is then the bursting of a boil, the eruption of pus, of "bad blood" between Hindus and Muslims which has accumulated over a few days or even weeks in a particular location. In some cities and towns—Ahmedabad and Hyderabad come immediately to mind—where the boil is a festering sore, the tension never really disappears but remains at an uncomfortable level which is below that of violent eruption.

Besides the ultimate cause, then, a riot has a period of *immediate tension* and a *precipitating incident* which have received much less attention than the more glamorous search for "ultimate" causes. The buildup of immediate tension occurs when religious identities come to the forefront because of a perceived threat to this particular social identity. The threat, a collective distortion of the meaning of a real event, makes members of the community demonstratively act through words and actions as Hindus, or as Muslims. In turn, the demonstration of this religious identity threatens members of the other community who, too, begin to mobilize their identity around their religious affiliation. Thus begins a spiral of perceived (or misperceived) threats and active counter postures which raises the tension between Hindus and Muslims. To give examples from some major riots: The recent demolition of Babri mosque was perceived as a threat to Muslim religious identity—a chain of mental associations leading from the razing of an unused mosque to the disappearance of Islam in India—which was then openly demonstrated against and, in turn, reacted to by a further consolidation and demonstration of a militant Hindu identity. The 1969 riot in Ahmedabad was preceded by a period of tension when members of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS)

began a campaign demanding the "Indianization" of Muslims and thus initiating a similar chain of mental associations and actual events. We saw that the threat to Hindus is generally around the issue of the country's territorial integrity which the Muslim seems to threaten either through a demonstrative identification with pan-Islamic causes or in the demand for a separate cultural identity, expressed through the insistence on maintaining Islamic personal law or in demanding a greater role for Urdu. Here the Hindu distortion of the threat takes place through an associative chain where such Muslim actions are imagined as precursors to a separate Muslim enclave, the creation of another Pakistan and, ultimately, the dreaded revival of medieval Muslim rule. For instance, the immediate tension which led to the Ranchi riots in 1967 was initiated by the state government's plan to raise the official status of Urdu which was perceived by the Hindus as a step down the road of Muslim separatism.

"Tension" of course, is too general a term to convey more than the most superficial of meanings. We need to further explore the contents and processes of this "tension" in our specific context of Hindu-Muslim rioting. What happens in the period of tension is that individuals increasingly think of themselves as Hindus or Muslims. In the more psychological language of the "social identification" theory, associated with Henri Tajfel and his co-workers, when group salience becomes high, an individual thinks and behaves in conformity with the stereotypical characteristics of the category "Hindu" (or "Muslim") rather than according to his or her individual personality dispositions.¹⁴ In a period of rising social tension, social identity dominates, if it does not altogether replace, personal identity as individuals perceive members of the Other group purely in terms of the former. As Hindus and Muslims increasingly see each other as stereotypes, there follows an inevitable homogenization and depersonalization. Individual Hindus or Muslims become interchangeable, perceiving each other in terms of shared category characteristics rather than their personal, idiosyncratic natures. Conversations couched in terms of group categories increase markedly: "Look at what the Hindus are doing!" "The Muslims have crossed all limits!" The stereotypes attributed to one's own and the adversarial group, we shall see later, take their shape from popular history, orally transmitted through generations.

The immediate tension at the eve of the riot is not merely a matter of cognitive functioning according to a social identity. The tension is also constituted of strong affects and emotions, "raw passions" if one will. The somewhat bloodless formulations of social identity theory are not completely

sufficient to explain a process which will end up being so bloody. Here we need to add psychoanalytic insights on the intertwining of the individual and the group from earliest childhood onward and a revival of the associated emotions in the current situation.

In the first years of life, it is only gradually that the child learns to integrate dichotomous "good" and "bad" images of the self—the angry and the loving baby—as well as opposing representations of caretakers who both gratify and frustrate. The child also learns that to have hostile impulses directed toward those on whom it depends is dangerous to its own well-being and that these negative feelings must be disowned. One of the main ways of disowning "bad," hateful representations is to externalize them, first on to inanimate objects or animals and then to people and other groups. In a given cultural group, mothers and other adults usually offer the same targets of externalization, or "reservoirs," as the psychiatrist Vamik Volkan calls them.¹⁵ The Hindu (and associated cultural symbols) is thus an emotionally charged target of externalization for the Muslim's own "bad" representations and angry feelings (and vice versa) from an early period of life, a convenient reservoir also for the subsequent rages which grow out of thwarted needs and private hurts. Together with this creation of the enemy, which is "neither 'merely' real nor 'merely' projection,"¹⁶ there is also a process of identification with one's group taking place. The child is assimilating within itself images of family and group members, thus coming to resemble them more and more while increasing its emotional investment in the group's shared symbols and traditions.

In the period of immediate tension, when the salience of one's religious-cultural group increases markedly, the feelings of love connected with the early identifications revive, as do the hate and rage associated with the targets of externalization. Since the enemy is also a reservoir of our own unwanted selves and negative feelings, it is important it be kept at a psychological distance. Consciously, the enemy should never be like us. Even minor differences between "us" and "them" are therefore exaggerated as unbridgeable chasms in what Freud called the "narcissism of minor differences."¹⁷ which evoke stronger hostility and hate than do wide disparities.

There is a special quality to the enmity I feel for a person who resembles me most but is not me. Next to my brother, it is my neighbor the Ten Commandments enjoin me to love as I do myself, precisely because my neighbor is the one I am most likely to consider as a rival. The stereotyping of the enemy group involves a progressive devaluation which can extend to the point of dehumanization where "they" come close to the child's earliest, nonhuman

targets of externalization. Making the enemy nonhuman is to avoid feeling guilt about destroying "it" in the riot that is imminent.

To summarize: the heightened salience of social identity, fueled by a revival of strong childhood emotions that arise from the intertwining of the self and the cultural group, together with the fact that the groups involved are religious ones, thus imbuing the conflict with religious ultimacy, are the distinctive markers of the tension immediately preceding a riot.

Among the various precipitating incidents, there are two which occur with such regularity in reports of riots that they may fairly be called archetypes. One of them has to do with Muslim violence toward the cow while the other pertains to disputes over religious processions. Whereas riots around the former are specific to India, riots provoked by religious processions have been common in the history of religious violence.¹⁸ Both incidents are archetypal in the sense that, irrespective of their factual veracity in a particular case, they are perceived as legitimate causes for violence to begin—shots from the starter's gun, so to speak. There is thus an unarticulated expectation that an incident around a cow or a religious procession should belong to the account of a Hindu-Muslim riot even if such an incident did not actually take place. Historically speaking, this expectation is not unjustified. Consider, for instance, the precipitating incidents of communal riots in the Punjab in a single year in the last century.

In 1886, riots occurred in Ambala, Ludhiana, Hoshiarpur, and Delhi. In Ambala, the precipitating incident was a change, insisted upon by the Muslims, in the route of the Hindu procession on the festival of Bawan Sawadasi. It was also widely rumored that the Muslims intended to bring large quantities of beef into the city the next day on the occasion of Eid. In Ludhiana, the riot began with the report that a cow had been sacrificed in a Muslim's house. In Hoshiarpur, the Muharram procession of the Muslims had passed a major part of its route when a bull suddenly appeared amidst it. The processionists were already involved in an argument with the Hindus over the entanglement of the *tazia* in branches of a *pipal* tree, held sacred by the Hindus, which the Muslims wanted to cut. The Hindus objected to the Muslims' beating of the bull and the riot was on. In Delhi, the riots began with the clash between Muslim and Hindu processions whose routes crossed each other.¹⁹ It is not surprising to read eighty years later that one of the worst riots of post-independence India, the 1969 riot in Ahmedabad, was set off by a Muslim vegetable seller who hit a cow which had stopped at its stand for a munch. Fisticuffs with the Hindu cowherd followed and "the treatment of the cow (which was not seriously injured), greatly magnified out of all pro-

portion, spread through the city and touched off further incidents. The rioting continued in various parts of Gujarat for some ten days."²⁰

The precipitating incident is immediately followed by the aggrieved group taking out a procession—when the procession itself is not the incident. A procession is necessary for the creation of what I call a "physical" group. A physical group is a group represented in the bodies of its members rather than in their minds, a necessary shift for a group to become an instrument of actual violence. For if we reflect on our own experiences of various groups we become immediately aware of a significant difference between, say, my experience of my cultural identity as a Hindu and my psychic processes when I am taking part in a religious assembly. In other words, belonging to a relatively abstract entity, the Hindus, touches a very different chord of the self than the one touched by being a member of a physical group, such as a tightly packed congregation in a Hindu temple. The self-experience of the latter is determined more by concrete, bodily communication and physical sensations in the press of other bodies. The self-experience of the cultural-group identity, on the other hand, is evoked more, and differently, by shared cultural symbols and history—heavily mythological—which is shaped by the group's hopes and fears and distorted by its ambitions and ideals.

The information I receive sensorially and sensually, linguistically and subliminally in a physical group and which influences the experience of my self at that particular moment, is of another order, and is processed differently, than the information received as member of a cultural group. In a crowd—an example of a physical group—the very nature of the situation with many people in close bodily contact brings a considerable sensual stimulation through channels of touch, vision, hearing, and smell which are simultaneous and are intensified by the multiplicity of their sources.²¹ There is also a communication of body heat, muscle tensions, and sometimes, of body rhythms. The individual is practically wrapped up in the crowd and gets continuous sensual pounding through all avenues that one's body can afford. The consequence is a blurring of the body image and of the ego, a kind of self-transcendence that is reacted to by panic or exhilaration as individuality disappears and the "integrity," "autonomy," and "independence" of the ego seem to be wishful illusions and mere hypothetical constructs. That the physical and cultural groups sometimes coincide and that it is the endeavor of those who use and manipulate symbols of cultural identity to bring the cultural group closer to the psychological state of a physical group is a subject which I will not pursue here.

I do not find the argument convincing that, as personal identity disappears in a crowd, the residue is some regressed, primitive state where the violent side of human nature is unleashed, as has been postulated in both the Freudian and the Jungian traditions. Such formulations need to be relativized and seen in the context and framework of a particular place and period in history—Europe between the two World Wars—when extremist ideologies of the Left and Right were creating mass movements imbued with messianic fervor. Building on the classical notions of crowds described by Gustave Le Bon (whose own ideas, in turn, were framed by the dread the French upper class felt in relation to the revolutionary masses), Freud's reflections on the psychology of crowds as well as Jung's observations on mass psychology were not free of the ideological concerns of their time, namely the liberal fear of the loss of individual autonomy in a collectivity and the socialist concern about how to make the desired collectivities more tolerable and tolerant.

Identity in a crowd only gets refocused.²² This refocusing is certainly dramatic and full of affect since a crowd amplifies all emotions, heightening a feeling of well-being into exaltation, fear into panic. The loss of personal identity in a crowd, however, makes individuals act in terms of the crowd's identity, for instance, according to the behavior "expected" of an anti-Hindu or anti-Muslim mob. The individual is not operating at some deeply regressed, primitive level of the psyche but according to the norms of the particular group. The violent acts are thus not random but represent the expression and adaptation to a novel situation of a historical tradition of anti-Hindu or anti-Muslim mob violence.

It is paradoxical that religious processions, presumably with spiritual aims, perhaps produce the most physical of all groups. Rhythms of religious ritual are particularly effective in breaking down social barriers between the participants. They produce a maximum of mutual activation of the participants and a readiness for action, often violent. This is why violence, when Muslim initiated, often begins at the end of Friday afternoon prayers when congregants, who have turned into a congregation, stream out of the mosque into the street in a protesting procession. Processions at Muharram for the Muslims and Dussehra (and increasingly Ganesh Chaturthi) for the Hindus are almost a certain recipe for violence when they are preceded by a period of tension between the communities and when a precipitating incident has just occurred.

Whereas internally a procession must transform itself into a physical group, externally it should demonstrate the community's strength. As the political scientist Sarah Moore points out, the success of the procession depends not only upon the number of people taking part but also on the route it

takes.²³ Routes are valued differently. To take a procession near or through an area inhabited by the adversary is more valued than taking a route which avoids potential confrontations. A procession which can pass through known trouble spots and major traffic arteries is considered more successful than one which slinks through back alleys. The number of chaperoning policemen, protecting processions which are going to cause the very trouble the police are trying to prevent, is another indicator of success.

Normally, the first two to three days of a major riot are the most violent, when the majority of the casualties take place. As the police regain control of the situation, the riot settles down to a low-level intensity of violence. Isolated incidents of stabbing, looting, and arson take place in the narrow alleys and twisting bylanes rather than in the major bazaars. Gradually, peace returns, although some kind of curfew and orders prohibiting the gathering of more than five persons may remain in force for many weeks. The official end of the riot is marked by the state appointing a commission of inquiry headed by a retired judge who is asked to determine the sequence of events leading to the riot, name those who were responsible, tally the losses, and offer suggestions to prevent future riots. The sole result of such an inquiry, besides offering temporary employment to the judge, is the transfer of a few hapless police officers who are held culpable for not having taken adequate precautions. Police officers, of course only the dishonest, have long since calculated the monetary value of this occupational risk and have made it a part of the compensation they feel entitled to, above and beyond the miserly salary they are paid by the state.

Hyderabad: December 1990

The Hyderabad riot of December 1990, the central event of my study, occurred after a period of relative peace between the Hindus and Muslims, the last riot in the city having taken place in 1984. Before that, riots had been an annual feature since 1978, the year of the first major communal conflagration since 1948 when Hyderabad became a part of independent India.

The 1978 riot was triggered by the rape of a Muslim woman, Rameeza Bi, and the murder of her husband, Ahmed Hussain, in the Nallakunta police station. In the beginning the mobs protesting police brutality included Hindus, but soon the situation took a turn where the two communities became pitted against each other. The incident sparking off the antagonistic postures was, as usual, the tiniest of sparks: some Hindus beat up a Muslim boy, the Muslims retaliated, the Hindus retaliated against the retaliation, and so on in an ever increasing escalation. The riots were centered around Subzi-

mandi, the central vegetable market, which is also one of the two locations of this study. Given the general propensity of the students of Hindu-Muslim relations to explain the violence between the two in economic terms, the hidden agenda of these riots is said to be an economic offensive by the Muslims designed to recapture Subzimandi from Hindu traders.²⁴ Destitute for almost three decades, most of the wealthier members of their community having migrated to Pakistan or other countries, the Muslims of the old city had suddenly come into money through remittances from the Arab countries of the Gulf, where the economic boom in the late seventies had created a big market for Muslim labor from Hyderabad. After having suffered a rapid economic decline within a decade of Hyderabad's integration with India, the Muslims again sought to regain control of the city's vegetable trade which they had lost to the Hindus.

After 1978, there was at least a riot a year, sometimes more, usually at the time of major religious festivals. The tension in the city is especially palpable during Ganesh Chaturthi of the Hindus, when clay idols of the god are taken out in procession through the streets to be immersed in the Musi river, and Muharram of the Muslims, when the Shias march through the city bewailing the martyrdom of Hussein, the Prophet's grandson. The riots also erupted on many other pretexts: Hindu shopkeepers refusing to close their shops in the strikes called by the Majlis (to protest against the takeover of the *kaaba* [shrine] in Mecca by a man claiming to be the Mehdi), the burning of the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, the removal of a chief minister perceived as sympathetic to one community. Between 1978 and 1984, over four hundred people lost their lives and thousands more were injured in the communal riots. A common thread in some of these riots (as in riots elsewhere) is the assumption of the state's role by the mobs of one or the other community. Like the sixteenth-century Catholic-Protestant riots in France described by Natalie Davis, the Hindu or Muslim mob perceives itself as doing what the state should have done in the first place; it is helping the political authorities get over their failure in fulfilling their duties, thus providing itself a certain legitimacy.²⁵

Coming back to the 1990 violence, the countdown for the Hyderabad riot began when L. K. Advani, the president of the BJP, began his *rath yatra* ("chariot pilgrimage") from the temple of Somnath on the west coast to Ayodhya in the Hindu heartland of the north. The stated purpose of the *yatra*, which was to take Advani through a large part of the country in thirty days and over ten thousand kilometers, was the construction of the Rama temple at the legendary birth site of the god where stood a mosque constructed in 1528 by founder of the Mughal dynasty. The Toyota van in

which the BJP leader traveled was decorated to make it resemble the chariot of the legendary hero Arjuna, as shown in the immensely popular television serial of the Mahabharata. Advani's chariot aroused intense fervor among the Hindus. Crowds thronged the roads to catch a glimpse of the *rath*, showered flower petals on the cavalcade as it passed through their villages and towns, and the vehicle itself became a new object of worship as women offered ritual prayer with coconut, burning incense, and sandalwood paste at each of its stops. In a darker, more somber aftermath, there were incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims at many places in the wake of the *rath yatra*.

Like a pond choked with lotus stalks during the monsoon, this religious-political exercise was replete with symbols. The symbolism began with the "chariot": a large lotus, the symbol of the BJP, was painted on the front grill of the Toyota. The lotus is one of the most Hindu of the universal symbols and is ubiquitous in India's religious iconography. Various lotuses are associated with different gods and goddesses; for example, the eight-petaled lotus is the dwelling place of Brahma. The lotus on the van—the chariot—was therefore highly significant. In the Hindu mind, influenced by tales from the Mahabharata and the visuals of popular poster and calendar art, the chariot is the vehicle of gods and mythical heroes going to war. Above all, the chariot is associated with Arjuna, with Lord Krishna as his charioteer, as he prepares for a just, *dharmaic* war against an evil though intimately related foe, the Kauravas. Arjuna's horses were white, signifying his purity; Advani's Toyota-chariot, which the newspapers were soon to call the "juggernaut of Hindutva," was also white.

Somnath, the starting point of the *yatra* and the location of an ancient Shiva temple, is also the greatest symbol of Hindu defeat and humiliation at hands of the Muslims. The legend of Somnath, which has entered Hindu folklore over large parts of the country, tells us that in the eleventh century Somnath was the richest and the most magnificent temple of Hindu India. One thousand Brahmins were appointed to perform the daily worship of the emblem of Shiva, a thirteen-and-a-half foot *lingam*, four-and-a-half feet in circumference. Three hundred men and women were employed to sing and dance before the *lingam* every day and the temple treasury possessed vast riches in gold, silver, and precious gems, accumulated over the centuries. Mahmud, the sultan of the central Asian kingdom of Ghazni, who swept over north India almost every year like a monsoon of fire and was famed far and wide as the great destroyer of temples and a scourge of the Hindus, came to know of the Hindu belief that he could destroy so many of their temples only because the deities of those temples had forfeited Somnath's support. With a view to strike at the very root of the Hindus' faith in their gods, and tempted

by the prospect of plundering the temple's treasures, Mahmud marched to Somnath. The Hindus were complacent in their belief that Shiva had drawn Mahmud to Somnath only to punish the sultan for his depredations. Hoping for a manifestation of Shiva's divine wrath, the Hindu resistance to Mahmud was unorganized and offered much too late. Hundreds of thousands of Hindus perished in the ensuing slaughter, according to legend—fifty thousand, according to nationalist historians. The temple was razed to the ground. The Shiva *lingam* was broken to pieces and together with the temple's plundered treasure transported to Chazni where its fragments were fashioned into steps at the gate of the chief mosque. The Hindu historian, acknowledging Mahmud's skill as a general and the fact that Muslim chroniclers regard him as one of the most illustrious kings and great champion of Islam, adds: "By his ruthless destruction of temples and images he violated the most sacred and cherished sentiments of the Indian people, and his championship of Islam therefore merely served to degrade it in their eyes such as nothing else could."²⁶ Somnath and Mahmud of Ghazni have become intimately associated over the following centuries. Today, among Hindus, the name of the temple conjures up less the image of Shiva than the memory of one of the most rapacious and cruel of Muslim invaders. In choosing to start the *rath yatra* from Somnath, the symbolic reverberations of the act were well calculated; the righteous Hindu chariot was setting forth to avenge ancient humiliations, to right old historical wrongs.

For the Hindus, Somnath is indeed what Volkan calls a "chosen trauma," just as the demolition of the Babri mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992 fairly bids to become one of the chosen traumas of the Indian Muslim.²⁷ The term "chosen trauma" refers to an event which causes a community to feel helpless and victimized by another and whose mental representation becomes embedded in the group's collective identity. Chosen trauma does not mean that either the Hindus or the Muslims chose to become victims but only that they have "chosen" to mythologize, psychologically internalize, and thus constantly dwell upon a particular event from their history. A chosen trauma is reactivated again and again to strengthen a group's cohesiveness through "memories" of its persecution, victimization, and yet its eventual survival. In the late nineteenth century, Swami Vivekananda had "remembered" Somnath thus: "Mark how these temples bear the marks of a hundred attacks and hundred regenerations continually springing up out of the ruins rejuvenated and strong as ever."²⁸ At the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century, Advani was to summon up the Hindu chosen trauma again from the depths of cultural memory.

If the *yatra* began in Somnath it was symbolically symmetrical for it to end in Ayodhya, the birthplace and capital of the kingdom of Lord Rama and thus the site of the Hindu's chosen glory. For many Hindus, the story of Rama is the most resplendent moment of India's history. The revival of its memory, commemorated annually in the Ram Lila, makes the collective chest swell with pride. The chosen glory, too, is psychologically internalized and is as salient for a group's cultural identity as its chosen trauma; both constitute landmarks on the terrain of a group's cultural memory.

Advani's cavalcade, of symbols as much as of people, came to a halt when on 23 October he was arrested in Bihar before he could start on the last lap of his journey to Ayodhya, where the BJP and its allied organizations, the *sangh parivar*, had promised to start the construction of the Rama temple on 9 November. The already high political passions were now nearing the point of explosion. The spark was provided by the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who had vowed that to prevent the construction of the temple he would not "let even a bird enter Ayodhya." The well-oiled machine of the *sangh parivar*, however, had succeeded in smuggling in thousands of *kar-sevaks* from all over the country for the task of construction. On 9 November, Yadav ordered the police to open fire on the *kar-sevaks* who had broken through the police barriers and were intent on the demolition of the Babri mosque as a prelude to building of the temple. Scores of *kar-sevaks* died in the police attack. Their bodies were cremated on the banks of the river Saryu and the ashes taken back by the BJP workers to the villages and towns in different parts of the country from which the dead men hailed. There they were eulogized as martyrs to the Hindu cause. Soon, Hindu-Muslim riots erupted in many parts of the country.

In Hyderabad, more than a thousand miles to the south of Ayodhya, the riots began with the killing of Sardar, a Muslim auto-rickshaw driver, by two Hindus. Although the murder was later linked to a land dispute between two rival gangs, at the time of the killing it was framed in the context of rising Hindu-Muslim tensions in the city. Muslims retaliated by stabbing four Hindus in different parts of the walled city. Then Majid Khan, an influential local leader of Subzimandi who lives and flourishes in the shaded space formed by the intersection of crime and politics, was attacked with a sword by some BJP workers and the rumor spread that he had died. Muslim mobs came out into the alleys and streets of the walled city, to be followed by Hindu mobs in their areas of strength, and the 1990 riot was on. It was to last for ten weeks, claim more than three hundred lives and thousands of wounded. One of the wounded was the two-year-old girl in the photograph.