

**ON RESISTANCE**



## **Rumors and Communal Violence: An Analysis of Communal Violence in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh (1980-2009)**

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### **Abstract**

Communal violence is a multilayered process which involves a complex interplay of various factors. Scholars have tried explaining the phenomenon of communal violence as it plays out in India concentrating on various factors. Most scholars agree that political parties often use religion, economic competition, patron-client relations to foment communal tension in order to gain electoral success. Various factors such as party politics, electoral politics, local administrations and police, economic competition and caste politics can be identified as contributing factors and actors in incidents of communal violence. However one factor which had received very little attention in the context of India is the role rumors play during incidents of communal violence. This paper uses works of Radhika Subramaniam and Terry Ann Knopf to explain that rumors can play a very important role in fomenting communal tension.<sup>1</sup> Feeding on preexisting distrust and with the help of media rumors can easily become one of the most important factors which lead to vicious communal violence. Before one looks into rumors, a brief analysis of the scholarship on communal violence will help us form a better understanding of the process in itself.

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**Keywords:** Communal Violence, Rumours, Political Parties, Caste Politics, Competition

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This is a mare's nest of paradoxes and ambiguities, where violence feeds on memory and memory on rumor, rumor on memory and memory on violence.<sup>2</sup>

### **Communal Violence: A Brief Theoretical Analysis**

Communal violence has always been mistakenly understood as a spontaneous outburst of violence between two antagonistic communities. On the contrary, studies show that communal violence is far from being spontaneous. There are multiple actors and factors at play which lead to a violent situation between antagonistic communities. Scholars like Wilkinson and Paul Brass have found that political parties and voting behavior can have a deep impact on communal violence.<sup>3</sup> Ashutosh Varshney finds inter-personal

<sup>1</sup>Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumor, Race and Riots*, Somerset NJ, Transaction Publishers, 1975.

<sup>2</sup>Radhika Subramaniam, "Culture of Suspicion: Riots and Rumor in Bombay, 1992-1993" in *Transforming Anthropology*, Volume 8, Numbers 1&2, 1999, pp. 97-110.

<sup>3</sup>Paul R. Brass, *Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press,

relations as the key to understanding why communal violence occurs in some places and not others.<sup>4</sup> Paul Brass propounds that Hindu-Muslim communal violence is more like a production of violence and points out three different phases of the production process –“Preparation/Rehearsal, Activation/ Enactment, and Explanation / Interpretation”.<sup>5</sup> Brass believes that the activation of the process generally has a political incentive as the root cause. Political parties mobilize masses on the basis of their identity in order to gain their support in elections. Polarization of masses along the lines of religion is a very effective method to arouse antagonistic feelings in masses and gather them by creating the ‘other’ who is necessarily an enemy.<sup>6</sup>

Echoing Brass, Wilkinson also believes that far from being a spontaneous reaction, riots are generally meticulously planned affairs. Thus, Wilkinson states “far from being relatively spontaneous eruptions of anger” ethnic riots are “often planned by politicians for a clear electoral purpose”.<sup>7</sup> Wilkinson finds the major reason for different levels of responses to riots in different states as arising from the level of democratic competition in the states.<sup>8</sup> Wilkinson propounds a theory according to which a government which is dependent on minorities to be in power will protect minorities in the case of an outbreak of violence. If minorities form an important part of the coalition and can control the formation of governments then also the government will protect the minorities.<sup>9</sup> Finally the level of political competition that is to say if the number of parties in the state are more, there is a chance of the government having to enter into a coalition with the minority parties. In such a situation also the minorities will find protection with the state government in the case of riots.<sup>10</sup>

Ward Berenschot tries answering the most important question: why do “followers follow”? To suggest that the masses are “docile followers” who get “easily swayed” by power hungry politicians is not enough of an explanation.<sup>11</sup> That there is an institutionalized system of riots at work is not a matter of contestation. Even though power hungry politicians use communal hatred to instigate masses for their own political gain what remains unexplained is why the masses react to the instigations. This despite the fact that they do not get a share in any of the “incentive” which the politicians gain out of violence.<sup>12</sup> Berenschot suggests that it is important to understand

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2005. Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic conflict and civic life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Yale University Press, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Paul R. Brass, *Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in India*, p.5.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p.7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ward Berenschot, “Rioting as Maintaining Relations: Hindu-Muslim Violence and Political Mediation in Gujarat, India”, *Civil Wars*, 2009, p. 415.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

“how political leaders can tap into existing fears, hopes and drives of those who actually perpetrate violence”.<sup>13</sup> There is a connection between the elite and mass concerns and it is important to understand this connection. Berenschot suggests that the answer to this question can be found in the working of everyday local political networks which work like “patronage networks”.<sup>14</sup> Berenschot’s argument is simple: political leaders are able to wield so much of influence over masses because of their ability to provide easy access to state services and resources. Politicians are able to “mediate between state institutions and citizens”.<sup>15</sup> These patronage networks help explain the nexus between political leaders, “goondas”, members of Hindu nationalist organizations, police and the masses and these network of connections are brought into action ever so often during heights of communal tension to instigate violence.

An analysis of various incidents of communal violence around the country leads us to identify certain key elements which are always at interplay during acts of violence. As mentioned above, political parties, electoral politics, police and administration, economic competition, media and rumors can have a role to play in escalating a volatile situation. In most cases violence can be attributed to the interplay of two or more of these actors and factors. In most of these cases of violence the root causes can be traced back to alleged attacks or destruction of religious sites of one community by another. Most often than not these allegations are just baseless rumors. The damages cost by such rumors can be extensive. Hence it becomes important to understand the role rumors can play in communal violence.

### **Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh**

Before we try and understand the role rumors can play in communal violence it is important to elaborate on the reasons behind choosing Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. The United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index analysis for the year 2011 puts Maharashtra at .549 which is above the national average of .504. However Uttar Pradesh stands at .451 which is below the national average and well below that of Maharashtra. In a comparison with other counties of the world as made by the UNDP, Maharashtra falls in the category of ‘Countries with Medium HDI’. Uttar Pradesh falls in the category of ‘Countries with Low HDI’. In the income index Maharashtra is placed at .489 while Uttar Pradesh at .444 measures lower than the national average of .465.<sup>16</sup> The report also identifies Maharashtra is placed at fourth spot from the top. Uttar Pradesh, on the end of the spectrum, is among the poorest states in the country being at the fourteenth spot of the index. This gives us a clear idea about the economic standing of the two states.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 416.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 415.

<sup>16</sup> M.H. Suryanarayan., Ankush Agarwal and K. Seeta Prabhu, “Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index for India’s States”, *United Nations Development Programme*, New Delhi, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

However, what is interesting for this present paper is that despite these economic disparities both states have been two of the most riot prone areas of the country. Some of the most riot prone cities and districts are in these two states. Mumbai, Malegaon, Bhiwandi in Maharashtra and Muzaffarnagar, Aligarh, Moradabad and Meerut in Uttar Pradesh have been witness to some of the worst riots in the country. Over the years large scale violence has decreased but the number of incidents of small communal skirmishes has increased. These small skirmishes help keep the communal fire burning. In 2013 alone 247 communal incidents took place in Uttar Pradesh which led to 77 deaths.<sup>18</sup> Maharashtra ranked second with a total of 88 cases of communal incidents.<sup>19</sup>

The country also witnessed the Musaffarnagar violence which was the worst in a very long time. If we look at the political leadership also both Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh were strongholds of the Congress government. The period between 1980 and 2009 has been witness to great turmoil in both the states' political trajectory. The 1980s saw the downfall of Congress, the rise of the Hindu right-wing parties and the assertion of the backward classes in the two states. The political turmoil in both states was accompanied by incidents of constant violence. The Shiv Sena which started as a cultural platform for Marathi youth soon tried gaining a footing in the political arena. In a bid to gain electoral success Shiv Sena often took the violent route and win elections on the basis of the age old divide and rule policy. In Uttar Pradesh caste politics played a major role and the rising BJP faced stiff competition from both the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party. Hence, it is interesting to undertake a comparative analysis of these two states.

### **Rumors and Violence**

Terry Ann Knopf while talking about rumors points out that what sets rumors apart from information is that the "story or allegation is unverified".<sup>20</sup> Knopf suggests that this piece of story or allegation can however be proved true or false at a later stage. Rumors should thus be judged by the objectivity and authority of the source. While rumors play a part in all aspects of life, in the political sphere rumors find "another fertile breeding ground" because facts, transparency of expression and information are very important in politics.<sup>21</sup> Knopf suggests that rumors create a scare among people and what is more important is that often people act on the basis of such rumors. Knopf calls this the "rumor-response phenomenon".<sup>22</sup>

Radhika Subramaniam in her work on Mumbai riots tries to understand why people react to rumors as they do. Subramaniam suggests that a whole gamut of factors work behind instigating people. However, Subramaniam feels the more important question

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/riots-record-2013-uttar-pradesh-worst-maharashtra-next-549900> (accessed on 1.07.2016)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Ann Knopf, *op. cit*, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p.9.

to be asked is why people respond to rumors and how do people become antagonistic towards another community. Subramaniam talks about a “culture of suspicion” which might not be overtly violent but is “fleeting and everyday”.<sup>23</sup> Writing in the context of race riots and the role rumors played in them Knopf offers that strained relationship between two communities and the fear that something bad might happen provide ideal situation for the spread of a rumor. Knopf further elucidates that the press often has a role in spreading rumors which instigate violence.<sup>24</sup> This fear is fed by a suspicion about the other community which is something so inherent in the minds of most people that it becomes a natural part of the thinking process.

### **Political Parties, Elections and Creating the “Culture of Suspicion”**

Following Subramaniam and Knopf’s line of argument then one could arrive at the conclusion that rumors feed on an already existing atmosphere of deep distrust. As has been already pointed out political parties and electoral politics have been important contributing factors to communal violence. Hence it becomes imperative to understand the role played by political parties and electoral politics in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh to nurture this “culture of suspicion”. For example in Bijnor, a predominantly Muslim dominated area (48% Muslims to a 42% Hindus and 8% untouchables) it became increasingly difficult for Hindu organizations to establish a footing.<sup>25</sup> Added to that was the BSP’s winning of the Bijnor Lok Sabha seat in 1990. The BSP won because of an alliance between Muslims and Chamars which left the “economically powerful Jats and urban Hindus out in the cold”.<sup>26</sup> In the light of such increasing communal tension a very small incident was enough to light the fire and Bijnor witnessed its first communal violence in August 1990. The communal situation worsened in the months to come. Jeffery and Jeffery suggest that Mulayam Singh, then a minister of the Janata Dal in a bid to consolidate his vote bank appealed to the sensibility of the Muslims and Backward classes.<sup>27</sup> A desperate BJP stirred up the growing communal tensions. The insecurity among the caste Hindus because of the numerical strength of the Muslims worked in BJP’s favour. So when news of the ascendance of Kar Sevaks on the Ayodhya Mosque trickled in, violence and arson reached new heights.

The riots in Varanasi in November 1991 took place at a very crucial time. Asghar Ali Engineer points out that the by-elections were to be held in India as well as in Uttar Pradesh in a few days time.<sup>28</sup> The BJP was desperate to win assembly as well as Lok

<sup>23</sup> Radhika Subramaniam, *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> Terry Ann Knopf, *op. cit.*, p.26.

<sup>25</sup> Amrita Basu, “When Local Riots Are Not Merely Local: Bringing the State Back in, Bijnor 1988-92”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29:40, ( Oct. 1, 1994), pp. 2605-262.

<sup>26</sup> Roger Jeffery and Patricia M. Jeffery, “The Bijnor Riots, October 1990: Collapse of a Mythical Special Relationship?”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Mar. 5, 1994), 29:10 pp. 551-558.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, “Benaras Rocked by Communal Violence”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 (10/11): 509-511, Mar, 7-14, 1992.

Sabha seats and chose to play the communal card to win votes. Its promises of building a temple in Ayodhya immediately after winning the state of Uttar Pradesh had fallen through. The attempts by the Chief Minister to appease the MLAs and MPs were not bearing any fruit. The removal of officers and bureaucrats who had taken actions against Hindu protestors was also not enough. Hence Engineer suggests that on the eve of the by-elections in order to gain support of the swing voters the government allowed the passing of the procession through areas which were communally sensitive.<sup>29</sup> The BJP government had to "satisfy its disgruntled cadres and even more so the Bajrang Dal cadres. Communal violence could satisfy them to some extent."<sup>30</sup> The strategy worked and BJP won 8 of the 14 by-elections, thus maintaining its majority in the Uttar Pradesh assembly.<sup>31</sup> A similar kind of strategy was followed by the BJP in Kanpur as well where all through the 80s it kept on increasing its vote base until finally in the 1991 election it emerged as a single majority party.

The role of Shiv Sena in fomenting violence during 1992 is undeniable.<sup>32</sup> *Maha Aartis* which were organized and the Shiv Sena chief went about proclaiming that the destruction of the mosque was the handiwork of Shiv Sainiks.<sup>33</sup> The Sena which wanted to reinvent itself after the electoral failures and its organizational crisis of 1991-92 saw this atmosphere of heightened tension as an opportune moment. Hansen suggests that during the period of the carnage and after, Thackeray, the Sena honcho delivered communally provocative speeches. Further he welcomed all the media attention being showered on him and "proliferated radical communal statements...."<sup>34</sup> This was part of a larger political strategy of the Shiv Sena which had always relied on the valorization of the Maratha leader Shivaji and juxtaposed this against the Muslim "other". Radhika Subramaniam sums it up neatly when she says, "Through these powerful symbols the regional incarnations of the Hindutva movement, the Shiv Sena evokes a historical struggle between an embattled Maharashtrian Hindu self and a rapacious, alien, Muslim other."<sup>35</sup>

Hansen in his account of the riots points out that after a Hindu family was burned in Jogeshwari in January 1993, the atrocities against Muslims reached a new high.<sup>36</sup> Scores of Hindu men led by Shiv Sainiks dawned on Muslim localities and carried on

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Communal Riots in India*, p.164.

<sup>32</sup> See Dipankar Gupta, *Nativism in a Metropolis: The Shiv Sena in Bombay*, Manohar, 1982; Jayant Lele, "Saffronisation of Shiv Sena: Political Economy of City, State and Nation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Jun. 24, 1995) 30:25, pp. 1520-1528; and Suhas Palshikar, "Shiv Sena: A Tiger with Many Faces?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, (April 3-10 2004.), pp. 1497- 1507; who all claim that Shiv Sena applied the strategy of violence to polarize voter base before every election and was able to spread its roots throughout Maharashtra.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Bloom Hansen, *Violence in Urban India: Identity Politics: 'Mumbai', and the Postcolonial City*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2001, p.121.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Radhika Subramaniam, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Bloom Hansen, *op. cit.*, p.122.

arson and loot. Over night the party of *goondas* emerged as the saviour of the Hindus and the hope of the Hindu middle class. Thus the Sena emerged as a “reliable defense against the Muslim menace”.<sup>37</sup>

Over the years the nature of communal violence itself has changed. Instead of large scale violence, most instances of communal disturbances are minor in nature. Dispute can start over small matters and soon take a communal colour. The obvious conclusion here is that political forces desperately try to give communal colour to small incidents of conflict where individuals of different communities are involved. This is done with the hope that the atmosphere of distrust and fear be kept alive and thriving.

### **Rumors and Communal Violence**

Roger and Patricia Jeffery point out that in the Bijnor riots of 1990s the complicated situation was furthered complicated by the rumor mills. Rumor spread that the violence was spreading outside the city.<sup>38</sup> Also the Hindus alleged that Muslims were attacking Hindus in Muslim majority villages and the Muslims had similar allegations against the Hindus. Jeffery and Jeffery in their account of the riots further state that other dangerous rumor which spread was that the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) was carrying out violence and killings in villages.<sup>39</sup> The villages were said to be under siege by armed men who were looting and killing villagers. The rumors gained credence where there already existed some history which made the incidents probable. Jeffery and Jeffery mention a certain village in Bijnor where Bengali Hindus displaced from East Pakistan were forced to stay in a Muslim majority village and these Bengali Hindus, eager to take revenge spread the rumor of “impending attacks and called for pre-emptive strikes”.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, Brass says that during the riots of 1992 in Kanpur a rumor spread that a large number of Hindus, policemen and PAC members were killed in the Muslim majority areas in spite of the presence of the military.<sup>41</sup> This resulted in the massacre of Muslim majority places like Nau Basta by a Hindu mob. S.K. Ghosh points out that rumor of conspiracy and alleged throwing of pork meat into a mosque played an important role in sparking off riots in Meerut in 1982.<sup>42</sup> The dispute over a dilapidated building turned into large scale rioting after the visit of the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid. S.K. Ghosh states that his conversation with a few Muslims was rumored to be discussion on some kind of conspiracy.<sup>43</sup> Several smaller incidents took place in and around the time of the visit of the Imam which resulted in growing animosity between the two communities. This ultimately resulted in a full scale riot.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.125.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Jeffery and Patricia M. Jeffery, *op. cit.*

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Paul R. Brass, “General Elections, 1996 in Uttar Pradesh: Divisive Struggles Influence Outcome”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, (Sep. 20-26, 1997). 32:38.

<sup>42</sup> S.K. Ghosh, *Communal Riots in India*. New Delhi, Ashish Publishing House, 1987, p.218.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

Varanasi has had a long history of communal riots. Asghar Ali Engineer in his accounts states that the 1991 Varanasi riots were sparked off by rumors of the alleged destruction of the idol of goddess Kali by Muslims.<sup>44</sup> Apart from this, the rumor of Hindus being dragged into Muslim houses in Madanpura and being “done to death” also spread.<sup>45</sup> Communal tension heightened and resulted in assaults on Muslims in other localities by the Hindus. Asghar Ali Engineer points out the case of ‘Sushil cinema house’ where Muslim viewers were attacked and stabbed.<sup>46</sup> The violence spread and resulted in the looting and killing of many Muslims in the area.

The 1983 Malegaon riot turned more violent due to rumors which were spread strategically. Asghar Ali Engineer states that these rumors were targeted to incite the Hindu villagers to take part in more violence and so was achieved by the rumors.<sup>47</sup> The villages around Malegaon witnessed increased atrocities against the Muslims. Engineer points out that as a result of the rumors “Muslim shops were looted and places of worship damaged”.<sup>48</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the 1992 post-Babri Masjid destruction violence, the rumors which did the rounds of the city resulted in heightening the tension in Mumbai. Thomas Bloom Hansen talks about the city being abuzz with rumors of angry Muslim mobs roaming the streets and looking for revenge.<sup>49</sup> The rumor instilled fear in the minds of the Hindus who then started patrolling the streets at night. An equally bizarre rumor during this time was the alleged arrival of consignments of arms from Pakistan and the Gulf. This resulted in large number of armed Hindu men assembling on the beach and staring into the sea waiting for the consignment to arrive. Rumors of Muslims storing arms at mosques were also proved to be baseless.

In the wake of the Bandra (east) riots fair share of rumors did the rounds in the press and among the people. Flavia Agnes states that Behrampada (a slum with Muslim majority) became the target of all such rumors.<sup>50</sup> It was rumored that the area was full of Bangladeshis and Pakistanis and there were arms factories in the area. Agnes further states that rumors such as bodies of Hindus were all over the place in the slum area and that the Muslims threatened to kill any Hindu who passes near the slum added to the fear factor.<sup>51</sup> Such rumors tend to increase the already existing communal animosity.

What is interesting to note is that in bearing resemblance to Knopf’s arguments about rumors, in all these cases the fear of the other already existed among the population. In

<sup>44</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, 1992, *op. cit.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, “From Nationalism to Communalism: Transformation of Malegaon”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 (Jul. 16, 1983), 29: 1259-1261.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Bloom Hansen, *op. cit.*, p.125.

<sup>50</sup> Flavia Agnes, “Two Riots and After: A Fact-Finding Report on Bandra (East)”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28, (Feb. 13, 1993) 7, pp.265-268.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

the case of Bandra (east) the middle class residents of housing complexes were already worried about the existence of criminal elements in the slum. Hence it was easy for them to believe the rumors that were floated. The press of course played its part here. The post-Babri masjid demolition period also was similarly fertile for the spread of rumors because distrust between the two communities was at its peak. Interestingly in all cases people decided to act basing their actions on the rumors afloat. Subramaniam notes that rumors have the capability to make “inexplicable temporal and spacial connections coherent”.<sup>52</sup> Thus accounts of rumors during the 1992 Mumbai riots include Muslim parents in Mahim (North Mumbai) rushing to collect their children from schools because there was a rumor of riots in Central Mumbai in fear of “retaliatory violence”.<sup>53</sup> In the case of Mumbai the underlying suspicion and terror helped make rumors more plausible and people reacted to such rumors without being witness to the said incidents. Rumors such as bodies of Hindus being scattered in alleyways, beheading of a Ganesh Idol or the arrest of Bal Thackery all became believable. Rumors of angry mobs of the “other” community coming to attack certain areas kept on surfacing and people kept fleeing their homes in fear.<sup>54</sup>

### **Rumors, Media and Communal Violence**

Knopf elucidates that the press often has a role in spreading rumors which instigate violence.<sup>55</sup> The wide readership of press and the generally authoritative position of that it holds make it an important medium through which rumors are spread. Although there is room for misinterpretation given the chaotic situation during riots but gross overstatement, reporting of baseless stories and statements and reaching conclusions based on those should be strictly avoided by the press. Engineer brings to our notice a report in the daily *Saamna* which tried raising suspicion among the masses by carrying articles about the disproportionate size of the mosque in Asangaon which allegedly received funds from the Arab countries.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, Engineer points out that the newspaper items however failed to mention the Hindu miscreants who were also a part of the acts of violence.<sup>57</sup> The reporting had a communal bias and was specifically biased against one community. Flavia Agnes points out that in the case Beherampada the vernacular press reporting was communally biased to the extent that it succeeded in creating an atmosphere of animosity against the locality.<sup>58</sup> People started viewing the locality as a threat to the Hindus and even the “English press endorsed these impressions

<sup>52</sup> Radhika Subramaniam, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Terry Ann Knopf, *op. cit.*, p.26.

<sup>56</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, “Asangaon Riots: Not a Communal Disturbance”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29 (Jul. 9, 1994), (28): 1711-1712 .

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Flavia Agnes, “Two Riots and After: A Fact-Finding Report on Bandra (East)”, pp.265-268.

as facts”.<sup>59</sup> The national dailies also sometimes indulge in coming up with conspiracy theories. S.B. Kolpe gives the example of Moradabad riot of 1980 where the *Times of India* came up with the theory of foreign involvement in the riot.<sup>60</sup> The Chief Editor of Times, Mr. Girilal Jain in an editorial article explained that the riot in Uttar Pradesh may have been the handiwork of some outside element. Kolpe suggests that the main aim was to contest the claims of Indira Gandhi who had alleged that the riots were the doings of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States.<sup>61</sup> The *Times of India* suggested that the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB), the intelligence agency of erstwhile Soviet Russia, could also be behind such acts. Another newspaper, the *Organizer* was convinced that Soviet Russia was behind the communal violence. Kolpe says that next in his research Mr. Jain discovered the involvement of Oil money which was being used to fund extremism in India.<sup>62</sup> All such claims had no solid grounding. Yet such articles were run in the paper for several weeks. Ultimately foreign hands came to be blamed for every other misdoing in India.

In Varanasi two competing newspapers with relatively greater reach ran all kinds of “sensational” stories after the riot of November 1991. The *Aaj* and *Dainik Jagaran* in order to increase their readership base “came out with sensational stories about underground tunnels, transmitters, petro-dollars etc.”<sup>63</sup> There were of course papers which provided a more objective view of situations. The press reporting in the wake of the Ramjanmabhoomi issue was also found highly biased. Asghar Ali Engineer gives the example of two Hindi medium newspapers – *Dainik Jagaran* and *Dainik Aaj* during which published highly inflammatory news pieces during this time.<sup>64</sup> The BJP-RSS mouthpiece *Panchanjanya* published articles about alleged infiltrators who had entered India from Afghanistan with the aim of instigating civil war in the country.<sup>65</sup> Engineer says that this news article played an important role in the way PAC dealt with Muslims during the riots.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Communal violence has followed a similar trajectory in both Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh where violence peaked in the 1980s with the right wing forces’ bid to come to power. All through the 1990s this struggle for power continued as BJP desperately tried to leave a mark on national politics with Rath yatras and Ayodhya controversy.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> S.P. Kolpe in Asghar Ali Engineer, (ed.), *Communal Riots in Post-Independence India*. Hyderabad, Sangam Books, 1991, p.345.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p.346.

<sup>63</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, 1992, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> Asghar Ali Engineer, “Press on Ayodhya ‘Kar Seva’”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26 (May 18, 1991), 20; 1263, 1265-1266.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

The political scenario of the country as well as in the two states slowly settled in the 2000s. An analysis of the various incidents of communal violence in both the states makes it clear that no one factor is single handedly responsible for a violent outburst. Various existing socio-economic and political factors contribute towards the creation of a violent communal conflict. Often rumors rely on the underlying tension and are the final catalyst for the outburst.

In the period following the 2002 violence in Gujarat, communal violence as ebbed altogether in India. Sporadic incidents of violence keep occurring, however they are localized and are more along the lines of religious skirmishes rather than riots or communal violence. The most serious case of communal violence was the 2013 violence in Muzzafarnagar, Uttar Pradesh. Smaller incidents keep occurring in both Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh as well as the rest of the country. These serve the purpose of keeping the communal fire burning without leading to widespread violence. In the run up to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections and even after, communal politics has been centered around “*ghar wapsi*”, “love *jihad*” and beef ban. Rumors have played a huge role in propagating this new brand of communal politics by propagating the culture of suspicion. In some cases this has also lead to atrocities on minorities (Una and Dadri are of course the most prominent examples).<sup>67</sup>

An analysis of communal violence and the role rumors play then helps reiterate Subramaniam's claim that rumors, memories and violence all feed into each other and help keep the other alive. The culture of suspicion which political parties create in order to further their electoral gains often is heavily dependent on creating the image of the fearful “other”. Political parties invoke on history and memory and interpret these to suit their specific goals. This culture of suspicion then prompts people to react to rumors during volatile situations. The vicious circle keeps turning. Although very many factors can be enumerated in a bid to understand communal violence one cannot deny that a serious understanding of the creation of the culture of suspicion and rumors help in understanding the process even better and could probably offer ways to reroute this trajectory of violence.

<sup>67</sup> On 11<sup>th</sup> July 2016, four dalit men were tied to a car and beaten up by “*Gau rakshaks*” (protector of cows) for skinning a dead cow that was killed by a lion in Una town of Gir district in Gujarat. A video was made of the incidents and was widely circulated on social media. This led to large-scale protests in Gujarat. Mobs took to the streets and set ablaze state transport buses in Rajkot, Dhoraji and other towns of Saurashtra. In Surendranagar, a truckload of cow carcasses were dumped outside the collector's office. In the ensuing violence, a policeman was killed and there were attempts of suicides by many people as a protest against the Dalit flogging. On the night of 28 September 2015 in Bisara village near Dadri, Uttar Pradesh, a mob of Hindu people attacked a Muslim family and killed 52-year-old Muslim man and seriously injured his 22-year-old son, because it was rumored that the family had killed a cow and consumed its meat on Eid-ul-Adha.

